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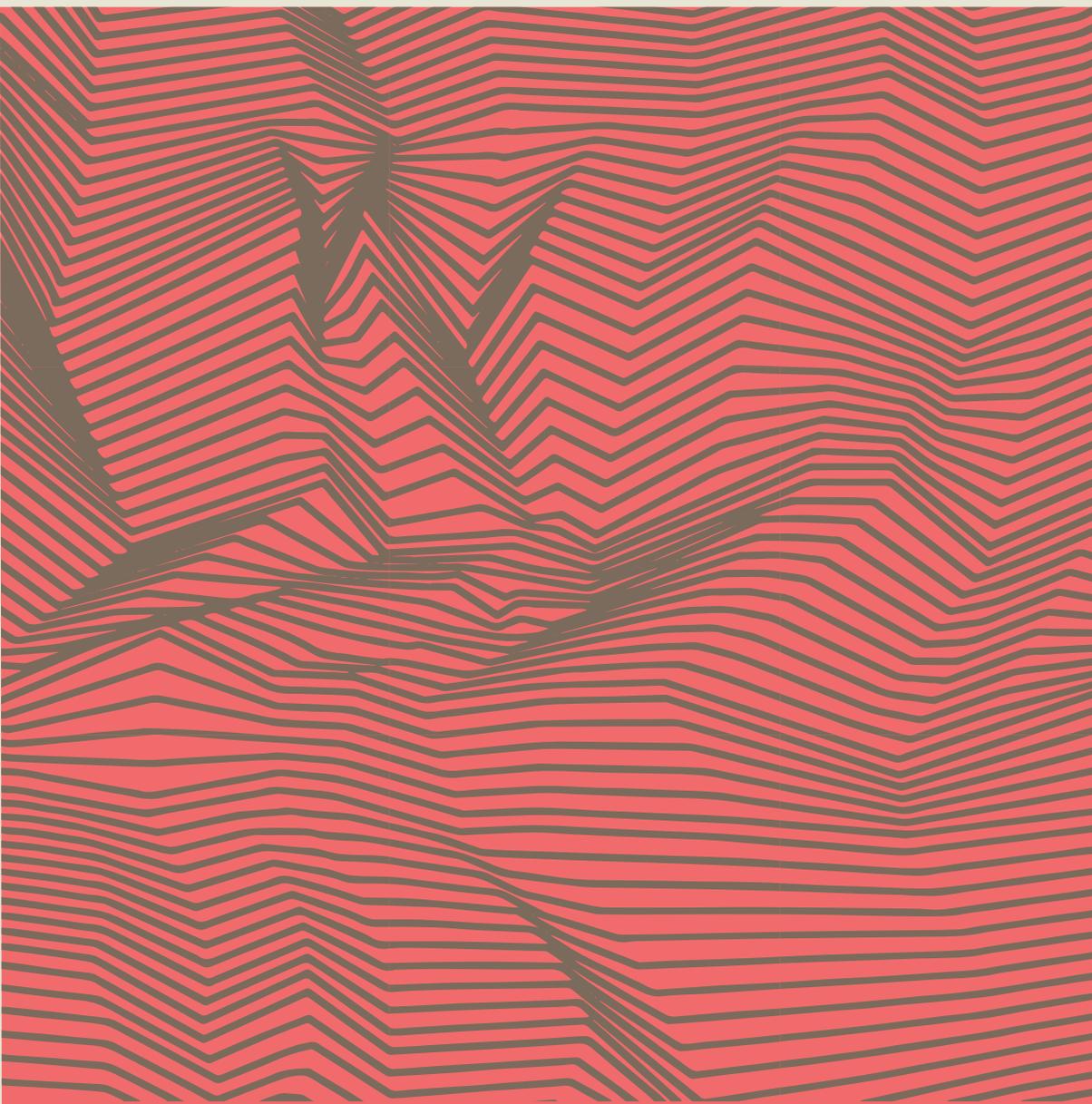
Il Tolomeo

Rivista di studi postcoloniali
A Postcolonial Studies Journal
Journal d'études postcoloniales

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Arnold Zable

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Arnold Zable (`http://www.arnoldzable.com.au`) is an award winning Australian writer, novelist, and human rights advocate. His memoir *Jewels and Ashes*, an account of his travels to the Poland of his parents, was published in 1991, and was recently reissued in a Special 25th anniversary edition. The diasporic imagination fuelled by his Jewish roots has instilled in him a deep understanding of the condition of travellers, migrants and refugees, as evidenced in his novels *Café Scheherazade* (2001), *Scraps of Heaven* (2004), *Sea of Many Returns* (2008) and the recent *The Fighter* (2016). His short story collections are *Wanderers and Dreamers* (1998), *The Fig Tree* (2002) and *Violin Lessons* (2011). He is the author of numerous essays, columns, feature articles, essays, and co-author of *Kan Yama Kan*, a play in which asylum seekers share their stories. He has lectured extensively on creative writing, storytelling ("the art of the specific", as he calls it), human rights issues, and immigrant and refugee policy. He has conducted workshops for groups including asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants, the homeless, the deaf, problem gamblers and the aged. Zable is a former president of PEN International Melbourne, and he is the recipient of many awards, including the 2013 Voltaire prize for human rights advocacy and the advancement of freedom of expression.

In 2014, Zable spent four weeks in Venice as writer in residence at Ca' Foscari University's International College, where he worked with students across disciplines on life writing. He was also invited by Beit Venezia-The Home for Jewish Culture to participate in the project 'Reimagining the Ghetto of Venice for the 21st Century', aimed at celebrating the literary legacy of the Jewish quarter that has given the world the term and concept of 'Ghetto' in the year of its quincentennial (1516-2016). Having already set a short story from *Violin Lessons* in the Ghetto of Venice, Zable (along with other writers including Amitav Ghosh, Rita Dove, Daniel Mendelsohn, Meena Alexander, Nicole Krauss, Doron Rabinovici and others) was asked to reflect on the topicality of ghettoes today starting from the eponymous site. The ensuing text, part of which was read at a special session of Venice international literary festival *Incroci di civiltà* in 2015, is published here for the first time.

Refugium

Arnold Zable
(Melbourne-based writer, novelist and human rights advocate)

Children play in the ghetto square. Mothers wheel prams and keep an eye on their toddlers. A group of boys pursue a soccer ball. It skids across the paving stones. One of the boys reclaims it. His kick misfires and the ball slams into a bronze plaque on the north side of the campo. It falls to the ledge that runs beneath it. Momentarily balanced, it topples over.

The ledge serves many purposes. School children discard their satchels there, infants reach up to it, in anticipation of hidden treasures; tour guides lean against it as they weave their tall stories.

On the bottom left corner of the plaque can be seen the figure of a helmeted soldier. He clutches a rifle with a bayonet fixed to the muzzle. He is thrusting the bayonet forward. His left leg is bent at the knee, while the right leg is braced, propelling him headlong into action. The bayonet is in relief, the point sharp, detached from the surface. The soldier is herding a mass of figures into cattle wagons.

The figures are melded together. Their heads are bowed, their faces bent downwards, anonymous save one couple – a woman holding an infant. Mother and child are tiny, yet they emanate startling power. In stark contrast to the bayoneting soldier the image evokes fierce love, the desperate protectiveness of a mother.

A toddler trots to the plaque, hoists herself onto the ledge and leans back on the tableau, legs dangling. She beams triumphantly at her mother who smiles back, acknowledging her efforts. The sharp point of the bayonet catches the toddler's sweater. She cannot wrench herself free. She twists and turns, but remains captive. Her jumper is coming loose. Her mother runs to the rescue. She lifts her daughter from the sill and whirls her in the air to still her wailing. It is not the first time a child has been caught by the bayonet.

The mother returns late at night. The square is deserted. She takes a file from her purse and works furiously. A figure crosses nearby. The mother strolls from the plaque and pretends she is en route elsewhere. She waits until the figure vanishes, returns to the bronze soldier and resumes filing. Her back is turned to the square, concealing her actions. She works away at the sharp point of the bayonet until it is blunted. She returns the file to her purse and walks from the square, elated. No one has noticed; and no one notices the next evening, except the mothers. They smile knowingly.

It is winter. A mist is descending. Lights are turning on in apartments overlooking the campo. Lamps, mounted on steel supports, cast warm shadows on the paving stones. Two boys practice karate moves. High up, on a fifth floor, an elderly woman sits by the window. She looks down on the square, and surveys the action. A shutter is flung open two floors below her. A younger woman leans out. She braces her hands on the windowsill:

"Paolo. Paolo", she calls. "Come in. Dinner is ready".

Paolo takes no notice. The square embraces him. It embraces the parents and their children; it embraces all who idle there; embraces the group of boys in hot pursuit of a soccer ball. Paolo bursts from the pack with dreams of world cup glory. He lifts his arms in triumph as he intercepts the ball and kicks it between the posts, marked by two sweaters.

"Paolo, Paolo, come in", his mother repeats. "Dinner is ready".

A toddler climbs onto the ledge. She is safe, far removed from canals and bridges, free to run loose in the Campo. Doubly protected now that the soldier has been castrated.

It is night when Nathan leaves the airport. The water taxi hurtles across the Laguna. He shields himself against icy winds. The outlying islands move by on the periphery of vision. The taxi is being driven in a fury. It is borne aloft and thuds back on the surface. It skims over the wakes of boats that have preceded it.

The young man at the wheel is in a hurry. He has been paid a set price and wants to complete the job quickly. Time is of the essence. Time is money. He is in no mood for idle conversation. These are difficult waters to negotiate. He takes advantage of the open lagoon to drive at full throttle. He knows these waters well. He knows the hazards, the lie of the buoys, the location of shallow channels.

As he nears the city the boat slows. Entering a canal, the driver steers carefully. The slim waterway dictates the pace; he must negotiate the water traffic. The façades of canal-side buildings are upon him; their sombre tones are intensified in the semi-darkness. He pulls up to a tiny landing, disembarks and within minutes he is standing before a doorway in a narrow alley. He unlocks the door and steps into the foyer. A flight of worn stone stairs ends abruptly at a door on the first floor landing. Nathan steps inside the apartment. All is clean, all in order. He is exhausted. Tonight he will fall into the deep sleep of the long distance traveler.

He awakes early morning. Through one of the windows can be seen a clothesline. The line extends over an alley between the third floor windows of opposite buildings. The shutters are closed, the ropes controlled by a simple arrangement of pulleys. The clothes are black, as if in this mundane task, as in the city at large, there is an aesthetic at work. Black t-shirts, black underwear, black trousers, black pantyhose, black socks

and jeans hang listlessly. They barely catch the breeze that is making its way through the calli.

The winter sun lights the stucco and exposed brick patches of the upper storeys. A shutter opens; a woman extends her arms and pegs one more garment on the line, a black skivvy. She pauses briefly, surveys her work, closes the shutters and vanishes. The line of black garments is a work-in-progress.

Nathan dresses and sets out. Tales come his way in the walking, in detours, chance encounters. He is guided by instinct. This is how he prefers it, to be led by the story, and to remain unobtrusive. Stories are his obsession, and walking his passion. He recalls a Yiddish saying: the world is full of little worlds and we are all playing hide and seek. Nathan is both hider and seeker.

Claudia sees it clearly, six decades later, in a bar off the Rialto: the *Campo San Giacomo dall'Orio* on an autumn morning. 1954. She is seven-years-old. She hurries down the stairs from her third floor apartment. She counts each step, leaps the final three stairs and dashes out into the campo. The plane trees are stripped of foliage; the square is exposed to the wan sunlight. The smell of fresh bread from the bakery warms her. She turns into an alley and makes her way to the glassblower's workshop. It is a routine she follows every morning.

Sprawled over the shelves are tortoises, their squat legs protruding from carapaces shaded in swirls of oranges and ochres; owls, transparent eyes dotted with enlarged black pupils; red-and-blue-plumed parrots from the forests of the Amazon; pairs of storks standing face to face, elongated beaks touching; lions perched imperiously atop transparent pedestals; swans and giraffes with slim necks that stretch the glassblowers' art to its limits.

And horses. Horses are the glassblower's specialty: horses cantering. Galloping. Black horses, silver horses, winged horses, sea horses, horses at rest, horses rearing on hind legs readied for battle, hooves and tail touching base, providing three-point balance.

Streaks of morning sun find their way through an open window; the rays animate the animals. They are on the verge of moving. They are congregating in herds, descending from their resting places. A menagerie is about to be let loose upon the city. Claudia sees them swarming through the square, diving into canals, clogging the alleys. They commandeer the piazzas, the boat landings. Venice is being invaded, given over to marauding animals.

The glassblower interrupts her reverie.

"I have something special for you", he says.

He is a tall man. His body is upright, muscular from years of labour. Nearing seventy he remains alert and restless, as if permanently poised for action. He has lived the best part of his life on his feet, moving between

furnace and workbench, running against the clock to shape the molten glass before the cooling. Working late into the night to provide stock for retailers.

If a work is broken, he gives the pieces to neighbourhood children. His eyes peer though a pair of black-rimmed spectacles. He lifts the glass leg of a horse from the counter and hands it to Claudia. The glass is transparent. The foreleg is bent at an oblique angle, implying a ferocious stance, a throwback to imperial triumphs.

On her return from school Claudia places the leg on the sill of the bedroom window. It lies on its side, fully exposed beneath the open shutters. She sinks back on the bed, rests her head on the pillow, and turns her eyes to the window. The sound of daily commerce drifts up from the square below her: the call of street hawkers, the laughter of children at play, the hum of conversation. Church bells toll the passing hours. The translucent glass is a reflector of changing tone and colour – a chameleon. In the horse's leg are concentrated the waning light of the campo, the pastel-shaded façades of surrounding buildings. In its transparent veins Claudia envisages the waterways of the city, and the open seas beyond it.

In the ensuing months she will come to know the language, to read in its varying shades the passage of the sun, the glare of midday light, and the approach of evening. In its changing tones she will envisage the shifts in season. She will recognise the reflection of foliage restored in spring to the plane trees. On days of rain and overcast skies her imaginings take on a darker hue. The city is sinking beneath rising waters. The boundaries between canal and pavement are being obliterated. High tides are invading the campo.

Water has entered the foyer of the apartment block. It ascends the stairwell and laps against the bedroom door like a pawing cat desperate to enter. It seeps beneath the door. It flows towards the bed, rises up the legs and attacks the mattress. It is about to touch the pillow. Claudia awakes with a start, her reverie abruptly broken.

She glances at the window. The glass leg is aglow with the reflected lamps of the square and, in her mind's eye, a concentrated image of the stars and planets, swirling constellations, distant galaxies. The glass is as solid as stone, yet as transparent as crystal. It is both mystery and reassuring presence, active participant and neutral observer.

For the rest of Claudia's life, it will remain her most treasured possession. She will retain it in the jewel box she kept it in as a child, alongside her father's cigarette lighter, mother's lipstick cover, and grandfather's silver snuffbox. She will lift out the leg and run her fingers over its contours. She will hold it up to the light and behold the workshop; and she will recall the glassblower at work by the furnace.

He is a shaman, a man in possession of magical powers. He lifts the rod from the kiln and works the hot liquid before it loses its fire. He applies

shears and tweezers, stretches and pulls, squeezes and pummels, and extracts the animal from its chrysalis. It has taken a matter of minutes.

She will press the leg to her ear and hear the waters of the Laguna; she will look through it and see the square, her childhood companions. And she will fling open the shutters and place it on a bedroom sill in a city far distant; and for a blessed moment, be returned from her exile.

This is his plan: at one time on any given day, Nathan will set foot in the ghetto. His rationale is to see it relation to the city. The ghetto is his touch-stone. Unlike those who once dwelled here he is free to come and go as he pleases. There are no curfews, no drawbridges, nor guards patrolling the waterways. There are no padlocked guardian gates to contain him. He walks from morning late into the night, and each day he allows a different route to unfold before him.

In time he begins to see beyond the apparent symmetry, beyond the intentions of those who laid the foundations of empire, their quixotic at-tempts to create perfection. It may be a matter of millimetres but the city is tilting. The walls are moving, leaning in on each other. The tilt can be seen in the piping that runs beneath the garrets. It is in the archways, the rectangular stone entrances and the wooden beams that frame the ceil-ings. It can be discerned in the slight slant of the pavements. It is in the stone supports of balconies and the wooden frames of shuttered windows. It is in the rising and falling, in both the sinking and the resistance.

This is the paradox, the city's central tension: Venice is fluid, built upon mud and swampland, shaped by water, baptized by reflected light, yet constructed of stone and mortar. Rising upon *terra ferma.* In the walking Nathan comes to understand the meaning of the term. Its origins can be traced back to this very city, *terra ferma* denoting, say the lexicons, the territories on the Italian mainland, which were once subject to the state of Venice. The city has risen on the interface between island and water, sea and terra ferma. Fortified by natural moats; hence a haven. A refugium.

Ibrahim dreams of Senegal each day, each hour, each minute; he dreams of Senegal as he stands late night on the Riva, a stone's throw from the Doges Palace. The chill is rising. It penetrates the marrow. He stamps his feet and digs his hands into his pockets. He jogs on the spot and hunches in his down jacket. On the ground before him are arranged imitation de-signer-label handbags.

"I cannot give up", he urges himself. "I cannot give up".

There is time enough for one last sale. It has been a bad day. One transaction may redeem it. There are people about. Tourists strolling by, photographers lined up on elevated vantage points, lenses trained west upon the lagoon in pursuit of yet another Venetian sunset.

This is Ibrahim's calculation: he will ask for forty euros and allow the

buyer to bargain him down as far as twenty, leaving a five-euro margin as profit. Better a small profit than no profit. This is how it has been since he arrived in the city, a battle waged between two obsessions vying for attention, the imperative to eke out a living, against the enduring ache of nos-thal-ghea. He churns over the figures, balance sheets, receipts versus expenses. Stocks are running low. Tomorrow he will journey by train to Firenze. He will purchase bags on commission in clandestine warehouses and return to Mestre where he lives in a two-roomed flat with eight compatriots, four to a room, the tiny kitchen a communal assembly point.

He is on perpetual alert. He looks about him. If he is caught the police may turn a blind eye or issue a warning; if he strikes it unlucky he will be taken to the station. He may receive a fine, and if he has valued possessions, they may be confiscated in lieu of payment. At worst he may be threatened with deportation. The scenarios are varied, but the danger is always imminent.

His mind is drifting. He is in Dakar. He envisages his mother and father, and his two sisters. They are in mourning for the third sister. She has been dead three months. She was pregnant, in her final trimester. She was fatigued. Feverish. She vomited. She was admitted to hospital and died a day later while her brother was in Venice. The unborn child had lain dead within her for three days but she did not know it. When Ibrahim received the news, he sank beneath the weight of his grief like a stone cast in water.

The city's beauty eludes him. He ponders the paradox; when those who pass by him are on tour in Senegal they are welcomed. They love the Senegalese in their native habitat. They find them handsome, photogenic. They take snapshots of smiling children. They are enervated by Senegalese drums and buy them to display in their living rooms on returning to their countries.

When they see the Senegalese in Venice with their goods laid out on the pavements, it's a different story. Some pass by with indifference, others with contempt. Some stop to bargain. They whittle down the margins. They possess wealth beyond his wildest imaginings. He has become immune to the contempt; yet there are times when he rages against his daily humiliation. He vows to purchase the ticket home on the morrow, but again he hesitates. He does not want to lose face, to court a sense of failure. Just one more day and his luck will surely change – he will be on the road to success and return home laden with riches. Just one more week and he will find employment. One more month, maximum, he promises. That's all. I swear it. He has been in Venice seven years now.

It is approaching midnight. This is his chance to occupy the piazza of San Marco. By day he would be exposed, the presence of his goods too obvious. The coast is clear. He lines up the handbags in front of the Basilica, but the fog is closing in, the people are leaving. He gathers up his goods and moves to the square's centre. He is the sole person remaining.

The air is thickening. One by one the famed landmarks are receding: the ducal palace, the prison, the soaring bell-tower of St Mark, the Basilica. The fog is fast descending. It envelops the isle of St George, and the lion atop the towering column. Ibrahim envisages the text inscribed in the open book the lion is holding. He knows it well: "Peace be with you Mark, my evangelist. Here shall your body rest".

He must not rest. He cannot afford to rest. Yet it is all closing down, vanishing: the orchestra rostrums, the steel roller doors over the shops, the Florian café where the price of a coffee is akin to a bad day's takings. The fairy lights of the arcades have dimmed; then they too are gone, along with the Christmas decorations. The fog is at his feet. The last to vanish are a flock of pigeons.

He is shrouded. He is warm, cloaked in the heat of his own body. The journey that has led here has been wiped out. He has no past, no future. He is on a cloud. He *is* the cloud. He is heartbeat. Pure being. Insubstantial. He cannot be seen; he cannot be apprehended. He is disarmed of responsibility. Rendered anonymous. He stands in solitude, a non-presence. And dreams of Senegal.

"It is the *ruakh* that draws me here", says Nakhman. He searches for ways to define it. "It's in the lagoon and the canals that surround us. It's in the dying vibration of a tolling bell as it gives way to silence. It is a white noise. Not loud, not soft. Not high. Not too low. It's not a definite sound, but it is always there. It is in the wind, in each breath. It's here, where we stand, in the ghetto square. It is everywhere and in everything, but it can only be heard in silence".

Nakhman leads Nathan to an apartment building. They climb a flight of stairs to the upper stories. The ceilings are lower, the floors more compressed. They come to a halt on the sixth story landing. Two steps forward and they are by the door of the top floor apartment. In the ghetto, the upper floors are several storeys higher, built beyond prescribed limits centuries earlier to accommodate the ghetto's burgeoning population. The confined residents had added storeys in their quest for living space; the skies had been a way out, a vertical way forward.

Nakhman's apartment rises above the neighbouring rooftops. Darkness falls early in winter, but on the top floor it lingers. He unfastens the shutters. The setting sun streams through the open window. On one side the shutters open onto the ghetto square. The shadows have lengthened. The footstones are paved in twilight.

On the opposite side, the windows face the sprawling city. It stretches before them like a billowing carpet patterned in ochres and reds, mauves and crimsons. Interposed by domes and bell-towers. In the distance a glimpse of San Marco Square and, on the furthest horizon, the upper decks of an ocean liner framed by a slim band of water; and directly below, the terra cotta tiles of lower rooftops, garrets and chimneys.

As darkness falls Nakhman lights candles; he prefers them to electricity. His thoughts turn to his son and daughter. He is divorced. He sees them only on weekends. "I light candles to illuminate the outside", he says. He switches to the collective pronoun of the proselytizer: "We light candles to illuminate our inner selves". The candles draw him out of his isolation.

He awakes abruptly each night at the same hour. It is built into him as precisely as the time tolled from a multitude of clock towers. He lives for the awakening at this hour, the purity of the stillness. And he hears it, he is convinced of this, hears it in the dead of night, that white noise in the darkness, the soughing of the city, interspersed by the muted tread of distant footsteps. Just one tone above the silence: the *ruakh.*

The wide-lens beauty of Venice is overwhelming. Yet it can turn cold in an instant. A deeper beauty lies elsewhere. It is in the private gestures on discrete display in public. It can be seen through the close-up lens against a sweep of islands. It is in the intimacies that lie beyond the walled palaces, the brick edifices, and the open spaces of piazzas. This is the unexpected privilege the city offers, and it can appear at any time. It is more likely to be seen when the eyes are at ground level, resisting the allure of gilded palazzos.

Nathan is on board a vaporetto heading back from the outer islands. The boat pulls up to a landing on the island of Giudecca. Two women wheel an elderly lady onto the boat over the rampart. Judging by the likeness in appearance the three women are a mother and two daughters. They are confined to the open deck; the wheelchair cannot access the cabin. Cold winds sweep the Laguna. The mother is swathed in scarves and shawls, inflated by quilts and blankets. All that can be seen is her face. The crumpling folds of her cheeks are as white as silence. Her deeply set eyes are keen and active.

The daughters huddle against her. They lean in from either side and touch their lips to her forehead. They massage her back and shoulders. The tableaux is rearranged mid lagoon; one sister steps away a pace, while the other moves in behind the wheelchair. She bends forward and wraps her arms around her mother, adding yet another layer of warmness.

The three women are curtained off on the tiny deck of the vaporetto. They have claimed their piece of space. It is all they need. Nobody else exists. The sisters are for their mother and she is for her daughters. They engage in intimate conversation; the landing stages come and go, but the tableaux remains constant.

The women alight at the Hospital station. The wheelchair cannot negotiate the landing ramp. Five men step forward and lift it over. The private has, for a moment, become one with the public. An instant later the public and private part company, and the women move on towards the hospital. Nathan remains on board. He sees them retreat as the boat pulls away from the station. He keeps watching until they vanish.

The stories are taking flight; the threads are spooling in unexpected directions. Ibrahim stands in the square of Santo Stefano. It is Sunday. Late morning. The winter sun has broken free of its moorings. Ibrahim dreams of Senegal, but in the hard light of day his dreams evaporate. Dakar is a chimera.

He has laid out ten handbags on the raw pavement. The bells of many churches are in full throttle. On Sundays there is an air of festivity. A sense of lightness descends on the city. Venetians appear more open, benevolent. For many it is a day of rest, a time for outings and family visits. For the street traders it is the best day to do business.

Ibrahim is lulled into a sense of security. It is too late by the time he sees them; three policemen are bearing towards him. He snatches up the handbags and threads them over his arms, five on either side, evenly balanced. They nestle in the crook of his bent elbows like a congregation of loose bracelets. He takes off towards Academia Bridge holding his arms up before him. The police are closing in. He ascends the steps two at a time to the apex.

He is exhausted. He has been up since five. He had taken the bus from Mestre on the daily commute over the Bridge of Liberty. On arriving at the terminus he had searched the waste-bins for discarded newspapers. He had spread the handbags on a bench and stuffed them. The stuffing shows off their ample figures. Inflated, the bags are more likely to attract buyers. He had made his way into the heart of the city, and stopped to lay the goods out in a succession of locations; and had abruptly grabbed them on hearing the warning passed via the street traders' grapevine: the police are nearby, the danger imminent.

Just one instant off guard and he is now cornered. There are no alleys to duck down, no squares to take flight in. All escape routes are closed to him. He edges towards the wood railings and extends his arms over the water. The police are within metres. He unbends his elbows and releases the handbags. The gesture appears like an offering. His pursuers have been thwarted. In order to be detained a trader must have the goods in his possession. The police turn away, deflated. Ibrahim leans over the bridge and stares at the discarded goods bobbing in the water. He calculates his loss in capital; then shrugs his shoulders, and resumes his habitual air of stoicism.

The handbags are moving downstream. The paper stuffing keeps them buoyant. The silver clasps glint in the sunlight. The bags are buffeted in the wakes of vaporettos and barges. They weave in and out of Grand Canal traffic. They separate, regain touch and form new constellations. Water is a leveller; the handbags are no longer imitations but water-borne Guccis. They are the harbingers of a new Venice. A tradition is being born, a marriage between sea and designer label. One day, surely, there will be a festival of floating handbags.

One by one they sink, as if they had talked it through beforehand, drawn straws and decided in which sequence they should give way, which ones, in descending order, had the most likely chance of survival. One solitary bag makes it to the lagoon. Like a salmon battling its way upstream it finds its way to the Adriatic. It collides with ocean liners and freighters. It brushes against a dead cat floating body up, legs extended beneath it, as if it had walked off land and kept on walking. The sea is littered with hazards, but it is open. It emanates the heady scent of freedom.

The Gucci's freedom is short-lived; it is trapped in a fishing-net. The net is hauled aboard a trawler and unraveled on deck, where the fish are sorted. A fisherman curses as he retrieves the handbag. With each passing year the amount of rubbish trapped in the nets increases. He is about to fling it back into the sea when he glances at the label. The Adriatic has yielded a treasure. Upon reaching port the following morning he allows it to dry in the sun and wraps it in gift paper. He takes it home to his wife. That night, for the first time in many months they make love, all thanks to a man who dreams of Senegal trapped on a bridge in Venice.

Ghetto: Nathan is aware of the history, while acutely attuned to ghetto's present. From the Venetian *getto* (foundry) since the first ghetto was established in 1516 on the site of a foundry. Some argue it is from the Italian *borghetto*, diminutive of *borgo* (borough).

The journey of the word is ongoing. It has assumed many guises: a part of a city, especially slum area, occupied by a minority group; an isolated clique or enclave. As a verb: to put in, or restrict to a segregated district. Historically: the Jewish quarter of a city. A neglected, or otherwise disadvantaged residential area; troubled by a disproportionate amount of crime. Adjective: urban, of or relating to inner city living.

Nathan makes his way to and from the first ghetto. He knows each exit. Knows where once stood the gates, the drawbridges. He changes direction on impulse. He digresses on tangents. He is lost. He finds his way. He is lost again. It is getting late. He is in the narrowest of alleys. If he extends his arms on either side, he can touch the buildings. He hears footsteps behind him. A shadow falls by his side. He quickens his steps. Now *he* is the shadow, the footsteps are his and the figure in front is hurrying. Shadow pursued by shadow; shadow pursuing shadow. He is lost. He regains his way. He is in a labyrinth.

He turns right and a canal is upon him, a cul-de-sac of water. It has crept up the steps. It laps at his feet. There is no way forward. He turns back. A single figure walks twenty metres ahead of him – a black silhouette, rugged up, hooded. Perhaps she is a potential lover, a thief, a young man buried in his thoughts, perhaps an old woman vanquished by her solitude.

The doors of passing buildings are hard up against the alley. The figure inserts a key in a latch, opens a sturdy door and disappears behind it.

A man emerges from a door three buildings on, and steps out metres in front of him. Nathan wonders what lies beyond the door: perhaps a hidden courtyard, a walled garden, perhaps the meeting place of a secret society. The city is closed off to him.

In Venice there is a House of Refuge. The location shall remain nameless. Night has fallen. Nathan heads for a bar off Campo Do Pozzi. A gathering of men and women stand by the counter. They are celebrating the birth of a boy born two hours earlier. They raise toasts to the baby, to the elated father, and to all who join them.

Meryam is waiting. She lives in the House of Refuge. The bar is a meeting place, a haven. She sits with her circle of friends. She is twenty-one. She radiates innate warmth but her smile is tempered by a deep melancholy. How can it be otherwise given the tale she is about to tell them?

The journey began in central Africa; the country too shall remain nameless. They left the town they had lived in all their lives, eighty men, women and children. They ranged in age from mid-teens to forty. Meryam was sixteen. They boarded a truck and headed north. They travelled by day and slept at night under open skies in forest clearings. They passed through several countries and stole across borders. Many weeks after their departure they arrived at their destination, Libya. And waited.

Meryam boarded a boat twelve months later and set out on a journey with strangers. They headed out upon the Mediterranean, a mythical sea: a sea of longing. The name evoked the allure freedom. And danger. Meryam was confined below decks. She could not step outside. She remained in the same place for the entire voyage. A girl sat between her knees. Beside her lay a young mother nursing a newborn baby.

Three days went by and still the boat sailed on. They were lost. They sailed in circles. The crew was unfamiliar with these waters. At some point the boat passed a threshold from the real to the ghostly. With each passing day the panic mounted. The passengers wept. They prayed. They could not sleep. They vomited. The stench rose. The air was fetid with the smell of urine and excrement. On the fourth day the ghost ship ran out of food and water.

On the fifth day a man fell overboard. The passengers mistook the fish for a shark. They were certain he was done for. The fish leapt from the water. They caught the silver glint of its hide. The dolphin circled and dived. The man rose above the waves and, bearing him up, was the dolphin. It nuzzled him back to the boat and stayed by him until he was winched to safety. The dolphin turned, headed back out to sea and vanished.

On the eighth day the passengers heard the drone of a plane. It circled, and dropped food and water. Within hours they were transferred to a police boat. They were exhausted. And light. They wished they could rest in this

moment, wished that it would stretch into days and nights and for all eternity. They prayed their trials were over; and as she tells the tale in a bar on a winter's night in Venice, Meryam looks away. She is weary. She gazes at an unseen point. Pauses. Composes herself, and resumes her story.

The boat docked in Lampedusa. The stay was brief. The passengers were transferred to a naval ship. It rounded Sicily and headed north on the Adriatic, bound for the port of Cavallino-Treporti, located off the Laguna by way of the Lido opening. As the boat approached the port the passengers saw before them a series of towers rising from the flatlands; outriders of Venice, built as a network of surveillance, partnered by coastal batteries, gunpowder factories, forts and barracks. Shelters.

That is how it appeared as the ship drew up to the Marina: the port was a shelter. The passengers lived there for two months; then were dispersed to Padua, Treviso. Mestre. From Mestre Meryam was bussed to Venice. She entered the fabled city over the Bridge of Liberty. She was ferried upon its waterways and ushered to a three-story building. She had finally arrived at the House of Refuge.

Waiting. Meryam knows every nuance of waiting. She has lived in the House for three years now. She knows the false alarm of raised hopes, the interminable boredom. She knows indifference and the kindness of strangers. She knows nos-thal-ghea, the pain of longing for the return, the ancient curse of Odysseus. Her father died in her absence. She yearns to see her mother, her brothers and sisters.

She has pared down her expectations, reduced them to a single aspiration: to make a living. She wants only to move from A to B. She plaits people's hair in intricate hairdos. She prepares African banquets. She phones her mother every day. "I am fine", she tells her. "I have friends. I am well looked after. Don't worry".

Nathan sits at a table in a neighbourhood bar; he is in Venice. He is on the seven seas. He is on the tray of a crowded truck. He is floundering on mythical waters. He is lifted high on the back of a dolphin. He is borne above the water and descends down, down, down into a hold; the air is stifling, he is choking. Yet despite the tale she is telling, Meryam speaks gently. Her voice is melodious, the tone understated, hence the story all the more compelling. She is radiant. Lifted by the company. Saving graces. Time is suspended. In this moment there is hope; transient friends gathered by a fire.

Then it is over. It is past midnight. The celebrations for the birth have long finished. It is five years since Meryam left her hometown. She leaves the bar escorted by friends. They accompany her to the House of Refuge. They hug her at the door. One by one they disperse. Nathan walks on through deserted streets and silent campi. The shutters are closed. All is dark, save a lamp here, and a bar there lighting the way in the labyrinth.

This is how it began for those in flight: with the scent of the sea, sun playing on water, light refracted by the Laguna. The Hun invaders who pursued them took fright. The islets and marshes, the swathes of wetlands repelled them. They feared the wildness. They feared they would be ambushed. They cursed the loss of their spoils and retreated to their Northern lairs deep within the mainland.

When the sharp crack of voices and the howl of dogs evaporated, those in flight ventured out of their primitive shelters and set to work. They found a way forward through trial and error. They invented ways to build edifices upon shifting foundations. From the swamplands there arose a city of islets, and from the city an empire. And from the empire, the inevitable fall, but the city remained, kept afloat by its beauty and the faint echo of ancestral memory. Recorded in the annals. Fifteen centuries have gone by, yet this is how it had begun: as refugium.

It is approaching noon on a Saturday morning. Nakhman and Nathan walk the familiar route from the ghetto square over the footbridge, past the kosher bakery and galleries of Judaica, closed for the Sabbath; past the imposing black door of the Spanish synagogue, locked for the winter; and along the alley that passes by the Chabad restaurant. Through the plate-glass windows can be seen tables covered in white cloths, places set in readiness for the midday Kiddush.

"Every person has a ghetto inside them", says Nakhman.

"The boundaries are of the mind. The *ruakh* is everywhere".

He calls it the paradox of the open perimeter. "The concept does not conform to the laws of geometry", he says. "It did not exist for Euclid. For the geometrician there are perimeters and open spaces, and the two are mutually exclusive. They do not take account of the mind, the ghettos of our thinking".

They walk beneath the beams of the ghetto doorway. They have breached the perimeter. They make an odd couple, Nathan and Nakhman, the atheist and the fervent believer. They turn left onto the Fondamenta di Cannaregio. They walk by the canal and pause by the fish stalls. The catch has long been sold, and the pavement hosed down, but the smell lingers.

They turn right, over Cannaregio Bridge, and veer hard right onto the pavement by the canal on the side opposite. One hundred metres on there is a park. The gate is set back from the footpath. Directly over the canal stands the ghetto entrance. The paths are coated in leaves; the trees are moulting. Their bare outlines are framed by the upper stories of the buildings behind them. A man stands at an outdoor tap and draws water.

"This is where I pray", says Nakhman.

He knows the species of trees and recites them as they appear: lindens and maples, chestnuts, oaks and plane trees.

He points to a park bench.

"Here is where I study. Where I read Torah".
They sit side by side.
And he recounts the story:

He was known as Paulo then. One night he was walking the darkened streets of Giudecca. Through the alleys could be glimpsed the lagoon and on the opposite shore, the lights of Dorsoduro. His marriage was unraveling. He had a girl of two and a boy of one; he had moved back into his parents' apartment and had taken to walking the city. He would board the vaporetto and make his way to Giudecca. He took solace in its darkened streets. He sat for hours in neighbourhood bars. He sought out the island's working class enclaves.

He was walking by a three-story apartment block when he saw it: a *menorah.* It stood on a sill framed by a ground floor window. It was of cheap metal; its eight branches were lit with electric globes enclosed in flame-shaped plastic. The apartment lights were partly veiled by the curtains. He imagined a family seated at the Sabbath table. "I knew instantly", he says."This is what I wanted for the rest of my life".

Hence it began, the process of conversion. He took the Orthodox option, years of study and prayer. He frequented houses of worship within the ghetto: the ornate Italian synagogue in the winter months, the larger Spanish synagogue in spring and summer when visitors from abroad boosted the numbers. He sought out teachers and Talmudic scholars. He began to take on their gestures, the rocking movement of the Hasid. He grew a beard and took to stroking it. He had left his parents' apartment and moved to the ghetto. He had found his way home, he says. And he had found his equilibrium. "It's simple", he says.

It is a word he uses often: "Simple". Yet Nathan can sense it: Nakhman's complexity, the residual anger. It is not so simple. It cannot be. In the weeks to come he will discern a more nuanced story, but for now he is at peace. Seated on a park bench beside Nakhman. Grateful for the moment of stillness, and for the paradox: the open perimeter.

This is a work-in-progress. Though the tales have encounters in Venice as their starting point, circa 2014, they have been reworked, re-imagined and transformed into fiction. The responsibility for the stories, and flights of fancy, rests with the author.

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Louis-Philippe Dalembert, «vagabond jusqu'au bout de la fatigue»

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Abstract   In his works of fiction, the Haitian novelist and poet Louis-Philippe Dalembert (Port-au-Prince, 1962) has developed the concept of *vagabondage* as a literary projection of his biographical wandering through multiple spaces. The aim of this article is to study the presence of *vagabondage* and its distinctive features in the novels that reflect Dalembert's perpetual motion: *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme* (1996), *L'Autre face de la mer* (1998), *L'Île du bout des rêves* (2003), *Les dieux voyagent la nuit* (2006). The main characters are constantly moving and they are cosmopolitan wanderers who belong to many places at the same time, just like Dalembert himself. By analysing the representation of movement in these fictions, we will show that the notion of *vagabondage* is depicted by the author as a positive and meaningful opportunity for the vagabond who travels across countries, languages and cultures.

Sommaire   Introduction. – 1 Pour une définition du vagabondage. – 2 Le vagabond est-il un sans-racines? – 3 Un 'ici', plusieurs 'là-bas'. – 4 Le pays-temps de l'enfance. – Conclusion.

Keywords   Contemporary Haitian Literature. Louis-Philippe Dalembert. Vagabondage. Wandering.

> Ou konn soti ou, ou pa konn antre
> «On connaît son départ, on ne connaît pas son retour»
> (proverbe haïtien)

Introduction

S'il existe un écrivain haïtien qui incarne l'appel du voyage et développe dans son œuvre une poétique de l'hybridité des langues et des genres, c'est bien Louis-Philippe Dalembert. Né à Port-au-Prince en 1962,[1] Dalembert part en France en 1986 pour poursuivre ses études universitaires. Après un retour provisoire en Haïti en 1996, il quitte à nouveau son pays natal et ce deuxième envol marque une rupture plus nette, qui l'amène à un itinéraire biographique caractérisé par de nombreux départs. D'un voyage à l'autre, il traverse des espaces divers: des villes européennes, parmi lesquelles Rome, où il a séjourné pendant plusieurs années, les

[1]   Pour les renseignements biographiques sur Dalembert, voir la page consacrée à l'auteur sur le site *Île en île.* URL http://ile-en-ile.org/dalembert/ (2016-09-13).

Amériques du Nord et du Sud, le Moyen-Orient… Au point qu'il semble ne pas appartenir à un lieu précis mais à tous les lieux à la fois. Sa vocation d'écrivain vagabond, incapable de s'enraciner quelque part, se reflète dans son œuvre poétique et romanesque dès ses premières publications, et le vagabondage physique devient aussi un vagabondage littéraire dans les genres et dans les langues, grâce aussi aux morceaux de chansons et de poèmes qui enrichissent la narration, ainsi qu'aux nombreuses citations tirées de l'*Ancien Testament* et d'autres sources. Cela montre bien l'impossibilité de ranger l'œuvre de Dalembert dans une catégorie préétablie sans tenir compte de son caractère hétérogène.[2]

Contrairement à quelques écrivains appartenant à la génération précédente, celle qui a vécu la montée au pouvoir du Président à vie François Duvalier en 1957 (Anthony Phelps, Émile Ollivier et Gérard Étienne entre autres), Dalembert n'a pas été obligé de s'exiler pour des raisons politiques et les circonstances de son départ d'Haïti ont été volontaires. S'il y a certainement un lien entre la dispersion géographique des auteurs nés dans les années 1950-1970 et l'exil massif de leurs aînés, le terme «exil» ne peut pas être attribué à ceux qui ont quitté délibérément leur pays, comme c'est le cas pour Dalembert. Comme l'a constaté E. Pessini, «les nouvelles générations qui écrivent hors d'Haïti mais appartiennent à la littérature haïtienne discutent cette notion d'écriture de l'exil pour souvent la mettre en question et en cause» (E. Pessini 2008, 68). Les déplacements continuels font de Dalembert un voyageur qui refuse de s'arrêter quelque part trop longtemps, qui «a choisi de vivre ailleurs, sans toutefois opter pour un seul pays dans lequel s'installer de manière stable» (A. Pessini 2012, 153). Le concept qu'il élabore et défend dans sa production littéraire ainsi qu'au cours des entretiens est celui de «vagabondage», un mouvement constant qui n'a pas de limites:

> J'ai vécu en France, à Nancy, à Paris, mais aussi à l'étranger, en Italie notamment, où je suis resté longtemps, et en Israël. Je retourne régulièrement en Haïti. […] Comme je vis ici et là, je dis souvent que je vagabonde ma vie. (Grunberg et al. 2005, 93)

La mise en fiction du vagabondage physique de l'auteur se traduit par une mosaïque de personnages qui partagent la même volonté de rejeter toute stabilité et de sillonner des espaces divers. A. Pessini souligne à ce propos que l'errance et le vagabondage «sont souvent le lot des personnages principaux qui se présentent comme d'éternels voyageurs, sans cesse en mouvement» (A. Pessini 2012, 157). L'errance pratiquée par les

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2   Dalembert lui-même confirme son rejet à l'égard d'une catégorisation de son œuvre: «[…] un écrivain comme moi qui refuse de s'enfermer dans un système, ou une esthétique qui risquerait de devenir définitive» (Ghinelli 2005, 124).

équivalents fictionnels de Dalembert sera ici analysée pour tracer un portrait du vagabondage et de ses caractéristiques dans le corpus da-lembertien choisi, qui se compose de quatre romans où le déplacement est au centre du récit: *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme* (1996), *L'Autre face de la mer* (1998), *L'Île du bout des rêves* (2003) et *Les dieux voyagent la nuit* (2006).

1   Pour une définition du vagabondage

La définition que Dalembert lui-même donne du vagabondage met en évidence ce qui distingue ce concept des autres notions qui entraînent un déplacement physique, comme l'errance ou le nomadisme:

> Différencier l'idée de vagabondage de concepts tels que l'errance – liée dans mon esprit à la malédiction divine qui s'est abattue sur le peuple juif […] – ou le nomadisme – associé à un héritage culturel donc subi, à mon sens, du moins dans la plupart des cas. Or le vagabondage, tel que je le conçois, est choix conscient, assumé, solaire. (Ghinelli 2005, 129)

Loin d'être associé à un sentiment de détresse et de nostalgie lié au souvenir du pays natal, que l'on retrouve souvent chez les auteurs exilés, le vagabondage élaboré par Dalembert est un élément positif qui apparaît pour la première fois dans *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme*. Récit du retour au pays après des années à l'étranger, le premier roman de Dalembert plonge le lecteur dans une quête menée à travers les lieux de l'enfance. Le narrateur, un homme adulte qui revient sur les endroits de sa jeunesse, entreprend un voyage dans la mémoire pour essayer de reconstituer sa propre histoire, à la recherche des traces du cireur de chaussures Faustin, figure paternelle du narrateur enfant. Plusieurs niveaux narratifs se superposent pour raconter la complexité du passé et montrer l'impossibilité de parvenir à une version unique de l'histoire. Le champ lexical du déplacement se compose d'expressions qui se réfèrent au narrateur adulte: «interminable errance»; «pérégrinations» (Dalembert [1996] 2004a, 17);[3] «plus d'une quinzaine d'années passées en terres dites étrangères» (CR, 37); «vagabondages dans certains pays d'Europe» (CR, 63); «l'avion qui te ramène vers d'autres errances» (CR, 264); «tes pérégrinations en terre étrangère» (CR, 265).

Dans *L'Autre face de la mer*, roman divisé en trois parties («Le récit de Grannie», «La ville», «Le récit de Jonas»), plusieurs voix se superposent pour narrer des événements rythmés par la présence de la mer: l'histoire

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3   CR dans la suite du texte, suivi du numéro de page.

de Grannie et celle de son petit-fils Jonas sont entrecoupées par le récit de la traversée de l'océan par un navire chargé d'esclaves. Le premier exil, corollaire de la Traite esclavagiste, est donc évoqué dans ce «roman qui interpelle les départs, les exils, les ailleurs flous qui ont bouleversé l'existence, la vie quotidienne, directement ou indirectement de presque tous les Haïtiens» (A. Pessini 2012, 397-398). Aucune référence spatiale ne permet au lecteur de situer les événements du point de vue géographique, mais plusieurs éléments se réfèrent à l'histoire haïtienne du passé et du présent, ce qui correspond à la volonté de Dalembert de rendre ses récits à la fois personnels et universels. Les deux personnages principaux sont confrontés à la thématique du départ et leurs opinions à cet égard évoluent au fur et à mesure que les conditions politiques et sociales du pays changent. Le déplacement se rapproche d'une maladie, quand Grannie fait référence aux nombreux départs dictés par la volonté de fuir le régime totalitaire de Duvalier. La vieille dame qui autrefois passait son temps à admirer les bateaux qui partaient du port et y arrivaient, animée par une curiosité énorme de connaître ce qu'il y avait au-delà des limites de l'île, considère les départs de ses concitoyens comme un abandon qui rend l'île malade: «cette envie quasi maladive de traverser l'océan» (Dalembert [1998] 2004b, 23).**⁴** En ce qui concerne les autres éléments qui renvoient au champ lexical du déplacement, ils ont une connotation positive et se réfèrent à Jonas, qui erre dans l'espace urbain: «s'y laisser aller dans une douce dérive» (FA, 125). Après la mort de sa grand-mère, Jonas décide de quitter l'île et de se consacrer au «départ pour l'inconnu» (FA, 222): «il allait donc voyager [...]. Ballotté de hall d'aéroport à quai de port, de gare d'autobus à station de train, sans forcément se poser» (FA, 223).

L'Île du bout des rêves est le récit d'une quête de soi de la part d'un vagabond qui sillonne les mers et les océans, à l'intérieur d'un cadre qui peut renvoyer au roman d'aventures. C'est un ouvrage riche d'éléments qui appartiennent à plusieurs genres narratifs et où jaillit la prédilection de l'auteur pour l'insertion de morceaux ou citations en langues étrangères, en particulier en espagnol et en italien. Partis à la recherche d'un trésor que Pauline Bonaparte aurait caché à l'île de la Tortue, le personnage narrateur et le mystérieux écrivain espagnol JMF entreprennent un voyage plus psychologique que physique. Le roman est parcouru par des références au déplacement, toujours à propos de l'aventurier et narrateur du récit: «nous allions passer la nuit entière à dériver, livrés à l'humeur du courant» (Dalembert [2003] 2007, 33)**⁵**;«moi, je bourlingue la vie» (IL, 42); «surtout ne pas s'arrêter. En dépit des chausses-trappes du temps, toujours aux aguets. Et puis, où aurais-je jeté l'ancre?» (IL, 42); «moi, je

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4 FA dans la suite du texte, suivi du numéro de page.

5 IL dans la suite du texte, suivi du numéro de page.

restais sur place ou dérivais vers d'autres errances» (IL, 44). Le dénouement du roman tourne autour d'une révélation de la part de JMF, qui avoue avoir tout inventé, car son but n'est pas de trouver le trésor caché mais de recruter le narrateur dans le combat armé pour la libération de Porto Rico. Selon JMF, le bourlingueur est un «vagabond individualiste» (IL, 243) et il lui confie quel était son objectif: «je voulais te sauver malgré toi. Offrir un sens à ta vie, arrimer ton vagabondage à un objectif plus noble que la dérive pure. Car tu vas à la dérive, cher ami.» (IL, 243). Les réflexions du narrateur après ce coup de théâtre semblent être prononcées par Dalembert lui-même: «[...] je devais avoir des ancêtres nomades. Solitaires et nomades» (IL, 248); «[...] la solitude et le nomadisme participent de la condition même de l'humain. Vagabond jusqu'au bout de la fatigue» (IL, 249); «comme si la vie n'était qu'une pérenne partance. Un éternel recommencement» (IL, 302).

Les dieux voyagent la nuit s'ouvre sur une cérémonie vaudou à laquelle le personnage principal, un vagabond haïtien qui a quitté son pays, assiste pour la première fois de sa vie, à New York. Dans ce roman dont la structure s'apparente aux étapes d'une cérémonie vaudou, réapparaît la figure de Grannie, grand-mère du narrateur qui représente le lien avec l'enfance, le pays natal et l'univers des *loas*,[6] qu'elle a refusé. Les premières considérations à propos de l'errance concernent Grannie, sur laquelle pèse une malédiction des esprits du vaudou, que le narrateur adulte décrit ainsi: «errera dans Port-aux-Crasses de quartier en quartier, sans feu ni lieu propre, sans pouvoir jamais planter ses racines dans une cour bien à elle» (Dalembert 2006, 37).[7] L'errance pratiquée par le narrateur adulte pourrait être directement liée au châtiment infligé à sa grand-mère: «parfois, tu te demandes, en repos de tes errements d'agnostique, si ton propre vagabondage ne serait pas le prolongement de cette antique malédiction» (DI, 37). Le vagabondage est associé aussi au passé du narrateur, «enfance vagabonde» (DI, 57), mais surtout à son présent: «vagabondage insatiable autour du monde» (DI, 149); «dans le long vagabondage en solitaire autour du monde» (DI, 209), «ton vagabondage [...] va-et-vient incessant par-dessus les océans» (DI, 220).

À partir des éléments répertoriés, l'on peut constater la récurrence des expressions concernant le déplacement à l'intérieur du corpus choisi. Le nomadisme de certains personnages créés par Dalembert (les narrateurs de *L'Île du bout des rêves* et *Les dieux voyagent la nuit*) semble être presque génétique, héréditaire, par conséquent incurable, mais la nécessité de voyager peut ressembler aussi à une maladie, connotée de façon négative, comme c'est le cas pour l'émigration en masse des habi-

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6   «[...] êtres surnaturels dont le culte est l'objet essentiel du vaudou» (Métraux 2010, 71).

7   DIdans la suite du texte, suivi du numéro de page.

tants de l'île dans *L'Autre face de la mer*. Néanmoins, quand il se rapporte aux hommes adultes, protagonistes des quatre romans, le déplacement a toujours un caractère positif et créateur.

2   Le vagabond est-il un sans-racines?

Selon Famin, «Dalembert est un écrivain vagabond, qui n'écrit pas dans une terre choisie pour l'enracinement mais dans les différents lieux du monde qu'il est amené à visiter» (2011, 177). Il ne possède pas de patrie littéraire et son écriture est liée aux endroits qu'il a visités, car chaque lieu est source d'inspiration, ainsi qu'il l'affirme lui-même: «tous ces pays ce sont autant d'espaces qui irriguent mon propre travail, mon écriture» (Chemla 2011, 388). Les vagabonds de Dalembert peuvent-ils alors être définis comme des apatrides, s'ils n'ont pas de patrie, pas de racines? Certes, ils revendiquent leur droit à un vagabondage sans répit, mais ils peuvent toujours revenir en arrière car leur choix de quitter la terre natale a été conscient et volontaire. Le concept de «racine» n'est pas porteur d'inquiétude chez Dalembert, il est pourtant souvent associé à des éléments qui renvoient à une sensation d'étrangeté, d'incertitude. Dans *L'Île du bout des rêves*, le narrateur réfléchit ainsi sur le lien qu'il entretient avec ses racines: «je vivais depuis longtemps éloigné de la terre natale» (IL, 41); «les années, des déceptions diverses m'avaient éloigné de toute notion de patrie» (IL, 248). Contraire à toute forme de stabilité, il proclame son identité d'homme sans patrie: «la notion de demeure m'est étrangère» (IL, 42); «j'étais partout à l'étranger et partout chez moi» (IL, 74). Le narrateur de *Les dieux voyagent la nuit* est un «sans-racines» (DI, 21) qui essaie de nouer passé et présent à travers un voyage plus spirituel que physique dans les souvenirs de son enfance, en se rendant compte que, tôt ou tard, le passé est prêt à resurgir: «on ne peut pas tricher longtemps avec ses racines» (DI, 201). Ces personnages aux racines mouvantes sont des cosmopolites dans le sens propre du terme: ils traversent des espaces, parlent plusieurs langues et croisent des cultures différentes. Les migrations qui caractérisent le parcours biographique de Dalembert et de ses personnages aboutissent à une conception identitaire dont le mot-clé est le Temps, considéré presque comme un substitut de l'espace. Vu que l'aspect des lieux change au fil des années et l'homme adulte ne peut pas retrouver les sensations de l'enfance à travers l'observation des territoires de son passé, la seule possibilité est de redécouvrir ces sensations dans le Temps, qui les garde intactes et ne les abîme pas. Il serait alors erroné de croire que les personnages de Dalembert, et l'auteur lui-même, soient des apatrides, même si la patrie en question n'est pas un espace géographique mais un espace mental.

L'itinéraire vers la prise de conscience qui amène le vagabond à iden-

tifier le Temps comme patrie commence par le départ de la terre natale, Haïti, qui est représentée par Dalembert sous la forme d'une allégorie. L'île de Salbounda et sa capitale Port-aux-Crasses ne sont rien d'autre que Haïti et Port-au-Prince, même si l'espace allégorique crée par Dalembert consiste en une superposition d'espaces:[8]

> J'ai visité ou vécu, même pour de courts séjours, dans suffisamment de pays du Tiers-monde, en Afrique ou en Amérique du Sud, pour trouver des similitudes avec la terre natale et, à partir de là, créer une topographie personnelle, proche de mes préoccupations et de mon vécu. (Ghinelli 2005, 129)

Les mots péjoratifs choisis par l'auteur pour connoter le pays et sa capitale[9] définissent un univers grotesque qui pourrait être celui de n'importe quelle ville du Tiers-monde. Cette allégorie est présente dans *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme*, *L'Autre face de la mer* et *Les dieux voyagent la nuit;* les expressions qui se réfèrent à Salbounda et à Port-aux-Crasses renvoient entièrement à une situation de désespoir et déchéance, et la ville n'a aucune connotation positive. La ville natale du narrateur de *L'Autre face de la mer* est un espace cauchemardesque et malsain: «cette ville ratatinée comme une vieille mangue, écrasée de chaleur, de saleté et de ragots» (FA, 97); «c'est la ville qui pue. Qui sent mauvais. Qui est sale. Laide» (FA, 124); «ses rues sales et chaotiques, […] ses montagnes ravagées, écrasées de soleil, ses mendiants loqueteux, ses bourgeois arrogants, la médiocrité triomphante» (FA, 222). Dans *Les dieux voyagent la nuit* la ville est définie par le narrateur comme un «immense égout à ciel ouvert» (DI, 12). L'espace urbain est aussi le symbole de la pauvreté, de la destruction et de l'oppression, où il n'y a pas de place pour l'espoir: «Une zone urbaine aux abois, coincée entre les rêves avortés des uns et la morgue indifférente des autres. À l'image de Salbounda tout entier qui n'en finissait pas de partir à la dérive et s'éloignait de jour en jour des autres îles caraïbes» (CR, 15-16).

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8   Pour une étude approfondie des caractéristiques attribuées à l'espace urbain, en particulier de la ville allégorique de Port-aux-Crasses dans les premiers ouvrages en prose de Dalembert, voir A. Pessini (2012, 165-83).

9   Comme Dalembert l'a expliqué lui-même au cours d'un entretien: «Salbounda 'se salir le cul' en créole haïtien» (Ghinelli 2005, 130). Voir aussi les définitions données par Valdman dans son dictionnaire du créole haïtien, par example «bounda»: 'ass, buttocks, rear'; «sal»: 'to dirty, soil, stain'. (Valdman 2007).

3   Un 'ici', plusieurs 'là-bas'

L'île de Salbounda représente un 'ici' auquel s'opposent plusieurs 'ailleurs', et ce dualisme jaillit avec évidence dans *L'Autre face de la mer*, où l''ici' est Port-aux-Crasses alors qu'au 'là-bas' correspond tout ce qui est au-delà des limites de l'île. Pour Grannie enfant, le 'là-bas' est d'abord «l'autre côté de l'horizon» (FA, 17), le lieu inconnu et merveilleux d'où proviennent les bateaux qu'elle regarde arriver au port: «j'aurais aimé qu'ils me racontent leur expérience, me disent les différences rencontrées, l'incompréhension suave des langues nouvelles, les arbres, la neige… tout ce qui rendait là-bas si beau» (FA, 17). Quand elle était une jeune fille, pour Grannie l'île représentait un espace fermé, limité, qu'il fallait traverser à tout prix, comme le souligne E. Pessini:

> Enfant, elle est obsédée par le lieu du départ et par un ailleurs qu'elle remplit de toute sa soif de connaissance. […] Elle conçoit son île comme une limite, l'océan comme un obstacle à sa croissance. (E. Pessini 2008, 78)

Mais le «là-bas» évoque aussi l'autre côté de Salbounda, où Grannie enfant et sa famille ont émigré pour trouver du travail; ce qu'elle ramène de ce «là-bas» n'a rien de positif: «une fausse affectivité qui m'éloignait de toute consonance proche de là-bas» (FA, 60); «les blessures ramenées de là-bas» (FA, 62). Après le retour, le «là-bas» devient une illusion, un rêve enfantin auquel ne correspond aucune réalité possible, surtout au moment où, dans le présent de la narration, commence l'exode des habitants de Port-aux-Crasses vers un ailleurs inconnu. Ces départs massifs sont perçus comme une trahison par Grannie, âgée et désabusée. Par contre, pour son petit-fils Jonas, l'envie de découvrir ce qu'il y a «là-bas» se manifeste quand il commence son parcours vers l'âge adulte: le départ vers l'ailleurs est l'occasion pour quitter un «ici» qu'il a pourtant aimé («la vie de ce côté-ci de l'océan ne me paraissait pas si cruelle», FA, 194) mais qui ne satisfait plus sa curiosité d'homme adulte.

Dans *Les dieux voyagent la nuit*, l'«ici» opposé au «là-bas» de Salbounda est la ville de New York. Le personnage principal et narrateur est originaire de Salbounda, a vécu à Paris et à Rome et se trouve dans la métropole nord-américaine, plus précisément à Harlem. L'éloignement de la terre natale a peut-être changé son aspect et son accent, mais il se souvient de son enfance et essaie de retrouver les caractéristiques de «là-bas» dans la figure de son amie Caroline, une sorte de pont qui lie deux cultures: «le corps de Caroline dans toute sa féminité d'ici et de là-bas. De là-bas surtout. […] Son corps à tes côtés. Et pourtant ailleurs, dans son sommeil. Comme si Caroline avait le pouvoir d'être ici et là-bas à la fois» (DI, 161). Les limites entre les deux univers, apparemment si différents, ne sont pas définies, car les espaces se superposent et s'entremêlent; le personnage

de Caroline, jeune fille de Salbounda qui habite New York, incarne la synthèse des deux mondes. Le narrateur ne parvient pas à saisir le mystère du corps de Caroline qui s'est refusée à lui, en marquant l'impossibilité de connaître tout ce que la jeune fille symbolise, en particulier les rites et certains aspects culturels du pays natal.[10]

Le parcours du vagabond, qui a quitté volontairement une île à la dérive pour consacrer sa vie aux voyages, se termine par une certitude d'appartenance, non pas à un lieu géographique mais à un pays-temps, concept fondamental à retenir pour comprendre l'œuvre de Dalembert:

> On n'habite pas un espace géographique, un pays, une ville, mais le Temps. Ce Temps est fait de pays successifs qu'on n'habite jamais qu'une seule fois, et seul. Et chacun correspond à des sensations, des découvertes personnelles de la vie. Notre incapacité à y revenir nous le rend, *a posteriori*, encore plus beau… ou plus cauchemardesque. (Ghinelli 2005, 125)

L'existence se compose ainsi d'une succession de pays-temps,[11] et la décision définitive du vagabond est une révélation qui survient après des années d'errance, comme le souligne le narrateur de *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme:* «de l'errance, je suis passé à cette phase de l'humanité où l'homme n'a de pays que le temps qu'il habite» (CR, 268).

4 Le pays-temps de l'enfance

Selon A. Pessini, «l'écriture dalembertienne se met en place autour d'une recherche, d'une tension qui veut appréhender le pays, mais surtout le pays au moment de l'enfance» (A. Pessini 2012, 293). Le pays-temps où le vagabond peut s'enraciner et établir un lien avec son passé est celui de l'enfance. L'opposition entre deux pôles, l'enfance et l'âge adulte, est au centre de l'œuvre de Dalembert: «il y a toujours cette tension entre l'ici et le là-bas, mais j'écris plus à partir d'un temps, que d'un lieu. Je pars de cette tension, entre aujourd'hui et hier. C'est cela le temps présent pour moi» (Chemla 2011, 386). Le sujet devient adulte après avoir vécu une

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10   «Depuis sa chambre newyorkaise, le narrateur du roman *Les Dieux voyagent la nuit* synthétise, face au corps désiré, mais omniprésent et presque encombrant de la femme aimée, la difficulté à retrouver et à dire Haïti» (A. Pessini 2012, 308).

11   Dalembert explique ainsi le concept de pays-temps: «il ne s'agit donc pas de substituer le Temps au lieu, si déjà le Temps est le lieu. J'imagine volontiers l'existence humaine comme un vagabondage où, de la naissance à la mort, l'on s'arrête dans des auberges, les pays-temps, pour une période plus ou moins longue jusqu'à la destination finale» (Ghinelli 2005, 126).

expérience traumatisante, comme c'est le cas pour le personnage principal de *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme*, qui abandonne son enfance au moment où il est obligé de quitter son quartier pour un autre. Dalembert a évidemment puisé dans son expérience biographique, car il a vécu la même fracture à l'âge de six ans:

> Depuis une semaine, plus précisément depuis le début des vacances, il n'est question que de ça: ils vont laisser le quartier pour un autre. Le petit garçon imagine difficilement ce nouveau lieu. Sans doute le refuse-t-il. Pour lui, le monde commence et finit sur le bord des quais. (CR, 241)

L'enfance, mot clé qui apparaît aussi dans le titre du premier recueil de nouvelles de l'auteur (*Le Songe d'une photo d'enfance*, 1993), est un concept qui revient dans les romans appartenant à notre corpus, toujours par rapport aux réflexions de l'homme adulte qui se retrouve confronté à son passé et à ses souvenirs. La seule façon pour retrouver le passé est de recourir à la mémoire, qui peut faire revivre le temps de l'enfance. Il est pourtant difficile d'accomplir le «voyage de la mémoire» (CR, 21) car le temps est un adversaire redoutable et dangereux: «l'homme descendit de la voiture, marcha vers l'agglomération, paré à livrer le combat face au temps. Qui rognait sa mémoire comme un vieux rat tenace et affamé» (CR, 37).

Le portrait de l'enfance tracé par Dalembert illustre une situation positive, une période de l'existence où le bonheur règne en dépit des difficultés: «malgré la perte de ses parents, son enfance avait été plutôt gaie» (CR, 36), «l'enfance, ce terreau intarissable!» (DI, 43). Le véritable exil n'est pas celui qui sépare l'homme de sa patrie géographique mais le départ de son enfance, qui provoque un déchirement beaucoup plus douloureux: «il s'exile à jamais de sa prime enfance, cet autre pays de lui-même» (CR, 250); «les traces de cette première vie, qu'il garderait au fond de lui» (FA, 223); «l'enfance perdue» (DI, 94). Même le vagabond de *L'Île du bout des rêves* se trouve aux prises avec son enfance: «seule l'enfance revenait par moments» (IL, 41).

Le binôme «enfance»/«âge adulte» résume, dans les romans étudiés, une opposition entre deux espaces plutôt qu'entre deux périodes, et cela est renforcé par le choix de verbes qui se réfèrent à des actions concrètes: «[…] tu n'habiteras plus cet autre pays de toi-même. […] Serais-tu arrivé à ce questionnement si tu n'étais pas parti de Salbounda […]? En un mot, si tu étais resté sur place. Si tu n'avais pas émigré vers l'âge adulte» (CR, 268). La notion du temps comme lieu géographique traverse ces ouvrages avec insistance: «pays lointain de l'enfance» (DI, 11), «pays-temps de l'enfance» (DI, 29), «pays-temps de l'adolescence» (DI, 57), «le pays-temps.

Le seul lieu auquel tu repenses toujours avec une profonde nostalgie. […] Ce pays – où plus jamais tu ne mettras les pieds, quoi qu'il arrive» (CR, 266). De la tension entre ces deux étapes de l'existence, naît un individu dont l'identité se compose d'éléments hétérogènes appartenant à la fois à la terre de l'enfance et aux terres plurielles de l'âge adulte, parcourues par le vagabond.

Conclusion

Son vagabondage sans limites fait de Dalembert un auteur aux racines mouvantes et un écrivain à vocation universelle qui ne s'enracine que dans le provisoire. De plus, le choix de synthétiser, dans ses fictions, tous les lieux traversés dans l'espace allégorique de Salbounda et la pluralité des langues utilisées le rendent un véritable cosmopolite. Les personnages principaux de *Le Crayon du bon Dieu n'a pas de gomme*, *L'Île du bout des rêves* et *Les dieux voyagent la nuit*, tout comme Jonas de *L'Autre face de la mer*, recherchent le bonheur dans les souvenirs liés à l'enfance passée, et en même temps se vouent à une errance volontaire, sans inquiétudes par rapport aux circonstances du départ de la terre qui les a vus naître. Les destins de Jonas et celui de Dalembert sont semblables, les deux ont quitté Salbounda/Haïti pour s'adonner au vagabondage. Les thèmes du départ et du souvenir de la terre natale s'entrelacent: le mouvement sans arrêt est un geste de fidélité envers l'île des origines. Pour Dalembert et son alter-ego Jonas, le pays est comme la femme aimée, à laquelle ils restent fidèles et qui ne peut pas être remplacée, même si les nombreux voyages les conduiront très loin, «comme un homme amoureux qui passerait d'une amante à une autre pour fuir l'image de la femme aimée. Mieux, pour lui rester fidèle dans l'absence» (FA, 223). En choisissant de vivre loin de ses racines et de s'arrêter partout mais jamais de façon définitive, Dalembert reste toujours inévitablement lié à son point de départ, comme les branches solides d'un arbre qui se sont éloignées du centre sans jamais le quitter: «l'arbre avait quelque chose de majestueux. De près, il paraissait plus impressionnant encore et dégageait une force que l'homme avait du mal à s'expliquer. Il leva la tête pour apprécier les branches à la fois massives et sensuelles, qui vivaient une fière autonomie loin des racines» (CR, 62). En fin de compte, il est impossible de déterminer la conclusion du parcours de Dalembert et de ses personnages, à travers lesquels il met en fiction les questionnements principaux qui caractérisent son itinéraire biographique et littéraire. Le voyage de ce vagabond infatigable n'est pas encore terminé.

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La société haïtienne dans le recueil
Le Roman de Bouqui de Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain
(analyse morphologique et sémiotique)

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Abstract   In Haiti the characters Malice and Bouqui are considered to be one of the most famous fictional couple in the folk oral tradition. In 1940 the ethnologist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain published *Le Roman de Bouqui*, the first anthology totally devoted to this inseparable duo. The essay analyses the fifty tales of *Le Roman de Bouqui* in order to validate the theories that link the two characters to the main historical Haitian social classes: the *Bossale*/Creole slave and the countryman/city dweller. The three different types of methodological analyses, i.e. morphological, lexical fields and actantial, allow an in-depth observation of the connections between fiction and reality, but also set the basis for a prediction of their future evolutions.

Sommaire   Introduction. – 1 Éléments sociologiques. – 2 Analyse morphologique. – 3 Analyse des champs lexicaux. – 3.1 Religion. – 3.2 Peur. – 3.3 Intelligence. – 3.4 Faim. – 3.5 Orgueil. – 3.6 Travail. – 4 Analyse actantielle. – 4.1 Axe du Vouloir. – 4.2 Axe du Pouvoir. – 4.3 Axe du savoir. – Conclusion: le pays profond. – Diagrammes. – Numérotation des contes du *Roman de Bouqui*.

Keywords   Comhaire-Sylvain. Le Roman de Bouqui. Haitian Folktales. Haitian Folklore. Countryman/City Dweller.

Introduction

Les fables d'Ésope ne sont pas, donc, des fables pour les enfants: ceux-ci aiment entrer dans l'univers féerique et de l'aventure fantastique, qui donne des ailes à leur 'imaginaire' kaléidoscopique. Les fables d'Ésope sont, au contraire, la transposition allégorique d'une réalité misérable et désolante, celle de la vie quotidienne, faite de servilisme, de misère; elles parlent des hommes et de leurs faiblesses et de leurs vices, de leurs actions dominées par l'ambition, par la soif de pouvoir, par la prétention et la vanité; les animaux, grâce à leur psychologie univoque, en deviennent les masques et les symboles. (Giammarco 2013, 14)[1]

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1   «Le favole esopiche dunque non sono favole per i bambini: questi amano entrare nel mondo fiabesco e dell'avventura fantastica che mettano ali al loro 'immaginario' caleidoscopico. Esse invece sono la trasposizione allegorica di una realtà squallida e desolante,

Comme Giammarco le constate, depuis toujours, les contes folkloriques sont considérés comme le miroir fictionnel de la société et leurs personnages animalesques construisent des masques-stéréotypes pour transposer la réalité dans l'imaginaire commun. Dès les origines, ces personnages à caractérisation figée ont souvent pénétré l'usage de la langue quotidienne, d'abord sous forme de similitude, ensuite en tant que métaphore, au point d'entrer à faire partie de l'onomastique.[2] Dans les diverses cultures les exemples sont plusieurs: l'astuce et le renard, la force et le lion, l'obstination et l'âne et, en Haïti, la sottise et Bouqui. Ce dernier, en couple avec son inséparable 'compagnon' Malice (la ruse), représente une exception à la vague zoomorphique du folklore, due au processus de ré-humanisation subi pendant la traversée Atlantique. Un processus obligatoire aussi bien pour le manque de correspondance dans la faune caribéenne, que, hypothèse hasardée, comme forme de revanche pour les conditions déshumanisantes de la plantation, auxquelles l'esprit haïtien oppose une ré-humanisation de réaffirmation. En tout cas, les deux, filleuls du lièvre et de l'hyène africaines, sont considérés, encore aujourd'hui, les représentants des personnalités composant la société haïtienne, tout comme leurs correspondants animaliers, Lapin et Zamba, ou humanisés, Jan Sot et Jan Lespri, incarnent les masques du binôme trompeur/trompé aux Antilles. D'ailleurs, chaque société a toujours donné son empreinte personnelle à la gamme des personnages de sa propre littérature orale en choisissant des symboles et des types capables de résumer sa propre culture; cependant, le cas haïtien est caractérisé par une association des personnages non seulement à une typologie humaine, comme par exemple 'l'astucieux', 'le sot', 'l'avare', mais directement à une spécifique classe sociale, dès l'époque de la plantation jusqu'à nos jours:

> Pour certains, Bouqui symbolise l'ignorance et Malice la connaissance. Mais qui connaît les frontières de l'ignorance et de la connaissance? Dans ce cas, l'expérience de l'oncle [Bouqui] fait des ravages dans le savoir de Malice. L'intellectuel, prétentieux et pédant, aux prises avec l'analphabète, malin et astucieux! C'est la thèse philosophique. Pour d'autres, Bouqui représente le colonisateur, ou mieux le blanc américain

quella della vita di tutti i giorni, piena di piaggerie, di miserie e parlano degli uomini con le loro debolezze e i loro vizi, del loro muoversi dominati dall'ambizione, dalla voglia di potere, dalla presunzione e dalla vanità; gli animali, data la loro psicologia univoca, sono assunti come maschere e simboli» [Traduction de l'Auteur de l'article].

2 Il suffit de penser au prénom 'Leonard' qui renvoie à la puissance et à la force léonine. Ce prénom est une adaptation savante en latin médiéval, d'après le latin *Leo, leonis* qui signifie 'lion', d'un prénom germanique basé sur l'élément *le[w]o* 'lion' (cf. allemand *Löwe*, littéraire *Leu*; néerlandais *leeuw*), lui-même emprunt au latin, et l'élément *hard* 'dur', devenu le suffixe-*ard* en français (Dauzat 1980, 382).

c'est-à-dire l'oncle Sam. Évidemment, Malice est, dans ce cas, le national qui, avec mille tours de son sac, trouve le moyen de dire tout haut ce que toute la population pense tout bas de l'occupant. Nous sommes en 1915 lors de l'occupation d'Haïti par les États-Unis d'Amérique. C'est la thèse politique. Pour d'autres enfin, Bouqui exprime le gros bon sens du paysan qui est souvent trompé par l'homme de la ville. Or, c'est lui qui tient les cordons de la bourse en tant que producteur. Le Citadin reste donc un parasite arrogant qui vit, en fait, aux dépens du paysan. C'est la thèse sociologique. (Victor 1993, 5)

À ces associations sociologique, politique et philosophique, il faut ajouter la thèse la plus répandue, celle historique, qui voit la correspondance entre Bouqui et l'esclave bossale et entre Malice et l'esclave créole. Une deuxième particularité de ce couple est la duplicité des personnages principaux, en contraste avec l'individualité du héros animal de la tradition africaine, le lièvre N'Djombor, qui change toujours de 'compagnon' ou de victime (Hyène, Éléphant, Lion, Tigre, etc.). En effet, en Haïti, Malice et Bouki constituent un duo inséparable bien défini et attesté, qui dans la classification des typologies des contes haïtiens d'E. Paul[3] obtient la première place. Dans cette étude, je me propose d'examiner, à travers trois types d'analyse différents (morphologique, des champs lexicaux et actantielle), le premier recueil écrit consacré à ce couple: *Le Roman de Bouqui* (1940) de l'ethnologue et folkloriste Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain. L'ouvrage rassemble cinquante contes de la tradition haïtienne, qui ont été recueillis et réécrits par l'autrice-ethnologue dans la première moitié du XXème siècle. Ce travail de Comhaire-Sylvain s'insère dans la lignée de son père, Georges Sylvain, auteur du célèbre *Cric? Crac? Fables de La Fontaine racontées par un montagnard haïtien et transcrites en vers créoles*, une réécriture, ou mieux une haïtianisation des fables de La Fontaine. Le choix de le *Roman de Bouqui* pour cette étude est dû non seulement au fait qu'il constitue la première anthologie du conte haïtien, mais surtout au fait qu'il est totalement consacré à Malice et Bouqui. Cette focalisation permet une analyse approfondie afin de valider les théories qui lient le couple haïtien aux deux binômes des classes sociales et historiques les plus importantes en Haïti: esclave bossale/esclave créole et Paysan/Citadin.

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3 La classification se base sur les catégories des personnages principaux des contes haïtiens. Les résultats montrent à la première place Malice et Bouqui, suivi par Contes d'animaux, Contes de Héros, Contes de Loup-garou ou d'esprits invisibles bienfaisants et malfaisants (Paul 1962, 10).

1 Éléments sociologiques

Contrairement à l'opinion commune et traditionnelle, qui croit à l'existence d'un seul type d'esclave, la société esclavagiste de Saint-Domingue non seulement était fermement hiérarchisée, mais était caractérisée par une sous-hiérarchie à l'intérieur de la couche des esclaves, composée par cinq sous-catégories: le Captif, le Bossale, le Bossale créolisé, le Créole et l'Affranchi. Le Captif[4] est l'esclave qui vient de débarquer du bateau négrier et il fait partie du lot à vendre aux enchères; dès qu'il sera vendu il deviendra Bossale, un 'meuble'[5] déambulant à disposition de son maître, et il devra s'adapter au plus tôt au système de l'esclavage en apprenant les règles et les hiérarchies qui le tiennent. Ce processus d'adaptation, comme l'affirme Meillassoux dans *Anthropologie de l'esclavage* (cité dans Barthélémy 2000, 206-212), au lieu d'aboutir à une intégration graduelle visait à une désintégration en quatre étapes: désocialisation[6], réification[7], désexualisation[8] et décivilisation[9]. Le résultat était une aliénation totale, qui aboutissait souvent au refus catégorique du travail imposé et au recours au *marronnage* (la fuite), ou encore pire au dépérissement et/ou au suicide. Emprisonné, vendu, reclus et exploité à l'instar d'une bête, le Bossale est un être solitaire, incapable de socialiser, replié sur lui-même et il ne peut que se renfermer dans les souvenirs de son passé libre. Cette condition d'aliénation vécue par la plupart des esclaves ne convenait pas au sys-

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4 Pour approfondir, voir Barthélémy 2000, 206-212.

5 Article 44 du Code Noir (1685): «Déclarons les esclaves être meubles et comme tels entrer dans la communauté, n'avoir point de suite par hypothèque, se partager également entre les cohéritiers, sans préciput et droit d'aînesse, n'être sujets au douaire coutumier, au retrait féodal et lignager, aux droits féodaux et seigneuriaux, aux formalités des décrets, ni au retranchement des quatre quints, en cas de disposition à cause de mort et testamentaire» (Colbert 1685).

6 «La première phase est celle de la désocialisation qui fixe les captifs dans leur nouvel état d'étrangers au service du système de la plantation. Ces hors statut, ces non nés ne peuvent se réclamer d'aucun titre d'insertion dans leur nouvel environnement. Tous les liens sociaux qui faisaient, auparavant, de chaque individu une personne, sont systématiquement détruits; les familles sont dispersées au hasard des enchères et les ethnies sont séparées afin de ne pas risquer de constituer, par la suite, des groupes trop cohérents au sein d'une même plantation» (Barthélémy 2000, 207).

7 «L'esclave perd tous ses droits en tant qu'homme. Il est traité comme une marchandise et fait partie des objets. Il est désormais assimilé, comme nous l'avons vu, au cheptel du maître» (207).

8 «Les rapports entre les sexes ne sont plus déterminés par la procréation mais uniquement en fonction du travail. Dans les tâches les plus rudes de la plantation, parmi ceux que l'on appelle les nègres de houe, la population de femmes atteint ainsi plus de la moitié» (207).

9 «L'insertion de l'esclave se fait par le biais d'un seul et unique rapport: celui qui le relie à son maître, sans aucune existence sociale par rapport au reste de la collectivité» (207).

tème économique de la plantation, qui se tourna vite vers une politique d'intégration du Bossale afin d'éviter une perte économique considérable. La 'créolisation'[10] progressive se butait à une nouvelle position sociale: le 'Bossale Créolisé'. De son coté, le 'nouveau' Bossale cherchera à s'insérer surtout en apprenant la langue créole et en participant aux cérémonies vaudou sécrètes et aux assemblées clandestines, outre à la participation publique plus active à l'intérieur de la collectivité. Cependant, malgré ses efforts et malgré ceux du maître, sa diversité sera toujours marquée par sa couleur, par le fait de ne pas être autochtone et par son ignorance culturelle et sociale, causes réelles de sa marginalisation. Contrairement au Bossale, l'esclave Créole est né et a grandi dans la plantation, il en détient les connaissances sociales et culturelles, car il a toujours vécu à l'intérieur de ce système dans lequel il se débrouille parfaitement et il ne risque même pas de s'abandonner aux souvenirs de Guinée, vu qu'il n'a jamais connu d'autre monde que celui de la culture de la canne à sucre. De plus, sa naissance 'privilégiée' par rapport au Bossale, lui donne un esprit plus fier et orgueilleux, même vaniteux dans sa demande de biens et de besoins 'à la française', comme par exemple la coiffure, les vêtements colorés et les ustensiles de ménage ciselés et décorés. Cette supériorité s'explique aussi par rapport à sa coopération avec le maître, à sa connaissance du fonctionnement de la plantation et à sa position en haut de son système pyramidal, sans oublier ses habilités pratiques et rhétoriques (en créole). Son esprit rusé et son savoir-faire seront les clés pour l'accès aux niveaux les plus élevés auxquels il essayera de prendre part à la suite de son affranchissement.

Après l'Indépendance (1804), la fracture entre les classes sociales haïtiennes demeure, le mépris des Créoles envers les Bossales se transpose dans le rapport entre les Citadins et les Paysans. Suite à la Révolution, les terres des colons sont redistribuées aux Haïtiens[11] et l'on assiste à une énorme explosion démographique, qui est caractérisée par une division nette entre jeunes et vieux. Les nouveaux Créoles, fils des Bossales, prennent l'attitude paresseuse des Créoles, ils méprisent le travail et se contentent d'une économie de base à l'effort minimum:

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10   Les mesures prises sont: «l'encadrement initial par d'autres esclaves de la même "nation". L'accoutumance progressive aux travaux de la plantation pendant une durée de 3 à 18 mois. L'intégration symbolique dans la nouvelle société au moyen d'une nouvelle naissance marquée par le baptême et l'attribution de nouveaux parents fictifs: les parrains et les marraines. L'attribution, après quelques temps, d'une parcelle de terre, le jardin, qui doit lui permettre d'améliorer les conditions de sa survie tout en lui inculquant le principe de travail volontaire» (208).

11   Selon l'article 12 des dispositions générales de la Constitution Impériale d'Haïti du 1805, «toute propriété qui aura ci-devant appartenu à un Blanc français est incontestablement et de droit confisquée au profit de l'Etat» (Janvier 1886, 32).

> La partie la plus jeune des gens vivant en dehors des villes me semblait passer l'essentiel de son temps à flâner sans but apparent. On m'a dit que ces jeunes créoles sont définitivement des vagabonds de tout premier ordre et que le seul travail véritable est fourni par les Africains [Bossales] survivants qui, à la différence de leur progéniture qui préfère la vie en plaine, se retirent dans les montagnes à l'abri du monde. (Charles Mackenzie cité dans Barthélémy 2003, 107)

En opposition à cette génération 'flâneuse', qui constituera la majorité des Citadins, s'affirment les 'anciens Africains', qui instaurent des micro-communautés isolées, indépendantes avec leurs propres codes sociaux, leur religion, leur culture et leurs traditions. À partir de cette première scission générationnelle, débute la formation de deux classes distinctes, les Paysans et les Citadins:

> L'une habitant les villes […] a reçu des connaissances qui lui ont donné les premiers instincts de la civilisation européenne; l'autre composée presque en entier de laboureurs […] a grandi sous l'impression des mœurs africaines pratiquées pendant longtemps et même de nos jours dans nos campagnes. (Thomas Madiou cité dans Barthélémy 2003, 118)

Une opposition qui se base surtout sur le contraste entre la civilisation citadine, calque de l'esprit européen, et le primitivisme paysan. Fortement méprisé, le Paysan est décrit comme:

> Enfantin et craintif, phénoménal de faiblesse, d'impuissance et d'ignorance, très doux, très passif, sans envie, sans désirs, sans besoins, d'humeur égale, instinctivement travailleur, riant toujours de ses belles dents blanches aussitôt qu'on lui parle, riant de tout, d'un ordre bref qu'on lui donne avec indifférence, d'une réprimande, d'une plaisanterie, de quelques cobs qu'on glisse entre ses mains calleuses, d'une menace de coups, riant même sous le coco-macaque [matraque], il reste animal et végétatif, avec un air d'avoir peur de penser et d'oser croire qu'il est un homme. (Stenio Vincent cité dans Barthélémy 2003, 119)

Ces données sociologiques et ethnologiques constituent la source primaire de confrontation pour les analyses qui suivent et qui visent à retracer les liens entre la réalité sociale haïtienne et la réalité fictive des contes. Il ne s'agira pas de retrouver les caractéristiques de la culture haïtienne à l'intérieur des contes pris en considération, mais plutôt d'une focalisation sur les deux protagonistes, Malice et Bouqui, afin de retrouver dans leurs caractéristiques les affinités avec la société haïtienne.

2   Analyse morphologique

Avant de s'intéresser à la caractérisation des deux personnages, il faut prendre en considération la totalité du *Roman de Bouqui* en le soumettant à une analyse morphologique sur trois niveaux (analyse de l'ensemble, des contes d'origine africaine et des contes proprement haïtiens), pour mettre en évidence l'existence du binôme invariable au niveau du rôle principal dans le cas haïtien, qui diffère de la tradition africaine, vu qu'elle est caractérisée par la présence d'un seul protagoniste ayant un partenaire changeable, comme le théorise Comhaire-Sylvain dans la préface de l'ouvrage:

> En Afrique, le seul héros c'est le lièvre. […]En Afrique bantoue, l'hyène n'est qu'un des multiples compagnons de chasse du lièvre dont il tire toujours parti.[…] En Haïti nous avons deux héros: Malice et Bouqui. (Comhaire-Sylvain [1940] 1973, 14)

L'analyse morphologique effectuée se sert des structures morphologiques universelles définies par Denise Paulme et théorisées dans son ouvrage *La mère dévorante. Essai sur la morphologie des contes africains* (1976), qui permettent de délinéer la structure morphologique du conte. Aux sept structures (Ascendante,[12] Descendante,[13] Cyclique,[14] en Spirale,[15] en

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12   La structure ascendante (manque-amélioration-manque comblé) est très simple, car elle se compose de trois fonctions exécutées par le même personnage, structure classable comme positive.

13   La structure descendante (situation normale-détérioration-manque), une structure simple de trois fonctions jouées par un seul actant, classable comme négative.

14   La structure cyclique peut avoir deux fins différentes: positive (situation stable-danger-malheur-secours-situation stable) ou négative (manque initial-manque comblé-insatisfaction-désobéissance-retour du manque). Dans le cas des contes analysés ici elle sera toujours négative.

15   La structure en spirale (manque-amélioration-manque comblé-détérioration-danger couru-nouvelle amélioration-état pleinement satisfaisant) s'oppose à la structure cyclique négative et mène à une double positivité.

Miroir,[16] en Sablier,[17] Complexe[18]) il faut ajouter une nouvelle catégorie, celle «complexe» (avec minuscule), qui permet de différencier certains contes du point de vue de la complexité de la structure narrative, car les deux protagonistes, Malice et Bouqui, deviennent respectivement les sujets de deux structures différentes à l'intérieur de la même histoire, comme par exemple dans le conte «Monplaisir», le dix-septième conte du recueil, où l'on remarque une structure Ascendant pour Malice, en contraste avec la structure Descendante de Bouqui.

Ainsi qu'il résulte du diagramme 1, le recueil présente, en général, un équilibre entre les différentes typologies de conte. En effet, il y a dix-huit récits à structure simple (Ascendante et Descendante), quinze à structure semi-complexe (Spirale, en Miroir, Cyclique et en Sablier) et dix-sept complexes (Complexe et complexe). Cet équilibre concerne même l'importance au niveau des personnages principaux (diagramme 2), vu que Bouqui est le seul acteur dans onze contes, Malice dans quatorze et l'on retrouve le duo inséparable dans les vingt-cinq contes qui restent. Cela indique un équilibre même au niveau de l'importance des personnages, car chacun est protagoniste pour un quart du recueil et membre du couple pour l'autre moitié du recueil.

Si l'on prend en considération les contes d'origine africaine, la situation change considérablement. En effet, au niveau de la structure morphologique l'équilibre reste presque constant (diagramme 3), même si avec une tendance à la complexité. En ce qui concerne les personnages (diagramme 4), l'individualité de Bouqui se réduit considérablement à trois contes, alors que Malice est présent dans huit, contre les quatorze contes consacrés aux deux. Du point de vue de la typologie des contes consacrés aux personnages, l'on notera de petites dissonances par rapport aux caractérisations traditionnelles. La première concerne Bouqui protagoniste d'un conte ascendant, alors que d'habitude il appartient au mouvement descendant. Cette exception est très probablement due au fait que le conte original avait comme protagoniste le lièvre africain (ancêtre de Malice)

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16   La structure en miroir (1er manque-amélioration-manque comblé; 2ème manque-détérioration-châtiment) a deux parties, dont la première a comme personnage principal le héros positif, alors que la deuxième est jouée par le héros négatif, les deux ont la même situation de départ.

17   La structure en sablier (1er manque-amélioration-manque comblé; 2ème manque-détérioration-châtiment) a deux parties, qui sont jouées par deux personnages à comportements inverses mais, contrairement à la structure en miroir, ici les situations de départ sont opposées (l'une positive, l'autre négative) et au cours du conte les deux personnages vont occuper l'un la position de départ de l'autre, l'un aboutissant à la réussite et l'autre à l'échec.

18   Dans la structure Complexe l'on retrouve deux structures coexistantes, qui constituent deux contes indépendants. La création d'un conte Complexe dépend de la décision du narrateur de prolonger la narration pour créer un effet de surprise ou de suspense en renversant la narration ou à travers l'insertion d'un nouveau personnage.

et que la transposition haïtienne en a changé l'acteur principal pour le relier au conte suivant («La revanche des moutons», 35-37) à structure descendante. Une autre particularité est la présence de la structure 'en Miroir', car ce type prévoit un déroulement non-synchronique des actions et, donc, une non-duplicité du rôle principal.

Dans les contes proprement haïtiens, la tendance se renverse presque totalement, car elle vire vers une simplification morphologique(diagramme 5): sur dix-huit contes, huit ont une structure simple, six complexe, quatre demi-complexe. De plus, la duplicité des rôles principaux est parfaitement rendue (diagramme 6): Bouqui, avec six contes en solo, acquiert toute son individualité, le même pour Malice avec cinq contes pour lui et les sept restant sont consacrés au couple. Une meilleure caractérisation des personnages est rendue aussi par l'appartenance aux structures les plus directes: à Bouqui correspond un mouvement descendant ou cyclique négatif, alors que ceux de Malice sont ascendants ou à spirale, donc nettement positifs. À cela s'ajoute aussi bien la présence de la structure 'en Sablier' que de six structures 'complexes', qui renforcent le synchronisme des personnages et la dualité du rôle principal, cette dernière confirmée aussi par l'absence de la structure 'en Miroir', dont l'une des caractéristiques est de séparer les deux protagonistes.

En résumant, l'analyse morphologique confirme les théories de Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain d'un point de vue strictement statistique (la moitié des contes voit la duplicité du rôle principal); de plus, il faut aussi retenir que les deux personnages sont nettement délinées par leur appartenance à une certaine structure morphologique, souvent négative pour Bouqui, alors que Malice domine dans sa réussite personnelle.

3   Analyse des champs lexicaux

Les isotopies, ou faisceaux de redondances sémiques, choisies pour l'analyse des champs lexicaux sont: Faim, Peur, Religion, Intelligence, Orgueil et Travail. Le choix est du à l'importance que ces catégories ont au sein de la culture et de la société haïtiennes, mais aussi à l'intérieur du cycle de Malice et Bouki. Dans cette étude, chaque catégorie comprend une connotation négative et une connotation positive[19] dans le but de démontrer la correspondance entre les deux protagonistes et les deux binômes sociaux (Bossale/Créole et Paysan/Citadin) à travers l'isolement des mots-clés pour la caractérisation des personnages.

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19   Par exemple l'isotopie Religion référée à Malice comportera les attributs *Vaudouisant* et *Profiteur*.

3.1 Religion

En Haïti, en particulier dans la culture paysanne, la religion est essentiellement liée au Vaudou, alors que le catholicisme n'a qu'une position relative[20] à l'intérieur du syncrétisme religieux haïtien. En ce qui concerne les deux personnages, le rapport avec le vaudou est totalement divergent. Malice, avec sa rationalité sceptique, contraste la superstition en y opposant une vraie connaissance des rituels du vaudou et des liens avec l'Afrique-Guinée; par contre, Bouqui est surtout victime de la crainte due à la superstition populaire. Cela comporte le choix Vaudouisant-Profiteur pour Malice et Croyant-Superstitieux pour Bouqui. À l'intérieur du recueil, si pour Malice les deux attributs sont presque également représentés (6 cas Vaudouisant-6 cas Profiteur), dans le cas de Bouqui la superstition est plus puissante que sa foi (5 cas Foi-11 cas Superstition), car il croit plus à 'ce qu'il a entendu raconter' qu'à ce pour quoi il prie. Cette confiance excessive en l'autre est propre à l'esclave Bossale, car sa méconnaissance du nouveau contexte le mène à se laisser influencer dans l'espoir d'accroître ses connaissances et de s'insérer dans la collectivité, même s'il va devenir plutôt la victime du Créole/Citadin profiteur.

3.2 Peur

Les fusils des colonisateurs, le fouet du maître, les armes des Étasuniens qui envahissent Haïti… impossible de les oublier, aussi bien que les conditions inhumaines de la plantation et l'appropriation illicite des biens, ou la réclusion et les punitions. La crainte et la peur sont deux sentiments constants en Haïti et les solutions possibles sont seulement la ruse, la violence ou la soumission. Pour Malice la peur devient Ruse (10 cas) ou Lâcheté (10 cas), alors que pour Bouqui elle est caractérisée par l'opposition Violence (24 cas)/Lâcheté (11 cas). Dans le cas de Malice la lâcheté traduit la terreur pure, qui contraint le personnage à se cacher ou à s'enfuir, tout comme le Créole qui se réfugiait dans le 'petit marronnage'[21] pour éviter les punitions du maître. Par opposition, on y retrouve l'habileté à se débrouiller dans les situations les plus difficiles et dangereuses à travers les

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20 «Dans toute une série de récits où Dieu est mentionné, il ne s'agit nullement du Dieu des Chrétiens, une vieille à qui je demandais à propos de *Crabe* s'il s'agissait du Dieu qu'on voit dans les églises m'a avoué que dans ce cas, on disait 'Dieu' pour 'Papa Mambo'» (Comhaire-Sylvain 1937a, xviii).

21 Le 'petit marronnage' est l'absence temporaire de la plantation de l'esclave, due surtout à la paresse ou à la crainte d'une punition, semblable à un simple vagabondage, dont le maître ne se souciait pas. À celui-ci s'oppose le 'grand marronnage', qui est la fuite définitive, souvent organisée en bande (Debien 1976, 432).

capacités linguistiques et la connaissance du contexte de la plantation ou, en général, du 'monde', comme pour son correspondant Citadin. Bouqui, au contraire, toujours à cause de son manque de connaissances, recourt surtout à la violence et à sa puissance physique; pourtant, quand la force ne suffit pas, il ne lui reste que la soumission la plus totale.

3.3   Intelligence

Le thème de l'Intelligence est lié à celui de la peur, car l'on y retrouve l'opposition entre la ruse de Malice et la force violente de Bouqui. Pourtant la Ruse (27 cas) de Malice ébauche souvent dans la Vanité (21 cas) qui s'étend jusqu'à l'arrogance et à la surconfiance dans ses propres habiletés. La victime désignée est certainement Bouqui, qui au contraire oscille entre la Naïveté (15 cas) et la Bêtise (15 cas). Sa bêtise est due surtout à l'impatience et à la distraction de son caractère 'sauvage', mais elle contraste avec son caractère enfantin et naïf, comparable à celui d'un enfant face'aux choses des adultes'. Cela comporte une naïveté pure dans l'acceptation des conseils-mensonges de Malice. Ce rapport de mépris et confiance traduit le rapport entre Créole/Bossale et Citadin/Paysan, de la supériorité intellectuelle opposée à la bêtise ou à la naïveté.

3.4   Faim

«On peut aller tout nu, je l'ai déjà fait autrefois, mais on ne peut pas avoir faim» (Comhaire-Sylvain [1940] 1973, 32), cette affirmation de Bouqui reflète bien l'importance de la nourriture non seulement dans le cycle de Malice et Bouqui, dans lequel elle représente l'élément vecteur des aventures, mais aussi dans la culture populaire haïtienne. Cette obsession pour la nourriture est vécue par les deux personnages de deux façons différentes: Indépendance (16 cas) et Égoïsme (9 cas) pour Malice et Dépendance (14 cas) et Gloutonnerie (22 cas) pour Bouqui. Dès son enfance, Malice sait comment se procurer de la nourriture, il sait toujours où et comment la trouver à bon marché ou gratuitement. Cependant, il n'obéit pas au principe de la collectivité paysanne, au contraire il est plutôt 'cachotier' et s'il lui arrive de partager c'est toujours sous menace. Une autre caractéristique de Malice est celle de l'accumulation des biens et de l'habileté à marchander, qui le lient davantage à l'esprit Créole et Citadin. À cette habileté se juxtapose la dépendance toute bossale et paysanne de Bouqui, car sans l'aide de Malice il n'est pas capable de se procurer de la nourriture, pour laquelle il est totalement dépendant au point de penser et agir 'avec le ventre', en dépit des punitions et des dangers qui en dérivent.

3.5   Orgueil

L'orgueil est un aspect très important en Haïti, car sa population a dû revendiquer son identité plusieurs fois face aux Étrangers. En ce qui concerne Malice et Bouqui, l'obstination de l'un et le caractère enfantin de l'autre se juxtaposent au désir commun de vengeance. L'Obstination (7 cas) de Malice traduit bien l'orgueil et la vanité de l'esprit Créole et Citadin qui, en cas d'échec, recourt à la Vengeance (11 cas) la plus cruelle afin de regagner la position sociale la plus prestigieuse. D'origine pauvre, Malice voit dans l'accumulation des richesses et dans la montée sociale les moyens pour revendiquer ses mérites et cacher ses origines, tout comme le Créole et le Citadin obsédés par le bovarysme mulâtre.[22] L'orgueil de Malice trouve sa satisfaction aussi dans le mépris pour Bouqui, qui lutte entre le désir d'améliorer ses connaissances et un Infantilisme (19 cas) qui est la cause de ses nombreux échecs. C'est justement l'échec réitéré qui fait jaillir un violent esprit de Vengeance (7 cas) envers la société méprisante et en particulier envers Malice, symbole de la 'supériorité' de l'Autre; tout comme le Bossale créolisé qui était fier de son africanité, mais qui en même temps cherchait à s'adapter en imitant les habilités et les façons de vivre des Créoles.

3.6   Travail

Le Bossale dépend du Créole comme Bouqui dépend de Malice dans le cadre du Travail. Cela se traduit en attitude de Commandeur (8) chez Malice, alors que Bouqui ne peut que se soumettre (Soumission, 8 cas). Pourtant il y a un point en commun: la Paresse, même si c'est plutôt Malice (8 cas) qui influence Bouqui (6 cas). Le premier, tout comme le Créole et le Citadin, n'est pas à son aise avec les travaux manuels, il réussit toujours à trouver un escamotage pour les éviter, ou encore mieux il assume le rôle de commandeur, comme le faisait le Créole dans la plantation en assumant le rôle de chef d'une escouade pour surveiller les autres esclaves. À cela s'ajoute aussi son habilité dans le vol, qui est profondément critiqué par la culture paysanne, mais très répandu dans la culture citadine. Au contraire de Malice, Bouqui présente une attitude de soumission due à son besoin

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22   Dans son ouvrage *Ainsi parla l'Oncle*, J. Price Mars critique l'attitude de l'élite mulâtre haïtienne aliénée dans son imitation des mœurs européens: «la communauté nègre d'Haïti revêtit la défroque de la civilisation occidentale au lendemain de 1804. Dès lors, avec une constance qu'aucun échec, aucun sarcasme, aucune perturbation n'a pu fléchir, elle s'évertua à réaliser ce qu'elle crut être son destin supérieur en modelant sa pensée et ses sentiments, à se rapprocher de son ancienne métropole, à lui ressembler, à s'identifier à elle» (Price Mars [1928] 1973, 44).

primitif de satisfaire sa faim, pour lequel il travaille les champs en obéissant aux ordres de Malice. En ce qui concerne la paresse, Bouqui en profite seulement quand il est avec Malice, ce qui souligne sa nécessité d'émuler l'autre, même si cela implique le vol ou le refus des travaux manuels.

Les résultats de cette analyse des champs lexicaux donnent une première mais décisive caractérisation de Bouqui et Malice. La confirmation de leurs ressemblances avec les binômes sociaux haïtiens constitue la base pour une deuxième analyse, plus spécifique, telle que celle actantielle, dont le but est de délinéer à partir du texte une caractérisation sociologique capable de confirmer l'interrelation entre la fiction et la réalité.

4 Analyse actantielle

Le modèle actantiel standard utilisé dans cette étude a été proposé par Greimas dans son ouvrage *Sémantique structurale* (1966, 172-185) afin d'analyser une action, qu'elle soit réelle ou thématisée dans un texte. Le modèle se compose de six actants (Sujet,[23] Objet,[24] Destinateur,[25] Destinataire,[26] Adjuvant[27] et Opposant[28]) qui ne doivent pas correspondre nécessairement à six acteurs différents: au contraire, il s'avère que la plupart des fois le même acteur en recouvre plusieurs ('syncrétisme actantiel'). Le modèle actantiel classique peut être intégré avec des 'compléments' ou 'sous-classes', pour approfondir et améliorer l'analyse. Dans ce cas, il a fallu intégrer l'actant Destinataire avec les catégories Virtuel/Réel, vu que dans la plupart des contes on retrouve l'opposition entre le Destinataire Virtuel et le Destinataire Réel. Une autre particularité de cette analyse est sa duplicité: en effet, dans le cas d'un conte à double rôle principal on a effectué l'analyse du point de vue de Malice aussi bien que de Bouqui. En outre, pour faciliter leur compréhension, les résultats seront donnés en suivant les trois axes théorisés par Greimas, qui relient les actants en trois couples oppositifs:
  – L'axe du vouloir: la relation entre Sujet et Objet;
  – L'axe du pouvoir: la relation entre Adjuvant et Opposant;
  – L'axe du savoir ou de la transmission: la relation entre Destinateur et Destinataire.

23   Celui qui accomplit une action.

24   L'objetà conquérir par le Sujet.

25   Celui qui ordonne la quête de l'Objet.

26   Celui qui profite de l'Objet.

27   Celui ou ce qui aide le Sujet dans l'action.

28   Celui ou ce qui s'oppose au Sujet dans l'action.

Cette analyse intègre les caractéristiques de Malice et Bouqui qui ont été regroupées dans la précédente analyse des champs lexicaux, afin d'approfondir et confirmer les résultats déjà obtenus.

4.1 Axe du Vouloir

Dans le recueil, comme déjà démontré dans l'analyse morphologique, Malice et Bouqui se partagent le rôle principal: ce qui diffère entre les deux est l'Objet. Dans le cas de Bouqui, l'Objet de ses désirs est presque toujours la Nourriture (25 cas: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 21, 24, 29, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44 et 49),[29] les autres objets d'intérêt sont la Vengeance (4 cas: 3, 13, 16 et 22), le Gain d'un pari (3 cas: 25, 26 et 48), le Mariage (1 cas: 10) et accomplir un bon Travail (3 cas: 1, 27 et 40). Tout comme le Bossale et le Paysan, Bouqui met au centre de son existence la Nourriture, mais il n'oublie pas son orgueil personnel (Vengeance et Gain d'un pari) et social (accomplissement d'un bon Travail). Pour mieux comprendre le thème de l'orgueil personnel, je donnerai l'exemple de l'analyse actantielle du conte «Toué… fa… maloré» (16), précédée par une réduction du conte à ses fonctions:

(16) «Toué… fa… maloré»
   I. Bouqui veut se venger de Malice.
   II. Bouqui va chez Malice pour le tuer.
   III. Malice, grâce à une question piège, découvre que Bouqui est dans sa maison.
   IV. Malice s'enfuit, Bouqui se lance à sa poursuite.
   V. Malice organise un plan d'action pour apaiser la colère de Bouqui.
   VI. Malice se donne l'apparence d'un mendiant couvert de plaies.
   VII. Bouqui rencontre Malice/le mendiant et lui demande la causes de ses plaies.
   VIII. Malice/le mendiant répond que les plaies sont dues à une malédiction de Malice.
   IX. Bouqui se rend chez Malice.
   X. Malice prononce les premiers mots de la malédiction.
   XI. Bouqui, effrayé, demande pardon et renonce à sa vengeance.

   Conte à structure Ascendante pour Malice: I-II manque, III-X amélioration, XI manque comblé.
   Conte à structure Descendante pour Bouqui: I-II état d'équilibre, III-IX détérioration, XI manque.

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29   Dans cette analyse, la référence à chaque conte respectera la numération dans *Le Roman de Bouqui*, par exemple le premier conte du recueil, «Le bain de Bouqui», sera indiqué avec le numéro '1'.

Sujet: Bouqui; Objet: Vengeance; Destinateur: Bouqui; Destinateur virtuel: Bouqui; Destinateur réel: Personne; Adjuvant: Force; Opposant: Superstition.

Sujet: Malice; Objet: Sécurité; Destinateur: Malice; Destinataire: Malice; Adjuvant: Exploitation de la superstition; Opposant: Bouqui.

L'histoire débute par le désir de vengeance de Bouqui après l'énième mauvais tour joué par Malice; cela reflète la volonté du personnage de reconquérir une position sociale acceptable. De plus, ce conte anticipe aussi d'autres caractéristiques du personnage de Bouqui, telles que la Superstition en tant qu'Opposant et la Force en tant qu'Adjuvant. Malice, au contraire de Bouqui, a plusieurs Objets du désir outre la Nourriture (16 cas: 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 21, 24, 29, 30, 36, 37, 46, 47 et 48): comme chez son partenaire, l'on retrouve la Vengeance (4 cas: 2, 14, 20 et 45), le Gain d'un pari (2 cas: 25 et 26), mais surtout la Richesse (7 cas: 4, 19, 23, 32, 39, 40 et 41) et la Sécurité (6 cas: 13, 16, 22, 33, 34 et 36), outre le fait d'acquérir une bonne position sociale avec le Mariage (3 cas: 10, 28 et 31) et d'éviter le Travail (2 cas: 27 et 50). Ces désirs collent parfaitement à l'esprit Créole et Citadin et confirment le lien entre Malice et ses correspondants réels. Pour mieux comprendre les attitudes de ce personnage il suffit de prendre en examen deux contes qui lui sont entièrement consacrés: «Malice oh!Tu as raison» (20) et «Le mariage de Malice» (31). Dans le premier, Malice se venge de l'exil infligé par le Roi en attirant sur lui l'attention de toute la population grâce à un festin:

(20) «Malice oh! Tu as raison»
   I. Malice retourne au pays après l'avoir quitté.
   II. Le Roi décide d'organiser une grande prière et invite tous ses amis, sauf Malice.
   III. Malice décide de se venger.
   IV. Le jour de la prière du Roi, Malice organise une fête au bord de la rivière.
   V. Les jeunes commencent à danser la musique de Malice.
   VI. Les parents des jeunes s'unissent aux danses.
   VII. Tout le monde oublie la prière du Roi.
   VIII. La Reine s'unit aux danses.
   IX. Le Roi reste seul.
   X. Le Roi s'unit aux danses.
   XI. Le Roi retourne chez lui et trouve la maison dévalisée (par Malice).

Conte à structure Ascendante: I-II manque, III-X amélioration, XI manque comblé.

Sujet: Malice; Objet: Vengeance; Destinateur: Malice; Destinataire: Malice; Adjuvant: Habileté; Opposant: Roi.

Ce conte montre la volonté d'être respecté à l'intérieur de la société, même si cela implique l'affrontement du Roi en personne. Têtu dans sa montée dans l'échelle sociale, Malice aspire même au mariage avec la fille du Roi, aidé en cela par la Chance aussi.

(31) «Le mariage de Malice»
  I. Un Roi a cinq filles. Personne ne connaît leurs prénoms. Malice est tombé amoureux d'une d'entre elles.
  II. Le Roi donnera une de ses filles comme épouse à celui qui devinera tous les prénoms des princesses.
  III. Malice, par chance, apprend les prénoms des princesses.
  IV. Le soir Malice se met à chanter une chanson sur les prénoms des princesses sous la fenêtre du Roi.
  V. Le Roi se précipite dehors pour trouver le chanteur et trouve Malice en train de chanter.
  VI. Malice épouse la fille dont il été tombé amoureux.

  Conte à structure Ascendante: I-II manque; III-V amélioration; VI manque comblé.
  Sujet: Malice; Objet: Mariage; Destinateur: Roi; Destinataire: Malice; Adjuvant: Chance; Opposant: Roi.

4.2   Axe du Pouvoir

Ainsi qu'on l'a vu dans le conte «Toué… fa… maloré» (16), la Force (11 cas: 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 25, 34, 36, 37, 43 et 48) est l'arme meilleure de Bouqui: grâce à elle il réussit à se (faire) procurer de la nourriture, à surmonter les obstacles et à survivre et, si cela ne suffit pas, il recourt à la Confiance (6 cas: 4, 10, 17, 22, 33 et 49), la plupart de fois en Malice (3 cas: 8, 15 et 29), comme le Bossale se remettait à l'expérience du Créole. De plus, le contact avec Malice lui a donné une certaine Ruse (6 cas: 5, 6, 9, 21, 35 et 42), mais son trait distinctif est la bonne Volonté (7 cas: 1, 12, 26, 27, 38, 39, 40) dans le travail, qui rappelle celle du Paysan et du Bossale. Adjuvants mineurs sont la Chance (1 cas: 24) et la Magie (2 cas: 3 et 44). Un exemple de la bonne Volonté et de la ténacité de Bouqui est le conte «Le figuier magique» (26):

(26) «Le figuier magique»
  I. Tout le village se moque de la faiblesse de Bouqui.
  II. Bouqui s'exerce à rester sans manger pour améliorer ses prestations.
  III. Bouqui propose un pari à Malice: celui qui reste le plus longtemps sans manger gagne.
  IV. Malice accepte le pari.

V. Malice et Bouqui sont enfermés dans deux maisons sans nourriture.
VI. Au bout de deux jours, Bouqui se sent mourir de faim, tandis que Malice est en pleine forme.
VII. Bouqui découvre que Malice triche: il se nourrit chaque nuit avec un figuier magique qu'il fait pousser en chantant une chanson.
VIII. Bouqui cherche à utiliser la même chanson, mais il l'a oubliée et rate sa tentative.
IX. Malice gagne le pari.

Conte à structure en miroir

Pour Malice: I-III manque, IV-VI amélioration, VII-IX manque comblé.
Pour Bouqui: I-III manque, IV-VI détérioration, VII-IX châtiment.

Sujet: Bouqui; Objet: Gain du pari; Destinateur: Orgueil; Destinataire virtuel: Bouqui; Destinataire réel: Malice; Adjuvant: bonne Volonté; Opposant: Bêtise.
Sujet: Malice; Objet: Gain du pari; Destinateur: Bouqui; Destinataire: Malice; Adjuvant: Magie; Opposant: Bouqui.

Si Bouqui se débrouille en utilisant un peu tout ce qui lui tombe sous la main, Malice, pour son succès, compte entièrement sur ses capacités. La Ruse (30 cas: 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 45, 46, 47, 48 et 50) est son Adjuvant majeur, mais il exploite aussi la superstition des autres, en particulier celle de Bouqui (3 cas: 2, 22 et 24). Comme pour le Créole et le Citadin, les Habiletés artistiques et pratiques (4 cas: 15, 20, 23 et 32) lui sont très utiles, quand ce n'est pas la Chance (2 cas: 31 et 41) ou un autre personnage comme Tortue (1 cas: 40) à agir pour lui. Malice recourt, donc, surtout à ses capacités, il se méfie des autres, même à cause du grand nombre de ses ennemis/Opposants. Les premiers de la liste sont Bouqui (18 cas: 1, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39 et 40), le Roi (6 cas: 15, 17, 20, 31, 32 et 41) et Macaque (5 cas: 2, 19, 45, 47 et 48); suivent des ennemis plutôt occasionnels, vu que la ruse et la tricherie de Malice n'ont pas de limites: Mère de Bouqui (1 cas: 4), Baleine (1 cas: 18), Grand Diable (2 cas: 28 et 29), Cabri (1 cas: 21), M. Jacob (1 cas: 23), Homme avec un bœuf (1 cas: 9), Père de Bouqui (1 cas: 11), Soso (1 cas: 46), le Bon Dieu (1 cas: 30) et enfin sa propre Bêtise (1 cas: 50) qui lui coûtera cher. Si pour Malice les Opposants sont surtout des êtres anthropomorphes, Bouqui est gêné surtout par ses propres défauts. Il est victime en particulier de sa Gourmandise (12 cas: 6, 15, 29, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 44 et 49), ensuite de sa Bêtise (8 cas: 1, 8, 12, 25, 26, 27, 39 et 48) et de sa Superstition (3 cas: 16, 22 et 24), comme par exemple dans «Toué... fa... maloré» (16). Pourtant, lui aussi a des ennemis en chair et os, le premier est sans doute

Malice (7 cas: 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17 et 36), suivi par Cabri (2 cas: 5 et 21) et Tigre (2 cas: 7 et 43) et, enfin, deux opposants occasionnels: Fille (1 cas: 3) et Homme avec un bœuf (1 cas: 9). Bouqui est donc le *faber* de sa mauvaise chance, quand ce n'est pas Malice à gâcher ses plans comme dans le conte «Bouqui sous les harnais» (10):

(10) «Bouqui sous les harnais»
   I. Bouqui et Malice aiment deux filles.
   II. Bouqui est le favori.
   III. Malice, jaloux, décide de voler la fiancé de Bouqui en lui montrant la bêtise de Bouqui.
   IV. Malice fait un pari avec la jeune fille: il retournera chez elle sur le dos de Bouqui.
   V. Malice se feint malade, Bouqui s'offre de l'amener sur son dos pour aller chez les filles.
   VI. Malice réussit à faire mettre à Bouqui selle, bride et mors.
   VII. Malice et Bouqui se rendent à la maison des jeunes filles, Malice est sur le dos de Bouqui, qui est sellé et bridé.
   VIII. Malice gagne le pari et la jeune fille rompt son engagement avec Bouqui.
   IX. Bouqui comprend d'avoir été piégé et retourne chez lui.

Conte à structure en sablier

   Malice: I-II manque, III-VII amélioration, VIII-IX manque comblé.

   Bouqui: I-II état d'équilibre, III-VII détérioration, VIII-IX manque.

   Sujet: Malice; Adjuvant: Ruse; Opposant: Bouqui; Objet: Gain du pari; Destinateur: Malice; Destinataire: Malice.
   Sujet: Bouqui; Adjuvant: Confiance; Opposant: Malice; Objet: Mariage; Destinateur: Bouqui; Destinataire Virtuel: Bouqui; Destinataire Réel: Malice.

4.3 Axe du savoir

Dans la partie thématique on a souligné le rapport de dépendance de Bouqui envers Malice, auquel correspond aussi le rapport Bossale-Créole et Paysan-Citadin. Cette relation se traduit au niveau actantiel par une prédominance de Malice comme Destinateur (40 cas)[30] et Destinataire Réel

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30   Dans les contes: 1, 1 (Bouqui en tant que sujet), 2, 4, 4 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 14, 14 (Bouqui en tant que sujet), 15, 16, 17,

(51 cas),[31] c'est-à-dire qu'il est à la fois à l'origine de l'action et le premier bénéficiaire. De sa part, Bouqui est souvent la cause de son insuccès; en effet, dans son cas il est pour la plupart des fois le Destinataire Virtuel (24 cas: 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 35, 36, 38, 40, 40, 42, 43, 44, 48, 48, 49) et non Réel (5 cas: 3, 5, 13, 13 et 38) de ses aventures, qui se terminent souvent avec Personne (10 cas: 1, 6, 7, 16, 22, 29, 35, 36, 43 et 44) comme Destinataire Réel, c'est-à-dire qu'il est à la fois le bénéficiaire supposé de l'action, qui en réalité se termine en échec, comme dans le conte «La chasse à la pintade» (8):

(8) «La chasse à la pintade»
   I. Malice remporte du succès dans la chasse à la pintade.
   II. Bouqui menace Malice afin de se faire accompagner à la chasse à la pintade.
   III. Bouqui se fait repasser la gorge pour avoir une belle voit capable de chanter la chanson pour la chasse.
   IV. Malice explique la technique de la chasse à Bouqui.
   V. Bouqui commence à chasser avec succès, mais il en veut plus.
   VI. Enhardi par son succès, Bouqui se trompe et fait fuir les pintades.
   VII. Malice et Bouqui perdent tout.

   Conte à structure cyclique: I état de manque; II-IV manque comblé; V insatisfaction ; VI désobéissance; VII retour du manque.

   Sujet: Bouqui; Objet: Nourriture; Destinateur: Bouqui; Destinataire Virtuel: Malice&Bouqui; Destinataire Réel: Personne; Adjuvant: Malice; Opposant: Bêtise.

En conclusion, Malice est forgeur et bénéficiaire de sa chance et des mésaventures de Bouqui (18 cas: 4, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25, 26, 33, 34, 37, 39, 40 et 48); naturellement, il y a aussi des cas où les Destinataires Réels sont Malice aussi bien que Bouqui (3 cas: 1, 9 et 21), mais c'est peu de chose par rapport aux cas qui voient le couple en tant que Destinataire Virtuel (13 cas: 4, 8, 13, 14, 15, 27, 27, 33, 34, 37, 37, 39 et 39).

18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 37, 40, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 48 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet) et 50.

31   Dans les contes: 2, 4, 4 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 8, 8 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 10, 10 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 11, 11 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 12, 12 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 13, 13 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 14, 14 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 15, 15 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 16, 17, 17 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 24 (Bouqui en tant que sujet),25, 25 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 26, 26 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 33 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 34, 34 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 36, 37, 37 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 39, 39 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 40, 40 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet), 41, 45, 46, 48, 48 (Bouqui en tant que Sujet).

Conclusion: le pays profond

Les catégories thématiques et les fonctions actantielles recouvertes par Bouqui et Malice reproduisent les caractéristiques haïtiennes du Créole et du Bossale, aussi bien que celles du Citadin et du Paysan. La connaissance de l'environnement et de la société, le savoir-faire et le savoir-parler, la ruse, l'esprit entreprenant et l'attitude au commandement de Malice collent parfaitement aux deux groupes sociaux qui lui sont liés; de même que les cotés négatifs tels que l'égoïsme, la vanité, le désir de vengeance, la paresse pour le travail manuel et la lâcheté. À son tour, Bouqui représente parfaitement l'esprit naïf, sournois et soumis du Bossale et du Paysan. Si certaines caractéristiques qui sont propres au Bossale, comme la naïveté et l'excessive confiance en autrui, frôlent la totale dépendance, d'autres sont proprement paysannes comme l'importance de la nourriture, qui chez Bouqui se transforme en gloutonnerie afin de symboliser un modèle négatif à ne pas prendre comme exemple. Les différentes façons d'agir de Malice et Bouqui traduisent, donc, presque tous les comportements et les actions possibles face aux problèmes de la vie quotidienne dans l'univers haïtien. Le fait d'opposer ces deux personnages l'un à l'autre pousse le public à discerner entre ce qu'il faut faire et ce qu'il ne faut pas faire, sans trop s'appuyer sur des caractérisations figées pour ne pas tomber dans le piège de la simple réduction à un héros positif vs un héros négatif. En effet, dans sa préface Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, en dépassant la vision encore traditionnelle[32] de son père, théorise même une évolution du rôle de Bouqui à travers sa réévaluation et surtout en parallèle avec une évolution de la société haïtienne:

> Lorsqu'il [le Paysan] commencera à perdre le sentiment de son infériorité, à se développer intellectuellement, nous verrons peut-être l'éclosion de nouveaux contes célébrant la victoire de Bouqui. (Comhaire-Sylvain [1940] 1973, 15)

Si au niveau fictif cette révolution a déjà commencé à prendre pied chez les conteurs et les conteuses contemporains, sans compter sa promotion au rang de personnage littéraire dans *Romancero aux étoiles* (1960) de Alexis ou dans *Bouqui au Paradis* (1968) de Fouché, au niveau sociologique la division qui existe à l'intérieur de la société haïtienne est encore très marquée, vu que persiste le rapport d'exploitation de la paysannerie de la part de la bourgeoisie citadine, au point d'y retrouver des similitudes avec la période coloniale:

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32 «B*ouqui* – un des héros de cette sorte d'épopée nationale, analogue au Roman du Renard, que nous appelons les '*Contes créoles*' – est la personnification de la bonne Brute, de la force inintelligente et cordiale qu'exploite et berne éternellement la Ruse, personnifiée par *Ti-Malice*» (Sylvain 1901, 9).

Il y a d'abord le paysan sans terre, près d'un million d'individus actuellement en Haïti et on ne parle pas de ceux qui sont partis. […] Et puis il y a les grands propriétaires terriens. Ceux que l'on va appeler les *grandon* qui sont les barons de provinces qui représentent une classe, disons une force politique. […] Ces barons de provinces, ces propriétaires terriens continuent à augmenter leur potentiel, et à s'accaparer également des terres de l'État; ce sont eux qui possèdent, disons, l'essentiel des bonnes terres: terres irriguées, versants caféiers, terres en canne à sucre. Le petit paysan vivote sur une terre plus marginale. En somme, si je me permets, je pourrais dire que c'est un peu le modèle colonial classique: de grandes plantations sur les meilleures terres et aux esclaves des parcelles de terres, les places-à-vivres. C'est à peu près la reproduction du même modèle à une échelle différente, en un temps différent. (Anglade 1982, 55-56)

C'est l'histoire qui se répète dans l'attente d'une rupture révolutionnaire et qui a son point de départ dans le pays profond, celui des racines identitaires de la paysannerie qui plongent dans la culture traditionnelle, pas encore contaminée par la corruption citadine et occidentale, une culture qui est encore une colonne portante de la résistance de l'esprit haïtien:

Ce que je voudrais souligner c'est que cette paysannerie de l'oralité a aussi mis en place sa propre structure de reproduction du savoir, ses propres techniques de transmission de connaissance. À un point tel que je crois que l'avenir de l'éducation en Haïti ne passera pas forcément par les programmes des écoles traditionnelles telles que nous les voyons; car un jour, s'il devait se passer quelque chose, ce sera aussi à travers une étude attentive des circuits non formels de l'oralité qu'il faudra peut-être aller chercher les méthodes, matières et moyens de formation du plus grand nombre, et les mêmes pour tous. (Anglade 1986, 60)

Le renversement social voit ses effets dans un tournant au sein de la littérature orale, en basculant les structures et les caractérisations figées, en proposant un Bouqui rusé et malin, mais privé des connotations négatives: un exemple d'intelligence et de collaboration, véritable représentant du 'Paysan Nouveau'. Il y aura un jour, peut-être, un nouveau recueil, ayant toujours pour titre *Le Roman de Bouqui*, car, depuis toujours, c'est lui le personnage principal, le porte-bonheur, celui qui amène le rire haïtien, car sans lui il ne vaut pas la peine de continuer à *tirer* des contes: «Malice était devenu vieux. Depuis la mort de Bouqui tout son entrain l'avait abandonné […]. On aurait dit que son esprit était parti avec Compère Bouqui et que la vie avait perdu pour lui tout attrait» (Comhaire-Sylvain [1940] 1973, 207).

Diagrammes

Diagramme 1. Typologies présentes dans l'ensemble du recueil
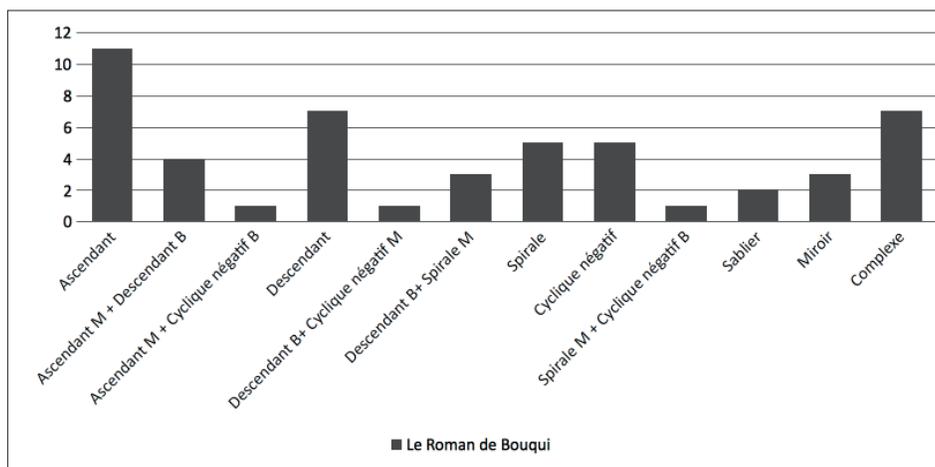
Diagramme 2. Attribution des typologies aux personnages principaux dans l'ensemble du recueil
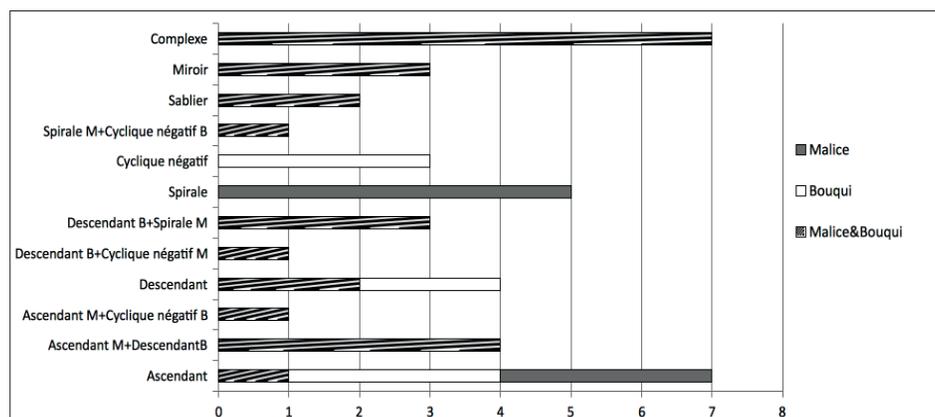
Diagramme 3. Typologies dans les contes d'origine africaine
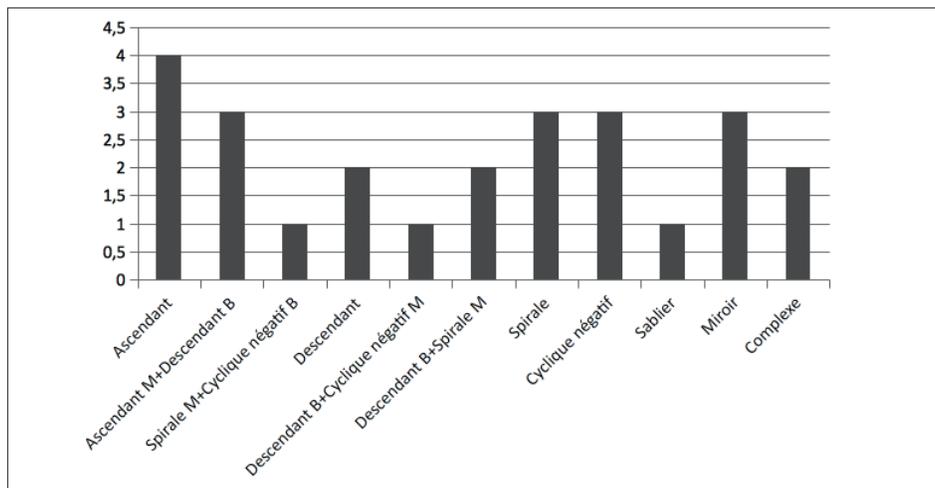
Diagramme 4. Attribution des typologies aux personnages dans les contes d'origine africaine
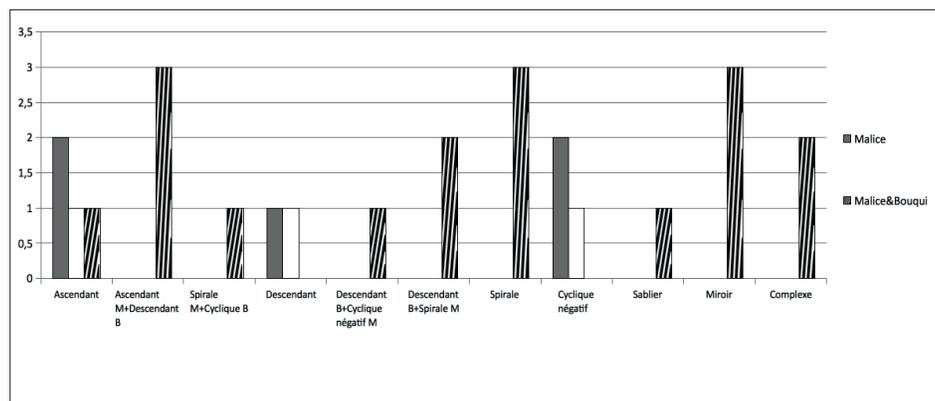
Diagramme 5. Typologies dans les contes haïtiens
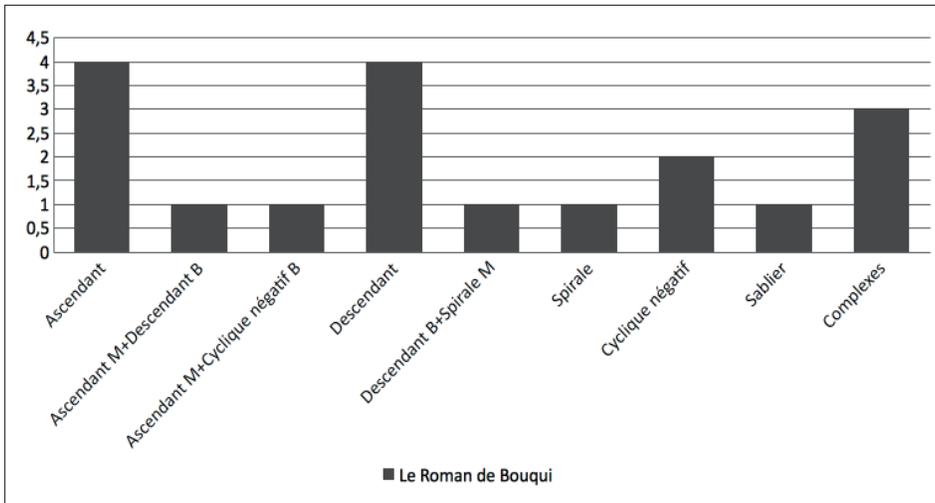
Diagramme 6. Attribution des typologies aux personnages dans les contes haïtiens
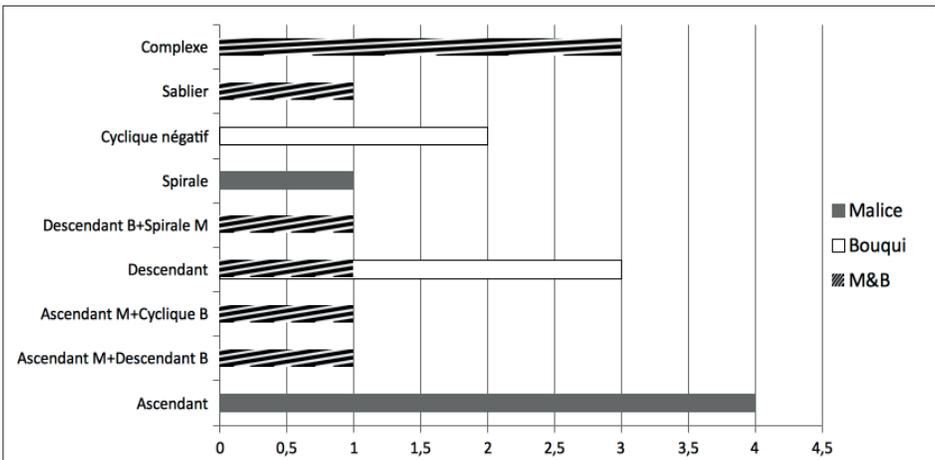
Numérotation des contes du *Roman de Bouqui*

1. Le bain de Bouqui.
2. Pourquoi les singes ne parlent plus.
3. Mizo.
4. Bouqui et Malice vendent leur mère.
5. Bouqui chez les moutons.
6. La revanche des moutons.
7. La vengeance de Compère Cabri.
8. La chasse à la pintade.
9. Le voleur volé.
10. Bouqui sous le harnais.
11. Le mariage de Bouqui.
12. Le jardin d'ignames.
13. Ce que Malice n'a jamais pardonné à Bouqui.
14. L'éléphant de Kangou-Amer.
15. Une autre histoire d'éléphant.
16. Toué… fa… maloré.
17. Monplaisir.
18. Le pari de Commère Baleine.
19. Le Bassin du Roi.
20. Malice oh! Tu as raison.
21. La veillée de Bouqui.
22. Où Malice continue à jouer des tours pendables à l'Oncle.
23. Malice le bien nommé.
24. Le taureau gagné.
25. Le plus grand travailleur.
26. Le figuier magique.
27. Le baptême.
28. Malice veut se marier.
29. Muro-muba.
30. Où l'on voit Malice aller demander à Dieu un peu plus d'esprit.
31. Le mariage de Malice.
32. Malice chez le Roi.
33. Les œufs de poisson.
34. Encore une histoire d'œufs.
35. Les oies.
36. Macaque et Bouqui.
37. La ruse du petit cabri.
38. Lisette.
39. Bouqui marchand de cendres.
40. La jarre magique.
41. Devin malgré lui.
42. Tête Sans Corps.

43. Les métamorphoses de Cabriti.
44. Vire-Volte.
45. Macaque, Malice et Bouqui.
46. Malice et Soso.
47. Où Compère Envoie-Jeter fait des siennes.
48. Le pari de Compère Malice.
49. La mort de la famille Bouqui.
50. La mort de Malice.

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A Struggle Between Literary and Self-Cannibalisation
The Brontës' Reversal in V.S. Naipaul's *Guerrillas*

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Abstract   This article discusses the after-lives of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) as they have been rendered in V.S. Naipaul's tenth novel *Guerrillas* (1975). Following the concept of 'literary anthropophagy' theorised by Oswald de Andrade in 1928 and then adopted by several postcolonial writers as a metaphor of reverse appropriation, this article argues that Naipaul's novel can be read as an extreme form of literary cannibalism. Naipaul's violent appropriation and 'digestion' of the Brontëan works are exemplified by the ironic interconnections among the characters of the novels, their gender role reversals, the peculiar reshaping of the colonial subtext, and the trope of rape. In particular, by means of these strategies, the author subverts the Victorian assumptions of order and creates a chaotic world in which the Brontëan references become the tools for a postcolonial 'cannibalisation' of 19th century fiction. In this light, literary cannibalism is not a mere rewriting of English literature, but Naipaul's personal way of interrogating and 'cannibalising' himself through the reversal of the English canon.

Summary   Introduction. – 1 What is Literary Cannibalism? A Postcolonial Definition . – 2 Literary Cannibalism in *Guerrillas*: Naipaul's Assimilation and Digestion of the Brontës. – 2.1 Differences and Similarities Among the Characters. – 2.2 Eating the Past: Chaos and the Ironic Reversal of the Victorian Subtext. – 2.3 The Reversal of the Rape Trope as an Act of Self-literary Cannibalism. – Conclusion.

Keywords   The Brontës. Hybridity. Intertextuality. Literary Cannibalism. Naipaul. Postcolonial Literature.

Introduction

In his fundamental essay *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon wrote, "there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place" (Fanon 1963, 39). V.S. Naipaul's tenth novel, *Guerrillas* (1975), sets out to enact this assertion. It is a story of violence centred on the rape and murder of the female protagonist Jane and on the passivity of her partner Peter Roche, who cannot (or does not want to) save her from the cruelty of her murderer, the mixed-race activist Jimmy Ahmed. But *Guerrillas* is also a novel of (supposed) revolt, or a sort of dramatic play-acting of a revolt, in which the unhealthy balance of relationships that connect the characters ambiguously appeals to the reader.

According to this brief summary, the novel may be read as one of the numerous postcolonial texts set in the Caribbean and meant to denounce its colonial past. Thus, it has often been studied in relation to the life and death of the Trinidadian activist Michael X.[1] Nevertheless, the aim of this article is to propose another standpoint, according to which *Guerrillas* can be read as an extreme example of 'literary cannibalism' that leads to a form of self-cannibalisation on the author's part. Indeed, it can be argued that through the re-writing of some Victorian texts, such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Naipaul tries to consume the English canon (and himself) by questioning the authority of Victorian English literature and adapting it to both the postcolonial context and his personal experience as a racially and culturally hybrid subject.

1 What is Literary Cannibalism? A Postcolonial Definition

By the expression 'literary cannibalism' I am referring to the theory of 'literary anthropophagy' elaborated in Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropofago* (1928). In his essay, de Andrade plays on the modernists' interest in primitivism and cannibalism and uses the latter as a meta-phor to explain the Brazilian custom of assimilating other cultures. In this light, "anthropophagy appears as yet another modernist attempt to offer a symbolic answer to the questions and anxieties posed by both cultural influence and the asynchrony of Brazilian modernity" (Jáuregui 2014, 24). The concept was later applied in postcolonial discourse to the practice of re-reading and re-writing colonial literature and culture. It was also used by postcolonial novelists as a trope to deconstruct and renegotiate identity, explain cultural processes and draw new boundaries between the 'self' and the 'Other'. As Silvia Albertazzi (2000) points out, this cultural and theoretical framework influenced the thought and work of scholars such as Glissant, Mariátegui, Fanon and Vieira, who later distinguished three

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[1] Michael X was a Black activist who started an agricultural commune, inspired by the black movement, in Trinidad. When, in February 1972, the commune burned down in a fire, the police discovered the bodies of Joseph Skerritt, one of the young activists, and of the lover of Michael X's cousin, Gale Benson. Michael was charged with their murder, found guilty and sentenced to death: during the trial, it was asserted that Benson had been shown an open grave and was then pushed in it and hacked on the neck by Michael X's machete. He was hanged in 1975. Scholars and critics, such as Michael Neill in «Guerrillas and Gangs: Frantz Fanon and V.S. Naipaul» (1982), Maria Grazia Lolla in «V.S. Naipaul's Poetics of Reality "The Killings in Trinidad" and Guerrillas» (1990), Neill ten Kortenaar in «Writers and Readers, the Written and the Read: V.S. Naipaul and "Guerrillas"» (1990), Anne Zahlan in «Literary Murder: V.S. Naipaul's "Guerrillas"» (1994), Ankhi Mukherjee in «The Death of the Novel and Two Postcolonial Writers» (2008), and many others, have highlighted the similarities between Michael X and Jimmy Ahmed. Naipaul's interest in the life and death of the Trinidadian activist is also shown in his work *Michael X and the Black Power Killings in Trinidad* (1980).

different moments in the postcolonial literary production: copy, rejection and anthropophagy (50).

The metaphor of anthropophagy as the act of eating and assimilating European culture is clearly connected with the ancient rituals of indigenous people who used to eat the flesh and/or drink the blood of a sacrificial victim in order to absorb its strength or power. In the postcolonial field the act of 'devouring' English culture or literature is transformed into an act of irreverent love and cultural resistance because "only by devouring Europe could the colonised break away from what was imposed upon them. And at the same time, the devouring could be perceived as both a violation of European codes and an act of homage" (Bassnett; Trivedi 1999, 4-5).

Fanon highlighted the importance of a similar triadic classification in *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to him,

> in the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. […] His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country. This is the period of unqualified assimilation. […] In the second phase we find the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is. […] Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native […] turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. (1963, 222-223)

Thus, the cannibalisation of English literature can also be seen as a revolutionary act of protest and struggle that goes beyond the concept of writing back because of its aggressive and transgressive purport, often linked to a particular political moment.

Naipaul's novel, as I have already pointed out, is linked to the precise political framework of Michael X's revolutionary commune, and it can be read as an example of literary cannibalisation for its recurrent psychological cruelty and physical aggressiveness, which imply a struggle and a corporal appropriation of the Victorian canon. Naipaul realises it by reshaping the protagonists of Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels. Moreover, *Guerrillas* is an example of literary cannibalism in the sense that cannibalism can be seen as a characteristic of the Other. It "draws our attention to the problematic relationship between real acts and the imaginary structures" (Guest 2001, 4), challenging us to reconsider the binary opposition between humanity and savagery. This opposition is exemplified in the depiction of the ambiguous and violent relationship that binds together Jane and Jimmy and terminates with the former's rape and murder. Furthermore, the Trinidadian author weaves a complex web of ironic connections between the Victorian characters and his own protagonists in order to both shake up the canon and serve his own 'cannibalistic' purposes.

2 Literary Cannibalism in *Guerrillas*: Naipaul's Assimilation and Digestion of the Brontës

2.1 Differences and Similarities Among the Characters

The first significant parallel between the Brontës' works and *Guerrillas* is related to the nature of the characters. Naipaul plays with the characterisation of his protagonists by subverting the features of their Brontëan equivalents. For instance, Roche has nothing of the Byronic hero created by Charlotte Brontë. While Rochester is described by the first person narrator as a "dark, strong, […] stern" (C. Brontë 1974, 120) and penetrating man, virile and masculine in his massive features, Roche instead is perceived by his girlfriend Jane as a white man lacking agency. He is portrayed from the beginning as a banal and ambiguously comforting lover who seems to understand her moral weaknesses without being able to accept them: "She [Jane] had, long ago, seen him as a man of action, a doer. Later, she had seen him as an intellectual. […] Now she saw that he was like herself, yielding and yielding, at the mercy of those events which he analysed away into his system" (Naipaul 1976, 175). Even though both Rochester and Roche represent the white male character or the coloniser who wants to subject and control the Other, be it a colonial subject like Bertha Mason or a white woman like Jane in *Guerrillas,* they differ in their real natures. Rochester, in fact, finally reappears as Jane Eyre's affectionate and still passionate lover, while Roche assumes the role of Jane's real tyrant by destroying her passport (and, therefore, her identity) and covering up her murder.[2] By doing so, he confirms that he is a coward and a liar.

Furthermore, Naipaul's aim of reversing the characters' roles is clearly indicated when we consider the characteristics of the two sets of lovers: the similarities between Rochester and Jane Eyre are, in fact, more evident than those between Roche and Jane who, in spite of their existential affinities, do not have a completely satisfactory relationship. On the other hand, in Charlotte Brontë's novel, despite all the trials that the two Brontëan characters have to face, their bond is finally confirmed thanks to their reciprocal love and intellectual affinities:

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2   At the end of the novel, Roche decides to cover up Jane's murder in order to reaffirm his role of coloniser who imposes his will. Jane is, in fact, out of control; as Paul Theroux points out in his *The New York Times*'s review of *Guerrillas*: «she [Jane] carries anxiety to the place and, without ever guessing it, intensifies the paranoia Jimmy has begun to feel. She is habituated to using people for her own drama, but in a series of reversals she herself is used, until at last she becomes a ritual sacrifice [...]. And in the end, Roche, whom Jimmy has always jokingly called "Massa", fulfills his role. The last word in the book is literal, not ironic: "Massa" – Jimmy knows what he is saying» (Theroux 1975).

"You are no ruin, sir – no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous. Plants will grow about your roots, whether you ask them or not, because they take delight in your bountiful shadow. [...] Choose then, sir – *her who loves you best*." "I will at least choose – HER I LOVE BEST. Jane, will you marry me?" "Yes, sir. [...] Mr Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life – if ever I thought a good thought – if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer – if ever I wished a righteous wish, – I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth. [...] I love you better now, than I did in your state of proud independence". (C. Brontë 1974, 474)

Instead, the relationship between Jane and Roche gradually collapses because of the loss of confidence and interest in each other:

Before, she [Jane] had always been reassured by his [Roche] presence, had almost needed it, needed to feel him reacting to her. But now, though she listened for his noises [...] she began to hide from him; and he too seemed to be staying away from her. [...] They met later in the kitchen [...]. But there was no connected conversation between them. (Naipaul 1976, 173)

As far as *Wuthering Heights* is concerned, Naipaul establishes a parallel between Heathcliff and Jimmy Ahmed. As John Thieme observes, there is an ironic association between the two characters because they both have doubtful origins (1987, 172). But there is a much broader and intricate range of interconnections between them.

Firstly, the name of Jimmy's commune is Thrushcross Grange, like Heathcliff's mansion. Although Roche states that "'I don't think it means anything. I don't think Jimmy sees himself as Heathcliff or anything like that'" (Naipaul 1976, 10), Jimmy's identification with Heathcliff has deep psychological roots. Indeed, Emily Brontë's novel, which is mentioned in the text (10), has strongly influenced Jimmy, as we can see from the last letter he sends to his ex-wife Marge:

I feel death is close to me tonight [...]. **I didn't have to hide anything from you, I didn't have to pretend I was anybody else**, you do not know the joy. But I suffered more as a man. When I was a child I was a child, **when you made me a man I couldn't bear being that child** [...]. **You shouldn't have let me down Marjorie, you shouldn't have sided with the others, I didn't want to hate you like the others, you were my maker, you broke my heart, you made me and then you made me feel like dirt again, good only for dirt. But it's funny how people always catch me out and let me down, so I am dying in anger** Marge as you prophesied and isn't that a terrible way to die". (226-229) [Emphasis added]

This pathetic farewell clearly bears out Jimmy's identification with Heath-cliff. Jimmy's ex-wife has shaped his personality just as Catherine Earn-shaw has done with Heathcliff's. From this perspective, when Jimmy af-firms "you shouldn't have sided with the others", or "you were my maker, you broke my heart, you made me and then you made me feel like dirt again", we may easily compare Jimmy and Marge's relationship to Heath-cliff and Catherine's love story.

However, Jimmy is also an inversion of Heathcliff, since the intent of Naipaul is not simply to rewrite the canon but to use and exploit it. He transforms the Brontës' characters into something contemporary and gives them a new interpretation. While Heathcliff leaves England to make his fortune abroad (E. Brontë 2002, 80), Jimmy goes to England from the Caribbean and then comes back. Furthermore, unlike Heathcliff, Jimmy's personality is portrayed as quite feminine, given his interest in the art of writing and his tendency to be subjugated. Actually, Jimmy is writing a novel from the point of view of an English woman called Clarissa who, besides recalling Samuel Richardson's heroine, seems to be Jimmy's fic-tional transposition of Jane. In contrast to Heathcliff, Jimmy's roots are clearly indicated: he is the son of a Chinese shopkeeper and a 'brown' mother from the Caribbean. This aspect relates him not only to the history of colonial indentured labour, but also to the character of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. They are both perceived as 'Others' and 'savages' and they both try to escape the colonisers' control by means of violence and murder. Nonetheless, as Thieme claims, while Heathcliff can actually be viewed as an allegory of the slave trade and the commodification of humans (1987, 173), Jimmy refuses to identify himself with slaves, as the poster in his bedroom suggests. In fact, the poster represents "a pen drawing of Jimmy Ahmed that made him all hair, eyes and moustache, and more negroid than he was, with roughly lettered words below: *I'm Nobody's Slave or Stallion, I'm a Warrior and Torch Bearer – Haji James Ahmed*" (Naipaul 1976, 17) [Author's emphasis].

Also, the three main female characters of these novels share many char-acteristics. Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw and Jane are three determined women who display the obstinate temperament and self-confidence of a teenager as well as an apparent weakness that seduces the male protago-nists, to the point that they become their objects of obsession. Neverthe-less, they do not share the same fate, since Naipaul's intent is to reverse the Victorian morals and tropes. Thus, a dark character like Bertha can be compared not only to Jimmy but also to Jane in *Guerrillas*. They both become fetishes sacrificed in the name of an unhealthy love that has been transformed into a tainted power game.

All these intertextual references assume even more importance if we relate them to the concept of 'literary anthropophagy'. Oswald de Andrade proposes "the creative consumption of European cultural capital in the

tropics in order to produce a national culture", as well as "utopian visions of the sexual freedom of the indigenous" (Jáuregui 2014, 25). Hence, we might argue that Naipaul tries to consume the English canon through the consumption of his characters, while he also refers to their utopian desire of sexual freedom through the impossibility of its realisation, as Jimmy's unsatisfactory sexual coupling with Jane demonstrates. In short, Naipaul updates the Brontëan protagonists and carries them into the 1970s. At the same time he creates weak and subjugated characters like the "dirty, ragged, black-haired" Heathcliff, (E. Brontë 2002, 48) or the "clothed hyena" Bertha Mason (C. Brontë 1974, 310). Thanks to this reversal, Naipaul avoids the risk of colonial mimicry[3] and provides instead a representative example of literary cannibalisation.

Naipaul's intentions are even more evident in his personal interpretation of Victorian symbols and tropes.

2.2   Eating the Past: Chaos and the Ironic Reversal of the Victorian Subtext

In *Guerrillas* the Brontës' colonial subtext is ironically evoked in order to cannibalise the assumptions of nineteenth century English society and 'spit them out' in a new and original version. In Charlotte and Emily Brontë's novels, colonial references have a strategic role because they show the critical position of the two authors towards colonialism, but their stance cannot equal Naipaul's personal involvement as a postcolonial writer. As a matter of fact, he transposes the Brontëan trope of the romantic triangle in the colonies in order to overturn it and come to terms with his personal condition as a postcolonial hybrid subject.

Naipaul's reversal of the Brontës' Victorian subtext starts with the environment, an element that can shape characters' personalities and identities, but also conceal them. *Guerrillas*'s setting, for instance, is certainly desolate and, in fact, it foreshadows the glum fate of the protagonists:

> Past the junked cars in the sunken fields, past the factories, past more country settlements, the suburbs, they approached the city, the rubbish dump smoking yellow-grey, the smoke uncoiling slowly in the still afternoon, rising high and spreading far, becoming mingled with the pink pall from the bauxite loading station, the whole shot through with the rays of the declining sun. Sunlight gilded the stilted shacks that seemed to scaffold the red hillsides. The land began to feel choked. But

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3   Colonial mimicry is the process theorised by Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* (1994). It refers to a condition of ambivalence or split in the identity of the colonised that occurs when members of a colonised society imitate the culture of the colonisers with the purpose to emerge as 'authentic'.

the shanty-town redevelopments were subdued [...]. On each fence post a black carrion corbeau sat undisturbed; others on the ground hopped about awkwardly, two feet at a time. (Naipaul 1976, 168)

In this passage the postcolonial environment has been eroded and exploited by the colonial society, just like the minds of the protagonists. The desolation of the landscape is even more marked than in the moorlands, and this is also due to the presence and action of fire:

The rubbish dump was burning: unusually thick, brown smoke, oily and acrid, which made her [Jane] turn up the window: mounds of rubbish like confetti, lorries and men and women and children blurred in the smoke, lightening occasionally into the yellow flame [...]. Fire: the smoking hills, the charred verges, it explained the words. (84)

The symbolic importance of fire is present in the three novels. As Tiffin points out, "in the landscape of Jane Eyre the 'red room' is the site of Jane's initial punishment, and it is Rochester who firmly associates it with hellfire, the West Indies and his mad Creole wife, Bertha" (1993, 60); while in *Wuthering Heights* the fire in the chimney is the faithful witness of every event of the story, especially when it burns the secret letters written by Cathy and Linton (E. Brontë 2002, 197). In *Guerrillas,* fire should supposedly play a revolutionary role, as the element that destroys the constraints of the postcolonial environment. However, this revolution does not take place, suggesting that in the former colonies nothing can really change. Hence, the destructive power of fire in the two Victorian texts is completely overturned in the postcolonial world and, as a result, it loses the intensity of its symbolic meaning.

Another fundamental Victorian symbol, the mansion, is re-written with an ironic intention. If Wuthering Heights, Thornfield Hall, Ferndean are, as a matter of fact, described as massive and impressive, Jimmy's Thrushcross Grange, unlike its counterpart in Emily Brontë's novel, is certainly depressing and inhospitable. It can hardly be reached, hidden as it is in the tropical forest: "at some distance from the road, on this side, on a smooth brown slope there was a long hut with concrete-block walls and a pitched roof of corrugated iron" (Naipaul 1976, 13). Moreover, according to Roche, Jimmy's commune is an "anti-historical" project (204) because of the ineffectiveness of its revolutionary aims. Indeed, despite the board which claims "THRUSHCROSS GRANGE PEOPLE'S COMMUNE FOR THE LAND AND REVOLUTION" (12), the inertia of Jimmy and his commune perfectly exemplifies the stagnant postcolonial condition of the island. The same apathy is evident in the laziness of its inhabitants who prefer dallying on hammocks (137) instead of reacting to their own consumption.

In truth, *Guerrillas* may well be defined as a novel of in-agency, where

the noble and respectable Thrushcross Grange has been transformed into a supposed rebels' refuge, a strange 'mansion' the function of which is to shelter poor black boys:

> They [Jane and Roche] saw, as they entered, stepping up directly from clay to concrete floor, a steel filing-cabinet in an unswept corner, an old kitchen chair, and a dusty table […] they saw two rows of metal beds […]. Four or five of the beds were occupied […]. Everything was exposed, lit up, and open for the inspection: the boys, their faces, their clothes, the narrow beds, the floor below the beds. On the wall next to the filing-cabinet what had looked like a large chart could now be read as a time-table […] ablutions, tea, field duties, barrack duties, field duties, breakfast, rest, barrack duties, dinner, discussion. (14-15)

The desolation that connotes Naipaul's description of Jimmy's Thushcross Grange has even more ironic implications because it recalls an orphanage like Lowood, the institution where Jane Eyre grows up, rather than a dangerous and revolutionary commune.

One of the most important images alluded to in all three texts is the Apocalypse, which is represented through the metaphor of the 'coming storm'. In each novel the realization of this catastrophe is related to the figure of the outsider. As Paravisini-Gebert points out, "*Guerrillas* mirrors Brontë's text in its examination of the outsider as catalyst, and of his ultimate downfall as representative of colonial despair" (2002, 250), where catalyst could also mean troublemaker and instigator of adversities. In *Jane Eyre*, the reference to the Apocalypse is very explicit in the evening readings of St. John, when the clergyman tries to convince Jane Eyre to follow him to India through the alarming words of the Gospel:

> The succeeding words thrilled me strangely as he spoke them: especially as I felt, by the slight, indescribable alteration in sound, that in uttering them, his eye had turned on me. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But", was slowly, distinctly read, "the fearful, the unbelieving, &c., shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death". (C. Brontë 1974, 444)

St. John predicts a terrible fate to Jane if she decides not to follow his warning and invocations. However, Jane Eyre's feeling is the exact contrary. In fact, she thinks she will die only if she joins her cousin in the colonies: "If I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death" (431). This is a central statement, since it anticipates Naipaul's Jane/Jane Eyre's fate at the end of *Guerrillas.*

2.3   The Reversal of the Rape Trope as an Act of Self-literary Cannibalism

The final rape and murder of Naipaul's Jane should represent the defini-
tive consumption of the canonical order of Victorian society and English
culture; however, Naipaul's subversive intent is already evident in the
description of the first sexual coupling between Jimmy and Jane, when the
desire of the former, who aspires to possess the white woman through the
sexual act, is frustrated by her attitude and behaviour:

> **She was already quite remote**. And when he opened his eyes to look
> at her, he saw that her right leg was drawn up, that the part of her-
> self **she had forbidden him to touch** with his hand was displayed,
> **as though she were alone**. That drawn up leg, so slender above the
> knee, and held slightly to one side: **there was something masculine
> about the posture**, something masculine about the hand that stroked
> the leg now. And she was looking at leg and hand. (Naipaul 1976, 80)
> [Emphasis added]

Jimmy cannot assume a position of superiority over Jane: her resistance
suggests that of the author who tries to resist the overpowering force of
English literature and his colonial roots. Even Jimmy's illusory victory
(achieved through Jane's rape) at the end of the novel takes on an inverted
function. Roche's cover-up of the murder and his consequent re-appropria-
tion of the role of the master who takes all the decisions and imposes them
on the colonised suggests how difficult the consumption of the English
canon can be. It also suggests the partial impotence of the postcolonial
writer who has to yield to it before taking his revenge.

The perverse relationship that links Jimmy to Jane would obviously be
impossible between Rochester and Jane Eyre because the Victorian hero-
ine is too strong to be violated in such a way. She is only an apparent
subaltern since, as we can see already at the beginning of the novel, little
Jane has the audacity to disobey the orders of her aunt and accept and
affirm her identity by looking at herself in the mirror of the red room (C.
Brontë 1974, 13). She never lets herself be dominated by anybody and she
is always ready to assert her autonomy. Thus, she refuses M. Rochester
after she learns of his previous marriage and she decides not to succumb
either to his violence (320) or to St John River's marriage proposal (432).
On the other hand, Jane in *Guerrillas* lives her sexuality more freely. At
the end of the novel, she becomes a sort of sacrificial element, an object
that, according to Roche, can be easily eliminated without consequences.
Indeed, since the beginning, Jane is a character built on absences: her
"absence of doubt", for instance, appears to Roche "like an absence of self-
knowledge" (Naipaul 1976, 103). In her lover's view, she seems "without
consistency or even coherence" (20). Jane herself, unperturbed, admits,

"perhaps I don't have a point of view" (25) without realising that, in this way, she condemns herself to a brutal murder.

Nonetheless, Jimmy's final victory is only an apparent triumph of the colonised over the coloniser because of his ambiguous sexuality. He is torn between his attraction to Jane and his homosexual relationship with Bryant, one of the boys of the commune. This aspect is particularly interesting and it helps us to understand the role of cannibalisation in Naipaul's text, because it opens up a different perspective through which we can read intertextuality in *Guerrillas*. The attribution of an equivocal sexuality to a character that can be considered as Naipaul's Heathcliff is a means to mock the canon and denounce its hypocrisy. It is also a proof of the immense fascination that the latter exercises on the Trinidadian author who accepts to be 'raped' by it. Therefore, denunciation and fascination go hand in hand for the author who defines Jimmy as "a succubus" (31), a mythological demon who seduces men and has sexual relationships with them.

Naipaul's literary strategies evoke a world of violence and express the polemical vein of his re-reading. His ironic use of the symbols and assumptions of the Victorian world has helped him to 'digest' them and produce something new: a sort of postcolonial sequel to *Jane Eyre* in which the Victorian heroine is transposed to a new colonial environment, tied up with the colonial life she was afraid of and an unhappy marriage with Roche(ster).

Actually, Jane's presentiment of death in the inhospitable world of the colonies comes true at the end of *Guerrillas*, where the postcolonial Jane Eyre **does** die in the colony. Therefore, the image of the Apocalypse as a frightful 'coming storm' finds its concrete realisation in Naipaul's text, and it is the result of his personal act of literary cannibalism, a sort of self-cannibalisation. According to Judie Newman, "the notion that one's life is a text in an incomprehensible language opens the possibility that one is being placed in another's text, interpreted as the figural realization of another's consciousness" (1996, 174). In this light, we might argue that Jane Eyre's final destiny has been fulfilled in *Guerrillas* through the character of Jane as a representation of Naipaul's consciousness. The dense network of relationships between India, the Caribbean and England outlined in the three novels clearly denotes the cartography of Naipaul's life, divided among his family origins, his mother country and his adoptive land. In this light, the Trinidadian author may have felt a strong relation and attraction to the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, considering that, as Tiffin has claimed, "dis-identification, recuperation, autobiography, the writing of the self implies for post-colonial writers the linked manoeuvres of the unmasking of imperial interpellation of the subjectified colonial, and an interrogation of the idea of England" (1989, 44). Naipaul had to cannibalise the Victorian literary background in order to recover his own identity.

This is the result of Naipaul's literary anthropophagy: a reversal and a personal appropriation of the Brontëan texts that has pushed the author to reconsider his own predicament as postcolonial writer. His refusal to identify with the Other, both in his public and private life, is comparable to the unwillingness of both Jane and Jane Eyre to be identified as subaltern. In other words, the author's potential personal identification with his Jane could be interpreted as a sign of his interior dilemma, as well as an extreme form of cannibalisation – the cannibalisation of the self.

In the end, death is the great equaliser. It links two lands, England and Trinidad, that are geographically and culturally distant and connects the fate of the 'subaltern' lovers of the three novels: Heathcliff, the unfortunate Bertha, and Guerrillas's Jane. Nevertheless, while in *Wuthering Heights* death represents freedom and true love, in *Jane Eyre* and *Guerrillas* it symbolises chaos and injustice. The murder of Jane, who is Jane Eyre's alter ego but also, in a sense, Naipaul's, can be viewed as a sort of atonement for the author who is fighting his condition of hybridity, but is also aware of the dangers inherent to the refusal of the Other.

Conclusion

Guerrillas, Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* share a number of fundamental traits, such as a strange sense of predestination and desolation that brings about the frustration of every desire, and the impossibility to reach real happiness and pleasure. A certain degree of initial illusion gives an even more bitter taste to the subsequent thrashings of life. But, while the two Brontëan endings keep the door open for reconciliation and redemption, in *Guerrillas* there is no possibility of liberation from the 'darkness' of life. Jane's murder symbolises the definitive triumph of chaos over the order of Victorian society.

Nonetheless, assuming that Naipaul's strategy of literary cannibalism has led him to identify with Jane and not with Jimmy, this same strategy could also be interpreted as a sort of atonement for the author's personal ghosts. In this light, Naipaul's act of literary cannibalism in *Guerrillas* is an attempt to digest and appropriate the canon in order to forgive and accept himself and his hybrid identity.

Indeed, according to Naipaul, coming to terms with oneself is essential, even if the tragic ending of the novel is further proof of the fact that "the world constructed by the English books in the Caribbean and the subsequent Caribbean experience of the country itself are brought into disastrous conjunction" (Tiffin 1989, 35).

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Exploring the Ethnographic Encounter
An Anthropological Approach to World Literature
in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract   Through a reading of Amitav Ghosh's 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide*, the article proposes a preliminary attempt to combine anthropology with world literature, a concept that has recently attracted significant attention from the fields of postcolonial studies and comparative literature alike. Firstly, I argue that world literature is best seen as a number of overlapping and/or divergent projects, and that it thrives if tackled through a plurality of approaches. Secondly, I suggest one possible approach to world literature, employing John Comaroff's definition of anthropology as a discipline characterised by a few closely interrelated epistemic operations that qualify ethnographic fieldwork. Lastly, I map Comaroff's epistemic operations onto *The Hungry Tide* to unpack the levels of anthropological sophistication of this novel. I advocate the revised concept of ethnographic novel that results from this reading – the idea of a novel of the ethnographic encounter – as a useful point of departure for a project of world literature.

Summary   1 World Literature: Points of Departure. – 2 An Anthropological Approach to World Literature. – 3 Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. – 3.1 Grounded theory. – 3.2 Reflexivity. – 3.3 Spatiotemporalisation. – 3.4 Rupture. – 3.5 Critical Estrangement. – 3.6 Being-and-becoming. – Conclusion.

Keywords   World Literature. Anthropology. Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*.

1   World Literature: Points of Departure

The aim of this article is to attempt to combine anthropology with world literature through a reading of a Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004). Before approaching the novel, it will be necessary to introduce both the current debate around world literature and the anthropological framework I refer to.

The widespread interest for world literature is a recent phenomenon, triggered by a number of key texts such as Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (1999, translated into English in 2004), Franco Moretti's «Conjectures on World Literature» (2000) and David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* (2003). World literature today, in very general terms, can be described as the attempt to tackle literature within a wider glob-

al context, employing broad comparative approaches to overcome the boundaries of individual national traditions. It has found particular resonance in the fields of comparative literature and postcolonial studies (see Prendergast 2004, vii) and, as a matter of fact, it could also be defined as the encounter between these areas of studies and the social, political, historical, aesthetic and literary issues connected to globalisation (see Deckard et al. 2015, 4).

These general definitions are useful to introduce the field, but the current exchange is actually the last (and most visible) stage of a complex and somehow convoluted history. Starting from Goethe, who popularized the concept in 1827, world literature was variously addressed by figures such as Marx, Tagore, Auerbach and several comparatists. These interventions were rarely consistent with each other, which explains, together with the different approaches to the discipline within American and European institutions (see D'Haen 2012), why the concept of world literature has historically been a contested one. This tendency has inevitably been inherited and intensified by the recent debate. Jérôme David, as a matter of fact, argues that the major contemporary contributions to world literature variously draw from at least four genealogies of the concept, and the different concerns that they investigate bring them "in different directions – so different, in fact, that the misunderstandings in the debates are more numerous at this point than real exchanges" (David 2013, 13-14).

Take Moretti and Damrosch, two of the most influential contemporary practitioners of world literature. Moretti is an excellent example of a 'systemic' approach. Taking as a model Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, Moretti attempts a study of the world-literary system, which he defines as "one, and unequal" (Moretti 2000, 56), because the relationship between its centre, periphery and semiperiphery are dominated by asymmetrical literary exchanges. Moretti is interested in studying the dynamics within the system in its entirety, focusing units that are "much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems" (Moretti 2000, 57). He therefore advocates the strategy of distant reading, aiming at a 'collaborative' literary history that is made up of "a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading*" (Moretti 2000, 57) [Author's emphasis].

On the other hand, Damrosch's work is a way to organize a practice of extensive close reading that takes materials from a variety of times, places, cultures and languages. Consequently, one of the definitions of world literature he gives is "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language" (Damrosch 2003, 4). Damrosch proposes to tackle this subset of literary works with a particular mode of reading, "a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (Damrosch 2003, 297), whose ethical purpose is to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

With their different aims and methodologies, Moretti and Damrosch effectively promote different projects of world literature. However, the fact that diverse projects are being carried out under the same label is not necessarily a bad sign. One must be aware of the risk that David points out – that debate may generate essentially misunderstanding instead of exchange. But it is arguably a risk worth taking. Paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, we should be less interested in "a perfection of consensus" than in "a refinement of debate", with the awareness that "what gets better is the precision with which we vex each other" (Geertz 2000, 29). We need to turn existing divergences into a productive interplay, trying to incorporate and integrate a vast number of perspectives. One is of course entitled to reject the validity of specific projects, or, alternatively, screen valuable insights while refusing some of the implications. However, as a general rule, it is sensible to conceive world literature precisely as a number of divergent or overlapping projects that discuss, clash and interact with each other.

In this sense, Erich Auerbach's classic definition of *Ansatzpunkt* (point of departure) is particularly useful. According to Auerbach, whoever wants to create a synthesis of a vast section of human culture should first find an appropriate *Ansatzpunkt*. This is defined as a "firmly circumscribed, easily comprehensible set of phenomena whose interpretation is a radiation out from them and which orders and interprets a greater region than they themselves occupy" (Auerbach 1969, 14). Auerbach conceives successful attempts to map world literature as a radiation out of one or more well-chosen points of departure.

Although Auerbach's *Ansatzpunkt* was conceived within an eminently philological conception of world literature, the general methodology sketched by his definition can legitimately be employed by a variety of approaches. Most interestingly, a compelling point of departure is able to **accommodate** a number of *divergent* models – facilitating the kind of exchange between different projects of world literature I mentioned earlier. In a sense the *Ansatzpunkt* represents how the individual practitioner decides to interpret the meaning of 'world' in world literature. And, indeed, there are many ways of seeing the 'world' that we can simultaneously tackle, as well as many ways to explore a specific conception of the 'world'. The basic premise of this essay is that one of these ways is to be found through anthropological paradigms.

2 An Anthropological Approach to World Literature

The conversation between anthropology and literature has been a very productive field of inquiry at least since Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), and most definitely after James Clifford and George E. Marcus's *Writing Cultures* (1986) and Geertz's *Work and Lives* (1988).

The question of whether anthropology can offer an interesting *Ansatzpunkt* for world literature, however, is another matter. Sure enough, the two disciplines – in their various declinations–have several points in common. Both originate in the nineteenth century and are historically connected to the development of capitalist modernity and imperialism. Both oscillate between the attempt to map the diversity of human experience and the attempt to create a unitary model out of that diversity. Both are involved in a cosmopolitan, cross-cultural enterprise, but run the risk of being complicit with imperialist agendas if undertaken under certain approaches. Both must face theoretical complications connected to the limits of the comparative method. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect at least a certain degree of insight from a convergence between world literature and anthropological approaches.

Nevertheless, finding a point of departure for a project of world literature within anthropology can be somehow tricky. For instance, if we take the definition of ethnographic novel as "one that conveys significant information about the culture or cultures from which the novel originates" (Tallman 2002, 12), this sub-genre can easily fit into one possible approach to world literature, which Damrosch defines as the search for "windows into foreign worlds" (Damrosch 2003, 15). This strategy, however, flirts dangerously with naive exoticism. The interesting aspect of anthropology for world literature is not the fact that it is a repository of exotica. What I suggest is to focus on how anthropology can offer a critical approach to the exploration of encounters between subjects in the globalised world.

A possible *Ansatzpunkt* for world literature is hence the *ethnographic encounter* – the coming together of ethnographer (or a comparable figure) and native during fieldwork, and the dialogue they establish – with the role of the ethnographer, from a narratological point of view, being played by the narrator or by a character, depending on the text in question. This is not a point of departure in the strict philological sense Auerbach had in mind, but is indeed, consistently with Auerbach's general definition, a concrete phenomenon from which a synthesis can organically emerge. With the term ethnographic I stress two aspects of this kind of encounter. One is the existence of cultural differences between the subjects involved. The other is the presence of a political and epistemological density that, however, is not necessarily bent towards manipulation and control as an encounter driven by (neo)colonial dynamics. This combination makes ethnographic encounters particularly interesting, because 1) they are projected towards a global, transcultural and transnational dimension and hence offer an entry point for a world perspective, but they are necessarily influenced by local specificities dictated by their participants; and 2) they are riddled in contradictions as they are inherently uneven, but they imply the opportunity of a dialogue.

Which anthropological framework, however, can we use to tackle ethnographic encounters? One particularly compelling model that this point of

departure allows us to employ is offered by John Comaroff in "The End of Anthropology, Again: On the Future of an In/Discipline" (2010). Anthropology, according to Comaroff, "ought to be understood as a praxis: a mode of producing knowledge based on a few closely interrelated epistemic operations that lay the foundation for its diverse forms of theory work, mandate its research techniques, and chart its empirical coordinates" (Comaroff 2010, 530). In other words, an anthropologist, beside adopting ethnographic fieldwork as primary research technique, is primarily defined by the fact that he or she approaches problems in a certain manner, guided by specific epistemic operations. These are: 1) the critical estrangement of the lived world; 2) the mapping of processes of being-and-becoming; 3) the use of the contradiction, the counterintuitive, the paradox and the rupture as a source of methodological revelation; 4) spatiotemporalization; 5) the adoption of grounded theory. It is worth noting that these epistemic operations are not necessarily found exclusively in anthropology. I would argue, however, that they acquire particular salience within the experiential dimension of the ethnographic practice they qualify – in the context of ethnographic encounters.

Let us examine Comaroff's epistemic operations one by one. An anthropological approach, as Comaroff views it, must first of all carry out a relativisation of familiar discourses and concepts through their juxtaposition with defamiliarising perspectives (Comaroff 2010, 530). A concept that we usually understand in one sense may benefit from insights taken from seemingly unrelated ethnographic material. This is critical estrangement. Simultaneously, an anthropologist must reconstruct how social abstractions and realities are created out of a variety of concrete, individual social actions and gestures. This is the mapping of the processes of being-and-becoming, and implies that an abstract concept does not exist a-priori, but emerges from the sedimentation of innumerable individual acts (Comaroff 2010, 530-531). Both critical estrangement and the mapping of being-and-becoming benefit from an attentiveness to the contradiction, the counterintuitive, the paradox and the rupture, which become a prime source of methodological revelation. In other words, unexpected, apparently unexplainable situations are ideal starting points to "lay bare worlds both familiar and strange" (Comaroff 2010, 531), enabling the first two epistemic operations described above.

Anthropological work, moreover, must necessarily be involved in a process of spatiotemporalization, which, for Comaroff, is contextualization taken in a profoundly theoretical sense. This means that anthropology should not locate its ethnographic narratives within a context that is given empirically or is an a priori. Instead, it must always *construct* its context "in proportion [...] to its analytical object" (Comaroff 2010, 531), situating it in multiple, intersecting spaces and temporalities. The adoption of grounded theory, lastly, is the unescapable premise of all the other epis-

temic operations. Grounded theory refers to a methodology in social research that enables to create analytical categories starting from empirical data – a theory that emerges out of the field instead of being superimposed on it (see Tarozzi 2008). For Comaroff grounded theory is

> an imaginative counterpoint between the inductive and the deductive, the concrete and the concept, ethnographic observation and critical ideation; also, in a different register, between the epic and the everyday, the meaningful and the material. (Comaroff 2010, 532)

What emerges from the adoption of all these epistemic operations is an understanding of anthropology as a powerfully deconstructive discipline, which bases its work on an exploration of local, material reality – from which theory must emerge – and focuses in particular on the contradictions and idiosyncrasies of life. The ethnographic experience is used to estrange, question and de-essentialise familiar concepts. All of this within a spatiotemporal framework that is at the same time complex and situation-specific.

To Comaroff's model we should add reflexivity, arguably the most important contribution of 'critical' anthropology of the 80s. It involves the awareness of the inherent bias of every position from which knowledge is constructed, and of the fact that all (ethnographic) texts, to use James Clifford's words, are "systems, or economies, of truth", requiring the use of a "rigorous sense of partiality" (Clifford 2009, 7). This means working towards the "*specification of discourses* in ethnography: who speaks? Who writes? When and where? With or to whom? Under what institutional and historical constraints?" (Clifford 2009, 13) [Author's emphasis]. Comaroff does not discuss reflexivity in detail, but his model makes sense only within a self-critical – and not only critical – perspective.

My point is that such an anthropological praxis would provide us with a useful model to identify that subset of literature that undertakes a critical deconstruction of the ethnographic encounter. This, in turn, would allow us to chart different literary representations of the ethnographic encounter in a variety of global contexts. Before doing that, however, it is necessary to test the viability of this model. In the rest of this essay, therefore, I will discuss a work of fiction that suits this approach particularly well–Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide.*

3 Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Before dedicating himself to creative writing, Amitav Ghosh was educated as an anthropologist. Unsurprisingly, an overall anthropological sensitivity characterises his entire work, with the travelogue/experimental eth-

nography *In an Antique Land* (1992) being perhaps the most prominent example. Differently from *In an Antique Land*, *The Hungry Tide (2004)* is a novel. Its most distinguishing feature, within Ghosh's work, is precisely the convergence between a novelistic form and an anthropological approach. The novel is set in the region of the Sundarbans, Bengal, at the very end of the Ganges' delta. The area is a made up of an archipelago covered in mangrove forests, whose inhabitants survive mostly out of the resources offered by the forest and the rivers, constantly threatened by tigers, crocodiles and storms.

Two characters enter the so-called tide country: Piya, an American cetologist of Indian origin, and Kanai, a Kolkata-born, Delhi-based businessman that runs a company of professional translators. Piya is coming to the Sundarbans to study the fluvial dolphin *orcaella brevirostris*, while Kanai is coming to read the recently discovered notebook of his late uncle Nirmal. He has been requested to do so by his aunt Nilima, the head of the Badabon Trust, a local non-profit organisation supporting the island of Lusibari. The notebook will turn out to contain the account of Nirmal's involvement with a group of refugees that, after settling on the island of Morichjhãpi, were brutally evicted by the government in 1979. The other crucial character in the novel is Fokir, a local fisherman whose mother Kusum died in the Morichjhãpi massacre and that Piya decides to recruit as a guide for her expedition. Kanai, who is attracted to Piya – in the same way as Piya and Fokir are to each other – decides to join them. The expedition, however, is struck by a terrible storm, during which Fokir dies to save Piya's life. In the end both Piya and Kanai decide to relocate themselves closer to the Sundarbans – Kanai moves to Kolkata, while Piya sets her working base in Lusibari, to collaborate with Nilima's Trust.

The Hungry Tide offers an anatomy of the meeting of metropolitan, cosmopolitan subjects and local inhabitants and environment. The encounter is a transformative one that exposes ideologies and prejudices, as well as unfolding spatiotemporal layers, in a thorough exploration that is self-aware of its position within a world-literary system. In the following sections I will use Comaroff's model to show how Ghosh unpacks the complexities of the ethnographic encounters he sets in motion.

3.1 Grounded Theory

The idea of grounded theory effectively describes the overall epistemic strategy of *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh presents us with a number of characters who arrive to the Sundarbans with a specific ideology or theoretical framework, characterised by a form of idealised abstraction. Nirmal cultivates a universal idea of revolution that is detached from the specificities of the tide country. Piya unwittingly endorses a conservationist agenda that

is not equipped with an awareness of the implications of such a practice for the local subalterns. Kanai, besides being a representative of arrogant regional upper-classes, equates knowledge with linguistic comprehension, and is convinced that his language skills are enough for him to grasp the subtleties of the tide country life.

The beliefs of these characters, however, will be 'grounded' to material reality through the encounter with the tide country and its inhabitants. Pablo Mukherjee argues that the novel works as a form of re-education of the "new and old elites" that must "absorb lessons of belonging from their encounter with the subalterns" (Mukherjee 2010, 116). Crucially, all these lessons are not simply epiphanies emerging from abstract philosophical, political or scientific speculation. They are epistemological breakthroughs generated by grounding the characters' interpretative schemes. The new schemes they forge are based, this time, on their empirical experience of the Sundarbans, on their encounter with local reality. As we will discuss more extensively in the following sections, it is Fokir that frequently acts as catalyst for these breakthroughs.

This does not mean that all knowledge these characters possess in the first place is pointless – Piya's scientific training, Kanai's linguistic expertise and Nirmal's ethical, poetical and historical insights are often extremely valuable. However, Ghosh does argue for a *Weltanschauung* that is based, in significant part, on an experience of reality. This is particularly relevant in a perspective of world literature, haunted by the ghost of a superficial engagement with a variety of cultural realities from a safe, hegemonic perspective. Which brings us to the more specifically self-reflective aspect of *The Hungry Tide*.

3.2 Reflexivity

Ghosh is aware of the implications of writing about the Sundarbans as an anglophone, metropolitan author, and weaves this awareness into the very texture of the novel. We are constantly reminded that we are observing the tide country primarily from a metropolitan perspective. Piya and Kanai are called outsiders since their earliest apparition (4), and indeed they are: Piya is a rootless, cosmopolitan scientist from the USA, Kanai, in spite of being Bengali, is separated from the inhabitants of the Sundarbans by class and caste. Ghosh constructs his rigorous sense of partiality by exploring the tide country with all the limitations that their position entails. He does manage to convey to his readers a gargantuan amount of information about the Sundarbans, but information is always dispensed in an indirect and believable way – typically through more insightful 'informants' with different degrees of insider knowledge – Nirmal, Nilima, Moyna (Fokir's wife) or Horen (Fokir's adoptive father). As mentioned above, Piya and

Kanai can also rely on their specialist expertise, but this only illuminates specific aspects of the tide country – they need to tap into local knowledge to seriously start to gain a wider understanding of the Sundarbans (see Vescovi 2011, 93-96).

Ghosh's concerns can be summed up in the terms used by Tabish Khair in *Babu Fictions* (2001). Khair stresses the importance of the basic dichotomy between anglicised middle class and subalterns – *Babus* and *Coolies* – that largely corresponds to the more specifically Bengali categories of *bhadralok* (gentlemen) and *gramer lok* (village people), a particularly strongly felt division in the tide country (see Jalais 2010, 28-29). Since, according to Khair, "Indian English fiction *is* Babu fiction", then "how […] is it possible to write Indian fiction in English and fiction about Indians in English […] without appropriating from a position of power or occluding Coolie/non-Babu realities and discourses?" (Khair 2001, x) [Author's emphasis]. Ghosh's solution here is to present a narrative where the perspective is clearly *babu*/*bhadralok*/metropolitan, and where the *coolie*/*gramer lok*/subaltern is neither unknowable nor invisible, but rather opaque, at least in some respects that change according to the narrative viewpoint. This is particularly clear in relation to Fokir, whom Piya and Kanai interpret in different ways according to their necessarily biased perspective. Fokir is significantly silent for most of the novel, and the relationship between him, Piya and Kanai is used by Ghosh to epitomise the difficulty that a metropolitan subject must face in trying to grasp a subaltern perspective.

The novel's insistence on the difficulties of translation is the consequential counterpoint of this strategy. In a sense, Kanai's translation of the *Bon Bibi Jahuranama* – a central text in the Sundarbans religious culture – epitomises this whole set of concerns. Kanai gives his translation to Piya as a parting gift towards the end of the novel. In the letter he attaches to the translation, he claims that the poem, which they both heard sung by Fokir, "lives in [Fokir] and, in some way, perhaps, it still plays a part in making him the person he is" (354). The poem, in other words, does provide an insight into Fokir's subjectivity. At the same time, however, Kanai notes that "such flaws as there are in my rendition of [the poem] I do not regret, for perhaps they will prevent me from fading from sight as a good translator should" (354). Kanai's position regarding the flaws of his translation signals a major moral development for the character, but also illustrates the whole ethical and aesthetic approach of the novel regarding subaltern subjectivity observed from a metropolitan perspective – it is to be grasped in fragments and in a visibly mediated form, through an ethnographically rigorous, self-reflective sense of partiality. In this way, the aspiring work of (anglophone) world literature can try to counter the hegemonic forces inherent in its practice.

3.3   Spatiotemporalisation

A novel where two outsiders visit a remote region of India might be summarily described as an encounter between global and local forces. Ghosh, however, goes a step forward – he inscribes the tide country into multiple spatial and temporal networks that are highly specific for the region and cannot be reduced to a simplistic global-local dynamic.

As for space, Ghosh manages to embed into his novel the complexities of what Annu Jalais calls "the social geography of 'up' and 'down'" (Jalais 2010, 5):

> These are the terms […] that the Sundarbans islanders use to navigate a geography comprising far more than the natural environment. The Sundarbans region as a whole is considered 'down' because it is infamously one of the poorest and least well-connected regions of WB [West Bengal]. Following this logic, the most 'top up' places […] are the areas nearest Kolkata; living on the island nearer the mainland rather than on those further south, and living in Kolkata or even in the towns of the Sundarbans […] is more prestigious than living in villages. (Jalais 2010, 5)

Ghosh lets the reader experience this multi-layered geography through Kanai's trip from Kolkata to Lusibari, passing through Canning, each step representing a new passage in the scale of prestige and power. Once the 'regional' geography is established, Ghosh introduces a further spatial dialectic, that between the Sundarbans and the larger world, whose influence is mainly felt through the pressure for environmental preservation.

The spatial localisation intersects with a network of temporal dimensions, connecting the present with historical episodes such as Sir Daniel Hamilton's experiment and the Morichjhãpi massacre. The former – the attempt carried out by a Scottish businessman, in the early twentieth century, to establish a communal and egalitarian society in a set of islands in the Sundarbans – historicises the struggle of the tide country inhabitants with the harsh environment they live in and represents a possible standpoint to elaborate ideas of social justice in the region. The latter epitomises the power struggle between the Sundarbans and the metropolis.

Ultimately, Morichjhãpi can be seen as the chronotope that brings these geographies and temporalities together. The settlement created by the refugees is seen by Nirmal as the next step in Hamilton's dream, a passage from individual to collective society-building. With the massacre, however, Morichjhãpi ends up representing also the inequalities embedded in the geography of 'up' and 'down'. The crucial point is Kusum's speech before the massacre. After listening repeatedly to the forest guards telling the refugees that Morichjhãpi is "part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the

world" (261), she cannot help but ask herself: "who are these people […] who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people?" (261-262). These questions have an immediate ethical and universal urgency, but they actually capture, in a nutshell, the very specific geography of power that starts from the refugees and ends with first-world ecologists, for whom the Kolkata people act as spokesmen. Ghosh's spatiotemporalisation is highly specific to the environment of his choice, creating a network of global connections in space and time from a local understanding of these relations.

3.4   Rupture

The most insightful moments of the novel are those where some form of rupture and paradoxical divergence between the metropolitan and local perspectives emerge. Ghosh manages to turn these moments not simply into instances of intensified drama, but also in anthropologically revealing moments that allow him to lay bare the fault lines between these contrasting world-views – a first step towards a more informed and complete world-view.

The key episode in this case is the tiger killing scene. Around the middle of the novel, Piya, Kanai, Fokir and Horen are forced to spend a night close to a village that is subsequently attacked by a tiger. A mob gathers to kill the tiger, trapped in a cowshed. For everyone, including Kanai and the reader, who have learnt of the tense relationship between humans and tigers in the Sundarbans, the reaction of the villagers makes sense. Piya, instead, is shocked, having conflated, up to that point, her own view of nature with that of the locals – in particular with that of Fokir, who is now eagerly joining the mob. She rushes to stop them, and only the fact that Fokir carries her back to the their boat prevents the villagers from turning on her.

Piya and Kanai voice an apparently unsolvable ethical dilemma that, in turn, is offered to the reader:

> Kanai spat into the dust. "Piya, you have to understand – that animal's been preying on this village for years. It's killed two people and any number of cows and goats –".
>
> "This is an animal, Kanai", Piya said. "You can't take revenge on an animal". (293-294)

The paradox stays in the fact that both Piya's conservationist instinct and the crowd's anger are justified in the context of that specific occasion. The aporia encapsulated in the episode enables, later on, the deconstruction of the preservationist discourse as Piya has understood it thus far. Piya sees the problem essentially as an ethical choice, disconnected from the practi-

cal implications for the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. What Piya needs is to complicate her position with what Rob Nixon calls a "transnational ethics of place" (Nixon 2005, 239) – an attachment to a specific environment that, at the same time, is aware of those global dynamics of domination and power that an abstract preservationism might choose to ignore. The process of acquisition of this form of ethics is obtained through what we have previously called critical estrangement.

3.5   Critical Estrangement

As it was mentioned before, critical estrangement involves looking for juxtapositions between familiar and unfamiliar concepts or situations to look at them under a new light. One clear case in *The Hungry Tide* is how Ghosh juxtaposes metropolitan preservationism, the *bhadralok-gramer lok* conflict and the struggle of the locals with their environment.

Throughout the novel, Piya gradually understands the convergence between preservationist discourse and *bhadralok* caste and class violence. The earliest intimations of this overlapping are in her first encounter with Fokir. The forest guard she is travelling with insists that he is a "poacher" (45). Piya understands that Fokir is fishing in an off-limits area and now that he has been caught he will have "to pay either a bribe or a fine" (46). The guard uses the power that derives from the metropolitan anxiety for conservation to rob a poor fisherman of his earnings. In this case, however, Piya can simply blame the guard's opportunism, thinking that compensating Fokir for his losses from her own pocket will balance the scales. She is not forced to revise her own position.

Things change after the tiger killing episode. It is Kanai – who has just finished reading Nirmal's notebook and knows the details of the Morichjhã-pi massacre – that voices out the connections between first-world ecology, *bhadralok* ideology and the suffering of the tide country people. He tells Piya that they are both complicit in maintaining the existence of the violent relationship between men and animals in the Sundarbans. As for Piya, she is complicit because:

> It was people like you […] who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human cost. And I'm complicit because people like me – Indians of my class, that is – have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. (301)

Although Piya is ferociously on the defensive in this episode, Kanai's point ultimately strikes home. When Piya discusses again the matter of environmental preservation with Nilima at the very end of the novel, she is adamant about the fact that she does not want to "do the kind of work that

places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it" (397), and this is why she wants to involve the Badabon Trust in her large-scale project on the *orcaella brevirostris*.

The crucial point is that Piya's change of perspective is possible only through a critical estrangement of her original notion of preservationism. It is only by testing the logic of Western preservationism in the Sundarbans – and by experiencing both the *bhadralok* abuse of that logic and the local, tormented relationship with ecology under international pressure – that she manages to change her perspective and acquire a transnational ethics of place.

3.6   Being-and-becoming

Kanai, in turn, offers an example of Ghosh's exploration of Comaroff's being-and-becoming, the movement from concrete actions to abstract systems or conceptions. The point in question, in this case, is the emergence of a structured *bhadralok* class ideology out of a seemingly urbane and cosmopolitan behaviour. For most part of the novel, Kanai acts according to what we could call his *bhadralok habitus.* In Bourdieu's classical definition, *habitus* is a set of internalised behaviours connected with "a particular class of conditions of existence», which operates «without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu 1990, 53). Since *habitus* does not require the conscious obedience to a set of rules, Kanai is able to behave with an astonishing sense of self-importance and class arrogance, and simultaneously to believe he has overcome the limitations of an upper-caste worldview through his cosmopolitan background. He does not consciously act according to a class and caste ideology.

For instance, at the beginning of the novel, he asks "an elderly and somewhat subdued-looking person" (5) to change places on the train to Canning. He thinks of this as a test of his charisma and persuasion skills. The man complies, but actually because he is scared by Kanai's upper-class appearance. Similarly, when Kanai first encounters Fokir, he is barely able to breach into the wall of silence that the man constructs around himself. He later puts all the blame on the fact that Fokir is allegedly "a peculiar, sulky fellow" (217). He never realizes that talking to Fokir, as Piya puts it, with "the kind of tone in which someone might address a dimwitted waiter, at once jocular and hectoring" (210), may have played a significant role in increasing Fokir's hostility.

In one of the novel central episodes, however, Fokir brings Kanai ashore, to show him some tiger tracks. As soon as he lands, Kanai slips and falls spectacularly into the mud. When Fokir tries to help him, Kanai attempts to re-establish his authority with verbal violence and starts hurling ob-

scenities at Fokir. This brings him to realise something deeply disturbing about himself:

> His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism towards the village. He had thought he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they spewed out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (326)

Interestingly, Kanai is particularly lucid about the origins of his actions in this circumstance. For once, he does understand precisely what is going on–an explosion of a class- and caste-based violence. The latent violence of his everyday actions emerges suddenly into a set of beliefs that Kanai himself is able to identify.

Bhadralok class ideology, in short, is seemingly overcome by the adoption of urbane cosmopolitism, but instead it simply lies in Kanai as a number of internalized attitudes – a *habitus.* These, however, can harden into more structured formations at specific points in time – in this case, as a defence mechanism – and provide Kanai, during the episode described above, with an ideological basis for his assault on Fokir. Of course, Kanai can tap into such an ideological formation because that very system of beliefs is echoed in his everyday gestures and attitudes, although he would normally deny its persistence. Being able to understand the back-and-forth between these two states is extremely valuable for a scholar of world literature that faces ethnographic encounters, especially when it is the friction between local and global systems of values that complicates such passages between everyday actions and ideological formations.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I tried to show how Ghosh stages a number of ethnographic encounters in *The Hungry Tide*, and approaches them employing strategies that closely recall Comaroff's epistemic operations. This mode of engagement with the world features variously in most part of Ghosh's works. We have already mentioned *In an Antique Land* (1992). In this work the encounter between an Indian anthropologist (Ghosh himself) and Egyptian villagers–intertwined with the reconstruction of the life story of a twelfth century Jewish merchant and his Indian slave–becomes the springboard for an attempt to narrate the history of a significant fraction of the (pre-modern, pre-capitalist) world-system, the Indian Ocean. Once again, we are presented with a global picture that is not superimposed

on, but is rather constructed through, an ethnographical engagement with local realities. Variations of this strategy can be found also in Ghosh's more recent production, both in fiction – with the *Ibis* trilogy – and in non-fiction – with the recently published *The Great Derangement*, whose environmental focus echoes, on many points, *The Hungry Tide.*

If Ghosh's work is suited to converse with Comaroff's model (and arguably with anthropology in general), the next step in an anthropologically-informed project of world literature is to connect him with other writers from different times and places that employ similar techniques. Take, for instance, Robert Louis Stevenson's complex engagement with the Polynesian world; Rebecca West's critical exploration of the Balkans; or Mahasweta Devi's registration of the tense relationship between metropolitan Indians and tribals. The list could go on. In spite of differences in poetics and spatiotemporal coordinates, also these authors relied, at a certain point of their career, on an exploration of ethnographic encounters that allowed them to address local specificities while constructing a global network of interactions and power struggles. Moreover, they employed the clash between these two dimensions not only to deconstruct and estrange familiar realities, but also to question their own position as observers and writers – not unlike Ghosh. In short, the ethnographic encounter seems to provide a ground of comparison between seemingly unrelated writers though the recurrence of similar modes and aims. That is why it may work as a *point of departure* for a project of world literature that both relies on and values the specificities of anthropological paradigms.

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Ritta parmi les bombes et *Parler étrangement*
Les nouvelles possibilités du poème explorées par Ritta Baddoura

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Abstract Between 1910 and 1975, Francophone Lebanese authors witness an evolution in their relation with French language that shows the necessity to 'get out' of their mother tongue in order to seize their identity in a better way. Despite a certain nationalist suspicion, this literature demonstrates all its relevance and authenticity. Lately, the generation of writers born in Lebanon during the Civil War puts itself in the continuity of this approach by means of a writing emerging from the memories of the ruins and corpses that inhabited their childhood. So, what is at stake when childhood and war cohabit in the same page some decades after the end of the war? How is the mother tongue perceived? And which characteristics does the linguistic 'exile' take in the poetic writing? Ritta Baddoura, Lebanese poet born in 1980 at Deir-el-Kamar and laureate of the Prix Max Jacob découverte 2015 for *Parler étrangement*, continuously explores this inextricable link among childhood, war and language in her collections. In this sense, we intend to analyse some texts of *Ritta parmi le bombes* and the path of tongue's 'shapes' in *Parler étrangement*. We will do this in order to find new stakes in the poetic experience that could reveal original approaches and dynamics in the relation to a theme that never ceases to haunt the Francophone Lebanese poem.

Introduction

Entre 1910 et 1975, on assiste chez les auteurs libanais francophones à une évolution dans leur rapport au français qui manifeste la nécessité de sortir de leur langue d'origine pour mieux saisir leur identité démontrant, contrairement à une certaine méfiance nationaliste, toute la pertinence et l'authenticité de cette littérature (cf. Haddad 2008, 13). La génération d'écrivains nés au Liban pendant la Guerre Civile se situe dans la continuité de cette démarche par une écriture surgie des souvenirs des décombres et des cadavres qui ont peuplé leur enfance. Mais quels enjeux se produisent lorsque l'enfance et la guerre cohabitent sur la même page à quelques décennies de la fin de ce conflit? Comment la langue d'origine

est-elle perçue et quelles caractéristiques assume alors l' 'exil' linguistique dans l'écriture poétique?

Ritta Baddoura, poète libanaise née en 1980 à Deir-el-Kamar et lauréate du Prix Max Jacob découverte 2015 pour *Parler étrangement*, explore sans cesse ce lien inextricable entre l'enfance, la guerre et la langue dans ses recueils. Connue au niveau mondial pour son blog pendant la guerre de 2006, *Ritta parmi les bombes*, lequel a été cité également par The New York Times et Le Magazine Littéraire, cette autrice n'a cessé de promouvoir la poésie comme la manifestation d'une liberté d'expression née du besoin de construire ce qu'elle n'a pu voir dans son enfance.

Pour la première publication en France de certains de ses extraits en 2004 dans le recueil *De l'obscure étincelle*, Michel Cassir décide d'associer l'œuvre de Baddoura aux autres poètes choisis dans le corpus pour leur tentative commune de «créer un 'lieu', où vivre devient enfin 'possible'» (2004, 9) à travers la poésie. Mais lorsque, comme chez Baddoura, la transfiguration de la réalité devient la quête aventureuse d'une liberté nouvelle et que la relation particulière créée entre les mots produit un sens qui semble ne plus se contenter de ce «lieu», cette motivation nécessite d'être relue sous une perspective différente. L'écriture poétique chez cette poète se limite-t-elle véritablement à un refuge dans lequel se protéger d'un monde où il n'est plus possible de respirer? Ou faut-il admettre que cet espace devient également un port franc d'où l'on peut s'ouvrir différemment au monde pour s'associer activement aux préoccupations collectives?

Dans sa définition de la poésie dans «Amorce diptyque d'un avènement» (cité dans Cassir 2004, 12), Baddoura raconte l'expérience de l'attente et du silence qui fait advenir la poésie dans un flux d'inconscience, dans un tourbillon de sensations qui l'emportent sur la conscience:

> Le choix des armes blanches, parce que la vérité sans cesse s'étonne. Je saisis, l'une après l'autre, les lettres à bras-le-corps. […] Les mots s'écroulent, envahissent mon histoire; intraitable assaut de l'imaginaire par l'imaginaire. Rapprochements inouïs, étreintes émouvantes, le sens écorche sa mante de maux. Vaste, il résonne. Aphasique, lumineuse, intense de synesthésie, la peau-mémoire se fait horizon. (12)

C'est à partir de cette définition de l'expérience poétique que nous nous intéresserons aux nouvelles possibilités du poème explorées par Ritta Baddoura. De fait, sa conception originale de l'écriture poétique, conçue comme découverte de dimensions nouvelles dans la transmission du poème au public, et fondée à la fois sur l'ouïe et sur la vue lors de ses lectures-performance, s'unit à un nouveau mode de diffusion.

A l'origine de cette conception, nous remarquons un vécu caractérisé par une quête constructive de l'inédit et de l'inhabituel: cette prémisse se traduit, d'un côté, par l'évolution du rapport de l'autrice à l'écriture et par

l'affirmation de sa propre poétique, et, d'un autre côté, par une action, volontaire ou non, de réévaluation de la poésie en termes de discours social.

En ce sens, nous nous proposons d'explorer certains textes du blog *Ritta parmi le bombes* et le parcours des 'formes' de la langue de *Parler Etrangement*, et ce afin de saisir des enjeux nouveaux dans l'expérience poétique qui pourraient révéler une démarche et une dynamique originales dans le rapport à une thématique qui ne cesse de hanter le poème libanais francophone.

1   De l'enfance à la guerre

À quelques mois de la fin de la guerre de 2006, Ritta Baddoura déclare au Magazine Littéraire que le déclic pour son blog *Ritta parmi les bombes* est venu de la lecture du blog du dessinateur Mazen Kerbaj (cité dans Geffroy 2006, 10). Ce dernier y racontait qu'il «avait joué de la trompette comme pour accompagner ou défier le son des bombes» (10). C'était pour elle l'occasion d'agir et de se libérer des images hypnotisantes, terribles et dramatiques qui étaient diffusées à la télévision et qui la clouaient chez elle allongée devant l'écran.

La passivité et l'impuissance vécues autrefois par nombre d'écrivains dans la première phase de la Guerre Civile de 1975 et qui, après le silence face à l'absurdité d'une guerre fratricide, s'étaient transformées en action par une écriture exutoire de ces sentiments dans les différents quotidiens libanais, prennent une nouvelle direction lors des bombardements en 2006: l'action passe en effet des lettres écrites aux journaux et des publications 'papier' au Liban à un besoin d'atteindre non seulement les Libanais, mais également toute la population mondiale.

Ce besoin d'union au-delà les frontières nationales devient possible grâce au recours à Internet, et notamment à la création de ce blog,[1] permettant ainsi une diffusion, en temps réel et partout dans le monde, des réactions aux événements passés en boucle sur les chaînes télévisées.

Mais, au départ, ce mode de transmission et de diffusion, qui altère les rythmes de l'écriture et de la réception, n'avait pas été envisagé par Ritta Baddoura qui, dans une interview téléphonique, se décrit comme «quelqu'un qui écrit lentement en prenant le temps pour dire les choses

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[1] Le lien `https://rittabaddouraparmilesbombes.chezblog.com` n'est plus actif depuis janvier 2015, des textes et poèmes sont néanmoins disponibles grâce à la publication de ces derniers par la maison d'édition SAQI. La péremption de ce lien témoigne, malgré une grande diffusion, de l'aspect éphémère de ce moyen de communication. C'est dans le passage du blog à la publication papier que s'assure une transmission dans le temps. Le livre mentionne systématiquement les dates de publication des textes sur le blog et associe à ce corpus un groupe de textes écrits ultérieurement.

et [dont le] processus d'écriture peut être assez laborieux».² D'après son témoignage, c'est une amie qui lui aurait parlé des blogs pour la première fois. Elle aurait ensuite commencé par écrire ses textes et poèmes sur papier avant de les recopier sur le blog – c'est le cas de TTV et de Fajr Blue Jazz. Ce n'est que plus tard qu'elle commença à suivre son ressenti en rédigeant tantôt sur papier tantôt directement sur le blog.

Dans l'avant-propos de la version papier de cette création 'virtuelle' qu'est *Ritta parmi les bombes*, Baddoura raconte cet épisode curieux. Il débute par cet appel venu de l'autre bout du monde, une semaine après que la capture par le Hezbollah de deux soldats israéliens, à l'heure où les bombardements sont à l'ordre du jour: «Kifik?» (Baddoura 2008, 12), soit «'comment vas-tu?' en libanais» (12), lui demande la voix de cette amie chère. Cette question, en apparence anodine, éveille chez l'autrice la conscience d'un état de malaise latent face à «la réapparition locale du bestiaire mythique de Guernica» (13).

A cette époque, la chaleur et le bruit étourdissant des bombes brouillent les esprits et troublent la perception du temps qui semble à la fois annulé et dilaté par la suspension du travail et la fermeture des écoles. Ritta avoue alors ne faire rien de spécial: «je regarde la télé... en fait je suis déprimée. Je dors beaucoup. J'ai rarement autant dormi dans ma vie. Je ne fais rien d'utile... Je n'arrive pas à croire que les gens meurent pas loin de moi et qu'on ne fait rien» (13).

Comme une épiphanie, ces mots nous font remonter dans le temps, au même état d'impuissance et de choc vécus par les parents de la poète et par les autres adultes qui, pendant la Guerre Civile qui ensanglanta le Liban de 1975 à 1990, essayaient de cacher leur peur à leurs enfants.

La terreur palpable de ses parents fut un déclic dans le passage abrupte de l'enfance à l'âge adulte de cette poète, déterminant une prise de conscience particulière. Cet événement a marqué l'esprit plus encore que le corps, les réminiscences n'étant pas estompées par le passage du temps:

> Un air aux accents enflammés et toute l'enfance est là à jouer au cer-
> ceau dans le couloir. Les années de guerre passées dans l'abri ou sur
> les escaliers moisis des immeubles resurgissent.
>   Invasion du présent par le passé. Le temps anesthésié.
>   La vraie guerre est neurochimique. (32)

Alors qu'elle n'était qu'élève à l'école primaire, Baddoura écrivait déjà des poèmes qui parlaient de la guerre, ou plutôt de la notion d'injustice lorsque, enfant et en tant qu'enfant, on comprend que la guerre «c'est

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2   Interview téléphonique que Ritta Baddoura nous a concédée le 11 juillet 2016 et à pa-
raître prochainement. Dorénavant, à moins qu'il soit autrement indiqué, les citations serons
empruntées de cette interview.

quelque chose que les enfants ne devraient pas vivre». Adultes, on se rend compte que cette condition d'exposition à une forme de violence excessive et absurde existe: «peut-être que pour moi ce qui a été le plus violent a été le moment où j'ai compris que les adultes ne pouvaient rien faire. C'est le moment où ce mythe de l'adulte protecteur s'est cassé. Je pense que ça a été quelque chose de très violent pour moi parce que j'ai bien vu que les autres enfants n'en étaient pas là».

Contrainte de renoncer à l'insouciance des premiers temps, Ritta était «enfant, mais [elle] étai[t] sortie du cercle des enfants. [Elle] n'était ni chez les enfants, ni chez les adultes». Tout en jouant avec eux, tout en partageant le même escalier où ils s'abritaient à la lueur de la bougie parce que l'électricité était coupée, en attendant de voir si la bombe allait tomber sur leur immeuble ou pas, elle se demandait comment ils arrivaient à s'amuser et à s'endormir:

> Ils n'étaient pas non plus dans un monde parallèle, mais ils arrivaient à rester insouciants, à rester dans quelque chose un peu plus propre à l'enfant. Moi j'étais enfant, je n'étais pas non plus une adulte, mais j'avais compris l'imposture, j'avais compris à un moment que les adultes étaient autant terrorisés que nous parce que les bombardements étaient très forts, parfois ils avaient plus peur que nous, et que quelque part ils ne pouvaient rien arrêter. […] En fait on se rend compte que les adultes et les enfants sont presque égaux, que bien sûr l'adulte te prend dans ses bras, il essaye de te consoler mais que devant la mort on est tous égaux, je l'ai compris très tôt, je l'ai intellectualisé, c'est-à-dire que je l'ai pensé comme ça quand je n'avais pas encore 10 ans.

De nouvelles logiques et des rythmes irréguliers caractérisaient la vie de ces enfants comme de leurs parents dont les moments de bonheur et de terreur alternaient de manière imprévue, passant d'un extrême à l'autre dans la même journée. Les premiers poèmes de Baddoura parlent de cette enfance tâchée de sang, de la fin de l'insouciance et l'innocence de l'enfant «qui paye un prix cher de l'enfance, de l'enfance ici qui n'est pas la même enfance qu'ailleurs», et c'est en particulier avec *Ritta parmi les bombes* que l'autrice réussit à dépasser l'obstacle de l'impuissance vécue par les adultes qu'elle a connus dans son enfance.

Ce dépassement se fait curieusement par un renouvellement du regard porté sur la télévision qui représente le commencement ainsi que le fil rouge de cet ouvrage. De fait, le rapport que cette poète entretient avec le petit écran suit une évolution qui la mènera de l'inaction à l'action.

Baddoura se «dope au TTV ou Tourisme Terroriste Virtuel. [Elle] apprend […] à la télé tous les noms de villages jusqu'alors inconnus rasés pas les Is-raéliens du sud» (2008, 21). Identifiée de «grand hôpital [où] chaque chaîne [était] un bloc opératoire» (11), la télévision apparaît comme un théâtre

où l'on voyait les morceaux de chair, on voyait les cadavres d'enfants sortis de sous les décombres, un peu verts à cause de l'usage de certaines bombes qui sont interdites. Il y avait quelque chose d'assez dur et on était choqué [parce qu'on voyait ça et on se disait] «le monde entier sait que ça se passe et personne ne fait rien pour l'arrêter». […] Il y avait quelque chose de complètement démesuré, les nombres s'alignaient sur l'écran, c'est-à-dire qu'on voyait défiler ces bandes, quand il y avait ces choses urgentes de la dernière minute, où le chiffre [du nombre des morts] augmentait et augmentait. Dire qu'il y avait eu quatre-vingt morts ou cent morts ou deux-cent morts dans une explosion, ça devenait au quotidien quelque chose de complètement tolérable, ou en tout cas qui était censé être tolérable.

L'écrivain décrit ainsi des périodes où la limite entre ce qui est tolérable et ce qui ne l'est pas devient floue. Une vingtaine d'années plus tard la guerre empiète à nouveau sur la vie quotidienne et à la question «tu écris?» de sa chère amie, Baddoura répond d'abord qu'elle n'écrit pas vraiment, que cela ne sert à rien, qu'elle écrit «juste par désespoir» (2008, 13). Cependant, elle comprend qu'il lui est possible de communiquer avec d'autres artistes grâce à Internet, de s'unir, même virtuellement, pour montrer que ce qui était devenu tolérable ne l'était en réalité pas du tout. C'est à ce moment que la volonté de réagir à l'«hypnose sidérante» de l'écran par l'arme blanche de l'écriture s'affirme.

Le 19 juillet 2006, après six jours passés sans être sortie de chez elle, Baddoura se rend à l'internet café d'Antélias de Beyrouth et lit pour la première fois le blog de Mazen: «ça m'a fait rire parce qu'il y avait beaucoup d'humour. C'était ironique, un humour assez noir, il y avait quelque chose de frais, de vivant, qui était en phase avec ce qui se passait dans le présent».

Du son de la trompette aux bruits des hélicoptères qui rejoignaient l'ambassade américaine à côté de chez elle et à la musique jazz de Bitches Brew de Miles Davis, c'est à partir de «ce lien de musique, de bruit, de chaleur, de bourdonnement des bombes» que tout a commencé.

En ce 19 juillet à 15h22, TTV, premier texte publié sur ce blog, traverse les câbles Ethernet et perce les écrans des utilisateurs:

Huis clos. 6 jours déjà que je traine entre les murs de cet appartement. Depuis la suspension des bombardements en 1991, je n'ai jamais passé autant de temps avec les miens dans un même espace. Ma sœur avance que c'est une stratégie arabo-israélienne pour nous obliger à nous côtoyer l'une l'autre et résoudre nos conflits en suspend. L'hypothèse me séduit. (Baddoura 2008, 19-20)

Ce recueil caractérisé par cet humour, diamétralement opposé à la noirceur tachée de sang des événements douloureux, se colore de nouveaux

mythes, quand les anciens dieux grecs tels Aube et Tonnerre se sont vus dépouillés de leurs noms devenus ceux des missiles Fajr et Raad. Au-delà de l'humour, le texte dresse une dénonciation autant directe que puissante.

Le recueil est tout entier rythmé par des jeux de mots qui oscillent du paradoxal au sarcastique pour mieux afficher l'absurdité du conflit non seulement d'un point de vue thématique, mais également linguistique. Les chaînes AL MANAR, EURONEWS, FRANCE3, CNN, LBCI, entre autres, sont les «destinations privilégiées» (25) de l'autrice qui tente d'établir un impossible état des lieux en comparant les différents tableaux dressés lors des entrevues avec les politiciens. L'incompatibilité confine à l'oxymore lorsque France 3 met en scène le déterrement des sarcophages en diffusant 'Les mystères de Sakkara': «là-bas on déterre les morts. Ici on enterre les vivants. On enfonce, on écrase, on étouffe, on oublie. On regarde les numéros de portable défiler sur l'écran. Ce ne sont que des chiffres» (29-30).

De cette indifférence écrasante, on passe à un sarcasme macabre lorsque, un jour avant la fin du conflit, l'Armée de défense d'Israël mène son opération défensive finale:

> [...] barbotant dans le fleuve Litani, les sentinelles de l'ennemi font des cures terminales
> Sur les dépliants il y avait inscrit: Le sang est un remarquable exfoliant
> Court-circuitant les négociations des grandes
> Nations, ils font de la cuisine
> Au menu d'aujourd'hui : Crânes farcis. (46-47)

Les champs lexicaux liés au bien-être et à la cuisine sont ici détournés, voire tordus, dans l'expression du rejet et de l'amertume d'une situation inacceptable qui relève de l'absurde. Le jeu de mots construit à partir de l'homophonie des cures thermales devenant «cures terminales» en est un exemple. Cet amertume se mélange à la condamnation dans « La ville balayée» posté le 27 août 2006, à moins de deux semaines de la fin des bombardements:

> Celle-ci, selon la légende vit ses ruines enfouies, camouflées, sous la moquette plus de sept fois. Avant l'invention de l'aspirateur.
> Sera-t-elle une fois encore reconstruite sur son amnésie propre, toute de deuil défigurée?
> Nous promènerons-nous dans un an dans les nouveaux quartiers résidentiels en plumant sans relâche le phénix qui renait de ses cendres?
> Combien encore aseptiser les mémoires, ravaler nos hontes tues, empoigner les fusils pour parler de liberté, puis d'unité...
> Combien encore de chapitres d'Histoire jamais écrits...
> Combien d'ennemis nécessaires et d'alliés inutiles...

Jusqu'à quand, à force de larmes et de discours lyriques et sacrés, nous faudra-t-il mendier notre filiation arabe?

Le monde arabe aurait perdu son nombril. Ou sa tête. Tout glisse dans les replis de son corps obèse massé au gras de l'or noir. La méditerranée y compris. Dansante et bleue, lumière de sel, captive d'un tapis de fioul qu'aucun ne songe à balayer. (51-52)

Baddoura reprend ici l'intensité d'un vers présent dans son premier recueil publié en 2000, *Etoiles d'araignée*, où poésie et corps se mêlent jusqu'à devenir un, jusqu'à ce que la première, souffle de liberté dans l'écriture, se substitue et devienne entité physique pour libérer, à travers la respiration et la voix du poète, celle de son peuple: «éponges gorgées d'encre au lieu de poumons» (cité dans Cassir 2004, 16).

Il nous semble que ce blog devenu recueil, dans sa tentative de rencontre et d'union désillusionnée mais toujours pleine d'espoir, permet particulièrement bien de saisir la profondeur de la poète dans son rôle actif d'écrivain, caractéristique du rapport particulier noué par Baddoura avec ses lecteurs.

2 De la guerre à la langue

En effet, avec *Ritta parmi les bombes*, se multiplient les voyages et les invitations à faire des lectures en public qui permettent à Baddura de développer son rapport à l'improvisation et faire évoluer en parallèle son écriture. Ces expériences sont fondamentales dans la compréhension de sa démarche poétique et artistique, largement nourrie par le contact avec son public et les retours qu'elle a pu obtenir.

De fait, grâce à ces rencontres éphémères, la créativité atteint une dimension esthétique particulière par «la mise en danger» que le bouleversement d'un ordre préétabli engage, qu'il s'agisse de faire vaciller la notion d'espace ou les éléments qui y sont présents. Selon Ritta Baddoura, l'essentiel est finalement d'avoir donné l'envie de lire de la poésie à ceux qui ne l'avaient jamais envisagé et d'avoir permis une connexion entre les êtres humains unis par la transmission du poème: «les gens arrivaient à se connecter à d'autres expériences, ils n'avaient pas forcément connu la guerre, mais ça les faisait penser à d'autres expériences». L'autrice remarque à ce titre que l'absence de la forme du livre permettait aux lecteurs de se heurter à «moins de filtres, moins de résistance à lire [avec une] sorte de circulation libérée».

Ainsi, Baddoura a commencé à appréhender différemment le «moment de lecture seul et le moment où la poésie est donnée, où elle est dite, où il y a une oralité». Retrouver l'intimité, qui se crée lors de la lecture, devient en effet plus difficile car la configuration de la lecture d'un recueil faite

dans la solitude et dans le silence change avec la présence d'autres gens, introduisant un rapport autre à l'espace, au mouvement, à la dimension sonore; configuration dont la poète a tenu compte lors de ses lectures-performance.

Sans posture intellectuelle prédéfinie, elle a alors suivi le principe selon lequel la poésie est faite pour être écoutée et pour être reçue: «dans l'improvisation il y a quelque chose qui est de l'ordre du voir et de l'entendre qui est multisensoriel [...]. Ce n'est pas une démarche intellectuelle, c'est une démarche sensorielle, c'est une démarche de vie et de rencontre».

À travers cette sensorialité amplifiée par l'éloignement de sa terre d'origine pendant ces nombreux déplacements, Baddoura déclare qu'elle a pu développer une «sorte de détachement qui vient de toutes ces expériences [de voyage et de rencontres], peut-être aussi de la pratique de l'écriture sur des supports différents» qui lui ont donné la liberté d'écrire des textes sur sa langue.

En effet, c'est lorsqu'elle déménage en France que «la forme de l'écriture et le souffle changent» par rapport à sa pratique antérieure: vivre dans le pays de la langue dans laquelle elle écrit la libère davantage du travail sur la forme et l'autorise à développer un rapport à l'espace différent. C'est ainsi qu'est né *Parler étrangement*, un parcours de 'formes' de la langue au sens littéral où la brutalité dissimulée dans certaines expressions adressées aux enfants croise la violence de la guerre. Cependant, contrairement à ce qu'ont pu penser les proches de la poète lors d'une première lecture du recueil, celui-ci ne se contente pas de collecter les marques laissées par le conflit, mais il y a beaucoup d'autres thèmes.

En fait, Baddoura explore la langue dans toutes ses facettes: de sa forme en tant qu'organe, qui nous permet d'émettre des sons, des mots, d'avaler la nourriture, à la langue parlée, au langage du corps, jusqu'à une conception très personnelle de la langue considérée comme 'provisoire'.

Dans un premier temps, le lecteur est confronté à la langue coupée de celles et de ceux «qui ne savaient pas tenir leur langue» (Baddoura 2014, 9), servie aux repas de famille «par temps de disette et de terreur» (9). On assiste ici à une poétisation de l'enfance de l'autrice, marquée par la figure de sa «Téta», sa grand-mère, qui réussit à négocier avec la mère de la petite afin que celle-ci répande de la poudre de piment sur son *lissane* – sa langue, en arabe libanais – plutôt que de la lui trancher, ainsi «elle ne dira plus que toute la vérité» (13). La mère pose alors ses ciseaux et l'enfant se prépare à recevoir sur le bout de sa langue ce piment qu'elle aime «particulièrement savourer avec des pommes de terre à la coriandre» (15). Dès ces premiers poèmes, les traditions se tissent autour la 'langue' et l'autrice explore les sens possibles du thème ainsi que la constellation des langues en général qui, toutes, ont la particularité de raconter «la même histoire avec variations» (7).

Cette curiosité enfantine portée sur les mots de ceux dont la langue fut coupée et qui restèrent collés «à leurs gencives» (11), ouvre le questionne-

ment sur la langue natale, celle qui l'a «nettoyé du sang et de l'ombilic de [sa] mère» (17). Que l'arabe libanais soit là ou qu'il soit absent, la langue le nourrit et il se raconte à travers les mots du français. En réalité, les deux langues que sont le français et l'arabe libanais ne peuvent pour l'autrice exister l'une sans l'autre. Certes, le français a rendu l'autrice incompréhensible «à celles et ceux de [son] accent» (17), mais elle n'a pas perdu pour autant son rapport à l'arabe libanais qui continue de la retrouver dans ses cachettes, sous le sable et les pierres «collé au silence collé à [sa] bouche» (29).

La problématique de la langue française qui s'est «travestie» (17) en elle – cette langue étrangère que l'autrice utilise pour parler son arabe libanais – entame alors la dialectique de la relation particulière entretenue entre les deux idiomes qui l'habitent: sa langue natale lui apprendra dès lors à creuser sa tombe, car il faudra que l'autrice meure dans cette langue pour renaître au français. Ce duel linguistique entre la mort et la vie se répercute sur le combat entre la vie et la mort dans les rues transformées par les horreurs de la guerre civile:

> et quand le matin après le massacre nous sortions
> chercher dans les rues détruites
> nos masques de vivants nos pieds butaient sur des
> morceaux de chair vive dans cette langue que le feu n'a
> pas fini de carboniser. (17)

Dans ce passage le lien entre la langue et la mort causée par la guerre paraît aussi inextricable que celui entre la poésie et l'enfance en réaction au feu qui continue de brûler cette langue de plus en plus desséchée à force de crier à la recherche des (sur)vivants. Pendant son enfance c'est en effet grâce à sa cachette, un endroit qui n'est pas un endroit car il est «sans porte» (35), que Baddoura se protège de toute cette violence. Il s'agit du poème: «L'enfance une fois a suivi le poème puis se mit à convertir | la vie en mots à donner à manger au poème» (27). On remarque alors la présence d'un pont entre une dimension intime et intimiste, créée dans la relation entre la poésie et l'enfance, et une dimension plus ouverte à la collectivité menant l'écrivain à mettre ses poèmes au service de la représentation d'un pays qui nécessite de retrouver une voix, sa voix.

Sensible et attentive aux notes de sa langue, à laquelle fait allusion l'image de couverture représentant un grand oiseau qui gazouille, accompagné et dirigé par les gestes de la petite fille debout sur la même branche, Ritta Baddoura amène le lecteur dans un Liban constamment présent à travers sa langue natale qui cherche la langue française. Cette recherche est également une quête identitaire qui, partant de ces images heureuses, atteint les profondeurs d'une âme consciente de la tragédie:

> Mon pays est parole qui ne franchit les lèvres
> Mais les divise

Cette parole respire au plus profond des narines
Tu ne peux pas la détruire

Que tu jettes les oiseaux par la fenêtre
Que tu tailles les arbres à l'image du fusil
Que tu poses sur moi ta cloche de verre
Sur ce sol partout mon sang imprime ton visage
Enlève ta cagoule. (73)

Dans ce poème, Baddoura s'adresse à l'ennemi avec une force dénonciatrice intensifiée par le recours à la deuxième personne du singulier. Ce message direct amplifie d'ailleurs sa dimension collective à travers la métaphore du Liban qui est parole. Une parole de vie qui respire toujours malgré la tentative de l'ennemi de la plier en parole de mort.

Ensuite, la tension monte et les yeux poursuivent les poèmes l'un après l'autre avec la même attention qu'ont les enfants pour «ne pas trébucher sur les cadavres que les femmes étendent avec le linge» (77). L'émotion de l'expérience translinguistique s'accroît, les questions sur sa langue trouvent une réponse elle-même multipliée en d'autres innombrables qui ne se limitent plus au rapport entre langue étrangère et langue natale, mais s'étendent à toute langue.

Le passage d'une forme de la langue à l'autre se développe aussi dans le déplacement du corps qui se fait toujours par des mots. Ce thème se déploie parallèlement à celui de la disparition, de la mort et à celui de la traversée des frontières, de la Palestine au Japon. Par le pouvoir des mots, l'autrice esquisse la relation étroite entre langues malgré la distance, en revenant sur les trajets simultanés de Paris à Nantes et de Tokyo à Kyoto. Ainsi se poursuit la découverte des formes multiples de la langue qui devient transfrontalière. Arrivé aux abords du poème, le *lissane* – l'organe de la langue étant du masculin en arabe – n'hésite plus et dépasse ses limites vers toutes les autres langues étrangères.

Une nouvelle conception personnelle du rapport à la langue et aux langues naît en effet à travers ce recueil et celui d'*Arisko Palace* que Ritta Baddoura a écrit lors de sa résidence d'écrivain en 2014 dans le cadre du projet ZIP Plaine plage dans la ville de Saint-Maximin la Baume, dans le Sud de la France. Cette nouvelle approche, différente de celle de *Ritta parmi les bombes*, exprime un regard nouveau porté par l'autrice sur son pays et sur la guerre.

Par exemple, le Liban de *Tentacules* (Baddoura 2008, 60-64), terre dépecée qui prenait appui sur un fusil pour se déplacer (60), et où la poète enfant a erré exilée pendant les dix premières années de vie (61), de même que la ville de Beyrouth, dont les murs avaient pour seul régiment «les futurs présidents les chanteurs du | moment les gentils martyrs | [...] Leurs | têtes [...] tentacules d'un même sort» (62), répond à une esthétique qui

sera davantage soignée dans *Parler étrangement*. La dénonciation se fait alors par des vers qui suggèrent la véhémence plutôt que de la dire directement:

> Sous les armes braquées un peuple entier couché sur le trottoir
> Quand montagne et mer ne sont plus que bouclier
> tout geste est braille de défaite et Beyrouth une solitude
> comme une autre qui perd en hiver ses mots. (Baddoura 2014, 79)

Vivre en France et écrire en français sur son pays d'origine devient donc pour Baddoura l'occasion de mettre des mots sur des ressentis touchant à son histoire et à sa langue, et lui permet donc d'analyser la relation qu'elle entretient avec elles.

L'autrice elle-même nous explique qu'avec *Parler étrangement* son rapport à l'écriture a beaucoup changé et que pendant la durée de ce projet elle est d'ailleurs parvenue à développer davantage une pensée personnelle de la langue. C'est bien cette pensée que nous lisons dans ce recueil où elle chante sa langue, ses langues, les langues.

«Le libanais est très vivant en moi et très présent. Je le découvre autrement aujourd'hui parce que je me suis plongée suffisamment dans autre chose» affirme Baddoura lors de notre interview. En effet, le rapport que l'autrice entretient avec sa langue natale est devenu encore plus important et encore plus intime depuis qu'elle vit à l'étranger, dans la mesure où elle entend cette langue différemment et que cette langue vit en elle autrement.

Et c'est à partir de cette distance que Baddoura explore son arabe libanais et toutes les langues qu'elle a pu connaître en les définissant finalement comme des langues 'provisoires':

> La langue c'est un pays, mais c'est aussi un lieu qui n'existe nulle part, mais que l'on peut emporter avec soi-même et qui change et c'est pour cela qu'elle ne peut être que provisoire. Quand on dit provisoire cela ne veut pas dire que c'est fini et que après il n'y a plus rien. Ça veut dire que c'est quelque chose qui est ouvert au mouvement. S'attacher à une langue comme quelque chose de figé c'est quelque chose d'impossible car elle évolue dans le temps: on ne parle pas la même langue si on est sous occupation, ou si on est dans un pays libre, on a pas le même rapport aux choses, tout change et la langue porte tout cela, tout ce qui est véhiculé […] il faut l'accueillir et être ouvert à tout ce qu'elle apporte.

De cette conception de la langue qui met l'accent sur le mouvement et la volubilité, dans le changement continu selon les âges et les pays, nous comprenons que non seulement l'arabe libanais est provisoire, mais que

le français, pourtant langue d'écriture de Baddoura, l'est également. En effet, si l'autrice continue d'écrire en français, elle s'inspire aussi des mots et sonorités d'autres langues qu'elle inclut dans le français pour retrouver cette partie essentielle de son être.

Ainsi, en se tenant à la perception personnelle de Baddoura, toute langue serait provisoire dans le sens où «on ne peut jamais habiter complètement une langue, on peut entrer et sortir, l'occuper, l'apprivoiser». À terme, on sera confronté à l'insuffisance d'une langue unique et aura alors besoin de faire appel à d'autres mots venus d'autres langues. En ce sens, la langue peut être à la fois «essentielle parce qu'on en a besoin pour aller vers les autres […]. Elle est une intermédiaire entre nous et nous-mêmes, entre nous et les autres […] mais [elle] peut aussi ne pas être 'utile' dans le sens où la langue en elle-même est une forme, elle est une musique, elle n'est pas le fond, elle essaye de porter le fond». Pour obtenir ce double substrat, on peut recourir à plusieurs idiomes dans lesquels on puisera pour nourrir la langue d'écriture.

Ce que nous pouvons lire dans ce recueil n'est pas un refus, ni une nostalgie envers la langue d'origine, mais «une envie, un manque, un désir de la parler» qui donne naissance à des poèmes nourris de sonorités. Le texte nous rappelle la peau, une surface qui prend différentes formes et couleurs, où l'arabe libanais est le derme et la langue française son épiderme, les deux se liant à la peau-mémoire dans le regard porté par l'autrice sur le Liban de son enfance.

À travers cette langue étrangère, l'autrice est parvenue à parler de «l'étrangère» (Baddoura 2014, 65), sa langue d'origine où elle est «morte un jour» (33) et qui existe sans être prononcée ouvertement. Elle y accède à présent en la parlant 'étrangement', en français, son nouveau refuge.

Ainsi, par le déplacement en France, l'exil linguistique devient d'abord pour Baddoura une possibilité de recul sur sa propre langue, qui lui permet ensuite de s'ouvrir à une réflexion sur les autres langues, sur leur rôle et leur fonction de transmission qui les désignent comme provisoires. La translation géographique aboutit enfin à concevoir la langue comme la possibilité d'une médiation, la poésie étant une manière parmi d'autres d'explorer cet état provisoire, car «la poésie [aussi] c'est un parler étrange».

Conclusion

Pour conclure, si la conscience des adultes pendant la Guerre civile de 1975 avait donné naissance à une écriture exutoire, entre autres, le temps et la maturité ont nourri chez Baddoura une nécessité différente qui n'est plus celle d'un défoulement, mais celle d'un principe d'union à construire à travers la poésie.

Si les enjeux relatifs au mode de transmission pour communiquer avec son public changent, les thématiques de la guerre et de la violence alimentent l'univers symbolique et émotionnel de la poétique de Baddoura, mais ne le phagocytent pas pour autant.

La guerre a fait partie de son histoire et l'a marquée, cependant, plutôt que d'influencer son écriture, elle a généré des conditions de création de son écriture. La guerre vécue dès l'enfance ne l'a pas réduite à cette thématique, mais a structuré son rapport au monde qui a évolué par la suite dans une ouverture aux expériences du présent, avec une constante dynamique d'aller-retour qui enrichit ses poèmes.

L'expérience de l'écriture devient pour Baddoura une arme blanche parce que «dans le sens de la guerre, il y a un corps à corps, il n'y a pas la distance et on attaque directement […] mais c'est une arme blanche aussi dans un sens plus imaginaire. Elle est quelque chose quasiment de transparent, d'invisible, de lumineux et qui est porteur d'une innocence […] et blanc aussi parce qu'il y a une forme de pacifisme». Cette conception, unie au choix de la diffusion mondiale permise par Internet, nous semble concourir davantage à la valorisation de l'expérience poétique dans sa prise en charge des préoccupations des collectivités en cherchant à créer un contact et une prise de conscience qui dépassent les frontières nationales et en donnant naissance à un réseau qui permette une circulation plus libre et libérée des arts en direction d'un public élargi.

À partir des poèmes écrits dans des conditions difficiles et intolérables, Baddoura a donc su tisser un lien particulier avec ses lecteurs et développer une conception de la poésie comme 'don'. La poésie alors se libère, elle devient un lieu de lien à l'autre et de rencontre vive tournée vers un renouveau de la société actuelle. Elle se fonde sur le déploiement de la sensibilité d'un regard formé mais jamais déformé par la guerre.

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L'épistolaire au temps du virtuel
ou le non-lieu des émiles amoureux

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Abstract   Does the practice of writing letters still exist? Are the mails we are sending each day in dozens replacing what we once called 'epistolary relations'? Are these ways of expressions the same by nature? This paper tries to see and understand what are the similarities and the differences between letters and mails as we have read them in two novels from young Quebec's authors and their novels: *Les lettres à Mademoiselle Brochu* from Maxime-Olivier Moutier edited in 1999 and *Iphigénie en Haute-ville* from François Blais published in 2006.

Dans le monde de la communication, le XXème siècle occidental commence sous le signe de la concurrence des technologies. On assiste au déclin de la télégraphie, à la montée de la téléphonie, à la naissance de la radio de Marconi et à la promotion d'autres moyens qui donnent l'impression que l'homme pourra enfin avoir une emprise sur le temps et l'espace dans son rapport aux autres. Cette impression de déjouer les contingences spatio-temporelles s'était déjà manifestée quelques siècles auparavant, alors que les pratiques épistolaires commencèrent à se démocratiser au point où les états crurent qu'il était d'intérêt public de créer des postes nationales.

   D'une certaine manière, on pourrait dire que les siècles se suivent et se ressemblent, puisque le XXIème siècle s'ouvrait aussi sur une concurrence des technologies de communication. L'informatique ne cessait d'agrandir sa part de marché au détriment des technologies auxquelles le XXème siècle nous avait habitués. Il suffit dorénavant de disposer d'un ordinateur (l'objet qui était pourtant le plus menacé, disait-on, avec le passage au troisième millénaire), pour capter de l'information en provenance de partout sur la terre, pour regarder un film, pour écouter un disque, pour télécharger un cours de langue, pour correspondre avec le gouvernement, pour échanger avec un être cher à distance, pour travailler à la maison; bref, l'ordinateur montre sa suprématie sur le téléphone, la télévision, la chaîne hi-fi, la bibliothèque etc. D'ailleurs, l'ordinateur portable est devenu un outil indispensable pour celui qui est appelé à se déplacer. Son bureau

virtuel peut ainsi le suivre à l'hôtel jusqu'à ce que vienne le moment de se donner à la sphère intime où il fera un Skype avec ses proches, paradoxalement éloignés par le déplacement, et enfin, lorsque lui viendront des pulsions lubriques, une panoplie d'aventures virtuelles s'offriront à lui.

Si l'ordinateur amène d'incontestables progrès, il modifie, dans la foulée, nos comportements. On ne se rend pas toujours compte à quel point la chose informatique multiplie quotidiennement nos contacts avec autrui. Le travail d'un professeur commence maintenant par la lecture quotidienne de ses courriels qui entrent par dizaines, courriels qui remplacent bien souvent des entretiens que deux personnes réelles auraient véritablement eus dans un espace aussi réel que physique. Certes, ces courriels n'ont bien souvent qu'un usage fonctionnel, mais ne pourrait-on pas imaginer qu'ils puissent un jour remplacer la lettre dans le roman épistolaire? Benoit Melançon, de l'Université de Montréal, refuse, «la lettre n'est jamais morte, elle est tout à fait différente de ce type de courrier» (Melançon 1996, 7). Pourtant, les écrivains, depuis quelques années, caressent le clavier de l'ordinateur et lui donne le rôle qu'avait la plume chez Madame de Merteuil. À titre d'exemple, Gabriel Matzneff a publié un premier recueil de courriels intitulé *Les Émiles de Gab la Rafale* (Matzneff 2010) composé de dizaines de courriels réels qui forment ce qu'il appelle un roman électronique. En 2014, il revenait avec ses *Nouveaux émiles de Gab la Rafale* (Matzneff 2014) portant une appellation générique différente, celle de *courrier électronique*. Intéressant déplacement, le courriel chez Matzneff serait dorénavant élevé au rang de genre littéraire. Cette nouvelle appellation est d'autant plus surprenante que l'auteur insistait auparavant sur la part romanesque du premier livre. Ayant correspondu un temps avec Matzneff, mes courriels trouvent réponse dans le second tome des émiles. Voici donc ce qu'il m'écrivait le 16 janvier 2011:

> C'est en relisant le manuscrit des *Émiles de Gab la Rafale* avant de le remettre à l'éditeur que je fus frappé, et amusé, par le caractère romanesque de ce texte: comme dans le roman classique (Proust, *Les Démons* de Dostoievski, etc.), un narrateur, un *io narrante* diraient les Italiens, et une foule de personnages fort divers qui gravitent autour de lui et finissent par constituer un véritable univers.
>
> Vous pourriez m'objecter qu'on peut en dire autant de certaines correspondances (je pense aux lettres de deux de mes maîtres, Byron et Flaubert), et vous auriez raison. Sans doute aurais-je dû appeler mon livre «courrier électronique». Toutefois l'expression «roman électronique», pour la raison que je vous déroule ci-devant, me plaisait et, dans la vie, je finis toujours par faire ce qu'il me plaît.
>
> Si dans ma préface je nomme Hervé Guibert, c'est parce que j'avais beaucoup d'affection pour lui (nous nous étions connus lorsque j'ai publié 'Les Moins de seize ans': il m'avait alors interviewé) et que je ne

perds jamais une occasion de nommer mes amis disparus; et puis, que Gallimard ait baptisé 'romans' deux tomes de ses Mémoires me semble un bon exemple de la liberté que nous avons aujourd'hui d'appeler 'romans' des ouvrages qui, à l'époque de Gide et de Martin du Gard, eussent été qualifiés d'une autre façon. (Matzneff 2014, 70-71)

Ainsi, les petites questions que je lui adressais en 2011 ont apparemment amené l'auteur à déplacer la fiction hors de l'organisation textuelle. Un peu à la manière d'un Rousseau dans la préface à sa *Nouvelle Héloise*, Matzneff s'interroge sur le statut des lettres qu'il publie. Fictives ou réelles? Refusant de parler d'e-mails, il opte pour l'émile, mot de son cru qu'il définit ainsi:

L'émile, missive électronique, est un genre littéraire nouveau. Il succède au poulet, au billet, au pneumatique de jadis; il suit, tel un sismographe, les variations de l'humeur, passe en éclair de la colère à la joie, de la tendresse à la haine, du futile au sérieux, de l'enthousiasme au désenchantement. (Matzneff 2014, 4e couverture)

Au fil des pratiques littéraires, le critique réévalue et recontextualise ses écrits, ses hypothèses; il est clair qu'il n'est pas la seule instance à se repositionner, l'auteur met aussi en doute ses propres certitudes. Condillac voyait une différence entre la lettre et la missive. La première étant «un écrit par lequel on commerce avec une personne absente», la deuxième se définissant par le moyen avec lequel elle est transmise: «lettre qu'on envoie par un domestique ou un polisson» (Matzneff 2014, 7). Lettre ou ne pas lettre! Lettre sans être lettre, la missive se définit donc par la qualité de la main qui la remet à son destinataire. Ces quelques considérations illustrent bien que la relation épistolaire est forte d'une culture dont les investissements intimes livrent beaucoup plus que le seul message livré par le support. Pour Benoît Melançon, le courriel n'a rien de l'épistolaire. Sans doute a-t-il raison, mais nous chercherons à comprendre, dans ces quelques pages, précisément en quoi elle diffère de son rival virtuel. Évidemment, personne ne peut, à ce stade, imaginer les stratégies de communication que développeront les générations 'courriel'. Tout comme on ne saurait entrevoir quelles seront les technologies de demain qui faciliteront la mise en scène des passions en mode épistolaire virtuel. Dans le présent article, je m'appliquerai à comparer deux romans épistolaires de l'ultra-contemporanéité québécoise, afin de démontrer que la valeur d'un courriel n'a rien à envier à celle de la lettre; mais, à mon avis, l'émile ne sera jamais en mesure de déployer toute la présence humaine qui vient avec la lettre. C'est donc à l'aide des *Lettres à mademoiselle Brochu* de Maxime-Olivier Moutier, roman paru en 1999; et de *Iphigénie en haute-ville* de François Blais, publié une première fois en 2006, que je construirai mon propos.

1   Lettres à mademoiselle Brochu

Maxime-Olivier Moutier sous-titre son œuvre de 'éléments pour une nouvelle esthétique de la crise amoureuse'. Le programme est vaste et le lecteur se laisse porter par une prose à la fois belle et dérangeante. Écrites avec la voix du quotidien, ces lettres composées sur papier sont envoyées régulièrement à une jeune femme qui ne daigne pas répondre. Ces missives sont en partie authentiques. À 25 ans, Maxime-Olivier Moutier sortait en effet d'une crise amoureuse qui l'a conduit à un internement et à une thérapie. D'une certaine manière, on peut lire ces lettres comme le prolongement de cette démarche. Voici comment il présente son livre:

> J'ai écrit ces lettres alors que j'étais fou. À ce moment là, j'habitais seul, sur le boulevard Saint-Joseph. Assez seul pour n'avoir plus rien après quoi me cramponner. J'avais décidé de mettre en acte une vieille idée que je traînais depuis loin dans l'enfance. Celle de prendre une femme pour lui faire entendre tout ce que je me devais de faire entendre dans la vie. [...] J'étais fou et j'aurais fait absolument tout pour que cette fille, presque choisie au hasard, n'ait d'autre choix que de m'aimer.
>
> [...]
>
> J'ai donc travaillé. Comme pour tisser une toile entre elle et moi. Une toile où glisser, pour aller la rejoindre. (Moutier 1999, 7)

Considéré comme «l'un des plus brillants représentants de la nouvelle génération d'écrivains» (Bordeleau 1999, 7), Moutier donne à la fois une parole virile et intime aux hommes dans la littérature québécoise. Cette correspondance sera parfois crue par rapport à ce qu'on a l'habitude de lire au Québec. Certes, l'homme sera fragile et vulnérable, mais ses sentiments, de même que ses besoins, seront affirmés. De plus, Moutier ne se gêne pas pour composer avec les stéréotypes de la virilité. Il est mécanicien dans un garage et se permet de théoriser sur les films XXX; Rocco Siffredi étant le nec plus ultra, le grand seigneur de l'art pornographique. «Très classe, il accomplit son travail avec passion et conviction. Un exemple à suivre dans tous les domaines» (Moutier 1999, 186). Difficile à comprendre comment on puisse espérer charmer une femme en lui parlant d'automobiles et de pornographie, même si dans les deux cas les informations arrivent comme des aveux visant à mieux faire connaître l'individu qui écrit, comme si celui-ci voulait partager avec la femme qu'il a choisie tous ses secrets les plus intimes et tous les fantasmes qui animent son esprit de jeune homme en crise. Difficile aussi de savoir ce que contenaient exactement les lettres originales puisque, de son propre aveu, Moutier a retouché aux lettres afin de créer ce qu'il appelle du Romantic Gore.

> J'ai beaucoup retravaillé l'écriture de ces lettres. Non pas par inhibition soudaine, mais parce que certaines d'entre elles étaient illisibles. Le tout

n'avait pas de sens. Comme maintenant, avec une fin qui ne finit pas de se poursuivre. J'ai reconstruit chacune de ces lettres, bien que j'en aie rigoureusement préservé la spontanéité, la panique et la maladresse. Le désir est le même. Il n'est alors plus vraiment question de la chose telle qu'elle fut au début, mais plutôt d'un livre. Un livre qui s'est écrit sans choix. (Moutier 1999, 10-11)

Le manque de choix est lié à la crise et si Moutier dut retoucher aux lettres «parce qu'elles étaient illisibles» cela explique peut-être aussi la raison pour laquelle Valentine Brochu ne lui répondra qu'une seule fois pendant les six semaines que dure cette crise épistolaire. C'est donc un roman monodique, toutes les lettres écrites partent dans la même direction et deviennent une forme de journal intime, en attente de se transformer en correspondance.

2   Iphigénie en Haute-ville

Comme pour le précédent roman, *Iphigénie en Haute-ville* dispose d'un sous-titre: 'roman à l'eau de rose'. Premier roman de François Blais, il fut remarqué par la critique tant pour son originalité que sa fraîcheur. Il fut en lice pour des prix littéraires québécois et retenu finaliste pour le Prix Senghor. L'histoire est assez simple. Lors d'une soirée bien arrosée, Érostrate aperçoit, dans les toilettes d'un bar de Québec, un graffiti qui lui propose d'appeler Iphigénie pour obtenir quelque faveur sexuelle. Érostrate, par un curieux hasard, retient le numéro de téléphone et décide, peu avant la fin de session d'hiver à l'Université Laval, d'appeler Iphigénie. Or, l'Iphigénie en question n'a rien d'une fille à laisser son numéro de téléphone dans les toilettes d'un bar malfamé de Québec. Au contraire, elle est encore pucelle, elle étudie la philosophie, elle déteste le monde en général, elle a une bien basse opinion de la société et voit dans les rapports humains un tissu de mensonges avec lequel elle sait se comporter, mais sans lequel elle se porterait beaucoup mieux. De plus, elle s'apprête à quitter Québec pour retourner passer l'été chez ses parents en Haute-Mauricie.

Mais Iphigénie n'est pas restée insensible au drôle d'individu qui l'a contactée. Dans les quelques mots qu'ils ont échangés, elle a retenu l'adresse électronique d'Érostrate et, dans un moment de faiblesse, elle se décide d'écrire un courriel à son hurluberlu. Ne sachant exactement de quoi l'entretenir et afin de connaître le potentiel intellectuel de son correspondant, Iphigénie donne l'amorce d'une histoire à construire. Érostrate se saisit de la proposition et s'applique à raconter un fabliau à partir des éléments proposés par Iphigénie. La réussite est totale, Iphigénie demande de nouvelles histoires et Érostrate fait de même.

Le roman de Blais est une histoire d'amour, et comme le dit le narra-

teur omniscient (aussi irrévérencieux que celui du Jacques de Diderot) «en conséquence, elle finira mal» (Blais 2009, 14). Sans connaître, sans jamais avoir vue Iphigénie, Érostrate tombe amoureux d'elle. Iphigénie ne peut supporter l'idée de changer la nature de leur relation, elle refuse de rencontrer son correspondant et elle refuse aussi de lui donner le numéro de téléphone de ses parents. Le virtuel est, pour elle, le nid de son affection. Pour Érostrate, la mémoire du graffiti revient le hanter, les courriels l'ont ouvert à une dimension inespérée, l'amour est né et doit se vivre de façon charnelle.

3   Espace et temps

À la lecture de nombreux textes théoriques sur l'épistolaire, on se rend compte que les chercheurs s'entendent sur un lieu commun: la lettre cherche à abolir la distance entre les individus. Jean-Paul Brighelli insiste à ce propos, la lettre «a pour fonction principale, nous l'avons déjà souligné, de raccourcir ou d'abolir, le temps d'une lecture, la distance et le temps» (Brighelli 2003, 13); Julien Harang écrit que la lettre «abolit les distances» (Harang 2002, 40). D'habitude critique, Régine Robin parlera du virtuel dans des termes qui nous ramènent à l'épistolaire: «Le virtuel, on l'a assez dit et écrit, a tendance à abolir l'espace et le temps» (Robin 1997, 260). Or, les deux romans dont je viens de résumer la trame narrative ne donnent pas l'impression que le temps et la distance s'abolissent par la lettre. Tout au contraire, les deux protagonistes masculins ressentent le manque. La lettre crée la distance, crée l'absence là où elle pèse le plus lourd. Maxime-Olivier Moutier commence ainsi sa production épistolaire:

> À défaut de t'avoir tout simplement là devant moi, assise de l'autre coté de la table, sous la fenêtre enneigée. À défaut de bien vouloir faire grimper le compte de l'interurbain qui nous sépare, à défaut de s'en priver, à défaut de pouvoir te parler comme si tu pouvais me répondre instantanément. À défaut d'être totalement heureux, à défaut d'être dingue, je t'écris. (Moutier 1999, 13)

Un mois plus tard et 120 pages plus loin, il écrit:

> Sache que je suis prêt à m'acheter une voiture, deux même, pour aller te voir. […] je suis tout disposé à acheter une auto, un ski-doo, un parachute et un sous-marin pour aller te voir trois fois par semaine. Pour t'aider à terminer tes fins de session. Soutenir le moral de Valentine. La consoler de tous ces petits riens qui la font trembler. Être là, à lui faire du café au lait de soja, les soirs où l'envie de pleurer lui prend. (Moutier 1999, 130)

La lettre manuscrite a tout fait, sauf combler la distance entre les deux pro-
tagonistes. Il est vrai toutefois que le livre de Moutier répond davantage
au modèle des *Lettres portugaises*, qu'au modèle des lettres de la *Nouvelle
Héloise*. En ce sens, il s'agit d'un récit monodique et l'absence de l'autre,
comme l'absence de réponse accable le personnage. Il ne faut jamais avoir
été séparé d'un être cher pour imaginer que la lettre, virtuelle ou non,
abolit la distance et le temps. Porteuse d'un projet commun, elle marque
la distance tout en étant animée d'une volonté empathique concrète. Elle
est lue et répondue dans un échange, dont le rythme contribue au projet
relationnel des correspondants. Ce qui est vrai ici pour la lettre, l'est tout
autant pour le courriel. Iphigénie s'excusera d'ailleurs du retard qu'elle
mit à répondre à Érostrate. Le rythme dans une correspondance est sou-
vent le moteur de la relation. Le temps doit donc être pensé non seulement
en fonction de la spécificité interne à la lettre, mais surtout en fonction
du rythme des échanges.

Si l'absence de réponse chez Moutier pèse sur le moral du narrateur et
rend le silence insupportable, le personnage de Blais, Érostrate, ne vit pas
la même situation. Le roman est polyphonique, Érostrate et Iphigénie se ré-
pondent de façon boulimique. Même s'il n'a jamais vu Iphigénie, Érostrate
«découvre avec stupeur qu'il est possible du désir (oui, du désir) pour une
fille dont on ignore de quoi elle peut bien avoir l'air» (Blais 2009, 30-31).
C'est aussi ce qu'a vu Vincent Kaufmann en lisant les lettres partagées
entre Kafka et sa fiancée Felice. «Pour que la magie unifiante de l'épis-
tolaire fonctionne, il faut que Felice commence par n'être presque rien»
(Kaufmann 1990, 13). Il n'est donc pas impossible que le courriel puisse
rapprocher les esprits, à l'instar de la lettre. Paradoxalement, il crée aussi
le manque de l'autre, il livre une intimité qui demande à une autre intimité,
de s'ouvrir à l'accueil de l'autre. Le courriel procéderait ainsi d'une double
dynamique: celle de l'ouverture et celle de la création. Pour Érostrate
l'intimité arrive par les courriels qui créent un espace de partage où les
deux protagonistes entrent en communion. Ce n'est donc pas la distance
qui est abolie, au contraire, l'absence de l'autre pèse lourd sur l'épistolier.
Mais la relation qui s'établit entre les deux correspondants est un projet
désiré et c'est cette connivence de deux êtres qui donne l'impression de
proximité. La lettre porte ainsi l'ailleurs en elle et l'apporte à l'ici, comme
un élément extérieur qui rendrait visite à mon intérieur. Il en faut bien peu
pour poursuivre la métaphore filée vers une pénétration virtuelle.

Accuserait-on un romantisme étrange d'être responsable d'un lieu com-
mun dans la classe universitaire, à savoir que le courriel serait une expres-
sion moins soutenue, moins personnelle que la lettre manuscrite? À lire les
critiques, on a parfois l'impression en effet que le vingt et unième siècle
n'amènerait pratiquement que des relations épistolaires dépourvues de
sentiments. Brighelli écrit à ce titre que «les e-mails les mieux conçus […]
manquent de cette matérialité de la lettre qui porte souvent une charge

sentimentale et incite à garder les lettres reçues dans quelque tiroir se-
cret d'un secrétaire oublié» (Brighelli 2003, 22). Les courriels d'Iphigénie
et Érostrate portent incontestablement une charge sentimentale et sans
doute sont-ils ensuite conservés sur quelque clé USB qui sera oubliée
dans le fond d'un tiroir, exactement comme une lettre manuscrite. Pour
Vincent Kaufmann, l'épistolaire est un «non-lieu», il ajoute même que la
«lettre éloigne de tout lieu. Elle vide l'espace de tout ce qui la rendrait
partageable» (Kaufmann 1990, 19). Nous ne pourrions pas être plus en
désaccord. Ce que nous observons ici est à l'opposé de ce qu'écrit l'auteur
de *L'équivoque épistolaire*. Si la relation épistolaire vit de la distance qui
désunit les deux épistoliers, elle crée par ailleurs un lieu anthropologique
qui est la relation elle-même. La lettre n'est pas un non-lieu, au contraire
comme tout lieu de ce type elle donne une origine à l'épistolier, elle est
expression originelle et comme le lieu anthropologique, elle donne l'iden-
tité à celui qui s'y est déposé. En ce sens, la lettre est habitée dans la
permanence, elle s'ancre dans l'espace, on pourrait même dire par une
homonymie qu'elle s'*encre* ou qu'elle est *encrage* afin de souligner le ca-
ractère manuscrit de la lettre, elle qui garde la mémoire, dans le liquide
déposé sur le papier, la présence d'ego qu'alter peut désormais caresser
de ses doigts. Ce n'est pas l'épistolaire qui est un non-lieu, c'est le cour-
riel qui ne porte pas cette charge émotive émergeant de la calligraphie,
telle une présence au monde, une manière de se présenter. De même, le
courriel ne recueille pas le baiser déposé comme une signature, il n'em-
baume aucunement du parfum laissé par le revers du poignet qui balayait
le papier au fur et à mesure que les émotions se répandaient au bout d'une
plume soigneusement choisie. Le courriel est un non-lieu aussi parce que
l'humain ne peut investir l'espace virtuel de sa personne. En revanche, le
non-lieu porte aussi en lui le projet de réunir par la pensée deux êtres qui
se cherchent. Ainsi, le virtuel n'est peut-être pas aussi dépourvu de sens
et de sentiments humains que les esprits bien pensants semblent croire.
Philippe Quéau, certainement un des plus grands penseurs du virtuel,
rappelle justement que les frontières entre réalité et virtualité ne sont pas
aussi étanches qu'on voudrait bien le croire.

> Le mot 'virtuel' vient du latin virtus, qui signifie force, énergie, impul-
> sion initiale. Les mots 'vis', la force, et 'vir', l'homme, lui sont apparen-
> tés. Ainsi la virtus n'est pas une illusion ou un fantasme, ou encore une
> simple éventualité, rejetée dans les limbes du possible. Elle est bien
> réelle et en acte. La virtus agit fondamentalement. Elle est à la fois la
> cause initiale en vertu de laquelle l'effet existe mais aussi ce par quoi
> la cause continue de rester présente virtuellement dans l'effet. Le vir-
> tuel n'est donc ni irréel ou potentiel: le virtuel est dans l'ordre du réel.
> (Quéau 1993, 26)

Le virtuel, chez Iphigénie et Érostrate, construit la réalité et la réalité attend d'être nourrie par le virtuel pour se réaliser. En ce sens, il me semble que la lettre sur support papier et la lettre virtuelle remplissent la même fonction empathique. Il faut être aveugle pour ne pas voir le pouvoir de cette réalité que nous construit le virtuel. Le non-lieu prendrait possession du destin des humains et on a sans doute tendance à sous-estimer sa capacité à créer des histoires de vie. Par le virtuel, Iphigénie éprouve le plaisir d'une relation qu'elle croit humaine, une relation qui la comble, parce que la misanthrope qu'elle est la pousse à rester en marge de la société. Les rapports humains reposent sur le mensonge et l'imposture, elle n'y croit pas. Portée par la prose d'Érostrate, elle prend goût à la vie, mais refuse d'y participer pleinement. Blais pointe un malaise, me semble-t-il, grandissant avec l'invasion du virtuel dans nos vies. Tout, désormais, se dématérialise en virtuel et les sentiments tentent de donner du sens au non-lieu, alors que, paradoxalement, le soupçon philosophique de la fin du XXème siècle a cherché à vider de son sens le lieu anthropologique. Nous sommes peut-être arrivés véritablement à l'homme-machine que La Mettrie annonçait au dix-huitième siècle. Si le virtuel est dans l'ordre du réel, pour reprendre les mots de Quéau et s'il porte en lui l'essence d'une réalisation, cette réalisation devra aboutir dans le champ du réel. Érostrate se rend bien compte que le virtuel l'a amené à tomber amoureux. Et face au refus d'Iphigénie de le rencontrer, Érostrate décide de rompre; l'absence pour lui, comme pour le Maxime-Olivier des *Lettres à Mademoiselle Brochu*, est dévastatrice.

> Ton ami, moi? Pfff! Un jeu vidéo, un délassement, une manière de diversion à ta petite vie plate, c'est ce que je suis pour toi. Avoue-le donc. Ami: tu parles de cette créature sur laquelle on peut toujours compter, chez laquelle on peut toujours débarquer n'importe quand sans jamais déranger, dont la présence ne nous indispose jamais? Dis-le donc que la seule place que je puisse espérer dans ta vie c'est sur cet écran où tu peux me faire fermer la gueule à loisir en cliquant sur le petit x. Eh bien, elle ne me convient pas cette place, je la refuse. (Blais 2009, 184)

Ce qu'Érostrate tente d'accomplir c'est de sortir Iphigénie de sa vie virtuelle pour l'amener à partager le réel avec lui. Mais Iphigénie est confortablement assise devant l'écran qui lui livre une expérience réelle, quoique vécue dans la froideur du non-lieu. Sa relation avec Érostrate lui plait bien comme elle est, la modifier c'est la mettre en péril. Érostrate veut sortir de la boîte qui l'enferme de la même manière que le personnage-narrateur Maxime-Olivier veut sortir du papier. Si le lecteur ne dispose pas des réponses de Mademoiselle Brochu, il a accès en revanche aux impressions et émotions d'Iphigénie pour qui, l'arrivée du Érostrate de chair incarne la fin de l'Érostrate de la relation et il semble que ce soit la relation qu'Iphigénie

cherche à protéger. Mais il ne faut pas croire pour autant qu'Iphigénie est indifférente à cette relation amicale et que c'est la raison pour laquelle elle refuse de le rencontrer, le narrateur omniscient donne au lecteur la possibilité de lire le journal intime d'Iphigénie dans lequel on retrouve une lettre touchante adressée à Érostrate, lettre qu'elle ne lui enverra jamais. Elle poursuit la métaphore lancée par Érostrate où l'ordinateur est anthropomorphisé. La boîte devient virtuellement le corps de femme hybride, où l'extérieur conquiert l'intérieur pénétrant ainsi l'intimité.

> Être de mauvaise foi, je pourrais facilement dire que ce n'est que par ennui […] que je t'ai laissé entrer dans mon compte Hotmail. Mais je vais être franche […] et avouer que si tu as pu entrer c'est qu'il y avait un petit trou par lequel entrer (en moi, pas dans mon compte hotmail, tu me suis?) […] Je dois dire qu'il arrivait à l'occasion que par ce petit trou le froid du dehors s'infiltre, que le vent s'engouffre et me fasse grelotter et aussi me fasse couler les yeux. Et puis là, toi. Tu t'insinues dans le petit trou, le colmates par ta présence et le vent soudain cesse de s'y engouffrer. […] Et comme il était minuscule ce trou, tu l'agrandis, y prends tes aises si bien qu'il finit par épouser ton contour et c'est là que tu disparais […] tu laisses en partant le trou tout agrandi et le vent qui jadis ne s'engouffrait en moi que sous forme d'un petit courant d'air entre maintenant par bourrasques. L'hiver partout dans moi, la Sibérie, aucun recoin pas exposé. (Blais 2009, 192-193)

Rupture réelle d'un amour virtuel, Iphigénie possède maintenant ce que Moutier appelle les éléments pour une nouvelle esthétique de la crise amoureuse. Il est frappant de voir dans cette longue citation les effets de la présence virtuelle dans l'imaginaire du vécu. Iphigénie aurait peut-être atteint cette identité cyborg dont parle Donna Haraway, c'est à dire un «organisme cybernétique, un hybride de machine et d'organisme, une créature qui a à la fois une réalité sociale et une vérité de fiction» (cf. Robin 1997, 255). Quoi qu'il en soit, l'expérience vécue dans le non-lieu se concrétise par la crise inscrite dans un véritable lieu anthropologique: le journal intime refermé sur lui, loin de la communion des esprits qu'avaient provoqué les courriels. Cette trame narrative rejoint me semble-t-il une distinction que le philosophe François Jullien fait entre l'amour et l'intime: «l'amour est exclamatif, superlatif, mais lui, l'intime, vit du retrait et se tait» (Jullien 2013, 203). On a l'impression qu'Iphigénie protège en fait l'intimité au détriment d'un amour qu'elle sacrifie.

Ce que l'épistolaire d'hier et d'aujourd'hui parviennent à créer c'est de l'intimité dans la distance. Comme le propose encore François Jullien:

> De quelque nature qu'elle soit, une séparation ne détruit pas l'intime. Car l'intime n'est pas de contact (coudoiement), mais d'intériorité, ou

plutôt d'un 'plus intérieur que l'intérieur'. C'est pourquoi il n'exige pas la présence, peut se développer dans l'absence. Dans l'absence, on peut rester 'auprès'. (Jullien 2013, 141)

Le courriel est-il la dématérialisation de la lettre? Il est certainement la lettre d'une autre époque, d'une autre culture. En lui, l'absence de matière prive de la jouissance d'un des cinq sens, le toucher. L'absent est également matériellement absent du message, il n'a jamais touché l'écran du lecteur, les lettres qui apparaissent dans un écran et qui imitent le papier. Il reste auprès du lieu anthropologique sans jamais y entrer, comme Moïse, il ne fait que montrer le chemin sans avoir droit d'entrer sur la terre promise.

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Tradurre la *bande dessinée* migrante
Il caso de *Les Mohamed* di Jérôme Ruillier

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Abstract   The comic book *Les Mohamed* (2011) by French author Jérôme Ruillier is situated in the landscape of the migrant *bande dessinée*, with its own singular characteristics. In this work, the author traced a global portrait of Maghrebi immigrants in France, by adapting the documentary/book *Mémoires d'immigrés* (1997) by French-Algerian author Yamina Benguigui. As migrant storytellers in general, *bande dessinée* authors are often the first 'translators' of unknown or removed realities, making them accessible to a large public. But what happen when they are translated in their turn? In a first part, this article canvases the process of intersemiotic translation that brought from *Mémoires d'immigrés* to *Les Mohamed.* In a second part, it focuses on the verbal/visual aspects of Ruillier's work and especially on the solutions I adopted in the Italian translation (*Se ti chiami Mohamed*, 2015).

Arte sequenziale (Eisner 1985), il fumetto è caratterizzato dalla compenetrazione di due codici espressivi, parole e immagini, strettamente correlati. Questa interazione, che si presenta senza dubbio come un arricchimento dal punto di vista artistico, complica il lavoro del traduttore, che si trova a dover fare i conti con una *medium-constrained translation* (Zanettin 1998, 2014), concretizzata nella presenza di un 'vincolo culturale' intimamente connesso con un 'vincolo iconico'. Quale postura assume il traduttore rispetto a questi vincoli nel caso specifico della *bande dessinée* migrante?

Anche se non viene mai sufficientemente sottolineato, fumetto e migrazione sono da tempo fortemente legati. I maggiori autori nordamericani del Novecento, a cui si attribuisce la nascita del fumetto moderno, erano infatti immigrati o figli d'immigrati. Basti pensare a George McManus (1884-1954, di origine irlandese), Rudolph Dirks (1877-1968, di origine tedesca) o Will Eisner (1917-2005, di padre austriaco e madre romena).[1] Questo non vale solo per gli Stati Uniti. Per citare un esempio, il 'galli-

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[1]   Un altro esempio merita di essere citato in questa sede: i creatori di Superman, il padre dei supereroi, la cui prima avventura viene pubblicata dalla DC Comics nel 1938, erano ebrei immigrati dall'Europa: Jerome 'Jerry' Siegel (1914-1996, sceneggiatura) e Joe Shuster (1914-1992, disegni). Alcuni critici hanno visto nella storia di Superman una rappresentazione

co' *Astérix* (primo albo 1961; prepubblicato nel 1959 dalla rivista *Pilote*) deve la sua creazione non a due autori francesi, ma a due figli d'immigrati: lo sceneggiatore Goscinny, di genitori ebrei polacchi e ungheresi, e il disegnatore Uderzo, di origini italiane. È però a partire dagli anni 1980 che il fumetto francese si arricchisce di una folta schiera di autori di origine 'altra' e, più in generale, di opere che si concentrano sul tema dell'immigrazione.[2] Il fenomeno migratorio coinvolge aree geografiche di provenienza molto diverse, dall'Europa all'Asia passando per l'Africa, ma l'immigrazione numericamente più significativa rimane quella maghrebina (in particolare algerina), per ragioni storiche legate al colonialismo e alle politiche migratorie adottate dalla Francia. Autori come Farid Boudjellal, o più recentemente Halim Mahmoudi o le sorelle Gargouri, presentano al lettore realtà rimosse, ancora troppo spesso sconosciute o taciute.

Il fumetto *Les Mohamed* (2011) di Jérôme Ruillier si colloca in questo vasto panorama,[3] pur con caratteristiche singolari. L'autore francese, nato in Madagascar, ha infatti realizzato un adattamento di *Mémoires d'immigrés* dell'autrice algerina Yamina Benguigui, tracciando un quadro globale dell'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia e mettendola costantemente in relazione con la storia francese. Così come avviene in generale per le scritture migranti, anche nel caso della *bande dessinée* gli autori sono spesso i primi traduttori di realtà sconosciute, che rendono accessibili a un ampio pubblico. Ma cosa succede quando questi autori vengono a loro volta tradotti?

Questo articolo analizza, in prima battuta, il processo di traduzione intersemiotica che ha portato alla creazione del fumetto *Les Mohamed*. Si sofferma in seguito sulle caratteristiche dell'opera e, in particolare, sulle soluzioni che ho adottato nella sua traduzione italiana (*Se ti chiami Mohamed* 2015).[4]

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dell'esodo del popolo ebraico: Kal-El (Superman), arriva su un nuovo pianeta, la Terra, dopo la distruzione di Krypton, rappresentazione simbolica dell'olocausto. Il suo lungo viaggio intergalattico, paragonabile a un esodo, lo porta in Kansas, dove vive esiliato sotto una nuova identità, quella di Clark Kent, costretto ad adattarsi a una nuova cultura. Dietro l'invenzione di questo personaggio c'è dunque la rappresentazione di una migrazione e la volontà di una rivincita: Superman è un eroe pienamente positivo, che riscatta non solo se stesso ma l'intera popolazione incontrata sul nuovo 'pianeta'.

2   Si considera qui solo la produzione di autori emigrati in Francia. Per un primo approccio alla *bande dessinée* nei paesi francofoni si veda il numero 14 di *Publif@rum*, interamente dedicato a «La BD francophone». URL `http://www.publifarum.farum.it/show_issue.php?iss_id=10` (2015-03-01). Sul fumetto quebecchese, particolarmente importante, è possibile consultare il numero tematico di *European Comic Art*, 5 (1), 2012.

3   Per un approccio generale ai rapporti tra *bande dessinée* e migrazione rimando a Vitali 2014b. Segnalo anche, in ottica più strettamente postcoloniale, Mehta e Mukherji 2015.

4   Le due opere sono indicate direttamente nel testo con le sigle *LM* (*Les Mohamed*) e *STCM* (*Se ti chiami Mohamed*).

1   Da *Mémoires d'immigrés* a *Les Mohamed*

Prima di incominciare a riflettere sui problemi traduttivi, occorre soffermarsi sull'origine de *Les Mohamed*. Questa *bande dessinée* si presenta infatti in partenza come una traduzione intersemiotica (Jakobson 1959), ovvero come un adattamento dell'opera filmica e letteraria di Yamina Benguigui. Scrittrice e cineasta francese di origine algerina, ex-ministro della francofonia, Benguigui ha svolto nella prima metà degli anni Novanta una serie di ricerche sull'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia, ricavandone un documentario e subito dopo un volume, entrambi intitolati *Mémoires d'immigrés* (1997). Le due opere presentano lo stesso scheletro: un insieme di biografie dalla struttura tripartita – *Les pères*, *Les mères*, *Les enfants* – ricostruiscono il quadro storico-politico, ma anche emotivo e affettivo, di quarant'anni d'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia, partendo dai *primo-arrivants* degli anni Cinquanta per arrivare alle seconde generazioni.

   Come sottolineano Gaudreault e Marion, «pour qu'un sujet s'incarne, le lui faut une ossature. La chair ou l'apparence extérieure, elle, peut changer, mais le squelette demeure» (1998, 39) Nel suo adattamento a fumetti, edito da Sarbacane nel 2011, Ruillier ha deciso di seguire in maniera molto fedele il lavoro di Benguigui, nella sua doppia natura visiva e testuale, rispettandone l'ossatura. La 'fedeltà' traspare prima di tutto nel codice iconico: è sufficiente confrontare qualche fotogramma del documentario di Benguigui con le tavole di Ruillier per rendersene conto. Dal punto di vista testuale, l'opera presenta la stessa struttura tripartita e riporta fedelmente i diversi frammenti biografici presenti nel volume di Benguigui (seppure con qualche inevitabile ellissi). Non a caso, Ruillier dichiara in apertura il medium che lo precede – il libro *Mémoires d'immigrés* – raffigurandolo nelle tavole di pagina 6 e 7, secondo un meccanismo definito da Bolter e Grusin come *rimediazione* (1999), ovvero un processo di generazione di forme nuove che rinviano in modo osmotico e ricorsivo ai media precedenti.[5]

   Il partito preso della fedeltà al lavoro di Benguigui non deve però trarre in inganno. È importante sottolineare che Ruillier non si limita a una semplice 'traduzione', ma la rimpolpa con netti interventi autoriali. Il suo apporto personale sta soprattutto nell'autorappresentazione: l'autore ha voluto mettere in scena se stesso all'interno del mondo diegetico, creando episodi che lo vedono protagonista, con i suoi dubbi, i suoi commenti che punteggiano la narrazione e la attualizzano, e che hanno il potere di mettere in relazione la storia dell'immigrazione magrebina con la storia della Francia *tout court*. Per esempio, in alcuni passaggi onirici, Ruillier

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[5]   Per chi fosse interessato a un'analisi più dettagliata di questo percorso intersemiotico, rimando a un mio intervento dal titolo «Tra documentario, libro e fumetto: il viaggio intersemiotico e transmediale di *Mémoires d'immigrés* di Yamina Benguigui», all'interno del convegno *Incerti confini*, Università di Bologna, 19-20 novembre 2015 (è in corso la pubblicazione degli atti).

interroga il padre defunto sulla sua esperienza della Guerra d'Algeria, considerandola dal punto di vista francese; in altre tavole, avvicina l'emarginazione vissuta da diversi migranti a quella che si trova spesso a vivere la figlia Sarah, trisomica. Per queste ragioni, definire l'adattamento di Ruillier soltanto attraverso il paradigma consolidato di Jakobson appare riduttivo. Più appropriata e produttiva per la lettura di questo percorso è la definizione di *transmedia storytelling* fornita da Henry Jenkins (2006), ovvero il dispiegarsi di una storia su più piattaforme artistiche, in cui ciascun media coinvolto aggiunge qualcosa, dando un apporto specifico alla nostra comprensione di ciò che è raccontato, nonché al percorso globale.

In questo primo processo di traduzione da parte di Ruillier intervengono dunque anche dei cambiamenti, tra cui la trasformazione del titolo, che da *Mémoires d'immigrés* diventa *Les Mohamed*, dove il nome proprio Mohamed, il più comune nell'area del Maghreb, sta qui a indicare nel loro complesso gli immigrati maghrebini, privati della loro identità e ridotti a mera forza lavoro: «quand on entre chez Renault», dichiara una delle persone intervistate da Benguigui, riprodotta in una delle prime tavole di Ruillier «on regarde comment vous vous appelez. Si c'est Mohamed, on vous envoie à la chaîne» (*LM* 2011, 11, fig. 1).

La trasformazione del titolo da *Mémoires d'immigrés* a *Les Mohamed* implica naturalmente una trasformazione dello sguardo, che da interno diviene esterno: ricordiamo che Ruillier non è figlio dell'immigrazione e per questa ragione non ha voluto appropriarsi del termine memoria (*mémoire*), fondamentale invece nel lavoro di Yamina Benguigui. Un intervento analogo, anche se con modalità diverse, è stato messo in atto nella traduzione italiana, come vedremo in seguito.
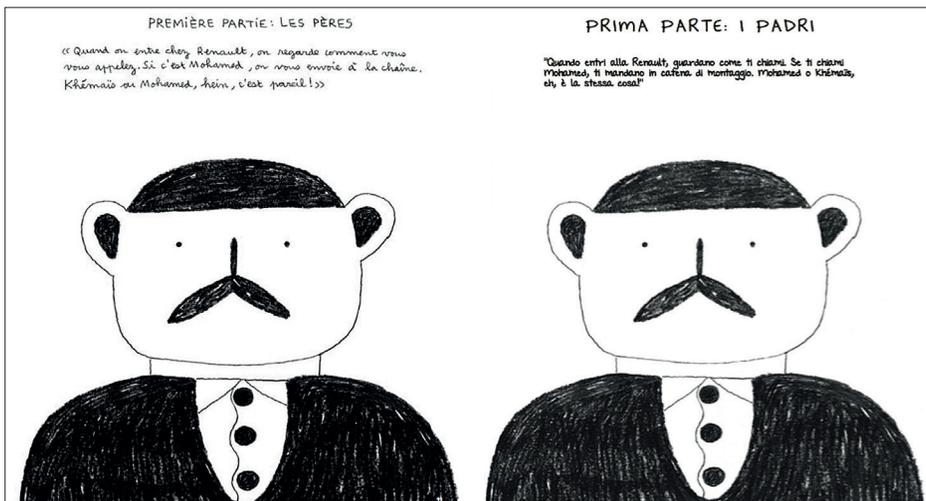
Figura 1. *Les Mohamed*, 11; *Se ti chiami Mohamed*, 9

Nell'adattamento di Ruillier, anche l'aspetto grafico merita grande attenzione. La caratteristica che più colpisce in questa *bande dessinée* è senza dubbio la scelta di utilizzare un *code animalier*: i personaggi sono rappresentati dall'autore come dei gatti stilizzati. A questo punto, il lettore di fumetti non può non pensare al celebre *Maus* (1986-1991) di Art Spiegelman (anche lui 'figlio' dell'immigrazione), che racconta la vita del padre sopravvissuto all'olocausto attraverso una metafora zoomorfa che vede gli ebrei disegnati come topi e i tedeschi come gatti. La scelta di Ruillier è simile e al contempo diversa: l'autore ha deciso di rappresentare tutti, maghrebini e francesi, allo stesso modo. Raffigurare con tratti marcati i personaggi immigrati sarebbe stata un'operazione sin troppo facile, disegnarli tutti nella stessa maniera è per l'autore un modo di rimetterli sullo stesso piano. Come ha dichiarato in un'intervista: «utilizzare teste di animali indefinite, dal tratto molto semplice, mi è sembrato ideale per occuparmi dei Mohamed. Queste maschere neutre, anonime, obbligano a spostare il nostro punto di vista, è di nuovo la parola ad avere il sopravvento» (Chiaramonte 2015).

Come si può apprezzare dalla tavola riprodotta (fig. 1),[6] il tratto dell'autore è di fatto essenziale, quasi infantile e volutamente stilizzato. Una scelta molto precisa, che risponde all'intento di affrontare argomenti complessi e delicati (immigrazione, integrazione, razzismo…) con la maggior semplicità possibile. Per la stessa ragione, l'autore ha preferito il bianco e nero, evitando la distrazione del colore. La volontà di chiarezza espressa nel codice visivo si specchia in quello verbale, esprimendosi in un processo di sottrazione grafica e di semplificazione testuale. L'insieme di queste componenti crea un fumetto di grande accessibilità. Per queste ragioni, nel complesso, come sottolineato dalla stessa Benguigui nella prefazione alla *bande dessinée*, *Les Mohamed* ha un forte valore di natura pedagogica (*LM* 2011, 3).

2   Da *Les Mohamed* a *Se ti chiami Mohamed*: il paratesto

Nell'ottobre del 2014, sono stata contattata dalla casa editrice Il Sirente a proposito di un progetto editoriale dedicato alle scritture migranti legate al mondo arabo. L'intenzione era quella di tradurre opere di autori provenienti dai paesi europei con il più alto tasso d'immigrazione araba, creando una sezione 'migrante' all'interno di una collana già esistente dedicata agli scrittori dell'altra sponda del Mediterraneo (Altriarabi).

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6   Tutte le immagini sono riprodotte per gentile concessione degli editori. Per l'edizione francese: Ruillier, Jérôme (2011). *Les Mohamed.* © Parigi: Éditions Sarbacane. Tiré de Benguigui, Yamina (1997), *Mémoires d'immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin.* © Parigi: Éditions Albin Michel; per l'edizione italiana: Ruillier, Jérôme (2011). *Les Mohamed*. Parigi: Sarbacane. Trad. da Ilaria Vitali. Trad. it.: *Se ti chiami Mohamed*. © Roma: Il Sirente, 2015.

Il progetto è ben espresso nelle parole della direttrice editoriale, Chiarastella Campanelli:

> Dopo 7 anni dalla nascita del progetto editoriale Altriarabi, è sorta l'esigenza di raccogliere anche le voci degli europei con origine araba. Un canto proveniente dal sud e un contro-canto proveniente dal nord, entrambi affacciati sulle rive del mar mediterraneo – «al bahr al abyad al mutawassit», il mare bianco di mezzo – per dialogare, confrontarsi, guardarsi. (Campanelli 2015, ii)[7]

Come ci dicono le statistiche, la Francia è il paese europeo che, per ragioni storiche, conta oggi il maggior numero d'immigrati maghrebini.[8] Eppure, questa comunità già numerosa negli anni Cinquanta del Novecento è rimasta per molto tempo invisibile. Per queste ragioni, *Les Mohamed*, primo fumetto a raccontare in maniera diffusa e organica il fenomeno dell'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia, mi è sembrato una buona proposta da avanzare. Anche se questo articolo non è incentrato sulla ricezione, mi preme ricordare alcuni aspetti riguardo alla collocazione editoriale di questa *bande dessinée*, che inaugura di fatto la sezione 'migrante' della collana Altriarabi, perché essi sono utili per capire la scelta della macrostrategia traduttiva.

Ogni traduzione produce inevitabilmente cambiamento, perché risultato di una serie di scelte. Questo aspetto è evidente sin dal titolo della *bande dessinée*, che come abbiamo visto si modifica già nel primo processo di traduzione operato da Ruillier. Nell'edizione italiana, il titolo si trasforma ulteriormente da *Les Mohamed* a *Se ti chiami Mohamed*. Chi traduce sa che non è il traduttore, ma l'editore a determinare la scelta degli elementi paratestuali, a cui appartiene anche il titolo. Nel caso di questa traduzione, l'ottima collaborazione con la casa editrice e in particolare con la direttrice della collana Altriarabi mi ha però permesso di avanzare delle proposte, tra cui quella che è stata accettata. Per ragioni legate alle differenze tra la storia francese e quella italiana, la traduzione letterale 'I Mohamed' non risultava sufficientemente evocativa e rischiava di apparire addirittura fuorviante, non rinviando in maniera esplicita a quella presenza massiccia d'immigrati di cui si è già parlato. Si

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[7]   Il progetto editoriale è stato finanziato dall'Unione Europea, all'interno del programma Europa Creativa. La traduzione di questa *bande dessinée* ha beneficiato inoltre del patrocinio di Amnesty International e del programma di aiuto alla pubblicazione Casanova (Institut français Italia/Institut français/Ministères des Affaires étrangères et du développement international).

[8]   Sono circa otto milioni i maghrebini e discendenti di maghrebini in Francia. Si vedano i dati raccolti da Frontex, URL http://frontex.europa.eu, e dalla Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration URL http://www.histoire-immigration.fr (2016-06-21).

è scelto dunque di modificare il titolo per l'edizione italiana, ricavandolo dal brano che apre la prima sezione del fumetto (*STCM* 2015, 21, fig. 1), riportato sopra.

Così come altri elementi paratestuali (per esempio la grafica di copertina), il nuovo titolo è stato sottoposto all'approvazione dell'autore. La scelta pare inserirsi bene nella realtà più ampia della *bande dessinée* migrante e risulta particolarmente indovinata se messa in rapporto con essa. Penso per esempio al fumetto *Unofficial Border-Crossing Guide for non-Europeans* (2013), dell'autore migrante di origine messicana Carlos Gustavo Carmona Medina, vincitore del concorso *ComiX4= Comics for Equality Award*, organizzato dall'associazione bolognese Africa & Mediterraneo e dedicato a fumetti inediti di artisti migranti.[9] Il fumetto in questione raccoglie una serie di aneddoti e consigli sui modi migliori per attraversare le frontiere dell'area Schengen quando si è migranti. La vignetta conclusiva dell'ultima tavola rivela tristemente «if your name is Mohamed, don't even try it» (Carmona Medina 2013), sottolineando la stigmatizzazione che avviene ancora oggi nei confronti di chi si chiama Mohamed, a decenni di distanza dalle esperienze raccontate nella *bande dessinée* di Ruillier.

Come già ricordato, l'opera di Ruillier si presenta come una sorta di biografia collettiva della comunità maghrebina in Francia a partire dagli anni Cinquanta. Ne derivano particolarità linguistiche e culturali, per esempio la presenza di varianti lessicali sull'asse diatopico, guidate tuttavia da un progetto, come abbiamo visto, di natura pedagogica.

Nel caso di opere che, come questa, presentano un'ibridità linguistica e culturale, la maggior parte dei traduttologi tende ad esaltare – non di rado a prescrivere – la *foreignising translation*, ovvero secondo i termini di Venuti, una traduzione 'estraniante' che si propone di conservare le caratteristiche linguistiche e culturali del testo di partenza, in un'ottica *source-oriented* (Venuti 1995, 1998). La posizione di Venuti ricalca la cosiddetta traduzione 'etica', che Berman contrappone a quella 'etnocentrica' (Berman 1999). Il partito preso della *foreignising translation*, tuttavia, non è sempre pertinente e in diversi casi rischia anzi di produrre, come evidenziato tra gli altri da Lievois e Balh (2016, 5), controsensi traduttivi. Sebbene gli interventi di Venuti e di altri studiosi che si collocano sulla stessa linea siano stati fondamentali (e salutari) per una presa di coscienza 'etica', questa strategia – come ogni strategia – non deve essere applicata in maniera cieca, ma mediata e valutata di volta in volta, consi-

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9   Segnalo qui anche un altro concorso per fumetti inediti organizzato dall'Associazione bolognese Africa & Mediterraneo e patrocinato dall'UNESCO, dal titolo Africa Comics, particolarmente interessante nel panorama della *bande dessinée* migrante. Si veda il sito dell'associazione Africa & Mediterraneo, URL `http://www.africaemediterraneo.it/it/portfolio/africa-comics/` (2016-06-28).

derando sempre la natura dell'opera, le intenzioni dell'autore e il contesto editoriale. Tra traduzione 'estraniante' e 'addomesticante' esistono infatti molte sfumature che traduttori e editori sembrano prediligere in questo inizio del XXI secolo.

Nel caso de *Les Mohamed*, la natura del fumetto e il contesto editoriale mi hanno guidato nelle scelte rispetto a diversi elementi testuali e paratestuali, come per esempio quella di includere un glossario alla fine del testo.[10] Come già segnalato, i fumettisti migranti sono spesso i primi traduttori di realtà sconosciute o rimosse. Questo processo traduttivo è reso esplicito, all'interno delle loro opere, dalla presenza di glosse esplicative che accompagnano un elemento percepito dall'autore come problematico, o da binomi sinonimici che decriptano un termine potenzialmente non chiaro affiancandolo alla sua traduzione nella lingua standard,[11] o ancora da apparati paratestuali (introduzioni, postfazioni, note e glossari).

L'inserimento di un glossario è una pratica adottata dalla casa editrice Il Sirente per tutti i testi che presentano una lingua diatopicamente marcata e costanti riferimenti a realtà culturali presumibilmente oscure per il lettore italiano. Rispetto alle note a piè di pagina, il glossario presenta almeno due vantaggi: non interrompe la lettura e permette facilmente al lettore di reperire termini che compaiono più di una volta nel testo, senza dover risalire alla prima occorrenza, dove è collocata la nota.

Nel caso specifico di questo fumetto, l'adozione di un apparato paratestuale è legittimata dalla natura pedagogica del fumetto e dal fatto che l'autore stesso aveva inserito alcune note e un glossario nell'opera originale che, in accordo con l'editore, ho ripensato e ridisegnato per il pubblico italiano. Penso, per esempio, al termine *beur*, che indica i figli degli immigrati maghrebini nati in Francia, termine trasparente per un lettore francese, ma non per un italiano. O ancora a diversi prestiti dall'arabo, come *haik* (velo) o *shashia* (copricapo maschile). Occorre infatti considerare che la Francia ha avuto una storia di colonizzazione e immigrazione molto diversa da quella dell'Italia, che le ha consentito di familiarizzare con numerosi termini ed espressioni oggi non più percepiti come stranieri. Da tempo, l'arabo appartiene alle 'langues de France', ovvero quell'insieme di lingue regionali o minoritarie parlate sul territorio francese e ritenute parte del patrimonio comune. Secondo il rapporto stabilito da Bernard Cerquiglini nel 1999, il *darija*, ovvero la variante dialettale dell'arabo

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10   È una soluzione che ho già adottato nella traduzione di diverse opere narrative, per esempio *Viscéral* di Djaïdani (2007; trad. it. *Viscerale* 2009). Altra possibilità, sempre all'interno dei dispositivi paratestuali, è quella di inserire prefazioni o postfazioni, alternativa che ho scelto in altri casi (per esempio, per la raccolta di racconti *Chroniques d'une société annoncée* del collettivo Qui fait la France?, 2007; trad. it. *Cronache di una società annunciata* 2009).

11   Questa strategia è anche definita da Marc Sourdot come 'ripetizione-traduzione'. Si veda Sourdot 2009.

parlata in Maghreb, faceva già parte di queste lingue, al pari del basco, dell'alsaziano o dell'yiddish.[12]

Tornando alla collocazione editoriale, mi preme segnalare che questo 'glossario' – termine che intendo qui nel senso più ampio e generale, come raccolta di voci corredate di informazioni linguistiche, ma soprattutto culturali – non si rivolge a un pubblico di accademici. Le opere edite dalla collana Altriarabi de Il Sirente si rivolgono per vocazione a un pubblico ampio e non specializzato. Lo stesso vale per l'edizione originale: il *Petit lexique* che compare alla fine dell'opera di Ruillier conta in totale cinque voci ed è tratto da un articolo della giornalista Perrine Dutreil, pubblicato su *Télérama* (*LM*, 287), dunque su un settimanale destinato al grande pubblico. Per le ragioni espresse sopra, il lessico in questione non prende in considerazione gli arabismi presenti nel testo, ormai non più percepiti come incomprensibili per un lettore francese. Le cinque voci che lo costituiscono (*indigènes*; *travailleurs immigrés*; *beurs*; *intégristes*; *communauté musulmane*) non presentano del resto alcun problema di decodifica per il pubblico francese, ma si offrono come spunto di riflessione su alcuni temi di natura sociale e storica. Non si tratta d'altronde di un lessico propriamente riferito a *Les Mohamed*, tanto che solo tre delle cinque voci – *travailleurs immigrés*; *beurs*; *intégristes* – compaiono nell'opera di Ruillier.[13]

Per la sua precisa collocazione editoriale, il glossario della traduzione italiana doveva rispondere a caratteristiche diverse, coniugando la concisione con l'accessibilità. Trattandosi di un'opera che affronta il tema dell'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia e che s'inserisce nel contesto editoriale di una collana specificamente rivolta all'immigrazione araba in Europa, l'intento era quello di definire non solo aspetti legati al mondo arabo, ma anche elementi caratteristici della realtà francese connessi all'immigrazione e alle banlieue disagiate. Nel glossario dell'edizione italiana della *BD*, che conta diciassette voci, ho quindi inserito termini appartenenti alla lingua araba, ma anche alcuni riferimenti alla storia dell'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia che compaiono nell'opera e che possono risultare problematici per un lettore italiano. Eccone alcuni esempi:

Beur ~ Figlio di immigrati maghrebini nato in Francia. Il termine è il 'verlan' della parola 'arabe (*STCM* 2015, 285).

H.L.M. ~ Acronimo di 'Habitation à Loyer Modéré' (alloggio ad affitto

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12   Sulla differenza tra 'langue française' e 'langues de France', si veda il sito `http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Politiques-ministerielles/Langue-francaise-et-langues-de-France/Politiques-de-la-langue/Langues-de-France` (2016-06-02). Sullo stesso portale è possibile consultare i rapporti periodici dedicati alle evoluzioni della lingua francese.

13   Considerando questi diversi fattori, l'uso del termine 'Lexique' risulta dunque in parte improprio, anche se è quello che è stato scelto dall'editore francese.

contenuto), particolarmente presente in banlieue. Di qualità superiore agli edifici H.B.M. (Habitations Bon Marché) e costruiti, in origine, per una sorta di classe media nascente, sono divenuti in seguito sinonimo di degrado e abbandono. Secondo le stime, nei primi anni Duemila circa dieci milioni di persone alloggiavano in Francia in un'abitazione H.L.M. (*STCM* 2015, 286).

Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme (Marche des beurs) ~ Grande marcia pacifista, partita da Marsiglia il 15 ottobre del 1983 e giunta a Parigi il 3 dicembre dello stesso anno, dove una delegazione è ricevuta all'Eliseo dall'allora presidente François Mitterand. Con oltre centomila partecipanti, è il primo evento che porta all'attenzione pubblica l'esistenza e le rivendicazioni dei figli degli immigrati nati in Francia (*STCM* 2015, 286).

Pied-noir ~ Francese d'Algeria rimpatriato dopo l'indipendenza del paese nel 1962 (*STCM* 2015, 286).

Shashia ~ Copricapo maschile, a forma di calotta, tradizionalmente usato nei paesi arabi, in particolare in Tunisia (*STCM* 2015, 286).

Gli esempi riportati sopra sono rappresentativi delle tre realtà presenti nel glossario: prestiti dall'arabo (*shashia*, ecc.); elementi extralinguistici come eventi storici connessi all'immigrazione maghrebina in Francia (*Marche pour l'égalité et contre le racisme*, ecc.); aspetti linguistici e/o culturali legati alla realtà francese e alle banlieue disagiate (*beur*, *H.L.M.*, ecc.).

Per quanto riguarda le (pochissime) note a piè pagina, esse sono state mantenute dal testo originale in accordo con l'editore e nel rispetto della volontà dell'autore. Riguardano perlopiù sigle e acronimi, per esempio «CLIS: Classe d'Intégration Scolaire» (*LM*, 168; *STCM*, 167), a cui ne sono state aggiunte poche altre non trasparenti per un lettore italiano, per esempio, «C.G.T.: Confédération Générale du Travail» (sindacato), (*STCM*, 40).[14] Alcune di queste voci, la cui definizione sintetica appare in nota, sono state commentate più diffusamente nel glossario a fine testo, laddove lo si riteneva utile per la comprensione del lettore (si veda per esempio il caso di «H.L.M.», *STCM*, 286).

Un'ultima nota sull'aspetto tipografico dell'edizione italiana: il carattere utilizzato, My Hands are Holding you, progettato da Kimberly Geswein nel 2011 per lo *scrapbooking* digitale, differisce dall'originale, scritto a mano dall'autore, pur ricordandolo da vicino (anche in questo caso come nei

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14 Trattandosi di interventi quantitativamente marginali, l'editore ha preferito non differenziare le note dell'autore da quelle del traduttore.

precedenti in cui si sono apportate modifiche rispetto all'opera originale, la scelta è stata sottoposta all'approvazione dall'autore).

3   Da *Les Mohamed* a *Se ti chiami Mohamed*: il testo

I problemi traduttivi posti dal medium fumetto sono già stati analizzati, tra gli altri, da Zanettin (1998, 2014) e dipendono in larga misura dall'inter-connessione tra il codice visivo e quello verbale. Com'è noto, le tavole di un fumetto prevedono una griglia, con spazi precisi riservati alla componente testuale (didascalie e nuvolette) a cui non si può sfuggire. Nel caso de *Les Mohamed*, quando si è rivelato impossibile inserire il testo della traduzione per via di spazi troppo ridotti, si sono cercate soluzioni durante il *lettering*, ovvero nella fase editoriale d'inserimento e adattamento delle parti testuali all'interno delle tavole. Le dimensioni di alcune nuvolette hanno determinato alcuni piccoli aggiustamenti, per esempio: «Bonjour» > «Buondì» (in luogo di «Buongiorno») (*STCM*, 66, 185, 209).

La presenza di una griglia non è che il primo elemento vincolante per il traduttore di fumetti: gli elementi potenzialmente problematici dettati dalla stretta relazione tra il codice visivo e quello verbale sono molteplici. Uno di questi è costituito dai fonosimboli, parole o gruppi di parole invariabili che riproducono o evocano un suono specifico, come il verso di un animale o il rumore prodotto da un oggetto o da un'azione. La difficoltà traduttiva deriva dal fatto che i fonosimboli sono spesso parte integrante dell'immagine e, pur imitando suoni esistenti, variano a seconda dei sistemi linguistici. Nel caso de *Les Mohamed*, li ho potuti tradurre perché questo non comportava interventi di modifica della componente grafica, a differenza di quanto accade in altri casi riportati nel volume curato da Zanettin (2014). La cosa che può apparire singolare è che ho dovuto tradurli… in inglese. La *bande dessinée* ha infatti creato un proprio fonosimbolismo. In Italia, il fumetto utilizza invece spesso (anche se non sempre) fonosimboli derivati dall'inglese, lingua particolarmente ricca di sostantivi e verbi onomatopeici monosillabici entrati progressivamente nell'uso fino a cristallizzarsi e ad essere impiegati anche in contesti diversi da quello del fumetto. Di seguito alcuni esempi di traduzione: «tousse tousse» > «cough cough» (*LM*, 30, 33, 41, 43, 235; *STCM*, 29, 32, 40, 42, 234); «croc croc» > «crunch crunch» (*LM*, 93, 107, 115; *STCM*, 92, 106, 114); «miam miam» > «gnam gnam» (*LM*, 103, 115, 193; *STCM*, 102, 114, 192).
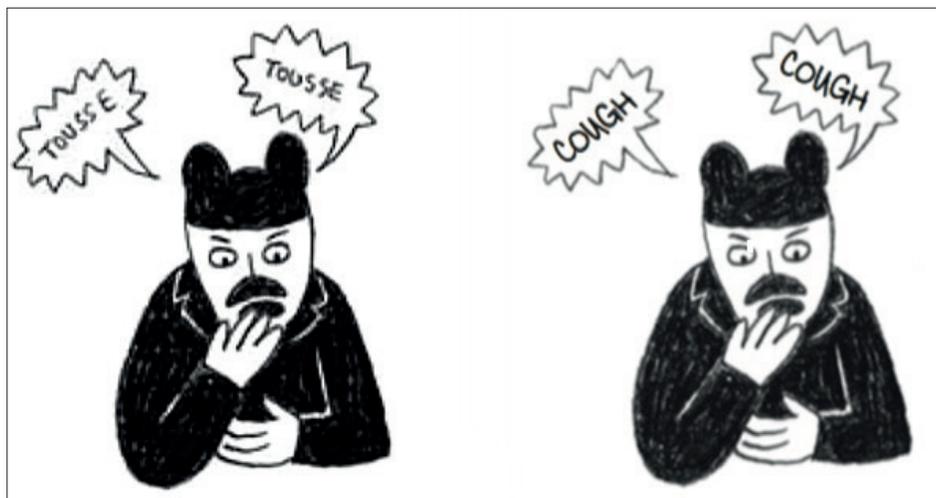
Figura 2. *Les Mohamed*, 33 (dettaglio); *Se ti chiami Mohamed*, 32 (dettaglio)

Figura 3. *Les Mohamed*, 115 (dettaglio); *Se ti chiami Mohamed*, 114 (dettaglio)

Quest'ultimo caso («gnam») rappresenta una neoformazione propria dell'italiano, costruita sul modello inglese con finale in consonante, come uno pseudoanglicismo.[15] Altre difficoltà legate al vincolo visivo possono sorgere nel caso di parole integrate all'immagine, dove il traduttore non può naturalmente intervenire. La seconda vignetta di pagina 111 (fig. 4) ne costituisce un esempio. Il personaggio compone con le lettere dell'alfabeto la parola *bal* (ballo). Fortunatamente, la vignetta funziona anche per un lettore italiano, perché dà l'idea che il personaggio debba ancora terminare la costruzione della parola.
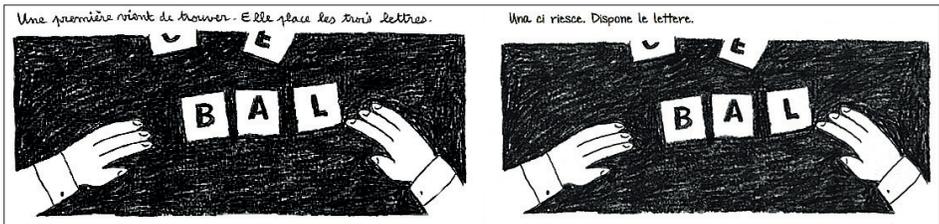
Figura 4. *Les Mohamed*, 111; *Se ti chiami Mohamed*, 110

Un altro aspetto caratteristico della traduzione di fumetti riguarda la presenza di elementi ludolinguistici che si esercitano nel doppio canale verbale/visivo, dando vita a giochi di parole connessi all'immagine. Si tratta di fenomeni che si legano al fumetto sin dalle sue origini. Quello che viene considerato convenzionalmente il primo fumetto italiano, *BilBolBul* di Attilio Mussino, pubblicato nel 1908 sul *Corriere dei Piccoli*, è un esempio perfetto di questa difficoltà traduttiva. Bilbolbul è un bambino africano, che vive nell'ex-Tripolitania (Libia occidentale), allora colonia italiana. Questo fumetto è interamente giocato sulle metafore visualizzate, ovvero la traduzione in immagini di metafore linguistiche. Nelle tavole di Mussino, Bilbolbul diventa letteralmente rosso di vergogna, poi giallo per l'invidia, bianco dalla paura, verde dalla rabbia ecc. Si tratta di un caso limite, ma che può verificarsi quando si traduce un fumetto. Nel caso di *Les Mohamed*, la commistione tra codice verbale e codice visivo non è stata in questo senso vincolante: questo fumetto non ha lo scopo di suscitare il riso e, anche per questa ragione, giochi di parole, metafore visualizzate e *pun* visivi sono quasi totalmente assenti.

In generale, il 'vincolo iconico' non ha dunque posto particolari difficoltà. Più complesso il rapporto con la componente legata al 'vincolo

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15   Nel suo studio sulla lingua del fumetto, Morgana (2003) ne rileva molti altri come *strap* (strappare), *rasp* (raspare), *zomp* (zompare, saltare).

culturale', ovvero con quell'insieme di elementi propri della cultura emittente non riproducibili in quella ricevente. Penso soprattutto ai riferimenti all'immigrazione o alla storia della Francia che implicano un bagaglio di conoscenze che un lettore italiano può comprensibilmente non avere. Importante, in questo senso, il trattamento dei *realia*, ovvero quei termini che indicano oggetti, concetti e fenomeni specifici di una cultura che non trovano traducenti precisi in altre lingue. Rientra in questa categoria il termine *beur*, cui si è già accennato.

Come specialista di scritture migranti, sono consapevole che il termine è di per sé particolarmente problematico (si veda Vitali 2011 e 2014a). Usato sin dalle sue origini «selon le jeu des intérêts, pour valoriser ou dévaloriser» (Keil 1991, 159), *beur* è il *verlan* di *arabe*, dove per *verlan* s'intende un linguaggio argotico a chiave che consiste nell'inversione delle sillabe di una parola (S1S2 > S2S1, per esempio, cité > téci, métro > tromé),[16] allo scopo di rendere le frasi incomprensibili ai non iniziati (lo stesso termine *verlan* è il rovesciamento di '[à] l'envers').

Se è facile risalire all'origine e al significato del termine *verlan*, più difficile – forse impossibile – è stabilirne con esattezza l'anno di nascita. Lo stesso *verlan*, infatti, anche se poco noto, «est probablement aussi vieux que le français lui-même» (Merle 2006, 48). Si tratta di una pratica argotica antichissima, di cui si riscontrano tracce già nel Medioevo, ma che si è mostrata straordinariamente produttiva a partire dal secondo dopoguerra, trovando terreno fertile nelle banlieue disagiate. È probabilmente negli anni Settanta che il termine *beur* si è sviluppato come auto-designazione dei giovani maghrebini della banlieue parigina.

Il processo di trasformazione che porta da arabe a *beur* è ancora oggi oggetto di discussione. Tuttavia è possibile ipotizzare, come avviene per molti trisillabi, che la sillaba mediana di *arabe* funga da perno attorno alla quale ruotano le altre due: da *a-ra-be*, si avrà così *be-ra-a*, per contrazione, *bera*, termine su cui interviene infine il comune fenomeno dell'apocope, portando alla caduta dell'ultima vocale. Il processo 'rovescia' così un termine, *arabe*, che aveva acquisito valore dispregiativo durante la colonizzazione, sovvertendone la valenza negativa e riscattandone il significato.[17]

L'esempio di *beur* non è che uno tra i tanti. Il *verlan* è un procedimento ampiamente usato nelle opere letterarie, cinematografiche e fumettistiche legate alla migrazione, dove si pone come una sorta di manifesto in cui si sedimenta una fitta rete simbolica e semantica. L'assenza in italiano di un fenomeno sociolinguistico paragonabile al *verlan* rende dunque par-

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16   Si indica qui soltanto il caso più semplice. Di questo complesso fenomeno e in particolare del suo uso nell'ambito delle scritture migranti ho parlato diffusamente nel saggio «La nebulosa beur» (2014).

17   Nel tempo, il termine ha assunto a sua volta connotazioni negative e per questo è stato riverlanizzato in *rebeu*.

ticolarmente difficile la traduzione (si veda Vitali 2011, 155-184). Come traduttrice di narrativa migrante, mi è capitato spesso di incappare in termini in *verlan* e di tradurli in modi diversi a seconda del contesto, a volte neutralizzandoli – utilizzando per esempio l'italiano standard *arabo* per *beur* – a volte lasciandoli invariati, e inserendo una nota a piè di pagina o una voce di glossario, come nel caso de *Les Mohamed*. La natura pedagogica di questo fumetto e la volontà dell'autore di guidare il lettore in un percorso di presa di coscienza delle realtà della migrazione e della marginalità mi ha fatto propendere per questa seconda possibilità. Non ho mai pensato, a differenza di altri traduttori,[18] di creare un *verlan* italiano. All'orecchio di un locutore italiano suonerebbe, a mio avviso, come un gioco bizzarro, un po' infantile e completamente scollegato dalla pratica linguistica reale. Il risultato finale, seppur apparentemente simile nella forma, 'tradirebbe' l'originale ben più di altre soluzioni. Sono al corrente dell'esistenza in Italia di fenomeni linguistici come il *trancorio*, linguaggio a chiave originario delle provincie di Milano e di Brescia costruito sulla metatesi sillabica. Tuttavia, la marginalità di questo linguaggio, sociologicamente troppo distante dal *verlan*, e la mancanza di un numero significativo di locutori ha fatto sì che questo socioletto non avesse alcun impatto sulla lingua standard, a differenza del caso francese (com'è noto, molti termini del *verlan* sono stati lessicalizzati negli anni; *meuf* > *femme* 'donna' nel 1981, *keuf* > *flic* 'poliziotto' addirittura nel 1978, per limitarsi agli esempi più celebri). Considerando l'insieme di questi fattori, utilizzare il *trancorio* o linguaggi simili non mi è parsa una via praticabile.

Per quanto riguarda altre particolarità linguistiche che pongono problemi di traducibilità e rischio di residui traduttivi, occorre ricordare che il fumetto, dal punto di vista verbale, ha delle caratteristiche proprie legate soprattutto alla forte presenza di dialoghi e del discorso diretto, e quindi a tratti specifici dell'oralità. Nel caso de *Les Mohamed*, si aggiunge il fatto che i personaggi si esprimono spesso in un francese approssimativo, un *français cassé* (Caubet 2005), mimesi della lingua parlata dagli immigrati maghrebini che non ne hanno ancora maturato una completa padronanza. Si tratta di un linguaggio carico di interferenze, approssimazioni fonetiche ed errori lessicali e sintattici. Questa particolarità verbale è stata mantenuta nella traduzione italiana. Eccone di seguito alcuni esempi: «la phoïde» > «febbre foide» (in luogo di *fièvre tiphoïde*, «febbre tifoide», *LM*, 137; *STCM*, 136); «les Pologne» > «i Polonia» (in luogo di *les Polonais*, «i polacchi», *LM*, 141; *STCM*, 140); «respirateur Philips» > «respirapolvere Philips» (in luogo di *aspirateur*, «aspirapolvere», *LM*, 122; *STCM*, 121).

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18   Si veda per esempio Gilda Lombardi e Riccardo Fedriga, traduttori del primo tomo delle *Chroniques de l'asphalte* di Samuel Benchetrit (2005), edito in Italia da Neri Pozza (2007), nello specifico il capitolo «Devant la tour»/«Davanti alla torre».

Un'altra specificità linguistica di questa *BD* riguarda, come si è già visto, la presenza di scarti diatopici, in particolare prestiti dall'arabo o dal *darija*, basiletto dell'area maghrebina, che ho deciso di mantenere tali, lasciando così invariato il palinsesto linguistico. Come già segnalato, i termini problematici per un lettore italiano sono stati registrati nel glossario alla fine del testo. Alcuni esempi: «gandura» (*LM*, 47; *STCM*, 46; glossario 285); «fatma» (*LM*, 120; *STCM*, 119; glossario 285); «halal» (*LM*, 200; *STCM*, 199; glossario 285); «yu-yu» (*LM*, 102, 152; *STCM*, 101, 151; glossario 286).

Tradurre una *bande dessinée* migrante significa dunque confrontarsi, da un lato, con i problemi traduttivi posti dal medium fumetto, dall'altro, con quelli posti più in generale dalle scritture migranti, che presentano quelle caratteristiche linguistiche e culturali specifiche di cui si è discusso. La traduzione de *Les Mohamed* è solo un esempio, e si sono volute mostrare qui alcune soluzioni tra le tante possibili. Come si è visto, sono molti gli aspetti che influenzano la postura del traduttore. Fattori intratestuali ed extratestuali hanno concorso nel determinare la scelta della macrostrategia traduttiva, che non deve essere mai assunta a priori, ma mediata e rimodulata di volta in volta.

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Forefronting Welsh Through English
Translating and Translanguaging
in Alys Conran's *Pigeon*

David Newbold

Abstract   Alys Conran's first novel, *Pigeon*, (2016), relates the misadventure of a disaffected young Welsh boy, partly through the eyes of his friend and accomplice Iola, who, like Pigeon, comes from a broken family. Both are growing up in a bleak post industrial village in North Wales, never named, possibly Bethesda, the setting for one of the finest novels ever written in Welsh, Caradog Prichard's *Un nos ola leuad*, which also charts the psychological undercurrents of a pre-adolescent boy trying to make sense of the world in which he finds himself, as he wanders innocently along a path of self-destruction. Prichard's novel, written half a century ago, is in Welsh. Conran, a native speaker of Welsh, writes in English. In choosing to do so, she offers insights into the way in which the two languages of Wales have been brought together through the media, through a bilingual educational system, and through changed attitudes towards both English and Welsh in the wake of devolution, more functional and less emotively charged. Pigeon and Iola are Welsh speakers, but they resort to English not just to interact with Pigeon's monolingual step-sister, brought to the village by a violent Englishman who moves in with Pigeon's mother, but also to play out their own fantasies, fueled by the language of films and social media. In short, *Pigeon*, with its continual reference to the language use of its protagonists, can be seen as an exploration of 'translanguaging', a term that first appeared in Welsh as *trawsieithu* (Williams 1994) and has been defined by Canagarajah (2011) as "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system".

Keywords   Welsh. English. Language Attitudes. Translanguaging.

Over the past two decade, the term 'translanguaging' has grown in popularity, especially in the field of bilingual education, to indicate the exploitation of a shared resource – the knowledge of two or more languages – to promote learning in formal educational settings. The benefits, it is claimed, include gaining competence in the 'weaker' language, as well as learning curriculum content. Above all, it is seen as a dynamic alternative to a more traditional classroom approach towards bilingualism, that of keeping languages separate (García 2009, Baker 2010), with more potential advantages, such as avoiding the pitfalls of translation.

But 'translanguaging' is not simply a classroom phenomenon or an educational trend. As Lewis et al. (2012) point out, the promotion of translanguaging is premised on the idea that in a bilingual context "children pragmatically use both of their languages in order to maximize understanding

and performance in the home, street, and school" (643). Nor is it confined to children; Canagarajah (2011) usefully defines translanguaging as the "ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system". This, presumably, is a more holistic phenomenon than code-switching, a rule-bound language activity variously interpreted as a form of language deficit, as an accommodation strategy, or (more commonly) as an identity marker (Wei and Hua 2013).

The term itself appears to be a literal translation of the Welsh *trawsiathiau*, a word first used by education researcher Cen Williams in the 1980s (Williams 1996), to refer to emerging practices in the burgeoning phenomenon of bilingual education in Wales. The development of Welsh medium schools from the 1980s, to include English speaking parts of the country as well as the Welsh-speaking heartland, offered parents almost everywhere in Wales the chance of a bilingual upbringing for their children. Many English speaking parents availed themselves of the opportunity. But this brought with it heterogeneous situations in which pupils would be more competent in one language, and in which the stronger language might usefully be employed to scaffold the weaker one. Thus, for Williams, a class might study a text (such as a video, or written input) in one language, and then discuss it in another, working across languages, or 'translanguaging'.

For Wales in the 1980s, this approach marked a new departure in language attitudes. In the previous century, Welsh had been banned in schools, and pupils caught speaking their mother tongue in class would be beaten at the end of the lesson as part of the infamous 'Welsh Not' campaign (Davies 1994, 443). In the twentieth century, Welsh medium education had become prevalent in the heartland (*Y Fro Gymraeg,* which included large swathes of north and west Wales), while Welsh as a foreign language became a statutory, but minor, part of the curriculum in the English speaking part of the country, especially in densely populated South Wales. The two languages were kept apart in most walks of life; this held true for literary production throughout most of the last century, since Welsh native speakers, conscious of their role as guardians of *yr hen iaith* (the old language) would only write in Welsh, and English mother tongue writers (whose parents may have themselves been Welsh speakers, Dylan Thomas being perhaps the most obvious example) could only write in English.

But the introduction of Welsh medium education in English-speaking South Wales, the establishment of a Welsh television channel, *Sianel Pedwar Cymru* (S4C), and the route to devolution that resulted (after two referenda) in the creation of the Welsh Assembly, has led to a noticeable shift in language attitudes, and a new confidence that Welsh and English can co-exist and in some contexts complement each other without necessarily threatening the survival of Welsh. An emblematic example of the dynamic

relationship between the two languages can be seen in the much-acclaimed S4C noir series *Y Gwyll* (hinterland), which first appeared in 2013, and which was shot back-to-back in English and Welsh, with both versions featuring snatches of dialogue in the other language. Leading actor Richard Harrington, a second language Welsh speaker who grew up in South Wales, and who plays a morose detective who has been relocated to Aberystwyth from Cardiff, says that his Welsh improved greatly during filming.[1]

One of the most significant indicators of a change in attitude towards the two languages can be found in the number of writers from Wales poets, such as Gwyneth Lewis, and especially novelists (Jon Gower, Fflur Dafydd, Llywd Owen), who use both languages, often translating or rewriting their own work. Some of these acquired Welsh through Welsh medium education; Gwyneth Lewis, the first poet laureate of Wales, author of the massive-lettered bilingual verse that adorns the millennium building in Cardiff,[2] and Llwyd Owen, who won the Welsh language Book of the Year award in 2007 with *Ffydd Gobaith Cariad* (Faith, Hope, Love), both went to Welsh medium schools in Cardiff.

This is the background against which *Pigeon,* the debut novel by Alys Conran, has appeared. Conran grew up in Welsh-speaking North West Wales, and it is here that the novel is set, in a small town that resonates strongly with the slate mining town of Bethesda. Bethesda is also the setting of Caradog Prichard's *Un Nos ola Leuad* (1961), possibly the greatest – and bleakest – novel ever written in Welsh, and one of the few to have been subsequently translated into English (as *One Moonlit Night*, by Philip Mitchell in 1995). Like Pritchard's novel, *Pigeon* charts the psychological undercurrents of a disaffected pre-adolescent boy (Pigeon, a name we will return to) who tries to make sense of a world of domestic violence in which he finds himself. He shares the journey with Iola, his streetwise soul mate, who like Pigeon comes from a dysfunctional family.

Pigeon's life takes a battering when his submissive single parent mother Mari remarries and a violent Englishman moves into his crooked two-bedroomed house on the hill. His stepfather (Adrian, but for Pigeon he is always just *He*) brings with him his daughter Cher, who is just a few months older than Pigeon, and who is given the second bedroom. Pigeon is moved into the shed in the garden (just for the weekend, Mari assures him, unconvincingly). Adrian, *He,* soon asserts himself as a wife beater and a domestic tyrant, and Pigeon is left to brood on revenge in the shed.

A frequent visitor to the shed is Pigeon's schoolmate and partner in

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1 Reported in *Wales on line*. URL http://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/actor-richard-harrington-talks-nordic-6464483 (2016-08-05).

2 The text in Welsh reads *Creu Gwir fel Gwydr O Ffwrnais Awen* (Creating Truth like Glass from the Furnace of Inspiration); the English text reads *In these stones horizons sing.*

truancy, Iola. Together they identify a scapegoat, a peripatetic ice cream vendor, who in their joint imagination becomes a child molester and a murderer. Inexplicably, Gwyn the ice-cream-man is seen as the root of all their troubles. But a plan to punish him goes horribly wrong when Cher (half privy to the plot, and fully convinced that Gwyn is a murderer) jumps into the van, and in the ensuing scuffle the handbrake comes off. The van runs down the hill and Cher is left permanently injured in the crash.

The central moment in the narrative comes when Adrian confronts Pigeon after finding out what has happened to his daughter. Adrian is shot and killed, and Pigeon, who confesses to the murder, is taken away to a Borstal near Liverpool. When he returns, several years later, he and Iola pick up the pieces of their existence, new truths emerge, and in the empty slate quarry above the town where Pigeon retrieves the gun which killed his stepfather, Iola reflects upon the lost years:

(1)   "How can I get back what you've lost?" I ask him again.
       He's still smiling, just a bit. Considering. You can feel something building.
       "Geiria", he says. *Words.*
       He shrugs his eyes searching the ground for them.
       "Only words". (252)

These closing lines of the novel, with the single, glossed, Welsh word *geiria* to remind us that the conversation is taking place in Welsh, confirm what a close reading of the text has gradually uncovered; *Pigeon*, more than a coming of age novel, more than a portrayal of dysfunctional family life in a depressed part of Wales, is a novel about language; something that the novelist herself only realized as she was writing. In an interview given to the *Wales Arts Review*[3] Conran recalls:

> when I came to Pigeon, finally, and he had a friend, and they started on their journey together through the story, from the moment they started speaking to each other, I knew they needed to speak in Welsh or else it would be all lies. Fiction isn't a lie. I couldn't write Pigeon speaking English. From that point on, the novel developed into being one about language. About losing language.

But language loss – Pigeon's partial loss of Welsh in the English Borstal, and his reluctance to use Welsh when he comes back to his home town – is only part of the story. His is a personal itinerary, set against the wider

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3   «The art of translation: Alys Conran and Sian Northey in Conversation» [online]. *Wales Arts Review.* URL http://www.walesartsreview.org/the-art-of-translation/ (2016-08-05).

picture of language use in the Welsh heartland, the dynamics of interaction between Welsh and English, and Welsh speakers and English speakers, and the mechanisms behind language choice and language attitudes. In her attempt to record these mechanisms, Conran needs to make the reader aware of what is happening linguistically at any moment in the narrative, and thus to constantly supply information about the language being used. As a result, there are numerous phrases in Welsh, as well as reporting phrases such as "she said in English" or references to the kind of language being used, like "funny chapel Welsh" or "posh English".

Most of the time the characters are using Welsh. But they are portrayed using it through English. This, of course, is a familiar problem for any writer wishing to represent a language community that uses a language different from the one that he or she is writing in, and which Tymoczko (1999, 25) calls the "struggle to translate the cultural metatext". Are culture-specific terms left intact, translated, or glossed? Are readers encouraged to infer meaning from context? To what extent is the dialogue made to reflect syntactical or lexical features of the language characters are supposed to be speaking?

In what now appears to be a bygone age, Anglo-Welsh[4] writers made use of syntactical features that had been transferred from Welsh, such as fronting of predicates ("From Llanelli he is"), invariant tag *isn't it*, and the ubiquitous *there's* + adjective to introduce an exclamation, as in 'there's kind of you!'. These forms, amply documented in Thomas (1985), Coupland and Thomas (1989) and Penhallurick (2007), were typically used to characterize the dialogue both of English speakers from the South Wales valleys, but also presumably Welsh speakers, such as the West Wales peasants created by Caradog Evans in what is sometimes referred to as the first Anglo-Welsh text, *My People* (1910). Anglo-Welsh texts might also offer a few cultural concepts (*hiraeth, eisteddfod*) or terms of endearment (*nain, bach, boyo*), to guarantee a Welsh colour to the writing, which, without making excessive demands on the English reader, also served to create a distance between standard English and the linguistic situation in Wales.

Conran uses a different strategy. Her young Welsh-speaking protagonists are given fluent, streetwise, contemporary English:

(2)   "How'd you know he'll be in anyways?" I ask Pigeon. (40)

Anyways? The unmarked form *anyway* would have passed unnoticed. But *anyways*, which the Cobuild dictionary has as an example of colloquial American, has only recently become common with British youth. Iola, the

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4   In the classic definition by Glyn Jones (1968), an Anglo-Welsh writer is "someone who writes in English about Wales".

narrator, is of course bilingual, and this presumably is the term she would have used had she been speaking English. But Welsh is her and Pigeon's default language, and this is the language they use together, unless we are told otherwise. When they do shift into English – when they translanguage – it is always for a reason, as we shall see, and we are made aware of the reason. Thus *Pigeon,* if it is a novel about language, as we have suggested above, it is not through highlighting specific structures, but rather because of its insights into the language attitudes and communicative strategies of a generation of post-devolution teenage bilinguals.

Iola is a convincing and at the same time precocious child narrator. She provides the structural backbone to the novel, and a running commentary on the unfolding drama. Every other chapter, from first to last, is seen through her eyes and prose; the even numbered chapters resort to a third person narrator that tracks Pigeon when he is not with Iola. The language she uses is simple, even disingenuous:

(3)   When Pigeon and me get off the bus, we're on a flat street where all the houses are separate and white, and they all have small gardens and its nice. (40)

or vague:

(4)   We did the funeral thing again. (56)

But it is interspersed, frequently, with arresting similes that illuminate the world view – and the moments of heartbreak – of a ten year old:

(5)   Number seventeen is one quarter of one of the big houses; a big house split up like a chocolate bar into little flats. (41)

(6)   I cry for Pigeon so much it's like tearing paper. (108)

Iola's inner voice transcends the language choices that need to be made in any spoken interaction. But when it comes to reporting dialogue, it is crucial to Conran's purpose that we understand which language is being used. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, Gwyn's Ice Cream van chugs up the hill with a tape blaring out the lyrics of an old song in English, but when the van stops and Gwyn sticks his head through the window to serve his customers, Pigeon and Iola, it's Welsh that he stutters:

(7)   "Iawn, b b bois?" he asks us.
      Together Pigeon and me breathe "Iawn" back, although everyone knows I'm not a boi, any more than Pigeon is a prissy Hogan – but I quite like being called a boi by Gwyn.

"B b be 'dach chi isio heddiw 'ta?" Gwyn's question goes up at the end, really high, as high as here; but we still haven't decided. (2)

This is the first snatch of dialogue in the novel, and there are more than a hundred to come, each one potentially creating a problem of reception for the monoglot English reader. Conran adopts a variety of strategies. The default response is to offer a clue, or rather a reinforcement of the message, which make inferencing possible. Thus the premise for "we still haven't decided", in the extract above, is that Gwyn has asked the children what they want. Similarly, when we read:

(8)   "Iola, be ti'n gneud?" asks Efa, standing in the doorway of the room now, seeing all the piles of papers I'm making. (80)

We infer that Efa is asking what Iola is doing, or in the following longer exchange (complete with the metalinguistic aside) that Gwyn has asked Iola why she and Pigeon have come to his house:

(9)   Gwyn, crouched on the toilet seat, can still hear whispering outside the door, and the girl's occasional sniffing sitting low, the sniffing sound about halfway up the door. After a while, he decides to try talking to her.
      "Sut mae??" says Gwyn shakily.
      The sniffing quietens.
      "Be ydach chi'n ei wneud yma?" His Welsh is even more formal than usual. Asking the questions, there's the sinking feeling that he doesn't want to know why they're here after all. (91)

Conran also resorts frequently to translations, which may be italicised:

(10) "Wel bore da, Efa Williams!" says Anti Gladys, as soon as we walk in through the heavy door of the chapel the second Sunday. "Ers talwm iawn", *long time no see,* she says, licking her pink lipstick, sour-puss mouth. (28)

Or put into parallel quote marks:

(11) ...he tells her slowly, tells her slowly what he's done, tells her as if she can understand.
      "Dwi 'di brifo dyn Mam" he tells her. "I've hurt a man". (95)

Or simply absorbed into the narrative flow:

(12) Anti turns and catches me in the act. "Un o'r teulu?" she asks Efa, syrup sweet. One of the family is she? (29)

(13) We get to the bus stop and hide inside. Pigeon stands looking out of it down the road. Ydi Gwyn yn dwad, Pigeon? Is he coming? (43)

Reinforcement of translation, through repetition or extension, is common:

(14) "Bydd Gwyn yn iawn, Pigeon?" she asks him. Her eyes are big and blue and there are no ideas in her eyes. *Will Gwyn be alright?* She asks him over and over. Will Gwyn be alright, Pigeon? Will Gwyn be alright? (93)

(15) "Fi nath o" says Pigeon, pointing at Him. "Fi".
It was me. It was me. It was me. (103)

(16) She tries to get off too. "Ddim fanma, Iola", he says. "Y nesa". *The next stop,* he says. Get off at the next one. (94)

Only rarely do we get no translation, and no assistance with inferencing:

(17) How old are you love?
I lie. "Deg" I say. (27)

But the high number of anglicisms in Welsh makes it possible for some exchanges in Welsh to be transparent:

(18) Afterwards, on the bus, counting the streets back home from Gwyn's, Iola's not speaking to him. She sits next to Pigeon, shaking.
"Stopia", he says. "Stopia".
"Sori", she says. And then, "Sori, Pigeon", again. She keeps shaking. (93)

Welsh spellings of English words (*sori* for *sorry, seksi* for *sexy*, etc.) indicate a closer relationship between phonology and writing than is available in English, and Conran exploits this, giving insights into the north Wales accent, but also, at the same time, language attitudes and the nature of translanguaging. When Cher, English mother tongue but now a second language Welsh learner, asks Pigeon why he's taking home a microscope from school, and carrying a bag of dirt, we read:

(19) "Wha you going to do with tha?" Cher catches Pigeon and me on the way into the shed with it.
"Anna lice it", says Pigeon.

"Snot anna lice, stewpit, it's analyse". (13)

This exchange has to be in English. Pigeon's final devoiced consonant /s/ (instead of voiced /z/) is 'corrected' by Cher, but as she does so, she calls him *stewpit* (stupid), indicating a devoiced final stop consonant, and her own linguistic development as an English speaker growing up in north Wales.

The Welsh – English contrast is subtly evident in the minimalist exchange between Pigeon, Mari and 'He' when his mother first brings her new partner-to-be home:

> (20) "O", she said.
>   "Oh", said the man.
>   "O", said Pigeon.
>   "Pigeon this is Adrian", she said in English. (18)

Flagging the language is frequent, especially to indicate a language shift:

> (21) Cher's come to meet us on the road asking in English, "Did you get him, did you get him?", and Pigeon just answers, "I will" (44)

And it often carries a narratorial judgement on the kind of language being spoken:

> (22) "What are you dressed up for, dear?" Anti asks Efa in her snobby Welsh. (29)

> (23) "Sad isn't it? So sad", says Efa all quiet in her slate Welsh "It's in a language called Yiddish". (50)

> (24) Norwegian is when you sing through your nose the same way Mrs Thomas at school speaks posh English for show. (50)

Language shift typically occurs to facilitate comprehension in an interaction in which one or more people are not familiar with a specific language; it can also be used exclusively to prevent comprehension. But in *Pigeon* we find instances of Pigeon moving from Welsh to English with his bilingual interlocutor. Rather than code-switching, this is translanguaging, a means by which Pigeon and Iola maximum the language resources available to them.

Over the last decade, translanguaging theory has had a significant boost in the work of Ofelia García and colleagues (2009, 2016), especially with regard to the US Latino-american context, and the language behavior of young bilinguals, for whom having recourse to a second language in a peer interaction, they maintain, indicates an enrichment rather than a deficiency in one or the other language. In a 2016 interview, García de-

fines translanguaging as "more than going across languages; it is going beyond named languages and taking the internal view of the speaker's language use".[5]

There are parallels here with Pigeon and Iola. They both take a functional approach to language use that transcends language choice as confined to a cultural imperative, and that comes to the fore when Pigeon and Iola switch, together, and unquestioningly, to English. It allows them, for example to tune into a make-believe world of stereotypes and associated subtexts and clichés that they have absorbed (in English) through TV and cinema:

> (25) Gwyn is a psycho and kiddy fiddler, knife carrier, mask wearer, pain-lover, torturer, and all the other things that come from those programmes on the TV that Pigeon watches, and I don't because of Efa, and which make him speak English like cowboys and say things like "Rho dy hands up or I'll shoot" and "Rhedeg i ffwrdd on the count of three, neu dwi mynd I make mincemeat of you!" (12)

> (26) "He's planning", says Pigeon in Welsh, and then changes to English like in the films "Planning his next terrible crime" says Pigeon. (41)

> (27) "We go there", says Pigeon, in English like in the films, "and we give him a... a...".
> "Taste of his own medication?" I finish it. (38)

Mutual support (such as co-constructing the sentence in 27) is part of the process of translanguaging. Pigeon is struggling to find the words in English, and Iola comes to his aid, although the expression she creates is slightly different from the English idiom 'a taste of his own medicine'. In this sense, perhaps, the speakers are 'going beyond named languages', but at the same time Iola and Pigeon are 'language aware' and anything but indifferent to the language they are using. They have language attitudes and preferences that are culturally engrained, but these are probably less static than in previous generations. This is especially true for Pigeon, whose personal development is intimately linked to his evolving attitudes towards Welsh and English, as we shall see.

Iola thinks English is "sludgy" (8), but she nonetheless enjoys providing the key words to describe the revenge scenario gradually taking shape inside Pigeon's imagination. Difficult, long words, whether in English or Welsh, are key to Pigeon's plan of teaching Gwyn a lesson:

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(28) Sometimes, when he and Iola are in the shed, planning, he'll throw a good word out of the shed door as if he doesn't care about it and watch through the window as Cher grovels on the ground to pick it up, the sounds of it almost slipping through her clumsy lovely sieve fingers, Pigeon likes it when Cher says one of these words, slips it into a sentence about something else. Cher's mouth is warm and soft; the words sound different in her mouth. "Pijin", she says, nervous. "D'you reckon Gwyn's psych-co-logical?".

Pigeon's tried to give his mam some of the words too, when she sits by his side on the bed, when she strokes his hair. He talks, saying the words, "atten-tive", "apa-thetic", "list-less", or, in Welsh: "di-fa-ter", "di-sby-ddu", "brth-io"… (23)

Pigeon, we are told is a "collector of words" (196), and in this sense the novel is a logbook of language acquisition, of both lexis and attitudes. In the Borstal (now known as a 'youth detention centre') in England where Pigeon spends several years for the crime he did not commit (it was Iola, we learn later, who pulled the trigger on Adrian), he is made to reflect on Welsh, on English, and the relationship between the two languages. Initially, he is seen as different by the English inmates, and an easy prey to bullies because of his Welsh accent:

(29) "Fucking Taffy", says Big Neil again as they're going into the Education Block. "I heard you're all related. Mum and dad brother and sister are they? You can tell by the look on you. Ugh. And that language's so ugly it makes me want to puke. Say that sound again. The one that sounds like you're going to be sick".
Pigeon looks at Neil, and says it: "CH".
"Say a word with it in".
"Cachwr", says Pigeon.
"What's that mean?".
"Arsehole" says Pigeon. (119)

Pigeon comes to reflect on his own relationship with Welsh, the language "he'd got smart with", and which he can "twist and turn" to say just what he wants; all of which just evaporates into "an accent" in the English medium institution of which he is now a part (131). But after an initial refusal of English, and after the encouragement of a teacher who recognizes his potential, he comes to realize that it can be part of his armour against a hostile world:

(30) Pigeon pretended he couldn't read Allan's English words until Allan almost gave up, stumped up by Pigeon's slow, painful reading.

"C'mon, lad", he said once, looking at Pigeon. "You can do better than that".

"I can in Welsh", was what Pigeon thought. I can in my own fucking language.

But slowly Pigeon learnt that English was a weapon, and could be a shield. You needed it in pristine condition, and you needed the tricks of it, so you could defend yourself. Your own language was a part of your body, like a shoulder or a thigh, and when you were hurt there was no defence. When the kids argue in Welsh at home on the hill it was a bare-knuckled fight. But English. With English what you had to do was build armour, and stand there behind our shield to shoot people down. (131)

But when Pigeon comes home to Wales it is Welsh that he refuses, so that when Iola tries to get him to tell her about his time in the Borstal, he will only answer her in English, much to her dismay and disorientation:

> (31) "So be nes di'n Lerpwl?"
> "In Liverpool? Nothing. We were shut in. I didn't do anything".
> Pigeon, in English?
> I try again. "Maraid nes ti 'wbath".
> "Nope, not much". This Pigeon's a book full of blank pages.
> "O" I say.
> There's a long silence. I want to go back to mine, pretend he never came back.
> "You stayn' at your mam's?" I ask him.
> "Yep". (152)

Redemption, of sorts, comes with a grey-haired farmer-cum-community worker called Elfyn, who teaches Pigeon how to build stone walls in the hills above the village and gently coaxes him back into using the *hen iaith*, greeting each word that Pigeon produces "as if it's made of gold, or purple slate" (224).

Pigeon is thus about acquisition as well as loss, about repossession as well as dispossession. As such, it is tempting to see this episode as an extended metaphor for the survival of a language community, with the wall reasserting the rights of ownership, and consequently identity, of that community. But at the same time, a wall establishes a point of contact with a neighbouring community, and at the same time the communities it separates are part of a wider shared landscape. Conran claims that she couldn't have written *Pigeon* in Welsh, because she needed the tension between

the two languages to be able to write it in the first place;[6] a tension that is evident in the space between the two languages, and that is constantly exploited in the translating and translanguaging, in the attitudes of the characters, and even the orthography.

Nor did Conran (unlike the bilingual novelists we referred to earlier) feel able to translate her work. But in what appears to be unique publishing venture, *Pigeon* has been released (by the Independent Welsh publishing house Parthian) simultaneously in English and in Welsh, with translation by Sian Northey. The Welsh title is *Pijin*, which is simply a phonetic rendering of the name.[7] But what sort of name (in any language) is *Pigeon*? For the protagonist it is simply an English nickname that stuck at an unknown point in his childhood. For the linguist, it is homophonous with *pidgin,* a contact language that refuses to develop into a fully fledged creature and take flight.

Conran herself offers two prefatory quotes to the novel (one from *The Bad Birdwatcher's Companion*, the other from the *Tin Drum*) both underlining the nondescript nature of the creature. The (non) description spills into the narrative; Pigeon is "grey" (14), he "scuffs around the town" (14), he is a "scavenger" (14) (for comfort); he is the sort of boy who passes unnoticed anywhere. And yet (like the bird he is named after) he is a survivor, an evolutionary success story. "With Pigeon", reflects Iola, "everything is bright and big and better than you'd think it was" (8). His shoulders, we read, are "delicate as eggshells" (14), and yet, at the end of the novel, we feel that they can bear the weight of an uncertain future. Pigeon has come to terms with language, with the power of words, and with his own identity; and on the way, and in his interactions with his world, he has provided a glimpse into the ongoing development of a bilingual community in Wales, in one of the most linguistically interesting corners of the British Isles.

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[6] URL http://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/actor-richard-harrington-talks-nordic-6464483 (2016-08-05).

[7] The Welsh word for 'pigeon' or 'dove' is *colomen*.

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Postcolonial Trauma in William Trevor's Anglo-Irish Big House Trilogy

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Abstract   This article explores William Trevor's Big House trilogy that is set against the backdrop of the early 20th century Anglo-Irish tensions. By interweaving postcolonial theory and trauma studies, my investigation seeks to unveil the melancholic and anti-melancholic stance in Trevor's fiction. Through narrative experimentalism, intertextual and intratextual links and symbolism, Trevor subverts the traditional features of the Big House literary tradition, showing that traumatic colonial history can offer a redemption of sort that discloses the transformative power of literary (postcolonial) imagination.

Keywords   Anglo-Irish Big House Fiction. William Trevor. Postcolonial Trauma Literature. Melancholia.

> Dark nourishes light's triumphant blaze, but who should want to know?
> «Solitude», William Trevor

> They were things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these where what prevailed, what endured, in the end.
> *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri

Psychological approaches to postcolonial studies have attempted to interrogate the traumatic legacies of colonialism on both colonizers and colonized. According to Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, trauma studies have been instrumental in offering a new understanding of genocides, collective traumas, racism and violence triggered by colonization. Yet, what Gert and Buelens lament is a lack of interest in non-European history:

> By ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world. (2008, 2)

While I acknowledge that trauma studies, since their theorization in the 1990s,[1] have ignored the role played by colonial exploitation in non-Western areas, I also agree with David Lloyd who claims that Ireland ought to be part of the postcolonial agenda.[2] The north-European island has always been regarded as marginal within postcolonial studies, although the Republic of Ireland was proclaimed only in 1949, two years after the end of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent. In his *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment*, Lloyd contends that "Ireland has always been both a template and an anomaly" (1993, 318), while in «Colonial Trauma, Postcolonial Recovery?» he argues that

> Trauma entails violent intrusion and a sense of utter objectification that annihilates the person as subject or agent. This is no less apt a description of the effects and mechanisms of colonization: the overwhelming technological, military and economic power of the colonizer; the violence and programmatically excessive atrocities committed in the course of putting down resistance and intrusion, the deliberate destruction of the symbolic and practical resources of whole populations. It would seem that we can map the psychological effects of trauma onto the cultures that undergo colonization. (2000, 214)

By connecting trauma studies to postcolonial theory, Lloyd wants to resist modern amnesia. For him, to recover from colonial trauma is then "to discern in "melancholy survivals" complex forms of living on […] athwart modernity" (219). The connection between Ireland and postcolonialism is still being debated and in one of the most recent studies, *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, the editors contend that "[t]he effects of the colonial past are far from over in Ireland and Northen Ireland" (2003, 2).[3]

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1   As Roger Luckhurst vividly explains in *The Trauma Question* (2008), trauma theory was born in the wake of Freud's studies on neurosis. In the aftermath of the tragedy of the Holocaust and of the disastrous consequences of the Vietnam War, the American academy saw a growing interest in trauma studies. Within the so-called Yale School, under the influence of Paul de Man's deconstructionism, a body of research was conducted particularly by Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominik La Capra and Shoshana Felman.

2   Abigail Ward's volume, *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance* (2015), is a recent example of the neglected role of Ireland in the postcolonial discourse. The collection examines novels, films, and fictionalized memoirs concerning individual and collective traumas from Palestine, Australia, South Africa and the Caribbean.

3   The essays collected in *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*, which features an afterword by Edward Said, interrogate Irish history in order to explore Anglo-Irish frictions and map possible continuities between Ireland and other colonies. Some of the issues had already been tackled before: Lloyd's analysis of historiography, for instance, was derived from his own book *Ireland After History* (1999), while Stephen Howe's examination of imperialism had been discussed in his *Ireland and Empire* (2000). The collection also includes an essay by

This year, Ireland celebrates its first centenary of the Easter Rising, the rebellion that paved the way to independence, but it also mourns the loss of a talented storyteller. Irish history has largely been shaped by migration and exile and William Trevor was a significative voice of Anglo-Irish exilic literature. Born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, to a middle-class Protestant family in 1928, he was only tangential to the Anglo-Irish Ascendency.[4] On the threshold between two worlds, Trevor has always experienced a sense of unbelonging, as he confessed in an interview to the *Paris Review*:

> I didn't belong to the new post-1923 Catholic society and I also didn't belong to the Irish Ascendancy. I'm a small-town Irish Protestant, a 'lace-curtain' Protestant. Poor Protestants in Ireland are a sliver of people caught between the past-Georgian Ireland with its great houses and all the rest of it and the new, bustling, Catholic state. Without knowing any of this, without its ever occurring to me, I was able to see things a little more clearly than I would have if I had belonged to either of these worlds. (Stout 1989)

Trevor has lived in south-west England since the 1950s when he began to write fiction. In spite of a copious literary career, a relatively limited attention has been given to his *œuvre*.[5] This paper intends to explore Trevor's Big House trilogy by creating a dialogue between postcolonial trauma theory and the Big House literary tradition. Trevor's growing preoccupation with Anglo-Irish history plays a central role in his Big House novels: *Fools of Fortune* (1983), *The Silence in the Garden* (1988) and *The Story of Lucy Gault* (2002)[6] illustrate his allegorical portrait of postcolonial Irish history. By focusing on intratextual and intertextual elements, the analysis aims to emphasise Trevor's engagement with the politics of migration and loss, the melancholic and anti-melancholic dimension of his fiction, and his tunnelling into violent history and traumatic representation.

Indian-American novelist Amitav Ghosh on the psychological connections between India and Ireland against the backdrop of the 1857 Indian Mutiny and the Singapore Mutiny in 1918.

4   The term described Protestant Anglo-Irish families which had settled down in Ireland since the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the term came to be applied to estates and mansions of families in decline in the wake of the Act of Union (1800). Anglo-Irish families lost the parliamentary seats they used to monopolize and a gradual dispossession turned them into a weak minority within a mostly Catholic country, particularly after the proclamation of the Irish Free State (1922).

5   In the most recent attempt to explore Trevor's half-century literary production, Paul Delaney and Michael Parker's *William Trevor: Revaluations* (2013) seeks to locate his writing beyond the mere national discourse.

6   Trevor's interest in the Big House tradition is displayed in short stories as well, such as the uncollected «Saints» (1981) and «The News from Ireland» (1986), in the eponymous collection. Both stories can be regarded as prequels of his two first Big House novels.

The Big House tradition is concerned with a sense of place that evokes troubles and anxieties more than home and community. As symbols of power and wealth, Big Houses are interpreted as "replicas of an England that was increasingly imagining itself as the modern version of the imperial Roman state" (Kreilkamp 2006, 60). While for some critics the genre is a nostalgic narrative imbued with elegiac scenes of rural life, for others, instead, the Big House fiction is far from elegiac since it condemns the trauma generated by English colonialism, providing a powerful metaphor for postcolonial resistance in post-independence Ireland. For the critic Seamus Deane, the Big House is an anachronistic trope, a "distorted history in the service of myth […] far from the contemporary reality" (1985, 32), while other scholars have pointed out its imaginative power. In the wake of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929), twentieth-century writers, such as Trevor himself and John Banville, have pursued the shift from an idyllic rural Irish landscape, which Deane criticizes as anti-historical, to a more psychological tunnelling of alienated characters in the throes of the transition from colonialism to independence.

Trevor's Big House fiction uses the conventions of the genre: decayed mansions, rural settings, absence of the landlords as moments of anxiety, and the rising Catholic middle class. Yet, his novels subvert the very features of the Big House tradition, which he revitalises with experimental narrative techniques and anti-romantic perspectives. With a radical revisionist framework, Trevor, as Kreilkamp contends, "reinscribes and simultaneously undermines the political, social, and economic divisions of the past through its depiction of the sensitive protagonist as new victim" (1998, 197). A further variation he plays on the Big House literary tradition is the less radical political orientation of his Protestant landlords. Not only do his Anglo-Irish families live on diminished estates, but they are also sympathetic to Catholics, showing empathy with the Irish. Likewise, Trevor introduces changes on his own familiar tropes, fluctuating between experimental and traditional literary modes. While *Fools of Fortune* and *The Silence in the Garden*, as the titles suggest, focus on metaphorical images of loss and pain under the power of chance, Trevor's last Big House novel, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, entails the focal role of a modern wounded hero who embraces grief and self-imposed exile as an act of anti-melancholic redemption.

Trevor, as Hermione Lee deftly observes, is a skilled writer in "climbing right inside the minds and the characters" (2013, 17). His literary language grasps elusive and traumatic experiences, bringing past unresolved grief to light, in an aura of sadness and melancholia that is not always destructive. By reading his Big House trilogy under the lens of trauma theory, Trevor's novels allow us "to read the wound" (Hartman 1995, 547) of his Irish characters. According to Geoffrey Hartman, literature aids to resist silence. As a compensatory strategy, literary writing can contribute to come

to terms with traumatic events since "[i]n literature, as much as in life, the simplest event can resonate mysteriously, be invested with aura, and tend toward the symbolic. The symbolic, in this sense, is not a denial of literal or referential but its uncanny intensification" (547). Trauma fiction, hence, mimics the structure of trauma itself: it remains suspended in the interface between past and present. The articulation of trauma resonates with temporal disruptions through which literature renders insufficiently grasped events at the moment of their occurrence.[7] The relationship between postcolonial theory and trauma studies becomes more complex when we focus on the ethical response they both convey. Trauma narratives may generate solidarity, enabling "visions of cross-cultural solidarity and justice" (Craps 2013, 101)[8] from the encounter of the two disciplines. In this light, Franz Fanon's work represents a reflection on the connection between trauma and solidarity in postcolonial issues. Fanon's pioneering insights, particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), disclose the "massive psychoexistential complex" (1986, 14) created by colonization on colonized and colonizers alike. A psychologist, Fanon reads the trauma of colonization as a form of psychic injuries which result in alienation, marginalization and dispossession. In this respect, literature allows for boundary-crossing solidarity to emerge from the recognition of pain, as Trevor's novels illustrate.

Fool of Fortune hinges on symbolism and unresolved mourning. The title of Trevor's first Big House novel bears an intertextual link to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.[9] Intertextuality, as Whitehead contends, is an overlapping feature between postcolonial fiction and trauma theory since the return to a canonic text "can enable us to grasp a latent aspect of the text, and at the same time to depart from it into an alternative narrative construction" (2004, 91). In his novel, Trevor dialogues with the Shakespearean text, creating an early twentieth-century Irish tragedy. Like the two feuding families in Verona, *Fools of Fortune* features two families related through marriages: the Anglo-Irish Quintons, living in Kilneagh, a big house in decline, and the English Woodcombes, dwelling in a sixteenth-century large mansion in Woodcombe Park. By weaving

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7 In *Trauma: Exploration in Memory*, Cathy Caruth understands Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* as 'deferred action' (1995, 8), as a haunting past which belatedly involves repetition, in line with Freud's notion of repetition-compulsion.

8 Although Fanon's theories explore the racial divide between black and white, his ideas are widely applicable to other postcolonial case studies. Alongside Fanon, we can include Octave Mannoni and Albert Memmi whose works offer an early investigation of psychological methods within postcolonial studies.

9 The phrase alludes to Romeo's declaration "O, I am fortune's foole" (III, 1, l. 136). Having killed Tybalt, the young Montague is forced to exile to Mantua, feeling like a fortune's puppet.

together forbidden love and revenge, Trevor gives voice to the silenced Irish victims of colonialism. Beyond the intertextual reference, *Fools of Fortune* draws upon «Saints» (1981), an uncollected short story concerned with brutal violence against the backdrop of the Anglo-Irish tensions. The intratextual connection that Trevor establishes between the tale and the novel epitomizes a self-consciousness that can introduce narrative distance. This combination also offers an endless repetition of tropes and images that powerfully haunt Trevor's Big House fiction. Trevor, like other modern novelists who did not experience traumatic events directly, filters through his own works and other literary sources his personal depiction of postcolonial Irish trauma. Such a dialogue requires, as Whitehead points out, the active role of the reader since "[it] depends on the reader to assemble the pieces and complete the story" (93).

Fools of Fortune is not a traditional Big House novel. Once an idyllic place, Kilneagh has become "as quite as a grave" (Trevor 1983, 9). The novel opens in 1983 with a dichotomous description of Kilneagh and Woodcombe Park, which is a Dorset big house bustling with life. The two houses stand for the two islands, Ireland and England, and their geographical position is interpreted as an embrace by Marianne who observes that "when you looked at the map Ireland and England seemed like lovers" (175). The embrace of England and Ireland symbolizes also the love affair between the Anglo-Irish Willie Quinton and the English-born Marianne Woodcombe, a forbidden love from which Imelda was born. The six sections into which *Fools of Fortune* is divided are named after the three characters whose viewpoints alternate throughout the novel. Trevor complicates the narrative framework since the two sections devoted to Willie and Marianne are narrated in first person, while the two chapters entitled «Imelda» feature an external narration although the focalization is centred on the child. The oscillation between internal and external narration illustrates Trevor's experimentalisms on the Big House literary tradition. The dispersed and fragmented narrative voices of the novel seek to foreground the limitations of human memory and the disturbing counter-effects of remembering.

The plot is based on an act of brutality: Kilneagh is burnt by the Black and Tans[10] in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and Willie's family – his father, his two aunts and the servants – die in the flames, while his mother becomes alcohol-addicted and ultimately commits suicide. The Quintons are atypical Anglo-Irish Protestants. Unlike the families in traditional Big House novels, they provide support to the Catholics and offer a shelter to the revolutionary leader Michael Collins. Likewise, during the 1845 Irish Famine, Anne Quinton, the first Woodcombe bride married to a Quinton,

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10 The Blacks and Tans were British ex-soldiers recruited to assist the Royal Irish Constabulary during the Anglo-Irish guerrillas against the IRA. The name derived from their khaki and dark uniforms.

starved to death after the altruistic act of helping local people. The household includes Catholic servants and Father Kilgariff, who educates Willie by teaching him pacifism and tolerance. Split between the path to pacifism, embodied by the Catholic priest, and the desire for revenge, symbolized by his mother's mental insanity, Willie ultimately chooses the latter direction. The man, a child when the arson took place, has incorporated the traumatic episode as a dreamlike sequence that continuously haunts him. Despite the love story with his English cousin Marianne, when his mother cuts her wrists with a razor blade, Willie brutally assassinates the man who had arranged the arson. Like the Shakespearean tragic hero, Willie is forced to exile from Ireland. He spends forty years in Italy, like the unnamed protagonist of «Saints» and the Gaults in *The Story of Lucy Gault*, recreating his home in the small town of Sansepolcro, near Arezzo. Here, he is fascinated by the lives of the Saints and, presumably by the Renaissance paintings of Piero della Francesca, who was born in the Tuscan town. In the end, his homecoming is not a peaceful one. He discovers that Marianne has given birth to a mute daughter, Imelda. The girl, named after the blessed Imelda Lambertini,[11] is a saint-like creature who has been raised in an environment redolent of grief and mourning.

Anglo-Irish relationships animate the novel like motifs that mimic traumatic repetition-compulsion. Marriages and love affairs between the Quintons and Woodcombes recur as uncanny repetitions that blur the border between past and present, causing "history to repeat itself, as in Anglo-Irish relationships it has a way of doing" (4). Anne of the Famine is like a ghost with healing powers of consolation. At the same time, Willie's ancestor is a figure of traumatic pain and her past experience epitomizes the love-hate dialectics between Ireland and England. While the feuding families in *Romeo and Juliet* reconcile with the death of two lovers, Willie and Marianne survive. Yet, Imelda's tragedy illustrates the power of history and chance on love and connection. In her flashbacks, which are drawn upon Marianne's thoughts and words, Imelda conjures up bodies enveloped in flames. Her imagination is a response to a traumatic storytelling which ultimately and definitely silences her. The novel presents a further intertextual reference, this time to W.B. Yeats' poem «The Lake Isle of Innisfree». Imelda confusedly recites verses from the poem. Yet, while Yeats' pastoral is connected to peace and hope, Imelda's whispering gives

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11   Imelda Lambertini (1322-1333) was born in Bologna to a noble family. At the age of nine, she was sent to the local Dominican convent where, in spite of her longing, she was not allowed to receive the Holy Communion because of her age. On the vigil of the Ascension in 1333, Imelda received the visit of a glowing light with the Sacred Host. The nuns realised that Jesus himself was satisfying Imelda's desire and the priest gave her the Holy Communion. Immediately after, Imelda died. She was beatified in 1826 and today she is the patroness of First Holy Communicants.

voice to images of "blood spurted in a torrent running over the backs of her hands and splashing onto her hair" (219).

With Imelda's terminal silence Trevor portrays his own conception of evil, which also affects the two islands. Like the Quinton-Woodcombe marriages generate destruction and death, the Anglo-Irish relationship perpetuates bloodshed and revenge. Trevor, however, seems to offer a kind of partial redemption. The novel ends up in the present, like the *incipit*, but this reconciliation is imbued with melancholy: Willie is finally reunited with Marianne and Imelda, but Kilneagh is in ruin and Imelda, their future, is insane and confused like the Anglo-Irish relationships. Through the child's final view of her parents around the mulberry orchard that Anne of the Famine had planted in the nineteenth century, Trevor transforms the unresolved mourning into a revitalizing metaphor. The child's saintly quality, "her happiness like a shroud miraculously around her" (238) – in a country where "it happens sometimes that the insane are taken to be saints of a kind" (198) – sets her free from reality and pain, providing partial atonement for history's cataclysmic force.

Fools of Fortune inaugurates Trevor's Big House trilogy. The writer complicates the plot mixing historical realism and symbolism, with a continuous shift of the narrative focalization. This strategy captures the postmodern awareness of the end of grand narratives, while continuous echoes of intertextual and intratextual references undermine the act of writing itself. A metafictional web, the novel combines Catholic culture, Italian Renaissance painting and Protestantism, fostering healing imagination in the witnesses of postcolonial traumas. The novel's polyphonic frame shows how individual traumas are always interconnected. Nevertheless, Trevor leaves unresolved to readers the question of the future, whether bloodshed and destruction will come to an end and there might be a resolution to the repetitive patterns of colonial violent history.

Trevor's following Big House novel, *The Silence in the Garden*, was published five years later and its very title conveys his persistent preoccupation with silence and solitude. In the oscillation between forward and backward, the novel employs repetitive patterns of traumatic violence against the backdrop of the never-ending upheavals between Ireland and England. The narrative is entirely set on a small island, Carriglas, whose name means 'green rock' (Trevor 1988, 15). Once a fertile place, Carriglas is surrounded by a ruined abbey and a big house belonging to the Rollestons, who have lived on its premises since the times of William Cromwell. The island is an allegorical and micro representation of Ireland itself with its historical frictions and attempts of modernization. Trevor expands the atmosphere of silence, secrets and inability to adjust to a bitter reality that he had already chronicled in «The News from Ireland», a short story set during the potato famine in 1845.

Like *Fools of Fortune*, *The Silence in the Garden* is an experimental Big House novel. The events are set between 1904 and 1971 and Tre-

vor juxtaposes a partly-omniscient third person narration, shifting the focalization to the various characters, with flashbacks and diary entries of Sarah Pollexfen, an impoverished cousin of the Rollestons. Again, Trevor undermines realism and reliable narrative perspectives, presenting a conflation of personal and collective recollections that show how trauma fiction, in line with the views popularized by its scholars, affects both individuals and collectivities. The authority of these narrators is further called into question by the fact that their exposition is often contradictory or, more provocatively, it tends to silence. The postmodernist multiplication of viewpoints, together with the postcolonial stance of giving voice to silent and marginal stories, intensifies the fragmentation of temporal linearity and narrative paralysis. Trevor's *mise en abîme*, through the diary entries, attempts to resist the obliterated and fragmented narratives that, for Caruth, characterize trauma fiction. In coexistence with belated responses taking the form of "repeated, intrusive, hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience" (Caruth 1995, 4), Sarah's diary embodies the attempt to give order and voice to the narrative. The diary passages, however, are only partial glimpses that gradually dissolve until Tom, the last member of the Rollestons' household, decides to burn them, shutting any further access to truth and secrets.

When Sarah is invited to Carriglas, in 1904, the place is like an Eden with strawberry trees, rhododendrons, fuchsia hedges, skylarks and swallows. After a period of absence, she returns in 1931, when a bridge is being built to connect Carriglas to the mainland, but Sarah realises that something has changed and "the grey façade of the house" (Trevor 1988, 12) becomes the dominant shade of the novel. Mr. Rolleston is dead and his elderly mother has never recovered from the loss of her son. Mr. Rolleston's two sons, John James and Lionel, and his daughter Villana, seem to be unaffected by the bridge. The elder brother redirects his boredom to Mrs. Moledy, a plump catholic mistress he regularly visits and whom he is ashamed of at the same time. Lionel, more reticent, ploughs the fields and he does not seem to understand that Sarah is in love with him, while Villana breaks her affair with Sarah's brother and ultimately marries Balt Finnamore, a pedantic solicitor who is much older than her. When the novel ends, in 1971, Tom inherits a decayed mansion, where slates fall from the roof of the gate-lodge and "[t]he ground is hard, like iron beneath his feet" (196). Forty years have passed since the construction of the bridge but nothing seems to have changed.

The traumatic episode buried in the Rollestons' silent garden revolves around the man after which the bridge is named, Cornelious Dowley. His death is embedded in the very soil of the island, a kind of metatextual palimpsest with burial markers dating back to pre-Christian civilizations, which work as metaphors of past frictions between pagans and Christians.

In a place where usurpation and violence are endemic, the three children, with Sarah's brother, mimic the adults' violence. They torment Cornelious, or, as Mrs. Rolleston remembers, "they hunted that child as an animal is hunted" (183). When Cornelious grows up, he takes his revenge but, in the ambush intended for the Rollestons, he kills Linchey, the Rollestons' butler. Nevertheless, Cornelious Dowley is regarded as a patriot by local people. He fights against the British and his assassination by the Black and Tans turns him into a martyr.

Sterility and greyness are the motifs that pervade the novel. While a bridge has connected the island to the mainland, the place is more isolated than it used to be. The Rollestons die childless, an intended resolution as a punishment for their sense of guilt. Tom, who was born from the love affair between Linchey and Brigid, a servant in the Big House, remains a bachelor in a mostly disintegrating house. Violence and destruction affect English and Irish alike and Sarah's recollections try to bring to light the darkness of the past. What once was a paradise has become a 'cobweb' that she cannot understand. The place and the people look like the same as when she first arrived, but Sarah observes "*I tell myself, but I feel as though I'm telling lies*" (116). Sarah's italicised diary sentences interrupt the silence looming over the narrative. Her fragmented memoirs give shape and order to the story, evoking an anti-melancholic force which resists traumatic silence and melancholia. The patterns of repetitions and mysteries that conceal the traumatic event are like a dark and destroying power which thwarts light and truth. Trevor seems to suggest that, while some people long to be relieved of their grief, others may want to recoil from truth. Such a dialectics reminds me of a question – quoted in the epigraph to my article – the heroine in Trevor's story «Solitude» asks herself.

I want to allude to the above-mentioned question while introducing Trevor's last Big House novel, *The Story of Lucy Gault*, which ultimately discloses a "light's triumphant blaze" (Trevor 2009, 367) to the interrogative. Like the Quintons and the Rollestons, the Gaults represent the last members of a dispossessed gentry dating back to the eighteenth century in a place where "[t]he style of the past was no longer possible" (Trevor 2002, 6). At the formal level, *The Story of Lucy Gault* plays new variations on the themes of the Trevor's Big House fiction. Whreas in his two previous Big House novels Trevor had employed first person narration and diary entries in the form of individual witnessing, *The Story of Lucy Gault* conveys, beneath its external narration with shifting focalization, the plight of a new sensitive victim.

In her childhood, Lucy is very much alike a Romantic heroine. In line with Wordsworth's Lucy, the child lives connected to the natural world, wondering through the woods of glen and along the coastline, caring for the bees and the blue hydrangeas. Nevertheless, Lucy is also a self-flagellating victim. After her childhood incident, she turns inward, withdraw-

ing from the world in the microcosm of Lahardane. In the aftermath of an attempted arson by three Irish Catholics, Lucy's father, Captain Everard Gault mistakenly shoots Horahan, one of the arsonists, wounding him slightly. Captain Gault, a wounded survivor himself of World War I, decides to leave Lahardane to the great misery of Lucy, who runs away. The child is feared drowned and her presumed suicide compromises the mental sanity of her mother, Heloise, who blames her English nationality for the attempted arson. The Gaults move to Italy first, as Will in *Fools of Fortune*, and to Switzerland later, in the wake of the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini. In the fictional Italian town of Montemarmoreo, Lucy's parents are drawn to its artistic monuments, the paintings of the Annunciation and the lives of the saints, particularly Santa Cecilia. Lucy, instead, is found lost by Henry, the Gaults' servant, who, with his wife Brigid, raises the child, waiting for the return of Captain Gault and his wife.

Lucy's resilience is cast on a melancholic spell that turns her into a kind of secular saint. In her middle years, she shares her mother's fascination with saints, living suspended in a sort of half-life marked by guilt and abnegation. An avid reader of Victorian novels, she wears her mother's white clothes, takes up embroidering and beekeeping. She rejects Ralph's love, embracing loneliness and grief in a mansion that becomes a healing and contemplative place, tangential to the Anglo-Irish tensions and World War II. When Edward Gault returns, after his wife's death in Switzerland, Lucy tries to recover their previous intimacy but her father dies soon. Lucy's concern with the preservation of the cultural and historical memory of her birthplace epitomizes a melancholic attachment that is not utterly destructive.[12] Trevor views loss as a position of strength rather than weakness and the novel shows how chance is not unrelentingly cruel. Scenes of unfinished mourning recur throughout *The Story of Lucy Gault*: in her hallucinations, inspired by Santa Cecilia's life and Renaissance paintings, Heloise, for example, connects herself to her daughter who remains a child forever in her imagination. Likewise, Horahan, the would-be arsonist, loses his rationality and is sent to an asylum. Haunted by visions of a burning house and of a drowned child, the man prays the Vergin, "begging for the gift of a sign, a whisper of assurance that he was not abandoned" (124).

Without succumbing to the disastrous consequences of the two previous Big House novels, *The Story of Lucy Gault* exposes formal strategies for a critique of melancholia. Trevor abandons the silences and reluctant revelations that characterize the melancholic traumatic novel. Since its very *incipit*, the traumatic experience that triggers all the misfortunes is clearly stated, while narrative realism and chronological linearity entail

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12   Since Freud's theorization in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), melancholia has been identified as a stance of "painful dejection, cessation of interest, loss of the capacity of love [...] [that] culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (Freud 1979, 244).

a gradual transformation to eschew pain and isolation. By directing her affection to Horahan, Lucy ultimately readjusts her melancholia. When Horahan visits Lahardane, Lucy experiences a kind of epiphanic annunciation, which brings the causes of her melancholia to light. Lucy, who bears the name of the saint patron of the sight, seems to suffer from blurred vision throughout the novel. After the encounter with Horahan, she forgives him and this act of pity interrupts the melancholic impasse of the novel. This passage marks the performative dimension of the narrative: Lucy's self-imposed exile and alienation are the solution through which she works out her melancholia. By directing Lucy's care to the man who triggered all her misfortunes, Trevor illuminates the causes of his heroine's melancholia. In her old age, Lucy, now mistress of Lahardane, is very much alike a Christian martyr. She takes care of Brigid and Henry and visits Horahan in the asylum, playing 'Snakes and Ladders'[13] with him. When the man finally dies, she publicly mourns him.

In conclusion, Lucy survives her cataclysmic life, although she is viewed as "a relic, a left over, respected for what she was" (209) in the economic miracle of the Irish Celtic Tiger. She breaks her isolation, visiting the places in Italy and Switzerland her parents had inhabited and in her elderly years she makes friend with two nuns to whom she reports the story of Santa Cecilia's martyrdom. Like a secular saint, Lucy does not resign to the entrapping and destructive power of history, neither she succumbs to the mental insanity that permeates Trevor's previous Big House novels. Her *Bildungsroman* shows that vulnerability may finally entail consolation and relation:

> [C]alamity shaped a life when, long ago, chance was so cruel. Calamity shapes the story that is told, and is the reason for its being: is what they know, besides, the gentle fruit of such misfortune's harvest? (224)

A survivor and witness to a traumatic experience, Lucy recounts her life to the two Catholic nuns who are astonished by her tranquillity and wander how calamity might have yielded such peace. Trevor's post-melancholic conclusion provides an answer to the nuns' bewilderment. Sitting in her chair and glancing at the dusk that illuminates the sky, Lucy watches the fading of the day. She is aware that one day she will die and Lahardane will probably become a hotel, but "[s]he smiles all the way" (227). The novel, hence, ends on a positive note, with Lucy in search of light, far from Imelda's mute insanity or Tom's silent bachelorhood.

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13   The game itself symbolically retains a moral meaning. As Saleem Sinai reminds us, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, 'Snakes and Ladders' is an allegorical depiction of human life where "for every ladder you hope to climb, a snake is waiting just around the corner, and for every snake a ladder will compensate" (2010, 194).

The novel's self-reflexive conclusion offers a luminous alternative to images of destruction and darkness. By shifting the focus to the heroine, as the title itself epitomizes, Trevor seems to reduce the collective dimension of pain and the postcolonial burden of English imperialism,[14] while disclosing the transformative power of vulnerability. "What happened simply did", Lucy meditates, knowing that "[s]he should have died as a child" (227). Like Lahiri's Gogol in *The Namesake*,[15] Lucy is a (post)modern wounded hero who seems aware of the fictionality of her story. Both characters, "melancholy survivals" in Lloyd's words (2000, 219), endure postcolonial traumas, undermining loss and alienation. Gogol's self-conscious conclusion, quoted in the epigraph to my article, reveals the healing power of literature, leaving to readers the freedom to cross the border from fiction to reality and vice versa. In a similar vein, the past conditionals in Lucy's self-realization describe an imagined past that did not occur. In this gap, Lucy's smile overcomes oblivion and melancholia: only in this self-conscious way can loss be mourned and change be properly enacted.

Trevor's departure from realism towards postmodern self-awareness in the Big House tradition is a sign of a new approach to trauma. In line with Fanon's vision, Trevor demonstrates that traumas can elicit solidarity between victims and perpetrators and that recognition alone is not a cure. Considering "its attempt to convey the literality of a specific event and its figurative evocation of the symptomatic response to trauma through formal and stylistic innovation" (Whitehead 2004, 162), trauma fiction does not necessarily lead to a final redemption. Yet, it is just by working through narrative that Lucy finds her path towards a genuine solidarity beyond religious and ethnic differences.

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14   The same catalysts of the evil event, Horahan, does not belong to any political organization and he rather seems to act out of his own initiative. At a distance of nearly fifteen years from his first Big House novels, *The Story of Lucy Gault* may reflect the recent better political scenario between England and Ireland.

15   In several interviews, Jhumpa Lahiri has expressed her debt to William Trevor's narrative art. Her most recent novel, *The Lowland* (2013), is based on a tragic episode affecting an Indian-American family, in line with *Fools of Fortune.*

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W.E.B. Du Bois's Proto-Afrofuturist Short Fiction: «The Comet»

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Abstract   This article examines W.E.B. Du Bois's short story «The Comet» in the light of the Afrofuturist movement, a transnational and interdisciplinary, theoretical and literary-cultural enterprise that has endeavoured to rethink the history of Black civilisation in order to imagine a different, better, future. A remarkable example of post-apocalyptic, speculative and proto-Afrofuturist short fiction, «The Comet» functions as a fictional counterpart of the influential key concepts – double consciousness, the color line and the veil – previously introduced by Du Bois and it also foreshadows further critical issues and tropes that would be developed later, namely Fanon's psychology of racism and Ellison's metaphor of invisibility. Moreover, as a proto-Afrofuturist work of fiction, the story prefigures the post-apocalyptic worlds of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler and becomes a parable in which the supernatural element of the toxic comet allows for interesting speculations on the alienation experienced by people of African descent.

Keywords   W.E.B. Du Bois. «The Comet». Afrofuturism. Double Consciousness. The Color Line. The Veil.

This article examines W.E.B. Du Bois's short fiction in the light of the Afrofuturist movement, a transnational and interdisciplinary, theoretical and literary-cultural enterprise that has endeavoured to rethink the history of Black civilization in order to imagine a different, better, future. Afrofuturism is based upon the unusual connection between the marginality of allegedly 'primitive' people of the African diaspora and modern technology and speculative science fiction. Using a wide range of different genres and media, the creative contribution of Afrofuturist writers, musicians, artists, filmmakers and critics challenges the stereotypical view routinely applied to the Black Atlantic experience and proposes counter-histories that reconsider the role of black people in Western society in the past and imagine alternative roles in the future.[1]

As is known, Du Bois's groundbreaking contribution, spanning from the 1890s to 1963, the year of his death, includes countless volumes, essays and articles, mainly about the sociology of interracial relations in America. In his *Autobiography*, Du Bois ([1968] 1991, 148) pointed out that he was striving to carry out a systematic investigation of the history of race rela-

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[1]   See Elia (2014) for an analysis of the development of Afrofuturism as a cultural phenomenon.

tions in order to analyse scientifically the so-called 'Negro problem'. At the same time, he was aware that it was not possible to be a detached scientist while blacks were still being lynched, hence his own enduring involvement in militant associations such as the *Niagara Movement* and the NAACP (*National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*). An elitist advocate for the so-called 'Talented Tenth' and one of the leading harbingers of the African-American Civil Rights movement, Du Bois widened his vision to an ever-increasingly international perspective, foreseeing well in advance the importance of the critical issue of transnationalism that would become central in postcolonial criticism thanks to the contribution of scholars such as, to name just two, Julia Kristeva and Paul Gilroy.[2]

An exemplary figure for the African-American community, historian, sociologist, intellectual and political activist, Du Bois used fiction as a further instrument of social analysis. There is still a significant critical gap to be bridged as regards Du Bois's output as a man of letters – five novels and a few poems and short stories – that so far has received relatively limited attention from the critics as well as from the public.[3] As Herbert Aptheker (1985, ix) has noted, Du Bois, in a letter of March 1938 addressed to the editor Frank E. Taylor, about the possible publication of a book of poems, declared that those poems were amongst the best things ever written by himself also because – in Du Bois's words – "this volume […] touches the race problem in unusual ways" (Aptheker 1973-1978, 2, 361-362). In fact, Du Bois was a supporter of the 'Harlem Renaissance', whose intense cultural activity fostered the rediscovery and the promotion of African-American art and literature. He opposed the idea of an apolitical 'art for art's sake' and highlighted instead the importance of ethical and political responsibility of art and literature that should trigger a social change via political propaganda. As he stated in the essay «Criteria of Negro Art» (1926), "all Art is propaganda and ever must be. […] I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (Sundquist 1996, 304, 328).[4]

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2   By 'Talented Tenth' Du Bois referred to an élite of African Americans (about one out of ten) who, thanks to their education and culture, could have led the African-American community towards the recognition of their rights. See Posnock (1997, 323-324); Kristeva (1993); Gilroy (1993). See also Elia (2015), whose main points are developed and expanded in this article.

3   The only exception is Du Bois's second novel *Dark Princess* (1928), on which many critics have focused throughout the years. For an overview of the criticism on Du Bois's works of fiction see Rampersad ([1979] 2001, 72-73).

4   It is odd to note the overdue Italian reception of Du Bois's *œuvre*. To our knowledge, only in 1975 the volume *Du Bois e la Black Reconstruction* by Lauso Zagato was published, followed by an essential collection of essays by Alessandro Portelli significantly entitled *La linea del colore* (1994) and by a notable essay by Anna Scacchi (2002) on *Dark Princess*. Over a century since the publication of the original version, the long awaited first Italian

However, Du Bois also acknowledged the importance of the artistic value of literature and took his activity as a writer of fiction very seriously. Anthony Appiah (2014, 19-20) has aptly argued that Du Bois was a man of contradictions, a complex figure characterised by a number of paradoxes: a left-wing man, but at the same time an elitist and a dandy; an anticlerical who often resorted to using Christian metaphors of suffering and redemption; a supporter of an art exclusively aimed at political propaganda who was concurrently committed to the aesthetic value of literature, poetry, art and music. Moreover, although Du Bois supported Pan-Africanism, pointing out that the African-American population should partake in a wider entity transcending nationalities, on many occasions he affirmed his community's sense of belonging to America, not only by birth and nationality, but also by political ideals, language and religion. Du Bois's is not a static ideology of race, but instead a corpus of problematic speculations, enriched through repeated adjustments and revisions, in a long and tortuous process that now and then has led to contradictory conclusions. Nevertheless, these somewhat conflicting ideas do not undermine the enormous pioneering value of his works that inspired a series of political and cultural phenomena that would modify interracial relations not only in the United States, but also all over the world.

What is particularly interesting is Du Bois's influence on Afrofuturism. In various guises and more or less explicitly, Afrofuturism has always been present in literary and artistic expressions of the African diaspora, but has found its own definition only since the early 1990s, thanks to the critical contribution of authors such as Sinker (1992), Dery (1993), Eshun (1998, 2003), Nelson (2000, 2001, 2002, 2010), Rockeymoore (2000), Yaszek (2005, 2006), among others. Its political agenda – Nelson (2010) has observed – is intended as an epistemology rewriting the history of the past and imagining a positive future for people of African descent and, with a transnational stance, for the whole African diaspora, through an accurate speculation about the condition of subalternity and the alienation of the past as opposed to aspirations for modernity. More recent contributions (Fawaz 2012, Womack 2013, Anderson and Jones 2015) have updated and broadened the discussion around the essence of Afrofuturism and its current implications.

As Fanon ([1952] 2008, 176) put it in the often quoted conclusion to

translation of *The Souls of Black Folk* was published in an important volume edited by Paola Boi in 2007, and afterwards more essays appeared, such as the remarkable contributions by Raffaele Rauty (2008a, 2008b, 2012), Scacchi (2008) and Annalisa Oboe (2008), the volume with an excellent introduction by Sandro Mezzadra *Sulla linea del colore. Razza e democrazia negli Stati Uniti e nel mondo* (2010) and the following article «Questione di sguardi: Du Bois e Fanon» (2013), and finally *La Cometa di W.E.B. Du Bois* (2015), my Italian parallel-text translation of the short story «The Comet», completed by an introductory essay.

Black Skin, White Masks, the black man no longer wants to be a slave of the past: "in no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future". And it is right there, hidden in between the vehemence of the Fanonian discourse, that the first signs of Afrofuturism emerge. Paraphrasing Marx, Fanon nullified a past-bent perception of the history of black people. No longer slaves of the past, blacks should look to the future. He called for a new vision of what could happen rather than for a redemption of the history it had been. But what means could possibly be used to pursue this objective? First of all education and culture, accomplished through hard work, with momentous evidence of this being shown in those learned and documented dialectical argumentations put forward by Du Bois in his pioneering collection of essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Secondly, irony and satire, the most remarkable features of George S. Schuyler's vitriolic novel, *Black No More* (1931). Finally, and this is what concerns us above all, the pursuit of experimentalism, the crucial element Afrofuturist practitioners have insisted upon.

It could be argued, then, that the diffusion of Afrofuturism activated a double process: on the one hand, it has encouraged the development of avant-garde literary and artistic forms; on the other, it has triggered research on Afrofuturist elements in works of art and fiction that were actually created at a time when nobody would have thought about the question in these terms, thus also attributing credibility and substance to the phenomenon. And here one may be surprised by the fact that as early as 1859 Martin Delany published the novel *Blake, or the Huts of America*, which already presented elements that prefigured this movement. The story of the heroic black revolutionary Henry Blake is a groundbreaking example of radical speculative fiction with a message. Following the path traced by Delany there is Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), the first piece of African-American utopian fiction; Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), another utopian novel envisioning a separate African-American state within the United States; Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Conjure Woman* (1899), the first known collection of speculative short stories written by a person of color; Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1902), the first 'Lost Race' novel by an African-American author describing the discovery of a hidden civilisation with advanced technology in Ethiopia; Edward Austin Johnson's *Light Ahead for The Negro* (1904), whose protagonist awakens in 2006 to discover that America has become an egalitarian and post-racist nation; and George S. Schuyler's novels, *Black No More* and *Black Empire* (1936-1938), the former a satire about an African-American scientist who invented a process that could transform blacks into whites, the latter describing the attempts of a radical African-American group equipped with superscience

to create their own independent nation on the African continent. All of the above are works of fiction that, in one way or another, transcend a mere realistic description of the narrated events and present proto-Afrofuturist elements (Webb 2014).

Perhaps the most important forerunner of the politics of Afrofuturism was indeed W.E.B. Du Bois. As he wrote in 1924 in defense of Eugene O'Neill, any mention of Black life in America had always caused "an ugly picture, a dirty allusion, a nasty comment or a pessimistic forecast" (Rampersad [1979] 2001, 75). In Du Bois's enormous output, among his works of fiction there are five novels: *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911), *Dark Princess* (1928) and the trilogy *The Black Flame*, consisting of *The Ordeal of Mansart* (1957), *Mansart Builds a School* (1959) and *Worlds of Color* (1961). For Du Bois speculative fiction represented a further instrument of interpretation and social analysis: "I have used fiction to interpret those historical facts which otherwise would be not clear", Du Bois wrote in the «Postscript» to *The Ordeal of Mansart* (Terry in Zamir 2008, 54).Therefore, in order to attain a realistic representation of African-American life, paradoxically Du Bois used imagination to reinterpret more correctly historical situations that had either been distorted or had not been adequately considered by traditional narrations.

In particular, the trilogy is emblematic of Du Bois's literary production exactly for the crucial overlapping of fiction and real life. Written when Du Bois was ninety, *The Black Flame* follows the life of the protagonist Manuel Mansart between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and describes in fiction the trajectory of Du Bois's life and career, introducing several characters who convey particular aspects of his own personality, such as, for example, Sebastian Doyle, who "not only studied the Negro problem, he embodied the Negro problem. It was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. It made his world and filled his thought" and professor James Burghardt, who, like Du Bois, used to teach at Atlanta University and claimed that "the Negro problem must no longer be regarded emotionally. It must be faced scientifically and solved by long, accurate and intense investigation", words that seem to have been uttered by Du Bois himself.[5] Moreover, Du Bois wrote several poems, like the famous «A Litany at Atlanta» (1907), and some short stories, in particular «Of the Coming of John», collected in *The Souls of Black Folk*, and «The Comet» (1920).

Published in the collection *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, characterised by a skillful balance of political militancy, art and literature, «The Comet» represents a remarkable and innovative example of fiction that, as we shall see, is simultaneously post-apocalyptic, speculative and

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5   This character shared Du Bois's mother surname (Burghardt). See Gates Jr. in Du Bois ([1920] 2007, xviii) and Edwards in Du Bois ([1957, 1959, 1961] 2007).

proto-Afrofuturist.[6] In this story, only Jim, a young black man, and Julia, a rich young white woman, survive the deadly gases of a comet in an early twentieth century New York. Du Bois employed this narrative device to speculate on whether racial prejudices could be erased in a world with only two survivors. Unlike the friendly comet described by H.G. Wells in his novel *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), Du Bois's comet brings about a post-apocalyptic world used for speculation on racial discrimination. There are some passages in the story playing as a fictional counterpart of the critical issues Du Bois had developed in *The Souls of Black Folk*, namely the concepts of double consciousness, the color line and the veil. Let us see how these issues are experienced by the protagonists.[7]

At the beginning of the story, Jim is quite aware of his marginal role in the white society of that time. While sitting on the steps of the bank where he works, no one notices him, and he is – as Ralph Ellison would famously express it in 1952 – 'invisible'. This is obviously because he is black, and also because, as Du Bois ([1903] 1994, 1) had famously put it, "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line". "How does it feel to be a problem?", Jim seems to be asking himself. Jim is sent by the president of the bank down into the lower vaults to retrieve some old documents. While he is down there, there is a huge explosion. When Jim reappears on the surface, he discovers that everybody is dead. Strangely enough under these circumstances, he decides to go to a trendy restaurant he would never have been allowed to enter before the catastrophe: "'Yesterday, they would not have served me', he whispered, as he forced the food down. Then he started up the street, – looking, peering, telephoning, ringing alarms; silent, silent all".[8] Suddenly Jim hears a cry. It is Julia. Here Du Bois significantly describes the glamorous woman's reaction when she realises that Jim is black:

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6   Rabaka (2007, 64-66) has also highlighted the ways in which «The Comet» foreshadows several themes of *Critical Race Theory*, namely the interlocking of racism with sexism and classism and the critique of modernity.

7   Du Bois ([1903] 1994, 2): "it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder". In fact, the metaphors of 'double consciousness' and 'veil' had already been presented by Du Bois in the 1897 essay «Strivings of the Negro People», published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and republished with slight amendments later in *The Souls of Black Folk* with the title «Of Our Spiritual Strivings»; moreover, as Mezzadra (2010, 30) reminds us, the dilemma of the 'color-line' had also emerged in 1897 in the conference *The Conservation of Races* and, three years later, at the first Pan-African Conference in July 1900, Du Bois for the first time uttered the famous sentence "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line". It was Frederick Douglass, though, who first used this phrase in an 1881 article from *The North American Review*.

8   See Du Bois (1920) for this and the following quotations from «The Comet».

> They stared a moment in silence. She had not noticed before that he was a Negro. He had not thought of her as white. She was a woman of perhaps twenty-five – rarely beautiful and richly gowned, with darkly-golden hair, and jewels. Yesterday, he thought with bitterness, she would scarcely have looked at him twice. He would have been dirt beneath her silken feet. She stared at him. Of all the sorts of men she had pictured as coming to her rescue she had not dreamed of one like him. Not that he was not human, but he dwelt in a world so far from hers, so infinitely far, that he seldom even entered her thought.

Julia's and Jim's worlds are far apart, separated as they are by both a vertical line (the color line) as well as by a horizontal line (the class line). Julia is the living embodiment of those higher-class women who were hardly aware of black people, because their social condition prevented them from meeting blacks. As Reiland Rabaka (2007, 70) has noted, this idea is reinforced by the recurring use of the verb 'to stare', which is a direct reference to the celebrated beginning of *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is worth mentioning again:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question. […] They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; […] Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. (Du Bois [1903] 1994, 1-2).

This "vast veil" is exactly what divides Julia from Jim, who thus experiences that peculiar sensation defined by Du Bois as double consciousness, the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others".[9] However, Jim and Julia start searching the city only to discover that they are the only survivors. It is worth mentioning Julia's ambivalence towards Jim. At the beginning, she is impressed by Jim's resolute behaviour, but soon after, as a result of her white supremacist upbringing, Julia ends up considering Jim as a dangerous alien rather than a potential saviour. She wants to run away from him, no matter where. The racist psyche persists even when races no longer exist: "for the first time she seemed to realise that she was alone in the world with a stranger, with something more than a stranger, – with a man alien in blood and culture – unknown, perhaps

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9   See Bloom (2001, 1-3), regarding Ralph Waldo Emerson's influence on Du Bois's 'double consciousness' and Ralph Ellison's subsequent variation, 'double vision'. On the limits of double consciousness, see Gilroy (2010, 152-154).

unknowable. It was awful! She must escape – she must fly; he must not see her again. Who knew what awful thoughts –".

Here Du Bois seems to foreshadow Fanon's ideas on the psychological aspects of racial discrimination. "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened! […] Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up", Fanon wrote in "The Fact of Blackness", the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 2008, 84, 86), in which he denounced the absurdity of inborn racism. Despite Julia's prejudices, Jim forgives her and gradually she seems to understand that Jim is not so dangerous. Formerly discriminated against in a white-led society, now Jim has become a sort of Adam, the first of a new humanity where blacks and whites should have the same rights and dignity. Julia seems even to resent the foolishness of human distinctions, as the following dialogue shows:

"Have you had to work hard?" she asked softly.
"Always", he said.
"I have always been idle", she said. "I was rich".
"I was poor", he almost echoed. […]
"Yes", she said slowly; "and how foolish our human distinctions seem – now", looking down to the great dead city stretched below, swimming in unlightened shadows.
"Yes – I was not – human, yesterday", he said.

This last assertion exposes Jim's inferiority complex, what Fanon ([1952] 2008, 4) would later describe as "epidermalization" of this inferiority. The dialogue seems even to develop into a sort of romance between the two – in the end they are the only ones who could possibly repopulate the earth. Julia is now gazing at him again not in a negative or discriminatory way, but quite the opposite:

He turned and looked upon the lady, and found her gazing straight at him. Silently, immovably, they saw each other face to face – eye to eye. […] Slowly, noiselessly, they moved toward each other – the heavens above, the seas around, the city grim and dead below.

The post-apocalyptic setting paradoxically stages a utopian vision of equality, wherein Julia's attraction towards Jim is strategically used by Du Bois to address the fear of miscegenation that made interracial sex a taboo for the American society of that time.[10] As Lisa Yaszek (2006) has pointed out,

10 Miscegenation was among the 'don'ts', i.e., things that were not to appear in motion pictures according to the Hays Code, a set of moral guidelines applied to U.S. films adopted in 1930. The anti-miscegenation laws were held to be uncostitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States as late as 1967.

it will take a natural disaster to eradicate racism. However, the idyll is suddenly interrupted by a car horn revealing that there are actually other survivors, in particular Julia's father and fiancé, who are quite concerned by the fact that she had to share this experience with someone whom they would call "a nigger". What is even more noteworthy is that Julia herself, after reassuring her fiancé saying that Jim had actually rescued her, quite ungratefully keeps showing the same prejudices as before, by not looking at him again. In the end the status quo is restored, everything is just as it was.

A notable example of post-apocalyptic, speculative and proto-Afrofuturist short fiction, «The Comet» thus functions as a fictional counterpart of the influential key concepts – double consciousness, the color line and the veil – previously introduced by Du Bois and it also foreshadows further critical issues and tropes that would be developed later, namely Fanon's psychology of racism and Ellison's metaphor of invisibility. Moreover, as a proto-Afrofuturist work of fiction, the story prefigures the post-apocalyptic worlds of Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler (for example in the novel *Dawn*) and becomes a parable in which the supernatural element of the toxic comet allows for interesting speculations on the alienation experienced by people of African descent. «The Princess Steel», an earlier unpublished short story recently uncovered in Du Bois's papers by Britt Rusert and Adrienne Brown, is yet another example of speculative short fiction confirming Du Bois's ability in dealing with racial discrimination using proto-Afrofuturist tactics.[11]

To conclude, «The Comet» may thus be seen as a significant work of proto-Afrofuturist fiction in which the conflation of past, present and future is designed to rediscover hints of the African avant-garde past, thus envisaging for Africa and the African diaspora a future unchained from the usual catastrophic predictions. The anthropologist Franz Boas was among the first to disrupt the up until then prevailing idea of the inferiority of the black race and to stress the need of a re-evaluation of the history of Africa. In 1915, Du Bois himself wrote *The Negro*, a pioneering book that claimed a place for Africa in world history and opened the field of black historiography.[12] In *The African Origin of Civilization*, the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop provided further historical evidence that the civilisation of ancient Egypt (the first recorded by history) was indeed a Negro civilisation. This historical reconstruction has called for a necessary reassessment of Negro history, far too often overlooked or underestimated by the 'Western' world – for example, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of*

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11 According to Rusert and Brown, *The Princess Steel* was written between 1908 and 1910. See Du Bois (2015) and Elia (2016).

12 George Shepperson has noted that other blacks had given historical proof that Africa was not without a past, including R.B. Lewis ([1844] 2012), Alexander Crummell ([1862] 2012) and Edward W. Blyden ([1887] 1994). See Du Bois ([1915] 1970, xiii-xiv).

World History, posthumously published in 1840, Hegel dismissed African history in its entirety in only a few unflattering pages. Herodotus's accounts reveal instead that the ancient Egyptians were Negroes and that Greece borrowed all the main elements of her civilisation from Egypt, including the cult of gods. Most modern Western civilisation is rooted in Egyptian cosmogony and science and even several Biblical passages are heavily influenced by Egyptian moral texts – Osiris, the redeemer-god, like Christ, sacrificed himself and was resurrected to save mankind (Diop 1974, 4, xiv; Du Bois [1915] 1970, 17-18).

Regardless of whether this historical revisionism is plausible, there is no doubt that black people themselves have sometimes ignored the importance of their own history, and this is mainly due to the fact that ever since the beginning of the slave trade, white masters have always performed a systematic erasure of the past and of the memories of blacks. It was much easier to control and subjugate those who no longer had a cultural heritage. Such erasure has often led to an inferiority complex, as Fanon has taught us. Negro authors and artists did not seem to be in a cultural position to question the problem of man's fate, the major theme of human letters. There are exceptions, though, Du Bois being one of the forerunners in fostering education for blacks and redeeming the role of the black intellectual (up until then, the phrase "black intellectual" had been a sort of oxymoron involving two mutually exclusive terms).[13]

Nearly a century has passed since the publication of «The Comet», but we realise on a daily basis that racial discrimination is still a topical issue. No doubt many things have changed for the better, and this is mainly due to the pioneering work of many activists, notably Du Bois. With regard to the importance of a reconsideration of past history, Du Bois once wrote "the past *is* the present […] without what *was*, nothing is",[14] a simple statement, yet charged with deep connotations that can be visually rendered into the image of Sankofa, a word in the Akan language of Ghana referring to the African bird with its head turned backwards, an apt icon of Afrofuturism and a symbol of hope for a better future involving taking from the past what is good and bringing it into the present in order to make positive progress.

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[13]   Diop (1974, xvi). Famous is Du Bois's attack against Booker T. Washington, at that time the most influential African-American leader, who supported an integrationist and appeasing politics between blacks and whites. As emerges from the third chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, «Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others», the object of the diatribe was education for black people. Du Bois backed up a 'classical' education, whereas Washington was for a vocational education aimed exclusively at learning technical abilities, an objective pursued in the Tuskegee Institute that he directed. See Washington ([1901] 2000, 71) and Jarrett (2014, 911).

[14]   W.E.B. Du Bois ([1946] 2015). Du Bois's italics. See Porter (2010, vii).

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Voci per la biografia di un paese
La narrativa polifonica di Yvonne Vera e la storia dello Zimbabwe

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Abstract   The whole of Yvonne Vera's narrative production (five published novels and a number of short stories) is steeped in the history of her own country. Though faithful to historical facts, Vera choses to focus her attention on individual lives, giving voice, she says, to those who are not given voice by the official treatment of history. Never forgetting the Pre-Colonial past of Zimbabwe, from her first novel, *Nehanda*, to the fifth, *The Stone Virgins*, Vera makes her characters fight against the harsh social and cultural imprisonment of Colonialism as well as against the atavistic patterns of African culture. While she shows that women are predestined victims, overpowered as they are by hostile realities especially when they try to break their fetters, Vera creates also epitomic male characters. Especially in *The Stone Virgins*, the four agonistes, two sister and two men unknown one to the other, represent Zimbabwe's predicament after Independence. The core of Vera's research is how to remember and yet overcome the past. One of the two men, a Chimurenga former fighter, falls into the pit of violence and death, unable to accept the challenge of freedom and life; the other, an anthropologist and historian, directs all his efforts towards the future, including in the future of his country the imperative of the restoration of the past: the last word of *The Stone Virgins* is "deliverance".

Keywords   Yvonne Vera. Zimbabwe. History. Chimurenga. Deliverance.

Tutte le opere di Yvonne Vera, scrittrice di etnia shona, nata nello Zimbabwe, a Bulawayo, il 19 settembre 1964, morta in Canada, a Toronto, il 7 aprile 2005, sono apertamente e dichiaratamente collegate alla storia del suo paese. Pur non essendo una storica di professione, Yvonne Vera, tanto nei suoi racconti e romanzi quanto nei suoi saggi critici (si è occupata di arti visive antiche e contemporanee, di tecniche museali e di Cultural Studies), fa uso costante di documenti storici ufficiali, testimonianze, resoconti, e anche di credenze e luoghi comuni popolari dello Zimbabwe – spesso affrontandone gli aspetti più difficili e problematici. Nella sua produzione narrativa, Vera elabora tutti i dati a sua disposizione, sottoponendoli a una metamorfosi immaginativa, ampliandone senso e significato senza mai, però, anche solo sfiorarne la mistificazione o l'alterazione a scopo ideologico. Quello che Vera si concede è libertà critica di focalizzazione e rappresentazione. Partendo dal presupposto che la storia, comunque intesa, è sempre narrazione, tiene soprattutto a sottolineare che le sue 'storie' non sono condizionate da un punto di vista ufficiale o di potere,

ma vogliono dare voce a coloro che ufficialmente non hanno e non hanno mai avuto voce: la gente comune, i poveri, gli spodestati, gli sradicati, gli oppressi, le vittime – nella società africana vittime sono soprattutto le donne, e con loro i bambini, ma vittime sono anche uomini giovani e meno giovani, intrappolati da radicale ignoranza e/o da un potere politico e ideologico egemone. La libertà che Vera si concede, pertanto, è quella di penetrare nelle zone buie e periferiche, negli anfratti delle vite individuali, che la storia ufficiale sfiora senza rivelare. Per farlo si concede anche la facoltà di contrarre e dilatare in funzione drammatica la durata temporale di alcuni eventi. Se da un lato le vite individuali, in quanto create dalla sua immaginazione, le consentono di non ingaggiare uno scontro diretto con la politica contemporanea del suo paese, dall'altro non semplificano, perché i suoi personaggi e le loro voci interagiscono con i grandi problemi, e non possono sfuggire alla interpretazione. Come dice lo scrittore messicano Carlos Fuentes (nella «Introduzione» alla sua raccolta di saggi critici *Geografia de la novela*, 1993), i romanzi non offrono risposte, ma pongono domande. I romanzi di Yvonne Vera pongono certamente domande molto pressanti.

Quando si legge nella lezione pronunciata da Nuto Revelli, nel 1999, in occasione del suo conferimento della *Laurea honoris causa* da parte della Università degli Studi di Torino, la frase: «decisi di dare una voce agli ex soldati, a chi aveva sempre dovuto subire le scelte degli "altri"», (`http://www.loccidentale.it/articoli/74055/leggi-un-discorso-di-revel-li-sulla-campagna-italiana-in-russia`), non è possibile non sentire qualche consonanza di intenti e sentimenti, che, senza alcuna conoscenza reciproca, collega due scrittori apparentemente molto lontani, fermo restando che la Resistenza in Zimbabwe ha, ovviamente, alcuni (non moltissimi) aspetti diversi dalla Resistenza in Italia. Yvonne Vera non ha vissuto personalmente tutte le vicende che racconta, ma, per quanto consentito dalla sua età, ne è stata testimone e spettatore diretto; non ha combattuto la guerra nel *bush*, ma ha visto, anche all'interno della propria famiglia, uomini e donne partire e non tornare, o ritornare cambiati per sempre; e soprattutto ha ascoltato, e cercato, innumerevoli racconti orali. La storia dello Zimbabwe, ex-Rhodesia, divenuto uno stato indipendente solo nel 1980, è lunga e piuttosto complessa. Il 1980 non è stato solo l'inizio dell'Indipendenza. Nel giro di un anno, infatti, la 'riconciliazione' ha lasciato il posto a un'atroce guerriglia interna, una guerra civile non riconosciuta, che da una parte vede schegge impazzite di ex-combattenti, che diventano 'dissidenti', e dall'altra forze governative di repressione – Robert Mugabe, di etnia shona per parte di madre, eroe della lotta per l'Indipendenza, è Primo Ministro. Il problema è senza dubbio parzialmente etnico, di antica inimicizia fra le popolazioni shona e ndebele, ma soprattutto è una lotta di potere. Civili del tutto inermi, donne e bambini, intere famiglie, sono vittime di ambo le parti. Le lotte per la liberazione, note come Primo e

Secondo Chimurenga, sono celebrate dalla storiografia ufficiale e dalla oralità popolare, ma poco è stato detto degli eventi posteriori, e anche di quello che avveniva nel *backstage* della lotta di liberazione nel *bush*. La narrativa di Yvonne Vera coglie proprio alcuni di quegli episodi difficili e nascosti, sia precedenti sia successivi all'Indipendenza, Ci vuole un coraggio non indifferente per rompere il silenzio e affrontare, come ha fatto questa scrittrice, molti tabù protetti dal potere.

Lo storico inglese Terence Ranger, africanista, Professore Emerito di Storia dei Rapporti Razziali (*Rhodes Chair of Race Relations*) della Università di Oxford, ma in quel periodo *Visiting Professor of History* nella University of Zimbawe e, in seguito, amico personale di Vera, nel 1992 volle conoscerla, dopo avere letto il suo primo romanzo, *Nehanda*, dedicato a un episodio ottocentesco storico di resistenza nera al potere coloniale bianco, episodio diventato leggendario nella memoria popolare collettiva del paese – e anche oltre i suoi confini. Ranger era stato profondamente colpito dalla lettura di *Nehanda*, tanto da affermare a distanza di anni (in una conversazione con chi scrive) che l'interazione dei romanzi di Yvonne Vera con la storia lo aveva portato a riconsiderare profondamente il proprio modo di affrontare la disciplina. Nella orazione funebre pronunciata il giorno dello spargimento di parte delle ceneri di Yvonne Vera in una foresta canadese vicina a Toronto (il resto delle ceneri è stato sparso sulle colline vicine a Bulawayo), Ranger ha detto: «When Nehanda – her novel about the heroic female spirit medium who inspired by the 1896 uprising against the Rhodesian settlers – was published in Zimbabwe in 1993, I read it with fascination. I am a historian and long ago, in 1967, I had published my own book about 1896, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* and had written about the life and death of the Nehanda medium. I had read the work of ethnographers about subsequent mediums of the Nehanda spirit. But when I read Yvonne's book I was bowled over by the daring of her imagination. [...] Yvonne had played about with time. [...] I must say that what she imagined is more dramatic and coherent than the "reality"» (dal manoscritto inedito della orazione funebre fornitomi dall'autrice).

Yvonne Vera ha pubblicato cinque romanzi, lasciando inedito e frammentario il sesto. Il primo, *Nehanda*, condensa gli anni conclusivi dell'Ottocento e il 'Primo Chimurenga'; *Il fuoco e la farfalla* (*Butterfly Burning*) richiama gli episodi del 1896-1897, ma coglie in particolare gli anni subito dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale; *Without a Name* (*Senza un nome*) e *Under the Tongue* (*Sotto la lingua*) raccontano episodi del 'Secondo Chimurenga', collocati negli anni delle lunghe lotte tra il 1964 e il 1980, l'anno della speranza; con le *Vergini delle rocce* (*The Stone Virgins*) Yvonne Vera estende la rappresentazione fino al 1986; con *Obedience*, il sesto, sarebbe arrivata al 2002. Considerati nell'ordine cronologico di composizione e simultaneamente nell'ordine cronologico delle storie che narrano, i sei romanzi costruiscono una storia dello Zimbabwe moderno, dall'ultimo

periodo del colonialismo a oggi, ma, come già affermato, una storia in cui l'attenzione è focalizzata sulle vite di singoli individui, persone comuni tra molte altre. La storia ufficiale è comunque presente nei romanzi, anzi è una realtà ineludibile molto vivida e quadri-dimensionale, nella quale sono appunto le vicende di persone comuni a occupare il *foreground*.

Dovendo operare una scelta, si privilegia qui una lettura dell'ultimo romanzo pubblicato, *Le Vergini delle rocce*. Le vicende del romanzo sono introdotte da due capitoli di ambientazione, ricchi di storia pregressa e di dettagli materiali della città di Bulawayo, tutti elementi che hanno la funzione di creare spazi e tempi del paesaggio naturale e umano, e simultaneamente di suggerire temi e problemi. Seguono poi gli eventi veri e propri, in una linea abbastanza semplice: nel 1980 Cephas Dube, un intellettuale che lavora a Bulawayo (non sappiamo ancora in che campo), per caso in visita nel villaggio di Kezi, incontra la bella Thenjiwe e si ferma con lei per qualche mese, vivendo una intensissima storia d'amore, che nessuno dei due ha il coraggio di rendere permanente. Cephas ritorna a Bulawayo e Thenjiwe rimane a Kezi, dove torna a vivere con lei la sorella minore Nonceba, che ha finito le scuole superiori in collegio. Dopo la ripresa della guerra, nel 1981, questa volta una guerra civile, Sibaso, un ex-nazionalista, ex-combattente del *bush,* ora un dissidente alla deriva, irrompe nella abitazione delle due sorelle a Kezi, e in un terribile rituale, decapita Thenjiwe, violenta Nonceba e le recide le labbra. Nel suo tormentato monologo interiore Sibaso indica che l'anno è il 1983. Dopo l'assassinio e lo stupro, Sibaso fugge nuovamente nel *bush* per andare a morire da solo sulle colline vicine a Kezi, in una caverna, in passato luogo sacro di un culto animista. Nonceba sopravvive e, dopo un periodo indeterminato, ragionevolmente di circa due anni, riceve una visita di Cephas Dube, che la convince a trasferirsi con lui da Kezi a Bulawayo. Forse qualcosa può cambiare nella vita martoriata dei due personaggi e dello Zimbabwe. Sapremo alla fine del romanzo che Cephas Dube è uno storico e un antropologo, il cui lavoro, presso l'Ente dei Musei e Monumenti Nazionali dello Zimbabwe, consiste, nel 1986, nel «ricostruire» la cultura del paese: «Una nazione nuova ha bisogno di restaurare il passato. Il suo epicentro, la capanna a forma di alveare, che deve essere installata nell'antico kraal di Lobengula, kwoBulawayo, l'anno che deve venire» (Vera 2004, 236). È importante ricordare a questo punto che Yvonne Vera ha lavorato come direttrice della National Gallery of Zimbabwe di Bulawayo (ramo della National Gallery di Harare). C'è nel personaggio di Cephas Dube non poco di lei stessa e delle sue aspirazioni politiche per il paese (e anche per la parità di genere, ma questo è un aspetto che deve attendere altra sede per essere approfondito).

Le vergini delle rocce è diviso in due parti, la prima che copre dal 1950 al 1980, la seconda dal 1981 al 1986, separate da un brevissimo capitolo di cerniera collocato tra l'anno della Indipendenza e la guerra civile (guerra

civile il cui riconoscimento come tale è tuttora molto problematico da parte governativa). Due sono anche fondamentalmente i luoghi rappresentati, e per alcuni aspetti contrapposti, la città di Bulawayo e l'enclave rurale di Kezi, con il territorio collinoso circostante e i suoi spazi sacri. In una lettura specificamente dedicata a evidenziare temi di teoria postcoloniale, non si può non sottolineare, inoltre, la presenza implicita delle due posizioni politiche e culturali di base che una ex-colonia africana può assumere, e che deve comunque affrontare, nei confronti della cultura dei colonizzatori: il rifiuto di tutto quello che appartiene alla cultura dei colonizzatori o l'integrazione di parte di quella cultura. Tra le due posizioni, che hanno suscitato e suscitano dibattiti molto accesi, esiste una gamma di livelli intermedi quantitativi e qualitativi, ciascuno possibile oggetto di ricerca. In particolare, in questo romanzo, sono rilevanti i temi della modernità, della gestione della modernità, degli stili di vita, delle competenze scolastiche e lavorative ispirate all'Occidente, del reddito, della sua distribuzione e della conseguente acquisizione di beni.

All'interno di questa struttura, che è studiata proprio per conferire alla narrazione un senso di continuità storica e di documentazione reale e quotidiana, agiscono i quattro personaggi principali, due uomini, Cephas Dube e Sibaso, e due donne, Thenjiwe e sua sorella Nonceba. I quattro personaggi sono individui in sé, e nello stesso tempo rappresentazioni simboliche delle posizioni di uomini e donne dello Zimbabwe. Le vicende vivono attraverso le voci dei quattro personaggi, ciascuna per costruzione ignara delle altre, e sono introdotte e accompagnate da una quinta voce, che non è quella di un canonico narratore onnisciente, ma quella di un testimone esterno che racconta il contesto e riferisce parole e pensieri delle voci, ma non entra mai direttamente nei loro racconti. Le cinque voci si integrano e si completano, attentamente orchestrate nel *layout* temporale e nello stile, per comporre un romanzo polifonico, dove le voci narrano dal loro punto di vista la storia e le posizioni ideologiche che Yvonne Vera, attenta ma libera studiosa di Bachtin, vuole far conoscere fuori e oltre l'ufficialità. Nulla è detto dell'appartenenza etnica dei personaggi, ma Sibaso è ragionevolmente ndebele, mentre Cepahs Dube non è di Bulawayo, viene dalla parte più orientale del paese, dalla zona di Harare. Le due donne sono probabilmente shona. Della quinta voce non si deve azzardare l'etnia, mentre si può notare che racconta sia la violenza dei «dissidenti», sia episodi del *Gukurahundi*, parola shona con cui si indica la pulizia che fanno le piogge di primavera, ma che presto è diventata nel paese la «pulizia» operata dalla notoria Fifth Brigade di Mugabe.

Yvonne Vera ha un'evidente predilezione per il discorso indiretto e la narrazione in terza persona, anche quando entra nel flusso di coscienza delle sue voci, ma qualche volta introduce nel *récit,* con violenza improvvisa, brani affidati all'io narrante di uno o più personaggi, palesemente in funzione drammatica e di caratterizzazione. Delle cinque voci di questo

romanzo, la voce di Sibaso parla più spesso in prima persona, mentre la voce di Thenjiwe arriva sempre attraverso il discorso indiretto o, se con le sue parole, nel ricordo degli altri. Le scelte di Vera sono deliberate: l'estroversa Thenjiwe sente, ama, si esprime con il suo bellissimo corpo, i suoi pensieri seguono spontaneamente il suo corpo, il suo io sembra per lo più esistere in funzione della percezione degli altri, ma lei non articola in discorso la sua comunicazione, e presto tutte le sue possibilità di discorso sono tacitate, troncate con la sua testa. È bella, ma esposta, impreparata e indifesa, come la sua terra, che lei stessa rappresenta nella sua dimensione naturale e sensuale, quasi primigenia e pre-coloniale, inconsapevole di dimensioni storiche e politiche esterne. Nonostante la sua qualità che noi europei chiameremmo 'arcadica', però, Thenjiwe non è serena. La affligge il tormento di voler sapere tutto sull'albero del *mazhanje*, che cresce in una zona lontana del paese, in un altrove, nella terra da dove viene Cephas. Questo suo tormento, apparentemente non razionale, ha qualcosa del presagio e della premonizione, è un ribollimento del profondo, un senso di 'prigionia' (si pensi al saggio critico di Vera *The Prison of Colonial Space*), un sintomo di fisiologica, inconscia ansia di conoscenza, frainteso e trascurato, per volontà della sua creatrice, dallo stesso Cephas.

Nonceba ha studiato, si è spinta più avanti nella società e nell'acquisizione di consapevolezza di sé e conoscenza del mondo, ma subisce simbolicamente l'amputazione delle labbra, menomazione che non le impedisce il flusso del pensiero, ma la rende temporaneamente incapace di parola parlata, e bisognosa, quindi, di qualcuno che l'aiuti a trasmettere il suo racconto senza, però, diluirne la tragicità. Padrona della tecnica del discorso indiretto, nei momenti di maggiore terrore Yvonne Vera rappresenta Nonceba che, pur nel pensiero, si esprime con forza come soggetto; proprio il discorso indiretto ne fa un 'io' oltraggiato che grida il suo dolore in un involucro di solitudine. In seguito Nonceba maturerà fino alla capacità di sostenere un dialogo e di affermare la propria identità in legittima evoluzione.

Cephas Dube è uno studioso, addestrato tanto al pensiero quanto alla parola, un uomo attento, che si guarda agire e pensare, e che si distanzia dal proprio vissuto, ponendosi fuori da sé anche nei momenti delle passioni più intense. Nella prima parte del romanzo, Cephas parla in prima persona una sola volta, quando, introdotto con precisione grammaticale, quasi pedantemente, da due punti e virgolette, pronuncia un lirico e solenne canto d'amore sul corpo nudo di Thenjiwe che sta per lasciare per sempre: «Tu sei bella come la creazione. Non esiste nessuna cosa che sia più bella di te» (Vera 2004, 59). Il canto, composto da Vera nello stile orale dei canti di celebrazione della tradizione shona, ma in un linguaggio sensuale assolutamente originale, è una lunga e articolata eulogia in cui il corpo della donna, il paese, la morfologia del territorio e la natura del paese si sovrappongono e si identificano, con toni passionali, ma anche ambigui,

fino a una vaga ma pervasiva indulgenza macabra, come se Cephas stesse per lasciare tanto l'amante quanto la sua terra – l'ambiguità è data anche (non solo) dal fatto che Cephas lascia Thenjiwe, ma non per il *bush* o per l'esilio, la lascia per incomprensione della realtà e forse per disimpegno: «Se tu dovessi morire in mia assenza e io trovassi che sei stata già sepolta, ti dissotterrerei al chiaro di luna, per poter toccare questo bellissimo osso […]. Tremo se immagino che tu non sia qui, da qualche parte nel mondo, quando io sono vivo, da qualche parte del mondo» (Vera 2004, 60). Nelle parti finali del romanzo, come e più di Nonceba, Cephas è maturato, e si dimostra capace di dialogo, e soprattutto di tolleranza e accettazione del diritto dell'altro al pensiero e alla auto-determinazione. È evidente il parallelismo con una nuova etica della cittadinanza e del pluralismo, etica della quale il dialogo deve essere parte fondante. Il potere delle parole di curare le ferite, e in particolare il potere del dialogo, è un *leitmotiv* di molta letteratura dello Zimbabwe, così come della letteratura contemporanea di molti altri paesi africani. In un certo senso lo si può trovare anche nel principio guida della recente *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Sud Africa. Nelle *Vergini delle rocce*, oltre al dialogo, anche il concetto di «celebrazione» di Cephas ha subito una evoluzione in direzione del lavorare per la comunità. Cephas e Nonceba condividono, con evidenti eccedenze politiche, anche la qualità della pazienza, della capacità di attesa, del lavoro paziente necessario alle conquiste intellettuali e materiali.

Sibaso, come accennato, è il personaggio che maggiormente si esprime in prima persona, come se pronunciasse continuamente la propria apologia. La sua voce parla in successioni ossessive di un lungo monologo interiore semi-volontario, interrotto e ripreso nel *récit*, dove si mescolano realismo, argomentazione lucida e delirio. Per volontà della sua creatrice, attraverso rarefazioni del controllo, Sibaso denuncia il processo degenerativo della sua notevole intelligenza e sensibilità. Nella rappresentazione di ognuno dei quattro personaggi, comunque, Yvonne Vera è sempre molto attenta a rimanere di volta in volta entro la competenza intellettuale e le possibilità sensorie dei suoi agonisti. La tecnica delle alternanze dei personaggi e delle loro modalità di espressione, delle variazioni improvvise della narrazione che passa dalla prima alla terza persona, crea transizioni repentine e inaspettate, e richiede pertanto una certa attenzione, ma è proprio quella tecnica che conferisce ritmo e vitalità al narrato. Anche la linea temporale non scorre in momenti cronologicamente susseguenti, perché Vera la assoggetta al fluire libero e autonomo dei ricordi, soprattutto in Nonceba e Sibaso. Nel *récit*, quindi, frammenti del presente precedono il passato, momenti posteriori del passato precedono eventi anteriori, tutti i ricordi si interrompono e poi ritornano, per ripiegare nuovamente, e infine ripresentarsi. L'effetto prodotto è quello di un inseguirsi e ri-presentificarsi di elementi cruciali per mezzo di un'audace tecnica della ripetizione. L'uso della ripetizione proviene direttamente dallo stile dei racconti orali, del

resto più volte adottato dai primi scrittori di narrativa dello Zimbabwe. Per tutte queste ragioni la ricomposizione della *fabula* può avvenire in modo appagante solo alla fine della lettura del romanzo.

Se Thenjiwe è precipitata con violenza nel silenzio prima ancora di poter imparare a parlare in prima persona, Sibaso sa parlare in prima persona, ma il suo cedere e fuggire, travolto da una voluttà di violenza e autodistruzione, alla fine lo riduce a un silenzio non meno definitivo di quello di Thenjiwe. Lo Zimbabwe non può contare su di loro. Cephas e Nonceba, invece, compiono un percorso umano e civile, che oltretutto non è concluso dalla fine del romanzo, ma può avanzare ancora, perché resta aperto al futuro e alla speranza – come Yvonne Vera vuole sia aperta la storia dello Zimbabwe contemporaneo. L'evoluzione è efficacemente segnalata da parte di Vera attraverso la progressione dell'uso del dialogo. Si deve notare che il dialogo non è mai usato per rappresentare il rapporto di Cephas e Thenjiwe, tutto è narrato attraverso il discorso indiretto. L'unica eccezione si ha quando Cephas pronuncia il suo bellissimo cantico sul corpo di Thenjiwe, ma di fatto non c'è nessuna risposta che trasformi il suo monologo in rapporto biunivoco. Altrettanto avviene entro il rapporto terribile tra Nonceba e Sibaso, ognuno prigioniero del proprio dolorosissimo monologo. Durante lo stupro Sibaso rivolge brevi frasi quasi tenere a Nonceba, comunicate però al lettore entro il vissuto di Nonceba; frasi raccapriccianti nel contesto, che sottolineano tanto l'incomunicabile solitudine del carnefice quanto quella altrettanto disperata della vittima. Sibaso ha anche un breve dialogo strumentale con l'estraneo che abita la casa di Bulawayo che una volta era casa sua, ma non a caso è un dialogo che non elicita alcuna soluzione per Sibaso, anzi conferma il suo isolamento. Già il primo difficile incontro di Cephas e Nonceba, invece, è in buona parte costituito da un dialogo. Ma è soprattutto alla fine del romanzo, con la rappresentazione delle conversazioni quotidiane di Cephas e Nonceba, che il dialogo diventa segno di positività e di ricostruzione individuale e nazionale. Per Yvonne Vera, inoltre, il dialogo è una importante forma di oralità e/o di rappresentazione letteraria dell'oralità. Vera usa con abilità e naturalezza il dialogo anche nei romanzi precedenti, ma particolarmente nelle *Vergini delle rocce* dimostra di saper creare dialoghi agili e dinamici, intercalati con verosimiglianza a un parallelo scorrere spontaneo dei pensieri dei personaggi: con il corso degli eventi le voci di Cephas e Nonceba si sono affinate e arricchite, in un certo senso sono davvero 'liberate' – appositamente l'ultima parola del romanzo è «liberazione».

Nei romanzi precedenti di Yvonne Vera i personaggi centrali sono figure di donne che soffrono, combattono, e spesso soccombono, nelle *Vergini delle rocce* i personaggi maschili acquistano molto più spazio e un'importanza pari se non maggiore. Per molti aspetti Sibaso e Cephas Dube sono più interessanti delle due sorelle, e sono senza dubbio più complessi. Thenjiwe e Nonceba possiedono entrambe una forte vitalità, entrambe possono rap-

presentare lo Zimbabwe con tutta la sua bellezza, la prima incarnando la bellezza naturale innocente della terra e la prosperità distrutte dalle violenze coloniali e postcoloniali, la seconda mostrando il percorso della bellezza e del valore che si ricompongono e si ricostruiscono, insieme alla coscienza e alla conoscenza, sia pure dovendo superare ostacoli enormi. Così, infatti, le interpreta Giuseppe Serpillo nel suo saggio su Yvonne Vera, notando che nei romanzi di Vera sono le donne «a rendersi conto che non si può restare fermi, né tantomeno tornare indietro» (Serpillo 2006, 5). Ma nelle *Vergini delle rocce* agenti altrettanto importanti sono Sibaso e Cephas. Sibaso subisce un'involuzione, diventa strumento di distruzione e si rifugia in un passato di morte, ma prima è stato innegabilmente strumento di liberazione. Con la figura di Sibaso, e soprattutto con la sua voce, Yvonne Vera mette in guardia il paese, perché dopo una lotta vittoriosa non faccia scelte regressive, caparbie e autolesioniste, perché non si richiuda in una nuova prigione (o caverna) dopo aver subito la «prigione» del colonialismo. Con Cephas Dube, invece, costruisce un personaggio che incarna il principio della speranza, l'uomo nuovo, forse l'utopia, certamente il portatore del sogno politico possibile. Per inciso: pochi mesi prima della sua morte, Yvonne Vera si riprometteva di leggere più seriamente *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*Il principio speranza*) di Ernst Bloch. Cephas Dube è consapevolmente cittadino di una nazione nuova e agente di ricostruzione: lavorando per i Musei e Monumenti Nazionali dello Zimbabwe (come, non si deve dimenticare, ha fatto Yvonne Vera nella funzione di direttrice della National Gallery di Bulawayo), Cephas indaga sulla storia del suo paese, cerca tenacemente nel presente i segni del passato, lavora testardamente e metodicamente per preservare, conservare alla memoria individuale e collettiva le reliquie di quanto si può ancora salvare per farne le fondamenta del futuro. Cura le ferite dello Zimbabwe, così come, parallelamente, cura le ferite del volto di Nonceba e la assiste durante gli interventi di chirurgia ricostruttiva delle labbra. Cephas è una bellissima figura d'uomo, di studioso e di scienziato, che conosce il dubbio, ma è nello stesso tempo sostenuto dal desiderio di positività e felicità propria e collettiva. Con il suo personaggio e con quello di Nonceba, Yvonne Vera dice implicitamente che il futuro dello Zimbabwe per lei non è un ritorno indiscriminato al passato, ma la conservazione della cultura autoctona armonizzata con l'acquisizione di mezzi e conoscenze, che consentano al paese autonomia in campo sociale, economico e politico. Il tema del dubbio in Cephas rende sobrio il tema della speranza, che potrebbe facilmente adagiarsi nella sola utopia. In Sibaso il dubbio si trasforma in rifiuto: «non ho combattuto per far piacere a qualcun altro» (Vera 2004, 182).

Mentre l'assunto principale delle *Vergini delle rocce* è testimoniare il condizionamento che la realtà fattuale dello Zimbabwe opera sulle vite individuali, il mistero che Yvonne Vera presenta al lettore e sul quale si pone domande è quello del senso e dell'origine del male. *Le vergini delle*

rocce è il suo romanzo più maturo e più complesso, sia per l'equilibrio della struttura sia per l'ampiezza della rappresentazione, e sia proprio per l'indagine sul male. Il male dilaga nel paese. La voce che costruisce il contesto sembra dire in qualche modo che il male è entrato nella storia del paese con la rapacità, lo sfruttamento, il razzismo e i massacri del colonialismo; ma dice anche che la negazione dei diritti umani, le sofferenze e le sopraffazioni, l'ansia del potere nutrono altro male da entrambe le parti. Eppure il male è ancora più misterioso, più irrazionale e inspiegabile di tutto quello.

Il grande enigma del romanzo e della storia narrata è veramente Sibaso, ex-patriota, ex-combattente per la libertà, ex-eroe delle agiografie popolari, che può poi lasciarsi precipitare nell'orrore dello stupro, delle mutilazioni, dell'assassinio, e della propria autodistruzione e morte. Negli anni violenti dopo l'Indipendenza, gli episodi simili a quelli narrati nel romanzo, come quello dell'uccisione atroce e teatrale del mite e grigio mercante di Kezi, Mahlathini, e quello della donna costretta dai soldati a uccidere suo marito davanti ai figli, sono stati molti, soprattutto nelle zone rurali del paese. In seguito molti altri episodi sono stati registrati attraverso racconti orali. Yvonne Vera, in più di una intervista, dice di averne ascoltati moltissimi quando era bambina, da sua nonna, dai vicini, dalla gente in generale, e inoltre da uno dei suoi zii, ritornato vivo dal *bush*, ma segnato per sempre. Responsabili di torture, stupri, atrocità e massacri sono stati tanto gli ex-guerriglieri dissidenti, quanto la terribile Fifth Brigade della repressione governativa.

Per uno scenario storico più ampio, ci si deve ancora una volta rivolgere alle ricerche di Terence Ranger, che ha pazientemente raccolto molte testimonianze e le ha rese fruibili agli studiosi nei suoi lavori. Prima di Yvonne Vera, altri scrittori dello Zimbabwe hanno scritto in inglese su quegli anni terribili. Il più importante è Chenjerai Hove, con il romanzo *Shadows* (1991), ma sono da ricordare anche Shimmer Chinodya con *Harvest of Thorns* (1989), e Alexander Kanengoni, con *Echoing Silences* (1997), e in precedenza con *When the Rainbird Cries* (1987), romanzo dove in particolare racconta la follia sanguinaria dei rapporti dei guerriglieri con gli abitanti dei villaggi vicini al confine con il Mozambico. Hove, Chinodya e Kanengoni, che sono tutti e tre anche poeti e usano un linguaggio di grande vigore drammatico, pongono tutti l'enfasi sulle atrocità commesse e subite, ma Yvonne Vera è la prima a porsi il problema della genesi del male anche su un piano che va oltre il conflitto etnico e le eredità del colonialismo, che pure non trascura.

Yvonne Vera rappresenta Sibaso attraverso un linguaggio ancora più forte e drammaticamente (in senso etimologico) poetico di quello dei suoi colleghi scrittori sopra ricordati, lo segue mentre 'agisce' il male e mentre, simultaneamente, pensa in sequenze spesso apparentemente scoordinate rispetto alle azioni; ma nello stesso tempo lo costruisce intelligente, acuto,

osservatore, e con una parte di sé in qualche modo consapevole del male. Con la sua tecnica abile e spericolata, Vera porta così la sua indagine e la sua rappresentazione dentro le pieghe dell'interiorità di Sibaso. Non pronuncia condanne e nemmeno tenta spiegazioni, ma lascia che sia la voce interiore di Sibaso in prima persona, attraverso immagini, frammenti di argomentazione, ripetizioni frequenti e ritmate, digressioni, registrazioni mentali di gesti e dettagli, a comunicare il disorientamento e la caduta nel male. È leggendo quelle pagine che ci si rende conto di quanto ancora agiscano nella poetica di Yvonne Vera il linguaggio lirico, i modi e i ritmi della tradizione dei racconti orali. Una qualità aggiunta e nuova è il dato di fatto che Sibaso non è un narratore ingenuo, o rozzo. Al contrario è un uomo colto, è sensibile alla bellezza, conosce il passato e la storia del suo tempo dentro e fuori del paese. È lui stesso a comunicare che, quando negli anni settanta, durante il Secondo Chimurenga, aveva deciso di partire per il *bush*, era uno studente di letteratura alla fine del suo primo anno di università. Yvonne Vera, in un capitolo particolarmente ricco del romanzo, lo rappresenta mentre, dopo l'Indipendenza, ripercorre in uno stato misto di lucidità e stordimento la strada cittadina dove viveva con suo padre prima della guerra nel *bush*: Sibaso non ritrova suo padre – nella sua vecchia casa ora abita un estraneo – ma ritrova un suo libro dei tempi dell'università, il romanzo epico nazionalista *Feso* (1956) di Solomon Mutswairo. Mutswairo, nato nel 1924, romanziere e poeta sia in lingua shona sia in inglese, ha esercitato con la sua opera una notevole influenza sulla scrittura di Yvonne Vera, tanto per gli argomenti e i temi che tratta quanto per lo stile orale e lirico che adotta nelle sue narrazioni epiche, in particolare in *Feso*, ma anche, e non solo, in *Chaminuka, Prophet of Zimbabwe* (1983). Inizialmente scritto in shona e poi tradotto in inglese da Mutswairo stesso, *Feso* nel 1956 era stato pubblicato con addirittura l'appoggio del governo bianco, o meglio del Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Dapprima considerato un *romance* di sapore locale e pittoresco, ammirato e letto nelle scuole, in seguito, negli anni sessanta, era stato messo al bando come libro pericoloso da Ian Smith, che tentava con ogni mezzo di mantenere vivo il potere bianco. Forse proprio per quello *Feso* era diventato in poco tempo quasi un testo sacro per la lotta nazionalista.

Nelle *Vergini delle rocce*, però, Sibaso vive l'opera di Mutswairo con grande ambiguità, in un certo modo si sente tradito dall'epica nazionalista di *Feso*:

Mi porge un libro. È *Feso* di Solomon Mutsawairo. Lo prendo. Ho letto questo libro. L'ho letto al primo anno di università, e poi ho abbandonato gli studi alla fine di quell'anno. Come può questo libro essere sopravvissuto a tutti i miei viaggi? […] Decido di aprire il libro. […] Sento un'esplosione dentro la testa. […] Conservata tra le pagine c'è una mappa piegata. Sgualcita. […] La mia fuga. Tutti quegli anni passati. Tra la

mappa e la prima pagina del libro trovo un ragno schiacciato appiattito dal tempo. Questo ragno è netto sulla pagina a stampa. Questo ragno è stato intrappolato quando le pagine una volta aperte si sono chiuse improvvisamente. (Vera 2004, 155-159)

Il monologo di Sibaso si estende per intere pagine. Il ragno schiacciato tra i due fogli, ridotto a un profilo senza terza dimensione lo porta a pensare, quasi alla fine del capitolo, che «solo l'Africa ha conosciuto la solitudine schiacciata di un ragno morto» (Vera 2004, 159). Un dettaglio che può sembrare marginale, ma non lo è, è costituito dal fatto che Sibaso non è il nome 'vero' del personaggio, ma un nome assunto durante la lotta, per avere, come avveniva nella realtà, una sorta di anonimato nelle azioni di guerriglia, e in questo caso, come leggiamo, anche nel dopo guerra. Nel romanzo il nome anagrafico completo di Sibaso non è mai dato, neanche quando Sibaso, cercando suo padre, ritorna alla casa cittadina dove abitava prima della guerra di liberazione e interroga il nuovo proprietario. L'anonimato implica solitudine, così come l'anonimato è alleato del male.

Profili graffiati sulla roccia, sottili come l'impronta del ragno essiccato tra le pagine di *Feso*, sono anche le «vergini» che danno il titolo al romanzo. Sibaso le ha viste durante la guerra di liberazione, quando si è rifugiato in una caverna sulle colline di Gulati:

> C'è un sacrario a Gulati, dove ci incontravamo, circa in trenta ogni volta. Era il solo momento in cui stavi tanto vicino alla paura di un altro. Una caverna chiamata Mbelele. Una cavità chiusa, enorme, conosciuta per tutto il territorio di Gulati come il più sacro dei luoghi sacri. (Vera 2004, 131)

Sulle pareti di roccia di Mbelele Sibaso ha trovato rappresentata quella che interpreta come la cerimonia funebre di un re, in onore del quale una fila di vergini attende di essere sacrificata per seguirlo nella morte. Deluso dall'Indipendenza, Sibaso semi-consciamente si identifica con il re ancestrale della sua interpretazione dei graffiti, e, quando si ferma a Kezi per ritornare alle colline, identifica le due sorelle con le vergini sacrificali di Mbelele. Dopo il ritrovamento del libro e del ragno, non vede altra soluzione che fuggire nel *bush*, e rifugiarsi nella morte. Sibaso non desidera la morte come tale, ma come rifugio dalla vita, come ritorno a uno stato prima della vita. In un certo senso vuole ritornare a quello che, durante la guerra di liberazione, era lo stato di attesa di una vita nuova, in un certo modo ritornare alla gestazione della libertà. Sibaso pensa a un solo luogo degno di accoglierlo: il ventre della caverna sacra sulle colline di Gulati, non lontano da Kezi. Il suo cammino verso la caverna è un viaggio a ritroso in ogni senso. Sibaso recede nella animalità sessuale dello stupro; ritorna a uccidere come faceva in guerra, ma ora senza la giustificazione della

guerra; regredisce fino a una richiesta infantile, paradossale e agghiacciante di affettività mentre violenta e uccide; e infine mentre viaggia nell'erba alta verso le colline si ferma a dormire solo nel cratere di una bomba – il cratere, «placenta della guerra» (Vera 2004, 138), è una prima evidente rappresentazione simbolica di un rifiuto dell'esterno, e di una regressione disperata al ventre materno:

> il posto più sicuro dove fare una sosta è il cratere di una bomba, che è già stato visitato dalla morte. I luoghi lisci e il terreno pianeggiante, fertili di vita di insetti e di piante che crescono, sono insicuri, come le rocce che traballano, insicuri. (Vera 2004, 135)

Ma il vero grembo materno dove rifugiarsi in un rituale di ritorno allo stato precedente alla nascita è «una stanza in una roccia», la caverna sacra di Mbelele «dove partoriscono i leopardi» (Vera 2004, 135).

Calcolando in base ai pochi indizi che Yvonne Vera concede, Sibaso deve essere un uomo di età tra i trenta e i trentasei anni, dato che le date del Secondo Chimurenga si possono dilatare fino a abbracciare il periodo 1964-1979. Sappiamo dalla stessa Nonceba che è un uomo «normale», con un aspetto accattivante, vestito dignitosamente: «E' un uomo come tanti altri, ha indosso una camicia azzurra [...]. Pantaloni color kaki. Un abbigliamento che dà sicurezza. Una camicia di cui ti puoi fidare, con bottoni di cui ti puoi fidare» (Vera 2004, 95). Sappiamo che è un uomo che ha studiato, sappiamo che ha combattuto e sperato, e sappiamo che ama e sente la bellezza: Yvonne Vera gli attribuisce, proprio durante la fuga verso Mbelele, un lungo, lirico, appassionato cantico alla bellezza e armonia della natura, dei monti, delle stelle, della luna sulle rocce. Come può Sibaso avere «seminato mine di terra» in tanta bellezza, in luoghi dove «hai la sensazione di essere divino»? (Vera 2004, 129). Come può avere dissacrato, con strumenti di morte e dando la morte, i luoghi di culto per i quali combatte? Come può uccidere, stuprare e mutilare donne innocenti e indifese dopo la fine della guerra di liberazione?

Sibaso non accetta i compromessi e lo afferma due volte con ironia sferzante e con l'immediatezza ellittica dello stile orale. La prima volta nel *récit* del romanzo è posteriore rispetto alla seconda nella *fabula* ricostruita. Lo stupro di Nonceba è già avvenuto quando Sibaso nel suo monologo interiore dice: «l'indipendenza è il compromesso al quale non potevo appartenere. Io sono un uomo che è stato liberato, Sibaso, un uomo che ricorda il male» (Vera 2004, 127); lo stupro non è ancora avvenuto quando dice:

> Ho combattuto sulle colline di Gulati. Sono un uomo che si è "riconciliato". La mia mente è ustionata e perfettamente libera. La mia mente è un fermento. Che cosa è vivere? A un certo punto la realtà smette di coincidere con i nostri desideri. Quando sono nato mia madre era già morta. (Vera 2004, 152)

Yvonne Vera alla York University, in Canada, ha studiato l'opera critica di Bachtin, del quale ha presto incontrato il famoso saggio su Dostoevskij; ha meditato le pagine sul romanzo polifonico, sul dialogo, sulla rappresentatività delle voci, e ha meditato anche sul rapporto della critica di Bachtin con il potere. A suo tempo ha poi letto *I fratelli Karamazov* e *I demoni*, dove oltre a un modello particolare di romanzo polifonico, adatto alle voci dei suoi quattro personaggi e alla sua quinta voce non determinata, ha trovato anche il problema del male. I romanzi di Dostoevskij affrontano il problema del male dalla prospettiva della redenzione, e sono immersi nel cristianesimo, temi che non appartengono a Vera. Gli intrecci in Dostoevskij sono sempre molto complessi e i personaggi sono moltissimi; inoltre, Dostoevskij fa uso del ridicolo, mentre il ridicolo è alieno a Yvonne Vera, salvo in due o tre occasioni circoscritte in *Nehanda* e nei racconti. I personaggi assediati dal male nelle opere di Vera sembrano diversi, perché il contesto è diverso, eppure qualcosa di Stavroghin e Verchovenskij, insieme a qualcosa di Ivan, Mitja e Alësa Karamazov ha contribuito alla formazione della poetica di Yvonne Vera.

   Il personaggio di Sibaso, e la sua voce possono anche avere un inquietante rapporto con l'ufficiale tedesco Franz von Gerlach, protagonista del discusso dramma di Sartre *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, messo in scena nel 1959 e pubblicato nel 1960 (Vittorio De Sica ne ha diretto una versione cinematografica, uscita nel 1962). Franz von Gerlach non ha combattuto una guerra di liberazione, ma di aggressione, è stato un torturatore nazista, colpevole di atrocità. Condannato per crimini di guerra, creduto morto per opera della potente famiglia, dalla fine della guerra (tredici anni) vive volontariamente segregato dal mondo in una stanza della grande dimora paterna vicino alla città di Amburgo. Per Franz, che rifiuta di parlare con il padre, e quindi con il potere costituito, questo è un modo morboso e intellettualizzato di prendere coscienza (o di procrastinare la presa di coscienza?) del male, di espiare, e di accollarsi, come Franz dice alla fine del dramma, la responsabilità del male nel mondo. Entrambi deliranti, Franz e Sibaso credono di pagare con la morte un debito irredimibile, un debito che non si può pagare. In Sibaso vibra, inoltre, un'eco abilmente distorta del giovane Maciek Chelmicki, protagonista del film *Cenere e diamanti* (*Popiól i diament*, 1958) del regista polacco Andrzej Wajda. Maciek, ex-combattente partigiano, dilaniato dalle antinomie del dopoguerra, sente la spinta della vita, vorrebbe la vita e produce, invece, violenza e morte per gli altri e per se stesso. Dei tormenti e della coscienza di Sibaso, Yvonne Vera nelle *Vergini delle rocce* non vuole offrire un'interpretazione intellettualizzata, vuole, invece, configurare il tragico attraverso una rappresentazione fortemente caratterizzata da forme di ipotiposi, e vuole, soprattutto, aprire domande di urgenza categorica.

Cronologia sintetica dello Zimbabwe

1000-1450 d.C. circa - Periodo d'oro del popolo e della cultura shona in larga parte del territorio ora chiamato Zimbabwe. Nel corso dei secoli sono costruiti gli imponenti monumenti megalitici oggi noti come *Great Zimbabwe*.

1500-1690 - Navigatori, conquistatori e commercianti portoghesi introducono il Cristianesimo. Le popolazioni di etnia ndebele hanno, e manterranno a lungo, il sopravvento su quelle di etnia shona.

1888 - Il magnate inglese Cecil Rhodes firma con il re di etnia ndebele Lobengula un accordo che gli garantisce lo sfruttamento delle risorse minerarie del territorio dell'attuale Zimbabwe.

1893 - Dopo una breve e violenta campagna di conquista, tutto il territorio prende da Rhodes il nome di Rhodesia. Stanziamenti di colonizzatori bianchi.

1896-7 - Sollevazione delle popolazioni nere contro la dominazione bianca, *Primo Chimurenga*. Vita e morte di Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, reincarnazione e medium della omonima principessa shona, venerata come spirito ancestrale e protettore del popolo shona.

1897 - Divisione del territorio in Rhodesia del Sud e Rhodesia del Nord.

1922 - I colonizzatori bianchi votano per diventare colonia britannica con governo indipendente.

1923 - La Rhodesia del Sud diventa ufficialmente colonia dell'Inghilterra.

1953-1963 - Le due Rhodesie e il Nyasaland si uniscono nella multirazziale Central African Federation. Economicamente proficua, la Federazione è malvista dalle popolazioni africane autoctone. Si scioglie nel 1963.

1964 - La Rhodesia del Nord diventa Zambia. La Rhodesia del Sud è chiamata semplicemente Rhodesia.

1965 - Ian Smith dichiara unilateralmente l'Indipendenza della Rhodesia. Dichiarazione sancita come illegale dall'Inghilterra.

1966 - Le Nazioni Unite impongono sanzioni alla Rhodesia per l'impostazione fortemente razzista del suo governo.

1970 - La Rhodesia si dichiara unilateralmente Repubblica della Rhodesia, non ottenendo alcun riconoscimento ufficiale nel mondo salvo quello del Sudafrica.

1970-79 - Sollevazioni nere e violente attività di guerriglia, Lotta per l'Indipendenza, *Secondo Chimurenga* – più aspro nelle zone rurali.

1979 - Prime elezioni con partecipazione della popolazione nera. La Rhodesia diventa Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe, eroe della lotta di liberazione, è Primo Ministro.

1980 - Lo Zimabwe è ufficialmente riconosciuto dall'Inghilterra e dal mondo come stato indipendente. Entro pochi mesi schegge dissidenti di ex-combattenti per l'Indipendenza suscitano pesanti guerriglie interne, cui seguono repressioni.

1987 - Robert Mugabe è Presidente dello Zimbabwe – tuttora in carica.

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L'humour est la meilleure arme pour transmettre un message
Entretien avec les bédéistes Mayadaet Maïssa Gargouri

Ilaria Vitali
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En mai 2016, la revue *Alternative Francophone* consacrait son neuvième numéro à la bande dessinée au féminin, pour rebondir sur la polémique explosée lors de la dernière édition du Festival de BD d'Angoulême, accusé d'adopter une attitude sexiste, n'ayant retenu le nom d'aucune femme pour son Grand Prix. S'il est vrai que les auteures de bande dessinée constituent encore un faible pourcentage du marché, il faut reconnaître que leur progression est continuelle (selon les statistiques 7,2% en 2001, 12,4% en 2015). Aujourd'hui, les bédéistes femmes de talent ne manquent pas et continuent d'augmenter. Parmi celles-ci, Mayada et Maïssa Gargouri. D'origine tunisienne, ces deux sœurs, nées dans l'Île-de-France respectivement en 1988 et en 1984, sont entrées tout récemment dans le champ de la bande dessinée à travers la création de *Desperate blédardes*, une série qui raconte la banlieue parisienne sans la stigmatiser. Lancée un peu par jeu sur Facebook en 2009, la série a atteint un large public de lecteurs en très peu de temps. Les gags, construits sur le modèle des *family strips* mais conçus directement pour le web, racontent le quotidien de quatre filles de banlieue issues de l'immigration, aux prises avec la vie quotidienne et ses aléas. Comme on peut l'imaginer, le titre est une référence à la célèbre série nord-américaine *Desperate Housewives*, mais avec le remplacement significatif de 'Housewives' par 'blédardes', terme qui désigne les filles issues de l'immigration maghrébine (du mot *bled*, 'pays' en *darija*). Dès le titre, la volonté des auteures de jouer avec les stéréotypes ressort donc avec force.

Le style cartoonesque, le regard enjoué, mais pas moins perçant, et le langage *pop* constituent quelques-uns des points de force de cette bande dessinée. Mais son intérêt ne s'arrête pas là. S'il est vrai que dans cette *bédénovela* les auteures abordent sous l'angle humoristique de nombreux clichés ou tabous qui ont longtemps pesé sur la représentation littéraire et artistique de la banlieue et des immigrés maghrébins, le but de cette série est beaucoup plus complexe: il s'agit, comme Mayada et Maïssa Gargouri l'affirment dans cet entretien, de faire sauter les stéréotypes qui

imprègnent les imaginaires d'un côté à l'autre de la Méditerranée, sans jamais tomber dans le leurre du regard ethnocentrique. La double appartenance des deux auteures les protège de ce piège. Ce ne sont donc pas seulement les poncifs liés à la communauté maghrébine que les auteurs font court-circuiter, mais aussi une certaine image de l'Occident.

Le projet des sœurs Gargouri surfe sur la nouvelle vague du *webcomic*, dont la figure-clé en France est sans doute Thomas Cadène (*Les Autres gens*, 2010). La nature virtuelle de ces *comic strips*, publiés en ligne, engendre tout naturellement des débats entre les internautes, qui commentent, réagissent et amplifient la discussion. Peut-on parler d'un avenir numérique pour la bande dessinée? C'est peut-être encore trop tôt pour le dire. L'expérience des sœurs Gargouri témoigne en tout cas de la grande fertilité de la création artistique en banlieue, et elle nous dit surtout quelque chose de précieux sur notre culture contemporaine, de plus en plus métissée, de plus en plus transmédiale.

> *Ilaria Vitali*: Parlez nous du commencement: d'où est née l'idée de *Desperate blédardes*?
>
> *Mayada G.*: L'aventure a débuté en 2009. J'ai toujours adoré dessiner et caricaturer mon entourage depuis mon enfance. Je m'amusais à cette époque là, pendant mes cours au lycée à caricaturer mes camarades de cours et mes profs. Puis un jour, j'ai eu l'idée de taquiner ma sœur en dessins, en représentant une de ses journées classique en la mettant en opposition avec la mienne. On pouvait y voir un contraste entre nous deux: la fille studieuse et la fille frivole qui pense aux sorties. J'ai dessiné plusieurs planches. Je les ai scannées. J'ai fait un montage et j'ai ajouté des bruitages, des musiques et un scénario. Et j'ai posté le résultat sur mon compte Facebook. À notre grande surprise, nos amis en commun ont adoré et ont réclamé une suite.
>
> *Maïssa G.*: Nous avons décidé de créer un concept et de l'écrire à deux. Toutes deux fans de la série américaine *Desperate Housewives*, nous avions convenu de produire une parodie avec une touche banlieusarde. Les femmes au foyer élégantes du quartier chic de Wisteria Lane laissaient place à quatre jeunes filles issues d'un milieu social modeste.
>
> *Mayada G.*: Pourquoi 'blédardes'? C'est un clin d'œil à l'origine maghrébine de nos parents et à un petit village dans l'Essonne dans lequel nous avons vécu pendant quatre ans, au cours de notre enfance.

> *I.V.*: S'agit-t-il donc d'une bande dessinée autobiographique?
>
> *Maïssa G.*: Il s'agit d'une bande dessinée semi-autobiographique. Nous avons repris nos personnages. Des proches font également partie du 'casting'. Nous nous inspirons des traits réels de chacun, mais nous

les grossissons. Nous abordons des thèmes que nous n'avons jamais vécus. C'est le cas par exemple des violences conjugales.

I.V.: Pouvez-vous nous parler de la création de votre BD? Comment s'effectue votre travail à quatre mains?

Mayada G.: Je dessine l'intégralité des planches pour garder le même style et nous écrivons les scénarios à deux.

I.V.: Vous êtes originaire de la Tunisie: quel est l'impact de cette empreinte culturelle sur la création de votre bande dessinée?

Maïssa G.: Nous nous servons de notre bande dessinée pour aborder avec beaucoup d'ouverture, mais également un esprit critique, les différences et les similitudes de culture entre l'Occident et le Maghreb. La double culture est un avantage car elle nous permet de ne pas véhiculer des idées ethnocentriques. Finalement, que l'on soit en Europe ou ailleurs, nous retrouvons toujours les mêmes problématiques, mais elles sont abordées différemment. Pour illustrer cette question, nous avons l'exemple des diktats de beauté au sein de la société. En Occident les femmes ont tendance a vouloir s'imposer des heures aux UV, tandis que de l'autre côté de la Méditerranée ou même en Asie, les femmes se tartinent le visage de fond de teint blanc ou sont parfois même amenées à utiliser des produits blanchissants ultra nocifs.

I.V.: Dans *Desperate blédardes* vous mettez en scène une banlieue loin des clichés évoqués par les médias. Peut-on parler d'un projet de réhabilitation de ce qu'on appelle par un euphémisme 'quartiers sensibles'?

Maïssa G.: À travers *Desperate blédardes*, nous espérons transmettre une image différente de celle qui est véhiculée et qui stigmatise pas mal de monde. C'est regrettable mais il arrive encore aujourd'hui qu'à CV égal, des candidats se fassent recaler pour un poste uniquement pour l'adresse indiquée. Alors, s'ils ont un nom à consonance étrangère, c'est le jackpot qui ouvre droit à la discrimination… Et après la discrimination, la frustration et ainsi de suite. C'est une sorte de cercle vicieux. Pour assainir les problèmes des banlieues, à défaut d'avoir favorisé la mixité sociale dans le paysage urbain, il convient de changer cette image. Nous restons confiantes avec le Grand Paris et les nouvelles lois qui favorisent la mixité sociale.

I.V.: Apparemment, *Desperate blédardes* se présente comme une bande dessinée 'légère' et pleine d'humour, la préoccupation première des héroïnes étant de rechercher désespérément l'âme sœur. En réalité, la BD touche souvent des sujets assez graves (préjugés, discrimination, violence domestique…) et dépasse la simple caricature de la

célèbre série américaine. L'humour semble une arme dont vous vous servez pour atteindre d'autres buts.

Mayada G.: L'humour est la meilleure arme pour transmettre un message et faire réfléchir sur certains sujets plus ou moins sensibles. Les dessins mènent souvent à de longs débats entre les internautes.

I.V.: Effectivement la publication de cette BD sur le Web rend possible l'interaction directe avec votre public, notamment à travers les réseaux sociaux. Qui sont vos lecteurs? Dialoguez-vous avec eux? Vous inspirent-ils de nouveaux épisodes de la série?

Maïssa G.: Nous somme suivies par des profils très différents: des hommes, des femmes, des enfants, des ados, des adultes et séniors, avec plus de femmes que d'hommes et une majorité ayant entre 15 et 25 ans. Nous avons eu le plaisir de découvrir des internautes en dehors des frontières, en Afrique, en Asie, mais également en Amérique du Nord et du Sud, et de toutes confessions confondues. Lorsqu'une jeune femme haïtienne ou une canadienne nous écrit pour nous indiquer qu'elle se retrouve à travers les dessins, nous ne pouvons qu'en être satisfaites. Car malgré le 'casting' en majorité oriental (pour compenser l'absence de représentativité dans les médias), nous nous efforçons d'aborder des questions universelles. Lorsque nous étions plus jeunes, nous nous retrouvions à travers les personnages des jumelles Olsen ou même les filles Ingalls. Nous souhaitons que n'importe qui puisse s'identifier à nos personnages.

Mayada G.: Sur les réseaux, après la publication de chaque dessin, les internautes débattent entre eux. Il nous arrive d'interagir également avec eux. Certains nous écrivent également en privé et nous prenons le temps de dialoguer avec eux.

I.V.: Le langage que vous utilisez dans *Desperate blédardes* est celui qu'on parle dans les cités de banlieue: un savoureux mélange d'argot, de verlan, de *darija* entre autres. Or, comme vous l'avez dit, votre BD touche désormais des lecteurs de tous bords. Pensez-vous que cela puisse poser de problèmes de compréhension ou, au contraire, que cela développe une empathie avec vos lecteurs?

Mayada G.: Pour chaque personnage spécifique, on s'efforce d'utiliser le bon langage et également les bons codes. Pour les jeunes, on se renseigne à chaque fois sur les nouvelles expressions qui sont désormais utilisées pour que les jeunes d'aujourd'hui puissent se reconnaître. Lorsque nous utilisons des termes étrangers, nous ajoutons une petite traduction. Et quand un personnage a un accent (comme la maman) nous retranscrivons l'accent. Ça accentue le côté humoristique et ça adoucit le personnage.

I.V.: C'est donc de votre entourage que vous tirez vos inspirations vi-
suelles/verbales? Avez-vous des 'maîtres' artistiques?

Mayada G.: Je puise mon inspiration dans mon imagination, dans mon
entourage, dans l'actualité, dans les lieux que je fréquente.

I.V.: Vos projets artistiques pour l'avenir?

Mayada G.: Nous avons en projet de développer notre bande dessinée
en papier et quelques autres projets en rapport que nous ne voulons
pas encore divulguer, pour garder l'effet de surprise.

Interview with Josip Novakovich

Sara Moschin
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Writer Josip Novakovich was born in 1956 in Daruvar, Croatia. His grandparents had moved from Croatia, by then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to Cleveland, Ohio. His grandfather then returned to what had become Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the First World War. At the age of 16, while he was recovering from an injury, Novakovich read his brother's books in simplified English, enthralled by his new-found capacity of decoding words in a language he had not thought much of before, and perceived a transformation within his personality. Four years later, when his application to study at Vassar College, New York, was accepted, he left his country in order to pursue a career in writing, despite the fact that, at the time, he was studying medicine at the University of Novi Sad in Serbia.

Novakovich has, since then, taught at Nebraska Indian Community College, Bard College, Moorhead State University, Antioch University in Los Angeles, the University of Cincinnati and Pennsylvania State University. He is currently in Montreal, Quebec, teaching at Concordia University. He is the recipient of the Whiting Writer's Award, a Guggenheim fellowship, two fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, an award from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation. He was anthologized in Best American Poetry, Pushcart Prize, and O. Henry Prize Stories. He has published a novel (April Fool's Day), three short story collections, two collections of narrative essays (Apricots from Chernobyl, Plum Brandy: Croatian Journey) and a textbook (Fiction Writer's Workshop).

My interview to Josip Novakovich was conducted face-to-face in Lovran, Croatia, on May 16th, 2016. The interview focused on the subjects of writing in a second language, and present and future contexts for writers using English in the light of the recent rapid spread of English as the world's lingua franca. We began by discussing the editing of the anthology Stories in the Stepmother Tongue (White Pine Press, 2000), a remarkable collection of short stories from authors who write in English as a second language, with each story introduced by a personal statement from the respective writer explaining the reasons behind the choice of writing in English. Stories in the Stepmother Tongue originated from a feature in the journal Mānoa: a Pacific Journal of International Writing (1993), which

was subsequently expanded with professional editor Robert Shapard, and collected short stories in English written by non-native authors.

> *Sara Moschin*: How was *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue* initially conceived?
>
> *Josip Novakovich*: The idea behind the whole project came from me. For the *Mānoa* journal special, Robert Shapard and I combined stories published for the first time and others. He's been an influential editor (at the time, he had coined the term 'flash fiction' with James Thomas and started the whole phenomenon). We put a call on *Poets & Writers* for stories written by non-native English speakers: we got more than 300 and we ended up publishing 10 of them. Then, to fall up we made additional research and so the anthology was a fusion of what we had collected before the addition on *Poets & Writers* and what we were sent afterwards. In the meantime, we realized that there were so many other writers showing up on the scene, and that is how *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue* saw the light. By then, we did have enough stories, so we thought about publishing a series of anthologies, which unfortunately did not happen mostly due to issues relating to publishing houses. However, I must admit that I do not see myself as an editor. In fact, I'm afraid I've forgotten my role as an editor during this interview. It's because I actually prefer writing in a second language, and discussing.

> *S.M.*: Is the profession of teacher and writer clashing with the role of editor?
>
> *J.N.*: You know, in editing you have a finished product on which you can basically make some adjustments. Essentially, I think teaching compared to editing is in a way more aggressive and provocative. When you teach and you're going into the process of writing, often you have something to do with stories starting from scratch. You can suggest this possibility, or that possibility, you can start from the middle, or maybe the introduction.

> *S.M.*: The stories collected in *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue* were selected with editor Robert Shapard. How would you describe the editing process? Did the collaboration with a native speaker originate any debate, especially as regards language-related issues?
>
> *J.N.*: Yes, our main disagreement was over grammar (word order, articles, etc). He worked as a professional editor in addition to being an English professor, and he was tempted to edit the stories according to the Chicago Manual of Style. I insisted that even skipping articles, as for example the Russians speaking in English do, added something to the flavour, and that each person evolved his or her own dialect

fusing the native language with English. I think that this is the most delightful thing, the intonation, the accents – which you can't see but can feel on the page through diction, word order, etc. He had a steady address and reputation, so it was good to have him advertise to solicit the manuscripts etc. First, we did a special edition of Mānoa Magazine and then expanded it into the anthology. We combined stories published for the first time and others. In the magazine, we published the first story by Edwige Danticat, for example, and by Samrat Upadhay.

S.M.: In the anthology there are writers who came to the States during their childhood, others as teenagers, others (including you, if I may) in their twenties. You stated that the stories were chosen out of their 'quality'. Any additional reason?

J.N.: Well, of course, we looked for diversity as well. For example, stories by Indian authors are very debatable because for many people from there English is the strongest language. Hindi is in most cases spoken at home, until the age of school when English has a more prominent role. However, [English] does come early enough and it becomes the superior language. It was my idea that there writers had to be represented in the anthology. And then there are pure immigrants such as Mikhail Iossel. For those Americans who do not understand my connection with the guilt complex, I usually say, "listen, I come from a country which got rid of serfdom in 1848 (most of the area that eventually became Yugoslavia, at least) and was colonized from North, West, East and South". I have more in common with black people than with white people in that sense. Croatians don't want to talk about it out of pride, still I am not hiding it. In a way, it gives me a certain critical distance from the colonialist guilt.

S.M.: The stories that were chosen for this anthology are connected through themes and two tendencies are easily noticeable. One is oriented to a linguistic form of seeking, or a quest if you like, for something to belong to, a context to fit within. The other gives the priority to escaping from a place, with English as the most suitable alternative to the native language. Are the two tendencies in complete opposition, or maybe could one of them be consequential, or even intertwined, to the other? And does this dualism influence the quality of writing on purpose?

J.N.: First of all, I tend to think that politics-oriented intents, which means writing with a political mission, usually make the quality of the writing worse. One tends to lose the sense of irony. But if there is a genuine interest towards the language itself, the outcome is more subtle, more playful, and generally better as a consequence. Many people chose English before going to the United States as a way to

free themselves; then, after going to the States, they look for a community to which they can belong, also on a linguistic level. There is, for instance, the case of Hispanic communities who still opt for Spanish, other choose to write in English, and also writers end up including the Barrio language in an American English period.

S.M.: Speaking of subjectivity, an aspect which is in common for most of the entries in *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue* is the strong presence of family members. Even though their influence on the main character takes various forms and attitudes, their relevancy to the plot is undeniable. Why?

J.N.: If you come from an older, more established culture, and then you go to the New World where families conventionally have two or three members, you tend to stay close to your relatives, also in virtue of the fact that economy is not flexible. That's part of why some immigrants do have a blueprint of their families and tend to tell family tales. Everybody in this field kind of looks back to some forms of tribal customs. And you learn stories from your family.As for folklore and storytellers in general, when you look back to your culture, you would look for some kind of original strength, since you cannot really compete with, or rely on, an American experience of childhood – you did not have one. So when I began to write, I remember thinking "wait a minute. I come from the oral tradition of the Balkans" and I went to Yugoslavia to find some storytellers and use their techniques. Up until I realized it's not really about the technique, it's about themes – in my case, war. I needed a war. And then in the 1990's a war came. When you think about it, war is deeply rooted even into Greek classics – the *Iliad*, to name one. The mythology is strong. I got to this storyteller in Belgrade and he told me the following story: "look at that barn, it's where my father and grandfather were shot by the Germans. When I was seven, the Germans came, I remember trembling and shivering in bed. I hid under the blanket. A German came in my room, put a hand on my forehead, went away and came back with a glass of water and two white pills. I remember it was extremely bitter, and thought I would die. And then they went away" he was shocked. Later he reconstructed the whole episode: he was probably ill and got treated with aspirin by a military doctor. The episode itself is extraordinary and complete. There's the element of surprise, the villain who turns out to be the good healer. I thought, "well, only war can give you a story like that". Back to family traditions, I'm also thinking of *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston. She's a good example of writing in English as a second language; even though she grew up in the States, she was raised in a Chinese-speaking family and wrote about her grandparents who worked on building railways. She really found

sources of storytelling within her relatives. Perhaps even more than people who do not belong to immigrant families. This phenomenon, the representation of immigrants, now is strong in Canada and the States. Some use it to their advantage, not always in a positive light.

S.M.: Considering globalization, English as the lingua franca and the Expanding Circle constantly gaining new members, could you picture the act of writing literature in English obtaining international recognition even in the case of a writer who never leaves his or her country of birth?

J.N.: I think that if you never experience life in an English speaking country you end up having way too many handicaps. You need the life, the speed of a living language which would inevitably be missing. I mean, theoretically it's possible, but vibrant pieces of writing are unlikely to be put together under such circumstances. I did [write in English] in medical school, when I was already into moving to an English speaking country. With the subjects I did not find challenging, I would take notes in English. Then, when I moved to the United States, for a while I considered writing in Croatian, but the language back in Croatia was already changing due to political reasons and I did not find it interesting; and besides that, my typewriter did not have all the letters from Gaj's Latin Alphabet. In English it's all more automatic, I do not need to look at the keyboard while typing. Speaking of the editions of my books on the Croatian scene, the current situation is a little frustrating for me, too. I can follow the translations of my books and they seem so different to me from what I write, they never sound good, that is not my rhythm. Maybe out of the fact that I've been away for so long and the language changed in the meantime. Anyway there are many Englishes, you know. You have the Hindi English, the Russian English which the tendency of omitting articles. Each country has its own peculiarities coming into English, but even more than that, there are as many Englishes as there are *people*. With immigrants you immediately assume that, out of the fact that they are immigrants, but you know, even in Croatian I had my own way.

S.M.: Should we never attempt to consider categories then, and just consider writers individually?

J.N.: In a way, sure, but beyond that, authors writing in English as a non-native language can still be grouped.

S.M.: Writer Shirley Geok-lin Lim mentions the influence that British literary classics had on her formation. Since the writers whose stories are featured in the anthology are mostly active in the United States,

could reading British literature be seen as an additional obstacle for a foreigner writing in American English?

J.N.: I sense an ambivalence in being critical of the Colonialist Empire and that aspect of the language, and at the same time embracing its influence enthusiastically. That may co-exist. Well, in my case I read most classics in translation. I read Tolstoj, Balzac and Flaubert in English, which is perhaps the reason why my stories sometimes sound as translations. And then Beckett, and... It might be shocking in Europe, but British literature in the States it's just a fragment in the education system, considering the impact that writers such as Hemingway had on American English. There's just so much American literature. And in any case, I think American English has been especially invigorated by languages spoken by immigrants. British English was less opened to import words from immigrants who were ghettoised, or despised, and had to ascend to a level of 'proper English'. In the States, Polish, Spanish, even Yiddish came in. In general, I guess every writer is affected in a different way and it is not always easy to determine what they read just from their books. Coming from Croatian, I couldn't help but notice that recently there was a revision of my native language through American and French minimalism, especially in efficiency and clarity. Many people write short sentences, and that's something new, which is maybe a consequence of cultural inferiority complex. Once I was in the States, for me it was a conversion experience. I really had to express myself simply and give up long, convoluted sentences with lots of dependent clauses. Like, "What do you mean with what you write?" "I have no idea, I am figuring out what I mean" "And who has the patience for that?". Anyway, you could still write long sentences in English, too. I'm thinking of Dickens now: as long as one does it well, it' clear. It's enjoyable to read Dickens because of his acrobatic approach.

S.M.: More than fifteen years have passed since *Stories in the Stepmother Tongue* was published. In your opinion, has anything changed in the perception the worldwide literary community has of non-native writers who adopt English for their profession?

J.N.: Oh, I am afraid, more than 20 years have passed now, considering that the anthology is in a way a consequence to the *Mānoa* feature which was published in 1993. In the meanwhile, a lot has changed. Ha Jin for example has since then won several awards in the U.S. There have been many anthologies of non-native speakers. Sandra Cisneros and other hispanic writers have become superstars, at least in the academic world. And moreover, this immigrant style of literature in the adopted tongue has become a worldwide phenomenon even for other languages – so for example, in Germany, now there's a prize for

the best novel of the year written in German as a second language. And Germans, who used to be almost a hermetic literary culture, where it was unimaginable that a non-native would dare to use the soulful language, well, even they now adore writers who have immigrated, and enjoy the flavours of different tongues in German, just as they enjoy the flavours of different ethnic cuisines in their otherwise horribly bland cuisine. Nearly every language of a major country right now is being injected with the vigour of foreign tongues.

S.M.: Considering the increasing influence of English-ruled social networks and, perhaps more importantly, the rise of educational systems teaching in English to students from an early stage of their lives in countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, would it be possible to foresee a growing number of non-native English writers in the next decade?

J.N.: At the moment, about 14 percent of American population is foreign born, and 21 percent of Canadian population is foreign born. More and more foreigners choose to keep writing in their native tongues especially if they come from the major ones, such as Spanish and Arabic, but many choose to write in the language in which they live, and if they live in English, they write in English. In Quebec, some write in French, and I think the French there enjoys a certain vitality of the influx of foreign voices. In the Middle-Ages, the lingua franca was Latin, and theologians, hardly any of whom grew up with Latin, all wrote in Latin as the second tongue. I do foresee that more and more people will write in English. So much communication takes place in English that people who don't live in anglophone societies naturally gravitate towards English.

Josip Novakovich's textbook Fiction Writer's Workshop is available in Italian: *Esercizi di Scrittura Narrativa. Transl. by Stefania Rossi*. Roma: Dino Audino Editore, 2008.

Teju Cole, *Punto d'Ombra*

Francesca Giommi
(Università degli Studi di Padova, Italia)

Teju Cole is a writer, art historian, and photographer. He is the Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College and photography critic of *The New York Times Magazine.* He was born in the US in 1975 to Nigerian parents, and raised in Nigeria. He currently lives in Brooklyn. He is the author of two books, a novella, *Every Day is for the Thief*, named book of the year by *The New York Times*, *The Globe* and *Mail*, NPR (National Public Radio), and *The Telegraph*, and a novel, *Open City*, which also featured on numerous book-of-the-year lists, and won the PEN/Hemingway Award, the New York City Book Award for Fiction, the Rosenthal Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Internationaler Literaturpreis. Teju Cole has contributed to *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, *Brick*, and several other magazines. His forthcoming Known and Strange Things, is a collection of essays on literature, art, travel, and politics.

His photography has been exhibited in India, Iceland, and the US, published in a number of journals, and was the subject of a solo exhibition in Milan in the spring of 2016 with the title of *Punto d'Ombra*.[1] The catalogue was recently published by Contrasto. The English edition, *Blind Spot*, will be published by Random House in April 2017. We asked him a few questions on the occasion of a reading held by the author during the Festival delle Letterature in June 2016, soon after the publication of this innovative collection of images and texts.

> *F.G.*: *Punto d'ombra* is your new book that mixes literature and photography. Is your model a writer like Sebald? What is the writing process of telling a story through images and words?
>
> *T.C.*: I don't think of Sebald so much as a model for this work. I'm closer to documentary filmmakers who combine images with memoir and philosophical speculation, such as Chris Marker, who made *Sans Soleil* and *La Jetée*. I also really enjoy Louis Malle's humane and personal approach to documentary. The process is to think of the project

1 Cole, Teju (2016). *Punto d'ombra*. Trad. di Gioia Guerzoni. Milano: Contrasto. Trad. di: *Blind Spot* (c.s.).

as an 'open work', in the sense that I gather many things in the course of my life and travels, and then later figure out how they might relate to each other. I might be in Indonesia and have a certain thought, and when I develop my film from Indonesia, I might find that this thought – which I deepen and refine by writing it down – connects with one of the photographs. Or I might develop the film, and find a photograph that tells me something I didn't know, leading to words I had not preconceived. It's always an organic process. I can't plan it all ahead of time, nor would I wish to. And also, I like Italo Calvino's idea of 'continuous cities', as described in *Invisible Cities*. He suggests that there is actually just one big, continuous city that does not begin or end: 'only the name of the airport changes'. What is then interesting is to find, in that continuity, the less-obvious differences of texture: the signs, the markings, the assemblages, the things hiding in plain sight in each cityscape or landscape.

F.G.: In what way does your writing affect your activity as a photographer and vice versa? Which came or comes first now?

T.C.: They arrived in my life almost simultaneously, about a dozen years ago. I found the voice I wanted to use in my writings at the same time I began to use a camera for more than just family shots. And they have developed together, so that *Open City* is haunted by photographs (though it contains none) and all my photographs look as though they had an articulable thought, a thought that could be written down, hidden inside them.

F.G.: In *Open City*, and elsewhere, your novel(s) seem(s) to defy or at least to challenge and redefine the conventional structure of storytelling. Is it intentional and to what extent? Do you have any particular model for this?

T.C.: Not really. I mean, I was influenced by James Joyce's *Dubliners* in the language, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* in the way thoughts move freely. But, for the most part, I just wanted to tell this story of one man's interior experience in the way it had to be told. I think the work is a little experimental, but not at all as experimental as works like *Ulysses* or *A Man Without Qualities*. The modernist project kind of stalled, and most novels of our time are extremely conventional. Only by those standards is *Open City* innovative.

F.G.: Your narrator is an 'unreliable narrator'. Is it a limit of consciousness or does it allow him (and you) a greater freedom of individual and artistic expression?

T.C.: I wanted to make a work that was close to life, where we remember things imperfectly and are not always our best selves. I wanted the possibility of disappointment to be part of the work.

F.G.: In *Every Day is for the Thief* an unnamed hero returns to his native Lagos after many years in America. Why is he unnamed? Is that you or an allegory of the contemporary migrant? Or are you trying to buy as much freedom and space as possible by evading categorisation?

T.C.: Precisely. Some of it is me, much of it is not. Freedom is all that matters. When you are reading, I want you to forget about the technique and just be absorbed in the flow of the thoughts and observations, so that it really does feel like a visit to Lagos.

F.G.: Which are your influences, literary and non-literary?

T.C.: Michael Ondaatje, Anne Carson, Johannes Brahms, John Coltrane, Luigi Ghirri, Lee Friedlander, Federico Fellini, John Berger, Michel Serres. My grandmother.

F.G.: How did your life change after the publication of *Open City* and then after *Every Day is for The Thief*?

T.C.: *Open City* gave me the tremendous privilege of doing what I enjoy for a living. It told me it's OK to go your own way, and be creative, and be a bit difficult. *Every Day is for the Thief* doubled that advantage. Without the reception those books had, I might not have had the courage to try something as experimental as *Punto d'Ombra.*

Recensioni | Reviews | Comptes rendus

Una lezione di 'Digital Humanities'
Teju Cole e Amitava Kumar

Carmen Concilio
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Sono sempre più numerose le sperimentazioni collaborative tra artisti che si esprimono e prendono forma sul web: si tratta di esercizi in Digital Humanities, web-art, o web-letteratura; non letteratura digitale *tout court*, bensì un nuovo connubio tra letteratura e mondo digitale. Ciò che più conta in questo tipo di progetti è la relazione che si instaura tra media, linguaggi, modalità di stampa e lettura che interagiscono e dialogano in modo creativo e originale.

In anni recenti si è instaurato e consolidato un proficuo dialogo in particolare tra fotografia e letteratura, immagine e parola. Un esperimento interessante è il discorso multimediale, ma anche multivocale e multifocale, che Amitava Kumar elabora a partire dalle fotografie dell'amico, fotografo-romanziere, Teju Cole, e dalle suggestioni letterarie che esse suscitano nel lettore-critico-scrittore.

Il progetto in questione s'intitola «Chi ha l'indirizzo?»[1] (2013) con testi di Kumar, indiano, e foto di Teju Cole, nigeriano-newyorkese, ed è un capitolo-web pubblicato on-line dalla rivista *Guernica. A Magazine of Art and Politics*. Narrazioni vi s'intersecano: la narrazione fotografica di Cole foto-autore, la narrazione di Kumar fruitore privilegiato della galleria fotografica, le narrazioni che Kumar seleziona e 'lascia parlare' in quanto fonti d'ispirazione o emanazioni delle fotografie stesse. Il sottotitolo dell'opera esplicita che si tratta di 'un progetto exfrastico', un commento alle fotografie non necessariamente didascalico, che s'interroga su come le coppie di fotografie di Teju Cole intercettino lavori di intellettuali che spaziano da Sontag a Singh.

Le foto, immagini sia a colori sia in bianco e nero, alternano, confrontano e giustappongono località lontane tra loro, parti del mondo talvolta apparentemente incompatibili (New York e Roma) e talvolta solo in apparenza contigue (Jaipur e Kathmandu). I titoli delle fotografie rimandano a luoghi precisi, geografie, città grandi o piccole, talvolta frontiere. Le coppie di

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1   Kumar, Amitava; Cole, Teju (2013). «Who's Got the Address?». URL `https://www.guernicamag.com/art/who%C2%ADs-got-the-address/` (2013-03-15). Guernica. A Magazine of Art & Politics.

fotografie giustapposte ispirano ad Amitava Kumar citazioni e commenti letterari, creando così doppie esposizioni e sovrimpressioni imagiste-letterarie. Non si tratta tanto di contaminazioni di- o tra- linguaggi, bensì di discorsi paralleli, ben distinti, eppure sovrapposti e sovrimposti.

La prima coppia di fotografie, «Roma-New York», alterna una foto a colori ad un'altra in bianco e nero. La prima ritrae la scalinata di Trinità dei Monti da un punto di vista aereo che esalta e dispiega una prospettiva insolita che quasi solleva plasticamente la bianca scalinata a mo' di fisarmonica. All'opposto, la seconda foto ritrae una scala a chiocciola di vetro trasparente, leggermente azzurrata, ripresa dal basso, per cui si vedono le suole delle scarpe di coloro che scendono o salgono. In entrambe le foto prevalgono figure in abiti scuri. Le due foto, grazie al titolo, mettono in primo piano, al centro, due capitali metropolitane, l'una antichissima, l'altra moderna, ma entrambe incise da architetture audaci, ingegnose e uniche al mondo, che le caratterizzano, le stigmatizzano e le rendono riconoscibili. Quelle scale sono segni-significanti: sfide architettoniche e temporali. La prima foto si dispiega in orizzontale con una visione dall'alto verso il basso: la scalinata scende verso sinistra e i viandanti scendono; la seconda si sviluppa in verticale con sguardo dal basso e produce un movimento curvilineo lungo il quale i passanti scendono verso destra e salgono verso sinistra.

Kumar, nostra guida tra le immagini, ci informa che il titolo della mostra è tratto da un poema di Tomas Tranströmer, poeta svedese, premio Nobel per la letteratura 2011, «La congregazione dispersa», di cui riproduce i versi più rilevanti: «Nicodemus il sonnambulo s'incammina | verso l'indirizzo. Chi ha l'indirizzo? | Non so. Ma è lì che andiamo».

La congregazione dispersa potrebbe essere l'umanità in genere, singoli individui che salgono e scendono le scale delle vie del mondo e non sanno esattamente dove andare, pur consapevoli di avere un indirizzo preciso da raggiungere. Sonnambulismo e smarrimento caratterizzano il viaggiatore, neo-*flâneur*, e un dialogo degno del teatro dell'assurdo caratterizza la sua comunicazione. «Maestro della solitudine»[2] è il poeta secondo Cole e i suoi poemi «si librano al limitare dell'indicibile». La sua poetica è chiara e minimale come le fotografie di Teju Cole. Un altro verso viene in soccorso a Kumar per definire l'estetica poetica tanto del poeta quanto del fotografo: «raggiungo le tracce di zoccoli di cervo nella neve. Linguaggio, ma non parole».

Per l'appunto le scale sono linguaggio scenico, segni artistici, significanti architettonico-urbanistici, parlano il linguaggio della *langue*. La *parole* l'aggiungiamo noi: staticità e moto, discesa e salita, bianco e nero, solitudine individuale e mancanza di comunicazione, anonimità dei soggetti, tutti

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2 Tutte le traduzioni del saggio di T. Cole e A. Kumar, dalle pagine del sito, sono mie.

uguali, quasi seriali. Il messaggio e il significato stanno nel segno che a Roma o New York, poco importa, le scene sono assolutamente intercambiabili, e i viandanti assolutamente uguali. Certo, ha ragione Kumar, «le foto sono perforate da luminosità e oscurità, silenzio e parola, ma trattengono un mistero, quella notte oscura in cui il lettore rigira tra le dita quella loro traslucida luminescenza».

Lagos-New York. La coppia successiva di fotografie apre un abisso geografico. Le due foto in apparenza non hanno nulla in comune. Di Lagos si vede una prospettiva disordinata ma armonica di case, sovrastate da un intrico di cavi dell'elettricità. Su tutto prevale una monocromia sul giallo pallido in cui due figure di uomini vestiti di nero si dirigono verso il centro dell'ampia strada. La seconda foto ritrae un parco pesantemente innevato e vuoto in cui una camminatrice con racchette occupa il centro mentre a margine s'intravvede una figura più piccola sempre in nero, esattamente come nella foto precedente. Di nuovo, le due foto sono diversissime e uguali. Le due figure nere in uno spazio per lo più vuoto sono isolate e non in relazione tra loro. Se il messaggio prevalente è l'individualismo, l'isolamento e l'incomunicabilità di chi abita e vive le città, allora le foto sono uguali. Nella foto newyorkese però nel parco deserto le due figure sono donne sole, di cui una atletica, vestita da sciatrice e nell'atto di svolgere esercizio di trekking. Nella Lagos di Cole le due figure in strada sono uomini.

Kumar commenta, ricordando Roland Barthes e la sua famosa foto del Nicaragua dove soldati e suore formano un contrappunto che 'punge' l'occhio. Cole vuole evitare la troppo facile retorica che oppone il terzo mondo al primo mondo. Le due foto si parlano per i gesti che mostrano, per i colori che ritornano, le foto s'incontrano, ma senza necessariamente dover esprimere un messaggio politico. Kumar non sottolinea troppo neppure la differenza di genere dei soggetti immortalati. Si appella, invece, a quell'allergia che Naipaul manifestava per l'ennesima mostra fotografica sulle proteste e malvessazioni in Sudafrica, ma anche alla sua ammirazione per Raghubir Singh, per il suo 'pittorialismo', privo di 'commento'. Come a dire che prevale uno sguardo estetico, pittorico, figurale, coloristico, materiale, di nuovo: linguaggio, non parole.

La parabola critica da Sontag a Singh è la parola significativa di Kumar, il quale ha il pregio e il privilegio, da intellettuale indiano-newyorkese, critico-lettore-scrittore, di attingere ad una 'storia della fotografia' che non sia solo occidentale o del primo mondo, ma che cerca modelli e voci critiche anche nel mondo postcoloniale, scegliendo il maestro indiano della fotografia, Singh, come uno dei modelli di Cole e V.S. Naipaul, scrittore indiano-caraibico di Trinidad, come commentatore.

Sasabe–Margao. In questa terza sequenza, la prima foto ritrae il muro che segna il confine tra Messico e USA, dove alcune croci provvisorie e precarie ricordano donne morte mentre tentavano di attraversare il deserto.

La seconda foto è una notturna di una località in India con autobus, moto e viandanti illuminati da una forte luce gialla; anche qui spicca una croce bianca, segno che ricorda al foto-autore il lutto di una zia di sua moglie rimasta vedova ancora giovane.

Qui Kumar ci accompagna tra citazioni di Sontag sull'impossibilità «di comparare e gemellare il dolore di due diverse realtà», e tra i legami di parentela che portano Cole in India. La geografia non è neutrale ma si fa psicosomatica, psico-geografia. L'empatia del foto-autore prima e del lettore poi è ciò che lega queste due immagini apparentemente incommensurabili.

Ancora un riverbero New York-Roma. La prima foto in bianco e nero mostra un attraversamento pedonale a zebra, viandanti in nero ripresi senza testa, le ombre scure delle loro gambe si ramificano sull'asfalto. La foto di Roma, a colori, riprende uno specchietto retrovisore in primo piano in cui si stagliano, in orizzontale però, neri alberi dagli intricati rami che incrociano a perpendicolo le gambe di una viandante. Nuovamente, poco importa che si tratti di Roma o New York, gli attraversamenti e le diramazioni possibili, anche le riflessioni del fotografo nell'istante in cui scatta, per diletto, per sbaglio, per scommessa, per scelta prospettica e nell'istante in cui pareggia le foto, le sceglie, le giustappone, le mette in mostra. Quella di Teju Cole è una poetica di traiettorie, intrecci, incroci e intersezioni che finiscono per trasformarsi in incontri, una poetica di 'patterns' come scrive Kumar. In chiaro-scuro, silhouette o filigrana.

Non sono immagini pedagogiche, giustapposte per insegnare, anche se l'insegnamento c'è: Roma è come New York. Per dimostrarlo Kumar scomoda John Berger, uno degli scrittori più amati dagli artisti postmoderni, ed evoca la giustapposizione della foto di Che Guevara, cadavere, con accanto il colonnello che punta il dito sulla ferita al petto, con il dipinto di Rembrandt *La lezione di anatomia* e con il quadro di Mantegna *Il Cristo morto*.

Jersey City-Cabo Frio: foto di viaggio richiamano in Kumar un'associazione con la poesia di Elizabeth Bishop sul viaggiare in Brasile. Quella di Kumar è una lunga, lenta e frammentata lezione di letteratura che nasce dalla germinazione di nuove significazioni grazie all'incontro, 'gemellaggio', 'gemmazione' tra letteratura, arti figurative, fotografia e storia culturale.

Delhi-Pittsburgh è una coppia di foto che hanno poco in comune. Nella prima uno specchietto retrovisore in un rikshaw mostra il volto sfocato e scentrato del giovane autista, la seconda è la foto di un uomo e di suo figlio in un bar. Il silenzio è ciò che accomuna queste foto, dice Kumar, come un silenzio da sordo-muti. Il riferimento è al romanzo di Cole, *Open City*, molto apprezzato a livello internazionale. Tuttavia, ciò che s'intravvede e che diviene più chiaro nel seguito del commento di Kumar è la poetica dello specchio che Teju Cole riprenderà in altre sue fotografie. Non solo le foto sono pareggiate, giustapposte a due a due, a coppie, ma spesso le figure

che vi si trovano ritratte sono figure allo specchio. Una poetica, questa che Cole condivide con il grande fotografo indiano Raghubir Singh, ma che ricorda a Kumar anche l'opera fotografica di Gilles Peress, fotografo della Magnum. La fotografia può rispecchiarsi o gemellarsi nella letteratura, lo dimostra Kumar con le sue fitte trame (*patterns*, più che genealogie) di riferimenti ad autori, artisti, critici di tutto il mondo, chiamati a dialogare con Teju Cole (Jacques Derrida, Alce Oswald, Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, Don De Lillo, Arundhati Roy, Sebald, tra gli altri), con la sua mostra fotografica esibita a Goa, e poi all'Ithaca College, NY nel 2013. Ma la letteratura, come la fotografia, è specchio della realtà, raramente evasione da essa, ce lo ricordava Teju Cole, quando in *Open City* spostava il discorso dalla *flânerie* newyorkese dell'apatico protagonista, Julius, impegnandolo, poi, in un serrato dibattito sul risentimento islamico, centrato in Belgio, a Bruxelles, nel 2011.

Il cassiere marocchino del punto internet che leggeva il saggio sulla Storia di Walter Benjamin in inglese non apprezza Tahar Ben Jelloun perché secondo lui mitizza la realtà reale e non parla della vita vera della gente normale. Questo è il pretesto per intavolare una serrata discussione su letteratura, cultura e discriminazione razziale nel cuore dell'Europa che mette il protagonista con le spalle al muro e la questione islamica in Europa al centro nevralgico del romanzo. L'arte non è quasi mai riflesso, ma – quasi sempre – è (specchio della) realtà.

Kumar invita Teju Cole a reinterpretare *The Americans* di Robert Frank, per mettere in bianco e nero, luce e ombra, come sono cambiati gli americani. Il volume fotografico «Punto d'ombra» (2016), pubblicato nella collana *In Parole*, di Contrasto, in Italia, in concomitanza con la mostra che ospita le foto di Teju Cole a Milano, è forse il punto di partenza per progetti più ambiziosi.

Sanchez, M.G. (2015). *Jonathan Gallardo*.
Huntingdon: Rock Scorpion Books, pp. 334

Esterino Adami
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Jonathan Gallardo is the third novel in M.G. Sanchez' literary production and, as the title easily suggests, it is a coming-of-age story, a *Bildungsroman* centred on a Gibraltarian protagonist going through a variety of experiences, including the irruption and the haunt of the paranormal. However, the author himself, in a personal communication we had some months ago, seems to offer another possible interpretive key to this and the rest of his long fiction by speaking about a speculation on and an exploration of the idea of movement, both physical and emotional, between spaces, times and dimensions. In this light, in fact, *The Escape Artist* (2013) concerns a kind of shifting between the UK and the Rock; *Solitude House* (2015) envisages a pendulum-like movement between Gibraltar and mainland Spain, whilst *Jonathan Gallardo* detects a sense of wandering within and across the colony, from the upper-class district around Main Street to the working areas perched on the Rock, as well as the human mind, perception and understanding.

Constructed as a biographical account of a young Gibraltarian man, the narrative makes use of the present tense to provide vividness and realistic effects, although some Dickensian echoes linger within the textual interstices: "his name is Jonathan Gallardo and he is an orphan. He is about six foot one, gaunt-faced but with big muscular hands, flat-stomached but with a naturally strong jawline, the type that boxing fans refer to as a natural cruiserweight" (1). But another achievement of the present-tense articulation of the story lies in the implied sense of actuality and inevitability that it strives to convey, almost turning a fictional story into a kind of objective chronicle, with reference to historical facts too: "time passes. The border has now been open for almost three years" (147).

The novel essentially follows a miserable, introspective character from his birth in the 1970s to the present, in his attempts to cope with a range of difficult experiences: the initial years at the Bishop Audley Home for Orphaned Boys, the time spent and the bullying at Gibraltar Technical College, the menial job as a street cleaner for the Public Works Department, and a poor social life. However, a curious, uncanny episode marks Jonathan's existence and throws him into a zone of liminality: during his stay

at the catholic orphanage, he "begins to hear a ringing buzz in his ears" (23), firstly near a statute of Mary and then, as he grows older, in various parts of the colony. Initially it is a kind of low hum, but then it becomes very annoying, overwhelming, and unbearable, and no doctor seems to find a cure for such a pain, which eventually worsens and even acquires a new modulation: a faint, distant voice, an echo of someone speaking in Spanish. Jonathan is at the edge of madness as he understands that the voices and messages that he hears come from the past and they ghostly portray a seedy context that does not exist any longer. To tackle his curse, he even contacts Mama Maria, "the best tarot card reader and *spiritista* on the Rock" (90), who however does not seem to be able to help him. When his uncontrolled fits threat to destroy his entire life, the boy looks for some relief from the psychiatric unit of King George V Hospital: thanks to the treatment and drugs he receives, he is now feeling better, but life will turn out to be even more complicated, with several other ramifications of the plot. Incidentally, the use of antidepressants and anxyolitic medications is not a new element in Sanchez's fiction (e.g. in his short stories) and it may allude to an attempt to sedate the inner chaotic thought and consciousness of a colonial territory that tries to come to terms with its instability, disorder and identity. In other words, madness provocatively surfaces as a metaphor for the condition of (post)coloniality in the contemporary epoch.

In my opinion, at least two ways can be proposed to approach this novel considering that on the one hand, it takes up the form of a dark fairy tale, with many elements borrowed from the gothic tradition or from a contemporary drama, whilst on the other it serves as an alternative canvas for the representation of the present and past histories of Gibraltar, thus unearthing hidden voices, anecdotes, and heritage. There are also other interesting stylistic characteristics in the book, in particular from a narrative perspective, such as the overabundance of sensory verbs like 'hear, see, seem' that are used to stage Jonathan's emotional maelstrom or the predominance of narration rather than speech to convey the idea of inner turmoil through an external focalisation. The playful but functional mechanism of code switching between English and Spanish too is notable and anchors the story to a specific location and context: "they always start off in English, but, this being Gibraltar, after a few minutes official policy is forgotten and Spanish rapidly becomes the main language of communication" (19).

Let me now return to the two interpretive keys mentioned above. The fantastic, eerie aura of the novel is mainly represented by the cacophony of voices that buzz inside Jonathan's head and that progressively become audible "in all types of places: tunnels, down alleyways, halfway up staircases, outside shops, inside offices, even in public toilet" (83). Yet it also emerges in other apparently superficial details: first of all, the evocative places that dot Jonathan's life. About the old orphanage for example, we

read that it "was originally built as a lazaretto for sick troops" (4) and with its heavy religious atmosphere, it still communicates a feeling of uneasiness, riving the decadent and corrupt Mediterranean atmosphere suggested by a certain gothic imagination. Other touches of mystery derive from the clairvoyant, the dreams and nightmares that continuously upset the protagonist and the looming reverberation of death and casualties. However, the novel – and this probably is its real force – also permits to examine the complex and multifarious condition of Gibraltar, and its many questions such as the necessarily double relationships with the UK and Spain, the somewhat threatening presence of the border, the sense of displacement that takes its toll on the population, and the blurred identity of a colony that seems not to be able to find its place in history, especially now as we head towards the uncertain Brexit age. In this light, the manifestation of the supernatural is instrumental in exploring discourses of language, power and society, acknowledging the numerous components that left a sign in Gibraltar, such as the Genoese and Maltese communities, the British military use of the Rock, but also the many forms of discrimination, racism and prejudice against the Gibraltarians themselves, often depicted as a crowd of ignorant, illiterate and 'inferior' subjects. To corroborate this journey through memory, the narration juxtaposes present and past, whereas the protagonist develops an interest in historical research and often consults documents and materials available from the library. In discovering events from the past, he also understands other aspects of his Gibraltar (for example, how the inheritance of the past is mirrored in the various place-names of his world), and to some extent of his own sense of the self: "what bothers him above everything else is how many of the demons of that long-gone colonial past are still encroaching their way into the present" (146). It is not easy to delineate the experience of those countries that have gone through or somehow are still affected by the condition of colonialism, but Sanchez offers a critical reflection on the theme by considering the complexities of a micro-territory that symbolically and geographically links and divides nations, seas, visions and populations.

Bhagat, Chetan (2015). *Making India Awesome*. New Delhi: Rupa, pp. 177

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For the western readership, the name of Chetan Bhagat is typically associated with the new voice of Indian fiction, including examples of 'call centre fiction' (*One Night @ the Call Center*, 2005) and coming-of-age literature (*Five Point Someone*, 2004), but in reality his swift and provocative prose works well for non fiction too. His new book, *Making India Awesome*, features short essays and columns previously published in newspapers and elsewhere with the purpose to stimulate, encourage and challenge the young generations of India to tackle and solve the many social and cultural questions that still affect the country. The volume is organised into five specific sections, each relating to a macro-theme, in particular politics, economy, society, equality and resources (the youth), and offers reflections and considerations on the contemporary situation of India, its complexities, ambiguities and heritage. The essays here collected touch on a range of topics from the echoes of the colonial past to the present-day language scenario and policies, the reinforcement of ideologies and religious thought as well as the endemic problem of political corruption, the binary connotations attached to the fair and dark colour of the skin, the mass entertainment deriving from Bollywood and cricket as well as people's attitudes towards sex, food, community and many other related issues.

Of course Chetan Bhagat looks at and discusses the present, with all its ramifications, but he also takes into account the weight of the colonial experience of India, in particular pondering the general approach to power that authorities and some individuals consider as the tool to master, exploit and degrade most of society. This context is made even worse when such type of behaviour concerns elected representatives and political men who should pursue goals of general improvement and welfare: on the contrary, however, many of such powerful figures use and abuse their official role for a personal profit. The author criticises the arrogance of the politicians, depicted with the Indian English term *netas* (actually a Bengali word from a Sanskrit root):

> Our political class inherited a British colonial system, which had zero accountability to be colonized. Quite cleverly, they didn't change laws to bring in accountability, the cornerstone of any democracy. [...] A large

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part of the problem is also the Indian mindset. We do see them as our kings. We do think that "they are in power" means "being in power only to do things in the national interest". (33)

Thus, the writer invites the young to critically revise and resize the position of political leaders, whose privileges should not be uncontrolled and everlasting, and whose work should aim at developing wellbeing for all classes irrespective of any religious or ethnic belonging.

Bhagat's writing draws attention to the need of a more inclusive, fairer and open-minded reconsideration of society, remembering that "India's poor are not a separate species from us" (161), but it also takes the form of explicit and practical suggestion to resist and react to the spread of society's ills and disadvantages, including national ideology, religious intolerance or lack of rights for minority groups. For example, with reference to Hindtuva, i.e. the process of Hinduisation of the country that intends to marginalise or uproot any form of difference in order to pursue cultural homologation, the author lists various real actions to perform: "shut up regressive Hindutva fanatics. We've heard them talk poisonous nonsense. You ignore them. They are your supporters. You have to tell them out loud and clear this is not okay. The young generation doesn't find it cool to support a leader who doesn't believe in a free and equal society. Send some of your old-fashioned partymen abroad to learn about gender issues and minority rights. They will make you sink otherwise" (20). Addressing a large variety of issues and questions that modern India has to come to terms with, the essays try to generate a constructive and deep debate in a dialogic manner, i.e. trying to involve readers, in particular the younger ones, so as to open their eyes and develop civil conscience, which advocates secularism but does not purge religion. In Bhagat's words, "it isn't easy for Muslims to live in a society that discriminates against them" (155), but the same kind of intolerance and bias applies to many other social categories or members, for instance women, or minority groups such as certain castes or 'tribals' (i.e. the Adivasi, or autochthonous communities of South Asia) or gay people. As far as marginalisation and persecution of the gay community is concerned, the writer traces the historical reasons behind this generalised stance as another heavy legacy of the colonial past, whose deleterious effects were and still are visible in many contexts and in the lives of people:

Section 377 is not an Indian law but an inheritance of British law. The same law, with the same section number, existed in over forty colonies of the British empire. Most of them have junked it or modified to decriminalize homosexuality. We have held on to it as if it is part of India's cultural heritage, whereas it is nothing but a relic of an unscientific Victorian past. (141)

Bhagat also brings in other matters, such as access to education and literacy, for example in the article "We, the half-educated people", in which he condemns the paucity of facilities, the inefficient grading and teaching methods, the old-fashioned contents of curricula. Indeed, the education system of India seems to be split between paradoxical contradictions: on the one hand, with incredible levels of tension and stress that some children experience when they sit the entrance examination for prestigious schools or ITTs (Indian Institutes of Technology), which in the worst cases even lead to suicide and depression, and on the other the precarious conditions of schools for a huge number of pupils, especially in the rural areas. Interestingly, the book briefly examines the sociolinguistic scenario of the country, in particular the opposition between Hindi and English, which fuels debates and responses of various kinds. Certainly it is not an easy problem to address and solve. However, in arguing and promoting linguistic and cultural hybridity, a feature that has always been present in India in so many contexts, the author elaborates his option, namely: "embracing Roman Hindi. Roman Hindi is not Hinglish. It is Hindi language written in the Roman script instead of Devanagari. For example, 'Aap kaise hain?' is Hindi for 'How are you?', but written in the English script" (106). In reality, this type of phenomenon already exists, and has been detected and documented in much academic research: it is especially attested among the young, creative generations, who not only can switch between languages but also apply this capacity to the new media and digital environments, with the final result of a novel, mixed and innovative code, for example in texting, i.e. the script used for text messages or WhatsApp.

Although at times Bhagat's writing style may sound slightly rhetoric, with a tone of excessive patriotism, his sense of commitment and critical gaze are honest as it is his intention to unearth and expose the unsolved questions that still hinder the economic, social and civil growth of India. As a matter of fact, the author is not afraid to openly give visibility to sensitive and controversial issues that traditionally have been put aside by the establishment: "there are writings that get you into trouble, and this might just be one of them" (154). Rather than a celebration of shining India, a type of myth grounded upon the interests and speculations of various forces that totally annihilates marginal voices and subjects, today we need a closer look at a complex, changing reality, with its many values and contradictions, and in this vein the writer fleshes out the pieces of the Indian mosaic and the challenges of the future.

«Littérature mauritanienne de langue française» (2014). Textes réunis et présentés par M'Bouh Seta Diagana et Mamadou Kalidou Bâ. *Interculturel Francophonies*, 26, novembre-décembre, pp. 302

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C'est la première fois qu'une revue scientifique internationale consacre un numéro à la littérature mauritanienne de langue française. Auparavant, seulement *Notre Librairie* avait publié un double numéro, en 1995, sur la littérature mauritanienne dans ses différentes expressions linguistiques. Dans la présentation, M'Bouh Seta Diagana et Mamadou Kalidou Bâ expliquent leur décision d'offrir, donc, au lecteur plusieurs approches: «travail panoramique, réflexions théoriques, étude de poétiques singulières ou même du regard de l'autre sur la Mauritanie à travers la fiction» (12). Les textes abordent, en effet, tous les genres et ils offrent aussi une réflexion théorique qui concerne écriture, événements historiques et thématiques diverses. Il est intéressant de noter comment des regards extérieurs – d'auteurs exilés ou étrangers – ajoutent des éléments à cette analyse. Ce qui se dégage, rien qu'à parcourir le sommaire, est l'importance et la difficulté de cohabitation des communautés mauritaniennes et, par conséquent, le rapport avec l'autre.

La première section du volume, juste après la présentation, est consacrée à l'«Emergence» de la littérature francophone mauritanienne. L'article de Manuel Bengoéchéa vise à dresser un premier bilan et à offrir des perspectives de lecture. Les différentes communautés mauritaniennes s'influencent réciproquement, au point qu'on retrouve plusieurs versions du même conte. La langue du colonisateur s'est donc ajoutée aux autres, déjà présentes sur le territoire, et a fait connaître les formes et les sujets littéraires occidentaux. Voilà pourquoi les premiers ouvrages francophones de la littérature mauritanienne présentent les différentes langues et communautés du pays. Les premiers auteurs francophones ont fréquenté l'école coloniale, qui a eu bien des difficultés à être acceptée, surtout par les Maures, au début du XXème siècle. La poésie, inspirée des poèmes de la Négritude, domine les premiers pas littéraires francophones dans le pays, des années 1960 à 1989. Le roman, le théâtre, la nouvelle et l'essai aussi voient le jour pendant cette période, mais ce n'est que dans les

années 1990 que l'on assiste à un «éclatement des genres» (25) avec la naissance de l'autobiographie et d'une littérature en français destinée à l'enfance et à la jeunesse. A partir de 2001, on assiste à un développement considérable, concernant en particulier le roman. A signaler l'œuvre journalistique très originale de Habib Ould Mahfoudh, *Mauritanides*, publiée en 2012, le courant «ethnographique» et l'écriture post-traumatique qui seront traités plus en détail dans le volume. Les problèmes que l'auteur souhaite résoudre au plus vite restent les maisons d'édition sur place (il n'y a que les Editions de la librairie 15/21) et l'absence de cette littérature des programmes scolaires et académiques, ainsi que des anthologies de littérature maghrébine et sub-saharienne. L'espace saharo-sahélien mauritanien couvre en partie les deux et sa littérature reste difficile à classer. Bengoéchéa ajoute une utile bibliographie de littérature mauritanienne francophone à la fin de son article.

M'Bouh Séta Diagana relate «La longue marche du roman mauritanien francophone», qui ne commence qu'en 1983 avec *Rellâ ou les voies de l'honneur* de Tène Youssouf Guèye, à cause des résistances à l'implantation de l'école française, qui ciblait les fils de chefs, notamment de la part des Arabo-Berbères. Les premiers auteurs francophones mauritaniens sont donc des Noirs, tandis que le premier romancier arabo-berbère est Moussa Ould Ebnou qui publie en 1990 et innove grâce à son inspiration futuriste. Guèye écrit un ouvrage ethnographique sur les Peuls, Di Ben Amar décrit la civilisation nomade, Harouna-Rachid Ly, «toujours sous un angle ethnique» (49), présente les conflits générationnels à cause du mariage endogamique. Après l'an 2000, l'esclavage, le conflit interethnique de 1989, la cohabitation de diverses communautés, la dénonciation de discrimination et racisme restent les thèmes principaux traités dans les romans.

Deux articles de la section «Regards de l'autre» présentent la figure d'Odette du Puigaudeau, une ethnologue autodidacte bretonne qui voyage en Mauritanie dans les années 1930 et prône la conservation des valeurs traditionnelles des nomades maures «contre l'idéologie du progrès, légitimatrice de la colonisation» (63), au point qu'elle devient propagandiste d'un «Grand Maroc» qui offrirait plus d'autonomie pour les déplacements dans le désert. Pierre Bonte l'accuse de conservatisme passéiste, tandis qu'Ana Monleon Dominguez, même en admirant son sens de l'esthétique, hérité du père impressionniste, et son intrépidité de femme voyageuse qui défend ses principes, trouve que dans ses deux premiers textes l'approche syncrétique «superpose l'imaginaire de l'auteur aux éléments du pays» (79). De cette manière, elle focalise plus l'attention sur le voyage que sur le pays visité. A propos de la structure et de la composition, Monleon Dominguez dresse une comparaison entre Odette du Puigaudeau et Dumas. La différence est dans l'attitude anticolonialiste de Dumas, alors que du Puigaudeau a besoin de la tutelle des autorités coloniales pour réaliser ses projets. Le troisième article de la section, par Achraf Mohamed A.G.

Ouedrago, concerne encore une fois le rapport entre littérature et ethno-graphie, mais chez Bios Diallo, qui décrit l'itinéraire de formation identi-taire d'un enfant peul. Essai lié à la biographie de l'auteur, le texte revêt une fonction didactique: réel et imaginaire, sacré et profane se mélangent dans la représentation du corps et de l'espace, dans le temps qui s'écoule de la naissance au mariage.

La section «Entre théorie et témoignage» concerne Abderrahmane N'Gaïdé, qui parle de son exil et qui est ensuite le sujet de l'article de Moussa Diallo sur l'écriture clinique. Le procédé est intéressant: il donne la possibilité au lecteur d'écouter un auteur et tout de suite après de se détacher pour le regarder à travers le miroir d'un autre. Ce qu'affirme N'Gaïdé – «dans l'exil la mémoire sert de gardienne et l'écriture est le processus indispensable qui nous conduit sur le chemin de la véritable délivrance» (97) – a comme point de départ la violence subie, qui se trans-forme en inspiratrice et guérit le narrateur et son peuple, selon Diallo. N'Gaïdé déclare que son écriture est une «itinerrance» (100): l'écrivain témoigne et partage ainsi son angoisse, sa schizophrénie et sa douleur avec le lecteur («conscience partagée», 114) grâce au français. Ce procé-dé lui permet justement d'éviter un thérapeute, de comprendre ce qu'il a vécu et d'expérimenter la solidarité humaine, avant de sombrer encore dans l'image chaotique de Bissau, capitale de la Guinée, pays d'exil qui, dans le roman, se confond avec l'auteur malade.

La section «Poétiques singulières» présente plusieurs auteurs et ou-vrages selon différents points de vue. Les deux premiers articles s'in-terrogent sur l'œuvre de Moussa Ould Ebnou: le premier analyse mythe et merveilleux dans le roman *Barzakh*, le deuxième met en question ses procédés romanesques. Mamadou Ould Dahmed étudie d'abord la struc-ture de *Barzakh* et les convergences du mythe œdipien dans sa forme et construction dramatiques. Ensuite, il prend en examen la prédestination oraculaire, les figures œdipiennes, notamment féminines, qui reviennent tout au long du roman et le parricide, «révolte contre les doubles paternels que sont ses maîtres successifs» (131). Le merveilleux scientifique nous projette du mythe, qui renvoie à l'ancienne tragédie grecque, dans un ave-nir futuriste où l'environnement est invraisemblablement technologique et où l'élément extra-terrestre dépasse les lois rationnelles. L'effet fantas-tique est augmenté par des «références subtiles à des récits coraniques dont la teneur parabolique renforce l'ancrage social et religieux du texte» (134): le protagoniste reçoit la visite d'El'Khadir, messager céleste, après une retraite mystique de quarante jours et quarante nuits. Le titre même du livre, *Barzakh*, désigne soit l'espace du Sahara habité par les Maures, soit la frontière entre la mer salée et celle d'eau douce, soit le royaume des morts, ce qui contribue à mélanger les valeurs symboliques à la confusion chronologique où vie, mort et sommeil perturbent la vie du héros et sa mémoire. Moussa Ould Ebnou utilise donc le mythe et l'impossibilité de

changer le destin pour évoquer l'histoire de son pays et le problème de l'esclavage, contre lequel le protagoniste se révolte en devenant «chantre de la liberté pour l'humanité entière» (138). Mohamed Ould Bouleiba, de son côté, conteste au premier roman d'Ould Ebnou, *L'Amour impossible*, un style lourd et des citations en contraste avec le contexte. Les mêmes critiques ont été suscitées par le deuxième roman de l'auteur, *Barzakh*, dont on vient de parler. *Madinat al Riyah* en est la traduction en arabe, toujours par Ould Ebnou, qui a ajouté aux chapitres des titres tirés de l'art musical maure appelé *azawane*, mais sans respecter l'ordre méthodologique d'un concert traditionnel. Il a aussi substitué l'histoire des villes à l'histoire politique du pays et inséré des déphasages par rapport à l'histoire et à la culture dont il s'inspire, comme une caravane nocturne qui travaille dans la saison des pluies. Ould Bouleiba le taxe alors d'avoir écrit «un roman pour la consommation» (144). En plus, il l'accuse d'avoir introduit dans la version en arabe de longs passages incohérents au niveau musical avec les chapitres qui suivent l'ordre d'un concert traditionnel et il trouve que l'auteur méprise les valeurs liées à la *tidinit* (luth) au lieu de les promouvoir.

On change de sujet avec l'article de Mamadou Kalidou Bâ, qui a un titre très explicatif: «Mises en récit des migrations sous contrainte inspirées des événements de 1989 à travers les romans mauritaniens: *Les Otages* de Mama Moussa Diaw et *Une vie de sébile* de Bios Diallo». Les deux livres s'inspirent de ceux qui sont communément appelés en Mauritanie «les événements», à savoir les incidents à la frontière avec le Sénégal, qui ont conduit à la guerre civile entre les différentes composantes ethniques mauritaniennes: les Arabo-Berbères blancs, les Peuls, Soninkés, Wolofs noirs et les Haratines, culturellement hybrides. Le brassage historique a donné naissance à une cohabitation déséquilibrée, mais le régime dictatorial raciste a exacerbé les revendications identitaires pendant les années 1980. Le traumatisme résulté du plan de dénégrification du pays a réduit au silence les écrivains pendant 18 ans. La littérature post-traumatique raconte aujourd'hui les déportations et les fuites sous menace, les veillées populaires qui mettent en scène la mémoire collective et quelques retours. Dans les camps de réfugiés au Sénégal, les Mauritaniens ont le statut de parias, à tel point que s'ils n'acceptent pas de changer de nationalité, ils n'ont même pas accès à l'école. Ils résistent néanmoins à la naturalisation dans l'espoir du retour, ne serait-ce que de leur dépouille: c'est le cas de l'héroïne d'*Une vie de sébile* de Bios Diallo.

Même en dehors des événement de 1989, une organisation criminelle bien huilée perpétue l'esclavage et le déséquilibre ethnico-social en Mauritanie et se reflète sur la violence politique: le pouvoir est usurpé et les étrangers en deviennent les boucs-émissaires. Leur mort est systématisée. Dans la famille, on retrouve la difficile cohabitation des Maures avec les Noirs, la jalousie et le rejet d'un frère et le malaise et la «posture de raté» (178) de l'autre. C'est l'atmosphère du roman *Le Cri du muet*, pré-

senté dans «Violences, silences et cris ou l'univers chaotique d'Abdou Ali War», par Marie-Rose Abomo-Maurin. Une société archaïque en lambeaux nourrit le microcosme familial, déchiré et paradoxal, d'un ancien esclave affranchi, qui choisit le silence en réponse aux violences subies: il a été victime d'une razzia d'enfants et ensuite assimilé à un animal, anéanti et asservi. Le chef de cet état malade est surnommé 'Nain Majuscule' et sa façon de gouverner est fondée sur des rumeurs et des tas de cadavres qu'il refuse de voir. Le silence sert au protagoniste pour observer de l'extérieur, dominer le chaos, refuser une certaine identité et revenir à soi-même. Son cri final est subversif, dénonce et se révolte, résiste et aboutit à la catharsis. On assiste à un bouleversement social: la foule des «déboutés de la vie» (185) se coalise et demande la fin des violences et l'assainissement de la ville lors du «temps de Fureur» (186). Abdoul Ali War met en garde contre la situation sociale actuelle et fait entrevoir une débouchée possible.

Elemine Ould Mohamed Baba analyse «La perception du temps dans *Mauritanides* de Habib Ould Mahfoudh», une chronique satirique, irrévérencieuse et moqueuse «parue régulièrement entre 1989 et 2001 dans les colonnes de journaux indépendants de Mauritanie» (200). Le sous-titre du livre récite «Chronique du temps qui ne passe pas». Mélancolie, amertume, méditation philosophique sur le temps kleptomane et pickpocket qui nous conduit «du néant au néant et de l'infini à l'infini» (192). L'auteur décrit un temps qui se succède verticalement et il affirme: «c'est moi-même qui me succède à moi» (192). La réflexion sur le temps passe par la «duodécimania» (192), sorte de mythologie nationale pathologique suivie au coup d'état du 12 décembre 1984 et qui bien illustre l'instauration d'une anti-culture militaire. Ould Mahfoudh démystifie l'histoire de son pays et s'inspire de plusieurs auteurs français qui ont traité le sujet de la fuite du temps, denrée périssable que les hommes doivent faire fructifier au lieu d'en être les geôliers.

La section «Croisements» s'occupe de la représentation identitaire: l'article de Cheikh M.S. Diop focalise sur les genres, celui de Coudy Kane sur le bilinguisme. Le point de départ de Diop est d'une part la république islamique de Mauritanie, pays «fruit de plusieurs civilisations» (205) autochtones ou arrivées avec la religion musulmane, de l'autre la littérature africaine francophone comme «fusion entre cultures populaires et contexte colonial» (205). Il choisit trois textes – la pièce de théâtre *Exilés de Gourmel* de Tène Youssouf Guèye, le recueil de poèmes *Odes Sahéliennes* d'Oumar Bâ et le roman *Barzakh* de Moussa Ould Ebnou – et analyse comment ils traduisent la diversité des identités en Mauritanie. Il s'interroge sur le type de discours qu'ils instaurent pour comprendre s'il s'agit d'une narration communautaire ou nationale. Diop reconnaît que tous les trois textes «insistent bien sur les circonstances historiques qui sont devenues des composantes fortes de l'identité des Mauritaniens» (214). Guèye est considéré un auteur engagé parce qu'il présente en

français, face à l'arabisation dominante, une pièce qui parle de glorieux royaumes autochtones avant l'arrivée de l'Islam, alors que Bâ a obtenu des postes de haute responsabilité grâce à ses rapports avec le pouvoir et Ould Ebnou évite dans son roman tout «discours partisan» (218). Par le biais de ces auteurs, la littérature francophone mauritanienne, difficile à classer géographiquement dans le continent, mais capable de tisser des liens précieux entre les mailles de l'histoire des identités multiples et problématiques du pays, s'avère encore à la recherche de sa place dans le monde. Tène Youssouf Guèye revient avec *Rellâ ou les voies de l'honneur* dans l'article de Coudy Kane, qui le compare à un autre romancier de la moyenne vallée du fleuve Sénégal et de milieu peul: Cheikh Hamidou Kane, dont il explore *Les Gardiens du temple*. La situation hybride des deux auteurs, poularophones et francophones, «a paradoxalement un impact positif sur la créativité» (230) et leurs romans sont «métissés» (230) au niveau lexical aussi bien que morphosyntaxique. La littérature orale se retrouve dans les deux textes sous forme de proverbes, aphorismes et chansons en langues africaines avec ou sans traduction, ce qui impose «un climat linguistique authentique» (232). Guèye vise à sauvegarder ce patrimoine immatériel de la littérature orale, tandis que Kane prône l'enracinement dans sa propre culture mais aussi l'ouverture au progrès. L'espace mental bilingue des écrivains se traduit sur la page en tant que «(ré)création d'un espace sociolinguistique cohérent» (233), capable de faire expérimenter au lecteur la différence. Le narrateur, qui se confond quelquefois avec l'auteur, s'excuse, explique, commente, est témoin et se situe en position liminaire entre les personnages et le lecteur. Ces deux ouvrages sont donc marqués par une appartenance double, à la culture africaine et à la langue française, entre lesquelles, grâce à l'usage savant du bilinguisme, ils créent habilement une médiation.

La conclusion dépayse le lecteur, qui est plongé dans un univers autre et a du mal à suivre l'histoire d'une bizarre loterie. Abdel Weddoud Ould Cheikh, en effet, termine sa contribution par un P.S. explicatif où il définit les *Mauritanides* une «archive de l'improbable» (255) et il déclare avoir mimé l'auteur à travers un «détournement» (255) de Borges à qui Ould Mahfoudh serait lié par son «inquiétude joyeuse et salutaire» (255) et ses intuitions.

On ne s'attend peut-être pas à trouver à la fin du volume quatre entretiens avec les auteurs. Cela permet au lecteur de connaître d'autres aspects de leur vie et de leur pensée, toujours liés au pays. Harouna-Rachid Ly, dans son essai autobiographique *1989, Gendarme en Mauritanie*, dénonce la politique de marginalisation et d'exclusion opérée dans la gendarmerie, mais il fait référence aussi, dans *Le Réveil agité*, à son amour pour la musique et à son désir de garder les traditions peules sans leurs dérives négatives. Dans sa nouvelle *Que le Diable t'emporte!* il fait visiter Nouakchott, la capitale de la Mauritanie, à un diable extraterrestre avec

un regard aigu et détaché. Il affirme aussi contribuer à l'enrichissement lexical du français avec ses emprunts peuls et ses néologismes. Bios Diallo nous raconte comment il a choisi ce pseudonyme, suite aux déportations massives de 1989, qui constituent également le sujet de son roman *Une vie de sébile*, à travers lequel il vise à relancer une pacifique cohabitation intercommunautaire et qui, à cause de la fin tragique de l'héroïne, a été très critiqué. Djibril Sall explique comment il a été édité «par le biais de rencontres» (277) importantes et il répète que les livres sont trop chers dans son pays. Moussa Ould Ebnou réfléchit sur ses propres réécritures en arabe et sur l'influence de sa formation philosophique et religieuse dans son roman *Barzakh*, où revit la tragédie grecque *Œdipe-Roi.* Quant à son roman *L'Amour impossible*, il revendique son appartenance à une littérature globalisée, contre la recherche de localisation dans ses œuvres. Pour ce qui est de la place du français en Mauritanie, il souhaite la création d'une nouvelle langue «à composantes plurielles» (291) et d'une nouvelle francophonie contre celle qu'il appelle «francophonie coloniale» (292), dans le but d'intégrer «les cultures différentes qui s'expriment dans des francophonies différentes» (291). Il dénonce en effet sa difficulté à publier ses livres en français plutôt qu'en arabe.

Pour les auteurs mauritaniens, comme l'affirme Mohamed Ould Bouleiba, le choix d'écrire en français facilite la découverte de la littérature mauritanienne au-delà des frontières nationales. Malgré cela, il s'agit encore d'une littérature méconnue dans son propre pays à cause du manque presque total de maisons d'édition locales, du prix des livres et du désintérêt du monde scolaire et académique. En plus, la Mauritanie est un pays qui jouit d'une «double appartenance aux espaces maghrébins et subsahariens» (23), mais les différentes composantes linguistiques et culturelles ont des difficultés de cohabitation, qui se reflètent dans les sujets des ouvrages et qui les rendent difficiles à classer dans les anthologies africaines ou francophones, où souvent ils sont oubliés. Cette publication arrive bien à temps pour faire noter cette absence, d'autant plus que la richesse des genres et des thèmes ne justifie plus une telle situation.

«Bars, cafés, buvettes» (2015). *Ponti/Ponts. Langues, littératures et civilisations des pays francophones*, 15, pp. 246

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Le numéro 15 de la revue *Ponti/Ponts*, centré sur le thème «Bars, cafés, buvettes», prend en considération les différentes facettes des lieux publiques qui servent à boire des boissons alcoolisées et leur fonction dans certains contextes francophones. Les interventions qui composent ce numéro de la revue de l'Université de Milan se proposent de tracer un portrait 'littéraire' des débits de boissons, conçus comme des espaces pluriels où plusieurs idées et univers se croisent. Le lecteur est ainsi invité à une tournée des bars atypique, entre littérature et sociolinguistique, un parcours qui touche l'Afrique Équatoriale, l'Océan Indien, les Caraïbes et le Québec.

La contribution d'Achille Carlos Zango, «Quand le bar devient miroir des mutations sociales post-coloniales dans *Temps de chien* de Patrice Nganang», est consacrée à l'image du bar à l'intérieur du roman de l'auteur camerounais. En proposant une lecture du texte littéraire par le moyen de la sociocritique, ce premier article envisage le bar comme un lieu révélateur des «mutations sociales et même linguistiques du Cameroun» (11) des années 1990. Le bar en question, Le Client est Roi, est un microcosme où les couches de la société se croisent, les clients partagent les rumeurs du quartier et les langues se mélangent, mettant ainsi en scène le métissage linguistique qui caractérise le Cameroun. À travers les yeux du chien Mboudjak, narrateur du récit, qui passe ses journées devant le bar de son patron, tous les enjeux de la société camerounaise post-coloniale se montrent et confirment que le bar représente, dans ce roman, le «miroir de la vie des sous-quartiers» (26).

Eva Pich-Ponce, dans son article «De la "Taverne du Chat Dansant" à l'"Underground": l'importance du bar comme espace de socialisation dans les romans de Marie-Claire Blais», prend en considération le bar dans sa fonction d'«espace intermédiaire» (30) à l'intérieur de deux romans qui se déroulent dans la ville de Montréal dans les années 1970. Pich-Ponche analyse le rôle attribué au bar dans *Un Joualonais sa Joualonie* (1973) et *Les nuits de l'Underground* (1978). Il désigne un lieu de sociabilité, où des communautés se réunissent, un «endroit où existe une liberté inaccessible

ailleurs» (43) et le miroir de la société québécoise des années 1970, de ses changements et de ses revendications identitaires. Des personnages issus de différentes couches sociales se rencontrent dans *Un Joualonais sa Joualonie*, qui met en scène les bars comme des endroits d'échange et fraternisation, dans un contexte caractérisé par l'opposition entre anglophones et francophones. Parallèlement, dans *Les nuits de l'Underground*, le bar est un lieu isolé et protégé où des femmes homosexuelles se retrouvent habituellement et tissent des liens d'amitié et d'amour qui ne seraient pas tolérés par le monde extérieur. Pour Marie-Claire Blais, le bar est donc un lieu de rencontres et d'échanges, un endroit à la fois publique et intime, où des solidarités nouvelles se constituent.

Dans «Cafés d'Haïti et cafés de l'ailleurs: Émile Ollivier, Jean-Claude Charles, Dany Laferrière», Alba Pessini se livre à une étude des bars dans les romans de trois auteurs haïtiens migrants, en prenant pour point de départ la réflexion de Marc Augé à propos du bistrot comme «espace romanesque» (45). Dans son analyse, Pessini fait une distinction préliminaire entre l'espace haïtien et l'espace de l'exil, pour montrer que la fonction du bar dans le corpus étudié change selon le contexte géographique, social et culturel. Les cafés haïtiens évoquent l'île, la communauté haïtienne et aussi, en particulier dans *Bamboola Bamboche* de Charles, une atmosphère perturbante qui reflète la situation politique et sociale du pays caribéen. Au contraire, les cafés en Amérique du Nord (Montréal chez Ollivier et Laferrière, New York chez Charles) sont des lieux d'agrégation dans des villes cosmopolites et multiculturelles, où les expatriés se rencontrent et partagent les souvenirs de la terre natale: un pont pour s'insérer peu à peu dans la nouvelle réalité de l'exil.

De son côté, Vidoolah Mootosamy, dans «Havre ou enfer: les caractéristiques des bars dans *L'homme qui penche* de Bertrand de Robillard» prend en examen l'«errance de bar en bar» (65) pratiquée par le personnage principal du premier roman de l'auteur mauricien. Loin d'être des endroits d'échanges et de rencontres, les bars ont la seule fonction de lieux où consommer de l'alcool et noyer ses pensées. Au moyen d'une comparaison entre *L'homme qui penche* et *La Modification* (1957) de Michel Butor, Mootosamy montre la transformation vécue par le personnage principal, un écrivain en pleine crise de création qui passe son temps «en flânant d'un débit de boissons à l'autre de la ville de Curepipe des années quatre-vingt» (64).

La section «Études linguistiques» présente une contribution de Gaston François Kengue et Jean-Benoît Tsofack, «"On entre OK et on sort KO" comme à la buvette...! Des espaces d'alcool et de leur mise en mots en contexte urbain au Cameroun», centrée sur une approche sociolinguistique qui vise à dégager la relation «entre pratiques de l'espace, pratiques sociales et pratiques langagières» (79). Les auteurs examinent les dénominations des bars et cafés dans trois villes camerounaises, Dschang, Douala

et Yaoundé, afin de montrer le lien étroit entre les noms des bars et la mise en relief de certains valeurs, parmi lesquels une ouverture à l'Autre et à l'Ailleurs et la diversité sociale et culturelle qui caractérise le Cameroun.

La dernière intervention de ce numéro de *Ponti/Ponts*, «Un Valdôtain cosmopolite: Pierre Lexert» de Simonetta Valenti, est un hommage à l'œuvre de Lexert, décédé en 2015. Le volume se conclut avec la section des notes de lecture, où sont regroupées de nombreuses interventions concernant les études linguistiques et les espaces francophones, divisées par aire géographique.

Chemla, Yves (2015). *Littérature haïtienne 1980-2015*. Delmas: C3 Éditions, pp. 314

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Yves Chemla, critique littéraire et auteur de nombreuses publications sur la littérature haïtienne, a consacré un riche volume de plus de trois cents pages à la traversée de trois décennies de publications d'auteurs haïtiens, comme le souligne le titre, *Littérature haïtienne 1980-2015*. Dans cet ouvrage «à vocation pédagogique» (7), son auteur se livre à la description d'une littérature extrêmement dynamique et plurielle comme la littérature haïtienne contemporaine.

Dans le «Préalable», Chemla met en évidence le caractère partiel de son travail, qui pourtant prend en considération un grand nombre de parutions diverses (poèmes, contes, romans, nouvelles), toutes en langue française, laissant de côté les parutions en créole. L'auteur lui-même précise qu'il ne s'agit ni d'une anthologie exhaustive ni d'une histoire de la littérature haïtienne, mais d'un ouvrage adressé en particulier aux professeurs et aux passionnés de littérature, ce qui paraît évident si l'on considère la perspective didactique privilégiée dans la présentation des auteurs et de leurs œuvres. Le «Préalable» se termine par un hommage de l'auteur à ses prédécesseurs: Léon-François Hoffmann, Maximilien Laroche et Max Dominique.

L'ouvrage se compose de trois parties qui visent à tracer un portrait chronologique des figures principales de la littérature haïtienne; même si le véritable intérêt de Chemla ce sont «les écrivains nés dans les années 1950-1970» (10), il propose d'abord un survol de la génération précédente. En effet, la première partie, «D'Haïti Littéraire aux années 1980», porte sur les grands écrivains de la deuxième moitié du XXème siècle qui ont vécu pendant le régime de François Duvalier (1957-1971), en s'ouvrant sur l'évocation de *Gouverneurs de la rosée* de Jacques Roumain, chef-d'œuvre du roman paysan, paru en 1944. Ensuite, après quelques pages sur Jacques Stephen Alexis, auteur engagé et maître du réalisme merveilleux, Chemla mène une analyse approfondie de l'œuvre de Marie Vieux-Chauvet, en particulier de sa trilogie romanesque, *Amour, colère et folie*, où la violence exercée par le pouvoir dictatorial sur les individus est mise en fiction et pénètre tous les aspects du récit. À une présentation du groupe Haïti Littéraire et de ses représentants (Anthony Phelps,

Davertige, Serge Legagneur, Roland Morisseau, René Philoctète, Auguste Thénor, Émile Ollivier, Frankétienne, Gérard Étienne), fait suite une section concernant ceux qui, au moment des départs pour fuir le régime de François Duvalier, sont restés en Haïti. Sont ainsi étudiés les parcours biographiques et littéraires de Frankétienne, Pierre Clitandre, Marie-Thérèse Colimon et Jean-Claude Fignolé. Mais la partie qui suit est certainement plus touffue, car elle présente les écrivains de la diaspora, en se focalisant d'abord sur l'espace québécois, où l'on retrouve trois auteurs désormais incontournables comme Anthony Phelps, Émile Ollivier et Gérard Étienne, et d'autres qui ne sont peut-être pas très connus du grand public, comme Georges Anglade et Roland Paret.

La deuxième partie, «En France», est centrée principalement sur la diaspora haïtienne en territoire français, représentée par trois auteurs (Jean Métellus, Jean-Claude Charles et René Depestre), mais l'on retrouve aussi un paragraphe qui retrace l'histoire de la compagnie théâtrale Kouidor, créée à New York par de nombreux artistes haïtiens exilés aux États-Unis. À l'intérieur de ce groupe, Chemla cite en particulier Georges Castera et Syto Cavé. En guise de commentaire, l'auteur termine ce chapitre par une réflexion sur les caractéristiques de la littérature haïtienne pendant la présidence de François Duvalier, en soulignant que la force démontrée dans certaines publications a constitué la base sur laquelle la génération successive a pu construire sa propre identité.

La troisième et dernière partie, «Un effet de génération», se penche sur une description détaillée du sujet central de l'ouvrage, c'est-à-dire les auteurs nés dans les années 1950-1970. Pour chaque écrivain présenté dans ce chapitre (dix-neuf au total) est proposé un portrait biographique et artistique, accompagné, dans la plupart des cas, d'extraits tirés des poèmes ou récits en prose les plus saillants des différents auteurs. Le premier dont il est question est Joël Des Rosiers, dont Chemla énumère les ouvrages en soulignant le caractère érudit de sa prose; quelques pages sont ensuite vouées à Dany Laferrière, qui occupe «un statut exceptionnel dans la littérature d'Haïti» (90). L'auteur analyse plusieurs romans des 'immortels' de l'Académie française, pas forcément dans l'ordre chronologique de leur parution: *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*, *La Chair du maître*, *Le Cri des oiseaux fous*, *Chronique de la dérive douce*, *Eroshima*, *Pays sans chapeau*. Pour compléter la liste de cette œuvre importante, Chemla ajoute un tableau où figurent tous les romans de l'*Autobiographie américaine* de Laferrière avec des repères spatiaux et temporels. Trois figures féminines sont ensuite mentionnées: Yanick Lahens, Marie-Célie Agnant et Évelyne Trouillot. Pour Lahens il s'agit d'une ample description de sa production littéraire, et l'attention est portée surtout sur *Failles*, récit publié après le séisme qui a ravagé Port-au-Prince en janvier 2010, et *Bain de lune*, livre gagnant du prix Femina en 2014. Après avoir longuement illustré l'œuvre de Lyonel Trouillot, qui

perçoit la littérature comme une pratique sociale, et celle de Gary Victor et son questionnement autour des perversions du pouvoir, Chemla présente la romancière Kettly Mars et ses «personnages et état d'hybridité» (185). Tout au long de cette partie, l'on retrouve des personnalités célèbres aussi en dehors d'Haïti comme Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Rodney Saint-Eloi et James Noël, à côté d'auteurs comme Michel Soukar, Margaret Papillon, Dominique Batraville, Jean-Euphèle Milcé, Emmelie Prophète et Guy Régis. En ce qui concerne les plus jeunes, le chapitre se conclut avec la présentation de Marvin Victor, auteur de *Corps mêlés* (2011), l'un des premiers récits qui mettent en scène le séisme, et Makenzy Orcel, qui a dédié son premier roman, *Les Immortelles* (2010), à la mémoire des prostituées de Port-au-Prince tuées par le tremblement de terre.

Dans la brève «Conclusion», Chemla mentionne quelques auteurs absents de son exposition, parmi lesquels Stanley Péan, Nadine Magloire et Robert Berrouët-Oriol, et il souligne le cas particulier d'Edwige Danticat, haïtienne qui vit aux États-Unis et qui a choisi l'anglais comme langue d'écriture. Pour terminer ce guide de lecture, son auteur signale l'«effervescence littéraire» (299) qui caractérise la littérature haïtienne contemporaine, en nommant quelques écrivains appartenant aux nouvelles générations, comme Stéphane Martelly et Jean Durosier Desrivières parmi tant d'autres. Une bibliographie regroupant les publications principales des auteurs cités vient clore cet ouvrage, qui est certainement un texte de référence pour les étudiants, enseignants et passionnés de littérature, par lequel Yves Chemla parvient à tracer un portrait riche de détails d'un univers en mouvement perpétuel comme celui des lettres haïtiennes.

«*Trois Femmes puissantes* de Marie NDiaye». Textes recueillis par Éric Lysøe et Anna Soncini Fratta. Città di Castello: I libri di EMIL, pp. 224. Analyses Textuelles 6

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Entre le 10 et le 13 octobre 2013 a eu lieu, dans la ville italienne de Cesenatico, le séminaire consacré au roman *Trois Femmes puissantes* de Marie NDiaye, organisé principalement par l'Université de Bologne (en particulier par le LILEC, Département des Langues, littératures et cultures modernes) et l'Université Blaise-Pascal de Clermont-Ferrand (en particulier par le CELIS, Centres des recherches sur les littératures et la sociopoétique). À la suite de ces journées d'étude, qui ont vu la participation des chercheurs, des doctorants et des étudiants de ces universités, a été récemment publié le volume numéro 6 de la collection *Analyses Textuelles*, qui réunit les communications du séminaire et la transcription des relatives discussions. Le but est d'offrir une relecture de l'ouvrage, enrichie non seulement par les différents points de vue des spécialistes, mais aussi par leurs diverses méthodologies. Cela permet d'élargir l'éventail des possibilités critiques d'un ouvrage qui, même si très récent (publié en 2009), est déjà considéré comme un classique de la littérature française contemporaine. En effet, louée par la critique et primée aussi bien du Prix Femina, pour le roman *Rosie Carpie* (2001), que du Goncourt pour *Trois femmes puissantes* (2009), l'auteure Marie NDiaye est un phénomène éditorial pour son style 'raffiné et impeccable', pour ses récits 'étincelants', tout comme pour sa personnalité et son histoire personnelle. Au centre du scandale politique à la suite de ses affirmations contre Sarkozy et de son auto-exile à Berlin, elle est aussi au centre des polémiques littéraires pour son «métissage tronqué» (126) et son refus d'être considérée une écrivaine africaine, elle qui a grandi uniquement dans la banlieue sud de Paris en l'absence d'un père retourné en Afrique quand elle n'avait qu'un an. Marie NDiaye est, donc, une source inépuisable pour les chercheurs dans les domaines les plus divers, de la sociologie littéraire à l'écriture féminine ou, encore, aux études postcoloniales. Cette richesse interprétative trouve dans le recueil, curé par Anna Soncini Fratta et Éric Lysøe, un support encore plus intéressant vu qu'il exploite uniquement le roman *Trois Femmes puissantes*.

La première contribution, «L'esthétique romanesque de Marie NDiaye» de Sylviane Coyault, professeur émérite de l'Université Blaise Pascal, concerne la question du réalisme fantastique dans la narrative de Marie NDiaye, en se concentrant en particulier sur l'effet d'étrangeté «sans recourir à l'irréalité» (7), en contraste avec le réalisme vif et puissant de l'ouvrage. La partie sur l'effet de réel aborde surtout les thèmes d'actualité comme la confrontation Europe/Afrique et le problème de l'immigration, en particulier vers la France; pourtant, Coyault souligne le fait qu'il ne s'agit pas simplement d'un roman expressément sociologique: au contraire, il s'agit d'une opération «discrète, à partir de points de vue singuliers» (15), ceux des nombreux personnages principaux et secondaires du roman. Et c'est justement encore par l'analyse des personnages que Coyault introduit la deuxième partie de son étude, celle qui est consacrée à l'étrangeté et à la malaise conçues comme deux sentiments éprouvés par l'autrice française d'origine africaine, aux prises avec la confrontation des deux continents, mais ressentis aussi par le lecteur qui se retrouve plongé dans un cauchemar en trois parties qui reflète la société actuelle. À l'actualité de la première contribution suit le point de vue plus classiciste de Georges Fréris, qui retrouve les références aux mythes et aux tragédies grecques présentes dans le texte, pour les confronter successivement aux références de matrice africaine. C'est toujours le binôme Europe/Afrique à éveiller l'intérêt, mais dans le cas de «Volonté contre fatalité: une autre lecture de *Trois Femmes puissantes*» Fréris se concentre plutôt sur des thèmes primordiaux, tels que la culpabilité et la fatalité conscientes, qui sont omniprésents dans l'ouvrage de NDiaye à travers les figures fières, héroïques et mythiques de ces trois femmes aux destins différents, mais toujours tragiques.

Le texte de Liana Nassim, «Amour, terreur, répugnance, entre descente et envolée. Les oiseaux des *Trois Femmes puissantes*» partage l'intérêt pour la métaphore avec la contribution de Falilou NDiaye «*Trois Femmes puissantes*: de l'autre côté des corps et des voix». Si la première analyse attentivement toutes les formes de métaphore et métamorphose des personnages en oiseaux, en soulignant la fiabilité de la ligne de démarcation entre l'état humain et l'état animal, la deuxième se penche surtout sur les changements du corps et de la voix des figures humaines. L'étude de Nassim assume l'allégorie volatile non seulement comme un moyen stylistique, mais comme un «mécanisme structurel» (66) qui influence la narration et bien sûr la langue. Par contre, l'étude de F. NDiaye se confronte avec la nécessité de l'autrice du roman de recourir aux continuelles métamorphoses pour construire «l'effet de surréel» (71) qui confond le lecteur dans son itinéraire à travers les diverses réalités présentes dans l'histoire de ces trois femmes. Les corps et les voix des personnages deviennent donc, selon F. NDiaye, des espaces non seulement de représentation, mais aussi d'une traversée psychique.

Loin de toutes les études présentées et en contraste avec elles, la contribution de Marco Modenesi, «À présent, plus tard et longtemps auparavant. Aspects de la structure temporelle de *Trois Femmes puissantes*», s'interroge sur l'importance de la temporalité, de la mémoire et de ses processus. Modenesi réfléchit sur comment la structure chronologique choisie par l'écrivaine donne un ultérieur sentiment de trouble au lecteur, qui se retrouve doublement dépaysé au cours de la lecture, du point de vue spatial, en suivant les trois itinéraires, aussi bien que du point de vue temporel, à la recherche des repères presque inexistants. À cela s'ajoute aussi la difficulté même des personnages dans l'acte de se souvenir, due souvent aux refoulements causés par leur instabilité psychologique.

Cette instabilité se retrouve aussi dans la personnalité de l'autrice, comme le démontre Michèle Bokobza Kahan dans son «*Trois Femmes puissantes*: posture d'auteur et écriture poétique», où elle analyse l'attitude instable de Marie NDiaye pendant les entretiens. Après une brève digression sur la posture de l'autrice dans la littérature contemporaine, surtout face à l'ère médiatique, Kahan cherche à «dégager le rapport particulier qui se tisse entre un auteur et ses personnages de fiction» (114), le tout en s'appuyant sur deux entretiens de type différent proposés à Marie NDiaye. Le premier, portant surtout sur une caractérisation plus détaillée des personnages, voit l'autrice participer activement à ce plongement psychologique et sociologique dans la fiction; alors que le deuxième, où on lui pose des questions plutôt générales sur la littérature, a comme résultat une fermeture presque totale, faite de silences et non-dits. Kahan démontre comme cette ambivalence se retrouve aussi dans les attitudes des personnages fictifs, en soulignant comment c'est plutôt le coté psychologique de l'autrice, au lieu de ses expériences autobiographiques, à influencer le processus d'écriture et de construction des personnages.

Toutes ces approches diverses et hétérogènes sont enrichies par les discussions qui ont suivi chaque contribution pendant le séminaire. C'est dans leur transcription que l'on aperçoit non seulement l'intérêt profond des spécialistes, mais aussi des autres participants et surtout des deux organisateurs, qui animent le débat avec des suggestions ponctuelles. En effet, c'est à l'intérieur de la deuxième section du recueil que les thèmes principaux pris en analyse trouvent de nouvelles connotations, toujours innovatrices, comme par exemple une lecture christianologique de l'ouvrage, le manque d'africanité ou encore la présence voilée de la sexualité plus hardie et du viol comme vecteurs narratifs. Des matières de réflexion puissantes, tout comme les trois femmes qui les ont inspirées.

«*Poésies érotiques* d'Évariste Parny» (2015). Textes recueillis par Éric Lysøe et Anna Soncini Fratta. Città di Castello: I libri di EMIL, pp. 160. Analyses Textuelles 5

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La collection *Analyses textuelles*, dirigée par Éric Lysøe et Anna Soncini Fratta, se propose à chaque numéro d'approfondir la connaissance d'une œuvre fondamentale de la littérature française et francophone. Comme il est illustré dans la présentation de la collection, ce projet éditorial représente la reprise des *Seminari Pasquali di analisi testuali* institués, en 1984, par Ruggero Campagnoli, Professeur de l'Université de Bologna, qui réunissait «chaque année, durant deux ou trois jours, des chercheurs autour d'une œuvre représentative de la littérature française du XVIe au XXIe siècle» (119). Après avoir abordé des ouvrages classiques tels que *Le capitaine Fracasse* de Théophile Gauthier (2015) ou *Corydon* d'André Gide (2014), le cinquième numéro de la nouvelle série se consacre aux *Poésies érotiques* du poète du XVIIIème siècle, Évariste Parny.

Né en 1753 à L'Hermitage de Saint-Paul, à l'île Bourbon, la Réunion d'aujourd'hui, Évariste Parny se découvre poète à l'âge de vingt ans pendant son retour au pays natal après un séjour de formation en France. Auteur entre autres des *Chansons madécasses* (1787) et de *La Guerre des Dieux* (1799), il est principalement connu pour le recueil *Poésies érotiques* (première édition en 1778, deuxième édition en 1781), composé à la suite d'un chagrin d'amour. Pourtant, la biographie de Parny ne peut pas être réduite au simple aller-retour entre l'île et la France métropolitaine, comme l'on ne peut pas réduire sa poésie à une simple lamentation amoureuse, mais, au contraire, il s'agit d'un auteur controversé, tout comme son œuvre, qui se détache nettement de la poésie académique de sa période. C'est justement ce fait d'être hors loi, hors des schémas traditionnels, qui a attiré l'attention des quatre spécialistes présents dans le recueil, qui ont examiné dans leurs contributions l'univers contradictoire de Parny, en particulier dans ses *Poésies érotiques*.

La première contribution, «L'ailleurs et l'exotisme dans l'œuvre de Parny: contours, empreintes et traces» de Jean-Michel Racault, se consacre au rapport entre la biographie et l'œuvre de Parny, sur la base du thème de l'exotisme et

du concept de l'Ailleurs. L'étude est bâtie essentiellement autour de trois nœuds fondamentaux: le rapport entre le poète et l'île natale, celui entre le poète et l'esclavagisme et enfin la dé-territorialisation apparente dans les *Poésies érotiques.* En premier lieu, Racault donne la géographie de l'île de Bourbon, telle qu'elle se présentait aux yeux des contemporains du poète bourbonnais, comme une terre paradisiaque en opposition à la plus barbare Madagascar. Cependant, cet Eden entouré d'eau est aussi le scénario de l'histoire de famille du poète, ou mieux de son ascension au pouvoir à travers guerres, maçonnerie et esclavage. Et c'est ce dernier, en effet, qui empêche Parny de donner un portrait bucolique de sa terre natale, alors qu'il y voit seulement «le spectacle de la servitude, où le bruit des fouets et des chaînes étourdit mon oreille et retentit dans mon cœur» (13). Un exemple parfait du côté illuministe et anti-esclavagiste de l'époque, que Racault définit plutôt un «anti-esclavagisme déclamatoire» (14), fait de bon propos, mais sans aucune suite pratique, surtout à cause des conséquences économiques (même pour Parny). Cette situation de tiraillement entre les utopies humanitaires et les pressions familiales a poussé, selon Racault, le poète vers une «fuite à double sens du terme: le départ de l'île […] et l'évasion dans une frivolité provocatrice» (14). Cette double évasion est liée au deuxième nœud fondamental, celui du refus de l'identité créole, en faveur d'une identité française, souligné par le rejet non seulement de l'île, décrite comme un paysage dangereux en proie aux catastrophes naturelles, mais surtout de l'Ailleurs et de l'exotisme perçus comme deux attitudes qui n'offrent que les descriptions de barbaries et de sauvageries scabreuses, tout au contraire de Paris, centre du monde de la tolérance. Cet exotisme «de la dégénération» (25) caractérise l'œuvre de Parny, exception faite pour les *Poésies érotiques*, comme le démontre Racault en parlant de «l'exotisme en creux» (26) de ce recueil, où même si l'on n'y retrouve pas les descriptions bucoliques à la Bernardin de Saint Pierre, il n'y a pas l'anti-exotisme qui caractérise les autres ouvrages, mais au contraire une présence semi-constante de l'île en arrière-plan, qui fait surface parmi les références à l'antiquité grecque en style parfaitement néo-classique.

C'est toujours le thème du paysage, mais plutôt intime et secret tel que l'alcôve, qui est au centre de la contribution de Ruggero Campagnoli, «L'alcôve obscure de Parny». Cet espace sombre est au centre de l'étude qui non seulement analyse le recueil poétique, mais aussi les impressions naïves du commentateur contemporain de Parny et sa difficulté à saisir les nuances poétiques relatives à l'obscurité en relation aux thèmes néo-classiques, bucoliques et bibliques. Cette étrangeté sémantique est considérée innovatrice par Campagnoli, qui en souligne le caractère désacralisant et 'avant-gardiste' en théorisant les rapports d'influence avec la poésie de Baudelaire et les images de Füssli.

Le thème de l'espace peut être considéré le véritable fil rouge de l'ouvrage, car il caractérise aussi les deux dernières contributions, «Temps, mémoire et souvenir. Les *Poésies érotiques* de Parny» de Catriona Seth et «Le ton, le temps et le lieu: Parny et la tradition de l'idylle libertine» de

Jean-Pierre Dubost. En ce qui concerne la première étude, il s'agit plutôt de l'espace considéré comme structure organisatrice du recueil poétique: en effet Seth observe les différences structurales et du contenu entre l'édition du 1778 et l'édition du 1781 du recueil de Parny. Ces différences indiquent aussi un choix stylistique et thématique différent; en effet d'un côté l'auteure analyse l'emploi des temps verbaux, de l'autre les particularités du vocabulaire. Le but en est de tracer les lignes de démarcation qui soulignent le passage d'une première thématique idyllique de la poésie fugitive à l'élégie, qui fait suite à la déception amoureuse, et enfin à la poésie de l'instant influencée par le rapport fusionnel et 'sauvage' avec une jeune Créole. Selon Seth, c'est justement cette capacité d'adaptation émotive et stylistique qui marque l'originalité du poète Bourbonnais. L'innovation de Parny se retrouve aussi dans sa manière de faire face à la tradition de l'élégie en la transformant en idylle libertine, comme le constate Dubost. En effet, dans son étude, il remarque que le caractère du poète est tellement hédoniste qu'il n'est pas possible de le classer simplement dans l'élégie la plus classique, car la puissance de la douceur et de la vérité des sentiments éloigne l'image de la Mort. Cette attitude est renforcée aussi par une utilisation innovatrice de la 'coupe', qui, selon Dubost, ne permet pas le surgissement des lamentations classiques mais, au contraire, module la voix en déréglant la tradition à travers les plus différents virages lyriques, tout comme souligné aussi par Seth. C'est donc en position charnière qui se place Parny, de même que son contemporain André Chénier, entre la tradition académique pseudo-classique et la révolution romantique qui ne voit pas encore l'aube, un espace de l'entre-deux qui caractérise les thèmes analysés par toutes les contributions de ce recueil, bien qu'elles se concentrent plutôt sur l'unicité de son innovation.

Fortier, Alcée (2011). *Louisiana Folktales, Lapin, Bouki, and Other Creole Stories in French Dialect and English Translation*. Lafayette: University of Louisiana Press, pp. 203

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Summary   1 Les différences entre l'édition de 1895 et l'édition de 2011. – 2 Les langues des «Louisiana Folktales».

1   Les différences entre l'édition de 1895 et l'édition de 2011

En ce qui concerne les différences entre les deux publications, nous relevons que l'appendice nommée *Bits of Louisiana Folk-Lore* a été déplacée dans la troisième section du livre. Si dans le texte de 1895 elle était un supplément au recueil, extrait de *Transactions of Modern Language Association of America* et de *Journal of American Folk-lore* (1888), maintenant elle représente une partie complémentaire de l'ensemble.

De plus, les notations de Fortier sur la langue créole, intitulées *The Creole Dialect*, étaient au tout début du livre, alors que maintenant elles se trouvent dans la première appendice. Elles donnent lieu à un ensemble cohérent avec les trois autres appendices, qui reproduisent deux textes de Fortier – *Proverbs, Sayings, and Songs* (Fortier 1887); *Customs and Superstitions in Louisiana* (Fortier 1888) – et l'*Etude sur la Langue Créole en Louisiane* d'Alfred Mercier. Pour terminer, les contes sont commentés par des notes à la fin du livre.

Voilà la répartition des contes dans la version actuelle des *Louisiana Folktales*:

– Part One: *Animal Tales* (bilingual);
– Part two: *Märchen* (bilingual);
– Part Three: *Bits of Louisiana Folklore (Creole-French)*, à laquelle s'ajoute la traduction anglaise des derniers contes.

Dans les contes d'animaux de la première partie sont rassemblés:
– Des contes étiologiques, comme, par exemple, «Compair Lapin et Madame Carencro» (6) et «The Dog and the Tiger» (12);

– Des contes où la ruse caractérise le héros, c'est le cas de «The Elephant and the Whale» (1), «Compair Lapin and the Earth Worm» (3), «Compair Lapin et Compair l'Ours» (4), «The Tortoise» (10), «Compair Lapin's godchild» (13), «Marriage of Compair Lapin» (15);
– Des contes d'animaux métamorphosés, comme «Mr Monkey, the Bridegroom» (9).

La deuxième partie, *Märchen*, se réfère à des véritables contes de fées, en les distinguant des contes de la première partie par des personnages humains à la place des animaux, bien que, dans une perspective ethnographique la distinction entre animaux et êtres humains n'existe pas. Un exemple de cette équivalence entre animaux et êtres humains surgit de la comparaison entre les contes «Mr Monkey, the Bridegroom» (9, première partie) et «The Devil's Marriage» (19, deuxième partie). Dans les deux contes, un singe et un diable se métamorphosent en êtres humains, en accomplissant une fonction narrative pareille au cours des deux récits.[1]

Pour ce qui est de la troisième partie, *Bits of Louisiana Folklore*, les contes reprennent des personnages de la tradition populaire, comme «Compair Bouki» et «Compair Lapin». Créatures de la tradition africaine, ils sont caractérisés par la ruse («Compair Lapin») et la stupidité («Compair Bouki»).

En particulier, nous relevons que certains contes, comme «Ein Fame ki tournin Macaque/A Woman changed into a Monkey» (37), «Dézef Ki Parlé/The Talking Eggs» (38), «Posson Doré» (40), se retrouvent aussi dans les recueils folkloriques d'autres pays francophones, avec des légères variantes.

À titre d'exemple, nous avons constaté que, en ce qui concerne Haïti, certains contes semblent plus populaires; notamment «Dézef Ki Parlé/The Talking Eggs» (38), et «Posson Doré» (40). De fait, nous avons relevé différentes versions de «Dézef Ki Parlé/The Talking Eggs» (38): dans le recueil de Parsons, avec le titre «The Good Child and the Bad Child»; dans celui de Comhaire-Sylvain, où il s'intitule «Maman d'l'eau»; et dans le livre des frères Marcelin, où le conte s'appelle «La Mére de l'Eau».

Ainsi, des variantes de «Posson Doré» (40) sont rapportées dans le texte de Bastien, où le conte s'intitule «Thézin»; dans celui de Hall, où il s'intitule «Beautiful Sun»; et de nouveau dans celui des frères Marcelin où le titre devient «Tésin, mon bon ami».

Nous avons rapporté les titres des contes, car il est intéressant d'observer où les auteurs ont mis l'accent; de fait les contes oraux n'ont pas de titres: ceux-ci sont créés et ajoutés aux contes transcrits par les folkloristes.

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1 Pour un approfondissement, voir Sanga (2005).

2   Les langues des *Louisiana Folktales*

Comme l'explique Alcée Fortier:

> The tales are given first in the Creole dialect, then in a faithful but not literal translation, as it is desirable to preserve the interest of the story. The study of the Creole dialect is of importance and interest, and the tales have been carefully written in Louisiana dialect, in order that the material may be of use to the philologist. (2011, xv)

Nous voyons que déjà en 1895 la langue originelle est respectée, tout comme le besoin de divulgation des contes, par le biais de l'anglais.

De toute façon, nous rappelons que si cette coexistence entre créole et anglais peut résulter du balancement entre étude scientifique et volonté de divulgation, le choix de la langue peut varier selon les exigences de diffusion des matériaux folkloriques collectés dans un but scientifique.

Par exemple, en ce qui concerne les recueils des pays créolophones, l'ouvrage de la folkloriste et anthropologue Elsie Clew Parsons, *Folklore of the Antilles. French and English*, rapporte fidèlement les contes dans le créole utilisé par les informateurs; par contre, dans la thèse de Doctorat d'Université d'une autre célèbre folkloriste, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain (*Les contes haïtiens*), le texte des contes est cité presque entièrement en français, probablement pour toucher un public universitaire et scientifique – non créolophone – le plus large possible.

L'intérêt pour la langue créole est souligné aussi aux appendices I et IV, correspondant à l'étude de Fortier *The Creole Dialect* et à celui de Alfred Mercier, *Etude sur la langue Créole en Louisiane*. Dans le premier Fortier expose plusieurs caractères du créole, car il pense que

> we can understand, by studying the transformation of the French into the Creole dialect, the process by which Latin, spoken by the uncivilized Gauls, became our French. [...] [The Creole dialect] for its structure serves to strengthen the great laws of language, and its history trends to prove how dialects have sprung from one original language and spread all over the world. (2011, 153)

L'étude grammaticale de Mercier est davantage ponctuelle, vu qu'il prend en considération plusieurs aspects, comme la formation des temps verbaux, des pronoms, mais aussi les phénomènes de l'agglutination/contraction des mots etc.

Selon l'auteur «il y a là [dans le créole] [...] au point de vue de la psychologie et de la philologie de curieuses recherches à faire» (Fortier 2011, 181). Voilà pourquoi non seulement Mercier illustre les particularités de la grammaire créole, mais il cherche aussi les raisons à la base de sa for-

mation et de ses spécificités. Ainsi, Mercier retrace certaines conditions de naissance du créole:

> Il y a d'abord un fait important à constater; c'est la rapidité avec laquelle le nègre, importé en Louisiane, oublie sa langue natale. Il y a pour cela deux raisons; la première, c'est que l'esclave pour comprendre son maître et pour en être compris, est obligé de se faire le plus tôt possible au langage dont celui se sert; la seconde, c'est que son idiome africain, n'étant pas une langue écrite, il n'a pas, pour conserver la tradition, la ressource du livre. Une langue dans laquelle on ne lit ni n'écrit, s'altère et s'oublie rapidement. (Fortier 2011, 181)

D'ailleurs, au delà des aspects linguistiques et grammaticaux, Fortier avait considéré d'autres versants de la culture créole, montrés dans les appendices II et III, soit *Proverbs, Sayings and Songs* et *Customs and Superstitions in Louisiana.* L'auteur y rapporte nombre d'exemples à propos des dictons et des coutumes populaires, qui donnent au lecteur des *Folktales* un cadre plus complet du contexte folklorique louisianais.

Néanmoins, le souci scientifique des *Louisiana Folktales* se manifeste aussi dans les commentaires et les notes finales du livre. Dans celles-ci, par exemple, Fortier précise le nom et l'âge de presque chaque conteur et le lieu de la transmission du conte, informations intéressantes du point de vue ethnographique. À titre d'exemple, que l'on considère «Julia, 7 Prytania Street», «old negress, 77 Esplanade Avenue», et «Félicie, coloured woman».

Font exception à ces remarques les contes numérotés 29, 31, 32, 36, relatives à des contes folkloriques très populaires, ceux du couple d'animaux *Bouki* et *Malice*; comme le dit Fortier: «[these stories] are innumerable, and in all of them, the rabbit is victorious, playing, as I have already said, the part of Renart in the story of the thirteen century» (Fortier 2011, 200).

Toutefois, la transmission du conte peut se réaliser aussi par une transcription d'une source écrite, dont Fortier indique l'auteur pour en prouver la fiabilité; c'est le cas du conte 28I, *Piti Bonhomme Godron*, où Fortier note que: «this tale was written in 1884 by Mr. ZÉNON DE MORUELLE, of Waterloo, La., and communicated to me by my friend, Dr. ALFRED MERCIER. [...] With the author's permission, I now reproduce it from the manuscript...» (Fortier 2011, 190).

L'auteur utilise donc deux modes de collecte, à la fois des informateurs directs et des sources écrites.

D'autres aspects marquant l'attention scientifique de Fortier pour son travail de folkloriste concernent l'origine et les modifications subies par les contes, qu'il relate dans les notes et les commentaires.

Parfois l'écrivain montre les racines africaines des histoires rapportées

dans la structure du conte. De fait, il met en évidence ce qu'il considère un goût typiquement africain, comme dans le conte 1, «Compair Bouki, Compair Lapin, and the Bird's Eggs», où il affirme que: «the way Bouki finds out what Lapin is cooking in his kettle, and the scraping off the pieces from his teeth by his mother, are typical of the negro mind, rude, but at the same time droll and cunning» (Fortier 2011, 188).

Fortier expose aussi des parallèles avec d'autres pays, en s'appuyant sur la récurrence des mêmes motifs; c'est le cas, par exemple du conte 29, «The Devil's Marriage», dont il explique que:

> The incident of the obstacles thrown in the way of the pursuer are common to many stories. M. Cosquin gives "Le Sifflet Enchanté", "L'Oiseau Vert", "La Chatte Blanche", "Le Prince et son Cheval", in which are found some of the incidents of the "Devil's marriage". The warning of the old woman to take the dirty eggs and not clean ones belongs essentially to folk-lore, and the women hanging in the closet is a motive of the Blue Beard type. Climbing up the pole to catch the pumpkin has a local color peculiar to Louisiana... (2011, 188-189)

Enfin, Fortier montre l'influence de la culture louisianaise dans les variantes racontées, comme dans le conte 2, «Compair Taureau and Jean Malin», où:

> The motives in this story are to be found in many folk-lore tales, but our Louisiana tale is nevertheless, interesting, and is full of *local colour*; for instance, when the boy states that "he was born when the peach-trees were in bloom, the year the snow fell"; snow is so seldom seen in Louisiana that the date of a snowstorm is as easy to remember as the day of the battle of New Orleans, "la guerre Jackson", say the old negroes... (2011, 187)

En conclusion, le recueil de Fortier représente une contribution importante pour les études folkloriques sous plusieurs aspects.

La langue créole des textes originaux, les études – de Fortier et de Mercier – sur cette langue, la traduction des contes, les dictons et les chansons rapportés donnent un cadre riche du folklore louisianais, même aux non connaisseurs.

De plus, le contenu narratif des contes eux-mêmes peut fournir la matière pour la comparaison entre les traditions des pays qui ont subi la colonisation française, comme nous l'avons brièvement montré pour le cas d'Haïti.

De fait, les ressemblances dûes aux communes racines africaines, fusionnées avec l'influence française et locale, sont un résultat de la créolisation analysable de plusieurs points de vue (historique, linguistique, culturel); ce qui peut donner aux *Louisiana Folktales* un rôle d'exemple fiable pour la recherche comparatiste en matière de folklore.

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Pensare ai 'limiti' degli studi culturali italiani

La rivista *estetica. studi e ricerche* ha di recente dedicato un numero alla memoria di Stuart Hall, «L'interruzione estetica. Stuart Hall e il paradigma degli Studi Culturali» (a cura di Marina Vitale), proponendo una riflessione sulla carica innovativa che l'*aesthetic turn* del pensiero di Hall ha portato nello studio della cultura britannica e nelle analisi sulla rappresentazione visuale. Gli autori dei saggi del volume (come ricorda la curatrice Marina Vitale nell'introduzione, autrice anche di uno dei testi pubblicati) sono tutti collegati, in maniera più o meno diretta, al cosiddetto 'polo napoletano' degli studi culturali: prima *traduzione* italiana del *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* di Birmingham e, ancora oggi, impegnato nello sperimentare e disseminare inaspettate traiettorie di ricerca. Il numero di *estetica. studi e ricerche*, tuttavia, se letto nel suo insieme di 'costellazione critica', ci dice qualcosa di più oltre all'*interruzione* estetica che lo sviluppo degli studi culturali e la figura di Stuart Hall hanno operato sulle «strutture del sentire» (Williams 1979, 169) della cultura britannica (per usare l'espressione coniata da Raymond Williams). Privilegiando dunque solo una delle possibili chiavi di lettura, è possibile dire che questo assemblaggio di testi critici sollevi un profondo interrogativo: in che modo sono pensati, *tradotti*, i *cultural studies* in Italia? Quali traiettorie critiche gli studi culturali italiani stanno intraprendendo?

Letta in questo modo, l'operazione che gli autori fanno è, allora, quella di utilizzare il 'metodo' di Stuart Hall (Chambers, «Stuart Hall dai Caraibi al Mediterraneo») per operare essi stessi un'*interruzione* all'interno degli studi culturali italiani.

Una delle più grandi tracce che il pensiero di Hall ha lasciato nel terreno degli studi culturali è proprio questo bisogno continuo di *traduzione*, questa necessità di dover lavorare con termini posti sempre – come scriveva Derrida – «sotto cancellatura» (Derrida 1998, 29), allo stesso tempo inadeguati eppure indispensabili. Questo metodo di 'procedere teorizzando',

come lo definiva Hall, concepisce il 'teorizzare' non come mera produzione di 'teorie' ma come tentativo di spiegare la realtà usando concetti che sappiamo essere non adeguati, consapevoli di doverli tradurre e riadattare a nuovi e diversi contesti sociali e culturali. È in questo senso che fare studi culturali dovrebbe comportare un lavoro di *riscrittura* della propria cultura, un pensare ai 'limiti' – per riprendere un'espressione althusseriana tanto cara a Hall – e *dai* limiti concetti come 'identità', 'soggetto', 'cultura', 'nazione', ecc. Consapevoli dell'impossibilità di pensarli nello stesso modo in cui sono stati pensati in precedenza o in contesti culturali differenti, fare studi culturali significa *es-tendere* un paradigma «fin dove è logicamente possibile» (Hall e Mellino 2015, 69). Da questo processo, almeno in Gran Bretagna, le singole discipline sono uscite 'interrotte', così come ad essere investito in maniera irreversibile è stato l'intero ordine discorsivo della cultura britannica. Se pensiamo, invece, all'impatto che gli studi culturali hanno sulle istituzioni o sulla società italiana in generale – nonostante i primi lavori pionieristici abbiano cercato di incrinare un certo modo di pensare la cultura (che in Italia, purtroppo, spesso porta ancora la 'C' maiuscola) – sembrerebbe che le *strutture* più profonde della cultura italiana si lascino *interrompere* difficilmente dai metodi di ricerca e di analisi che caratterizzano la portata *politica* di questo campo di studi. Certo, gli studi culturali sono soltanto un'*espressione* di cambiamenti che dovrebbero essere *già in atto* nella società, tuttavia è proprio sulla complessità di questo iato che ci si potrebbe interrogare. Pensare ai 'limiti' degli studi culturali italiani potrebbe, allora, aiutare a ragionare non tanto sulle similarità quanto sulle fratture che il nostro 'fare studi culturali' presenta nei confronti dei *cultural studies* britannici. Ripensare il significato dei concetti usati dai *cultural studies* rileggendoli attraverso una lente più adatta al nostro contesto (sociale, politico, economico), permetterebbe di capire *cosa sono* oggi gli studi culturali in Italia, quali siano i limiti e le potenzialità interne al loro tras*formarsi* nell'attuale *congiuntura.*

Come ha sostenuto in più occasioni lo stesso Hall, qui non si tratta certamente di rendere gli studi culturali un 'monumento', ovvero di disciplinarli, congelandoli in una definizione omogenea e 'proprietaria' di cosa dovrebbero essere al fine di difenderli da eventuali contaminazioni – ciò significherebbe auspicare la loro spoliticizzazione e, di conseguenza, la loro morte certa. Il terreno degli studi culturali deve, come ci ricorda Hall, restare costantemente indefinito anche quando viene istituzionalizzato – «l'istituzionalizzazione è inevitabile e pericolosa allo stesso tempo» (Hall 2015, 30) – giocando sulla interdisciplinarietà piuttosto che sul farsi disciplina.

Tuttavia, è possibile rinvenire una certa resistenza della cultura italiana al farsi contaminare dalle prospettive più *politiche* degli studi culturali e a contaminarle a sua volta: le istituzioni universitarie italiane sembrano non riuscire ancora a *riscrivere* le proprie discipline, abbandonando gli

steccati identitari e aprendosi a una maggiore transdisciplinarietà – Roland Barthes affermava che «per fare dell'interdisciplinarietà, non basta prendere un "soggetto" e intorno ad esso chiamare a raccolta due o tre scienze. L'interdisciplinarietà consiste nel creare un oggetto nuovo, che non appartenga a nessuno» (*Giovani ricercatori*, 1984). In proposito, Lidia Curti ci ricorda nel saggio contenuto nel volume «Sognare in Afro» che gli studi culturali nascono proprio dalla crisi degli studi umanistici e sociali e ciò che propongono non è tanto un allargamento dell'oggetto di studio quanto un modo *diverso* di studiarlo. Non il *cosa*, dunque, ma il *come*. È in questo senso che si spiega la portata dirompente dell'*interruzione* del femminismo operata nello stesso centro di Birmingham quando, durante gli anni settanta – ci ricorda sempre Curti – esso fece «irruzione attraverso la finestra [...] "facendo un rumore indecente, sequestrando il tempo"» (Curti, «Sognare in Afro», 32-33). L'interruzione femminista mise in crisi i presupposti radicali del progetto, evidenziando come anche lo stesso Centro non si sottraesse, nei fatti, alla natura 'genderizzata' del potere. Ancora, Curti ci ricorda l'*interruzione* operata all'interno della rappresentazione delle identità e delle differenze nelle arti visive, così come l'*interruzione* della forma espositiva del museo: se, nella prima, l'opera artistica smette di essere legata alla rappresentazione di una identità nera *essenzializzata* e l'opera d'arte si fa *soglia* in cui pensare l'identità nella sua 'mancanza' (in senso psicoanalitico), nella seconda la forma espositiva delle opere artistiche smette di essere legata al concetto di 'national heritage', aprendo a nuove forme espositive per l'arte della differenza. L'arte visiva diviene, dunque, un linguaggio in grado di operare quella interruzione epistemica e culturale che ha permesso di riarticolare la questione dell'identità e della cittadinanza all'interno di un discorso estetico che diventa *politica della rappresentazione*, aprendo lo spazio per una nuova «costellazione critica» (Chambers, «Stuart Hall dai Caraibi al Mediterraneo», 107). Come viene messo in luce da Marina Vitale nel suo saggio «Rappresentazione e visualità nel pensiero di Stuart Hall», l'arte è infatti considerata da Hall una *forma di pensiero* – un modo di sentire, di vedere, di pensare – la cui fruizione e produzione ha un ruolo *conoscitivo* fondamentale.

In un saggio pubblicato di recente in italiano sull'arte della diaspora nera, Hall scriveva: «per chi lavora nella dislocata zona del "culturale", il mondo deve divenire in qualche modo un testo, un'immagine, prima di essere "letto"» (Hall 2015, 196). Considerare la natura *testuale* (e quindi *storicizzata*) delle espressioni culturali – siano esse in forma visiva, letteraria, del mondo dei media, ecc. – ha in effetti rappresentato una delle prime *interruzioni* che i *cultural studies* hanno operato all'interno della cultura britannica. Si tratta di un aspetto del pensiero di Hall ripreso da Marta Cariello nel suo saggio «Dentro la tensione delle parole: Stuart Hall e la letteratura», quando ricorda che i primi studi culturali hanno riconfigurato il campo della letteratura e la stessa categoria di 'letterario' a

partire dal fondamentale contributo dato dall'analisi di Raymond Williams sul rapporto tra marxismo e letteratura. Quel 'materialismo culturale' alla base della produzione teorica degli studi culturali britannici e che oggi ci permette di leggere la cultura e i suoi linguaggi in chiave di rapporti di potere, considerandoli parte integrante della struttura economica e non più relegati nel ruolo ancellare della sovrastruttura. È mettendo in pratica questo 'metodo' degli studi culturali che il saggio di Miguel Mellino «Che genere di nero è il "nero" della questione nera secondo Hollywood» ricorre al pensiero di Hall per interrogare il significante *black* all'interno della recente ricodificazione cinematografica hollywoodiana della storia delle lotte degli africano-americani (Mellino riprende qui un noto saggio di Hall sulla cultura popolare nera, «Che genere di nero è il "nero" della cultura popolare nera?»). L'autore aggiunge un 'terzo momento' della politica della rappresentazione nera ai due già teorizzati da Hall: quello della neo-liberalizzazione del significante *'black(ness)'*. Un momento caratterizzato dalla cattura neo-liberale della *blackness* e dalla sua incorporazione – e de-politicizzazione – all'interno dell'*American way of life*.

Adottare 'il metodo' di Hall e degli studi culturali, dunque, non significa limitarsi alla spiegazione del funzionamento di alcune pratiche culturali ma implica, piuttosto, una vera e propria *rottura epistemologica* nei confronti della propria cultura. L'orizzonte di senso ne dovrebbe uscire modificato irrimediabilmente. È questo che mette in luce Iain Chambers nel suo saggio «Stuart Hall dai Caraibi al Mediterraneo», quando fa riferimento al «campo della cultura come territorio contestato» (103). Interrogare la propria cultura comporta 'de-familiarizzare' con l'identità e le appartenenze nazionali, lasciandosi disturbare da un'interferenza che proviene dai margini. Questo elemento fondamentale che caratterizza il progetto politico dei *cultural studies* è sottolineato anche dallo stesso Hall nella sua stimolante *Lectio Magistralis* che apre il numero della rivista*,* «Nuovi paradigmi nello studio della cultura»*,* tenuta a Napoli il 6 giugno 2008 in occasione del conferimento della laurea *Honoris Causa* da parte dell'Università 'L'Orientale' e qui pubblicata per la prima volta. *Interrompere epistemologicamente* un ordine culturale – ci dice Hall – significa svelare i rapporti tra cultura e potere che *surdeterminano* i soggetti, e che costituisce la base fondamentale per l'emergere di nuove direzioni di ricerca. Già in un'intervista pubblicata nel 2007 con il titolo significativo di «La cultura e il potere», Hall precisava:

Affrontare la cultura o le espressioni culturali da un punto di vista meramente formale, intenderle semplicemente come valori o come significati, non costituisce affatto la tematica dei *cultural studies*. Fare *cultural studies* significa cercare di identificare i rapporti della cultura – del significato o del *meaning making* – con altre sfere della vita sociale, ovvero con l'economia, con la politica, con la razza, con la strutturazione delle

classi, dei generi, ecc. […] Qualcuno ha iniziato a praticare i *cultural studies* come fossero un tipo di formalismo, producendo saggi e articoli sulle cose più disparate. Si può fare *cultural studies* anche in questo modo, producendo testi su qualsiasi cosa, dalle soap-opera alle t-shirt, ecc. Ma questo non significa necessariamente che si sta affrontando il rapporto tra cultura e potere. (Hall 2007, 10-14)

Da un certo punto di vista, stando a quanto ci dice Hall, questo modo specifico di fare analisi culturale sembrerebbe essere molto spesso frainteso e piuttosto banalizzato in Italia. Ciò che sembrerebbe emergere da un certo modo italiano di fare studi culturali è un tipo di analisi culturale che dà maggiore attenzione all'analisi semiotica dei prodotti culturali piuttosto che alla loro messa in relazione con il sistema di potere che li produce. Se i rapporti tra cultura e potere nelle società cambiano a seconda di diverse e specifiche congiunture storiche – è in questo senso che gli studi culturali sono *storicamente specifici*, di natura *congiunturale* –, se i significati culturali e l'articolazione della cultura subiscono costantemente trasformazioni radicali di significato, quali sono, allora, le questioni che – in questa congiuntura storica – stanno cercando di affrontare gli studi culturali in Italia? Quali sono i rapporti tra cultura e potere che cercano di spiegare? Quale tipo di crisi *producono*? Se è difficile trovare una riflessione sistematica su questi aspetti all'interno degli studi culturali e postcoloniali italiani, ben più difficile è indagare la natura di questa intermittenza.

Certo, si tratta di questioni complesse, le cui risposte sono tutte da costruirsi, tuttavia non smettere mai di interrogare e *tradurre* il nostro orizzonte di senso permette di trovarci «nella prossimità di Stuart Hall» (Chambers, «Stuart Hall dai Caraibi al Mediterraneo», 107). Hall scriveva: «non è attraverso Raymond Williams o Richard Hoggart che ho incontrato i *cultural studies*, li ho incontrati in rapporto a una domanda che mi portavo dentro» (Hall 2007, 55).

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Indian Graphic Novels
Towards Decoding India

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Graphic novels are fast becoming a solid reality in the literary panorama of India. Rising over the shadows of the ubiquitous and omnipotent Amar Chitra Katha, the Indian graphic novel is far more than just gods and freedom fighters as it is commonly believed. Exploring a myriad of issues and formats, from myths to science fiction, autobiography to history and literary classics, this medium is steadily and continuously emerging as an effective way of representing contemporary India. There are graphic novels on development, sexuality, identity, social and political realities that tell more than what is already said.

Not only are the new wave storytellers and artists relying on the intrinsic quality of imagination that this format offers, but they are also experimenting new strategies taken from cinema and non-graphic literature and enriching them with numerous literary, historical and biographical references to be able to reflect alternative realities beyond the media-saturated realities of contemporary India.

The creators of graphic novel produce narrative and emotional impact by combining visual and textual elements towards understanding of histories and truths (political and social) about India. Caricatures are a powerful tool that allows to develop satire around the event. Historical, political or social caricatures are offering an insight into our political realities, social-economic conditions or even historical occurrences highlighting our hypocrisies and dual standards. But how do caricatures function to do this?

Promod K. Nayar explains that "caricatures are the distorted representation of any individual with a fair amount of exaggerated physiognomies to reflect the inner nature of the individual" (Nayar 2016, 194). With reference to Lawrence Stretcher, Nayar also affirms that

> pictorial caricature pertain to the grotesque or ludicrous representation of scorn or ridicule of human vices or follies and exaggeration of their most characteristic features by means of graphic images. (194)

Thus, through exaggeration and grotesque the satire gives an alternative view of History, culture and society. Moreover, the focus of the graphic nar-

ratives on individual battles and traumas, stories of women, of individual survivors, of personal losses ensures 'critical literacy' around the event. The term 'critical literacy', explains Nayar, means understanding how such national events, processes or policies affect the individual and the family. Nayar highlights that by visualizing micro histories, the graphic narratives help to extract the event from being an objective reality, expressed in numbers and dates, and to restore its subjective meanings.

R.K. Laxman's pictorial satire on socio-political issues has been fulfilling the mission for long. But the current graphic narrative is working towards enabling a satirical critique of the Indian contemporary realities, thus making alternate and radical realities visible. *River of stories, Bhimayana*, *Delhi Calm*, *Drawing the Line*, *A Gardener in the Wasteland*, *This Side That Side*, *The Harappa Files* (to name a few) represent personal stories of victims, suffering, deprivation along with the larger national narratives of progress, equality, freedom and development.

While *River of stories* depicts the impact of building the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the local population, *A Gardener in the Wasteland* is an account of Jyotiba Phule's struggle for liberty and *Drawing the Lines* is a reaction to the 16 December 2012 brutal rape in Delhi of a young girl, popularly known to all as Nirbhaya. *Bhimayana: The Experience of Untouchability*, *Delhi Calm* and *This Side That Side* move further from just reviving certain events and the action around them, and take History to task to prove that indeed History is not only about the past. It is about how the present generation engages with this past today to negotiate with its legacy.

Bhimayana is an account of Bhim alias Bhimrao Ambedker – the man who goes on to draft the constitution of India –, of his encounter with untouchability and his fight against this inhuman practise that deprives a man of his humanity and forces him to believe that even animals have more freedom than them. In depicting the plight of the untouchables or Dalits as they are more commonly known, the narrative questions the very presence of the caste system that puts castes above all humanity. Intertwined with the past incidents of discrimination are the more recent incidents that jolt India that claims the abolition of the caste system and practicing of untouchability as a crime. What has then changed? A few Dalit political figures have been given privileged posts in the government to work for the betterment of the lower castes, but in pursuing their own interests they have ignored the problems of the castes. Also in the name of the improvement of these castes and to provide equal opportunities in education and employment, a system of quotas was put into place and this has only worked to create new divisions and categories among people. The narrative thus very clearly portrays in words and pictures the impossibility of rising above the curse of the caste system in India as it is deeply etched in the minds of even those who are born in the present-day 'free' India.

 Delhi Calm deciphers the city during its state of emergency and the sus-

pension of Civil Rights during the Emergency of 1975-1977. Though set during the Emergency, the purpose of the author is not to showcase the violent episodes of slum clearance and forced sterilization under Sanjay Gandhi, neither does he want to reveal the state head's attempt to save her own power using the constitutional provision of 'state of emergency'. The main focus actually is the only movement against the masked threat to the country's democracy lead by Jai Prakash Narayan and his call for 'Total Revolution', and the fall of the movement because of the half committedness not only of his followers, but that of the country as a whole. This indifference and acceptance is what is alarming and dangerous. In the present time too, there is a strange daily calm along with the daily alarms on violence, jams, scams, inflation, communal politics and the fall of the very ideals of the republic.

By the same author, *This Side That Side,* an anthology on the Partition of India, has a more hopeful note. The anthology is a graphic account and exploration of the Partition encompassing memories and desires fostered with nostalgia, pain, yearning, speculation and curiosity written and illustrated by 47 collaborators from 'this side' and 'that side' of the borders – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. *This Side That side: Restorying partition* is a representation as much metaphorical as factual of the Partition and what it means to live in the shadow of this epochal moment that has shaped the fates of three nations, and continues to define the lives of people across the three nations. Partition discourse no longer concentrates on the political drama emphasising the role of the state actors, but it is shaped by the memories of the survivors and the consequences of what happened when those lines were drawn. In exploring the present generations' relationships with the Partition that left gaping scars on our collective psyche and set of chains of external and internal violence that have not snapped yet, the anthology goes beyond the horror, the displacement, the severed relationships. *This Side That Side* is thus about the children of Partition – not only people but entire communities, ways of life both current and remembered. It is an attempt to restore the fractured perspectives on the same truth as in Orijit Sen's *Making Faces* that summons readers to create faces by choosing the upper middle and the lower portions through trifurcated pages reminding of the politely ignored truth – we are all the same, it is just a matter of seeing. It is an effort to reconcile with the pain of partition, of how ordinary people negotiated with the uprooting and displacement and how they continue to negotiate its legacy reminding all that 'This is not how nations are made' – a line from the story *Which Side* of the anthology.

The Partition of India is not a closed episode of history. It continues to widen the gulf and deepen the scars etched in the memories. We continue to feel the after shocks of the partition, whose social and political dimensions have given birth to new polemics of terrorism and the politics of appeasement. *This Side That Side* is an effort to renew and to flame the curiosity to reach out to the other side in the hope of opening new dialogues

for a reconciliation with a past that haunts this side and that side alike.

While socio-political concerns are a recurring theme in these graphical narratives, the desire is to resurface and to re-politicize these issues in order to present the new realities that have developed around them over the years. Another set of graphic novels such as *Corridor, Kari, and Hyderabad* offer a kaleidoscopic representation of contemporary city's fragmented realities and hidden lives and loves.

Soon to join these narratives on city life is Ram Vaketesan's *Black Mumba* set to release later this year. *Black Mumba* is a collection of four graphical stories, set in the city of Mumbai, portraying the dark shades of the 'city of dreams'. But what else can these stories suggest about an over-projected city that has only hopelessness and fallen dreams to offer? All the four stories in *Black Mumba*, narrated by the weary, dejected police officer Dev, are snapshots of incidents and cases that he encountered. Though the stories start as a crime fiction, there are no criminals in the stories. There are no good or bad guys in there, only the weird, the bleak and the dreamy nature of life that this city is famous for. The stories reveal the secret and the hidden mythology of the city that continues to find its magical influence despite the misery, the violence, the oppression that has gripped the metropolis. It is the relationship that a Mumbai dweller shares with the city that keeps the city alive in his memories even far away from there as is the case of Ram Vanketesan. Amidst the prestitute journalism and TRP driven media, the Indian Graphical novel is decoding India in all its verity.

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Michela Calderaro
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Born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica, surrounded by an extended family, aunts, uncles, cousins, her own siblings, grandparents and great-grandparents, Jacqueline Bishop spent her early years with her father, while her mother had emigrated to the United States. After finishing high school, she joined her mother and continued her studies in New York.

Founder of *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*, a literary and visual arts magazine, Jacqueline Bishop now teaches in the Liberal Studies Program at New York University. She is a poet and a novelist, but also a photographer, a painter, a filmmaker and a producer.

She published two collections of poems, *Fauna* (2006) and *Snapshots from Istanbul* (2009); a novel, *The River's Song* (2007); an art book, *Writers Who Paint, Painters Who Write*, (2007); a collection of oral histories from Jamaican women living in New York, *My Mother Who Is Me: Life Stories from Jamaican Women in New York* (2006); photography series, among which *Childhood Memories*; an amazing collection of both poems and drawings, *The Tempest Poems* (2014), which is a testimony of her interest in the connection between the visual arts and the written word, for the 9th Annual Liberal Studies Colloquium, *Shakespeare's Globe*, to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth.

The Gymnast and Other Positions, winner of the 2016 Bocas Prize for Caribbean literature, non-fiction category, is the latest stirring and satisfyingly disturbing work to be offered to us by Ms Bishop. It is a three-part book; there are short stories, essays, and interviews with Bishop by other writers and journalists. This division, though seemingly plain and obvious, is in fact quite misleading since the parts transcend their genre, crossing, overlapping, and intersecting one another – quite an unconventional way of assembling a book.

Readers of Bishop's work, her affectionate reading public, will find themselves in a familiar territory, recognising landscapes, situations, atmospheres; others, who would encounter her work for the first time, will be entranced by the richness of her prose, her imagery and insight, but perhaps shocked by the reality they will be exposed to.

Usually an introductory story is designed to grant a collection its tone, to set the pace, or to provide the reader with a key to the understanding of the narra-

tive. Here, however, the beginning confirms the unconventional way in which this whole collection was constructed. The title story, with its erotic tone and allusive suggestiveness, would seem to lead us to an earthly paradise of the senses, but it actually takes us to a paradise lost or to an earthly hell. Whether that paradise would ever be regained, only Bishop's next endeavour will tell.

Jamaica and its inhabitants are an ever-present entity in her works. Fictionalised autobiographical details and biographies of other women and girls are so closely knitted that it is difficult to discern the boundaries between the personal and the recounted experiences.

The book, through most of the short stories, is perhaps Bishop's strongest and most devastating statement on sexual abuse and on the sacredness of a woman's body. It is actually a testimony of a battle fought on and for women's bodies.

Layer after layer, sentence after sentence, the stories begin with a whisper and proceed, as in a crime story, by unearthing revelations that lead to epiphanies.

Echoes of her previous works can be heard in both short stories and essays.

The vicissitudes of the girls who inhabit *The Gymnast* are new versions of a pivotal short story, «Brown Girl in the Ring», one of Bishop's earliest published stories. We hear the same voice, though now it has taken on a universal dimension, which surfaces in the different parts of the book.

This 'conversation' between and within works is a characteristic she shares with other Caribbean writers and visual artists whose works tends to engage in an endless conversation.

The short story «Oleander», about the encounter between a tattoo artist and a woman whose entire body is covered by a tattoo of a giant oleander, takes its title from a poem in *Fauna*. In that poem a girl is abused by the Master, in a house where she was *supposed* to be protected, while here we have a girl abused by those she is *supposed* to consider as family.

It is indeed within the family that most horrors take place. In stressing how her poems, her prose and her art are closely connected, we should also mention that the word 'family' is the same word that comes to the mind of the little girl in the poem «Snakes» (*Fauna*) after she has been raped by her grandfather:

> I did not know how to name
> what my mother and my grandfather had done to me,
> until that day at the zoo when I saw them, a family,
> curled around each other, saw the venomous tongues that darted
> and flickered, the evil intent in their glowing red eyes.

The 'positions' of the story's title are also reflections on the position of the author in the relationship with her characters. These characters have been haunting Bishop, as she herself mentions in one of the interviews

(«Writing Across the Diaspora», 151), so relentlessly to force her to bring them to the page, to let them tell their stories, in their own words.

Bishop becomes the means through which to voice the pain of separation, abandonment and abuse these characters have suffered.

We have a mother, who is exposed to the brutal reality of her lover's betrayal with her own adoptive daughter («Tall Tale»); a girl, who devises a way to heal her scars, looking for love where she cannot get it («Terra Nova»); but we also have stories that highlight the power of spirituality to overcome pain («Effigy») or introduce the idea of resurrection and rebirth («Flamboyant Tree»).

Absent fathers, mothers who are forced to emigrate to provide for their children, abusive grandfathers and step-fathers – balanced and juxtaposed by positive grandmothers and great-grandmothers, the saviours, who are also repositories of culture and memory: they help us to focus on issues that are very dear to Bishop, and recur in her entire oeuvre, such as belonging, identity, cultural heritage, the feeling of being out of place in one's own country, of being torn between places, of living in exile. Ancestors become, then, our spiritual guides. Ancestors, Bishop suggests, are the fabric we are made of.

The transition from the stories (Part 1) to the essays (Part 2) is so natural we almost do not notice it. We find again characters and images we have just left in the previous pages.

In «Sailing with Wayne Brown», about a much admired writer and Bishop's mentor, we learn about the genesis of the short story «Flamboyant Tree». The essay deals with the "dilemma of belonging" (81) and the fictional rendering of biographical details. Brown's influence is increasingly more evident throughout many of the interviews.

There is not one single thread connecting the various sections of the book, but rather a complex network of threads, like a spider's web, with many threads intersecting each other.

It is in the interviews and essays that the visual element of Bishop's work is thoroughly explored and self-referencing becomes more evident.

What I have noticed about my visual art is that I seem to almost always work in a series and in that way it is very similar to storytelling. It is almost as if I am telling little stories in the three major visual art works that I have completed to date. There is a strong narrative element. (124)

Her stories derive from the lives of Jamaican women and men, who then find their way into her paintings, drawings and photographs, to be then discussed in her essays. This process is well analysed in «Photographs on the Mantelpiece», where we follow Bishop as she walks through her "grandmother's house looking at the photographs that decorate her house" (75), and delving deeper into her feelings of displacement, her need to belong and at the same time fear of not belonging.

One of these photographs, reproduced alongside the essay, is of Bishop herself, her wide opened eyes looking almost frightened.

These photographs will be given new life, first through the essay, where they lead the writer to discuss how images of past lives shape our own memory, then in the interviews, mainly in «The Haunted Self», where she discusses her photography series, *Childhood Memories*, where her aim was, she says, "to reconstruct a childhood that was part real, part mythologised" (159).

Some of these photographs are also reproduced here; images of Jamaica are merged, superimposed on images of New York. Bishop discusses how the images in her *Childhood Memories* have reached their final version: at first, she just tried to group them in a collage; then, to pile film on top of film and, finally, to use digital formats that allowed the merging of reality with imagination.

Closing the book, we realise it has embarked us on a journey of reflection on the role of the artist, exploration of how memory and imagination are used by the artist to *show* us, with words and images, that the past is what informs us, what shapes us and also makes us understand where we are heading.

Sekou, Lasana M. (2016). *Book of the Dead*. Philipsburg St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, pp. 68

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Caribbean literature has been gaining stature and critical attention beyond its territorial boundaries, not only in countries whose people speak the Caribbean languages but also in such countries where the study of Caribbean literature, culture and history is part of university curricula, and where more and more high school teachers are introducing their students to this rich and colourful world.

The Caribbean is one of the most dynamic literary environments, where a lot is happening, where literary festivals are organised one after another and, mainly, where a new use of language is taking form, or, better, where language *happens.*

And when one talks about language, Lasana Sekou's name comes to mind at once with shimmering colours.

Mr Sekou's language is rich and colourful, yet his works also take the form of a cry for independence of St. Martin and its people. The small island is in fact one of the last existing *colonies*, still under the control of the Dutch and French governments. The aspirations for full independence are passionately pursued and Lasana Sekou is viewed as the champion of the St. Martin's independence struggle.

His body of work comprises 15 published books, most translated into Spanish, French, Dutch, German, Turkish and Chinese; an Audio CD of his collection *The Salt Reaper*, where he recites his poems to music; he is the recipient of countless international awards and honours; his works have been published as bilingual volumes, in English and Spanish (*Corazón de pelícano-Antologia poética de Lasana M. Sekou/Pelican Heart-An Anthology of Poems by Lasana M. Sekou*), and trilingual volumes, in English, French and Spanish (*Nativity/Nativité/Natividad*). He is also a successful editor and mentor for new young writers.

Book of the Dead is his latest collection of poems; reading it feels like embarking on a journey not knowing where you will land, but knowing very well that the person at the helm will surely never let you down. It is a journey across very stormy seas – full of challenges and scary seascapes.

Embarking on this journey, the reader can expect to be questioned, prodded, pushed to the limits, but his or her reward will be a promise of redemption – only a promise, though, with no advance guarantees.

Are we ready to choose between Lucifer and Legba? Which god will help us to get out of Babylon and head across borders and boundaries towards islands that are depicted as metaphors for Jesus, to be sold, enslaved, stripped naked and covered in blood?

Book of the Dead is a history book, a book of remembrances and, therefore, about the power of memory and, as such, would lead to the *creation* of a universal canon – a canon that is deeply rooted in the soil of St. Martin, true, but whose branches are bound to reach other world regions across the ocean in a reversal of the Middle Passage.

The collection represents the struggle of creating – and evolving through the written word, through language – a way of interpreting the past, of appropriating the past, connecting memories to other memories.

Remembering means re-living the past, granting it a new life. And as painful as it might be, individual remembering is a step towards *constructing or creating* a collective identity.

Collective memory is a product of individual memories – family recollections, biographies and autobiographies – that, though often influenced by the present or by personal interpretations, when passed on from generation to generation after having been processed by the creative mind of true artists, contribute to building our identity.

But memory, though the bearer of immortality, is fragile. It can be tricky or misleading, it can be obscured by reticence, by involuntary amnesic aphasia (Freud 1953). And, thus, it is the artist's task to unveil and analyse such instances. To warn us that what happened in the past is actually happening today, in front of our sealed eyes. Lasana Sekou urges us to break open the seals that blind us.

This collection of poems reads the past through what is happening in the present, ties past history to present history, connects past horrors to today's horrors, yesterday's borders and boundaries to today's borders and boundaries.

Discussing the Middle Passage, writer Lorna Goodison stressed the importance of memory: "I know that, there is no way of forgetting something like that. I believe that the remembering of it is part of the equipment I have been given as a writer" (Calderaro 2006).

And here Lasana Sekou urges artists to become the historical *actants* who lead to the construction of a whole new society; suggesting that it is the poet's awareness that renders the history and memory of past generations immortal, warning us that we are actually recreating the boundaries and barriers of the past.

This new collection opens with a voice that is almost a murmur, with a rhetorical thought, with a choice that must be made, and ends, coming a

full circle, with "il' s'maatin" (61), with lines uttered with a voice that is no longer soft but has become firmer and stronger, though somber, after the thunders of the collection's middle part, because "time to choose./ soon come" (62) after having collided against boundaries, after the "Angel of Death" (52) has taken its toll and more "blood [has sealed] the cradle of the nation" (51).

Actually, with the last poem, properly titled «Seal», we are caught bereaving, then falling into silence because every possible word has been uttered already, any choice offered, and Man is now faced with a choice.

The collection is filled with references to gods, myths and literatures of the past, with tributes to contemporary authors and reports about forgotten slaughters. In the first poem, we are faced with the choice between Lucifer and Legba. Then we hear about the fate of Pheippides, the messenger bearing the news of Athens' victory (unavoidably echoing Pheippides' words in Robert Browning's 1897 poem, «Athens is saved, thanks Pan»). It was indeed Pan, the god of wild nature, of shepherds and music, who helped the Athenian herald.

And so we begin by facing choices, a victory and nature.

The focus on nature, past and present genocides and martyrs of all nations expands Lasana Sekou's collection scope to touch larger audiences, both in the Caribbean and beyond, in lands that are theatres of slaughter and other horrors, because though some would say we're destined to repeat a pattern of horrors we might still have time to pursue a different destiny of our own choice.

In Sekou's poems, we find not only a narrative of people's past but also a portrait of a society that has been assembling pieces of various pasts, a mosaic of historical remembrances, a society that can survive and build its future only through these very remembrances, ensuring a solid foundation of shared heritage.

Events are reflected on by a narrating voice that shifts back and forth through myths and actual reports, blurring past and present in a continuum of devastating images, making the reader ponder over the connection between literature, culture, revolutions and the transformation of societies.

The collection is a wake-up call, a cry to preserve and cherish what we have before it is too late. Culture and heritage must be preserved and disseminated.

Lasana Sekou seems to suggest that it is through the study and dissemination of poems and stories by Caribbean contemporary writers, and through their involvement in building a new society, that readers outside the Caribbean could better understand how the memory of a horrible past can be processed by artists for shaping a nation.

And by retrieving, restoring and re-rendering their past through the use of art and poetry, people whose ancestors were uprooted, shipped away

from their homes, deprived of their language, their names, their identities and their heritage, can overcome their own aphasia and start building a new future.

However, Sekou warns us, it is a process that does not necessarily call for forgiveness but, on the contrary, requires full recognition and acknowledgement of the past by all the parties involved.

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Leach, Sharon (2014). *Love It When You Come, Hate It When You Go*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press Ltd, pp. 200

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Born in Kingston, Jamaica, a writer and columnist for the *Jamaica Observer* and editor of the paper's weekly literary arts magazine *Bookends*, Sharon Leach is an accomplished fiction writer whose works have always been praised for the bluntness of her prose, direct style and unique female perspective.

Her stories have appeared in anthologies and literary journals – *Kunapipi*; *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*; *Iron Balloons: Fiction from Jamaica's Calabash Writer's Workshop*; *Blue Latitudes*: *An Anthology of Caribbean Women Fiction Writers;* the *Jamaica Journal; Caribbean Writing Today; Calabash: A Journal of Arts and Letters; AfroBeat Journal*; *Pepperpot: Best New Stories From the Caribbean*.

In 2011, she was awarded the Musgrave Bronze Medal by the Council of the Institute of Jamaica in recognition of her achievement in the field of literature.

Her first collection of short stories, *What You Can't Tell Him*, published in 2006 by Star Apple Publishers (Trinidad), portrayed a society populated by characters on the threshold of choices that they, as well as the reader, hoped would bring them peace if not happiness, or in dire situations from which the reader was eager to see them escape.

But there is no redemption offered for Sharon Leach's characters even in her new work. The men and women we encounter in *Love It When You Come, Hate It When You Go*, share the same fate of their predecessors.

Indeed, this eagerly awaited new collection represents a merciless examination of a society destined, probably, not to find salvation.

We witness a failing humanity, frozen at some existential critical point, struggling to pull itself out of the gutter, locked in dysfunctional situations. There is no salvation when these characters' expectations are turned into broken dreams and they are left to face a brutal reality.

Surprisingly, however, the tone of Ms Leach's writing is never depressed nor depressing: her characters are ready to rise again and again after each suffered blow, and we keep rooting for their success, failure after failure.

Ms Leach's maturity as a writer shines through the pages of her new stories, and her strong visual and sensual prose perfectly renders the harsh and difficult lives of the characters, who, though they happen to be Jamaican, meet failures, hopes and despair universally shared by all humanity.

This new collection is a mixture of many *sounds*: we hear the rhythm and drumbeats of Jamaican culture, but we also hear the cry of every woman and every man who inhabit any cosmopolitan city.

It is indeed a collection of cosmopolitan fragments of life, where characters use, or attempt to use, whatever they have to offer, often sex, in order to reach their goals.

While these characters find themselves in situations that might appear at first difficult to accept, or even to fathom, we soon realise that these are people we are acquainted with, or heard about, or just briefly met, because they are all believable, and their voices clear and personal.

Each character has actually his or her own voice; we hear only *their* version of the story, be it in the first or third person narration, and we are drawn to listen to their stories. The author successfully detaches her persona from the page, does not express any kind of judgment towards her creations, giving the reader pieces of their lives, to see and at times to pity, never to judge.

Sharon Leach's multilayered stories deal with contemporary Caribbean life, with mainly urban middle-class women and men who are all are very candid about their sexual needs or obsessions.

She paints a frank portrayal of a society that mirrors our time, made of characters we may very well know, some impoverished, or on the verge of losing whatever meagre wealth they have, they are our neighbours, family members, our peers.

There's a thread connecting each story to another, a thread of despair and loneliness, and not surprisingly in most stories words and expressions such as 'alone' and 'by yourself' pepper the pages.

Though there is hope at the beginning of the characters' journeys, such hope often turns into despair and defeat. What they *do* accomplish is only the passage from sadness to tragedy, and when they think they have found some sort of consolation, it is actually just a passive acceptance of the lesser evil.

Their struggles, resilience and drive to overcome the odds are not enough, and even when they do feel strong enough and choose a line of action that would pull them out of their predicaments, deep down they know that whatever they do the reality they live in would not change.

And if at times it seems they are bound to earn some sort of respite, they actually find themselves on the brink of a personal abyss.

However, a sliver of precious hope is to be found, and cherished, in the stories of Daniel («Love Song») and Sugar and Celine («Comfort»). We follow their paths down to the last page, realising there might still be some brighter

future in their lives, some redemptive opportunities, some recognition that things could change. Whether this will actually happen is left unsaid.

Some of the characters seem to be projections or extensions of characters we rooted for in Sharon Leach's previous collection – like Sugar, who reappears here to begin her transformation into the person she hopes she would become, able to leave behind her poverty and misery, to begin a journey towards a future yet to be built.

This story is central to the collection, since in it we find all the elements that are present in the other stories – secrets, sex, shame, desire to escape an ugly and brutal reality, lies, white lies, denial and silence.

Here too, just as in the previous collection, at the core of the characters' existence there's often a secret – their own, or their loved ones' – that must be kept hidden from society, from their spouses or parents, and it is a secret that will endanger, or destroy, their lives, their physical or mental health. Errors, even innocent errors, of the past are never left to rest, and each of these women and men, without exception, ends up paying the consequences of such errors.

Secrets need a fictional 'truth' in order to embark on a new dream life; a fake, perfect, dream life – a perfect marriage, a perfect heterosexual identity, a perfect father/daughter relationship.

Without any trace of sensationalism, or voyeurism, we are shown what lies behind the pretension of these perfect lives. Often, the origins of evil lie within the family, and often the 'perpetrators' are the fathers. Incest is a reality seldom discussed or exposed, but has been surfacing lately in many younger writers' works. It is a reality that appears to be common in all communities, that crosses classes and social positions, and that Sharon Leach reports using the characters' voices, letting them tell their stories without any authorial comment.

These are voices that would remain with the reader long after turning the last page, voices that go deep into our consciousness, voices we cannot ignore nor dismiss:

Ten years ago, I found out that I wasn't my father's only girlfriend. (126)

I stared at him, finally understanding. […] He was here to dump me. "All these years, I told myself that what we did was my choice". I stood up. "I know what you did to Stephen and Jimmy. You did the same thing to me. […] You're a sick piece of shit". […] "Sweetheart", he said […]. "If I am, then what are you?" (136)

Incest, homosexuality, infidelity and betrayal, none of these must be exposed, under penalty of exclusion, rejection and social ostracism.

So they all tell themselves lies and behave as if they do not, hoping such lies would either fade away over time or be transformed into a beautiful

reality – only to later discover that lies and secrets never go away, that they would only stay hidden behind a flimsy veil that would always be ready to blow open and expose what is actually only a semblance of normality.

Ferraro, Alessandra (2014). *Écriture migrante et translinguisme au Québec*. Venezia: La Toletta Edizioni, pp. 155

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Un intéressant phénomène d'interférence entre culture migrante et culture de la communauté d'accueil a donné vie depuis quelques années au Québec à une écriture qui, exprimant les transformations d'une identité individuelle et collective en devenir, a fait éclore un réseau touffu de textes. Alessandra Ferraro en explore de manière approfondie et pénétrante thèmes et formes, en fournissant un cadre générique précis et une base herméneutique rigoureuse à une création de plus en plus riche et difficile à codifier, souvent ambivalente et indéfinissable.

Comment fonctionne l'interaction entre une littérature comme celle du Québec, déjà par elle-même travaillée par la question de l'identité nationale, et une littérature toute récente exprimée par des écrivains immigrants issus de pays éloignés du Québec par leur langue, leur culture et leur histoire et ne s'inscrivant d'aucune manière dans son développement? Comment cette interaction se manifeste-t-elle au niveau textuel? À ces questions l'essai «Écriture migrante et translinguisme au Québec» d'Alessandra Ferraro répond par une argumentation finement charpentée à travers un vaste *corpus* formé d'une vingtaine de romans, récits, poèmes et pièces théâtrales, parus dans les années quatre-vingt et quatre-vingt-dix, choisis parmi des textes québécois et des textes migrants.

C'est une analyse qui se construit autour de la prégnance de l'idée de 'transculture', mot qui synthétise dans le sémantisme de son préfixe 'trans-' soit l'idée du franchissement d'une limite spatiale, soit celle d'un mouvement: celui par lequel deux réalités différentes entrent en contact, produisant un métissage culturel et linguistique qui modifie aussi bien l'identité des uns, les immigrés, que des autres, la culture d'accueil.

Les premiers chapitres de l'essai pénètrent dans le dialogisme qui traverse ces textes et explorent les stratégies de l'interdiscursivité et de l'intertextualité qui y sont à l'œuvre: aussi bien, donc, les relations que les textes migrants entretiennent avec les discours reçus de la culture de référence, que les relations de coprésence, plus ou moins manifestes, entre

deux ou plusieurs textes, l'un dans l'autre. Placés dans un entred-eux, parmi plusieurs langues et cultures, les textes migrants ont en effet la tendance à intégrer des intertextes québécois: c'est ainsi qu'ils s'insèrent dans des thématiques essentiellement québécoises, come le roman de l'écrivaine d'origine frioulane Bianca Zagolin (*Une femme à la fenêtre*), ou qu'ils réalisent une sorte de *captatio benevolentiae* à l'égard de la culture d'accueil, comme le roman de Dany Laferrière (*Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*) par ses citations. Mais, souligne Ferraro, *Speak What*, véritable palimpseste et réécriture de *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde de la part de l'auteur d'origine italienne Marco Micone, est, par contre, l'exemple d'une œuvre qui trahit, jusqu'à partir du pastiche du titre, le besoin de faire entendre ouvertement la nouvelle présence culturelle et le désir, ressenti par son auteur, d'un Pays pluriel, habité par tous.

Ferraro approfondit la portée de ces mécanismes dialogiques en soulignant en parallèle la particularité de la situation linguistique au Québec, en principe fondée sur le multiculturalisme et la coexistence des communautées liées à leurs propres cultures. À cela, les stratégies interdiscursives constituent une réponse provocatrice, surtout lorsqu'elles, sous forme d'une hétérophonie ironique, tournent au ridicule les voix qui expriment des préjugés ou des lieux communs (ainsi que dans le roman de Flora Balzano, *Soigne ta chute*) ou théâtralisent une hétérologie qui laisse place, à côté du discours de la culture traditionnelle, au discours de l'Autre, source de leur transformation même (comme dans le roman de Jacques Godbout, *Le temps de Galarno*,).

En assumant cette hybridation linguistique comme procédé constitutif de la métamorphose qui a intéressé la scène culturelle montréalaise des années quatre-vingt, l'essai prend en considération la littérature 'migrante' en tant qu'expression d'un sentiment de déracinement linguistique et culturel: il considère une série d'auteurs d'origines différentes qui ne se servent pas de leur langue maternelle pour écrire. Bien qu'inserés à l'intérieur de la littérature du Québec, ils traduisent par leurs œuvres une altérité qui se révèle aussi bien au niveau de l'imaginaire, de la représentation des espaces que du vécu linguistique. Le translinguisme paraît alors qualifier de la manière la plus adéquate leur corpus, étant la manifestation de la nécessité de vivre et de s'exprimer dans la perte d'une langue; perte qui, cependant perce dans leur écriture, travaillant leur choix génériques et formels.

Le problème est au centre du débat qui a porté à la naissance du magazine trilingue *Vice Versa*, fondé à Montréal en 1983 de la transformation du périodique ethnique *Quaderni Culturali*, par des intellectuels d'origine italienne – Fulvio Caccia, Lamberto Tassinari, Bruno Ramirez et Antonio D'Alfonso. «Lieu de l'affirmation d'un nouveau concept d'identité» (43) et d'une redéfinition du discours culturel québécois, ce laboratoire de la transculture manifeste dans l'utilisation des trois langues, l'anglais, le

français, l'italien, sa «largeur d'horizons et de perspective» (44); il exprime aussi une nouvelle idée d'immigration, comme outil pour envisager des développements futurs de la société, dont il est porteur.

Également, l'étude de Ferraro ne manque de signaler, à l'égard de ce climat d'identités en construction et de métamorphoses des formes expressives, l'émergence, tant au Canada anglophone qu'au Québec, du phénomène de l''Italian-Canadian Writing'. Ce courant d'écrivains d'origine italienne a contribué à l'idée d'une remise en cause du canon littéraire et d'une redéfinition des typologies textuelles: non plus à l'intérieur du cadre d'une littérature nationale, mais dans le contexte d'un 'polysystème littéraire'. En cela il s'unie, comme l'essai le précise, à la réflexion de Marco Micone sur la possibilité de l'existence d'une littérature québécoise écrite en d'autres langues que le français et à la suggestion offerte par Antonio D'Alfonso de qualifier du mot 'italique' la littérature qui rassemble les italiens de par le monde.

L'enquête se poursuit par une lecture des œuvres de Marco Micone, Carole David et Antonio D'Alfonso: la spécialiste observe attentivement l'originalité formelle qu'ils prêtent à leurs textes, centrés sur le thème de la difficile relation personnelle des différentes générations des migrants, partagées entre plusieurs langues et plusieurs continents, avec leur milieu d'origine. Elle met en évidence la similarité de ces œuvres dont l'architextualité très différente – s'agissant aussi bien de romans que de nouvelles, de poésies que d'essais, de pièces théâtrales que de narrations filmiques – s'accompagne à la modulation du même sentiment de manque linguistique et d'égarement identitaire de leurs auteurs.

L'écriture autobiographique est expérimentée et ressentie alors en tant que solution à ce conflit personnel. L'étude démontre par des renvois ponctuels à ces textes que la narration fictive à la première personne ainsi que le prisme du 'je' lyrique, grâce à la prise en charge de la dimension autobiographique, parviennent à proposer une vision composite mais réconciliée de l'identité migrante. C'est ce qui émerge dans le passage du genre dramatique (*Gens du silence*, *Addolorata, Déjà l'agonie*) à l'autofiction (*Le figuier enchanté*) pour Micone et, de la même manière, dans le passage de la fiction narrative (*Impala*) à la poésie (*Terra vecchia*) pour David.

La problématique identitaire parcourt également la production de D'Alfonso, «exemple classique de l'imaginaire translinguistique», «modèle de l'écriture migrante» (83), auteur d'ouvrages qu'il autotraduit de l'anglais au français et vice versa, dans l'impossibilité d'écrire en italien ou en dialecte molisan, langues perdues des origines.

En quête d'une réconciliation avec le monde auquel il sent d'appartenir en profondeur, D'Alfonso confie aux Italiens épars dans le monde la tâche de défendre et d'illustrer la culture qu'il définit 'italique': ils sont appelés – il remarque – à «souder nos cultures canadienne (anglaise), québécoise et italienne» (88) dans un entrelacement qui valorise aussi bien les diffé-

rences que les similitudes de leur propre identité originaire, impossible à effacer.

À cet égard, l'étude de Ferraro, unissant à la description minutieuse du contenu des textes la sensibilité de l'analyse pragmatique, montre de manière ponctuelle que «l'autotraduction devient une pratique constitutive da sa production» (88): son essai contient une fine réflexion sur l'espace paratextuel de l'œuvre de D'Alfonso, lieu d'expression important de son appartenance linguistique et culturelle multiple. Le colophon, les introductions, les notes finales, les préfaces, la quatrième de couverture, les remerciements – note l'autrice – sont des marges précieuses où souvent l'auteur révèle que ses textes fragmentaires ont été déjà publiés «ou déjà rédigés à l'origine, dans la langue vers laquelle le volume sera ensuite autotraduit» (90). Fondée sur l'autotraduction et la réécriture, l'œuvre entière de D'Alfonso «se construit suivant un mouvement en spirale» (90), écrit alors Ferraro, qui ne manque pas de mettre en évidence aussi l'indéfinition des sources bibliographiques, l'incertitude dans la documentation du parcours éditorial de ces textes. Le véritable projet de son travail, en effet, au-delà de tout effort de révision de ses nouvelles publications, de tout aller et retour entre une langue et l'autre, reste toujours son «éclectisme linguistique et culturel» (92), sa volonté de faire coexister ses identités multiples**.**

À ce propos, l'enquête de Ferraro note que la langue dont D'Alfonso poursuit la recherche ne correspond en réalité ni au français, ni à l'anglais, ni à l'italien, ni non plus au 'guglionesano', son dialecte maternel: elle vise, comme l'autrice le démontre de manière de plus en plus convaincante, à une langue secrète, «une langue d'avant la langue» (100), précédant les mots et leurs origines, un «langage absolu» (99), «prébabélique, auquel personne n'a jamais eu d'accès et par rapport auquel toutes les langues, mêmes les langues dites maternelles, ne sont qu'une approximation» (100).

C'est justement la recherche continuelle du souffle vital de cette langue absente – approfondit Ferraro – qui pousse l'artiste, à la fois traducteur, photographe, metteur en scène et musicien, vers la mélodie de la langue de la poésie, coffret qui tout accueille et recueille, au-delà de tout manque et toute impossible adoption. Et si l''impossibilité d'écrire en italien le conduit dans «le tourbillon d'un processus autotraductif infini» (98), son œuvre devient aussi une 'narration intermédiale', intersémiotique. Elle est capable de questionner par l'intermédiaire et le mélange de plusieurs supports et de plusieurs langues la frontière entre l'absence et la présence, de mettre l'accent sur la disparition et le vide et de raconter l'effritement d'une conscience qui vit dans un autre lieu et dans un autre temps mais qui se sent toujours, irrémédiablement, étrangère aux nouvelles cultures rencontrées. Le poète peut s'identifier alors au mythe d'Antigone, dont D'Alfonso réécrit sous plusieurs formes génériques l'histoire, emblème du rapport conflictuel avec sa propre famille; ou également, comme D'Al-

fonso le met en lumière dans son recueil *The Other Shore/L'autre rivage*, il peut raconter son vide existentiel, son questionnement identitaire infini, dans l'éparpillement d'une série de fragments poétiques alternant avec les images, en noir et blanc, d'un village ancien, le lieu d'origine de sa famille. Premier des volumes autotraduits, ce «livre de phrases suspendues» (93) est articulé sur deux sections: contenant l'une une réflexion sur l'écriture, l'autre une description autobiographique du parcours familial d'émigration. C'est, conclut la spécialiste, le journal intime d'un «fils d'immigrés, condamné à être toujours un déraciné» (93) et d'un artiste qui raconte par la diffraction médiatique l'impossibilité de définir son identité.

L'autrice présente ensuite les autofictions de Monique Bosco et de Régine Robin, écrivaines d'origine juive, provenant l'une de l'Autriche, l'autre de la Pologne, et la production théâtrale de Wajdi Mouawad, libanais émigré au Québec, après quelques années en France.

Bosco et Robin conjuguent le sentiment de la perte identitaire propre aux écrivains migrants au drame personnel de l'exil forcé par la Shoa: leurs textes (*Confiteo*r de Bosco et *L'immense fatigue des pierres* de Robin) sont un écho du deuil et de la blessure existentielle qui marquent leur parcours autobiographique. L'essai focalise les différentes modalités énonciatives de reconstitution des histoires personnelles narrées. Chez Bosco, ce sont l'actualisation d'un moi éclaté, fragmenté par les oscillations d'un flux de souvenirs qu'il n'arrive pas à maîtriser et le développement d'une narration autobiographique, marquée à jamais par l'univers concentrationnaire, qui n'arrive pas à constituer le récit mémoriel de manière cohérente. Dans l'œuvre de Robin, à l'opposé, c'est la construction d'une écriture conçue comme lieu d'agrégation de tous les aspects de la vie de celui qui écrit, comme 'hypertémoignage' d'un narrateur 'hyperconscient' qui crée et défait à son gré les différentes existences mises en scène. Le concept même d'identité est mis en question et «la tragédie du peuple juif est le lieu d'un non-sens biographique» (128), conclut Ferraro.

Littoral, *Incendies* et *Forêts* sont les titres des premières pièces du plus jeune des auteurs du *corpus* choisi, Wajdi Mouawad, nées du sentiment d'arrachement linguistique et culturel souffert à la suite de la guerre au Liban. Elles sont une description de la vie de quelques adolescents issus d'un milieu aisée du Québec, tout à coup obligés à se heurter au souvenir d'histoires familiales plongeant leurs racines dans les événements les plus atroces du Moyen-Orient. Le mythe d'Œdipe, synthèse explosive d'un imaginaire déchiré et douloureux, est alors assumé presque comme texte-source de l'écriture du triptyque: l'enquête de Ferraro, qui se développe ici comme une relecture à lumière du mythe classique de ces pièces tissées autour d'une trame d'incestes et d'homicides, en scrute et dévoile les multiples échos. Il en émerge le tragique du thème du parricide, perpétré par Amé, le protagoniste de *Littoral*, réincarnation de la figure œdipienne, qui, lors d'un combat, n'a pas su reconnaître son père; ou la question de

la filiation occultée, comme dans l'intrigue narrée dans *Incendies* autour de l'inceste de Nawal et du bourreau Abou Tarek, nouvel Œdipe à l'origine du drame existentiel de deux jumeaux, Jeanne et Simon, dont il est père et frère; ou, enfin, la thématique de la malédiction par le sang, mise en scène, même à travers des renvois intertextuels à la tragédie racinienne, dans *Forêts*. Mais si les créations de Mouawad s'inscrivent dans la mouvance de la tragédie grecque, c'est pour mieux la détourner: l'essai le démontre de manière intéressante, en développant en profondeur le sens de différents coups de théâtre qui changent le dénouement des pièces.

La culpabilité ressentie et avouée par Amé – observe Ferraro – n'est en effet que le point de départ pour découvrir, à travers un regard vers le passé, vers la douleur de son rapport équivoque et tragique avec les figures parentales, une issue dans la maturité: la dépouille du père de l'ami Wilfrid, confiée à la mer, «amarrée aux bottins contenant les noms des morts à cause de la guerre» (136) est élevée à la fois à figure archétypale pour toute une générations d'enfants orphelins, appelés à vivre pour reconstruire la mémoire historique de leur Pays, et à symbole de régénération et de mobilité: d'ouverture vers de nouvelles possibilités dans les relations humaines, amicales et sociales et non seulement généalogiques, ainsi que la pièce le suggère. Et si la connaissance, la confrontation avec la vérité et l'horreur concernant ses propres origines, fait de la figure du fils un personnage tragique, cette connaissance n'implique pas la punition, ainsi que le voudrait la tragédie classique: aucune fatalité pèse sur Jeanne et Simon, que leur mère, par un message d'amour, invite à dépasser la haine et l'ignominie qui marquent leurs histoires. De même, les sentiments de l'amour et de l'amitié se substituent aux liens de sang dans la troisième pièce du cycle, où une longue quête identitaire au cœur de l'horreur conduit enfin Loup, la protagoniste, à la découverte heureuse et surprenante du geste accompli par Ludivine, l'arrière-grand-mère présumée qui, pendant la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, s'est sacrifiée pour sauver son amie juive Sarah Cohen, enceinte et véritable arrière-grand-mère de Loup.

La fin bouleversante imposée par le renvoi aux thèmes de la tragédie grecque est surpassée et démentie par le dénouement heureux des récits narrés, où l'identité personnelle de chacun est valorisée grâce à sa relation au monde, au pouvoir de sa liberté et à la nouvelle échelle valorielle élaborée par Mouwad même.

Tout cela est attentivement étudié et scandé par l'élégante argumentation d'Alessandra Ferraro qui démontre de manière brillante que la forme de ces œuvres, imprimant les tensions et les égarements de leurs auteurs dans la langue et dans le fonctionnement textuel même, ressemble, comme une grande métaphore, aux histoires racontées. Elle le fait en soulignant l'architextualité ingénieuse et problématique des œuvres en question, en observant la diégèse parfois irrationnelle de différentes narrations, confiées à une instance narrative fragmentée ou à une pluralité d'instances

emmêlées et confuses; ou, également, en remarquant l'amplification des drames réalisée par la stratégie de la diffraction intermédiale ou par la polyphonie d'une réécriture orchestrée grâce à la relecture de la mythologie classique ou à l'exercice de l'auto-traduction.

Fondée sur une connaissance et une sensibilités exquises du tissu social et des dynamiques propres aux différents systèmes culturels au Québec, soutenue par une évidente maîtrise des instruments de l'analyse sémiotique, narratologique, sociolinguistique et psychanalytique, la recherche de Ferraro nous offre une lecture savante de l'écriture migrante au Québec: en même temps et de manière précise et originale, elle circonscrit et pénètre les constantes thématiques et morphologiques et définit le cadre de référence d'une création littéraire qui, dans son incessant questionnement identitaire et ontologique, reste liée à la transformation, au passage et, donc, à la nécessité d'ouvrir notre système de codification littéraire à des toujours nouvelles possibilités de discussion critique.

Obszynski, Michal (2016). *Manifestes et programmes littéraires dans les Caraïbes francophones. En/jeux idéologiques et poétiques*. Leiden; Boston: Brill-Rodopi, pp. 271

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«… le centre, ce point depuis lequel était supposé rayonner une littérature franco-française, n'est plus le centre». Ainsi s'expriment les signataires de l'article-manifeste «Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français», paru dans *Le Monde* le 16 mars 2007. Michel Le Bris, Jean Rouaud et les autres ont voulu critiquer fortement la notion de francophonie littéraire qui ne représente plus aujourd'hui les spécificités du champ littéraire. Les réflexions sur ce manifeste et sur le volume collectif qui l'a suivi, *Pour une littérature monde*, qui a significativement perdu la mention de la langue afin de laisser toute la place à l'idée de la littérature s'étalant sur un espace global, clôturent le volume de Michal Obszynski qui nous présente un parcours diachronique par les écritures manifestaires des Caraïbes, et plus spécifiquement des Antilles françaises et de Haïti du XXème et XXIème siècles.

La mention 'écritures manifestaires' est fondamentale dans cet ouvrage qui ne se limite pas à la prise en compte des ouvrages explicitement engagés, mais qui approche les textes démontrant un «effet-manifeste» (Abastado 1980, 4) tout en s'insérant dans des contextes génériques divers. Par exemple, des textes littéraires spécifiques ainsi que toutes les formes de «quasi-manifestes» (Diaz 2009, 10), écritures paratextuelles où les auteurs justifient leurs démarches esthétiques et se positionnent par rapport au monde des lettres, actions et mouvements engagés. Cet élargissement du panorama des textes étudiés permet de suivre de près et de manière exhaustive le cheminement de la conscience des écrivains antillais et haïtiens, leurs discours étant divers et présents dans une panoplie de textes divers. L'ouvrage présente des analyses élargies du champ littéraire à une certaine époque ainsi que des très belles micro-analyses des textes permettant de saisir l'apport manifestaire dans les plis et replis du style et des argumentations.

L'approche binaire de la présentation, qui met en regard dans chacun des deux chapitres principaux les discours manifestaires tels qu'ils se sont développés à Haïti et aux Petites Antilles françaises, consent au lecteur

de comparer et de saisir les spécificités et les différences entre les deux situations de manière naturelle et en même temps très efficace. Cela parce que les événements historiques, qui sont à la base de la relation avec la France et le monde occidental des deux réalités caribéennes, ont conditionné différemment le développement de la littérature et ont engendré des discours programmatiques distincts chez les écrivains et les intellectuels. Ainsi le lecteur suit l'évolution de la conscience littéraire à Haïti et ensuite peut la comparer avec ce qui s'est produit à la Martinique à la même époque, une situation éclairant l'autre et vice-versa.

Le volume est composé de trois chapitres plus un épilogue, avec aussi les paratextes indispensables: l'introduction, la conclusion, la bibliographie et l'index des noms, outils très efficaces, complets et très bien composés. Le premier chapitre présente le cadre théorique sur lequel poseront toutes les analyses et les argumentations successives. Cette entrée en matière fournit les éclaircissements nécessaires sur les présupposés qui ont permis la composition du corpus des textes qui seront étudiés au fur et à mesure dans les chapitres suivants. La réflexion de Jeanne Demers et Line Mc Murray dans *L'enjeu du manifeste: le manifeste en jeu* sera le fil rouge qui parcourra tout le volume et imprimera une unité dans le discours analytique et critique très appréciable parce qu'elle réalise l'assimilation de tous les textes du corpus par leur confrontation sous la même loupe. Cela génère aussi une unité du regard critique visant l'impact du discours manifestaire sur le public à travers la prise en compte de sa «charge persuasive», et des diverses lectures critiques et des réactions qui l'ont suivi. Les manifestes sont partagés aussi en deux catégories majeures selon leur impact et leur perspective actionnelle: les «manifestes d'imposition» et les «manifestes et discours d'opposition» (23). Une autre condition du discours manifestaire qui est toujours prise en compte dans le volume est le positionnement dans le moment historique et dans le champ littéraire: en particulier par rapport à l'institution littéraire, dans un contexte global et avec une forte volonté politique que l'on relève dans tous les discours du corpus. En effet, il est clair que les questions politiques et notamment la confrontation avec la «langue du colonisateur» (39) sont les données les plus spécifiques des textes envisagés: cela engendre une «signification politique accordée aux innovations esthétiques» qui acquièrent une valeur engagée aussi.

Dans le deuxième chapitre, «De l'assimilation culturelle à la prise de conscience identitaire», la relation avec la France et l'hégémonie culturelle et surtout linguistique du pays colonisateur est l'objet de l'opposition la plus virulente des textes manifestaires pris en compte par l'auteur. L'enjeu de l'affirmation identitaire touche profondément les intellectuels des deux espaces culturels, dans des moments et des manières variés selon les situations. Depuis le début du XXème siècle, avec l'essor des études ethnographiques et «l'intérêt pour le relativisme culturel» (45), le milieu

artistique et littéraire s'ouvre et légitime la parole littéraire d'auteurs noirs francophones. Des mouvements comme le panafricanisme et celui afro-américain de la Renaissance Noire ont stimulé la prise de conscience des auteurs sur leurs origines et stimulé l'évolution des littératures haïtienne et antillaise. La donnée de base des discours manifestaires de la première moitié du siècle sera la «réorientation de la représentation des Noirs».

À Haïti, tout au long du XIXème siècle, les textes littéraires, fortement engagés, sont utilisés comme des tribunes par des écrivains qui ont des rôles politiques aussi. L'auteur analyse les textes de Louis-Joseph Janvier (*L'égalité des races,* 1884*)*, d'Anténor Firmin (*De l'égalité des races humaines*, 1885) et d'Annibal Price (*De la réhabilitation de la race noire par la République d'Haïti*, 1900) dont les titres programmatiques sont assez explicites quant aux visées socio-politiques pour la reconnaissance des droits des Noirs. Ces démarches sont dépassées dans les textes des auteurs de la génération successive qui «illustrent l'oscillement entre l'imitation des modèles français et la recherche d'une expression nationale propre» (57). Les auteurs qui se rassemblent autour de la revue *La Ronde* (1898-1902), fondée par Pétion Gérôme et Dantès Bellegarde, cherchent à renouveler l'écriture littéraire en suivant des valeurs symbolistes, mais la réalité haïtienne reste à l'écart de leurs œuvres. Les idées des jeunes rédacteurs sont exprimées dans l'«Avant-Propos» du recueil *Poèmes de la mort* (1907) d'Etzer Vilaire. Le texte se rapproche du manifeste d'imposition parce qu'il se pose en opposition à la poésie haïtienne de l'époque emprise de romantisme et de patriotisme. Le lectorat visé est encore français et la revue démontre quand-même une forme d'engagement pour la reconnaissance des spécificités nationales haïtiennes: les écrivains de *La Ronde* proclament une poétique de l'universel tout en refusant l'apologie stricte du local.

La modernité haïtienne se développe dans les années vingt pendant l'occupation des États-Unis, par une nouvelle revendication identitaire. *La Revue indigène* (1927-1928) devient le lieu de publication de textes littéraires et de critique proclamant les spécificités de la littérature populaire haïtienne: cosmopolite, moderne et moins dépendante du modèle français, authentique (62). Ces idées sont exprimées dans un texte inaugural, «Chronique-Programme» de Normil Sylvain, dont le titre exprime la portée manifestaire. La *Revue indigène* marque un moment important pour la conscience littéraire haïtienne: revendiquant une autonomie par rapport aux canons français et tournée vers d'autres cultures comme celle des Noirs aux États-Unis. Jean Price-Mars joue un rôle important dans le mouvement indigéniste haïtien grâce à son essai *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (1928), texte à valeur programmatique où il préconise la réorientation culturelle vers la tradition et la reconnaissance de l'héritage africain. En 1938, la revue *Les Griots* témoigne du «glissement du programme 'indi-

gène' vers l'idéologie noiriste et l'absolutisation de la question raciale»
(80). Le texte liminaire du premier numéro de la revue, «Déclaration»,
expose les présupposés de base de l'idéologie ethniciste et 'noiriste' de-
venue très radicale. Cette tendance s'estompe en 1945 avec la parution
du recueil des poèmes *Bois-d'ébène* de Jacques Roumain, qui se présente
comme un texte engagé politiquement et socialement. L'analyse pointue
de quelques poèmes démontre la démarche manifestaire au concret dans
les audaces syntaxiques au service des thématiques relevant de la reven-
dication identitaire. À la même époque se développe aussi le mouvement
surréaliste haïtien prônant encore l'engagement politique et l'implication
de l'écrivain dans la vie sociale, devenu une exigence après le début de
la dictature de François Duvalier. Plus que des textes, ce sont une série
d'interventions et de «gestes intellectuels» qui déterminent l'engagement
surréaliste dans un «manifeste agi»: les séjours à Haïti d'Aimé Césaire
(1944) et d'André Breton (1945), la publication du recueil de poèmes *Étin-
celles* (1945) de René Depestre et celle de la revue *La Ruche* (1946), qui
deviendra l'organe de la Jeunesse Révolutionnaire. L'apport manifestaire
de ces actions réside dans la prise de conscience d'une possibilité de ré-
sistance par la littérature.

Dans la même période, le domaine franco-antillais vit une situation poli-
tique, sociale et culturelle marquée par l'assimilation à la culture française
et «les écrivains antillais sont fortement attachés aux modèles culturels
européens» (97). La littérature dite créole ou 'doudouiste', qui se déve-
loppe jusqu'au début du XXème siècle, vise l'imitation des modèles des
grands auteurs français pour montrer le caractère exotique des îles (voir
l'anthologie *La fleur des Antilles* de René Bonneville, 1900). Dans la pre-
mière moitié du siècle se développe le discours anti-assimilation et la
réflexion sur la place de l'écrivain antillais dans la littérature française.
Le premier auteur portant un regard critique sur la colonisation est René
Maran dans la «Préface» à son roman *Boutoula* (1921), où il dénonce la
situation d'oppression coloniale tout en se positionnant dans l'espace des
écrivains et intellectuels français.

Ici se profile l'une des spécificités de l'écrivain antillais: la prise de
conscience de sa condition d'ancien colonisé qui aspire à une pleine recon-
naissance sociale et la revendication de ses origines. Cette dichotomie est
présente aussi chez le groupe afro-antillais qui anime *La Revue du monde
noir* (1931-32) dont le premier «Éditorial» proclame les buts principaux qui
sont politiques et anthropologiques plutôt que littéraires, visant l'émanci-
pation des Afro-américains. La revue *Légitime défense* (1932), fondée par
trois collaborateurs de la précédente, René Ménil, Jules-Marcel Monnerot
et Étienne Léro, poursuit les mêmes programmes et l'«L'Avertissement»
contenu dans le premier numéro exprime «la volonté de rompre avec l'as-
similationnisme des élites antillaises aux valeurs et normes européennes»
(108). L'aspect manifestaire des discours contenus dans la revue, la rhéto-

rique du refus et le style iconoclaste que Obszynski analyse dans le détail seront d'inspiration pour les intellectuels afro-antillais et Léopold Sédar Senghor aussi le considère comme un mouvement fondamental dans le parcours de prise de conscience identitaire des écrivains noirs. Ainsi, à partir des années trente se développe le processus pour l'affirmation de l'écriture antillaise autonome et le journal corporatif *L'Étudiant noir* (1935) contient des articles programmatiques où le concept de la négritude est mis en avant. Ensuite, le *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) d'Aimé Césaire «s'impose comme l'œuvre majeure de l'éveil identitaire aux Antilles» (118): par sa prise en compte du parcours littéraire antillais, sa critique et la volonté d'aller au-delà des discours euro-centrés. La notion de la négritude est à la base aussi de la revue *Tropiques* (1941-1945) dont les articles présentent une argumentation manifestaire prônant une littérature qui doit être proche du réel, engagée et libre; et la poésie peut être l'instrument de cette liberté parce qu'elle a le pouvoir de libérer les consciences. La revue travaille aussi pour ramener le discours littéraire sur la spécificité territoriale de la Caraïbe par rapport aux origines africaines: l'univers culturel antillais est mis en valeur et cela rejoint le futur discours postcolonial. La lecture approfondie du poème «En guise de manifeste littéraire», qu'Aimé Césaire a publié dans *Tropiques*, illustre ces voies nouvelles de la littérature antillaise. Elle est suivie par un développement approfondi du débat portant sur l'*Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (1948) de Senghor, qui constitue un véritable manifeste littéraire par son titre annonçant le refus du passé et un programme spécifique regroupant les textes sous le sceau de la négritude et de la solidarité entre les races. L'impact fort de l'anthologie est dû aussi à la préface de Jean-Paul Sartre, «Orphée noir», qui «légitime la pratique poétique de la négritude» (140). Pourtant, dans le contexte antillais s'opère vite le dépassement de la notion de négritude, déjà avec l'essai «Peau noire, masques blancs» (1952) de Frantz Fanon qui, comme le voit bien Homi K. Bhabba, «ouvre une marge d'interrogation sur la négociation entre identité et altérité» (142).

Ainsi se profile la transition vers le troisième chapitre du volume, «Entre l'hybridité et les pièges de l'identité», où on affronte la discussion qui s'est développée pendant la deuxième moitié du XXème siècle. «Trois éléments: le progrès de la décolonisation, la montée du marxisme et, dans le cas des Antilles, la départementalisation» sont les trois situations politiques encadrant et imprimant la marque sur la poursuite de la discussion identitaire et littéraire. La revue *Présence africaine* (1947) sera la tribune par laquelle s'exprimeront la plupart des intellectuels et le chapitre présente encore une fois la tractation séparée pour les deux domaines: le haïtien et l'antillais.

Le réalisme merveilleux est l'une des tendances esthétiques majeures qui se développent à Haïti et consiste en un dépassement du concept de

la négritude. Jacques-Stephen Alexis en définit les caractéristiques principales dans une conférence prononcée pendant le premier congrès des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs organisé par «Présence africaine» en 1956. Cette conférence est un acte manifestaire par sa volonté de rassembler les écrivains sous un programme commun et par l'imbrication du politique et du littéraire. Alexis décrit les procédés de l'École du Réalisme Merveilleux et se pose polémiquement «envers l'art bourgeois, l'indigénisme haïtien et la négritude» (148); il met en relief la sensibilité haïtienne vers le sensible, le spirituel et l'irrationnel qui est accepté naturellement sous la forme du merveilleux. Le cadre conceptuel d'Alexis comprend aussi le constat de l'hybridité de la culture haïtienne et la proposition d'une vision pluriethnique et pluriculturelle. C'est un discours nouveau, programmatique et manifestaire, proche de la pensée postcoloniale qui se développera par la suite, proposant aussi l'utilisation de la langue créole dans les œuvres littéraires.

La situation politique, l'instauration de la dictature duvaliériste et la répression qui en découle sont à la base de la résistance du groupe Haïti littéraire (1961) fondé par Anthony Phelps, Serge Legagneur, René Philoctète, Villand Denis et Roland Morisseau, restés dans leur Pays jusqu'à la moitié des années soixante. Cette communauté artistique sera le modèle pour les autres qui se formeront dans les Pays de la diaspora haïtienne, au Québec et au Canada, autour des revues *La nouvelle optique* (1971) et *Collectif Paroles* (1979-1987). La réponse des écrivains spiralistes restés au Pays face à la dictature et aux répressions sera plus tard la dislocation totale de la structure textuelle par des manipulations qui la déstabilisent la rendant aussi instable que la vie ordinaire de cette période. Les romans de René Philoctète Franketienne et de Claude Fignolé apparaissent comme de véritables manifestes par la mise en place de stratégies textuelles qui tentent de «reproduire la complexité et la multiplicité de l'univers» (160) et où la subjectivité et l'arbitraire deviennent les matrices créatrices primaires.

Suite au départ de leur Pays, les écrivains et intellectuels haïtiens créent donc des communautés importantes dans le nord du continent américain où se développe la conscience de l'identité hybride et celle «de la migrance comme 'lieu de culture'» (163). L'article «L'Effet d'exil» de Robert Berrouët-Oriol sera considéré comme le manifeste de la revendication des écrivains et intellectuels haïtiens immigrés au Québec qui veulent être considérés à plein titre comme des participants de plein droit au champ littéraire québécois. Une série de textes permettent à Obszynski d'illustrer les composantes du discours identitaire et la manifestation des revendications: l'essai *Théories caraïbes* de Joël De Rosiers (1996), l'article «L'Eracinerrance» de Jean-Claude Charles paru dans la revue haïtienne *Boutures* (1999) et l'essai *Repérages* d'Émile Ollivier (2001). Ces trois textes exposent des visions esthétiques et des programmes littéraires

et concourent à la définition d'une «poétique de la migration» (166). Ils pointent aussi l'évolution d'un discours empreint d'idéologie politique et de revendication vers celui d'une littérature plus centrée sur une écriture autonome et réflexive, une expression de l'individu plutôt que de la société en général.

À la même époque, le contexte politique différent de la Martinique et de la Guadeloupe détermine le fait que les écrits manifestaires et programmatiques antillais posent la confrontation avec la France métropolitaine. Le but premier des intellectuels et des écrivains antillais est d'établir un espace culturel autonome qui doit aussi faire les comptes avec le passé colonial et le néo-colonialisme actuel. La réflexion d'Édouard Glissant et notamment l'analyse de trois ouvrages – *Le Discours antillais* (1981), *Poétique de la relation* (1990) et *Traité du Tout-Monde* (1997) – permet à l'auteur de saisir les étapes du passage d'une visée anticoloniale à celle postcoloniale. L'étude en détail des trois textes en met en valeur les données proprement programmatiques et les discours à l'allure manifestaire. Le développement sur l'hybridité de la sensibilité et de la culture, ainsi que celui sur la promotion de la langue créole dans la littérature se situent en ligne droite avec ceux des prédécesseurs, d'Alexis par exemple. L'utilisation du créole en littérature est pour Glissant un véritable acte de subversion par rapport à l'hégémonie du français et donc de «résistance à l'oppression culturelle de la France» (185). Une conceptualisation plus radicale est exprimée dans *Éloge de la créolité* (1989) de Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau et Raphaël Confiant. Considéré comme 'manifeste d'opposition', cet essai met en valeur encore une fois le caractère hybride de l'identité antillaise qui doit être envisagée sous la loupe du concept de diversité. La littérature peut être le lieu où se réalise la démonstration de la complexité antillaise en toute liberté et authenticité: la langue créole, où l'oralité rejoint l'écriture, permet de rendre compte de la multiplicité du monde. L'auteur du volume montre le caractère ambigu de l'*Éloge*, dû à son rejet de tout dogmatisme d'un côté et à la proposition programmatique de l'autre côté; ambiguïté qui a été à l'origine d'une réception contradictoire du texte, mais qui a aussi donné une grande visibilité aux promoteurs de la créolité.

Les essais postérieurs de Glissant proposent des discours différents et montrent la dialectique vivace qui se crée à l'époque contemporaine pour la redéfinition des catégories littéraires et des visées de l'action littéraire aussi. Le concept de 'créolisation du monde', que décrit Glissant dans sa *Poétique de la relation*, permet d'élargir le champ littéraire, de dépasser les nationalismes tout en sauvegardant les spécificités nationales. Par la reprise de l'image du rhizome (Deleuze et Guattari), Glissant montre comment les idées et les mouvances peuvent se répandre horizontalement partout dans le monde. Dans le *Traité du Tout-Monde*, il arrive à exprimer une mission de l'art: «Écrire c'est dire: le monde» (208). Le style injonctif

du traité démontre une démarche manifestaire: Glissant rejette les par-
ticularismes nationaux et promeut un élargissement des visions tout en
garantissant l'autonomie de l'écrivain. La dialectique antillaise sur les
buts et les programmes de la littérature se développe encore avec l'essai
Lettres créoles (1991) de Chamoiseau et Confiant et ensuite avec *Écrire
en pays dominé* (1997) de Chamoiseau, construits en dialogue avec les
textes de Glissant. Le titre de l'essai de Chamoiseau présente d'emblée
une attitude manifestaire et l'écrivain y propose une esthétique visant la
résistance par rapport à l'influence dominatrice française. L'ouverture vers
le monde, l'utilisation du créole, l'écriture plurielle et expérimentale per-
mettent «l'exploration de l'hétérogénéité du monde contemporain» (215).
Manifeste détourné, cet essai montre l'engagement de l'écrivain dans le
champ de l'esthétique pour résister à l'uniformisation et à la domination
idéologique.

L'épilogue du volume présente une lecture approfondie des enjeux mani-
festaires de l'article «Pour une littérature-monde en français» et du volume
collectif *Pour une littérature-monde* (2007), recueil de témoignages et
articles d'écrivains de langue française. L'analyse aboutit à l'interprétation
de l'éviction de la mention de la langue dans le titre du volume: ce serait
le miroir d'une déclaration sous-entendue de la volonté des écrivains de
dépasser la vision francophone pour s'ouvrir définitivement au monde
dans son étendue, variété et mixité. Au-delà des discours de revendica-
tion d'une place dans l'espace littéraire français et d'un élargissement du
même champ, les écrivains se posent dans une perspective plus ouverte et
revendiquent une identité singulière, une position individuelle autonome
en prise avec le monde contemporain dans sa globalité, dans le brassage
des cultures, des mentalités et des pratiques culturelles.

Le parcours proposé par cet ouvrage, à travers les discours et les actions
ouvertement ou subrepticement manifestaires, nous amène ainsi à travers
le déploiement de la conscience littéraire des deux domaines caraïbes du
XXème au XXIème siècle. La dialectique entre les positionnements idéolo-
giques, la réflexion sur les relations entre le champ littéraire et la réalité
politique et sociale illustrent de manière éclairante le chemin des écrivains
et des intellectuels vers le dépassement des particularités régionales, qui
ne signifie pas du tout l'abandon de l'identité, mais la redéfinition de celle-
ci à l'échelle globale aujourd'hui.

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