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# CINCINNATI ROMANCE REVIEW

Volume XIII 1994

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## PREFACE

When we became editors of the *Cincinnati Romance Review*, neither of us realized what an enriching and challenging experience it would be. A considerable number of excellent, perceptive articles on a wide variety of topics relating to French, Peninsular Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Francophone and Latin American Literatures were submitted for publication. After each paper had been read by two readers of our Editorial Board, in compliance with our policy of blind submission, we had the difficult task of coordinating the selection of the articles to be published, then overseeing the organization and printing of this thirteenth volume. It is thus the result of a cooperative effort of both the graduate students and the Editorial Board, and one of which we in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures of the University of Cincinnati are all proud.

We are greatly indebted to our Executive Editor, Jean-Charles Seigneuret, whose expertise and guidance were invaluable as we compiled this volume. Moreover we wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to Alicia de Gregorio and Ariane Pfenninger for their outstanding and tireless support in proofreading the articles. Special thanks must also be made to Marvina Lowry-Brook for her positive, patient in-putting and correction of the manuscript. Last but not least we would like to express our gratitude for the encouragement of Dr. Judith Muyskens, Head of the Department, and all the Faculty whose support and comments facilitated our task.

We greatly appreciate the confidence placed in us as Editors of the *Cincinnati Romance Review*. It has proved to be an extremely rewarding experience which will certainly benefit us in our future careers.

Luis F. Alvarado  
Susan Sadlier

# DRAMA Y RITUAL EN LA CULTURA PREHISPANICA: EL ALTIPLANO MEXICANO

*Kathleen Rupright*

Al pensar en el término 'teatro,' es probable que surja en la mente una definición que incluye ciertos elementos reconocidos en la tradición occidental: un diálogo entre dos o más actores que se realiza en un escenario delante de un público y una acción, o conflicto, que se resuelve de alguna manera en la escena final. En nuestra tradición teatral--hay excepciones, claro está--(uno piensa en Luigi Pirandello o en Berthold Brecht)--y en la de otras culturas, el teatro no sigue necesariamente el modelo occidental; el NOH japonés, el teatro clásico chino y las danzas dialogadas de Bali son algunos ejemplos.

Con respecto al teatro prehispánico náhuatl, por otra parte, será necesaria una definición algo diferente; una que puede incluir la idea de escenas, de conflicto, de diálogo, pero en circunstancias distintas a las que conocemos, a las que conocían los españoles recién llegados a estas orillas en el siglo XVI. Esta definición se formará en torno a la palabra "espectáculo." Si pensamos en teatro como espectáculo o fiesta, podremos encontrar respuestas a algunas de las preguntas que surgen acerca de los elementos que reconocemos como teatrales: ¿Quiénes actuaban en estos espectáculos? ¿Cómo eran su vestuario y su maquillaje? ¿De qué manera utilizaban la danza y el canto? ¿En dónde tenían lugar estas fiestas? Aunque no se ha encontrado ningún texto de un drama indígena de antes de la conquista española, las respuestas podemos encontrarlas en las páginas de las crónicas y los códices que produjeron los conquistadores y los frailes misioneros. A partir de las descripciones de los frailes Bernardino de Sahagún, Diego Durán y José de Acosta, por ejemplo, se puede constatar que el teatro náhuatl se representaba en lugares dedicados a los espectáculos; que existían escuelas especiales para adiestrar a la gente en los bailes y las canciones que formaban una parte integral de los espectáculos; que contaba con recursos escénicos variados y abundantes; que variaba con frecuencia las formas y los temas; que tenía una gran influencia social sobre el pueblo, y que era una parte entrañable de su experiencia religiosa (León-Portilla 13; Garibay 333,337; Sten, *Ponte* 23).

Los términos "representación" y "espectáculo" que utilizamos aquí sugieren un rol pasivo para el espectador, como lo es en la tradición occidental: el espectador mira la acción del escenario, aprecia o no el conjunto de efectos visuales y orales y, quizás llega a alguna

conclusión--afirmativa o negativa--sobre el tema que ha visto desarrollarse sobre el tablado. Pero para los nahua, un acto tan solitario e introspectivo no era posible si no lo acompañaba alguna acción participatoria. En ese sentido, el drama era más un acontecimiento que una representación, y en ese acontecimiento participaban todos (Sten, *Vida* 34). Si no actuaban--es decir, cantaban, bailaban o personificaban a un dios o una diosa--, estaban preparándose para otro espectáculo. Estos podían durar un par de días, de siete a diez días y hasta un mes (Sten 37). Miguel León-Portilla señala que "existía en el mundo náhuatl prehispánico algo así como un ciclo sagrado de teatro perpetuo que se sucedía sin interrupción a través de sus dieciocho meses de veinte días" (17).

En este teatro-espectáculo, el sentido más profundo, más oculto residía en la experiencia mística que venía de haber participado en un acto religioso. La diversión o la alegría como meta en el teatro náhuatl era secundaria a las exigencias de la religión. Aunque hay referencias a representaciones cómicas en las descripciones de la época (diálogos entre bufones, por ejemplo, y farsas que parodiaban a viejos borrachos), la mayor parte de ellas indica una meta seria y de suma importancia para los náhuatl, nada menos que la afirmación continua de la relación equilibrada entre el ser humano y las fuerzas cósmicas que eran sus dioses. María Sten, en su libro *Vida y muerte del teatro náhuatl*, dice que el fin del teatro náhuatl

. . . era liberar a los espectadores--que al mismo tiempo eran actores--del miedo a las fuerzas sobrenaturales, del terror que les infundían los dioses esotéricos . . . lo esencial en aquel espectáculo era ganar la gracia de los dioses, aplacar sus iras, descifrar sus propósitos y colaborar con ellos en asegurar la existencia del mundo por medio de la sangre derramada. (34)

Una explicación sucinta de la religión náhuatl resulta bien difícil por su carácter ecléctico. Al conquistar un pueblo, los aztecas solían absorber los dioses de los conquistados, o algunos de ellos, por la misma razón que destruían el *teocalli* (templo) local y construían su propio *teocalli* en el mismo lugar: para demostrar su dominio sobre el pueblo conquistado.

Una consecuencia de este proceso de conquista y absorción era una multiplicidad de dioses y de mitos. Otra consecuencia se ve en el hecho de que los dioses llegaron a representar más de un aspecto de la naturaleza o de la vida. Quetzalcoatl, "serpiente emplumada," era al mismo tiempo dios del aire, el sol del atardecer y la estrella matutina. Tezcatlipoca, "espejo humeante," hechicero, multiforme,

era uno de los dioses más importantes en el panteón náhuatl, era dios del pecado, del cielo nocturno y de la Osa Mayor. Los aspectos de Coatlicue, "la de la falda de serpientes," diosa de la tierra y de la fertilidad, reflejaban la dualidad de la vida: dominaba la producción de la tierra, lo que daba vida al pueblo, pero también, al recibir los cadáveres y las cenizas de los muertos, representaba la fuerza destructora de la tierra.

En general, los dioses mexicanos carecían de atributos humanos; no mostraban las pasiones humanas como lo hacían los dioses griegos ni las características paternas de Dios, Nuestro Señor, pero ejercían un poder enorme sobre la vida del pueblo náhuatl. Su presencia se sentía en todos los aspectos de la vida: en los ciclos agrarios, en la división del tiempo, en las actividades diarias, en la guerra, en la producción artística y en las diversiones. Todo se ordenaba de acuerdo con los mandamientos divinos interpretados por los sacerdotes.

Los humanos tenían que propiciar a los dioses y con sus sacrificios ayudarlos a ganar la perpetua lucha cósmica contra la destrucción del universo. El regalo más valioso que se les podía ofrecer era la sangre humana, metafóricamente llamada *chalchihuitl*, "piedra verde preciosa," y el corazón, *yolli*. Sin esa sustancia mágica, no podían existir Tlaloc, dios de la lluvia, ni Xiuhteeuhltli, dios del fuego, ni Centeotl, dios del maíz. De mayor peso metafísico era su creencia en que Tonatiuh, el sol, necesitaba la sangre. Según el mito teotihuano de la creación, el sol fue creado cuando los dioses se sacrificaron, y él, nutrido de esa sangre divina, pudo comenzar su viaje diario por los cielos (Soustelle 10). Los mexicanos, que se consideraban hijos y servidores de Tonatiuh, tenían que alimentarlo para que continuara su curso cada día, manteniendo así el orden del universo. Jacques Soustelle explica las consecuencias de fallar en sus responsabilidades:

Sustraerse a este deber cósmico es traicionar a los dioses y por lo mismo a los demás hombres: porque lo que es verdadero para el Sol, lo es también para la tierra, para la vegetación, para todas las fuerzas de la naturaleza. Nada nace, nada vive sino por la sangre de los sacrificados. (102)

Toda acción humana tenía una resonancia cósmica, todo lo que se ofrecía en honor a los dioses--comida, música, danzas, procesiones, flores, plumas, piedras preciosas, sacrificios humanos--tenía un significado implícito. Por consiguiente, los elementos que formaban el espectáculo estaban teñidos de solemnidad y de terror porque, todos juntos, ligaban a los participantes con sus dioses y con los representantes de los dioses en la tierra (Sten, *Vida* 34-50).

¿En qué consistían estos espectáculos? Dice el Padre Angel María Garibay, un conocido estudioso de la literatura náhuatl: "difícil es bailar en la historia de los cultos religiosos uno de ritual más complicado y aparatoso que el de los antiguos mexicanos" (333). Los espectáculos eran un conjunto de ceremonias religiosas, desfiles, bailes de varios tipos, recitaciones o canciones, música e, invariablemente, sacrificio. Toda la comunidad participaba: el *tlatoani* (el señor o jefe), los nobles, los sacerdotes, los guerreros y los *macehualli* (el pueblo). Para la preparación de los atavíos y del decorado, había artesanos especialistas en, por ejemplo, la confección de capas de *quetzalli*, las plumas del colibrí, muy apreciadas por su iridiscencia. Otros artesanos se encargaban de decorar los escenarios con ramas de pino y flores de papel y de plumas.

En Durán y Sahagún se encuentran muchas descripciones de diferentes tipos de fiestas rituales. Una de ellas, la del *Tlacazipehualiztli*, el desollamiento de hombres, que tenía lugar en Tenochtitlan, parecía tener once etapas distintas:

- 1) La víspera del día de los sacrificios había un baile de los cautivos que iban a perder la vida sobre el *temalacatl*, la piedra redonda sobre la cual se hacían los sacrificios.
- 2) Al otro día, después del desollamiento, un desfile en que participaban individuos luciendo las pieles de los sacrificados pasaba por toda la ciudad.
- 3) Luego, una larga procesión bajaba del templo mayor y culebreaba por las calles de la ciudad. En la procesión bailaban guerreros disfrazados de tigres y de águilas, mientras otros caminaban disfrazados de los dioses importantes. También desfilaban guerreros con sus cautivos que serían sacrificados. Al llegar al *temalacatl*, los representantes de los dioses se sentaban alrededor de la piedra.
- 4) Se cantaba y se bailaba en torno a la piedra.
- 5) Se sacrificaba una codorniz. Luego, tenía lugar el combate ritual, en que un guerrero fingía luchar con su cautivo que estaba atado de un tobillo al *temalacatl*. Después, el sacrificio del cautivo. Podía haber cientos de cautivos.
- 6) Un sacerdote llevaba la sangre sacrificial en una procesión que pasaba por toda la ciudad.
- 7) Seguía el baile de las cabezas, *motzontecomaihtotia*, en el cual cada guerrero llevaba la cabeza de su cautivo.
- 8) Al otro día, un baile de saltos, *tequiquixtillo*, en que los sacerdotes iban disfrazados de animales, aves y peces.
- 9) Seguía un baile de competencia entre los grandes de

Tlatelolco y los de Tenochtitlan. Formaban dos filas y bailaban frente a frente.

10) Al anoecer, los nobles se retiraban y continuaban los guerreros. Los acompañaban canciones.

11) Seguía la fiesta hasta medianoche con bailes en que participaban mujeres de todas las clases sociales (Durán, I).

En un solo festival había once espectáculos, cada uno con su propio tema, actores, atavíos, y todos formaban una unidad hecha de elementos teatrales y de fervor religioso.

A partir de estas descripciones de los frailes y de muchas imágenes que vemos en los códices, en la cerámica y en la escultura, llegamos a comprender que para el pueblo náhuatl, la danza y el canto eran una parte esencial de la vida. Tal era su importancia que existían escuelas, llamadas *cuicacalli* o casas de canto, en que mozos y mozas aprendían a bailar, cantar y tañer bajo la dirección de los sacerdotes. Los jóvenes no podían ausentarse, pues no querían ofender a *Macuixochitl*, "cinco flor," el dios de la danza y del canto. Durán nos explica en dónde se situaba el *cuicacalli* de Tenochtitlan, cómo se ejecutaban los bailes, y de qué manera se montaban los escenarios para las fiestas:

El baile de que ellos más gustaban era el que, con aderezos de rosas, se hacía, con las cuales se coronaba y cercaba. Para el cual baile, en el *momoztli* principal del templo de su gran dios Huitzilopochtli hacían una casa de rosas, y hacían unos árboles a mano, muy llenos de flores olorosas; adonde hacían sentar a la diosa *Xochiquetzalli*. Mientras bailaban, descendían unos muchachos vestidos todos como pájaros, y otros como mariposas; muy bien aderezados de plumas muy ricas, verdes y azules y coloradas y amarillas, y subíanse por estos árboles y andaban de rama en rama, chupando el rocío de aquellas rosas. Luego salían los dioses, vestido cada uno con sus aderezos, como en los altares estaban, vistiendo indios a la misma manera, y con sus cerbatanas en las manos andaban a tirar a los pajaritos fingidos que andaban por los árboles. De donde salía la diosa de las rosas, que era *Xochiquetzalli*, a recibillos, y los tomaba de las manos y los hacían sentar junto de sí, haciéndoles mucha honra y acatamiento, como tales dioses merecían. (I: 193)

Hay frecuente mención de cantos en las descripciones de los festivos; como parte importante del espectáculo ritual eran necesarias canciones de distintos tipos que muchas veces iban acompañadas de música. Por los cronistas sabemos que los nahua

tenían especialistas llamados *cuicapixque* que se ocupaban en la composición de poemas sagrados y seculares. Durán cuenta que "[l]os Señores todos tenían sus cantores que les componían cantares de sus antepasados . . . y de sus victorias y vencimientos y linajes, y de sus extrañas riquezas . . . . Había otros cantores que componían cantares divinos de las grandezas y alabanzas de los dioses . . ." (I, cap. XXI).

A través de varios manuscritos del siglo XVI, la *Historia toltecachichimeca* entre otros, se sabe que también los jefes y guerreros se interesaban en la producción de cantos. Cuando no estaban ocupados en las muchas actividades asociadas con la guerra, solían llenar sus horas componiendo y recitando poemas--solos o en grupo, en reuniones privadas o en público (Garibay 342).

El náhuatl, el lenguaje en que se componían y se recitaban estos cantos, era la lengua oficial del imperio azteca, pero tenía sus raíces en tiempos remotos y en culturas de las cuales tenemos poquísima información. Se cree que era el idioma del gran centro religioso de Teotihuacan y que se empleaba en el imperio cuya sede era Tula-Xicotitlan.

En términos fonéticos, el náhuatl es más o menos sencillo: tiene 18 fonemas entre los cuales se incluyen 4 vocales similares a las *a, e, i, o* del español. Idioma aglutinativo, se presta a la formación de palabras largas por medio de prefijos, sufijos, diminutivos, aplicativos, reflexivos y reduplicaciones. La acentuación cae siempre sobre la penúltima sílaba.

Una de las características más notables del náhuatl clásico, tal como se representa en los textos del siglo XVI, es el uso de una gran variedad de metáforas expresadas en frases o palabras paralelas. El lenguaje poético también se caracteriza por el difrasismo: la agrupación de dos frases o palabras para expresar una idea, como en la frase hecha *in teocuitlatl, in chalchihuitl* "metal/oro, piedra preciosa verde," que significaba "riquezas."

En un manuscrito del siglo XVI conocido como *Los cantares mexicanos*, se encuentran composiciones similares a nuestra poesía lírica y épica y otro tipo que Garibay denomina "poesía dramática." Este último grupo de cantos incluye poemas dialogados entre el cantor y un personaje, monólogos introspectivos, coloquios entre el cantor y un coro o varios personajes, invocaciones, dedicatorias de un sacrificio y cantos cuya meta no se ha podido averiguar. Uno de los poemitas que parece tratar el amor lo canta una mujer disfrazada de tórtola amarilla:

Tlapachtli nonenepil  
chalchiuhtli ye noten:  
nicnomatia ni Quetzalchictzin notatabuan

niczobua notlapal  
 a in teixpan nichoca  
 ¿quen in tizque ilhuicatl itic?  
 [De coral es mi lengua,  
 de esmeralda mi pico:  
 yo me avaloro a mí misma, padres míos,  
 yo, Quetzalchictzin.  
 Abro mis alas,  
 antes ellos lloro:  
 ¿Cómo iremos al interior del cielo? (377)

Estos cantos emplean un complicado sistema de metáforas que aun para el público náhuatl debían de haber sido difíciles de descifrar, si no incomprensibles. Garibay sugiere que el vocabulario utilizado en las canciones aporta múltiples significados. Una de las imágenes más repetidas se hace con la palabra *xóchitl* (flor) que parece significar también *cuicátl* (canción). Juntas quieren decir "poesía," según Garibay, pero también son intercambiables. Aparecen en una variedad de frases dobles, como en el siguiente verso: "Del interior del cielo vienen/estas hermosas flores, estos hermosos cantos" (347). La ambigüedad de la palabra *xóchitl* se nota en la frase "las divinas flores de los sacrificados," que puede referirse a las canciones de los cautivos o a los corazones o las almas de los que mueren en el sacrificio (118, 383).

En su estudio de las canciones rituales incluidas en los *Cantares mexicanos*, John Bierhorst comenta ampliamente sobre el "canto de fantasmas" ("ghost song") que emplea un sistema muy elaborado de metáforas. Es su opinión que el vocabulario de estas metáforas señala un idioma esotérico mucho más complejo que las imágenes dobles sugeridas por Garibay. Consta que muchos sustantivos como *xóchitl*, *cuicátl* y *chalchiuhtl* también se refieren a personas, específicamente a príncipes o guerreros muertos a quienes el cantor, guiado por uno de los dioses, invoca para que vuelvan a la tierra a escuchar los cantos (17-18).

Aunque no se puede ligar concretamente ningún poema específico de los *Cantares* con ninguna de las descripciones de las ceremonias, está claro que formaron parte de un gran número de espectáculos. Eran necesarios músicos, bailarines y, al menos, un cantor (Bierhorst 70); para ciertas canciones que parecen diálogos entre una persona y un coro, se aumentaría el número de cantores (Garibay 373).

De algunas indicaciones en el manuscrito, se supone que el cantor recitaba acompañado de dos tipos de tambores, el *huehuettl* y el *teponaztli*. El primero, que todavía se usa en México, es grande, de madera, de forma cilíndrica, generalmente cubierto con piel de

venado. Cuando se toca con las manos, produce dos tonos separados de una quinta. El *huehuetl* era el instrumento de percusión más utilizado en las fiestas, según las indicaciones que tenemos. El *teponaztli*, un tronco vaciado con dos aperturas en la parte superior, se toca con palillos y también produce dos tonos (Bierhorst 72).

Lo único concreto que sabemos acerca del acompañamiento de los cantos son cuatro sílabas, *TI QUI TO CO*, escritas en varias combinaciones al principio de algunos de los poemas, que parecen indicar tanto el ritmo como el tono de los tambores. Se ha establecido la teoría de que las vocales *O* e *I* representan los dos tonos del *teponaztli*, y se ha jugado mucho con las combinaciones posibles, sin resultado concreto, claro está, puesto que los nahua no dejaron composiciones musicales escritas (74-82).

Para concluir estos comentarios sobre el espectáculo náhuatl, queremos solamente señalar que para los que se interesan en investigar algunos de sus aspectos dramáticos y poéticos será sin duda una experiencia estimulante y a la vez frustrante. Por un lado, hay mucha materia con la que trabajar, a pesar de los extensos estudios de Garibay, León-Portilla y Bierhorst. Por otro lado, los enormes vacíos en nuestro conocimiento del contexto de los cantos y la necesidad de aprender el náhuatl clásico para acercarse a los textos presentan un desafío considerable. Es de esperar que esta época de comunicación internacional, estimulada por el interés reciente en la perspectiva indígena sobre el quincuagesimo aniversario, dará un empuje a la investigación de la literatura náhuatl preservada en los manuscritos de nuestras instituciones académicas y nacionales.

*Saint Michael's College*

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# TRANSLATION AND THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE IN THE RENAISSANCE

*Kenneth Lloyd-Jones*

Much Humanist reflection on language during the Renaissance turned on the mysteries of the nature, and even more so the fate, of humankind's first, Edenic tongue. Did not the Bible affirm that God *spoke* Creation into existence, and that Adam's earliest exercise of his free will was to *name* each of the animals (*Gen. 1.3-26* and *II.19-20*)? And was that not all in keeping with the Old Testament's prophetic foretelling, and the New Testament's evangelical affirmation, of the divine Word? Among the most interesting aspects of the Humanist fascination with this question, the notion of a linguistic continuum both stretching back to the "original," prelapsarian language, and forward to the return of a Golden Age characterized by a "universal" language, was to have a pervasive and occasionally ambiguous attraction. Discussion of the status of individual languages within this continuum served furthermore to link scholarly interests to popular culture in the sixteenth century, and this is particularly so with regard to a number of Humanist approaches to translation, something which - no matter how diversely it was either theorized or implemented - constituted by its very nature an activity that brought synchronic perspectives to bear on a question otherwise conceived diachronically.

It can be argued that in earlier centuries, translation in the West had chiefly served to make the wisdom and truths of the past accessible to the translator's contemporaries, seen as impaired in their own grasp of such virtues by the passage of time that had alienated them from primal goodness. Certain dimensions of Renaissance translation were now to focus on the opportunities made increasingly available by exploration, colonization and international trade to consider the phenomenon of language along comparative, essentially anthropological lines, rather than in hierarchized or moral terms.<sup>1</sup> For those Humanists attracted to the notion of the universality of knowledge, something that was seen as both cause and effect of the recovery of a universal language, translation emerges as a means of expanding the Greco-Roman cultural inheritance even beyond its already (somewhat) familiar Hebrew and Arabic components. But if translation is a corrective to the polyglot fragmentation of knowledge ensuing from the divine wrath at Babel, it is also, paradoxically, a means of keeping humankind in a state of multi-lingual intercourse, by virtue of the very fact that it both concedes and codifies linguistic difference.

Thanks to the endeavors of such groups as the Jesuits in India, China and Japan, or the Franciscans in the Americas, for example, Renaissance thinking about language was, from the mid-sixteenth century on, confronted to a hitherto unprecedented degree with linguistic structures owing nothing to such normative European concepts as syntactical, morphological and lexical structures, or even alphabetization. Increasing familiarity with ideographic or pictographic languages called for new ways to conceptualize the relationships between speaking, writing and reading, and even the idea of *a word* was to become increasingly insecure. And if this was so, what then was to become of a divine Truth whose veracity itself was predicated on mankind's capacity to grasp the Word of God, one and indivisible?<sup>2</sup> Such considerations brought a decidedly teleological thrust to so much of the Humanist concern for bridging the shattered language of Eden and the "pure language" of the end of time, denoting as it must the apocalyptic return to harmony of discourse between the human and the divine.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, scholars were to expend considerable effort in their search for normative structures that would reveal the common underpinnings of all human language: needless to say, they did so with more or less regard for philological rigor, and, in consequence, more or less persuasive results. Some, like Guy Le Fèvre de la Boderie (see Secret, 1969) labored - not wholly unscientifically - to draw out the shared origins of Greek, Latin and their Romance derivatives, and the various Semitic languages. He also contributed significantly to the contemporary fascination with the myth of the "Gallic Hercules," which further promoted such syncretic investigations by arguing for the Celtic (Gaulish) origins of Greco-Roman culture (see Jung). Others gave proof of more ingenuity than scholarship, such as the learned Hebrew scholar, Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo, who strove to demonstrate that the only way to gain access to the lost language of the Etruscans was through the study of Aramaic (see Secret, 1977), or the Lowland Humanist Gropius Becanus (see Maillard [1989] 336), whose *Origines antwerpianae* of 1569 purported to prove that God (but perhaps not the serpent?) spoke to Adam and Eve in Flemish.

Such considerations are found at all levels of linguistic endeavor of the period, but particularly in the context of the deciphering of symbols, taken as para-linguistic signs. Blaise de Vigenère, for example (see Maillard, 1982), thinking in terms that we would today identify with the concepts of signified and signifier, drew on his knowledge of the Kabbalah to posit what he called "the algebra of the world." Hoping to gain entry into the circle of initiates, and convinced, like many of his contemporaries, that the keys to a universal language

were to be found in the study of esoteric, occult and magical texts, he sought to implement a symbolic notation based on a system of supposed unitary equivalency between a given thought and its articulation. This reduction of spoken language to a set of symbolic representations foreshadows our modern understanding of utterance and reception as exercises in encoding and decoding, and evinces a truly remarkable approach in which not only the need for translation, but - in a culture little more than a century into the age of printing - even discrete linguistic structures become ultimately superfluous. As Maillard (1989) aptly remarks, "A l'art de la traduction, tout approximatif et dès lors inutile, se substitue cette 'langue des anges', qui n'est autre que l'abstraction mathématique et la primauté de l'écrit pour transcender les langues parlées, vouées à demeurer singulières" (340). It was in a similar perspective that the Chinese ideographs sent back by the Jesuit missionaries excited the linguists of the Renaissance, representing as they do a system of annotation that owes, in theory at least, everything to the modes of (presumably objective) conceptualization and nothing to the (presumably subjective) exigencies of the spoken language. While it is true that Western mathematicians had long since been freed, through their recourse to numbers, from the limitations of vocalization, and that Scholastic philosophers had practised various forms of what we would today recognize as symbolic logic, I do not believe that any scholar took the linguistic implications of this question as far as Blaise de Vigenère, for whom the fact that the ideographs came literally from the other end of the world gave credence to the conviction that there could indeed be a universal sign for every etymon, and that the universal language was thus within reach.

It was this same notion that was to seize the interest of a writer like Juan de Acosta, in his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*. In discussing the Indian languages, Acosta realizes that they are so different from the norms of Castilian that it makes the recourse to language in order to talk about language an even more slippery undertaking than usual. Thus, to make his topic easier to grasp for the relatively uncultured national audience he is hoping to reach, for example, he compares the various Aztec and Incan pictographs to the signs of the Zodiac, with which his public was perfectly familiar:

Son cifra[s] y no letras, porque por qualquier nombre que se llame Marte, ygualmente lo denota al Italiano, y al Frances, y al Español, lo qual no hazen las letras, que aunque denoten las cosas es mediante las palabras, y assi no las entendien, sino los que saben aquella lengua. *Verbi gratia*. Esta escrita esta palabra Sol, no percibe el Griego, ni el Hebreo que

significa, porque ygnora el mismo vocablo (VI.4: *Que ninuna nacion de Indios se ha descubierto use de letras*, f.259<sup>v</sup>).

It is particularly striking in this instance to see how Acosta's French translator, to be even clearer, reaches beyond the original, rendering both Acosta's Castilian text and his Latin tag in a more discursive and amplified manner:

Tels caracteres sont chiffres & non pas lettres, pourautant que quelque nom que Mars puisse avoir en Italien, en François, en Espagnol, tousiours ce caractere le signifie: ce qui ne se trouve point és lettres: ear iaçoit qu'elles denotent les choses, c'est par le moyen des paroles: D'où vient que ceux qui n'en sçavent la langue, ne les entendent pas, comme pour exemple le Grec ny l'Hebreu ne pourra pas comprendre ce que signifie ce mot *sol*, iaçoit qu'ils le voyent escrit, pource qu'ils ignorent le mot Latin (VI.4: *Que l'on n'a point trouvé aucune nation d'Indiens qui usast de lettres*, f.278<sup>v</sup>).

It is precisely this universality of the symbol that delights Acosta and those of his kind, bearing in mind fully the original sense of τὸ σύμβολον as a sign designating something by inference. Indeed, were it not for the authoritative testimony of the Jesuits, Acosta considers the coexistence of pictographs both in the Americas and in the Orient to be something of a "cosa prodigiosa y que no fuera creyble" (*Historia* f.261<sup>v</sup>), an exclamation rendered noticeably more emphatically by the French translator: "chose prodigieuse & estrange, voire qui seroit incroyable" (*Histoire* f.280<sup>r</sup>). Good Catholic and Christian apologist though Acosta shows himself to be in the rest of his writings, there can be no doubt of the depth of his dismay as he recounts how he witnessed many of the Indian tree-bark volumes burned, in the name of religious orthodoxy, by one of the missionaries: as Acosta puts it, with a touch of asperity, by "un Doctrinero" (*Historia* f.264<sup>v</sup>), neatly - and perhaps more safely - translated into French as "quelque Pedant" (*Histoire* l.283<sup>r</sup>). It was surely the missed opportunities for the further exploration of the modes of universal symbolism, rather than humanitarianism or religious tolerance, that moved Acosta to regret this act of destruction: and yet in one sense that is perhaps a distinction without a difference. Translation is an activity forced upon us by the fact that we are divided from each other first and foremost by our speech, and only incidentally by the manner of our reduction of that speech to symbol. Consequently, the search for a universal language, in its desire to suppress all barriers to communication, does in fact take on the values of humanitarianism and tolerance. As

Acosta pondered the implications of his realization that "written" pictographic translation (the unverbilized manipulation of symbols) was a very different matter from "oral" translation (the necessarily reductive constriction to a monoglot system), he clearly came to sense, and to be moved by, that universality of the human condition which we can so easily overlook when we concentrate on our differences. Although not sufficiently versed in the techniques of what we would see today as comparative anthropology, Acosta shows himself fully sensitive to all that is involved when any culture is so certain of its own hold on the truth that it imposes itself, at any cost, on another. Discussing the manner in which he had seen certain of the converted Indians transcribing their new-found Christian truths, adapting their system of communication to the "translation" of concepts of varying degrees of familiarity, he writes:

y cierto se admirara qualquiera que lo[s] viere. Porque para significar aquella palabra, Yo pecador me confieso, pintan un Indio hincado de rodillas a los pies de un religioso, como que se confiessa... y a la gloriosa virgen Maria, pintan un rostro de Nuestra Señora, y medio cuerpo con un niño... y donde faltan ymagines, ponen caracteres: como en que peque, & c. De donde se podra colegir la viveza de los ingenios destes Indios (*Historia* ff.265v<sup>o</sup>-266r<sup>o</sup>).

Here, it is as if the human poignancy of the scene obviated the need for the French translator to gloss or otherwise comment on the original:

Et à la verité quiconque les verra, s'en esmerueillera, car pour signifier ces paroles, *Moy pescheur me confesse*, ils peignoient un Indien à genoux aux pieds d'un Religieux, comme qui se confesse... & à la glorieuse vierge Marie, ils peignoient un visage de nostre Dame, & un demy corps de petit enfant... & où les images leur deffailloient, ils mettoient des caracteres, comme *enquoy j'ay peché*, & c. D'où l'on peut cognoistre la vivacité de l'entendement de ces Indiens (*Histoire* f.284v<sup>o</sup>).

Perhaps the implied lesson - that the Indians could readily "translate" such universal concepts as humility (or was it humiliation?), or the love of a mother for her child, but felt inadequate when confronted with Christian sin - does away with the need for interpretive comment.

It should not however be thought that such questions of language involved only the consideration of alien cultures or distant lands. Louis Meigret, for example, engages in the course of his *Grammère*

Françoÿze in the perfectly conventional Humanist practice of arguing for the supremacy of French based on its derivation from the Classical languages. He is thereby brought to argue that, in the same way that all languages can be reduced to a universal grammar, so the universal language structured by that grammar could serve to articulate the whole of knowledge:

Or ęt il qe notre lang' ęt aojourd'hui si ęarięhię par la profession ę expęrięce de' langes Latin' ę Gręcqe, qu'il n'ęt poįt d'art, ne sięęe si diffięil' ę subtile, ne męme ęęte tant haote theologe... dōt ęlle ne puisse trettęr amplemęnt ę elegamment (preface *Ad' Lecteurs*, ff.2r<sup>o</sup>-v<sup>o</sup>).<sup>3</sup>

It would be ungracious of us to wonder if Meigret's candidate for the universal language might not bear a suspicious resemblance to his own mother-tongue. Nevertheless, Meigret does realize that linguistic change is primarily a matter of usage, and the effect of natural rather than of moral law. In this, he is to be distinguished, for example, from his contemporary, the great Hellenist and philologist Henri Estienne, for whom linguistic evolution resulted primarily from the decay of the parent tongues. Meigret approvingly quotes a couplet from Horace, which he then puts into French, to ensure that his point is clear:

come dit trębien Horace:

Multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque,  
Quae modo sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus.<sup>4</sup>

Lę' qels sonet pręq'ęinsi ęn notre lange:

Pluzieurs mōs de pięęa par l'uzaje lęssez  
Renętront, ę seront lę' reęuz dęlessez (f.104r<sup>o</sup>).

It is a similar faith in the natural processes governing linguistic usage that brings him to assert that French word order is preferable to Latin word order, because, he argues, the latter is contrary to nature. What French puts at the end of a sentence, Latin puts at the beginning:

si nou' considerons bien l'ordre de nature, nou' trouverōs qe le stile Franęoęs s'y renęe beaocoup mieus qe le Latin . . . Le Latin de vray dira pour pler elegāmęnt *Gallos vincit Caesar*: qi soneroęt ęn gardāt le męme ordre, lę' Gaoloęs a veincu Cęzar: pour Cęzar a veincu lęs Gaoloęs (f.143v<sup>o</sup>).

Meigret's reasoning here is based on his blurring of the notions of translation *ad verbum* and translation *ad sensum*, and on his consequent assimilation of the order of nature with the rigor and

objectivity of logic. As cause is to effect in nature, so subject is to object in grammar, in that there can be no effect without a cause, and no object of a verb's action without the agency of a subject: a subject can exist without an object, but not vice-versa. Inevitably, however, Meigret's readiness to be guided by the order of nature eventually leads him away from the notion of a universal language as scholars like Blaise de Vigenère and Juan de Acosta conceived it - that is, as something accessible to all humankind precisely because it was the language of no one group. Declaring that his preference for French is not to be taken as a negative judgment on Latin, he concludes that, since Latin style was entirely appropriate for Latin, so must French style be for French:

més aosi ne trouve je pas rezonable q'on doëve s'y asservir, & lesser une beacoup plus façil' & ezee maniere de dresser le bâtiment de notre lange suyvant l'ordre qe nature tiēt en ses œuvres, & qe l'uzaje de parler a voulu suyvre (ff.143v<sup>o</sup>-144r<sup>o</sup>).

Meigret's concerns are of course far more overtly patriotic than Blaise de Vigenère's or Juan de Acosta's. For him, "le bâtiment de notre langue" ultimately relies more on its enrichment through translation from the Classical tongues and the other vernaculars, than it does on the need to make it a repository for universal or encyclopedic knowledge.

Similar concerns animate Etienne Pasquier's immense (and immensely popular) *Recherches de la France*, first published in 1560, and then in increasingly augmented editions until well after the author's death. In his chapter "De l'ancienneté et progrès de notre poésie française,"<sup>5</sup> for example, he discusses at some length the Germanic, rather than the Latin origins of French. This undertaking certainly corresponds in part to that same wave of anti-Italianism sweeping mid-century France that would lead a philologist like Henri Estienne to publish his highly satirical *Deux Dialogues du nouveau langage françois, italianisé et autrement desguisé* (Geneva: H. Estienne, 1582), and inspire various other Humanists to explore and defend the thesis of Hellenic rather than Latin sources of the national vernacular, since Greek was not tainted by the historical link to Italian (see Demaizière). There is however more to it than linguistic jingoism. Discussing the fact that French metrics depend on syllabic stress and rhyme, unlike Latin poetry which depends on vocalic quantity for its formal structure, Pasquier invokes the early sixteenth century German Beatus Rhenanus, who, he says, voulant montrer que la vieille langue des François symbolisait avec cele des Germains, dit ainsi:

Germanica Francos usos fuisse lingua cum innumera alia argumenta probant, tum vero manifeste convincit liber ille insignis Evangeliorum, francice, hoc est germanice, versus.... Ejus codicis hic est titulus: Liber Evangeliorum in theodiscam linguam versus.... Habet ipsum opus elegantissimam praefationem, cuius hoc initium est, nulla litera mutata:

Nu wil ich scriban unser heil  
Evangeliono deil  
So vuit nu hiar bigunnon  
In Frenkisga zungun.

Qui Germanice callet satis intelligit ista verba, nisi quod hodie aliter scribimus et proferimus, non addentes alicubi tot vocales, alicubi plures adjicientes.

Hiar hores io zi guate  
Was got imo gebiete  
Was wir imo hiar sungun  
In Frenkiska zungun.  
Nu fruves si hes alle  
So werso wola wole.  
Ioth wer si hold in muate  
Francono thute<sup>6</sup> (234-235).

With self-evidently popularizing intentions, Pasquier then goes on to propose his own translations of these excerpts, and to offer his own gloss on what Beatus Rhenanus's purposes were in adducing them:

Ores veux-je écrire notre salut  
De l'Evangile partie,  
Que nous ici commençons  
En française langue[.]  
.....  
Ici écoutez en bonne part  
Ce que Dieu vous commande,  
Qu'ici nous vous chantons  
En française langue.  
Or se réjouisse tout homme  
Qui au vers bien voudra,  
Et qui le retient  
En un franc courage (236).

Pasquier affirms that Beatus Rhenanus is quoting from Otfrid von Weissenburg's *Liber Evangeliorum* here, "pour montrer que la langue des Français, lors de cette traduction, n'était autre que celle des Germains que nous appelons Allemands," and that the morphological

feature most responsible for this historical superiority is to be found in the language's aptitude for rhyme, "[la] rime qui s'est constituée de main en main jusques à nous, en notre vulgaire français, qui fut composé en trois langues, wallonne, latine et française" (236). By suggesting that French versification owes its superiority to the (supposedly) "Germanic" features of syllabic stress and rhyme, rather than to the "Latinate" reliance on the use of vocalic length for rhythmic effect, Pasquier is clearly attempting to dethrone the Classical tongues from their privileged status - but not only for the political purpose of aligning contemporary France with her northern, rather than her southern, neighbors. By making the Germanic origins of the national language at the least the equal of its uncontested Latin sources, the claim for the universality of the French language can clearly be better sustained. Pasquier's notion of linguistic continuity, and thereby of cultural universality, is clearly far more a function of political power than of cultural idealism. Latin may well have been the closest the Western world had yet come to a universal language, but that was on account of the military and economic might of the Roman *imperium*: Pasquier's underlying claim for the superiority of French, on the other hand, is based less on the prowess of those who speak the language than on inherent qualities of the language itself. Exploiting the degree of linguistic overlap between lexemes which we would today differentiate with greater specificity, Pasquier translates Otfrid's reference to Frankish (*Frenkiska*) by "en française langue," and *francono* by "franc" (forthright, bold), and with evident relish for the primary Latin sense of *germanus*: "having the same parents" (< *germen*: sprout, bud). He thereby achieves a high level of assimilation between vernacular speech and national character: by the commandment of that same God who splintered the universality of humankind after Babel, the spread of the "good news" brought by the evangelical Word is made possible through the common germination of factors drawing on values that are at once French, Frankish and courageous in their origins. This compendium of values comes down to us, furthermore, in an unbroken chain from the common sources of the modern vernacular: Germanic, Latin and the language of pre-Roman France ("trois langues, wallonne, latine et française"). And translation is thus poised between the means of recovery of the past, and "notre salut," when the wound inflicted after Babel will be healed, the promise of the divine logos will be fulfilled, and all of Creation's primal unity will be restored to prelapsarian harmony.

In a revealing (and perhaps predictable) coincidence, part of the text taken and translated by Pasquier from Beatus Rhenanus's discussion of Otfrid's poem is also to be found in the last of the texts to be considered here, Claude Fauchet's *Recueil de l'origine de la*

*langue et poesie françoise, ryme et romans.*<sup>7</sup> The main interest of Fauchet's text for our present purposes, however, lies in his prefatory discussion of the fate of the original language, and in particular of the paradoxical consequences of our linguistic diversity. After speculating that Hebrew may well be the original language - although that is something we will never know, as he wistfully concedes - Fauchet reflects on God's purposes in endowing humankind with language in the first place: "Dieu ayant doué l'homme de la raison... à fin qu'il eust moyen de louer son createur, voulut qu'il la peust declarer par un signe apparent, qui est la parole" (1). The function of the original language was thus to provide semiotic representation for human reason, the faculty which we have been granted so as to tell of the glory of God: the purposes of Creation are linked to the universal capacity for reason, and signed by the universal language, in the divine scheme of cosmic unity. Conceptualized in such a manner, must we not then conclude that discrete languages, whether differentiated by the effects of either time or of geographical distance, can only inhibit the restoration of that original universality?

Puis donc que la parole estoit si necessaire à l'union & entretenement des humains, voire à la louange du grand & admirable ouvrier de ce Monde, d'où vient que chascune langue a si peu d'estendue, et qu'il s'y trouve tel changement, qu'à peine nous pouvons entendre le langage de nos bisayeux [?] (2).

What then is to be made of translation in such a scheme of things? By breaking down the linguistic barriers between us, will it move us closer to the universal language that will signal the recovery of our rightful place in the divine plan? Or will it simply further legitimize those barriers by its implicit codification of linguistic variety? The problem emerges clearly in Fauchet's account of the Roman jurists practising in Greece after its absorption into the Empire:

Ils voulurent que les Juges des pais conquis fussent Romains: ou pour le moins usassent en leur sentenees & actes publiques, de langue Romaine. Si rigoureusement, qu'ils ne voulurent jamais respondre aux Grecs qu'en Latin: les contraignant parler par Trucheman, pour leur oster le moyen de monstrier la promptitude & facilité de leur langue (qui les faisoit estimer) non seulement en la ville de Rome, mais au milieu de la Grece, & d'Asie: à fin de rendre envers les nations estranges, la Romaine plus venerable (41).

While we cannot doubt that part of Fauchet's purpose here is to promote a strategy for the glory of the French language, and thus of France itself, comparable to the might of Rome through its use of a universalizing Latin, we may also conclude that there is an element of Humanist disillusion in his subsequent remark, "les langues se renforcent, à mesure que les princes qui en usent s'agrandissent" (43). In the face of the political and economic praxis of the sixteenth century, the motor of universal unification turns out to be perhaps more of a *translatio imperii* than the *translatio studii* that so much of Humanist idealism had been built on.

Doubtless as a result to some degree of the devastation of the Wars of Religion and the ensuing decades of civil and political unrest, inevitably echoing for the Humanists the turmoil following the collapse of the Roman republic, French thinkers in particular were to become increasingly attentive to the idea of a universal language in the first third of the seventeenth century (Maillard [1989] 340-348). Writing from Amsterdam in November 1629, Descartes informs his correspondant Mersenne of his dissatisfaction with a pamphlet on the subject which his friend had recently sent him: "Cette proposition d'une nouvelle langue semble plus admirable à l'abord, que je ne la trouve en y regardant de près: car il n'y a que deux choses à apprendre en toutes les langues, à savoir la signification des mots, et la grammaire" (*Lettre XV*, 76). In any case, he adds, there is really no chance that such a universal language will ever come about: "N'espérez pas de la voir jamais en usage: cela presuppose de grands changements en l'ordre des choses, et il faudrait que tout le monde ne fût qu'un paradis terrestre, ce qui n'est bon à proposer que dans le pays des romans" (82). In predicating the realization of the universal language on humanity's capacity to relearn the original language, Descartes's insight into the irrecuperability of primal innocence invites reflection not only on what was lost, but also of course on all that was gained, after the convulsion at Babel.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> As Maillard (1989) notes, the consolidation of Western civilization on its Classical foundations was not the only animating principle behind the Humanist theory of culture, and the role of translation in that theory:

La science et la pratique des différentes langues de l'univers, à travers leur inventaire et leur déchiffrement généralisé, ne

sauraient être isolées d'aspirations religieuses à reconstruire un monde cohérent. Lui sert de moteur et modèle un double mythe théologico-philosophique emprunté au passé, celui d'une langue originelle et de l'unité encyclopédique du savoir, telle que l'avait formalisée Raymond Lulle (333).

The thirteenth century Catalan mystic Ramon Llull was influential in the development of medieval neoplatonism, and as such enjoyed a rebirth of popularity in the sixteenth century, particularly when the rise of neo-aristotelianism precipitated a renewal of interest in the epistemological bases of the categories of knowledge. His *ars inveniendi veritatis*, through recourse to symbolic notation and logical methodology, was of great interest to Renaissance humanists attracted to the notion of the universality of knowledge, something that existed under the original language and that might be recaptured by a universal language: see his *Ars magna* of 1306.

<sup>2</sup> Such prefiguration of the Christian *logos* was seen, for example, in the foretelling by the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah: "then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (*Zeph.* III:9).

<sup>3</sup> In his efforts to restore French orthography to a more phonetic system, Meigret may be seen as taking an initial step in the direction of universalizing his discourse, in precisely the same way as that aimed for by today's International Phonetic Alphabet.

<sup>4</sup> Horace, *Ars poetica*, 70-71; the preferred modern reading is

Multa renascentur quae iam eecidere, cadentque  
Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from Pasquier are taken from his *Oeuvres Choisies*, ed. Léon Feugère: the latter has somewhat modernized the spelling of the original. This chapter corresponds to Book VII, chap.3, of the last (1611) edition of the *Recherches de la France* published during Pasquier's lifetime, and figures in vol.I, pp.234-249, of Feugère's edition.

<sup>6</sup> Pasquier is quoting from Beatus Rhenanus, *Rerum Germanicarum Libri III* (Basel: Froben, 1531, re-ed. in 1551), vol.2. Otfrid von Weissenburg's *Liber Evangeliorum*, written about 870, in Old High German (South Rhine-Franconia dialect) is considered the earliest German poem to use rhyme, rather than assonance or alliteration. The excerpts quoted by Pasquier are construed slightly differently in modern editions: see Piper's ed. (28) for these particular excerpts.

<sup>7</sup> Stressing in his turn the belief that rhyme was the discovery of his French/Frankish ancestors, Fauchet offers his own translation of the

opening lines of the excerpt from the *Evangelienbuch*, prefacing it with the observation that Otfrid "translata partie des Evangiles en consonantie et Leonine, ainsi que tesmoingnent les vers qui s'ensuyvent..." (66). He then cites the German text, and adds that he wishes to translate it *ad verbum* rather than *ad sensum*, so as to facilitate his readers' ability to verify his accuracy:

C'est à dire presque mot pour mot,  
 Je veux maintenant escrire nostre salut  
 Qui consiste en l'evangile,  
 Ce que nous avons commencé  
 En langage François (67).

He goes on to qualify the German text as "ces vers de vieil langage François-Germain, mal entendu pour le iourdhuy, sinon par les Frizons, & encores sçavants en leur langue" (67). The Frisians originated as a Teutonic tribe of northern Holland (modern Vriesland), successively colonized by the Romans, the Saxons and the Franks; as such, they perhaps represented for Fauchet the ideal of ethnic blending in the name of universal unity.

Trinity College

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## DEFENDING THEIR HONOR: WOMEN'S VOICES IN *EL LIBRO DE APOLONIO*

*Carmen S. Rivera*

Much has been made of Apolonio being a non-traditional epic hero in this poem of the thirteenth century. Here the hero does not challenge the enemy with his sword, but rather he challenges them with his knowledge; and, instead of drawing support from his army, he relies on the study of the books in his library. Marina Scordilis Brownlee points out "the values of clerkly 'bookishness'" interwoven in the poem and how writing "becomes thematized" here. Yet, not much has been said about the female characters and how they resort to language and wit in order to save their lives. At different moments in the narrative we encounter female characters empowered by language. Luciana manages to get what she wanted all along, marriage to Apolonio, by presenting her father with a riddle. Tarsiana saves her life and her honor by singing and reciting in public. Her words become medicine and food for the ailing souls of the male characters. On the other hand, silence becomes a death sentence for those who can not find words to speak. I believe that by applying the theories of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray to this medieval text, we might gain some new insights into the dynamics of the female heroines wielding words as their weapons.

Both Cixous and Irigaray believe that women up until now have been denied access to language and to their own sexuality. Irigaray defines the woman's genitalia as a mouth: "For her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus within herself, she is already two--but not divisible into one(s)--that caress each other" (24). She further explains how women's first attempts to express their own sexuality and to find linguistic means to do so is through "mimicry:" "Women's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation . . ." (85). According to Cixous, "woman has never *her* turn to speak . . ." ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 879), hence the prevalence of male writing. "Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 880), declares the French feminist.

E. Jane Burns in a presentation on "Feminism and the Fabliaux," explained how in the Middle Ages female nature was linked to the woman's genitalia. They were reduced to a "vaginal mouth," a silent hole. When they spoke, they were criticized for their garrulousness. In the French fabliaux, women's voice is depicted as empowering with

negative force. Women can only use words to deceive and manipulate men. In *El Libro de Apolonio*, though, women are empowered by language in order to protect their honor and save their own lives. Only those who choose to keep silent are submitted to the ignominy of sexual abuse.

Luciana is the first woman in the poem to put in evidence her speaking and singing skills. King Architrastes, her father, sends for her to help him identify the young stranger sitting at his table. Apolonio, who up until now has refused to reveal his name and his title, is convinced by her "palabras d' amiztat," and tells the story of his adventures and misfortunes. Again, Architrastes relies on Luciana's skills to lift the spirit of his guest and asks her to sing for them. Luciana grabs the "vihuela," takes off her cloak and begins to sing "un son natural." Standing there in a very thin robe, both her body and voice find natural expression.

While everyone in the hall praises her music, king Apolonio claims he can sing better: "mas si prindo la vihuela cuido fer un tal son / que entendredes todos que es más con razón" (28). His song is praised for its complicated notes and variations, tones and semitones and when he is finished everyone agrees that not even Apollo or Orpheus could sing or play the instrument better. There are two points to be made here. First, Luciana's "natural" style even though very pleasing is no competition for the rational learned style of Apolonio. Second, the poem does not include the songs themselves so what we have are the judgments and comments of an obviously biased narrator.

Resourceful as ever, Luciana, who has fallen madly in love with Apolonio, arranges for her father to name the hero her tutor in music. When three young men approach Architrastes about marrying Luciana, the king suggests they each write a letter to her so she can choose among them. He then sends Apolonio with the letters to Luciana who responds by sending her father an answer in form of a riddle: "que con el peregrino querié ella casar, / que con el cuerpo sólo estorcíó de la mar" (33).

Joan Ferrante explains why female characters in romance, like Luciana, had to resort to the manipulation of words:

The women in romance, though more central to the story than in most epics, are rarely at the center of power; they too rely on subtle and devious methods. Their most common tools are words and magic, both involving skill and cleverness, both employed to manipulate without the object's being aware of it. Manipulation by words takes various forms: the hidden promise, the false oath, the forged letter, the beneficial fiction, the malicious lie. (216)

In fact, what Luciana is doing here is "mimicking" masculine discourse. At the beginning of the poem, we encounter king Antioco who designs a riddle in order to keep possible suitors away from his daughter. Irigaray explains why women might resort to mimicry: "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it" (76). By imitating a successful masculine ploy, Luciana gains control over her future and her body when Apolonio provides the solution and marries her.

Unfortunately, once she is married and has a respectable and honorable husband to speak for her, there is no need for Luciana to have a voice. While traveling across the sea, Luciana gives birth to Tarsiana but supposedly dies in labor. Apolonio puts her in a casket together with some gold coins and a document explaining Luciana's identity and ordering a fitting burial for her. The casket is found by some fishermen who decide to follow Apolonio's instructions. It is while doing so that Luciana is restored to life and the fishermen decide to build a monastery where the lady can reside until her lord comes back for her. Luciana no longer speaks for herself but has her husband's written words to do so. From now on, her life, her mouth and her body are under the strict constraints of the Church and the nun's habit.

Luciana's daughter, Tarsiana, seems to inherit her mother's mastery over language and music. The poet tells us how she was educated in grammar and music and would not miss a day of study. In her case, all that education and training finally pays off since her life and honor will depend on her manipulation of words.

Dionisia, the servant entrusted to care for Tarsiana, grows envious of the young princess and decides to have her decapitated. E. Jane Burns points out how decapitation of women is the equivalent of castration of men. Yet Cixous insists that women are not as afraid: "woman couldn't care less about the fear of decapitation (or castration), adventuring, without the masculine temerity, into anonymity, which she can merge with without annihilating herself: because she's a giver" (888). Maybe, having been "muffled throughout their history," women have learned to live "in muted bodies" (886).

Tarsiana, then, who is about to be decapitated and silenced forever, asks to have a moment to pray for her soul. Her prayer is carefully structured in three parts: first an invocation to God, then a description of her situation, and finally a plea for help. Her speech is so effective that even God is moved by it and decides to intercede on her behalf: "hobo Dios de la huérfana duelo e compasión: / enviól su acorro, oyó su petición" (54). Immediately, a couple of thieves show up and scare away Teófilo, the hired killer, but turn around and

kidnap her.

Once again, Tarsiana finds herself in peril. She is bought in a slavery market by the owner of a brothel. He has just finished writing the price of her virginity in the door, when the first customer, Antinágoras, comes in. Realizing that her body is going to be violated, she prays to God, *demanding* that He has to help her since He would not have saved her from death to abandon her to such an ignominious fate. The poet then describes how with "words" Tarsiana was able to manipulate and control the man's frenzy: "El princip Antinágora que vinié denodado / fue con estas paraulas fierament amansado" (57). It should be noted that Tarsiana only succeeds by using very rational arguments. Up until then in the poem, only male speeches have been praised for their "rationality."

Anita Benaim Lasry argues that "most Spanish romances imply that women are perfectly capable of assuming a masculine conduct and they ought to be encouraged to do this by strong examples of successful masculine heroines" (234). Tarsiana is indeed such a heroine. By borrowing from male discourse and making it her own, she is able to protect her other "mouth" from being violated.

Not only does Antinágora desist from sexually abusing her, he gives her the money intended to pay for his sexual pleasure. She then goes to the owner of the brothel and proposes to him a reasonable business deal: he can make more money with her singing and entertaining people in the street. Reluctantly, Tarsiana becomes a "juglarsa." According to Menéndez Pelayo, "juglaría" was among the medieval occupations which did not enjoy social respect and legitimacy. Still, Tarsiana recognizes that there is less damage to her honor and reputation in this profession than in prostitution. In fact, when introduced to Apolonio, she declares that she is a street troubadour against her will (67).

At this point Tarsiana reminds us of Scheherazade in *A Thousand and One Nights*, who sentenced to be decapitated, manages to survive one day at a time by telling a story to the caliph. The minute her words fail to entertain him, she will be dead. Like Scheherazade, Tarsiana needs to entertain from day to day in order to save her body. But unlike the Arab heroine who only has to impress one person, the Spanish character has to sing for any possible sexual partner.

Antinágora continues to visit Tarsiana and becomes used to listening to her to the point that he falls in love. He declares how he gets sick just by eating on the days he does not hear her words. In the meantime, king Apolonio has arrived in town completely devastated since he believes that both his wife Luciana and his daughter Tarsiana are dead. Learning of Apolonio's sadness, Antinágora knows what will cure him and sends for Tarsiana, telling her that she can "name"

her prize for coming to entertain the king. Once again, words have empowered her to the point that she can command any amount of money. In fact, her words now have a medicinal power as she tells Apolonio: "yo trayo letuarios, especia tan sabrida, / que si mortal non fuere, o que seya de vida, / yo l' tornaré alegre, tal que a comer pida" (67). She promises to provide the cure for Apolonio's ailment and restore his "appetite." Tarsiana then goes on to sing and to present a series of riddles to the sad king who solves them one by one. Finally, when an impatient Apolonio strikes her, the young princess starts crying and wondering out loud why her father has not rescued her. Apolonio recognizes the story but does not admit to her identity until she *names* the wetnurse that took care of her as a baby. By pronouncing the name of the dead woman, Tarsiana *names* herself and restores her own identity.

Recognized by her father and restored to the dignified position she deserves, Tarsiana marries Antinágora. Yet, marriage for her, like for her mother, means silencing her own voice. The rest of the poem is about how Apolonio finds his wife, returns to his own country, demands punishment of Dionisia and her accomplices, and finally dies peacefully after a long and prosperous reign over his kingdom. Luciana and Tarsiana do not speak again since now they both have a man who will protect their honor.

Lasry compares Tarsiana's heroic qualities with the non-heroic nature of Antioco's daughter. Forced to have an incestuous relation with her father, the daughter, who does not even have a name, remains silent until her death. When she finally confides in an old wetnurse, she is told to keep quiet and not to dishonor her father or herself publicly. The daughter agrees to keep her mouth shut to the point that not even food is permitted to go in: "La dueña por est' fecho fue tan envergonzada / que por tal que muriese non quería comer nada" (4).

Silence only allows for the abuse to continue and for death to spread throughout the kingdom. As mentioned before, Antioco makes up a riddle to be solved by anyone attempting to marry his daughter. The suitors's failure to answer the riddle, their silent response results in their decapitation.

Years later, after Apolonio marries Luciana, he is informed of the death of Antioco and his daughter. They were both struck by lightning as a punishment from God for their sin. In her silence, the daughter is held as passive accomplice to her father's crime.

The other woman to die in the poem is Licórides, Luciana's wetnurse entrusted with the care of Tarsiana. In her deathbed she finally tells Tarsiana about her heritage and who her parents really are. The poet describes how her tongue gradually becomes weaker as

she dies: "Cuando esto le hobo dicho e enseñado / e lo hobo la niña todo bien recordado, / fue perdiendo la lengua e el hora llegando, / despidióse del mundo e de su gasañado" (51). On the other hand, it is her words just before dying that empowered Tarsiana by *naming* her real parents and giving the child her own identity.

Contrary to the fabliaux, where women supposedly use their voice for deception and seduction, Tarsiana and Luciana use theirs to gain control over their own sexuality. Their access to language and power is nevertheless temporary and limited. Not only are they constricted to "mimicry" of "masculine discourse," they can only express themselves and tell their stories orally. Twice in the poem the people from different towns decide to erect a monument to Apolonio's courage and inscribe his adventures on it. The poem itself is named after the male hero and focuses on his life. The fact that half of the lines deals with the trials of these two heroines does not seem to face a poet who insists that the subject of his work is Apolonio. Hélène Cixous insists that the permanency of writing permitted to men is denied to women:

Speaking (crying out, yelling, tearing the air, rage drove me to this endlessly) doesn't leave traces: you can speak--it evaporates, ears are made for not hearing, voices get lost. But writing! Establishing a contract with time. Noting! Making yourself noticed!!! "Now *that* is forbidden" ("Coming to Writing" 15).

Luciana and Tarsiana might be allowed to speak and *tell* their stories, but to write themselves into history, never!

*University of North Carolina*

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# DU ROLE DES PAIRES DE MOTS-RIMES DANS L'EXPOSITION DE L'*IPHIGENIE* DE J. RACINE

*Cécile Vernier Danehy*

Le théâtre de Jean Racine est un théâtre d'introspection où le non-dit rivalise avec le dit et où la parole se fait geste. Ce qui n'est pas dit par le personnage peut être révélé par la prolifération de sens résultant de la juxtaposition de deux mots rimant ensemble à la fin d'un dystique. D'Aubignac, dans sa *Pratique du Théâtre* insiste: "Parler c'est agir" (282). Chez Racine, l'action se fait parfois à travers certaines paires de mots-rimes, lourdement connotés. En position forte et ayant plusieurs significations, ces paires auront aussi plusieurs fonctions et ceci à différents niveaux: sémantique, dramatique, mimétique.

La paire de mots-rimes devient alors véritablement un message à décoder, un texte dans un contexte qui lui-même varie. Il peut s'agir des parties qualitatives de la tragédie: l'intrigue, les caractères, la pensée, la mélodie, la diction, les techniques scéniques (les deux dernières n'entrant pas en ligne de compte dans cette étude). La tragédie peut se jouer sur plusieurs plans qui deviennent autant d'autres contextes pour le mot-rime et son partenaire: le plan de la religion, celui de la politique ou de la famille ou bien encore le plan personnel. L'exposition, le noeud, le point culminant, la péripétie et la catastrophe sont encore autant de contextes dans lesquels le mot-rime aura à jouer un rôle.

L'analyse proposée ici vise plus particulièrement la façon dont Racine fait participer le mot-rime à l'exposition dans les soixante premiers vers d'*Iphigénie*. Racine procède par touches successives, précises, subtiles. Soigneusement construites, les expositions de Racine sont généralement très rapides. Ainsi, dans les premiers vers de ses tragédies l'auteur renseigne non seulement sur le lieu, sur l'action, le temps de l'action, les personnages, l'état de la situation quand la pièce commence, mais encore il fait également présager de l'avenir et surtout, il établit un rapport de connivence avec son public, son lecteur. Le public de Racine est omniscient. Cette omniscience est en grande partie due aux indices fournis par certaines paires de mots-rimes qui éclairent les événements. La rime parle au lecteur quand le vers reste muet pour le personnage.

La pièce commence sur la première tentative d'Agamemnon de revenir sur sa décision de sacrifier Iphigénie. Il réveille Arcas pour l'envoyer au devant de Clytemnestre et de sa fille, leur interdire

l'entrée du camp et les renvoyer à Argos:

Oui, c'est Agamemnon, c'est ton roi qui t'éveille.  
Viens, reconnais la voix qui frappe ton oreille. (vv.1-2)

Par ces deux premiers vers Racine saisit l'action à son coeur. L'identité et le rang du locuteur est immédiatement établie. Le mot "éveille" à la rime indique le moment de la journée, le matin. Le "viens" en position forte au vers 2 se détache nettement. Il s'agit d'une invitation, d'un ordre même. Ce "viens" s'adresse à Arcas mais également au public, au lecteur. Racine nous invite à entrer dans son monde, à participer à l'action. Nous devenons personnages aussi bien que spectateurs. La paire *éveille-oreille* représente l'exigence du roi et celle de Racine que nous écoutions attentivement. Personnages et spectateurs se doivent d'avoir une oreille "éveillée", une oreille attentive--bien écouter pour bien comprendre. Cette paire joue au niveau des personnages, de l'intrigue et du public ou du lecteur.

Cette première paire est à garder à l'esprit parce que dans cette tragédie, la plupart des personnages semblent frappés de "surdité". Personne n'écoute personne, Agamemnon le tout premier. Ainsi, il est ironique que ce soit lui qui insiste sur l'importance de l'écoute dès les premiers vers. Cette "surdité" va engendrer un perpétuel malentendu qui devient lors un des principes dynamiques de l'action. L'oracle de Calchas est le premier de ces malentendus. Agamemnon interprète de façon erronée la demande des dieux, c'est-à-dire qu'il écoute mal, il comprend mal. L'oracle demande "une fille du sang d'Hélène" (v. 59), une Iphigénie<sup>1</sup> mais pas *sa* fille Iphigénie. Agamemnon agit ensuite sur cette fausse interprétation. Sa réaction à l'oracle de Calchas déclenche une réaction en chaîne. Chacun se méprenant sur les intentions de chacun, la situation s'envenime jusqu'au moment où l'on consent enfin à écouter Calchas, au v. 1746: "Vous Achille et vous Grecs, qu'on m'écoute". Il était temps en effet qu'on prêtât une oreille attentive et que l'ordre fût rétabli.

En deux vers, Racine a établi un lien entre son public et lui, il a présenté un roi debout très tôt et dans un état d'agitation inhabituelle. Il fait pressentir quelque chose de grave. L'exposition continue avec Arcas qui s'éveille et s'étonne:

C'est vous-même, Seigneur! Quel important besoin  
Vous a fait devancer l'aurore de si loin?  
A peine un faible jour vous éclaire et me guide.  
Vos yeux seuls et les miens sont ouverts dans l'Aulide.  
Avez-vous dans les airs entendu quelque bruit?  
Les vents nous auraient-ils exaucés cette nuit?

Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune. (vv.3-9)

Le temps de l'action est bien marqué ("devancer l'aurore"). Tout cela se passe de très bonne heure, ce qui accentue l'urgence de la situation. Le lieu se précise: l'Aulide, tandis qu'"armée" et "Neptune" suggèrent un camp militaire stationné en bord de mer. La paire *bruit-nuit* (vv. 7-8) continue l'antithèse éveil-sommeil contenue dans le premier vers et qu'on retrouve dans le vers 9. Elle renforce aussi l'opposition bruit-silence: les bruits de la mer, des vagues, du ressac "dorment", noyés dans le silence de la nuit. Elle souligne la notion d'attente: tout le camp est aux aguets pour surprendre le premier bruit, le premier claquement de voiles brisant le silence nocturne. Mais "tout dort".

Les vers 8 et 9 renseignent sur l'action: "Les vents nous auraient-ils exaucés cette nuit?" L'armée, le roi attendent les vents. Le lecteur attend la réponse d'Agamemnon. Mais celui-ci ne répond pas car il n'écoute pas Arcas. Il a même oublié sa présence. Au silence du roi, Arcas répond lui-même à sa question, après avoir vainement tendu l'oreille:

Mais tout dort, et l'armée, et les vents, et Neptune.

Chaque mesure de ce vers très ponctué marque la progression du désespoir des Grecs à ne pouvoir partir en guerre, désespoir dont Neptune est la cause. C'est avec lui que Racine termine le vers, lui associant "fortune" à la rime:

Heureux qui, satisfait de son humble fortune,  
Libre du joug superbe où je suis attaché,  
Vit dans l'état obscur où les Dieux l'ont caché! (vv. 10-12)

Neptune, le dieu implacable, domine les hommes et les écrase. Racine indique ici un des plans de la tragédie: le plan de la religion. Les dieux s'amuse avec les hommes qu'ils méprisent. La paire *Neptune-fortune* explicite cette domination. Les dieux et en particulier Neptune ont la fortune des humains entre leurs mains. Cette emprise divine sur les destinées humaines est un des thèmes de la pièce. Elle commence par la rage d'Artémis: furieuse qu'un soldat ait tué son animal préféré, la déesse demande à Neptune d'empêcher les Grecs de partir à la conquête de Troie, en interdisant aux vents de souffler. Cette emprise continue par l'oracle de Calchas, suffisamment ambigu pour permettre plusieurs interprétations, et en particulier la plus douloureuse pour Agamemnon, le faisant ainsi souffrir de la façon la plus gratuite. Neptune "dort", sourd aux prières des hommes.

La paire *guide-Aulide* (vv 5-6) qui reviendra plusieurs fois dans la tragédie<sup>2</sup>, souligne, elle aussi, l'influence divine. Agamemnon sera impuissant à empêcher l'arrivée d'Iphigénie. A la scène 3 de l'acte I, Agamemnon, trop sûr d'avoir réussi à empêcher la venue d'Iphigénie, se moque d'Ulysse en prétendant s'incliner devant les dieux, au moment même où il croit avoir déjoué leurs plans. Son orgueil le pousse à s'engager plus qu'il ne le devrait puisqu'il promet d'offrir Iphigénie en sacrifice si celle-ci parvient au camp:

Et si ma fille vient, je consens qu'on l'immole.  
 Mais, malgré tous mes soins, si son heureux destin  
 La retient en Argos, ou l'arrête en chemin,  
 Souffrez que, sans presser ce barbare spectacle,  
 En faveur de mon sang j'explique cet obstacle,  
 Que j'ose pour ma fille accepter le secours  
 De quelque Dieu plus doux qui veille sur ses jours. (vv. 330-336)

Il a l'insigne audace d'en appeler à un "Dieu plus doux" alors que c'est lui qui joue au dieu en tentant de tromper Calchas. Il apprend vite et à ses dépens que le plaisir des dieux est aussi de déjouer les plans des hommes. Inéluctablement, les dieux guident vers l'Aulide les pas de tous les protagonistes du drame: Achille revient trop tôt et malgré les efforts d'Arcas, Clytemnestre et sa suite se perdant, Iphigénie arrive en Aulide accompagnée d'Eriphile. L'Aulide est un pôle magnétique vers lequel tous et toutes convergent. La paire *guide-Aulide* explicite cette attraction invincible.

Les vers 10-12, prononcés par Agamemnon, sont une réflexion sur la condition des rois. Cette réflexion est déplacée. On s'attendait, d'une part, à ce qu'Agamemnon réponde à la question d'Arcas et, d'autre part, à ce qu'il donne enfin la raison de son comportement. Cette réflexion se justifie cependant de deux manières: 1) par le trouble même du roi qui est visiblement préoccupé. La tendance d'Agamemnon à ne pas écouter est très nettement exprimée ici, et cela renvoie à la paire *veille-oreille*. Agamemnon veut qu'on l'écoute mais il reste sourd aux autres et 2) cette réflexion permet à Racine d'explicitier très tôt le conflit "politique-famille" qui va dominer la tragédie. Elle fait pressentir le caractère indécis d'Agamemnon. L'indécision devient un principe dynamique de l'action. Prisonnier de son indécision, le roi est véritablement incapable de prendre une décision et de s'y tenir, exposant ainsi clairement sa faiblesse de caractère aux yeux de tous. La paire *attaché-caché* (vv. 11-12) prend alors un sens nouveau. Ce n'est pas la couronne ("le joug superbe") qui tient Agamemnon enchaîné et incapable d'agir mais bien plutôt

son indécision et son orgueil démesuré, sa faiblesse de caractère. L'adjectif "caché" montre qu'Agamemnon préfère contourner un problème que d'y faire face. Il se cache derrière des prétextes, des feintes pour faire ou ne pas faire, dire ou ne pas dire, sacrifier ou ne pas sacrifier. Il affectionne particulièrement la dissimulation, le mensonge pour confronter les difficultés. La paire *attaché-caché* joue au plan de la caractérisation d'Agamemnon, être faible, être faux, dominé par son orgueil, sa vanité qui l'enserrent et l'empêchent d'être grand.

Arcas est étonné des propos d'Agamemnon qu'il juge tout à fait choquants:

Et depuis quand, Seigneur, tenez-vous ce langage?  
 Comblé de tant d'honneurs, par quel secret outrage  
 Les Dieux, à vos désirs toujours si complaisants,  
 Vous font-ils méconnaître et haïr leurs présents? (vv. 13-16)

La paire *langage-outrage* souligne parfaitement le caractère inapproprié de l'attitude du roi. Le "langage" devient un "outrage." Les paroles d'Agamemnon sont un outrage à sa condition de roi. S'exprimer ainsi montre qu'il n'est pas digne de sa position. Achille et Agamemnon s'outragent mutuellement par la parole, plus que par les actes. Outrager l'autre par la parole, c'est aussi tâcher de l'influencer, de le pousser à l'action:

Achille

Juste ciel! puis-je entendre et souffrir ce langage?  
 Est-ce ainsi qu'au parjure on ajoute l'outrage? (vv. 1369-1370)

Cette paire récurrente *langage-outrage* éclaire la relation entre Agamemnon et Achille. Ces deux hommes, aussi orgueilleux l'un que l'autre, ne céderont jamais aux arguments de l'autre. Leurs échanges ne peuvent être qu'outrage sur outrage, car c'est la seule façon de s'atteindre dans ce qu'ils ont de plus cher: leur ego. Ainsi leurs entretiens, au lieu de mener à une résolution du conflit, ne peuvent qu'aggraver celui-ci.

La paire *complaisants-présents* (vv. 15-16) est lourde d'ironie tragique lorsqu'on sait l'attitude des dieux envers les hommes. Les dieux ne font jamais de cadeaux puisqu'il faut les payer (par le sang ici: un sacrifice humain pour les vents). Quant à la complaisance des dieux, elle aussi est à remettre en question, car procurer des joies aux hommes n'est pas leur préoccupation majeure. L'exposition se poursuit:

Roi, père, époux heureux, fils du puissant Atrée,  
 Vous possédez des Grecs la plus riche contrée.  
 Du sang de Jupiter issu de tous côtés,  
 L'hymen vous lie encore aux Dieux dont vous sortez.  
 Le jeune Achille enfin, vanté par tant d'oracles,  
 Achille, à qui le ciel promet tant de miracles,  
 Recherche votre fille, et d'un hymen si beau  
 Veut dans Troie embrasée allumer le flambeau. (vv. 17-24)

Achille est présenté comme l'amant d'Iphigénie. La paire *beau-flambeau* insiste sur le caractère parfait de l'union entre les deux jeunes gens et place la tragédie au plan personnel de la passion amoureuse. Le v. 17 précise les deux autres plans sur lesquels l'action se situe: la politique ("roi"), et la famille ("père", "époux"). C'est du conflit de ces trois états--roi, père, époux--que naît l'indécision d'Agamemnon qui ne parvient pas à concilier les inconciliables: en tant que roi, il se doit de ménager sa gloire et sa mémoire, de respecter les demandes des dieux et l'intérêt des Grecs; en tant que père, il veut sauver sa fille du couteau sacrificateur; en tant qu'époux, il veut la paix de son ménage. Arcas présente également au roi une liste de toutes les raisons que celui-ci a d'être reconnaissant aux Dieux. L'ingratitude et l'attitude indigne d'Agamemnon en deviennent d'autant plus flagrantes. La paire *Atrée-contrée* (vv. 17-18) attire l'attention en rappelant la part que joue l'hérédité dans la famille des Atrides. C'est en détrônant son oncle Thyeste qu'Agamemnon est devenu roi de Mycène et le maître de "la plus riche contrée;" ce même Thyeste à qui Atrée, son frère, avait offert un festin sous prétexte de réconciliation, puis lui avait servi à manger ses propres enfants. Tout comme son père, Agamemnon choque par sa présomption, par sa duplicité. Le portrait du roi se précise.

La paire *oracles-miracles* (vv. 21-22) est, en filigrane, l'annonce de l'heureux dénouement pour la fille d'Agamemnon: un miracle se produit. Par un second oracle, plus explicite que le premier, Calchas apprend aux Grecs qu'il y a erreur sur la victime. Le mot "oracles" reviendra à deux autres reprises, chaque fois accompagné du mot "obstacles".<sup>3</sup> Racine aurait pu le faire rimer avec "obstacles" dès la première fois. Pourtant, au vingt-deuxième vers, c'est le mot "miracles" qui lui répond. Cette paire est bien un indice de ce qui va se passer.

Arcas interrompt son discours pour interroger le roi. C'est la deuxième fois en moins de trente vers qu'Agamemnon est pris à ne pas écouter son interlocuteur. Le roi pleure:

Bientôt... Mais quels malheurs dans ce billet tracés  
 Vous arrachent, Seigneur, les pleurs que vous versez?  
 Votre Oreste au berceau va-t-il finir sa vie?  
 Pleurez-vous Clytemnestre ou bien Iphigénie?  
 Qu'est-ce qu'on vous écrit? Daignez m'en avertir. (vv. 35-39)

La paire *vie-Iphigénie* (vv. 37-38) nous donne le sujet de la tragédie: il s'agit de la vie d'Iphigénie. C'est la première fois que cette paire apparaît à la rime. Elle reviendra aux vers 1749-1750. Les première et dernière fois que le mot "vie" est à la rime, il a pour partenaire "Iphigénie". Arcas a l'intuition du malheur qui va frapper. Comme à l'accoutumé, Agamemnon, oublieux d'Arcas, ne répond pas à la question de celui-ci. C'est maintenant la troisième fois:

Non, tu ne mourras point; je n'y puis consentir. (v. 40)

Pour Arcas, cette réplique n'a aucun sens. De ce fait, elle frappe davantage. Cependant, si Agamemnon ne répond pas directement à la question d'Arcas, sa réponse peut être en partie une réaction à la juxtaposition *vie-Iphigénie*. Le roi est persuadé que c'est de cela qu'il s'agit. L'exclamation d'Agamemnon révèle la position qu'il a maintenant adoptée vis-à-vis du sacrifice: le refus.

L'exposition se continue maintenant à travers le discours d'Agamemnon. Ce changement de personnel pour faire l'exposition ajoute de la variété au discours, ce qui garantit l'attention du public. Cela permet aussi à l'auteur de donner deux visions de l'histoire, deux points de vue:

Tu vois mon trouble; apprends ce qui le cause,  
 Et juge s'il est temps, ami, que je repose.  
 Tu te souviens du jour qu'en Aulide assemblés  
 Nos vaisseaux par les vents semblaient être appelés.  
 Nous partions; et déjà par mille cris de joie  
 Nous menacions de loin les rivages de Troie. (vv. 41-46)

La paire *joie-Troie* marque dans quel esprit les Grecs partent à la guerre. Il y a une joie malsaine à vouloir envahir Troie et anéantir la ville et ses citoyens. Pâris est seul responsable de l'enlèvement d'Hélène. Cependant, tous les Troyens doivent périr et les Grecs s'excitent à l'idée du sauvage carnage. (On ne peut s'empêcher ici de faire une association entre ce carnage tant attendu et le mot "rivages", comme si le mot "rivages" appelait irrémédiablement le "carnage" qui lui répond en écho). Cette paire prendra davantage de force au cours de la tragédie, et elle se chargera d'ironie lorsque Clytemnestre et

propre soeur en ces termes peu flatteurs:

Cette Hélène, qui trouble et l'Europe et l'Asie,  
 Vous semble-t-elle un prix digne de vos exploits?  
 Combien nos fronts pour elle ont-ils rougi de fois? (vv. 1278-1279)

Et Achille de renchérir:

Et que m'a fait à moi cette Troie où je cours?  
 Au pied de ses remparts quel intérêt m'appelle? (vv. 1372-1373)

La joie des Grecs est cependant de courte durée:

Un prodige étonnant fit taire ce transport:  
 Le vent qui nous flattait nous laissa dans le port.  
 Il fallut s'arrêter, et la rame inutile  
 Fatigua vainement une mer immobile. (vv. 47-50)

La paire *inutile-immobile* est particulièrement bien choisie pour décrire l'action des hommes. Face aux dieux, tous leurs efforts sont futiles, inutiles. Cette association montre l'ironie de la situation paradoxale où le mouvement n'engendre que l'immobilité; toute une armée s'agit pour n'accomplir strictement rien: "Fatigua vainement une mer immobile." Pendant toute la tragédie, il y a une forte activité de la part d'Agamemnon, d'Achille, de Clytemnestre pour empêcher le sacrifice mais, en définitive, personne ne parvient à faire bouger la situation: le sacrifice d'Iphigénie semble devoir s'accomplir envers et contre tout. Racine souligne de nouveau cet état de choses quand il associe, à la rime, Achille avec "immobile":

Madame, je me tais, et demeure immobile.  
 Est-ce à moi que l'on parle, et connaît-on Achille? (vv. 949-950)

De tous les personnages il est certainement celui dont on penserait le moins qu'il soit immobile ou inutile. Mais le "bouillant Achille" homérique n'est pas celui de Racine. Ironie des ironies, à la fin de la pièce, nous comprenons que les efforts d'Agamemnon, de Clytemnestre et d'Achille à sauver Iphigénie étaient doublement inutiles puisque la jeune fille n'avait jamais été la victime désignée des dieux. Elle ne courait donc aucun danger.

Ce miracle inouï me fit tourner les yeux  
Vers la divinité qu'on adore en ces lieux.  
Suivi de Ménélas, de Nestor et d'Ulysse  
J'offris sur ses autels un secret sacrifice. (vv. 51-54)

Quoique surprenant, le comportement d'Agamemnon est tout à fait conforme à son caractère. Au lieu de faire le pompeux sacrifice auquel on s'attendrait dans un cas comme celui-là, il dissimule au reste de l'armée le sacrifice qu'il offre à Diane. Il se cache pour faire "un secret sacrifice". Pour permettre à l'action de se dérouler de la manière que nous savons, il était nécessaire que ce sacrifice restât secret et que les quatre hommes présents fussent seuls à connaître la volonté des dieux. Il n'empêche que l'attitude furtive d'Agamemnon étonne. Par ailleurs, le caractère furtif, secret, voire même inquiétant de toute cette activité est renforcé dans ces vers par les [s], [f] et [v] qui évoquent des froissements, des frôlements, des chuchotements, la clandestinité.

La paire *sacrifice-Ulysse* met en scène pour la première fois le mot "sacrifice" et il est en position forte. De plus, il est attaché à Ulysse. Cette paire explicite la fonction du personnage. Ulysse est présent quand Calchas prononce l'oracle. Il sait donc exactement ce que les dieux ont demandé. C'est lui qui fait immédiatement pression sur Agamemnon pour que celui-ci fasse venir sa fille en Aulide pour y être sacrifiée:

Je me rendis, Arcas; et vaincu par Ulysse,  
De ma fille, en pleurant, j'ordonnai le supplice. (vv. 89-90)

La paire *Ulysse-supplice* est un écho à peine modifié de la rime *Ulysse-sacrifice*. Dans toutes les scènes où Ulysse est présent à l'acte I, son seul souci (et sa seule fonction) est de maintenir Agamemnon dans sa décision de sacrifier Iphigénie. A la fin de la pièce, c'est lui qui se charge d'annoncer à Clytemnestre que le sacrifice a eu lieu, mais que sa fille est saine et sauve. Clytemnestre insiste bien sur le rapport entre Ulysse et le sacrifice quand elle s'écrit:

Elle vit! Et c'est vous qui venez me l'apprendre! (v. 1722)

Ulysse est véritablement lié au supplice, au sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

Agamemnon est maintenant sur le point de révéler son terrible secret:

Quelle fut sa réponse! et quel devins-je, Arcas,  
Quand j'entendis les mots prononcés par Calchas: (vv. 55-56)

Arcas et Calchas se trouvent liés à la rime. Cela indique les rôles opposés qu'ils doivent jouer dans la tragédie. Agamemnon réveille Arcas pour le charger de sauver sa fille en l'empêchant d'arriver au camp. Plus tard, dans le but encore d'empêcher le sacrifice, c'est Arcas qui prévient Clytemnestre et Iphigénie des intentions d'Agamemnon (acte III, scène 5). Calchas, au contraire, a pour fonction d'assurer que la victime demandée par les dieux leur soit offerte. L'un doit empêcher le sacrifice, l'autre doit l'exécuter. Le moment est venu de révéler le secret:

"Vous armez contre Troie une puissance vaine,  
Si dans un sacrifice auguste et solennel  
Une fille du sang d'Hélène  
De Diane n'ensanglante l'autel.  
Pour obtenir les vents que le ciel vous dénie,  
Sacrifiez Iphigénie." (vv. 57-62)

Le premier vers de l'oracle reprend ce qui a déjà été exprimé par la paire *inutile-immobile*: les efforts humains sont vains. Il est donc inutile de tenter quoi que ce soit, tant que le sacrifice n'aura pas calmé le courroux de Diane. De plus, l'oracle ne demande pas Iphigénie immédiatement mais "une fille du sang d'Hélène." C'est ici que l'erreur sur l'identité s'installe, et c'est aussi ici que l'intrigue prend deux directions. Hélène a soigneusement tenu secrète la naissance de cette fille qu'elle avait eu de Thésée, car Calchas lui avait prédit que sa fille mourrait le jour où elle apprendrait son identité. Eriphile est cette Iphigénie que les dieux réclament ici. La paire *Hélène-vaine* (vv. 57, 59) prendra tout son sens à la fin de la pièce, quand Calchas reconnaît Eriphile au moment du sacrifice:

Un autre sang d'Hélène, une autre Iphigénie  
Sur ces bords immolée doit y laisser sa vie. (vv. 1749-1750)

La jeune fille se sacrifie elle-même. Hélène aura vainement tenté de soustraire sa fille à la mort. Dans ces vers 1749-1750, on retrouve la paire récurrente *Iphigénie-vie*, liée cette fois au personnage d'Eriphile et non plus à la fille d'Agamemnon, et qui renvoie aux vers 37-38. Ainsi, dès le départ, il n'était question que d'Eriphile. Nous aurions dû avoir l'histoire d'Eriphile. A cause du malentendu initial, nous avons l'histoire d'Iphigénie. La fille d'Agamemnon a privé de son histoire la fille d'Hélène.

Pour terminer, la paire *dénie-Iphigénie* (vv. 61-62) confirme qu'Eriphile a été privée de son histoire: on a dénié à Iphigénie-

Eriphile son rang, sa gloire et pour finir, sa vie. Cette paire renvoie également à la position d'Agamemnon qui, pendant longtemps, dénierait sa fille Iphigénie, aux dieux en refusant le sacrifice. Elle renvoie également au dénouement de la tragédie quand les dieux-mêmes refuseront Iphigénie pour choisir Eriphile, l'autre Iphigénie. Ainsi, les dieux privent de gloire la fille d'Agamemnon et Agamemnon lui-même. La première est privée de l'honneur de s'offrir en sacrifice à la gloire personnelle de son père, à sa vanité pure, car il ne veut pas "vieillir dans sa famille". Quant à Agamemnon, il est privé de la gloire d'avoir surmonté son amour paternel, d'avoir préféré le devoir à la famille et d'avoir accepté de sacrifier sa fille. Ces dieux qui, depuis le début de cette tragédie, s'amuse avec les humains, se sont particulièrement divertis aux dépens d'Agamemnon et même d'Iphigénie en leur déniaient finalement toute gloire. Ici, à travers cette paire *dénie-Iphigénie*, Racine réécrit la fable.

Au vers 62, l'exposition est virtuellement terminée: tous les personnages de la pièce ont été nommés y compris Eriphile ("une fille du sang d'Hélène") et tous les éléments essentiels sont en place pour comprendre et apprécier la tragédie. Par ses paires de mots-rimes, Racine a concentré le processus de l'exposition tout en présentant le passé, le présent et le futur de l'action, une action qu'il a réécrite à sa manière et discernable par une lecture attentive et une "écoute" des mots-rimes.

Middlebury College

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Il s'agit du personnage d'Eriphile, fille d'Hélène et de Thésée et dont le vrai nom est Iphigénie. Comme il l'explique dans la préface à son oeuvre (*Oeuvres complètes* 670), Racine a découvert ce personnage dans Pausanias. Le prénom d'Iphigénie, partagé par les deux princesses, permet donc à Racine de dénouer sa tragédie, sans avoir recours au sacrifice de la fille d'Agamemnon d'une part, et d'autre part, d'exploiter l'erreur d'identité à des fins dramatiques.

<sup>2</sup>"Aulide" est la seule rime à "guide". Cette paire revient quatre fois dans la tragédie aux vers 5-6, 133-134, 501-502 et 797-798.

<sup>3</sup>Aux vers 257-258 et 1549-1550. La paire *obstacle-oracle*, cette fois au singulier, apparaît aux vers 1109-1110.

<sup>4</sup>La paire *Ulysse-supplice* apparaît également dans la tragédie *Andromaque*. Dans la version de Racine, Andromaque réussit à sauver Astyanax de la mort en trompant Ulysse:

J'apprends que pour ravir son enfance au supplice  
 Andromaque trompa l'ingénieux Ulysse, (vv. 73-74)

Ulysse, personnage absent dans *Andromaque*, est cependant rendu très présent par la rime. Là encore, il est lié au sacrifice. Dans ces deux tragédies qui forment la même histoire, Ulysse est celui qui a encouragé les sacrifices d'Iphigénie d'abord, d'Astyanax ensuite.

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# LA RESPUESTA DE SOR JUANA: LA RETORICA DEL SILENCIO

*Nereida Segura*

Reflexionando sobre el mundo de la literatura, mencionó Virginia Woolf: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction"(6).<sup>1</sup>

Juana Inés halló ese espacio en el convento de las Jerónimas y contó con la independencia económica que le proporcionaban la dote de su tío, los regalos de la virreina y los ingresos que recibía por sus propios escritos. Sin embargo, no fue ese un espacio buscado, sino la menos mala de todas las opciones posibles, la cual, si bien por un lado le proporcionaba esa libertad que necesitaba, por otro, la ataba con las obligaciones y normas que regulaban ese lugar en el que ella pretendía subsistir, materialmente delimitado por los muros del convento y espiritualmente por los preceptos de la Iglesia católica, la cual, en Nueva España en el siglo XVII, se encontraba bajo la poderosa influencia de los jesuitas. Así menciona en su *Respuesta a Sor Filotea*:

Entreme religiosa, porque aunque conocía que tenía el estado de cosas (de las accesorias hablo, no de las formales), muchas repugnantes a mi genio, con todo, para la total negación que tenía al matrimonio, era lo menos desproporcionado y lo más decente que podía elegir en materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación. (55)<sup>2</sup>

Ya antes había declarado que el motivo por el cual entró en religión fue el de sacrificar su entendimiento a quien se lo dio y por esta razón es capaz de soportar los ejercicios, de nuevo repugnantes, "de una comunidad" (53).

Nada agradables, desde luego, debieron de haber sido tales ejercicios y obligaciones cuando tanto insiste en su repugnancia. Y aunque aceptemos con Octavio Paz que la oposición de Sor Juana a la vida conventual se basa en los aspectos formales más que en el contenido (542), este enfrentamiento va a crearle una tensión interna que traducirá en su obra con un constante juego de oposiciones y aparentes contradicciones. Este entramado de apariencias le proporciona un medio de sobrevivir y de profesar un no-callar en un ambiente que le era adverso como mujer y como escritora con una mente independiente.

Sin embargo, ese mismo tiempo histórico que la limita le

proporciona a la vez los mecanismos de escape dentro de su propio esquema estético. En la *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, Sor Juana hábilmente se apropia de un señor Barroco patriarcal e inquisidor y lo doblega en sus ampulosas formas, descentra más su centro, para poder decir algo que se afirma al negarlo, que se defiende al disculparlo con falsa modestia, que se hace real al imposibilitarlo con continuas torceduras de frase, negaciones y contradicciones, con las que no se avanza en el discurso, sino muy lentamente y siempre con la obligación de volver hacia atrás y de cuestionar lo que se había aceptado como verdadero.

Sor Juana crea su propio espacio semiótico con la disrupción del lenguaje por la negación, lo que se traduce en ausencias y rupturas en las que van a filtrarse sus propias preocupaciones e ideas.<sup>3</sup> Negación que no sólo no es extraña a la simbología barroca, sino que se alza como uno de sus elementos constitutivos, a menudo bajo el dominio de la paradoja. Al apropiarse de dicha simbología de una forma consciente, Sor Juana emplea lo que Josefina Ludmer llama "tricks of the weak" (Merrim 86-93).

Negar es un truco de los débiles "which here," de acuerdo con Ludmer, "separates the field of saying (the law of the other) from the field of knowing (my law). . . ." (91). En esta recodificación de formas existentes al dotarlas de un nuevo contenido con el fin de hacerse oír dentro del único marco posible y del que no hay escape, el de un lenguaje establecido de antemano, el verdadero "yo" se pierde en los mismos trucos que utiliza, se inscribe en el texto a través de un tropo barroco como el de la elipsis, se sacrifica a un "yo" ficticio que hay que decodificar para llegar a recibir el mensaje.

En la *Respuesta*, Sor Juana le da otra segunda vuelta a su subjetividad ficticia al exponérsela en una carta. De todos los géneros, es el epistolar el que tendemos a recibir como más creíble en cuanto a su referencialidad, en cuanto a la transparencia de sus enunciados. ¿Cómo sospechar de la autenticidad de las palabras de una monja que se confiesa? Pregunta ingenua que nos convierte en inocentes víctimas de un juego en el que la carta que nos ocupa tenía que haber sido una ficha más, aunque poderosa. En el escaso año que transcurrió entre la publicación de la *Carta Atenagórica* y la *Respuesta*, su autora se resolvió a morder la mano que la "alimentaba" en un gesto de rebeldía que el obispo de Puebla, destinatario de la *Respuesta*, probablemente no esperaba. Esta carta es a su vez otro truco de "una débil" que, al utilizar este medio de expresión, ejemplifica la teoría de Ludmer sobre por qué no ha habido mujeres filósofas:

. . . one can answer that women have not engaged in

philosophy from the space delimited by classical philosophy but rather from other zones; . . . . The letter and the autobiography provide the forum for Juana's erudite polemic. Now can we understand these lesser genres (the letter, the autobiography, the diary), mediating between the literary and the non-literary and termed the genres of reality, as the space favored by women's literature. (93)

Sor Juana se vuelve a apropiarse, esta vez de un género, el epistolar, cuyo dominio le corresponde por su propio género, el femenino, y lo convierte en el medio de teorizar en la aparente intimidad de un relato autobiográfico.

En este baile de máscaras del intercambio epistolar, es fácil apreciar la rebeldía de la escritora a pesar de, o mejor dicho, gracias a los elementos que singularmente combina en sus frases de agradecimiento, en sus disculpas y en el intento de justificar los motivos que la mueven no sólo a escribir, sino a escribir sobre temas profanos y no únicamente religiosos.

Todos estos argumentos, en los que su yo pugna por manifestarse sutilmente, preceden a los otros dos temas centrales de la carta: su filosofía del conocimiento, inscrita en el marco de la Teología, a la que Sor Juana se refiere como "la reina de las Ciencias" (57), y cuál debe ser la posición de las mujeres dentro de la Iglesia.<sup>4</sup> Sor Juana quiere descubrir el significado de las cosas en, según sus propias palabras, "sus variaciones y enlaces ocultos" (60). En este sentido el texto es autorreferencial: hay que buscar en la misma *Respuesta* sus enlaces ocultos, hay que leer entre líneas para alcanzar su verdadero significado. No sólo proyecta el Barroco sobre el mundo sino también sobre sus propias ideas al presentarlas con un lenguaje que se explica a sí mismo; al elaborar, en definitiva, un metalenguaje.<sup>5</sup>

Ortega y Gasset, al intentar adecuar el uso del término "paradoja" basándose en su etimología, señala que conocer Filosofía es conocer el Universo. Como la doxa es la opinión natural y espontánea, en su actividad del conocimiento, la Filosofía tiene que desligarse de ella basándose en otra doxa, esto es, en una paradoxa (9: 719). Pues bien, para defender el derecho de las mujeres a tener voz dentro de la Iglesia, Sor Juana se vale de unas proposiciones que va a manejar con las leyes de la lógica para llegar a la conclusión, contraria entonces a la opinión natural, de que supone un peligro el prohibir a las mujeres que se dediquen a actividades intelectuales como estudiar, escribir y enseñar privadamente (75). Se pregunta por qué no puede dedicarse una mujer anciana a la instrucción de doncellas y sigue con un ataque al sistema: "Esto deberían considerar los que atados al Mulieres in Ecclesia taceant, blasfeman de que las mujeres sepan y enseñen..." (79).

Así la *Respuesta* es doblemente paradójica: por sus temas y por la forma en que están expuestos. La retórica es fundamental en esta "autobiografía a medias," y aquí entra en juego la ironía, que es ante todo un discurso ficcional debido a las características del yo que escribe, del que lo recibe y por los temas y referencias mitológicas a autores religiosos y profanos. Si, como hemos señalado antes, es necesario analizar el yo que esconden esas palabras con apariencia de verdad, no es menos necesario analizar la figura que esconde la firma del destinatario, más obviamente disfrazado por el uso de dicha firma. El obispo, Fernández de Santa Cruz, en un gesto de increíble humildad, decide introducirse en ese terreno epistolar adoptando un seudónimo femenino no exento de significado: el nombre "Philotea," apunta Dorothy Schons, ya significa por sí mismo "lover of God."

Palafox y Mendoza, uno de los predecesores de de Santa Cruz en el obispado de Puebla, publicó un libro titulado *Peregrinación de Sor Filotea al santo templo y monte de la cruz* como imitación de una "Filotea francesa" que da a los demás el ejemplo de su humilde obediencia a la Cruz. Sor Juana, concluye Schons, sabía entender el significado de esta firma (59). La carta de Sor Juana presupone otro texto, la *Carta Atenagórica*, a cuyo prólogo, escrito por el obispo de Puebla la *Respuesta* se dirige. Susan Stewart dice que el conflicto social condiciona la forma de la ironía en la que se presentan y chocan dos juicios contrarios (20). Debido a esa tensión creada por la falsa pretensión de igualdad en un espacio que el obispo y Sor Juana habían acordado compartir, es posible apreciar un tono irónico en esta mascarada, en la comunicación entre dos voces en conflicto bajo una aparente sensación de continuidad, rota por esa misma ironía: "...pero, señora, ¿qué podemos saber las mujeres sino filosofías de cocina?..." (71). Continúa Sor Juana: "Si el crimen está en la *Carta Atenagórica*, ¿fue aquella más que referir sencillamente mi sentir con todas las venias que debo a nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia...?" (83). La doble identidad de su destinatario le permite ironizar un gesto de arrepentimiento con el que pretendidamente se disculpa de ese alarde de orgullo: "...Pero, ¿dónde voy Señora mía?. Que esto no es aquí ni para vuestros oídos . . . e insensiblemente se deslizó la pluma a quererle responder en particular, siendo mi intento hablar en general" (83).

De una manera explícita, con ese deseo de hablar en general, está diciendo que no a los límites del espacio que le impone ese acuerdo tácito, a las constricciones en el uso de la palabra otorgada y se excusa de esta desobediencia amparándose en su mismo juego: . . . os pido perdón de la casera familiaridad o menos autoridad de que tratandós como a una religiosa de velo, hermana mía, se me ha

olvidado la distancia de vuestra ilustrísima persona, que a veros yo sin velo, no sucediera así . . ." (90). Y aunque afirme que "si no es interviniendo vuestros preceptos, lo que es por mi defensa nunca tomará la pluma..." (86), lo dice ya al final, como una ironía más en una carta en la que no ha hecho otra cosa sino defenderse.

Con respecto a esta duplicidad, señala Ortega y Gasset que la ironía es la suma de la verdad y de la falsa modestia con la que representa un sujeto devaluado (8: 438). Sor Juana pregunta retóricamente: "¿Por ventura soy más que una pobre monja, la más mínima criatura del mundo y la más indigna de ocupar vuestra atención . . . . No es afectada modestia, Señora, sino ingenua verdad de toda mi alma . . ." (48). Esa modestia, mezclada con la sorpresa que forma parte del juego acordado, adquiere notas de falsedad en las claras exageraciones y en su también exagerada humildad:

. . . saber responder a vuestra doctísima, discretísima, santísima y amorosísima carta . . . [por el] no esperado favor de dar a la prensa mis borrones . . . excede a la capacidad de agradecimiento tanto por grande como por no esperado . . ." (47).

Siempre que se refiere a su persona lo hace con adjetivos negativos, formados en su mayoría con la anteposición de un prefijo negativo de manera que la raíz afirmativa, con sus connotaciones positivas, sigue estando presente, aunque ligeramente camuflada: *ignorante*, *incapaz*, *indigna*, *inepta*, *infeliz*. Descripción que luego va a contradecir, al establecer una analogía entre los ataques que recibe a causa de su entendimiento con los que padecieron por el mismo motivo Jesucristo y San Pedro y al compararse con todo un grupo de insignes mujeres en el campo de las letras, ya sean figuras de la mitología, como *Minerva*, o escritoras seculares y santas como *Débora*, *Hipasia* o *Paula*. No hay mejor manera de esconder, o de significar lo contrario de algo, que insistir reiterativamente en la no-verdad de un enunciado.

Apoyándose en este sistema de negaciones, Sor Juana va a encadenar las paradojas que dan acceso a su pensamiento: ". . . de manera que aquellas cosas que no se pueden decir, es menester decir siquiera que no se pueden decir, para que se entienda que el callar no es no haber qué decir, sino no haber en las voces lo mucho que hay que decir" (50). Paradoja epistemológica en la que nos aconseja buscar en los márgenes, dando la vuelta a sus líneas, transformándolas al reorganizar de nuevo los elementos, para que esa voz de la frase no escrita, sino sugerida, hable: "Así yo, Señora mía, sólo responderé que no sé qué responder; sólo agradeceré diciendo que no soy capaz de

agradeceros . . ." (50). Protesta de quien se niega a hablar abiertamente en los términos que se le conceden y permiten, de quien nos está diciendo, como observa Ludmer, que no sabe cómo responder ni agradecer dentro de ese rígido marco (88).

Sí podemos creer en la verdad, tal y como aparece en la superficie, de la siguiente frase sin necesidad de darle una vuelta que ya ella misma le ha dado al usar una doble negación con la que enfatiza el doble sentido de todas sus negaciones anteriores:

Lo que sí es verdad que no negaré . . . que . . . fue tan vehemente y poderosa la inclinación a las letras, que ni ajenas representaciones . . . ni propias reflejas . . . han bastado a que deje de seguir este natural impulso que Dios puso en mí . . . (53).

Amor a las letras y talento que exhibe con orgullo, el cual intenta respaldar, atribuyendo tal inclinación a una decisión divina y al determinismo. Pero, a pesar de esta justificación, se retracta para luego volverse a afirmar en un acto de continua contradicción que refleja su lucha por someter su ingenio a los preceptos de la Iglesia así como su temor a juicios adversos:

. . . el no haber escrito mucho de asuntos sagrados no ha sido desafición, ni de aplicación la falta, sino sobra de temor y reverencia debida a aquellas Sagradas Letras, para cuya inteligencia yo me conozco tan incapaz y para cuyo manejo soy tan indigna . . . (51)

Pero, ¿qué es la *Carta Atenagórica* sino una reflexión teológica, y por lo tanto referente a las Sagradas Escrituras, sobre las finezas de Cristo? (Paz 520).

Tampoco oculta Sor Juana lo que es su ambición mayor, cuando confiesa: "Yo no estudio para escribir, ni menos para enseñar (que fuera en mí desmedida soberbia), sino sólo por ver si con estudiar ignoro menos" (53). Esta preocupación obsesiva por el conocimiento, o por la imposibilidad de alcanzarlo en su totalidad, de llegar a un conocimiento de la ignorancia, es el tema de su poema *Primero Sueño*. Por otra parte, Sor Juana confiesa su incomodidad al tratar asuntos profanos: ". . . yo no he escrito sino violentada y forzada y sólo por dar gusto a otros . . ." (52). Esta declaración es otra verdad a medias, otro intento de rehuir cualquier tipo de responsabilidad, motivado, como ya hemos comentado, por esos temores a los juicios de la jerarquía eclesiástica y por sus conflictos interiores. En ella, esos temas mundanos son muchas veces el pretexto para posteriores

elucubraciones filosóficas, alejadas de los motivos naturales que las desencadenan. A este respecto comenta Ludmer: "Sor Juana constructs a doctrine of reading . . . which negates the division between profane and otherworldly knowledge . . ." (91). Bien es sabido lo mucho que hubiera beneficiado a Aristóteles conocer de filosofías de cocina (*Respuesta* 71).

La *Respuesta a Sor Filotea* se presenta como un sistema de diferencias en la dualidad presencia-ausencia. La intencionalidad de afirmar por omisión se nos descubre, de nuevo, en el mismo texto:

. . . para huir la dificultad de responder, y casi me he determinado a dejarlo al silencio; pero como éste es cosa **negativa**, aunque explica mucho con el énfasis de no explicar, es necesario poner algún breve rótulo para que se entienda lo que se pretende que el silencio diga; y si no, dirá nada el silencio, porque ese es su propio oficio: decir nada. (49)

Es imposible escapar de la ironía que subyace en la consideración de la tesis desarrollada en más de veinte páginas un "breve rótulo del silencio." Extensión que se hace necesaria, sin embargo, cuando a éste se le adjudica la ardua tarea de hablar a través de diferentes relaciones y combinaciones que Calvino señala como constitutivas del mito en lo que dice pero, sobre todo en lo que, por la elección de dicha combinación, deja de decir.<sup>6</sup> Lo cual no deja de ser, al fin y al cabo, una gran paradoja.

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

## NOTAS

<sup>1</sup>Para una previa comparación de Sor Juana Inés y Virginia Woolf véase Merrim 11-37.

<sup>2</sup>También como escritora y monja con una mente independiente al no cumplir lo que de ella se esperaba. Se encuentra siempre bajo un doble yugo: el de su sexo y condición.

<sup>3</sup>Tanto Merrim como Harss señalan cómo las fórmulas del Barroco le sirven a Sor Juana para expresar sus inquietudes filosóficas. Según Merrim, "Baroque and thus syncretic, a woman writer, Sor Juana epitomizes this cultural model" (30).

<sup>4</sup>Merrim agrupa el contenido de la carta en tres temas: "(1) the text written directly to the bishop; (2) what has been read as her intellectual biography; and (3) the polemic regarding St. Paul's maxim that women remain silent in church" (88).

<sup>5</sup>En relación a esta inclinación de Sor Juana a descubrir el significado de las cosas, observa que en el verso barroco "words wanted to be more than words: the figures of the stars caught in the figures of speech." Para Harss "the deceptiveness of appearance" del Barroco permite disfrazar esas inquietudes neoplatónicas que amenzaban la filosofía cristiana.

<sup>6</sup>Véase Calvino 76-77 para su definición de la literatura y del papel primordial que desempeña el silencio o, según Calvino, "the linguistic void."

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# EMBODYING ORIENTAL WOMEN: REPRESENTATION AND VOYEURISM IN MONTESQUIEU, MONTAGU AND INGRES

*Madeleine Dobie*

This paper is a reading of three instances of the image of oriental woman in works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, in other words, works set against the backdrop of at first nascent and later full-blown Colonialism. They are Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, (probably begun in 1717 and finally published in 1721), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters*, the manuscript of her correspondence with friends and literary acquaintances in England, when, from 1717-1718, she accompanied her husband, ambassador to the Sublime Porte, and lastly, Ingres' *Bain turc* of 1863.<sup>1</sup>

The very figure of oriental woman limits the representation of real middle eastern women to the privileged image of the Levantine/Persian harem woman, a figure which appears throughout Colonialism in almost every artistic genre. The fascination exercised by this figure undoubtedly derives from its *impossibility*: the inherent invisibility of the women who are portrayed. Oriental women fascinate because they are unknowable, immured within a harem or hidden beneath a veil. These structures of concealment frame a negative image, paradoxically proclaiming the existence of the secret which they are designed to protect.

The fascination can also be ascribed to a phantasy of containment, since harem and veil may be held to protect the essential or eternal feminine, morally and physically sheltering women from contamination by the masculine, public sphere. The fact that the women need to be concealed gestures towards desirability and value as well as reflecting male dominance. It is a crime punishable by death to look upon them, but the sight is all the more delectable for being forbidden. Indeed, in order to see oriental women, one must become a voyeur, a figure which appears in all three of the texts which I shall address. I shall argue that this voyeurism, generated by the absolute seclusion of women and reflecting male control, is in fact the locus of a destabilization of the series of oppositions and power structures which initially seem to govern the western depiction of oriental women.

Veiled women are one of the most immediately *visible* signs of alterity of Islamic culture, as well as its most secret dimension. The fact that they mark both the alterity and the authenticity of their

cultural context is one explanation of the drive, within the context of Colonialism, to represent them. In *L'an V de la révolution algérienne*, Frantz Fanon expresses the logic of the colonialist as "ayons les femmes et le reste suivra" (23). As the most visible (albeit invisible) of cultural attractions, oriental woman becomes picturesque or 'like a picture', neatly framed by the structures of containment. By extension, it could be argued that this marker of authenticity or of the nature of a culture itself depends on the mechanics of representation and depiction, or in other words, that which is generally construed to be inessential and inauthentic.

The first scene I would like to read in the context of this paradox is Letter III of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*. It is the first letter in this epistolary novel to be written by a woman - the fictional author is Zachi, one of the wives whom Usbek has abandoned in the harem during his voyage to Paris. The letter is a submissive lament over the absence of the master, recalling former happiness and in particular, past sexual gratification: Zachi emerges as a devoted wife, avid for the erotic attentions of the master.

In the course of these recollections, Zachi recreates for her reader a personal memory which also happens to be a stereotype of oriental polygamy (it also occurs in the letters of Mary Montagu, in spite of the fact that she generally tries to position herself as a debunker of this kind of lascivious image): Usbek, surrounded by wives jealously competing for preference, reenacts the judgment of Paris - which is of course a *Hellenic* myth. Initially, the women appear before him "après avoir épuisé tout ce que l'imagination peut fournir de parures et d'ornements," and Zachi reminds her husband that "tu vis avec plaisir les miracles de notre art." However, in order to choose between them, he commands his wives to "paraître...dans la simplicité de la nature." At this point, the women shed all artifice and are unveiled -- they are literally undressed and denuded so that they appear in their natural or true form.

The correlate to this self-exposure or exhibitionism is, of course, the act of viewing, and Zachi recalls that from passive spectatorship, Usbek progresses to an investigative curiosity -- "tu portas tes regards curieux dans les lieux les plus secrets" -- which itself culminates in consummation or carnal knowledge. In this scene, not only are the carefully concealed, sacrosanct bodies of oriental women unveiled, but the most secret recesses of their femininity are also exposed to the penetration of the male gaze.

The scene is structured by a relation between exhibitionism and voyeurism which is most apparent in the relationship between the wives, particularly Zachi, who admits "je comptai pour rien la pudeur," and Usbek. However, in her remembrance of the scene *as a scene*,

Zachi remains detached from it, an observer, reader or *voyeur* sexually stimulated by a visualized past. In other words, Zachi is not simply the exhibitionist or the object of representation, she is also the voyeur and the representer, such that positions inside and outside the experience and its representation are destabilized. Widening the compass of this contaminating structure, the reader of the *Lettres persanes* is also placed in the position of being a voyeur of forbidden sights, and is thus involved in an exchange with Usbek and Zachi which, once again, complicates positions inside and outside the representation.

This instability is characteristic of the critical project of the *Lettres persanes*. In this satirical text, the 'veil of Orient' is deployed to mask a movement of self-criticism, with the topos of oriental despotism representing French absolutism, Islam standing for Catholicism and the oriental subjugation of women mirroring European constructions of gender. However, I would argue that this destabilization of the positions of self and other which gives the text its political force, exceeds both a deliberate, controlled exchange and the more regressively signed inevitable and uncontrollable projection of the self in constructions of alterity.

Surrounded by his naked wives, Usbek invites them to pose for him: "tu nous fis passer en un instant dans mille situations différentes." The presumed immanence of nakedness fails to capture the *essential* beauty of the women, and they are told to assume different postures as though they were models posing for a painter. Here there is a slippage away from the empirical experience of seeing which is central to the project of the *Lettres persanes*, as to many texts of the period, towards aestheticization. The movement of aestheticization could be said to collapse the difference between mere viewing and an active painting. This distinction can also be characterized as the difference between mimetic representation and figuration, or, by extension, between reading and writing.

Rather than exposing the truth of the natural body, what the undressing displays is a nude, in other words, a figure drawn from the repertory of art history and eroticism. Closely tied to the ideology of representation, the nude could be viewed as the figure of figure, the degree zero of the body which is always already figural and charged with value. The fact that the literal unveiling does not uncover a natural or real body but a figure or a proliferation of veils cast over the truth, finds its correlate in the later figural unveiling of Zachi and Usbek's other wives as deceitful, unfaithful or untrue women. In marked contrast to the one-dimensional sexuality which Zachi gives voice to in letter III, as early as Letter XXX she is caught in compromising situations, first with a white eunuch and subsequently

with a female slave. This image of a forbidden, polymorphous feminine sexuality is another characteristic of Western depictions of oriental women, a depiction which invariably reflects male concern about women in general. For example, in the *Traité des eunuques* of 1707, disturbed by the possibility of women having sexual liaisons with and even marrying eunuchs, Ancillon prefigures Freud in wondering what a woman wants --if not the phallus-- and worries "de quelle nature sont ces désirs, sont-ils permis?" Both questions are companions to the essentializing question "what is woman?" and like it, culminate in essentializing phantasms of containment, such as the harem.

Although the *literal* unveiling unveils only a figural body, it should not be assumed that the *figural* unveiling which exposes woman as perfidiously unfaithful supplies the truth: in fact, as I have suggested, it supplies only another stereotype or phantasm of nymphomaniacal sexuality. What is more significant is the destabilization of the opposition of the categories of truth and lie, literal and figural and interior and exterior of the body in its relation to representation. (To examine fully this movement in the *Lettres persanes* would require a much more comprehensive reading of the novel, focussing on Roxane as the character who tells the truth by lying, the Nietzschean figure of woman as the lie of truth.)

The second and parallel scene which I would like to examine occurs in Mary Montagu's travel letters. Although these letters present themselves as private and biographical rather than fictional, they actually almost certainly constitute a polished and edited composite of the original letters, all but one of which have been lost. The letters share both sources and influences and the representation of the Orient as a strategy for criticizing the West, with their fictional and public contemporary, the *Lettres persanes*.

In Montagu's letters, penetrations into the forbidden spaces of harem and hammam are presented as real events, with Montagu's aristocratic title, and more particularly her gender, attesting to the veracity of her representations. I shall focus on the first of two letters which narrate visits to the Turkish Baths. It describes the public baths of Sophia, and, at least on a primary level, is addressed to an unnamed Lady, and dated April 1st, 1717.

Both of Montagu's letters concerning the baths begin outside the building and describe the movement inside towards the centre occupied by the women, proleptically confirming Edward Saïd's characterization of Orientalism as an attempt to make everything visible by exteriorizing the interior in representation (19-22). Once inside the baths, Montagu is greeted by "some two hundred women." (The image of oriental women is typically plural because they are

Zachi remains detached from it, an observer, reader or *voyeur* sexually stimulated by a visualized past. In other words, Zachi is not simply the exhibitionist or the object of representation, she is also the voyeur and the representer, such that positions inside and outside the experience and its representation are destabilized. Widening the compass of this contaminating structure, the reader of the *Lettres persanes* is also placed in the position of being a voyeur of forbidden sights, and is thus involved in an exchange with Usbek and Zachi which, once again, complicates positions inside and outside the representation.

This instability is characteristic of the critical project of the *Lettres persanes*. In this satirical text, the 'veil of Orient' is deployed to mask a movement of self-criticism, with the topos of oriental despotism representing French absolutism, Islam standing for Catholicism and the oriental subjugation of women mirroring European constructions of gender. However, I would argue that this destabilization of the positions of self and other which gives the text its political force, exceeds both a deliberate, controlled exchange and the more regressively signed inevitable and uncontrollable projection of the self in constructions of alterity.

Surrounded by his naked wives, Usbek invites them to pose for him: "tu nous fis passer en un instant dans mille situations différentes." The presumed immanence of nakedness fails to capture the *essential* beauty of the women, and they are told to assume different postures as though they were models posing for a painter. Here there is a slippage away from the empirical experience of seeing which is central to the project of the *Lettres persanes*, as to many texts of the period, towards aestheticization. The movement of aestheticization could be said to collapse the difference between mere viewing and an active painting. This distinction can also be characterized as the difference between mimetic representation and figuration, or, by extension, between reading and writing.

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veiled and therefore anonymous, or because they belong to a polygamous structure.) All are said to be "in the state of nature, that is, *in plain English*, stark naked, without any beauty or defect concealed." However, the lack of adornment of either body or prose soon gives way to the painterly perspective which we have already noted in the passage from the *Lettres persanes*: "There were many amongst them as exactly proportion'd as ever any Goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shiningly white, only adorned by their beautiful hair...."

In this aestheticization, oriental women are once again integrated into an occidental artistic tradition. The praise accorded here (as elsewhere in the *Embassy Letters*) to their white skin is one of several aspects of Montagu's purported Turkophilia which suggest that what is appealing in alterity is ultimately a pleasing reflection of the self. The fact that this constitutes an inversion of the negative reflection of Europe in Montesquieu's portrayal of oriental despotism, reflects the status of the Orient as a locus which is characterized by its capacity for exchanges or tropological reversals. Not only is the image of the bathers aestheticized in the sense that empirical perceptions are matched with cultural memory while description takes the form of painting or creation, but the unveiled naked body is represented as already figured or pre-figured to the extent that the women's hair is portrayed as something supplementary, an adornment or veil, disrupting the concept of body or corpus as a self-enclosed totality.

The impression that a relation between models and a painter governs this passage is confirmed by the fact that despite the naked women's invitation, Lady Mary, as outsider, insists on remaining clothed. However, this detached, external or voyeuristic position is itself complicated by the fact that she proceeds to invoke the presence of a real painter who is male: "I had wickedness enough to wish secretly that Mr. Gervase could have been there *invisible*. I fancy it would have very much improv'd his *art* to see so many fine women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working..." (my italics). This moment in the text can be read as an allegory of the broader relation between a writing which represents visual experience, and painting or aestheticization. It also figures the relation between the text and the western male reader, here figured as invisible voyeur. As a Westerner, there is a degree to which Montagu assumes a masculine position towards an Orient which is often gendered as a feminine locus, an enigma or Sphinx to be interrogated and solved by male explorers and scholars.<sup>2</sup> Borrowing Gayatri Spivak's term "native informant," Montagu could be described as a 'female informant' who opens up or represents the baths for the voyeur.

However, unlike a painter or an orientalist ethnographer,

Montagu puts herself in the picture of the baths, going so far as to describe her costume and the women's reaction to it as a marker of her occidental alterity. It is interesting to note that several years earlier, she had herself modelled for Gervase who painted her in the costume of a shepherdess.

Thus, in this second scene of voyeurism and exhibitionism involving the naked, oriental female body, not only is there a blurring of the exteriority differentiating and segregating representer and represented, painter and model, but aestheticization invades representation and contaminates the real or the natural, and the naked body is, once again, already external to itself, pre-figured in and by representation.

In 1819, Ingres copied this passage --omitting the reference to Gervase-- into his *Cahier (IX)*, and it provided inspiration and documentation for a series of orientalist paintings of odalisques and oriental bathers. The debt is clearest in the *Bain turc* of 1863, which similarly portrays a large number of women, occupied like those in Montagu's account (for example, in braiding hair), almost all with luminously white skins. The darker-skinned women seem in fact to be servants: the belief that harem owners preferred light-skinned Georgian or Circassian women was a commonplace of contemporary descriptions of slave markets and its promulgation reflects, among other things, the self-projection involved in the occidental fascination with oriental alterity.<sup>3</sup>

In two paintings of 1826 and 1828, both known as *Petites baigneuses*, there appears the figure of a turbaned woman drawn from an earlier painting, the *Baigneuse de Valpinçon* of 1808. In both *Petites baigneuses* the turbaned bather's gaze is fixed on an object--in the first, on another woman, and in the second, on a eunuch. In an article entitled "The Harem Dehistoricized: Ingres' Turkish Bath," the art historian Marilyn Brown has called this female figure a "surrogate voyeur" - a voyeur whose voyeurism mediates that of painter and viewer alike and thus defers the closure of the painting (60). She also suggests that this female figure can be read as an allegory of Ingres' relation to Montagu as a source of his image of otherwise invisible, inaccessible oriental women.

The same figure reappears in the *Bain turc* of 1863 as the mandolin player in the center foreground, who, though her back is turned to the viewer, is clearly exchanging glances with one partner of an embracing couple to her right, creating a triangle which can certainly be read as homoerotic. One aspect of Mary Montagu's aestheticization is that it effaces the erotic signification which it clearly bears. This resistance may be read in her denial of the presence of homoeroticism: the women were naked "...yet there was not the least

wanton smile or immodest gesture amongst 'em" (my italics). A similar play between eroticism and a chaste classicism is at work in the *Bain turc*, though the presence of a "surrogate voyeur" may suggest that Ingres himself read Montagu's denial as an affirmation.<sup>4</sup>

In 1859, Ingres began the *Bain turc* as a rectangle--the form in which it was first sold to the Prince Napoléon. Since his wife, the Princesse Clothilde found the scene lascivious, it was returned to the artist who transformed it into the tondo shape it has today. This change could be interpreted in many ways, for example, as a reflection of Ingres' admiration for Raphael who also used the cameo form. For the purposes of this reading it is interesting that the oval shape, rather than suggesting a window on the outside world or simply aesthetic convention, resembles a key-hole or a mirror. The impression of a key-hole is certainly generated by the illicit nature of the scene and the voyeurism it both evokes and allegorizes, while the idea of a mirror suggests self-referentiality as opposed to "realist" representation.

I have already noted the self-reference tying the two *Petites baigneuses* to the earlier *Baigneuse de Valpinçon* and the later *Bain turc*. The latter painting is in fact the culmination of self-reference in Ingres, and draws on models (in all senses of the word) from a variety of earlier paintings. It also portrays a figure whom critics have variously identified as the painter's first or second wife, and a woman who resembles his first, unrequited love who was also the cousin of his first wife whom he is supposed to have married because of the family resemblance....

In the broader historical context, the painting is not, conventionally speaking, referential, because it conveys a timeless image of the Levantine harem, already out of date after the reform period known as the *Tanzimat*. Before Ingres painted the *Bain turc*, legislation had abolished slavery in the Ottoman Empire and, for financial reasons, harems were declining. In 1861, while Ingres was working on the painting, Sultan Abdülaziz broke up the harem declaring that one wife would be sufficient!

Ingres often had patrons in mind when painting, and the second buyer of the *Bain turc* was Khalil-Bey, a pre-Crimean Turkish ambassador to St. Petersburg, then resident in Paris. He was a conservative 'old Turk' and may perhaps have been nostalgic for the disappearing mystique of the harem.... Perhaps more interesting is the fact that in 1866 (the year after he bought the *Bain turc*), he commissioned *Le sommeil*, another voyeuristic scene of two women entwined, from Gustave Courbet.

Of course it could also be argued that the baths depicted by Montagu and Ingres had never existed. Montagu's account is by far

the most aesthetically pleasing and potentially erotic account by a woman traveler in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Unlike various other women travelers, Montagu completely ignores the presence of children at the baths.

In mid-nineteenth century debates in art criticism, Ingres was both praised and criticized for his realism - his love of detail and his attempt to make everything visible and palpable (in contrast to the expressionism exemplified by Delacroix, the man who Baudelaire called his antipodes). He was also both praised and criticized for his classicism, or his deference to Raphael and to a repertory of classical forms which led him to perfect or correct nature. (A common criticism is that the bodies he painted were anatomically impossible, for example, that he added vertebrae to elongate the spine). In other words, Ingres was either too real or too artificial, and in Baudelaire's extensive writing on Ingres, both complaints are voiced. For example, in *Le salon de 1846* he praises Ingres' faithfulness to the least detail of his model, suggesting that he likes women too much to change them, and bends himself to their form "avec une âpreté de chirurgien" (917), while in the *Peintre de la vie moderne*, he writes that Ingres' great defect is to correct nature (1164-5).

In *L'exposition universelle de 1855*, Baudelaire writes that Ingres' paintings evoke powerful and disturbing sensations because they evoke "un milieu fantasmatique," or rather, "un milieu qui imite le fantasmatique." This statement recalls, indeed, translates the expression *mimesis phantasmatos*, or copy of a copy, which Plato uses to characterize art in its distance from nature and the true forms. Baudelaire proceeds to say that Ingres' paintings mobilize a population of automata "qui troublerait nos sens par sa trop visible et palpable extranéité" (962-3). This fear, close to Freud's *Unheimlich*, is generated by both the figural dimension of art as the substitution of a substitution and its vertiginous closeness to naturalistic representation and palpable visibility. The polished forms seem real, but inevitably reveal themselves as artifice the nearer one approaches the canvas. In this sense, the paintings resemble the descriptions of naked oriental women in both Montagu and Montesquieu, in that unveiling or denuding reveals, not the essence of femininity, the natural body or the real, but representation or figuration as the condition of referentiality.

In the three works I have mentioned, representation is associated with the structure of voycurism, which unexpectedly contests the opposition between inside and outside (and indeed the very positions of exhibitionist and voyeur), deferring the closure of the text and permitting a tropological exchange of positions 'inside' or 'outside' structures of representation. As Gayatri Spivak has suggested, the

verb 'to represent' has at least two senses: to act as a proxy for the other, putting the self in his or her place politically (in German *vertreten*), and to imitate or figure (*darstellen*).<sup>5</sup> Attempts to represent the oriental woman depend on the possibility, whether fictional or real, of putting oneself in her place, literally inside harem or baths, yet even non-fictional representations of this politically disenfranchised group are contaminated by representation in the alternate sense of giving a figure of the other. Representation as proxy depends on a substitution determined by tropological structures which belong to the order of figuration.

In 1862 Flaubert wrote in a letter to Sainte-Beuve that "...ni moi, ni vous, ni personne, aucun ancien et aucun moderne, ne peut connaître la femme orientale, par la raison qu'il est impossible de la fréquenter" (57-58). His own liaison with the Egyptian prostitute, Kuchuk Hanem, suggests that this inaccessibility is not to be explained by the empirical fact that, veiled and immured, oriental woman is socially and politically invisible. The obstacle is rather that the figure of "oriental woman" is a prosopopeia: a catachrestic trope giving face to a class which it in fact brings into existence as a class; the "Orient" as a whole could also be said to be catachrestic in this sense. A catachresis is also a figure for figure - a figure with no literal, but only a figural referent, a marker put in the place of seeing and knowing where there is nothing to see or know--its own truth or the abyss of truth.<sup>6</sup>

The image of oriental woman evokes the classical figure of truth as a naked but *veiled* goddess: if the veil is removed, the truth should appear. However, as I have attempted to show, what the literal unveiling exposes is a proliferation of veils or representations. The veil associated with oriental women is characterized by the fact that it reveals the form without exposing it, resisting a clear opposition between inside and outside. I would argue that in the works we have considered, this indeterminacy extends to the relation between insiders and outsiders, objects and subjects of vision, in their mutual imbrication in the veils of representation.

Yale University

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I have used the edition of the *Lettres persanes* in the *Oeuvres complètes* edited by André Masson, and Robert Halsband's edition of the *Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*. The manuscript was first published posthumously in 1763, in accordance with the

author's wishes but against those of her family. The *Petite baigneuse* of 1826 is in the Phillips Collection in Washington, that of 1828, along with the *Bain turc*, in the Louvre.

<sup>2</sup>This gendering can be read in Montagu's characterization of the masculine preserve of the Grand Tour in a letter to Lady Pomfret, March, 1740.

<sup>3</sup>The *Bain turc* was completed in the same year as Manet's *Olympia*, a painting with an even more overt racial hierarchy between prostitute or courtesan and slave. Baudelaire attributes the oriental preference for fair-skinned courtesans to their coming from subjugated nations. However, in this period this is not, on the whole, echoed in Western prostitution and eroticism, which does not yet valorize the darker-skinned bodies of colonized women.

<sup>4</sup>This is not the only letter of the *Embassy Letters* which can read as homoerotic. Cf. also Montagu's fascination with the "fair Fatima," the Kahya's lady described in letters to Lady Mar of April 18, 1717 and March 10, 1718.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. her discussion in "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Jacques Derrida's discussion of catachresis in "La mythologie blanche."

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# AN ENGAGING ENTERPRISE: COLLABORATION, MANIPULATION AND READER RESPONSE IN BORGES' *EL HACEDOR*

Andrea L. Bell

Borges the writer was inseparable from Borges the reader. That he was acutely interested in the reader's involvement in his own work is evident from several of his interviews, and suggests a belief that the reader should--or at least could--share in the role of the text's creator. His postscript to *El libro de arena* speaks to this philosophy of the collaborative nature of writing: "Espero que las notas apresuradas que acabo de dictar no agoten este libro y que sus sueños sigan ramificándose en la hospitalaria imaginación de quienes ahora lo cierran" (182). Both thematically and structurally, Borges problematizes the notion of reading in the prose fiction pieces in his "silva de varia lección," *El hacedor*.<sup>1</sup>

*El hacedor* is a hand-picked collection of what Borges himself considered to be among his best works of prose fiction. It was first published in 1960, the result of his editor's insistence that, if Borges were to just dig through his drawers full of notes, he would find enough unpublished material for a book. Many of the texts in *El hacedor* are remarkably short, averaging 320 words in length, several times shorter than most of the stories in his previous collections. Indeed, they are *cuentos breves* (very short stories), a sub-genre which tends to forego traditional constructs such as character names and descriptions, clear temporal and spatial settings, semantic precision, and a strong anecdotal story line. These and other factors produce highly indeterminate texts, wherein at myriad points within the fiction the reader is called upon to supply missing information so that the story makes sense. By applying Wolfgang Iser's notions of "textual blanks" (as outlined in *The Implied Reader*, 1974, and *The Act of Reading*, 1978), we can discern many of the manipulative strategies, as well as opportunities for reader engagement, at work in *El hacedor*.

One of the thematic concerns explored in several of the stories is the writerly problem of representation; reading a text mirrors the writer's difficulty in accurately expressing the disjunction between first and second hand experience. Language is the vehicle for communication, but the limits of language would argue against the possibility of communication ever being wholly successful. Blanks function as both the medium and the message, then, in demonstrating how language confounds the writer's attempts at true communication with the reader. They speak to the imperfections inherent in the craft

of writing, and to the problematic act of creating.

We see this in "El hacedor," the first piece in the collection. As a story it hinges on remembering, and from the very start it emphasizes the random, piecemeal, and highly subjective nature of memory:

Las impresiones resbalaban sobre él, momentáneas y vívidas; el bermellón de un alfarero, la bóveda cargada de estrellas que también eran dioses, la luna, de la que había caído un león, la lisura del mármol bajo las lentas yemas sensibles, el sabor de la carne de jabalí, que le gustaba desgarrar con dentelladas blancas y bruscas, una palabra fenicia, la sombra negra que una lanza proyecta en la arena amarilla, la cercanía del mar o de las mujeres, el pesado vino cuya aspereza mitigaba la miel, podían abarcar por entero el ámbito de su alma. (13)

The memories which make up the protagonist's life in this story reflect an intimate experiencing of the world, impressions that are unique to him and which define his universe. His memories are non-sequential and without context; they are islands of life completely enveloped by blanks. The protagonist, we soon learn, is losing his ability to experience the world directly, for he is going blind. As the encroaching mists of sightlessness blur the outline of all that surrounds him, he ceases to move forward in time and begins instead to exist in the past. He descends into memory and relives two key moments from his past which ultimately catapult him back into the future, for they reveal to him in an epiphanic flash of understanding the meaning of his blindness:

[Y]a adivinaba . . . un rumor de gloria y de hexámetros, un rumor de hombres que defienden un templo que los dioses no salvarán y de bajeles negros que buscan por el mar una isla querida, el rumor de las Odiseas e Ilíadas que era su destino cantar y dejar resonando cóncavamente en la memoria humana. (16)

He is to become a storyteller, a creator--"el hacedor"--and the source of his art will come from within. Out of a spotty and subjective past he will fashion a future, and the realities he is to create will inherit the blanks which inevitably surround memory. His artistic creation will bear the characteristic imperfections of memory, for it will capture only a very personal fragment of the world.

The last sentence of the story, which immediately follows the passage quoted above, introduces the next phase of the problem, that

is, reception. Following the revelation of the protagonist's as yet unborn texts, the narrator states, "(s)abemos estas cosas, pero no las que sintió al descender a la última sombra" (16). This final declaration functions thematically to highlight the distance separating fictional writer and reader, and calls attention to the limitations of language to communicate personal experience fully and faithfully. That the reader is made aware of these limits points to the existence of a thematic blank, a juncture at which some sort of action is called for. The imperfections of the medium must be mitigated by the receiver. When the protagonist's experiencing of life becomes fraught with blanks--his blindness--he evokes his past in order to forge meaning for the future. In this, then, we see the message of the story "El hacedor:" we are all of us "The Maker," and like him must be both Creator and Created.

A similar concern with representation and communication is seen in the story "Dreamtigers." In this *cuento breve*, the narrator tells us of the tigers of his youth, the majestic Bengals that he saw in zoos, encyclopedias, and natural history books. But he feels distressed, just as a writer might, by both the divine might and the galling impotence of his role as creator:

Este es un sueño, una pura diversión de mi voluntad, y ya que tengo un ilimitado poder, voy a causar un tigre. ¡Oh, incompetencia! Nunca mis sueños saben engendrar la apetecida fiera. Aparece el tigre, eso sí, pero diseado o endeble, o con impuras variaciones de forma, o de un tamaño inadmisibile, o harto fugaz, o tirando a perro o a pájaro. (18)

"Dreamtigers" is about artistic creation, and this theme has direct relevance to reader-response theory, for the reader is to take heed from the narrator's lament: an artist, in recreating a vision in his or her soul, produces a work which can never be as vivid or pure as the original. We see once again the recurrent Borgesian idea that both literature and dreams provide us with many alternative realities, realities which can be maddeningly elusive and difficult to capture or define. Dreams are a place where consensual reality breaks down, and hence the reader will find the images actualized by the reading of the text to be somehow misshapen with respect to an outside point of reference. For what is created is the offspring of reader and text, of past and present, and ultimately cannot be wholly faithful to any single one of them.

Other stories also make this thematic comparison between original and reproduction, and through it tie into the subject of reading. They establish an analogy between experience and

representation on the one hand, and text and reading on the other. Towards the middle of the story "El hacedor," for example, when we go back in time and relive the protagonist's memories, a number of rhetorical questions are raised about what it is like to remember things without their accompanying emotional context. Those emotions lived and died with the original events, though, and now new emotions are born at the time of remembering--just as new responses, emotional and intellectual, arise as part of the act of reading. Similarly, in the first paragraph of "Ragnarok," the narrator explains that the text which follows is the record of a dream, and apologizes for how inadequate such a transcription will inevitably be in terms of capturing the feelings of that dream. And in "Inferno, I, 32," both Dante and a caged tiger have dreams in which God speaks to them of their destinies; but when each awakens it is only with the vaguest recollection of the content and feel of their dreams. The relationship between dreams and literary representation in Borges' prose fiction becomes clear, and by following that thematic relationship out, one realizes that reading is but a shell of a primordial experience belonging to someone else. Only when reading is understood not as the scramble to recapture something distanced and alien, but as the creation of something *new* which is immediate and personal, will the experience be satisfying.

One can also see in the short stories of *El hacedor* the systematic deployment of blanks functioning to illustrate the bilateral nature of influence between reader and writer. In the process of exploring the writerly problem of representation, Borges also examines the question of reader responsibility. Blanks provide a locus for a power struggle between reader and text. The deficit of information which these blanks signal will be abrogated according to the subsequent contribution of the reader or the text, in a relationship of antagonism or complicity: antagonism if textual manipulation of the reader's responses is met with resistance. Textual manipulation on the structural level will be considered in a moment; for now, let us look at how readerly ascendance in the face of blanks speaks to the concept of creative empowerment.

"El simulacro" is a story about a stranger who sets up a mock wake and impersonates General Perón mourning Eva Duarte. The stranger's identity is never explicitly clarified in the text; rather, there is direct evidence that his identity was established only thanks to the conscious or unconscious complicity of the townspeople in perpetuating the sham: "Era alto, flaco, aindiado, con una cara inexpresiva de opa o de máscara; la gente lo trataba con deferencia, no por él sino por el que representaba . . ." (31).

The townspeople respond to the man in complete contradiction to

the appearance he presents, showing deference to someone with a face like a simpleton, because they have engaged in an act of interpretation. In responding as they do to the blank which is the stranger's identity, they are providing an interpretation that will ordain how the rest of the "story" will be played out in their town. Continuing their participation in the sham, the women help the stranger set up a tableau of a wake, complete with candles, flowers, a cardboard box to serve as the coffin and a blonde-haired doll as the corpse. The townspeople designated the content of the sham when they used "General Juan Perón" to fill in the blank of the stranger's identity; now they dutifully follow through by attending the wake--filling by the coffin, expressing their regrets, and dropping a few coins into the money box. Their complicity in writing the text determines their reading of it.

There is a sense of criticism in those stories in *El hacedor* whose theme is the curiously repetitive nature of history, for the implication is that, in the absence of someone who will intrude in its shaping, destiny will never be altered. The analogy with reading is that without the active participation of the reader, the potential in a text will never be actualized. In just two paragraphs, the story "La trama" presents the astonishment and pain felt by victims who, throughout centuries of literature, have discovered among their assailants the face of someone thought to have been a friend. The present victim, an Argentine gaucho ambushed by men with knives, recognizes among his attackers his adopted son and, as he falls to the ground, softly cries out, "¡pero, che!" The story closes by observing, "lo matan y no sabe que muere para que se repita una escena" (39). To break out of this cycle, to alter the outcome of the story, to defy the unilateral authority of the unknown creator, requires the intervention of one who will accept the challenge inherent in blanks to shape the destiny of the text.

As alluded to earlier, the problems of representation, manipulation and interpretation in *El hacedor* are made manifest in textual blanks on the structural level as well. Blanks arise in *El hacedor* from the ambiguity and complex symbolism, but also from the shifting narrative voice at work in the stories. In Iser's theory of reader response, blanks are the primary locus of a reader's interaction with the work. Analysis of structural blanks can reveal textual strategies for negotiating the creative power latent in them.

According to many theorists, narrative strategy is an effective means of evoking and guiding reader-response. Thomas E. Lyon is one of a number of scholars who have studied Borges' narrators and the various methods by which their potential for manipulating the reader is realized. He speaks of the "creation of a bond of intimacy between reader and narrator," and says that: "Borges' narrator

demands participation rather than passivity or marginality . . . . He brings the reader into intimate contact with the material and characters, affording sort of a special entrance into them through the secrets of his powers" (371).

In his article Lyon demonstrates how Borges makes frequent use of parentheses to create confusion and insert manipulative discourse into his stories. This device is regularly employed in *El hacedor*. At times it provokes an interruption of the reader's temporary suspension of self and involvement in the text, requiring a return to a more discriminating frame of mind for the consideration of a parenthetical opinion, interpretation, or instruction. In all of these ways Borges is able to keep a reader slightly off balance. Reading a *cuento breve* in *El hacedor* is not a smooth, seamless undertaking, in part because of the many intrusions by a questioning or manipulative narrative voice. And each of these intrusions creates a juncture at which a reader may assert him or herself, either by rebelling against the narrator's authority, or by becoming a sort of interlocutor for the issues and ideas which have been raised via parentheses. In "La trama," for example, we as readers have been drawn into the story of the attack on the gaucho, when suddenly, on the point of reporting the gaucho's death cry, the narrator deflates the tension by informing us parenthetically that the gaucho's words really must be *heard*, not *read*. The mood is broken; we are temporarily disengaged from the events being described and are forced to become distrustful of the text's fidelity.

Similarly, the narrator can jolt a reader into a more active reading mode by introducing self-doubt; that is, by questioning the narrator's competence or reliability. In "Dreamtigers," a story that turns on memory, the narrator's ability to recall things from his childhood becomes suspect when he parenthetically confesses, ". . . yo no puedo recordar sin error la frente o la sonrisa de una mujer" (17). Revelations such as these prompt a reader to exercise caution, and encourage a more discriminating approach to the subsequent story.

In some cases narrative manipulation comes in the form of suggestions--some subtle, some not--as to how a reader should interpret an event or situation. In "Diálogo de muertos," when a stranger arrives in town he is described as follows: "Rojizo, atlético y obeso, resultó inevitable que casi todos lo creyeran inglés . . ." (35). At this point a reader susceptible to narrative suggestion joins the ranks of "todos," and the stranger in effect becomes an Englishman. However, the narrator promptly mocks our credulity, for the stranger in question turns out to be wholly Argentine, complete with a top hat and a curious woollen poncho--Juan Manuel Rosas, the notorious Argentine cacique.

Paradoxically, the tone of Borges' writings, as well as their intellectualism, conspire to diminish the impact and visibility of such gaps in form and content as the ones discussed above. But it does not at all follow that these *cuentos breves* therefore have little real potential for reader interaction. On the contrary, it is this very complexity in Borges' stories that leads to multiple readings, and in the attempt to understand them a reader will constantly try to reconcile as many blanks as possible in order to achieve a more complete, coherent and familiar narrative; one that "makes sense."

Ts'ui Pên's wondrous book in "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" is a labyrinth, a never-ending work in progress. It consists of an infinity of forking paths, each representing crossroads where irreversible acts were committed. Any literary work becomes just such a labyrinth through the act of reading, because the readers' participation in the text produces reading experiences which are forever unique. "Mutaciones" (from *El hacedor*), a reflection on the evolution of objects into symbols, concludes:

Cruz, lazo y flecha, viejos utensilios del hombre, hoy rebajados o elevados a símbolos; no sé por qué me maravillan, cuando no hay en la tierra una sola cosa que el olvido no borre o que la memoria no altere y cuando nadie sabe en qué imágenes lo traducirá el porvenir. (50)

Thus, too, is the act of reading, impermanent and ever-evolving. The interactive experience of reading a text will never be the same twice; the last episode is already obsolete, and no one can say what changes the future will bring.

*Hamline University*

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Among those who have undertaken research on issues of genre and praxis of the very short story are Andrea L. Bell, "The *cuento breve* in Modern Latin American Literature," diss., Stanford University, 1990; Wilfrido H. Corral, *Lector, sociedad y género en Monterroso* (Veracruz: Centro de Investigaciones Lingüístico-Literarias, 1985); Juan Armando Epple, "Sobre el mini-cuento en Hispanoamérica," *Obsidiana* 3 (1984): 13-24; Irving Howe and Iliana Wiener Howe, eds., *Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982); Rudiger Imhof, "Minimal Fiction, or the Question of Scale," ed. Hans-Jurgen Diller, *The Very Short Story II* (Heidelberg:

Carl Winter, 1984): 159-68; and Dolores Koch, "El micro-relato en México: Torri, Arreola, Monterroso y Avilés Fabila," *Hispanamérica* 30 (1981): 123-30.

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# VOICE OF DISSENT: A WOMAN'S RESPONSE TO THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN DEBATE ON THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN

*Rebecca Messbarger*

In June of 1723, the internationally recognized Academy of the Ricovrati in Padua held a public debate on the following topic: "Se debbono ammettersi le Donne allo studio delle Scienze, e delle Belle Arti." Antonio Vallisneri, president of the Academy, distinguished scientist and professor of medical theory at the University of Padua, introduced the debate and judged its outcome. Guglielmo Camposanpiero, a Paduan patrician, argued in defense of educating women in the arts and sciences while Giovan Antonio Volpi, noted publisher and professor of philosophy at the University of Padua, opposed the formal instruction of women.

According to notes on the event recorded in the *Giornale delle adunanze*, part of the current library holdings of the still extant Academy:

Fattosi l'apparecchio con solenne forma, si riempie la Sala di dame, che vi concorsero in numero maraviglioso, cosi' pure cavalieri, e letterati, oltre gl'Accademici.... (273)

The debate was waged and judged by men. Women, however, did not silently accept the men's evaluations of their educability. They did not acquiesce to Vallisneri's final judgment advocating the restriction of women's education to the aristocratic class, nor did they leave unchallenged assumptions regarding women's social function and the essence of femininity. The numerous women officially in attendance at the Academy during the debate infiltrated a sanctuary of male authority and defied with the force of their bodily presence male command over their fate. Women not only challenged male dominion over public address and women's destiny by penetrating the Academy, female writers and intellectuals also officially responded to the debate. In 1727 the nine year old prodigy, Maria Gaetana Agnesi, presented an oration in Latin to a Milanese academy in which she refuted Volpi's arguments against the education of women and defended the formal instruction of girls. Aretafila Savini De' Rossi, a Sienese noblewoman and poet, wrote a powerful rebuttal entitled *Apologia in favore degli studi delle Donne, contra il precedente Discorso del Sig. Gio. Antonio Volpi*. De' Rossi's treatise which was included in the 1729 publication of the debate, is the subject of this paper. Even thirty

years after the Academy assembled to argue the question of women's education, the event continued to incite public reactions from women. The poet and scientist, Diamante Medaglia Fiani, cited Vallisneri's final judgment as a point of departure for her oration on the education of women which she presented to a Brescian academy circa 1753.

The debate at the Academy of the Ricovrati literally situates and enacts the intense polemic over the social function and nature of women which stood at the center of public discourse in Italy during the eighteenth century. This event reveals with singular clarity the pivotal shift that took place during the Enlightenment age in women's status as a subject of serious intellectual discussion. In contrast to previous centuries, the "Woman Question" no longer served primarily as an intellectual diversion for male academicians who wished to demonstrate their wit and innovation with regard to "set pieces in an established literary genre" (Woodbridge 1).<sup>1</sup> Many eminent figures of the eighteenth century such as P. Verri, G. Bandiera, P. M. Doria, A. Conti, M. Delfico, F. Algarotti, G. Filangeri and P. D. Soresi, to name a representative few, sought to evaluate seriously and pragmatically the essence of femininity and women's roles within the private sphere in terms of their practical influence on the public good.

The Paduan debate demonstrates that the expansive discourse about Woman converged on the question of women's education. Increased attention to women's cultural and intellectual development grew primarily out of the Enlightenment campaign to reform rationally and pragmatically the policies and institutions of society. Women's indirect influence on the public sphere by means of their roles within the private sphere came under intense scrutiny. Many *Illuministi* such as Delfico, Bandiera and Soresi, condemned the pervasive denial to women of formal instruction as a threat to the health and well-being of society. They called for the education of women because they viewed women as the primary educators of the nation's young and as the chief managers of the nation's households. Conservatives also wrote prolifically about the problem of women's education. They, however, argued for the strict limitation of women's intellectual development in order to safeguard the "natural" social order.

The debate of 1723 also serves to document women's increased presence in the public sphere. Although women gained no meaningful legal or political rights in Italy during the eighteenth century, they possessed highly influential, unofficial power.<sup>2</sup> This age produced a uniquely large and commanding body of female intellectuals from the wealthy and aristocratic classes who were active in both scientific and literary arenas. Women were members of academies (including the

Accademia de' Ricovrati, before and after, though not during the time of the debate [Maggiolo]), they were journalists, taught at universities, presided over salons, and published literary, scientific, and philosophical works. As in the case of Aretafila Savini De' Rossi and the aforementioned Agnesi and Medaglia, many women also interceded on their own behalf and on behalf of other women in the debate on the function and nature of women.

This paper will examine the rhetoric and methodology of De' Rossi's response to the Paduan debate as the building blocks of her unconventional argument for the education of women. I aim to bring to the fore one of the many influential female writers of this age who has been disregarded by traditional literary studies. By highlighting this one text, I seek to identify dominant features of the multifaceted female voices that together challenged male dominion over public discourse and constructions of femininity in the eighteenth century.

A study of the representation of women by a female author, particularly a female author writing in what most would consider a pre-feminist age, must ask itself how the writer challenges and appropriates for her own purposes the language and ideas of a male-dominated literary tradition (Abel 3). De' Rossi subverts her opponent's arguments by imitating the academy's analytic methodology and scientific rhetoric while at the same time articulating and privileging women's lived reality. In contrast to the participants in the Paduan debate, De' Rossi does not engage in an ontological discussion regarding the a priori essence and meaning of Woman and Man. Rather, she bases her arguments on the unadorned reality in which women, men and children live and interact. Her steady, world-bound view lays bare the ideological tenets and masculinist biases that inform and sustain conventional conceptualizations of Woman (and by extension, conventional conceptualizations of Man as well). She appropriates the language and ideas of the male Academy and redirects them, arguing not what woman ought to be but what woman is in her everyday life. De Rossi boldly defies what Gilbert and Gubar call "literary paternity" in their acclaimed book *The Madwoman in the Attic*. De' Rossi takes up the forbidden pen and rethinks and rewrites Woman from the unrecognized, transgressive vantage point of women's lived reality and female desire.

Before considering De' Rossi's treatise it is first necessary to summarize briefly the principle arguments of Volpi's discourse to which she was responding. Volpi opens his treatise by isolating his illustrious female public from the common mass of women who, he claims, are the true subjects of his address. With a crescendo of accolades, which he reiterates throughout his discourse, Volpi enumerates the attributes that distinguish his female listeners from

common women and petitions them to recognize that his discourse and its implications are not directed towards them but regard solely those other women:

E tanto piu', che essendo le Illustri Donne che ora mi ascoltaao, e per isplendore di sangue e per fortuna di educazione, e per grandezza d'animo e d'ingegno, sopra il comune dell'altre Donne altamente distinte, non dovranno in veruna maniera applicare a lor medesime cio' che io del vulgo donnesco intendo di dover dire . . . (28).

Volpi strives to convince his privileged, female listeners that Woman is not only separate and distinct from Man, but that Woman is also radically separate from themselves. Woman, as Volpi constructs her, is thus always the other being, one who is inherently outside spheres of power. He calls upon aristocratic women to confront rationally and scientifically the intrinsic inferiority of common women. He summons them to admit that the genus Woman merits a separate destiny both from that of men and from exceptional women like themselves. The female spectator is not, however, invited to share in the male inheritance. She is set apart from men who are immersed in the world and set above common women who are limited by their innate weaknesses.

The central argument of Volpi's address struggles to recast women's subjugation to men as the very foundation of their happiness. Volpi argues that while Nature has yoked men with the awful burden of shaping history and directing social progress, women's innate ignorance and dependence on men insulates them from the anxieties that come with active participation in the world. To demonstrate that women enjoy greater freedom and happiness, Volpi juxtaposes women's carefree existence inside the protective confines of the private sphere with an exhaustive list of men's social and political obligations at home and in the world.

History, tradition and social custom confirm women's innate inferiority for Volpi and justify the exclusion of women from public life. He regards history as a precise measure of the true and actual nature of things and as an infallible authority for the comprehension and management of present events and institutions. Volpi does not base his arguments on specific laws, events or governments in history; he refers sweepingly to the uniform subjugation of women by the ancients "gli antichi," during ancient times "tempi antichi." Volpi cites the consistent exclusion of women from the public sphere by one epoch after another as incontrovertible evidence that women are essentially unfit to pass beyond the threshold of the domestic sphere.

Volpi does not argue against the education of women solely on the basis of historical precedent. Like many of his contemporaries, he meticulously maps Woman's essential inferiority onto her outward form and inside the dark recesses of her body.<sup>3</sup> He simultaneously casts Woman as a seductive object of desire, a generative animal and an unmitigated biological deformity. Volpi at once exalts the power women's beauty has over men and he provides detailed descriptions of women's grotesque fluids, fibers and reproductive biology. In accordance with dominant scientific thought, Volpi assumes a natural contingency of the female intellect on the inherently inferior female body.<sup>4</sup> His arguments on the outer and inner aspects of the female body aim to prove empirically Woman's innate physical and intellectual inferiority and to confirm her multiple function as object of male desire, reproducer of the species, and antithesis to man.

Volpi ends his address by exploiting traditional male fears of the *femme savante*: once instructed, women's lust for knowledge will become insatiable; educated women will thwart the public good and jeopardize the survival of the species by refusing to marry and to bear children; educated, married women will rebel against the authority of their husbands. The woman philosopher will plague her husband with academic questions when he returns from a day made difficult by the demands of the world. An education would, in short, induce women to deny their biological destiny and to subvert the absolute male power upon which social order is predicated.

In the very first lines of her treatise, Aretafila Savini De' Rossi distinguishes the rhetoric and approach of her discourse from the language and methodology of Volpi's address. In contrast to Volpi's obsequious appeals to his female public with which he began his lecture, De' Rossi omits altogether the traditional opening invocation and moves instead directly to the heart of her argument: women's lived reality. She declares that despite her own severely restricted education, she will not be deterred in publicly defending the cause of women.

Piacesse pure a Iddio, che non mi fusse stato barbaramente impedito di seguire il mio genio per gli Studj: forse che in questa occasione non mi mancherebbe materia di appagare la vostra aspettazione, e da sostenere la giustizia della nostra Causa; ma con tutto che io sappia quanto poco possa compromettermi del mio pover talento, non vi tacero' quel tanto, che mi e' paruto di potere addurre in nostra difesa . . . (50).

De' Rossi's assumption that her own experience speaks directly to the

general question of educating women, implicitly rejects Volpi's division of women into two distinct species: the exceptional and the norm. She seeks to combine the two into a vision of woman no longer alienated from herself.

De' Rossi predicates her credibility and the validity of her arguments on her status as an outsider to the Academy. She contrasts the probity of her intentions and the honest candor of her arguments with her opponent's rhetorical skill and artful manipulation of the truth. Unlike the highly educated academic, she promises to defend her position "non per arte, ne' per ingegno, ma per avere osservato, che in quelle cose, dove abbiamo qualche interesse, si pensa, e si sminuzza finissimamente ogni bagatella..." (51). Keen self-interest drives her defense of the education of women; and it is precisely this personal involvement, she argues, that makes her a more exacting and reliable observer than the academic and the scientist.

Direct, unadorned style, plain rhetoric and empirical methodology characterize other treatises written by women during this century in defense of expanding women's role in public life. Like De Rossi, Diamante Medaglia Faini, Rosa California, Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola, to name only a few of these women writers, adopt prose styles and approaches in their defenses of women that at once underscore their dispassionate rationality and mastery of contemporary intellectual discourse and that set them outside of the Academy. Women's appropriation of the theory, rhetoric and approach which the male-controlled academy promulgates has a dual and fundamentally paradoxical aim. The successful manipulation by women of the language and ideas current in the inner sanctums of the Academy at once undermines exclusive male authority over intellectual discourse while it legitimizes women's arguments before an authoritative male public.

Mimicry is one of De' Rossi's primary weapons against her opponent, mimicry that fluctuates between serious imitation, biting sarcasm and parody. She subverts Volpi's assumptions about the essence of femininity for example, by drawing identical conclusions about the essence of masculinity. The author precisely reiterates her opponent's arguments, inverting, however, the male subject and the female object of the original discourse. De' Rossi declares that women naturally reign superior over men because of men's intrinsic emotional disequilibrium:

a esaminar bene le cose, come veramente stanno, accade loro di trovarsi vinti da Noi, e signoreggiati, non per violenza, o tirannia nostra, ma per non sapere essi signoreggiar le proprie passioni. (51)

At the heart of De' Rossi's rebuttal to Volpi's discourse is an acrid deconstruction of her opponent's idealization of feminine beauty. The author exposes the portrait of womanly perfection as a vacuous fiction that jeopardizes authentic virtue and the well-being of the domestic sphere:

**Ben miserabili saremmo Noi, se il nostro pregio maggiore consistesse nella bellezza, che presto manca, e di cui poche furono dotate. Ma qualunque siasi questo privilegio, quanto riceverebbe d'accrescimento, e di perfezione per mezzo degli Studi! Assai piu' senza dubbio, che dal dispendioso lusso delle mode, degli abbigliamenti, e del trattamento, dietro le quali cose veggiamo perdersi la maggior parte delle Femmine, con rovina talvolta delle Case, condannate a soccombere a spese eccedenti le loro forze. (53)**

The author counters Volpi's romanticization of feminine beauty with realism. She bluntly declares that beauty is neither lasting nor universal to women. She contradicts Volpi's facile veneration of womanly charms with a frank description of the moral poverty and material extravagance common to women who predicate their worth entirely on their outward appearance. Not only does De' Rossi challenge the integrity of Volpi's arguments, she challenges his authority to interpret women's reality. A self-defining female chorus, "Ben miserabili saremmo Noi...," defies the masculinist ideology asserted by the solitary, male voice. De' Rossi once again challenges Volpi's view of women's radical self-alienation. Her use of "noi" demonstrates her refusal to accept Volpi's distinction between noblewomen and Woman and unites the author and her class with all women.

De' Rossi's arguments on the purpose of education and the qualifications for access present a radical departure not only from Volpi's thesis but from Enlightenment arguments for the education of women. The author advocates an egalitarian system of education for the general improvement of women's lives which bases access on ability and desire for learning rather than on social advantage or public utility:

**Grande non solo, ma onesto divertimento sarebbe per le Donne l'essere ammesse agli Studi, a misura della complessione di ciascheduna, delle comodita', e sopra tutto del talento . . . (53).**

De' Rossi zealously defends her belief that intellectual ability may

be inherited by anyone, regardless of gender or social position. In sharp contrast to her opponent, she asserts that nature does not discriminate when endowing individuals with talent, whether intellectual or practical:

La natura poi nel distribuire i suoi doni, non dimostra parzialita' piu' col povero, che col ricco, col nobile, o col plebeo, essendosi veduti sempre de' rari talenti sollevarsi sopra la loro bassa fortuna . . . (54).

Though De' Rossi never directly challenges Volpi's invocation of history to prove the essential inferiority of women, her underlying belief in the impartial distribution of human potential makes history beside the point.

The author forcefully promotes open access to learning for all women and delineates the distinct benefits this access would provide to noblewomen and to women of all classes:

Studino dunque tutte quelle, a cui il Cielo ha dato una forte volonta', ed ingegno, senza sprezzare un tanto dono per vano timore: le Nobili, e Civili, per utile, e decoro proprio; le vulgari, non solo per se stesse ma per insegnare alle Fanciulle volonterose di apprendere le scienze. (55)

De' Rossi's proposal for the education of women calls for an essential transformation of the existing social order. She contends that while formal instruction would provide personal gratification for upper class women, women of the lower classes are to be given access to an education not only for their own benefit but for the advancement of other women. In bidding poor women who receive an education to become the teachers of the girls in their community, De' Rossi proposes an unprecedented union among women founded on women's command over the education of women. The author's proposal defies men's traditional control over women's lives. De' Rossi recommends that women, at least in part, usurp male authority by educating themselves and by collaborating to educate each other. Finally, in contrast to Enlightenment ideology, the public good with which the author specifically concerns herself is not the good of society at large but rather the good of the community of women.

In response to Volpi's assertions that educating women would ultimately lead to the end of the human race, De' Rossi again subverts Volpi's notion of femininity by substituting a careful analysis of male conduct for his examples of women's behavior. She considers the sexual behavior of educated men and concludes that, contrary to what

Volpi claims, learned women would be no more disinclined than learned men to isolate themselves from the opposite sex, refuse to marry and cease propagating the species: "Posciache' ove le Donne si ammettessero a filosofare, seguirebbe ne' piu', ne' meno, come siegue adesso negli Uomini" (55).

De' Rossi counters Volpi's assertions that educating women would destroy the harmony of the home with several practical arguments that study women's real contribution within the private sphere. De' Rossi considers household harmony and the protection of the moral and financial well-being of the family to be a positive effect of educating women.<sup>5</sup> As in the rest of her discourse, De' Rossi analyzes women's everyday reality and precisely delineates how an education would enhance women's lives. She recognizes that women are responsible for the primary care and early education of their children and for the management of the household. Formal instruction would necessarily improve women's ability to fulfill these duties. She further maintains that educating women would provide a practical and crucial safeguard against realistic threats to the family estate from husbands' prolonged absences from home or premature death.

De' Rossi strives to defeat the Academy's spokesman by demonstrating the superiority of her judgment. Each time she appropriates Volpi's rhetoric and approach to the "Woman Question," she aims to show her analysis to be more scientific and reasonable than that of the scientist. At the same time De' Rossi, writing as a woman, challenges male hegemony over intellectual discourse. She speaks as a woman but within the authorized language of men.

De' Rossi's text manifests a common tension between the woman writing and the woman writing as woman. This tension is further accentuated by the topic of discussion. Women writing on the subject Woman during this age must concurrently deny and underscore their sex. De' Rossi supports her conclusions with empirical analyses of the condition and intellectual capacity of women as well as with the authority of her primary experience as woman. While she often appropriates the rhetoric and method of the dominant discourse, she does so both to legitimize and to highlight the differences of her assumptions.

De' Rossi does not promote a radical alternative to women's traditional roles within the home. She does not propose that women endeavor to conquer the public domain nor does she advocate any practical modification in the civil or legal status of women. De' Rossi clearly considers the domestic sphere to be the fitting frame for women's lives. Although her treatise stops far short of explicitly analyzing the origins of women's inequality and the social,

psychological and political structures that contribute to it, she presents a powerful challenge to conventional ontological assumptions regarding women and the nature of femininity. She supplants an essentialist discourse on the intrinsic inferiority of the feminine intellect that rests on the assumption of male authority with a constructionist interpretation of women's intellectual development which is infused with the authority of women's experience.

Fixing the discourse on women's lived reality rather than attempting to negotiate sanctioned ontological assumptions about women and the nature of femininity provides De' Rossi with new control and unique authority over the discourse on Women. The author redirects the "Woman Question" away from the feminine myth sanctioned through history by male desire, and toward the process of women's social and intellectual development. Her own experience and the collective experience of women serve as the authoritative foundation for a women's theory of Woman.

*University of Chicago*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Linda Woodbridge provides a detailed historical and critical analysis of the literary genre she calls the "formal controversy about women" as it developed up to and during the English Renaissance. She argues persuasively that the genre did not form part of serious intellectual inquiry into the social function and nature of women. She maintains that by the sixteenth century, the "formal controversy" was predominantly a conventional, strictly structured literary game that served to showase the literary talent and originality of male academicians. Woodbridge's study provides a precise historical backdrop with which to understand and to contrast the eighteenth century's negotiation of the "Woman Question."

<sup>2</sup>For a general discourse on the condition and status of women in eighteenth-century Italy see Luciano Guerici's *La sposa obbediente*; Susanna Bucci and Fiorenza Taricone's *La condizione della donna nel XVII e XVIII Secolo* and Ginevra Conti Odorisio's *Storia dell'idea femminista in Italia*. For a detailed account and analysis of the issue of women's education see Luciano Guerici's *La discussione sulla donna nell'Italia del Settecento* and Carmela Covato *Sapere e prequidizio*.

<sup>3</sup>For other examples of this representation of Woman's biological inferiority see Antonio Conti's letter to the French Magistrate Perel

and Ferdinando Galiani's *Croquis d'un dialogue sur les femmes*.

<sup>4</sup>Luciano Guerci provides an important overview of what he calls this century's "scientific misogyny." Guerci focuses his analysis on the theory of interdependence between the female anatomy and the female intellect elaborated throughout the Settecento (*La Sposa* 125-166).

<sup>5</sup>Contrary to conventional arguments in favor of educating women during this age, however, De' Rossi does not consider the enhancement of women's performance of domestic duties the primary aim of women's education.

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# LOS CONCEPTOS DE HISTORIA Y METAHISTORIA EN EL CUADRO DE VELAZQUEZ "LAS MENINAS" Y EN EL DRAMA DE BUERO *LAS MENINAS*

*Jeannette Elaine Riefkohl*

En un monumento a Velázquez en Sevilla, España se lee, la inscripción "Al pintor de la verdad." Esta "verdad" que presentó Velázquez en toda su obra y por la que se le reconoce es la que Buero Vallejo representa en el drama *Las Meninas*, publicado en 1960. Tomando los aspectos que aparecen en el cuadro del mismo nombre, Buero reconstruye el momento histórico de la España de 1656, durante el reinado de Felipe IV. Este estudio se propone demostrar cómo Buero parte del plano visual de una pintura, para reedificar lo que había--y hay--detrás del cuadro de Velázquez. Veremos cómo en la obra de teatro *Las Meninas*, Buero no sólo apunta a un período de decadencia y corrupción moral en las cortes de la España del siglo XVII, sino también a una sociedad contemporánea que durante la dictadura franquista (o cualquier otra dictadura en cualquier lugar del mundo) tiene básicamente los mismos problemas que señalara el pintor en 1656. Veremos que Buero abre la posibilidad para una reinterpretación de la historia "oficial" (o la versión oficial de la historia) y plantea el derecho a la libertad de expresión de todo ser humano. Para lograr este propósito, analizaremos ambas obras--pintura y teatro--dentro de un contexto histórico, político y social. La crítica seleccionada para este estudio, trabaja principalmente con los conceptos de intertextualidad, ideología y drama histórico. A través de estos tres, examinaremos la pintura y la obra de teatro dentro de sus períodos específicos.

Para comenzar con un sumario de la crítica, me limitaré a resumir la teoría de Bakhtin en cuanto a la intertextualidad. Según Bakhtin, la mayor parte de las obras del Siglo de Oro son monológicas, en el sentido de que no cuestionan el orden establecido. Cualquier obra que presente intertextualidad, por el contrario, es dialógica, porque expone dos cosmovisiones: la del "texto-uno," o el original, y la del "texto-dos," o la versión que se basa en una obra anterior. Entonces, podemos establecer que parte de la función, y resultado, de la intertextualidad es presentar una segunda cosmovisión que subvierte lo anteriormente escrito.

Dentro de este contexto, la intertextualidad no se puede separar de la ideología. Plamenatz define el término "ideología" como "a set of closely related beliefs or ideas, or even attitudes, characteristic of a

group or community." Él divide la ideología en dos categorías: (1) dominante, ésta es la que defiende los intereses de las clases que controlan el poder y; (2) oprimida, o la que protege los intereses de las clases marginadas.

Ahora bien, si combinamos lo que expone Bakhtin--que cualquier obra que presente intertextualidad es dialógica porque presenta dos cosmovisiones--con las categorías de ideología que propone Plamenatz--dominante u oprimida--podríamos inferir, entonces, que un texto monológico presenta la ideología de la clase dominante; y un texto dialógico, o para nuestros propósitos intertextual, presenta la ideología de las clases marginadas. De esta forma, cada texto--dos resulta ser un desafío que reinterpreta la ideología del texto--uno.

Lindenberger utiliza este concepto de la ideología para elaborar sus comentarios sobre el drama histórico. Según él:

The dramatist could seek out eras whose essential conflicts seemed to point forward, in fact to anticipate those later stages of the historical process with which the audience might experience some emotional identification . . . . Indeed, writers could seek out periods in which an older, reactionary view of life was colliding with some newer, more attractive dispensation.

Esta nota de Lindenberger sobre el drama histórico encaja muy bien con lo que afirma el crítico de pintura Maurice Sérullaz al describir una de las características en la obra de Velázquez:

. . . one of the most striking characteristics of Velázquez's work is that his models, although in reality belonging to his own era, manage to transcend it, existing outside of any time framework; they would have been just as appropriate several centuries before, as they would be in advance of their time.

Vemos así que Velázquez, como personaje histórico, se presta para personaje literario, por la similitud entre una de las características en su pintura y una de las propiedades del drama histórico. La pintura de Velázquez, como cualquier otro género de ficción, presenta personajes que trascienden su época; mientras que en el drama histórico, por lo general, los temas escogidos por el dramaturgo se aplican tanto al tiempo y espacio recreados en la obra literaria, como al mundo contemporáneo del autor.

Si observamos detenidamente el cuadro "Las Meninas", una de las posibles interpretaciones es que el pintor, Velázquez, está dentro de un cuarto pintándonos a nosotros. Los reyes observan el mundo a

través del reflejo de un espejo, la infanta nos mira de soslayo; las meninas atienden a la infanta, la dama de honor y D. Diego de Alzona discuten, el aposentador espía, mientras el pintor, Velázquez, nos mira de frente, porque nos está pintando. De esta manera, nosotros nos convertimos en el mundo que el pintor quiere representar en su cuadro. Además de Velázquez, sólo la familia real y la enana nos observan también. Los demás u observan a la familia real o conversan entre sí. Sin embargo, de todos los que observan, sólo el pintor (o el artista) ve el mundo (nosotros) tal cual es; los reyes nos miran a través del reflejo (o la distorsión) de un espejo; la infanta Margarita, que nos mira de soslayo, es, desafortunadamente, una niña, cuya interpretación del mundo carecería del conocimiento, la madurez y la ideología necesarios para podernos comprender; y Maribárbola, la enana, a pesar de ser adulta, no es una persona "normal," de lo que en el siglo XVII (y, de hecho, hasta hace poco), se pensaba que afectaría su capacidad de razonamiento. Por medio de esta interpretación, podríamos deducir entonces que sólo el pintor (o el artista) ve y presenta la Verdad en su creación. Según esta explicación del cuadro, la verdad es lo que el pintor está pintando, es lo que el artista refleja en su obra, es nuestro mundo, somos nosotros.

Pasando de esta interpretación del cuadro al drama histórico, que es lo que nos interesa, vemos que el primer punto en común que une a ambos es que el móvil del drama de Buero es, precisamente, la búsqueda de la Verdad y el lograr la libertad para poder expresarla. Buero decide re-presentar al pintor de la corte como portavoz de la ideología de las clases marginadas; un rebelde contra la opresión y la hipocresía, en un mundo cegado por la obcecación de no reconocer la realidad, la injusticia y el sufrimiento humano.

Uno de los ejemplos más representativos en el drama de esta costumbre de faltar a la verdad lo encontramos cuando la infanta M. Teresa interroga a Velázquez y le ruega que le diga si es cierto que su padre, el rey Felipe IV, ha procreado más de 30 hijos naturales. Velázquez elude la pregunta y le contesta: "La verdad es una carga terrible . . . . Y en la Corte, nadie . . . pregunta para que le digan la verdad." La infanta insiste en que quiere saberla, y Velázquez le responde: "Vuestro linaje no os permitirá encontrarla casi nunca. Aunque tengáis los ojos abiertos, os los volverán a cerrar..." Notamos aquí el dialogismo que plantea Bakhtin; dos visiones diferentes: una es la "oficial," el rey como representante de Dios en la tierra; y otra la "extraoficial," el rey como el gran padrote de la España monárquica. Las diferencias ideológicas postuladas por Plamenatz son igualmente visibles: la ideología dominante establece lo que se dice en voz alta sobre el rey; la ideología oprimida son los rumores que jamás se aceptan públicamente.

Marta Halsey también habla extensamente de la búsqueda de la verdad en la pintura y en la obra de teatro. Según ella, el cuadro manifiesta el intento de Velázquez por mostrar la decadencia moral y económica de la España del siglo XVII. La decadencia moral se hace evidente en el cuadro: (1) por el reflejo de los reyes en el espejo, lo que simboliza que no están de cara al pueblo, sino mirando a través de un filtro; (2) por la manera como el aposentador espía lo que pinta Velázquez, demostrando así desconfianza o recelo hacia el pintor y; (3) por la forma altiva y suspicaz como la infanta mira de soslayo al mundo que pinta Velázquez. En la obra de teatro, estos tres hechos se desarrollan para crear una intriga política que lleva a Velázquez a ser juzgado por la Inquisición y por el rey.

Por otra parte, la decadencia económica es más evidente en la reinterpretación de Buero que en la pintura. El ejemplo más significativo de la situación económica de la corona se da cuando el rey hace mención al hecho de que los seis barcos llenos de plata que venían para España desde América, se los hundió "el inglés." Esto demuestra que el pueblo español para poder subsistir, está a merced de las riquezas traídas del Nuevo Mundo--los reyes subsistirán no importa a qué costo para el pueblo.

Dentro de ese mundo de mentiras, corrupción y envidia, Velázquez (el personaje literario) sólo confía en la visión y la sinceridad de Pedro, un anciano casi ciego quien años atrás fuera el modelo de su pintura "Esopo." Cuando Velázquez lo invita a que vea el esquema de "Las Meninas" le explica que está pintando un cuadro donde se resume todo cuanto sabe. Pedro es el único que puede entender lo que representa la pintura. La juzga con clarividencia y severidad:

Un cuadro sereno: pero con toda la tristeza de España dentro. Quien vea a estos seres comprenderá lo irremediamente condenados al dolor que están. . . . Quien los mire mañana, lo advertirá con espanto . . . pues llegará un momento . . . en que ya no sabrá si es él el fantasma ante las miradas de estas figuras . . . . Y querrá salvarse con ellas . . . puesto que ellas lo miran, puesto que él está ya en el cuadro cuando lo miran . . . . Y tal vez mientras busca su propia cara en el espejo del fondo, se salve por un momento de morir.

Este es el mundo verdadero que, dentro de la corte, ve solamente Velázquez. El mendigo comparte su visión porque siente el mismo amor por la pintura que Velázquez; Pedro quería ser pintor. Comparten la misma visión, tal vez porque el artista, quien percibe la belleza del mundo, es quien mejor pueda entender su sufrimiento.

Pero la ironía del hecho está en que Pedro, un anciano casi ciego es el único que, además de Velázquez, ve la verdad. En este drama histórico, Pedro representa la visión dialógica del mundo, la ideología de los oprimidos, el pueblo de España. Por eso es el único que entiende la pintura de Velázquez. Los consejeros de la corte, cegados por sus intereses, no la reconocen (o no quieren reconocerla), y los reyes son aconsejados por estos mismos consejeros. Vemos así que Buero expone las dos visiones: la monológica, que representa a la nobleza, y la dialógica, o la de las clases oprimidas.

La maquinaria política que se organiza contra Velázquez lo consideraba peligroso por su genio y su visión dialógica. Las fuerzas contra el pintor continúan consolidándose hasta lograr que la Inquisición lo acuse de haber pintado un desnudo ("Venus") y que el rey dude de él, por estar pintando un cuadro ("Las Meninas") donde todos los que aparecen (hasta el perro) parecen ser más importantes que los soberanos. Entonces se somete a Velázquez a un proceso ante la Santa Sede que es presidido por el rey. La tensión de la obra escala mientras el espectador ve a un Velázquez desconocido hasta entonces, lleno de una vitalidad y una capacidad verbal exorbitante, que lo llevan a defenderse contra todos sus enemigos a la vez. Durante el proceso, Velázquez (1) refuta la prohibición de la Inquisición de pintar desnudos porque hasta en las iglesias se encuentran pinturas de divinidades desnudas; (2) demuestra que su primo lo acusó ante la Santa Sede por celos profesionales, no por razones religiosas; y (3) ridiculiza a Nardi, un pintor mediocre traído para que juzgara la obra de Velázquez.

Lidenberger explica que los procesos legales son infinitamente efectivos en los dramas históricos:

Trials have been a persistent element in the history of drama . . . . Indeed, one could speak of a natural affinity between drama and trials . . . . A trial is . . . an abstraction of reality in which issues become sharply dichotomized and reduced to essentials.... Like a well-made play, a trial attempts to move unalterably toward the uncovering of some truth which, in one way or another, was hidden at the start.

Especialmente, si es un proceso en el cual se sabe que el espectador se sentirá defensor de la víctima, como lo es en este caso. Y es precisamente este proceso lo que trae la figura de Velázquez a la España del siglo XX durante la época franquista--cuando los artistas debían defender su arte ante una dictadura que no admitía innovación estética alguna, por temor a que hubiese una crítica implícita al régimen dictatorial.

Con la defensa de Velázquez a su libertad de expresión, Buero toca fibras muy sensibles en todo lector/espectador que haya sufrido persecución política, no solamente en España, sino también en el plano universal. Al reinterpretar la vida de Velázquez, Buero también reinterpreta al pueblo español y su sufrimiento durante el régimen de Franco, al igual que a todos los otros pueblos donde ha existido opresión.

Para cerrar con un resumen de la crítica literaria aplicada a este estudio, vemos en el drama histórico "Las Meninas" los dos niveles de dialogismo de que habla Bakhtin. Primero, Buero establece un diálogo entre dos elementos del siglo XVII: el cuadro "Las Meninas" y el creador detrás de esta ficción plástica. Segundo, Buero abre un diálogo entre los siglos XVII y XX. Estos dos niveles cuestionan la versión "oficial" de la historia y su valor. En el primer diálogo, hemos visto cómo Buero parte de un plano visual (la pintura "Las Meninas") para reinterpretar la época histórica de Velázquez y a Velázquez mismo. Este primer diálogo muestra, además, un móvil posible que instigó a Velázquez a pintar "Las Meninas": representar en su obra la ideología de los oprimidos. Lo notamos en la dulzura con que le habla el pintor a Pedro y en las cosas que le dice: "Durante estos años creí pintar para mí solo. Ahora sé que pintaba para vos. Apoyaos en mí. Yo no os puedo dejar. Venid. Dadme la mano."

El segundo nivel del diálogo entre el Siglo de Oro y la época moderna demuestra cómo los problemas de la España del siglo XVII seguían vigentes en la España franquista y, desgraciadamente, en el mundo contemporáneo. Los problemas básicos que Buero refleja en su obra son: obcecación ante el sufrimiento de los marginados, ambición desmedida por obtener y mantener el poder (a costa de todo un pueblo) y una manía irremediable de nunca decir (ni de querer oír) la verdad. Estos problemas son tan actuales en el siglo XX como lo eran en el XVII. Se espera que a base de los diálogos establecidos por Buero el espectador inicie su propio diálogo con la ideología predominante de su propia época y circunstancias. Sólo así se evita la fácil resignación a la versión histórica oficial.

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## LA PALABRA Y EL SILENCIO: LA POESÍA DE ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK

*Assunta Polizzi*

Tradicionalmente el sujeto poético se reconocía como poseedor de un lenguaje privilegiado, un lenguaje "otro," y de allí nacía la atribución por parte de la crítica de un carácter especializado a la expresión de la poesía en verso (rimas, reglas métricas, etc.). Otra es la condición del sujeto poético en los textos actuales: un sujeto precario que utiliza los más diferentes lenguajes. Con la aparición del personaje, de la máscara o del doble en el espacio poético, desdoblamientos que delatan un intento paradójico de despersonalización en unos casos, de distanciamiento en otros, empieza a revelarse una distinta concepción del lenguaje, puesto que la transformación del sujeto es inseparable de la transformación de su palabra.

Pierden valor las reglas tradicionales de la poesía. Dejando de lado reglas, géneros y hasta la intención implícita de comunicar, se plantea la cuestión sobre el "acto de escribir."

Esta cuestión informa, a veces, la misma realización poética, dando lugar a un proceso de "ensimismamiento" por parte del sujeto poético. Una constante reflexión sobre el acto artístico, su gestación y su creación. Y, de hecho, la obra de nuestra poetisa, Alejandra Pizarnik, resulta involucrada en este proceso hasta configurarse como una "conciencia vuelta hacia sí misma, observándose en el acto de escribir, cuestionándose sobre la poesía y el lenguaje" (Lastra xviii). Siempre a la búsqueda de la palabra que exprese lo inexpresable.

Por lo que se refiere a este cuestionamiento sobre el lenguaje y por otros motivos como el onirismo de las imágenes, la poesía de Alejandra Pizarnik sugiere una clara filiación con el movimiento surrealista. Por ejemplo, Bellini la define "parasurrealista." Pero, esta filiación desarrolla un proceso que traspasa el mismo Surrealismo: con Pizarnik la crítica de la palabra llega a ser absoluta, hasta el límite con el silencio. Negación de la poesía misma.

De hecho, los surrealistas cuestionan sobre el lenguaje poético buscando sí "otro" lenguaje, más válido y renovador, pero nunca poniendo en peligro el proceso creador o la seguridad de la comunicación que cada poeta o escritor necesita para seguir escribiendo. Con Pizarnik vamos más allá, poniendo en duda, en un "crescendo" y desde sus primeros poemas, la validez misma de la palabra, de la empresa poética. Esto llega a ser tema central de su experiencia poética.

Así se expresa ella misma en una entrevista que le hizo Martha I. Moia a fines de 1971:

Siento que los signos, las palabras, insinúan, hacen alusión. Este modo complejo de sentir el lenguaje me induce a creer que el lenguaje no puede expresar la realidad; que solamente podemos hablar de lo obvio. De allí mis deseos de hacer poemas terriblemente exactos a pesar de mi surrealismo innato y de trabajar con elementos de las sombras interiores. Es esto lo que caracteriza mis poemas.

Su búsqueda de exactitud se identifica con el análisis riguroso de la palabra como "signo lingüístico," es decir, como elemento base, intencional y arbitrario, necesario para el acto comunicativo.

El término "signo" suele definirse como cualquier tipo de asociación entre un dato perceptible y un concepto, (significante/significado). Podemos hablar de "comunicación" más específicamente sólo cuando el "signo," que tendrá que relacionarse, además, con la realidad referencial, viene producido intencionalmente por parte de un sujeto. Este proceso implica un imprescindible pacto comunicativo entre el emisario del signo y el receptor del mismo, necesario para garantizar el pasaje de información.

Hemos querido recordar aquí, sintéticamente, años de estudios de lingüística para mejor seguir en nuestras consideraciones sobre el tratamiento que Alejandra Pizarnik hace del lenguaje.

Ahora, lo que empieza a plantearse en su proceso creativo es una profunda duda sobre la eficacia del "pacto comunicativo" al cual hemos becho referencia antes. Su obra poética llega a poner en evidencia la total arbitrariedad de la palabra, es decir, de la relación entre el signo y su referente, subrayando su consiguiente incapacidad de "crear la realidad." El sujeto poético, "vuelto hacia sí mismo," empieza a buscar la expresión para su "referente," su realidad. Esta búsqueda se concretiza en el espacio poético como "configuración verbal de una experiencia humana," según la definición de Debicki (178).

Pero, la poesía, al hacerse palabra, "hacia fuera," pierde toda fuerza reveladora. La imagen, al concretizarse en forma, degrada todo movimiento vital, movimiento del pensamiento, de los sentidos, y sufre de una irremediable muerte: "... Pero hace tanta soledad que las palabras se suicidan" ("Hija del viento," *Las aventuras perdidas*, 1958).

Y más aún:

... la soledad no es estar parada en el muelle, a la madrugada, mirando el agua con avidez. La soledad es no

poder decirla por no poder circundarla por no poder darle un rostro por no poder hacerla sinónimo de un paisaje. La soledad sería esta melodía rota de mis frases"

("La palabra y el deseo," *El Infierno Musical*, 1971).

La palabra degrada la realidad, la fragmenta y el poema "Sólo un nombre" llega a ser emblemático de tal incapacidad de reproducir en la forma la esencia:

alejandra alejandra  
debajo estoy yo  
alejandra  
("Sólo un nombre").

Podemos notar cómo el nombre propio "Alejandra" se vuelve en nombre común "alejandra" por la utilización de la letra minúscula, expediente éste evidente sólo en la escritura. Se subraya, así, la voluntad de hacer una poesía que más que nunca es forma. A través de la degradación del nombre se le priva al sujeto de su unicidad y se lo aleja de su profundo referente, en este caso la poetisa misma como ser individual. Palabra y ser están separados por un abismo produciendo una "ausencia" que es fracaso comunicativo y desesperada soledad:

Hemos dicho palabras  
palabras para despertar muertos  
palabras para hacer un fuego  
palabras donde poder sentarnos  
y sonreír.

Hemos creado el sermón  
del pájaro y del mar,  
el sermón del agua  
el sermón del amor.

Nos hemos arrodillado  
y adorado frases extensas  
como el suspiro de las estrellas,  
frases como olas,  
frases como alas.

Hemos inventado nuevos nombres  
para el vino y para la risa,  
para las miradas y sus terribles  
caminos.

Y ahora estoy sola  
 -como la avara delirante  
 sobre su montaña de oro-  
 arrojando palabras hacia el cielo  
 pero ahora estoy sola  
 y no puedo decirle a mi amado  
 aquellas palabras por las que vivo.  
 ("Cenizas")

La palabra poética fracasa. Es incapaz de crear, de dar vida al texto. Ella puede sólo "re-plicar" la realidad, quitándole lo singular de cada experiencia de conocimiento. En el espacio poético, la palabra es sólo un doble forzosamente "obvio," redundante, y por eso privado de cualquier información que haga eficaz el acto comunicativo. La poetisa lo expresa de modo directo en uno de sus últimos poemas:

nunca es eso lo que uno quiere decir  
 la lengua natal castra  
 la lengua es un órgano de conocimiento  
 del fracaso de todo poema  
 castrado por su propia lengua  
 que es el órgano de la re-creación  
 del re-conocimiento  
 pero no el de la resurrección  
 de algo a modo de negación  
 de mi horizonte de maldoror con su perro  
 y nada es promesa  
 entre lo decible  
 (todo lo que se puede decir es mentira)  
 el resto es silencio  
 sólo que el silencio no existe.  
 ("En esta noche, en este mundo")

La palabra exacta, que fundiría signo y referente, no existe y su búsqueda resulta inútil:

no  
 las palabras  
 no hacen el amor  
 hacen la ausencia  
 si digo agua ¿beberé?  
 si digo pan ¿comeré?  
 ("En esta noche, en este mundo")

"Agua" y "pan" son sólo palabras. No producen ninguna realidad. Ellas difieren del concepto y se imponen, con su materialidad lingüística, como única realidad del poema. Además, producen un vacío, una impenetrable barrera que les confiere un carácter extremadamente rígido.

Como hemos dicho, en la comunicación lingüística lo que hace posible la transmisión del mensaje se basa, supuestamente, en la convencional aceptación del código y en la consiguiente relación de "obviedad" entre el signo y su referente. En cambio, en la singularidad de la experiencia poética, la expresión sufre la degradación verbal de una experiencia humana," según la definición de poesía de Debicki, presupone una unicidad imprescindible y necesaria para garantizar la supuesta irrepitibilidad del acto artístico.

Así se expresa la poetisa:

Ojalá pudiera vivir solamente en éxtasis,  
haciendo el cuerpo del poema con mi cuerpo,  
rescatando cada frase con mis días y con  
mis semanas, infundiéndole al poema mi  
soplo a medida que cada letra de cada  
palabra haya sido sacrificada en las  
ceremonias del vivir.

("El deseo de la palabra")

Y en otra ocasión:

Delicia de perderse en la imagen presentida.  
Yo me levanté de mi cadáver, yo fui en busca  
de quien soy. Peregrina de mí, he ido hacia  
la que duerme en un país sin viento."

("Caminos del espejo")

Entre los términos de esta controversia empieza así a delinearse la profunda "crisis" del lenguaje que llega a involucrar toda la obra de Alejandra Pizarnik. De hecho, no estamos completamente de acuerdo con Lasarte cuando, en su estudio sobre la poetisa, dice: "El lenguaje sentido por la poeta como irrealidad y como ausencia, es a la vez atrocamente real, ya que ella no puede prescindir de las palabras sin perder su voz" (872).

Y la poetisa dice:

Volver a la memoria del cuerpo, he de volver a mis huesos  
en duelo, he de comprender lo que dice mi voz."

("Caminos del espejo")

Y yo no diré mi poema y yo he de decirlo. Aun si el poema  
(aquí, ahora) no tiene sentido, no tiene destino."  
(*"Fragmentos para dominar el silencio"*)

Se trata de una crisis completa en el sentido de que abarca en conjunto a todo el ser poético. Su obra llega al "silencio" como única, verdadera expresión. Si la forma degrada la esencia y tiene con ella una relación de incompatibilidad, si "la muerte es una palabra," entonces la única posible comunicación existe en lo "no expresado," en lo "no dicho," en una auto-negación de la función vital del sujeto hablante:

Pero el silencio es cierto. Por eso escribo. Estoy sola y  
escribo. No, no estoy sola. Hay alguien aquí que tiembla.  
(*"Caminos del espejo"*)

La palabra es una cosa, la muerte es una cosa, es  
un cuerpo poético que alienta en un lugar de mi nacimiento.  
(*"El sueño de la muerte o el lugar de los cuerpos  
poéticos"*)

Y a la muerte llega la búsqueda de comunicación de Alejandra Pizarnik, negándose cualquier posibilidad de rescate a través de su obra.

El deseo de escribir "poemas terriblemente exactos" y la atracción de dejar que el poema "se escriba como quiere escribirse" coexisten en fundamental oposición a lo largo de toda la obra de Alejandra Pizarnik. A medida que crece en importancia el tema de la palabra poética, se vuelve más y más precario el control que la poetisa quisiera tener sobre su medio. Así, ella termina creyendo en el "fracaso" de todo su poema y llegando al "silencio."

*University of Palermo*

## OBRAS

- La tierra más ajena (1955)*
- La última inocencia (1956)*
- Las aventuras perdidas (1958)*
- Los trabajos y las noches (1965)*
- Arbol de Diana (1962)*
- Extracción de la piedra de l*
- Nombres y figuras (1969)*
- El infierno musical (1971)*

*La condesa sangrienta (1971)*

*El deseo de la palabra (1975) (Antología)*

*Textos de sombra y últimos poemas (1982) (Antología)*

*Poemas (1982) (Antología)*

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## ICONOCLASM AND DESIRE IN THE EARLY POEMS OF APOLLINAIRE

*Susan Harrow*

"No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old," Ezra Pound declared (85). Pound's peremptory one-liner raises questions of literary currency and redundancy that have a particular relevance to the cultural upheaval of the turn of the century and the multi-faceted Modernist challenge to the literary modes of the *fin de siècle*. It is not my intention to explore the problematics of "Modernism," or indeed extend the debate over descriptions and definitions of Modernism.<sup>1</sup> The perspective I am adopting sees Modernism (in the French context) as a set of radical responses to the predominantly Symbolist-led aesthetic which dominated the late nineteenth century. Modernism, viewed in diachronic terms, is perceived as a reaction against Symbolism and the working-through of an aggregate series of alternative literary options. With this perspective on aesthetic change and reorientation, it is possible to identify in Apollinaire's earliest poetry the site of a struggle between different moments in the development of French modern poetry across the century's divide.

The focus of this paper is a series of poems composed by Apollinaire in the late 1890s, poems which appeared in various Symbolist reviews and which were subsequently published in the *Alcools* collection (1913). The anarchic style and obscurantist content of these early poems ("Merlin et la vieille femme," "L'ermite" and "Le larron") have led critics to dismiss them as gratuitous juvenilia.<sup>2</sup> My concern here is not with assessments of poetic quality in the conventional sense. I shall instead look at these poems afresh, from stylistic, periodizing and psychoanalytic perspectives. In other words, I shall attempt to make sense of the "adolescent babble."

The main interest of these poems lies in their challenge to Symbolist orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup> Through his texts, Apollinaire engages in a critical reassessment of the Symbolist legacy and this quickly turns into a textualizing of stylistic obsolescence. In this Apollinaire's earliest poetry demonstrates a key characteristic of literary Modernism, that is to be retroactive, to write itself (quoting Raymond Williams) as a "sequence of innovations and experiments, always more immediately recognized by what they are breaking from, than ... what they are breaking towards" (43).

Clearly, what these early poems are breaking *from* is a set of inherited practices characterized by a high degree of "inwardness" (the

thematics of Idealist contemplation, constructed through opaque, esoteric language). Apollinaire's procedure is to discredit those practices, challenge the authority of the canon, and dispute Symbolism's claim to orthodoxy. This involves generating textual strategies for disputing and displacing the underlying assumptions of Symbolism. The effectiveness of these strategies relies on the reader's dualizing perception of 1. the code (Symbolism) 2. the critique of that code. Reader recognition demands the selection of significant elements of the code. This involves a degree of condensing and reduction as the diversity of practices that may be said to constitute Symbolism are flattened to a "readable" hypotext. The process of creating expectations which are then systematically overturned is the basis for Apollinaire's critique of Symbolism. What follows is a closer examination of these procedures at work in the texts.

### Creating expectation

A brief survey of the poems' titles reveals key paratextual prompts to interpretation: the titles "Merlin et la vieille femme," "Le larron," and "L'ermite" suggest the *topoi* of contemplation, spirituality, and metaphysics; and evoke worlds that are medieval, mythical, legendary, and allegorical. The titles subscribe to (and thus reaffirm) the literariness of Symbolism, while suggesting correspondences between the verbal and visual output of Symbolism. I am thinking of the Arthurian affinities between aspects of these poems and the dream-worlds of Aubrey Beardsley and Edward Burne-Jones, or the landscapes of contemplation painted by Puvis de Chavanne.

Certain inferences can be made from paratextual indications, inferences which the texts proper support and develop. The allusions to the privileged *fin de siècle* worlds of medieval romance, legend, and the Bible are individualized through the named personae inhabiting the texts: Merlin, Morgana, Viviane, the Old Woman, the Thief, the Hermit. Discrete lexical items ("éternelle," "univers," "Mémoire," "Amour," "Art," "mirage," "lune," "étoiles") crystallize into themes of prophecy, eternity, asceticism, redemption, and sacrifice themes consonant with the Idealist aspiration of Symbolism. In this way the semantic features of Symbolism are foregrounded, while the preference for abstractionism (allegorical treatment and verbal hermeticism) restores the syntactic conventions of Symbolism.

The initial perception of the operation of a Symbolist group-code forms the basis of a stylistic contract between author and reader in a given text. The tendency for each text in turn to confirm this perception generates further reader-expectation as to the restoration, across the series of texts, of a specific pre-existing literary model (hypotext).<sup>4</sup>

### Violating expectations

The transgression of conventions has radical consequences in that it defamiliarizes reader expectations, invites (compels?) us to engage in a reappraisal of tradition as well as in a critique of our own assumptions. The reader is thus drawn into the text, twice over, experiences the making and the breaking of the stylistic contract. In the same way as the process of *violating* expectations cannot be extricated from the process of *creating* expectations, so the reader does not interpret the poem in a linear, strictly sequential way.<sup>5</sup> Instead the reader engages in a process of constant revision and qualification of her/his perceptions, particularly where initial expectations are overturned and new expectations generated. The texts are constantly lifting away from a set of primary stylistic assumptions to embrace instances which revise, contradict, or negate these assumptions. In this way each text forces us to be aware of itself as *process*: as a sum of strategies for engaging with the problem that is *writing in the shadow of a predecessor*. This is Apollinaire's response to what Harold Bloom has called the "anxiety of influence" the necessity for "new poets" (the last poets in the tradition) to "mispraise" (misread) the poetry of their "strong" predecessors in order to become in turn "strong" poets.<sup>6</sup> I shall return to Bloom's Oedipal interpretation of the struggle for poetry but for the moment let us look further at the stylistic and rhetorical strategies involved.

Writing against the tradition means profaning the sacred. Apollinaire's strategy centres upon the conspicuous infringing of the thematic and stylistic norms of Symbolism. Challenging the "higher order" Symbolist priorities (Idealism, abstraction, suggestion) demands procedures which deflate and devalorize. "L'ermite" exposes the systematic substitution of the divine for the pedestrian ("... O nuit je vois tes cieux / S'étoiler calmement de splendides pilules"), the spiritual for the bodily, and the contemplative for the ingestive ("Trop d'étoiles s'enfuient quand je dis mes prières / ... / Voici donc pour mon jeûne un morceau de gruyère"). The importing of themes of sensuousness, sexuality, and the erotic subverts the metaphysical component of Symbolism ("En vain j'ai supplié tous les saints aémères / Aucun n'a consacré mes doux pains sans levain"). This relentless parodying of the semantic preferences and characteristic images of Symbolism threatens the stylistic coherence of the pieces and contributes to the reversal of the Symbolist value-hierarchy.

By highlighting their parodic procedures, we perceive the poems as exercises in iconoclasm. Approached from this angle, the texts interiorize the debate over cultural change, projecting the rivalry between Tradition and the New in terms of a crucial confrontation

over style that undoes Tradition by subverting it but stops short of proposing a replacement. This is an approach which emphasizes the destructive rather than the actively creative, one which underscores the writer's tendency merely to contest, not to propose. It is a charge that Theo Hermans makes of Apollinaire in these works (50). But, is there a sense in which these poems go beyond merely internalizing the processes whereby poetry extricates itself from *fin de siècle* assumptions? Is there evidence of the texts creating a framework within which alternative semantic and syntactic possibilities can be explored?

I would argue that within a meaning-giving system modeled on Symbolist preferences (Arthurian romance, myth-world, quest narrative), the poet launches an experiment which works towards new options that may be described as Modernist. By abolishing the semantic hierarchies of Symbolism, the poet can set about treating traditional material in new, relativized ways (a procedure well-documented in the cases of Eliot and Joyce).<sup>7</sup> With the eroticizing of traditional themes, the search for spiritual grace is rewritten as a scenario of sexual fantasizing that places the body and desire at the center of the texts. Homosexuality, incest, the menstrual taboo, and bodily dysfunctions reveal textual pleasure in alternative, anti-canonical subject-matter. It is the sign of language freeing itself from the "block to consciousness" that Symbolist language and aspiration had come to represent. The effect of incongruous thematic imports is to install uncertainty and skepticism at the center of the texts. This surfaces in the expression of ambivalence, provisionality, paradox, and humour -- take the debunking of stellar and solar imagery ("Le soleil en dansant remuait son nombril," in "Merlin et la vieille femme"), or the savaging of the metaphysical body of Symbolism ("Puisque l'absolu choit la chute est une preuve / Qui double devient triple avant d'avoir été / Nous avouons que les grossesses nous émeuvent / Les ventres pourront seuls nier l'aséité," in "Le larron"). Irony gives voice to the critical consciousness at work, exposing redundancy--"Vois les vases sont pleins d'humides fleurs morales" - and proposing subversive alternatives - "Par ironie veux-tu qu'on serve un plat de fèves" (given the Pythagorean taboo on bean-eating). Conjecture and self-correction, like questions, signal a characteristically Modernist preference for the inconclusive and open-ended poetry of fractured thoughts. This is a world where we do not know for sure who speaks and to whom. In the pre-*Alcools* version of "Le larron," for example, textual indications of speakers are suppressed, the rival voices competing in dialogism. In "Merlin et la vieille femme" the opening evocation of the womb-spread sky is unattributed; a moment's stream-of-consciousness that is interrupted by the voice of the narrator -

(from first-person "La lumière est ma mère ô lumière sanglante" to third-person "Merlin guettait la vie et l'éternelle cause" without a declared transition). Thus, a shifting consciousness surfaces in the poem in these fluctuating voices which struggle to break through aesthetically received forms, seeking a new syntax in unconnected fragments.

Returning to Bloom's Oedipal interpretation of the struggle for poetry and to the text as a site of competing influences, I want now to look at how that struggle is internally duplicated in the fictions which the texts produce. The process is figured, allegorically, by Merlin's fathering of a Son (Poetry - "mon ouvrage immortel"). "Merlin et la vieille femme" inscribes a *mise en abyme* of the desire to displace the Father-Precursor and engender one's "own" text (union with the Old Woman enables Merlin to reproduce himself, the birth of a Son, reasserting the "Semblable" and suppressing the "Rival" - significantly the Old Woman fades out of the text with the birth of their son). The struggle against the constraining Precursor-Authority that Bloom describes, Apollinaire himself summed up as the need to lay one's father to rest: "On ne peut partout transporter le cadavre de son père mais nos pieds ne se détachent qu'en vain du sol qui contient les morts" ("Les trois vertus plastiques," 93). Avoiding biographism, I would argue that the textual engagement with the problematics of influence generates a series of fictions which explore the struggle against repressive authority in terms of the crisis of origins, the search for self, and the pursuit of desire.

The poems abound in matter for psychoanalytic treatment; indeed they actively signal their suitability for a psychoanalytic reading. A rapid overview of these anxiety-bound texts reveals heavily underscored thematics of dream ("rêves poupins," in "L'ermite"), transgression, guilt, confession ("Je confesse le vol des fruits doux des fruits mûrs," in "Le larron") desire, eroticism, sadomasochism ("Les oiseaux de leur bec ont blessé vos grenades / Et presque toutes les figues sont fendues," in "Le larron"), initiation ("printemps finissants qui voulaient déflourir," in "Merlin et la vieille femme;" "La triade est mâle et tu es vierge et froid," in "Le larron"; "Comme un poupon chéri mon sexe est innocent," in "L'ermite"). There is in each of the poems a strong appeal to *urtext* - to myth, legend, and Grail romance, in the writing of personal fiction of desire.<sup>8</sup> The texts overlap with Freud's "Family Romances" - a fiction produced at a specific moment of crisis and focusing upon birth, conflict, desire, and the struggle against (paternal) authority (235-241).

### Fictions of desire

The search for self raises the inexorable question of parental identity and provokes a crisis over origins. In "Le larron" explicit allusion is made to an unnatural conception with Oedipal undertones - "Ton père fut un sphinx et ta mère une nuit; ... ils n'eurent enfin la pubère et l'adulte / De prétexte sinon de s'aimer nuitamment." The hero's birth-guilt is exacerbated by the judicial determining of "offender"-identity ("voleur"): this compounds the "outsider" status of the Christian intruder. The gaze of others fixes the identity of self as failed, false and reprehensible. The pagans' repeated "naming" of the Thief as *Maraudeur étranger malheureux malhabile* enforces their judgement. Similarly, the premature textual erasure of the thief as a voice (silenced at stanza 7 and there are 31 stanzas) condemns him to be forever the object of the judgement of others. And so the search for self encounters the obstacle that is constraining Authority (paternal authority, and by extension the Law). Opposition to the rule of the Father (represented by the theft of the forbidden fruits) casts self in the role of profaner of the sacred and incites retribution. Here, in "Le larron," retribution means the erasure of maleness as the identity of the protagonist, gendered male, slides towards the female. The exiling of the Thief from the community of the Father is inscribed upon the structures of language, thus - "La triade est mâle et tu es vierge et froid." Excluded from the triadic relationship, refused initiation, the thief is forced to redirect desire through Art but the frescoes he views throw back the image of original guilt ("L'inceste solaire et nocturne"), frustrating his attempts at sublimation. A parallel text in the failure to sublimate desire is "Merlin et la vieille femme." Desire is expressed through the allegorical union of Merlin and the Old Woman but the interplay of their fingers merely *mimes* experience "L'entrelacs de leurs doigts fut leur seul laps d'amour / Elle balla *mimant* un rythme d'existence." Desire, unsatisfied, is deferred until the coming of Viviane.

The poem entitled "L'ermite" centers upon a desiring subject although the *object(s)* of desire seems at first remote and intangible - the Hermit is "caressed" by "Tentations de lune et de logomachies." The temptation of metaphysical mystery connects, of course, with Symbolist Idealism. More intriguing, the Hermit's declared preference for verbal mystification catches the self-reflexivity of the text. The explicit reference to *logomachies* identifies a *struggle* with words. The allusion underscores the Modernist concern with renewing language and anticipates the punning of "l'amour la mourre" - a homophonic play that affords textual pleasure and power, but hints at an effort to conceal desire behind a reassuring cloak of words

- "Seigneur le Christ est nu jetez jetez sur lui / La robe sans couture ...." <sup>9</sup> Ironically, "L'ermite" is the poem where sexual desire is most nakedly *exposed*. The Hermit expresses his desire for initiation: his sex he likens to a "dear little baby" - "Comme un poupon chéri mon sexe est innocent;" non-initiation is experienced as denial and leads to priapic crisis, described as "Anxieux seul et debout comme une borne." The obstacle to the pursuit of desire here is spiritual authority. The Name-of-the-Father translates, in "L'ermite", into God-the-Father and God denies the Hermit first spiritual fulfillment and now the fulfillment of erotic desire. God is the block and so becomes the focus of the Hermit's frustration when he asks "Seigneur que t'ai-je fait". Yet it is not clear that the Hermit has "done" anything (merely dreamed of it). His only crime is to be a divided self. Torn between sexual and metaphysical aspirations, the Hermit is consequently excluded from the spiritual realm and from the sensual world. Each goal is an obstacle to the fulfillment of the other goal, thus they cancel each other out, exasperating desire. At times desire obscures its object the inaccessible female other. For example, the allusion to "L'inconnue" points up the impossibility of naming, far less knowing the desired other. Similarly, the metaphysical goal is occluded by the desperate desire of the Hermit to rival his spiritual hero and ideal by means of an exemplary feat of mimesis *imitating* Christ's bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane. Haematidrosis may be the sign of spiritual election the Hermit longs for, but he has, instead, to contend in this economy of desire with a deflationary nose-bleed: "Une goutte tomba Sueur Et sa couleur / Lueur Le sang si rouge et j'ai ri des damnés / Puis enfin j'ai compris que je saignais du nez / A cause des parfums violents de mes fleurs."

The body is thus revealed as a mediator of signs, as a text that demands to be read. The body is the site of the drama of a desiring and desolate self. The poems expose a highly problematic relationship of self to body: the body is crucial to a stable sense of identity, yet is experienced as anarchic and unpredictable. Thus the Hermit's discovery of a prosaic nose-bleed is a sign of the disjunction between the dreamed-of self (elected one) and the subjective reality of self (unremarkable and unchosen). The somatic reasserts itself and so the body's dysfunctionality mirrors the inferiority of the desiring self. In this the poems reveal an unwelcome coextensivity of body and self. The body is a set of signs that give rise to anxiety rather than to pleasure. As the outward focus of the inner self, the body is chaotic, uncontrollable, discharging its secret, guilty fluids. Worse, the seepage threatens the body and the self with trivialization the Hermit's blood-leaking is the sign of his crushing ordinariness, a dissolving of ideal self into embarrassing liquidity and the undoing of

the spiritual by crude materiality. The body tends also to block desire that is feared or unfamiliar by means of psychosomatic symptoms - there is the "migraine picuse" which temporarily cancels the Hermit's erotic dream ("... mes désirs s'en vont tous à la queue leu leu") and binds him to his own ailing body. The stark image of menstrual blood smeared against the sky at the beginning of "Merlin et la vieille femme" has a similar function - the bleeding light recalls an ancient taboo and serves to redirect Merlin's Oedipal desire through the potentially sublimating structures of allegory.

Desire is articulated through the body of self and upon the body of the other (female or feminized object). The texts expose the displacement of desire from whole female object to a discrete part of the female object or even its redirection to a substitute object; this is consistent with fetishization. The failure of attempts to harness sexual desire leads crucially to violence that is turned upon the female other. The treatment of the other in "L'ermite" involves, typically, the mocking of female sexuality or the mutilation of the female body "Riotant des vulves des papesses / De saintes sans tétons ...." The wholeness of the female body is under attack. The process of morselization allows the subject control over part of the body as a substitute for the whole body he can never possess. The Hermit avenges his own dysfunctional body by fragmenting and fragilizing the female other. Elsewhere violence shifts from female other to a discrete object. Selected substitutes for the female other proliferate in the form of fruits, but the fruits bear the unmistakable traces of the transference - in "Le larron" the forbidden fruits are eroticized, made body, and then violated ("Les oiseaux de leur bec ont blessé vos grenades"). The fruits reveal the signs of a mutilating knife ("mon couteau *punique*") turned against the female sex in an act of sadistic punishment "... presque toutes les figues étaient fendues." Other fruits get their revenge as the Hermit lies in the "verger pantelant" amid the "groseillers sanglants" and "la sainte cruauté des passiflores," this tormenting vision of sadomasochistic pleasure frustrates his search for refuge in sleep.

The Hermit, the Thief, and the Enchanter Merlin - the inhabitants of these mystery worlds are caught in the gap between desire and its appeasement. Anxiety binds the texts but frustration is unleashed in scenarios of violence and violation where the flesh ravaged, reduced, and ridiculed, materializes the savaged Symbolist "body" of the texts. In this the poems hold up a mirror to their own processes, exposing a powerful image of the exasperating struggle to counter influence.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The debate over Modernism continues. The major studies reveal a range of approaches, affirming Raymond Williams' plea for a discrimination of modernisms in *The Politics of Modernism* (1). M. Bradbury and J. McFarlane's, *Modernism* views Modernism as a cultural superstructure spanning 1850-1940. M. Calinescu, in *Five Faces of Modernity*, sets aesthetic modernity in the wider context of the socio-cultural debate and makes an important contribution to unravelling the semantic tangles of the term Modernist. D. Fokemma and E. Ibsch's study, *Modernist Conjectures*, takes a minimalist approach in order to discriminate between Modernism and Avant-Garde, and seeks, by typologizing, to dispel the interpretive confusion that hangs over these disputed terms. Other commentators view the terms Modernism and Avant-Garde as broadly synonymous, even interchangeable: C. Russell, *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries*; R. Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*; M. Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*. As the debate over taxonomies continues, we have to be aware that even if we reach a consensus on descriptions, we should avoid seeing the concepts in a stable relationship one to the other. Rather, we need to consider how, at any one time, one concept may subsume or be subsumed by the other in a relationship that is variably hyperonymic and hyponymic. If we accept the view that Modernism is constantly reviewing its theory and practice (as M. Levenson argues in the introduction to *A Genealogy of Modernism*, then we accept that the relationship between the two terms can never be stable. This may be confirmed both at the level of the development of literary movements and across the span of a writer's composition. Apollinaire is a case in point for across the corpus represented by the major collections *Alcools* (1913) and *Calligrammes* (1918) we find a range of positions emerging, from the anti-Symbolist through the neo-Symbolist to the Modernist and the more earnestly Avant-Garde.

<sup>2</sup>The critical tradition in Apollinaire studies has focussed upon the esoteric component of these poems and the establishment of sources, philological, philosophical and mythical: central to this is Madeleine Boisson's encyclopedic *Apollinaire et les mythologies antiques*. Scott Bates' *Guillaume Apollinaire* extends the study of the convergence of poetry and biography. Bates sees Apollinaire rewriting his biography through the opaque world of Symbolist-derived, syncretist-inspired imagery. "L'ermite" is viewed as a projection of the poet's revolt from the Church whilst the anti-Christian content of "Le larron" links it with "L'ermite:" "two anarchist allegories" (14). T. Mathews, in *Reading*

*Apollinaire* refers to "L'ermite" as "a pastiche of Symbolist language and aspiration," (19). M.-L. Lentengre's *Apollinaire et le nouveau tyrisme* differs from biography-led discussions in that she is primarily concerned with literary models and the search for style against a prevailing Symbolist tradition: in this her approach is closer to my own. The focus for Lentengre's discussion is *L'enchanteur pourrissant* and the conspicuous ironizing of medieval themes as a strategy for denouncing the literariness of Symbolism.

<sup>3</sup>Symbolism is perhaps a term less fraught for being less fought over. Clearly, when it comes to descriptions, Symbolism is more easily periodized than Modernism (in France the 1880s-1890s). Commentators from Paul Valéry, through Ezra Pound, to Edmund Wilson, see the development of Symbolism in diachronic terms. Symbolism is perceived as a reaction against the materialist ethos of Naturalism (see Paul Valéry's letter of 1932, in Fokemma and Ibsch, 24). Symbolism marks the shift from a fascination with the hard edge of existence to a preoccupation with the transcendental, the mystical, and the metaphysical. Viewed from the other end, Symbolism is perceived as a collection of soft-boiled aesthetics which in turn would be replaced by the drier hard poetics of the early 20th century (Ezra Pound, "The Hard and the Soft in French Poetry"). The classic studies of Symbolist movement in Europe are: Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, "Symbolist Poetry and the Ivory Tower," and Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle*.

<sup>4</sup>Gérard Genette explores hypertextuality and its strategies (parody, pastiche, satire, and travesty) in *Palimpsestes*.

<sup>5</sup>Here I am distinguishing between the acts of interpreting and literal "reading" which is structured left-to-right, top-to-bottom of the page in the Western tradition, except for instances of concrete and ideogrammatic poetry.

<sup>6</sup>Harold Bloom (*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*), appropriates the Oedipal model in order to account for the structures through which poetic writing develops. Insofar as Bloom's theory reaffirms the notion of literature as a diachronic series of shifts, disjunctions, and new departures, it is pertinent to our study of the reorientation of Modernism away from its immediate predecessor, Symbolism.

<sup>7</sup>Fokemma and Ibsch analyse the making of Modernism through shared semantic and syntactic codes. The chapters on Eliot and Joyce in *Modernist Conjectures* place due stress on the relativization of traditional matter.

<sup>8</sup>The work of Bruno Bettelheim (see *The Uses of Enchantment*), has focussed on the relationship between literary text and developing

child and on the educative and therapeutic value of the content of the fairy tale. My interest here is not with author- or reader-analysis, but with text-analysis as such. For a seminal study in this field, one expanding into genre-application, see Marthe Robert's *Roman des origines, origines du roman*.

<sup>9</sup>Freud's work on the significance of puns, double entendre, and jokes appears in "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious" (1905). He emphasizes the liberating function of jokes, the release of repressed desire in a momentary snatching of pleasure.

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# TRASLACION SEMANTICA Y CREACION EN TRES POEMAS DE *OBRAS INCOMPLETAS* DE GLORIA FUERTES

*Peter E. Browne*

En *Obras incompletas* la poesía de Gloria Fuertes nunca parece alejarse de lo que Dámaso Alonso designa "lo cotidiano intrascendente," pero sí en ocasiones logra crear exitosamente nuevas configuraciones, principalmente a través de una acertada transposición de campos semánticos. A nuestro parecer esta traslación del sentido como medio de creación se corresponde con lo que parece ser la técnica predilecta de Gloria en esta antología, el *quiasmo* semántico. En una u otra variante, esta técnica ocurre con una frecuencia excepcional en *Obras incompletas*, de modo que no se puede pasar por alto. Varía desde un jugueteo al parecer infantil hasta el grado de sofisticación de que nos percatamos en un poema como "Melancolía del mendigo." A nuestro parecer este último poema precisamente es uno de los mejores en la colección.

## *"Melancolía del mendigo"*

He mirado al mendigo mucho más que otras veces,  
lo mejor del mendigo es su pelo y su mano,  
su mano se desliza por el aire cuchillo  
y se clava en tu pecho y te pincha temblando.  
El mendigo del puerto tiene sabiduría,  
en esa mano larga que te tiende cortante,  
el ya sabe la frase, según vengas o vayas,  
a unos: por amor de Dios... Y a otros: salud, hermano  
--según te ve el pelaje--.  
El mendigo en su choza tiene discos antiguos,  
un reloj sin manillas y un ave disecada;  
el mendigo es un ente sabihondo y profundo  
y tiene una querida que llorar al recitar. (83)

"Melancolía del mendigo" ilustra bien el proceso dual discutido por Debicki: 1) el uso de la realidad extratextual para configurar una nueva realidad poética; 2) la comunicación de un aspecto de esta primera a través de configuraciones poéticas. Lo que nos atañe discutir en el presente estudio es lo primero, la creación de nuevos significados textuales, la cual se logra principalmente a través de varias traslaciones o violaciones en el campo semántico.

Es notable que en "Melancolía del mendigo," dejando a un lado la versificación, la variación en el registro lingüístico detectable en el texto es mínima. Efectivamente nunca salimos del ámbito de lo coloquial. Incluso los vocablos neutros "sabiduría" y "profundo" caben dentro de esta esfera. Los significados del poema dependen enteramente de la forma en que el lenguaje se manipula dada la ausencia de resonancias intertextuales que apuntarían a la presencia de otros registros. El poema ilustra bien cómo se puede dar lugar a una sofisticada manipulación semántica a través del empleo de un lenguaje coloquial y poco variado en términos de registro.

En "Melancolía del mendigo" se crean unos significados textuales propios; asimismo se generan con destreza unos choques semánticos que después de la mitad del poema se reconcilian y se funden. En breve, la violación del campo semántico es esencial al acto creativo en este poema.

Una especie de tensión se establece ya en el segundo verso, donde el mendigo parece objetificarse o deshumanizarse según la manera en que le focaliza el hablante. Al afirmar que "lo mejor del mendigo" es "su pelo y su mano" se nos desvía de su interioridad humana para presentárnoslo casi como un mecanismo. Inmediatamente después de esta impresión inicial de cosificación, viene un efecto de violencia bastante fuerte con los dos versos siguientes, que a su vez respaldan la impresión de un proceso mecánico. El verso "su mano se desliza por el aire cuchillo" constituye un recurso de lenguaje que la primera vez podría producir una sensación de violencia; una lectura rápida y descuidada interpretaría "cuchillo" como objeto arrojado por la mano. Una lectura más detenida revelará que esta impresión es falaz. Debido a la supresión del artículo, "cuchillo" está en aposición con "mano;" por lo tanto tiene que leerse como metáfora de la eficacia con la cual opera la mano del mendigo. Pese al parecido ontológico entre los objetos "mano" y "cuchillo," la supresión del artículo ante el segundo para negar su significado literal constituye a nuestro parecer un caso de violación (y por lo tanto de traslación) de su campo semántico. Este acto de violación es también un acto de creación, ya que "cuchillo" adquiere un valor propio acondicionado por la configuración del texto. No obstante, el parecido ontológico entre el objeto real y su metáfora significa que el grado de transformación es todavía mínimo.

Al continuar nuestra lectura del poema, la inicial impresión de violencia se pone en tensión tajante con la afirmación del verso siguiente, "el mendigo del puerto tiene sabiduría." El atributo que se le designa ahora nada tiene que ver con el compartimento que se acaba de asignar de acuerdo con nuestro paradigma usual. No obstante, a continuación este aparente choque se clarifica en los

versos seis a nueve, en los cuales se pone de manifiesto la destreza con que el mendigo se sale con la suya. De hecho, la aparente violencia y "sabiduría" del mendigo se dan a entender como una misma cosa--su destreza para manipular su circunstancia. O sea, se hace evidente que los vocablos que al parecer presentaban opuestos polares ("cuchillo," "sabiduría") manifiestan una sola realidad. Estamos ante un caso de inversión radical que se asemeja en gran medida al funcionamiento de un *quiasmo*, caracterizado por una traslación en dos sentidos, en cruce de significados. Tanto "cuchillo" como "sabiduría" se desplazan de sus campos semánticos habituales y extratextuales, convergiendo en el cruce para adquirir un mismo valor: "destreza," *savoir-faire*.

Vistos desde un ángulo inverso, pero complementario y, de acuerdo con la poética de Michael Riffaterre,<sup>1</sup> "cuchillo" y "sabiduría" podrían percibirse como dos desplazamientos divergentes de la misma *matriz*, no expresada directamente pero subyacente, que sería precisamente ese valor.

Siguiendo la misma pauta de desplazamiento semántico, también se explica la materialidad de un enfoque en "su pelo," el cual se clarifica al llegar al verso nuevo donde "pelaje" evidentemente significa apariencia, y así "pelo" se da a entender como el don de apariencias (otro aspecto de la "sabiduría" del mendigo).

El proceso de fusión de significados opuestos se hace aún más completo en los últimos cuatro versos. Lo aparentemente violento ("mano cual cuchillo") se da a entender por fin no sólo como una correlación de lo sabio, sino como algo vinculado a lo tierno ("tiene una querida que llora al recitar"). Al mismo tiempo lo objetificado ("lo mejor del mendigo" del segundo verso) se hace plenamente congruente con lo interior o espiritual ("sabihondo y profundo"). Toda esta reconciliación ocurre a través de un simple proceso de exposición.

A nuestro parecer, la lectura de este poema tiene que ser bastante cerrada, ya que todo su texto apunta hacia una lectura determinada. Es bastante obvio por ejemplo que "cuchillo" es una metáfora de "mano," que a su vez casi forzosamente tiene que leerse como un símbolo de la destreza (lo cual no niega su importancia material). Asimismo es bastante evidente que tanto metáfora como símbolo constituyen vínculos en una cadena de traslación semántica, con el resultado de que "cuchillo" equivale a la destreza misma.

Por otra parte, la lectura más plausible de las imágenes "un reloj sin manillas" y "un ave disecada" parece ser, aparte de su posible existencia real, sencillos símbolos de la condición económica y espiritual del mendigo respectivamente.

En resumen, el valor del poema consiste en ser un texto en que se

generan tensiones para reconciliarse después con eficacia y en el que ciertos signos ("mano," "pelo," "pelaje") adquieren un significado propio dentro del contexto del poema. El acertado uso de metáforas y símbolos que apuntamos arriba demuestra en sí mismo cierto grado de creatividad poética. No se trata de gastadas figuras existentes en el discurso extratextual, sino de figuras que se generan singularmente dentro de la propia matriz del poema, y esto a base de materiales que no salen del registro común y coloquial.

A continuación, discutiremos brevemente dos poemas en los cuales es casi igualmente notable el traslado de sentido que sufren ciertas palabras dentro del texto.

*"Enseñanzas"*

Aprendamos por fin de las tinieblas,  
de las bestias,  
imitemos las formas de las flores,  
de los insectos aprendamos vida  
y de la hierba danza.  
Conozcamos la paz de los salvajes.  
Anochece la tarde;  
el mendigo "echa el cierre" recoge su pañuelo,  
una veinte a la hora veces saca.  
La Luisa anda enredada con el Pepe.  
Tere la castañera escupe raro  
y su hijo el botones se hace golfo,  
por lo demás aquí no pasa nada.  
Anochece deca.  
Dos ángeles al fin izan la luna  
cual si fuera bandera de un partido. (62)

"Enseñanzas" es un poema que tempranamente rompe con el horizonte de expectativas del lector. De hecho esto ocurre en el primer verso, con el aserto "aprendamos por fin de las tinieblas," en que el mandato puede inclusive darnos un choque, dada la carga de negatividad que encierra el vocablo "tinieblas." Es evidente que este verso forma una especie de bloque con los cinco siguientes, los cuales también podrían romper con nuestras perspectivas. No obstante se percibirá una especie de jerarquía de negatividad y también de literariedad dentro de estos versos.

"Tinieblas," en su contexto extratextual, es una palabra completamente negativa. Al propio tiempo se nos destaca por ser una palabra algo castiza (aunque familiar para el hablante del idioma coloquial) y sobre todo por tener resonancias religiosas. Parte del choque inicial que nos produce el mandato "aprendamos por fin de las

"tinieblas" tiene que disminuirse por el hecho de que el lenguaje de los cinco versos siguientes es netamente neutro, sin la menor huella de literariedad. Es este contraste parcialmente lo que permite un traslado semántico. Al llegar al lugar común "la paz de los salvajes," (con ecos rouseauianos, desde luego) nos percatamos de que "tinieblas" ha adquirido un valor netamente positivo, que su negatividad es irónica, y que su verdadero significado sería "lo primordial". Basándonos más estrictamente en el conjunto de imágenes ("bestias," "flores," "insectos," "hierba"-- una obvia cadena de metonimias) sería "lo natural."

Si se llega a esta resolución para el sexto verso, en el séptimo se rompe el equilibrio al introducirse lo anecdótico: "Anochece la tarde." Nos preguntamos qué significación tendrán los tipos mendicantes que se enumeran y que parecen contrastarse bastante con la imagen del salvaje noble evocada en el verso seis. Esta vez lo negativo parece ser real, hasta gráfico. Se expresa en lenguaje tajantemente coloquial, desprovisto de literariedad.

Esta aparente desmitificación no puede sino dejarnos perplejos después de haber experimentado el proceso evidente en los seis primeros versos. No obstante al final ocurre una re-mitificación que apoyaría "la paz de los salvajes:" "Dos angeles al fin izan la luna/cual si fuera bandera de partido." Así al llegar al final del poema se pone en evidencia un *quiasmo* que podría representarse sencillamente a través del siguiente esquema:

<i>Registro religioso</i>	<i>Registro secular</i>
<i>Negatividad "tinieblas"</i>	"escupe raro" <i>Negatividad</i>
<i>Positividad "dos ángeles"</i>	"paz de los salvajes" <i>Positividad</i>

En ambas partes del poema, lo negativo sufre un traslado semántico al confrontarse con su contrario. Los dos últimos versos cambian nuestra perspectiva para que veamos lo indeseable de los mendigos como una mera exterioridad. Más importante de observar por su mero virtuosismo es el tipo de simetría semántica que Gloria establece en este poema. A nuestro parecer, ella ha creado de hecho un *quiasmo* perfecto. "Enseñanzas" difiere del poema previo en que el registro de lenguaje entra en el juego y por el hecho de ser más simétrico.

*"Siempre pasa"*

Quando estamos ahogados de ceniza  
y nos crujen los huesos de la espalda  
y nos riñen los jefes sin mirarnos.  
Quando estamos dispuestos para todo

y hacemos letanía del suicidio.  
 Vemos, que el silencio ha bajado,  
 que nos tienden un cable  
 que nos peinan el pelo  
 que suenan campanillas  
 que nos besan los brazos,  
 si también os sucede, alegraos amigos  
 hay una especie de ángel  
 sentado con nosotros. (109)

En el poema "Siempre pasa" es una imagen, más bien que un vocablo o un aserto, lo que nos choca en el primer verso: "abogados de ceniza." Nosotros destacaríamos que "ceniza" por sí sola es una palabra que, pese a caber dentro de lo coloquial, o neutro del lenguaje, viene ya cargada de resonancias, así que inclusive en el primer verso nos pone a la expectativa de posibles referencias a éstas. Inmediatamente, pensamos en sus implicaciones de desolación, de destrucción y del rito católico--en su posible valor simbólico. Nuestra experiencia cultural nos ha formado un horizonte de expectativas en torno al solo vocablo "ceniza."

Al proceder en nuestra lectura, el signo que nos choca luego es "jefes;" como esto enseguida introduce un código social, sirve a colorear "ceniza;" se genera el significado "Opresión social." Cuando llegamos al quinto verso; "y hacemos letanía del suicidio," salta a la vista la ligadura semántica entre "letanía" y "ceniza;" asimismo parecen ligarse al campo semántico de "ceniza-desolación." "Letanía" y "suicidio" se relacionan como dos resonancias bien distintas de la palabra clave del primer verso; de este modo, "ceniza" parece ir adquiriendo resonancias que antes sólo poseía en potencia. Se continúa en los dos versos siguientes con una referencia al mundo concreto; --"que nos tienden un cable,"--lo cual indica claramente que materialmente estamos dentro de algo así como una mina. Así se nos recalca que "ceniza" tiene asimismo un sentido estrictamente literal. Lo siguiente, en cambio, parece recalcar las resonancias religiosas ya establecidas: "suenan campanillas" y "nos besan los brazos."

La resolución de "siempre pasa" parece incompleta. No obstante, la suma de significados de "ceniza" parece ser la de "opresión social" y lo más interesante es ver cómo todos los ecos posibles del vocablo han entrado en juego para conducirnos a este sentido.

Conclusión--Como lo hemos aludido, la inversión de campos semánticos es casi una constante en *Obras incompletas*; de hecho, a menudo parece constituir un juego tan mecánico que pierde pujanza. En tales casos, la efectiva traslación semántica es mínima, en cuanto sólo entra en juego una dimensión de significado.

En cambio, esperamos que nuestra discusión de los poemas "Melancolía del mendigo" y "Enseñanzas," así como la del algo distinto "Siempre pasa," habrá recalcado el valor poético que Gloria Fuertes es capaz de lograr, mediante un empleo esmerado de la técnica de la inversión.

*Panamerican University*

#### NOTA

<sup>1</sup>Esta interpretación sería desde luego conforme al tipo de lectura propuesta por Michael Riffaterre, el cual parece efectivamente aplicable en cierta medida a un poema al parecer tan cerrado como "Melancolía del mendigo." Nosotros apuntaríamos no obstante el peligro de aplicar las teorías de Riffaterre a poemas en que la polisemia es más evidente. Véase Michael Riffaterre, capítulos I & II.

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LES TRAVAILLÉS DE LA MER:  
HISTORY AND THE FATE OF PROSE POETRY  
IN  
PONGE'S "GALET"

*Charles Nurley*

"Dans le cours de notre préhistoire même, la future réconciliation se préfigure."

—Francis Ponge

"Formé d'entassements de siècles et de lieux."

—Victor Hugo

"La position de Francis Ponge est anachronique, résolument."

—Henri Maldiney

Since the publication of Sartre's seminal essay on Ponge in 1944, the poet's playful depiction of things in *Le parti pris des choses* (1942) has been the subject of considerable critical inquiry, very little of which, however, has dealt with the cultural ramifications of Ponge's "parti-pris." This is all the more surprising in light of Ponge's later attempts to affiliate his own poetic project with those of numerous poet-predecessors. In *Pour un Malherbe* (1965), for example, Ponge speaks of his desire to "porter dans ses bras son père mort d'une génération précédente, le dresser et forcer tout le monde au respect de lui" (316). Who are, one might ask, the spiritual "fathers" Ponge commemorates in *Le parti pris des choses* and how do their projects relate to Ponge's own modest encounter with "le monde muet"? In a word, how does Ponge's cultural "parti-pris" inform our reading of his work?<sup>1</sup>

"Le galet" provides an interesting case in point. Toward the end of his attempt to describe the pebble, Ponge tells us his vision becomes "empêtrée"—entangled—somewhere, I would like to suggest, between familiar contact and the memory of the works of previous poets. Indeed, throughout "Le galet," the poet's gaze is displaced by the magnetic force of memory which keeps him from contemplating the present as an isolated totality. Ponge's quest in "Le galet" takes on the guise of some great geological excavation thanks to which the past is momentarily resurrected, liberated from its silent condition beneath what Ponge calls "la couche opaque et temporelle du sable."<sup>2</sup>

This act of historic recuperation is, in many ways, a meditation on the history of poetry as well. Specifically, it is a reflection on the "pre-history" of Ponge's own preferred poetic genre, the prose poem, via a

re-examination of the work of France's great romantic poet, Victor Hugo. In "Le galet," in other words, Ponge allows texts that precede the birth of prose poetry as a modern form of poetic expression to come to the surface and be heard. More than twenty years prior to his "resurrection" of Malherbe, Ponge had already begun to reflect upon the relationship his work shares with that of another, equally significant poet whose work was frequently belittled by Ponge's poet contemporaries. From the point of view of a descendent, Ponge remembers--"aussitôt, à mille ressources"--Hugo's distinctly epic vision.<sup>3</sup>

While "life," in "Le galet," ostentatiously endeavors to suppress any sense of debt to the past, to the rocky material upon which it is founded--"la terre végétale leur permet depuis quelques jours de se reproduire *sans rien devoir au roc*" (emphasis added)--, it is the very act of revealing such strategies of suppression that constitutes Ponge's pact with Hugo and his desire to assign history a productive role in "Le galet." In ways that substantiate Roland Barthes's definition of *écriture* as "un acte de solidarité historique" (14), indebtedness to a literary past in "Le galet" becomes a creative form of textual practice through which the reader rediscovers some of early romanticism's most characteristic dreams, not the least of which was to try to carve out an authentic place for humanity in a world that no longer felt like home. Such a task involves reaffirming the importance of continuity over and above an increasing sense of fragmentation and loss. While the fragmented nature of Ponge's prose poem would appear to depart from Hugo's attempts to portray progress by means of a cohesive narrative,<sup>4</sup> the fact that the pebble's history is itself embedded in France's heroic past serves to heighten the significance of prose poetry's "epic origins." Instead of conforming to the avant-garde's dream of a definitive break with the past, Ponge's use of a rhetoric of continuity in "Le galet" to establish a link between literature past and present suggests the need to reassert the value of a restorative approach to literature in our time.

Reference in "Le galet" to the way things were *before* the Flood and to the earth as a magnificent ancestor--an "aïeul énorme"--suggests a desire on Ponge's part to return to a time that preceded the birth of prose poetry as a modern form of poetic expression. If Hugo is a likely candidate as the poet-predecessor of Ponge's rhetoric of reminiscence in "Le galet," it is because of his enduring influence on modern French letters as what Pierre Albouy calls an "aïeul lointain" (124). Before exploring how "Le galet" resurrects and reformulates Hugo's poetic legacy in terms of a new pongean perspective, I would like to return to Hugo's work and, specifically, to moments in that work which testify to a commonality of

interest in the theme of "désagrégation" shared by Ponge and what one might call prose poetry's most significant *aleu*.<sup>5</sup>

To be sure, many texts in Hugo's corpus deal with fragmentation and the theme of erosion. Hugo's positive view of "désagrégation" as an aesthetic principle in "A l'Arc de Triomphe" (1837), for example, closely resembles Ponge's image of the time-worn pebble in "Le Galet." In his poem, Hugo praises fragmentation as a force that enriches the poetic imagination: "La vieillesse couronne et la ruine achève. / Il faut à l'édifice un passé dont on rêve, / Deuil, triomphe ou remords." Another suggestive image of erosion occurs in "La vision d'où est sorti ce livre," an 1859 poem which Hugo later used to preface his great verse epic, *La légende des siècles: nouvelle série*. In this poem-preface, Hugo uses images of cataclysmic fragmentation and decay to characterize the nature of his project to write a legendary account of the universe from beginning to end. In the closing lines, Hugo likens his expansive epic to a ruin, a mere vestige of what epic poetry once was:

Ce livre, c'est le reste effrayant de Babel;  
C'est la lugubre Tour des Choses, l'édifice  
Du bien, du mal, des pleurs, du deuil, du sacrifice,  
Fier jadis, dominant les lointains horizons,  
Aujourd'hui n'ayant plus que de hideux tronçons,  
Epars, couchés, perdus dans l'obscur vallée;  
C'est l'épopée humaine, âpre, immense,--écroulée.

By underscoring the consciously imperfect state of his epic, Hugo shares with his readers the awareness that the idea of writing such a history as an integrated whole is an illusory one, given the fragmented nature not only of the world that surrounds him but of the poetic imagination itself.

We rediscover Hugo's fractured epic--"Aujourd'hui n'ayant plus que de hideux tronçons" (emphasis added) in the preternatural form of Ponge's decaying cadaver in "Le galet:" "telle est aujourd'hui l'apparence du globe. Le cadavre en tronçons de l'être de la grandeur du monde ne fait plus que servir de décor" (emphasis added). In this way, an epic past that is remembered in Hugo's already fragmented *Légende* is again fragmented--but also revived--in "Le Galet," where Ponge breathes life back into the spectre of prose poetry's forgotten past.<sup>6</sup>

To be sure, the differences between Hugo's *Légende des siècles* and Ponge's "Galet" are as significant as the concerns both poets share in their desire to rekindle history's poetic significance. While Ponge's affiliation with France's epic tradition is clearly supported by the fact

that he speaks of the past in heroic terms, "Le galet" also constitutes a departure from epic narrative by virtue of the fact that it has no real hero. However heroic the pebble's story may appear, it is not itself epic, but rather the elaborate *mise en scène* of the impossibility of recapturing epic grandeur. Having been uprooted, detached from any specific and cohesive founding narrative that might serve to ground it in a tradition whose origins are easily discernible, the pebble cannot rest. Instead, "Le galet" constitutes an encounter of Ponge's jocular prose with an epic past whose language remains sacred, tied to the rock bottom truths of what Ponge calls "l'ossature sacrée du globe."

Throughout "Le galet," Ponge utilizes the concept of "désagrégation" as a means of revalorizing the role of history in the poetic text. In the poem's opening sentence, for example, Ponge reintroduces us to a defunct meaning of the verb "définir," embedded in the word's rich etymology: "Le galet n'est pas une chose facile à définir." While the word "définir" has the peculiar air of scientific formulae that are meant to limit discourse to the precision of absolute axiomatic rigor, Ponge exploits a deeper meaning, concealed in the word's past. An avid reader of Littré's *Dictionnaire*, Ponge was undoubtedly familiar with the following passage from *Le roman de la rose*, which Littré mentions in a rather detailed excursus on the etymology of the word "définir:"

"quant plus tost definera [mourra],  
Plus tost en paradis ira."

Here we find death historically embedded in the origins of the verb "définir." In light of this, the opening sentence of "Le galet" can be read as follows: "Le galet n'est pas une chose facile à mourir," which, in turn, is in perfect agreement with what Ponge will later tell us: "dans la nature, [la pierre] est en réalité la seule chose qui y meure constamment." The strategies of "poetic definition" in its etymological sense as "rendering poetry mortal" thus enable Ponge to make use of prose poetry as a consciously temporal phenomenon that threatens at any moment to pass on, to be wiped out, "sous la couche opaque et temporelle du sable."

In a similar vein, disinterment is central to Ponge's interest in the past: throughout the text, rocky material is frequently found underground, covered by layers of vegetation which must be physically penetrated by the inquisitive poet in order that he might contemplate the object he has chosen to describe. Unlike a text like "Le pain," where Ponge privileges the surface ("sans un regard pour la mollesse ignoble sous-jacente"), descriptive passages in "Le galet" consistently lead readers beneath the external veneer of objects and events.



into nine parts that are not held together by any kind of cohesive chronological development, it is difficult to speak of "Le galet" in terms of textual continuity. Some sections repeat what has been stated elsewhere and, on occasion, contain fragments of other texts that are reworked in ways that suggest that the work as a whole--if it is still possible to speak of "Le galet" in terms of a whole--is in fact a set of variations on the specific theme of fragmentation.

Only in the first and last sections does Ponge designate beginnings and endings to a work that otherwise resists such demarcations as "before" and "after." Within a framework that explicitly introduces and concludes a text that claims neither to introduce nor to conclude, Ponge shares the awareness with his reader that beginnings and endings are not at all what is at stake in "Le galet." The very notion of "une *perpétuelle désagrégation*," "dont la durée est *éternelle dans la stupeur et la résignation*" (emphasis added), prevents us from experiencing in "Le galet" the insurgency of one, spontaneous, disruptive event. Indeed, in "Le galet," the very notion of "trauma" or revolution is greatly problematized. Like *La légende des siècles*, in which the French Revolution is peculiarly absent, so too is revolution's "place" in the temporal unfolding of "Le galet" difficult to discern. Nor in "Le galet" is there a clear path leading us from one moment in the pebble's history to the next. The combined gestures of returning to a time "before the Flood" in the beginning and of positing "Le galet" as a series of new beginnings--"ces débuts"--at the close of his work make it difficult for us to know for certain whether we have "advanced" in the course of our reading, whether we have moved away from such beginnings toward more meaningful ends. One might say instead that each section serves to "erode" the notion of linearity, undermining narrative's tendency to develop in a progressive manner.

Despite the absence of any sense of historic linearity, throughout "Le galet," history stubbornly insists that it not remain hidden, relegated to the depths where it might easily be forgotten. It demands to be accorded a place "à la surface," voicing its presence there precisely where fragmentation is most likely to occur. At one point, the complicity of sea and land gives birth to a past recovered in the felicitous form of the personified pebble: "la mer [...] sans cesse arrache des blocs qu'elle garde, étreint, balance, dorlote, ressasse, malaxe, flatte et polit dans ses bras contre son corps ou abandonne dans un coin de sa houche comme une dragée, puis ressort de sa bouche..." The sea plays an active role in the fragmentation of the past. The sexual overtones in the verb "êtreindre," moreover, suggest that the sea's erosive power is not solely destructive. Indeed, as the integrity of the pebble's origins is lost, historical artifacts are engendered. The confrontation of land and sea turns fragmentation

into a reproductive event, giving birth to the present by fragmenting and reshaping parts of the past.

Revitalized history in "Le galet" is the result of fragmentation. Because it can be broken up into bits and pieces, it can also be put together in countless ways--"aussitôt, à mille ressources"--within Ponge's prose poem. Of course, the price for the liberation of the shards of the earth's once unified entity is dear: "toute vie alors recule loin des mornes étendues où tour à tour la disperse et la rassemble la frénésie du désespoir." Giving history an absolutely free voice has opened the poetic imagination up to "a frenzy of despair," to a kind of fear and trembling. It suddenly becomes impossible to impose any semblance of order upon a world whose smallest fragments have been set adrift like so many floating signifiers, meaning one thing and then another. Such fragmentation, however, does little to darken Ponge's characteristically light-hearted approach to poetic depiction.

The past's resurgence as fable and legend contributes to the imaginative nature of Ponge's poem. Throughout the poem, erosion is at work in concert with an equally vital thematic of continuity or interconnectedness: "Engagé à l'imagination de grandes choses parmi l'ombre et le parfum des forêts qui recouvrent parfois ces blocs mystérieux, l'homme par l'esprit seul suppose là-dessous leur continuité." By undermining continuity as something that exists prior to a poetic account of it in writing, Ponge reasserts continuity at a level other than that of reality: within the domain of the poetic imagination, between his work and a literary past all but forgotten by other poets in the early part of this century.<sup>8</sup> Only by closing his eyes to what he sees in the real world--that is to say rampant "désagrégation"--can Ponge return to beginnings that are other than modern. The sand--[qui] nous ferme [...] les yeux--, blinding eyes eager to see continuity where there is only disruption, has the healing effect of reminding us that it is not in the world that continuity is made, but only in poetry, in its legendary forms.

The opening evocation of the biblical Flood provides a case in point: "qu'on ne me reproche pas en cette matière de remonter plus loin même que le déluge." Here, the possibility of returning to an antediluvian state is not in any way questioned. Indeed, in line with the textual emphasis on the concept of "perpétuelle désagrégation," the facility with which Ponge effectuates such a return has a tendency to undermine the specific significance of the Flood as a truly disruptive event. From the outset, rupture between past and present is overcome, at least temporarily, as Ponge effortlessly transgresses a frontier that can no longer keep him from rediscovering some previous condition. As a mytho-historic term that describes a catastrophe caused by divine injunction and meant to purge the

human race of its accumulated sins, the expression "déluge" is intended to give meaning to catastrophe in retrospect by condemning what precedes it in favor of what follows. By returning to a time that precedes the Flood, Ponge returns to what appears to be a condemned state of constant flux. Historical or legendary creation in "Le galet," in this way, supplants divine providence. Ponge's return to a past that was supposed to have been effaced by the Flood--in a later section Ponge will mockingly stress the fact that water "leaves no trace" and therefore cannot be historically recorded on the pebble's surface--is more profoundly an undermining of history as a story of divination. Once the divine origin ("déluge") has been transgressed and reworked into a truly human beginning, where heroes have become readers and the earth a text, it becomes possible for Ponge to rediscover the past historically. In "Le galet," beginnings are man-made and laden with a past that no Flood can truly efface.

The illusory nature of the opposition between present and past--exemplified by vegetation's vain efforts to destroy, or at least mask, history by literally burying it beneath a profusion of verdant growth--further illustrates Ponge's case for continuity: "la grandeur morte, la vie fait voir aussitôt qu'elle n'a rien de commun avec elle." Instead of seeing ("voir") that it is altogether unlike dead grandeur, life strives to make clear ("faire voir") that it wants to have nothing to do with death, grand or otherwise. Here, life is defined as an attempt to forget its own mortality. It is this falling away from death that gives life its will to exist as being in time. And yet, the repetition of the common pronoun "elle"--"elle n'a rien de commun avec elle"--establishes a grammatical similarity between life and "la grandeur morte" that subverts life's plea for difference, for immortality.

Toward the end of "Le galet," Ponge brings us to the brink of an apocalyptic vision according to which the past would be dissolved and along with it the possibility to remember: "Gardant alors toutes les traces, sauf justement celles du liquide, qui se borne à pouvoir effacer sur lui celles qu'y font les autres, [le galet] laisse à travers lui passer toute la mer, qui se perd en sa profondeur sans pouvoir en aucune façon faire avec lui de la boue." In this passage, the passivity of the pebble is total. Without surrendering to the sea the traces that constitute its history, it surrenders its very being: "il laisse à travers lui passer toute la mer." The Flood, that previous barrier which Ponge so easily abolished in the first lines of his poem returns toward the end as that which threatens to efface all trace of memory. And yet, in the above passage, the victory of inundation as a force capable of actually effacing history is undermined by the sublime ambiguity of Ponge's prose. The pebble "keeps all traces," but at the same time it "lets the

whole sea filter through, which disappears into its depths." Is history, in the end, lost to the sea? It seems highly unlikely, since the sea's image is a weak one, "sans pouvoir," as Ponge tells us. Indeed, history in "Le galet" tolerates to the last the very forces that try to subdue it.

In the text's actual moment of closure, Ponge's concern is not with "effacement," but rather with "début:"

Trop heureux seulement d'avoir pour ces débuts su choisir *le galet*: car un homme d'esprit ne pourra que sourire, mais sans doute il sera touché, quand mes critiques diront: "Ayant entrepris d'écrire une description de la pierre, il s'empêtra."

In the passage with which he closes his poem, Ponge reminds us that "*le galet*" (like the prose poem entitled "*Le galet*") does not represent a true ending point, but rather a moment on a continuum characterized by a constant activity of reconstruction, repetition, restoration, and redeployment. In nature as in poetry, there is no single identifiable beginning--only a plurality of more or less felicitous "début"--, just as there is no true ending. If the pebble, in Ponge's words, "meur[t] constamment," it is also constantly reborn. The same could be said of his text, and of the poetic tradition it evokes, fragments, and revivifies.

In light of such a reading--one that stresses the redeeming, polyvalent role the past plays in its encounter with the present--, it becomes possible to speak of "*Le galet*" in terms of its indebtedness not only to the work of poets past but to the past that poets make. While the stature of the object Ponge has chosen to depict is modest, it becomes evident in reading "*Le galet*" that the forces behind the pebble's making are no less impressive than the forces that went into the making of those of France's edifices with which Hugo so clearly identified. To be sure, Ponge's project in "*Le galet*" differs from that of Hugo both in scope and in the ways Ponge's pebble resists assimilation into the work of art. Perhaps it is in failing to do what others before him had done so well--as Ponge concedes in the last line of "*Le galet*," "il s'empêtra"--that Ponge remains true to his cause. Taking the side of things is, by definition, a commitment to something other than art and what Ponge no doubt critically calls "la perfection de sa forme."

The conclusions we are given in "*Le galet*" are not the kind that aim at preserving the integrity of the work as a whole. Indeed, the end of "*Le galet*" tends to undermine the very idea of wholeness as a poetic principle. As a result, the ending becomes provisional, as does the work itself. The pebble's own integrity endures, its symbolic value as that which defies symbolic appropriation is preserved to the last. Disenchanted by a kind of writing that has turned its back on the

world, Ponge puts an abrupt end to his authorial project as soon as he suspects that the pact between world and work was a false one, a textual ruse to disinherit the world and aspire to the fabrication of a reality all its own, one that is no longer under any obligation to anything outside itself. Safeguarding the provisional character of his prose poem appears to be the best way for Ponge to safeguard the pebble as something that cannot be reduced to writing.

Nowhere else are the themes of continuity, rupture and fragmentation more actively engaged in shaping the literary act in *Le parti pris des choses* than in "Le galet." With the possible exception of *Pour un Malherbe*, never again will Ponge endeavor with such explicit care to question modernity's claim to have sprung from its own loins. Within the temporal continuum Ponge has created, we are never quite sure where we have been placed with respect to the work of his contemporaries. But, as I have tried to suggest, the corpse of romanticism--whose "arrêt de mort" has yet to be signed--is brought back to life within the emancipating confines of the poetic odyssey that is "Le galet."

Some troubling questions, however, must go unanswered. Have we, in the course of our reading, progressed *beyond* the Flood--"Après le déluge" as Rimbaud would have it--or does the Flood still await us somewhere farther down the road? Or, alternatively, has Ponge, in "Le galet," made prose poetry impervious to the threat of inundation altogether, opting for a more discerning way of turning the disruptive energies of poetry's past to its own advantage? One thing remains certain: in the words of Michel Beaujour, "no poetry, to the extent that it turns away from history and communication, is revolutionary" (39). Ponge's eagerness to receive a literary legacy that others had turned down, in addition to his playful dismantling of an epic mode of depiction according to which history could be traced in terms of "before" and "after," mark a starting point in his career, "ces débuts" as he puts it at the end of "Le galet." But it is also an end, a paroxysmal point from which history turns back on itself and effaces the vectors that had once seemed so dependable, if not for revolution, at least for epic poetry.

*Middlebury College*

## NOTES

The first epigraph is from *L'atelier contemporain* (69). The second is from "Pente de la rêverie." The third is from *Le legs des choses dans l'oeuvre de Francis Ponge* (92).

<sup>1</sup>The present study is part of a project I am currently working on that concerns the relationship *Le parti pris des choses* shares with various predecessors in the nineteenth-century prose poem tradition, including Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé.

<sup>2</sup>If the poem's embrace of the past seems at times "un-modern," the same might be said of the pebble itself. In a most significant way, the pebble is an object of nostalgia. It is time-worn. By emphasizing the pebble's temporal dimension, Ponge preserves the vital role of the past in modern prose poetry. In opposition to modernity as de Man defines it--that which exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier" (148)--, Ponge's explicit efforts to salvage the past in "Le galet" constitute a clear denunciation of the iconoclastic modernist's fantasy.

<sup>3</sup>It would undoubtedly be possible to compare Ponge's reworking of the epic mode in "Le galet" to the work of other nineteenth-century poets; within the epic tradition, however, Hugo's contribution was the most impressive and ambitious. In the words of H.J. Hunt, Hugo's epic poetry "represents the culmination of a century's poetic effort" (283). For more information, see Hunt's book, *The Epic in Nineteenth-Century France*.

<sup>4</sup>See the preface to *La légende des siècles--Première série*: "ces poèmes, divers par le sujet, mais inspirés par la même pensée, n'ont entre eux d'autre noeud qu'un fil, ce fil qui s'atténue quelquefois au point de devenir invisible, mais qui ne casse jamais, le grand fil mystérieux du labyrinthe humain, le Progrès" (2: 566). In his study of Hugo's epic poetry, Hunt questions, rightly I believe, the success of such a project: "Hugo has failed, has perhaps never really tried, to give a comprehensive view of human history, or to present such a consistent enchainment of events and civilizations as one might suppose to be the goal of an ardent believer in the sacred nineteenth-century principle of *perfectibility*" (285). It is, perhaps, this element of "failure" in Hugo's epic endeavor that brings his work closer to "Le galet."

<sup>5</sup>In her *Défigurations du langage poétique*, Barbara Johnson discusses the provocative place of Hugo in Mallarmé's prose poetry. According to Johnson, Hugo's death meant, for Mallarmé, the death of verse. In Mallarmé's words, "Le vers je crois, avec respect attendit que le géant [Hugo] qui l'identifiait à sa main tenace et plus ferme toujours de forgeron, vint à manquer; pour lui, se rompre" (171). Johnson goes on to show how, "à l'intérieur de l'espace explicitement fantomatique du poème en prose mallarméen, le vers est, visiblement, un *revenant*" (173). In my reading, I would like to suggest that Hugo's ghost reappears in "Le galet" in ways that substantiate Hugo's continuing influence on prose poets beyond the nineteenth century.

<sup>6</sup>In *Pour un Malherbe*, Ponge speaks of the remnants of past texts as *tronçons*: "Le principal mérite de cette Mémoire, [...] c'est qu'elle constitue enfin le plus juste des critères, et que les grandes oeuvres, ne demeureraient-elles que *par tronçons* (une strophe, un fragment de strophe), n'y perdent rien, mais y gagent au contraire" (269, emphasis added). It is interesting to note that Baudelaire also uses the term "tronçons" in his letter to Arsène Houssaye to characterize his prose poems.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, the beginning of the fifth section of "Le galet," which begins: "A l'esprit en mal de notions qui s'est d'abord nourri de telles apparences." Elsewhere in *Le parti pris des choses*, in a work appropriately entitled "Bords de mer," the reader finds the following sentence: "un esprit en mal de notions doit d'abord s'approvisionner d'apparences." Such echoing underscores the significant role repetition and redeployment play in Ponge's prose poetry.

<sup>8</sup>For an interesting discussion of the problematic nature of the avant-garde's dismissal of romanticism in the early twentieth century, see Charles Russell's book.

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THE QUEST FOR AUTHORITY AND CONTROL  
THROUGH DIALOGUE IN A WOMAN'S  
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF  
URSULA SUAREZ'S *RELACION AUTOBIOGRAFICA*

*Habib Zanzana*

One of the salient and certainly most intriguing features of Ursula Suárez's *Relación autobiográfica* is the presence of dialogue as a powerful stylistic and structural device consciously chosen by the Chilean nun to construct her autobiography. In fact, this eighteenth century text acquires through dialogue the ability to provide an intimate, skillful, and entertaining account of a woman's life. This study will examine the expression of the self and the representation of others in the *Relación*, in order to determine the need and evaluate the effectiveness of dialogue as a structural principle. My aim is to show that this form of communication responds not only to aesthetic considerations and a desire to bring the reader directly into the discourse but, most importantly, that it serves as a tool that helps establish authority and control over author's independence from previous literary models and especially patriarchal narratives. The analysis will focus essentially on the use of dialogue in the first two notebooks in which the nun presents her case and sets up her arguments. They offer a valid and valuable representation of the stylistic, thematic and ideological properties developed in the fourteen notebooks that constitute the *Relación*. The analysis will center on the author's manner of telling, and on her process of writing, as they relate to a woman's life, in order to demonstrate that the text embodies a clear consciousness of the self as a woman and as an author.

In the opening notebook, the author chooses to draw the reader directly into the process of writing while at the same time calling attention to the conflict which opposes mother and daughter as they become the focus of the narrative. Ursula engages the reader by creating an immediate bond and promising a long overdue confession "en referir cosas que tantos años han estado en mí sin quererlas desir" (89). The statement may express a strong commitment to truth or respond to an urge to transform the reader into an intimate partner. It can also be considered a strategy skillfully designed to direct and manipulate the reader and ultimately affect the reception of the text. To attenuate the effect of such a delicate strategy, Ursula introduces in the notebook various complaints about the difficulty of the task and the continuous battle she must face with the pen. The reader of the

period and of confessional literature was accustomed to the traditional comments made by writers concerning their apparent lack of style and the hardship they faced in the act of writing. I do not mean to undermine Ursula's struggle "vensa tanta dificultad y resistencia como tiene mi miseria en referir las cosas..." but I do suggest that it is best understood if we place the painful resignation within the *topoi* of the period.

The first notebook centers the discourse on various linguistic exchanges, brought into the present by the ability to use memory at the service of writing. This choice responds to both structural and aesthetic considerations. Ursula will design the *Relación* and consequently the first notebook according to a model that recalls the generic construct of a spiritual autobiography. Memory constitutes the vehicle that allows the recollections of the past. It inevitably leads the nun to place the focus of the narrative on some of the tensions she experienced as a child. Mario Ferreccio Podesta signals the importance of memory in the introduction to his edition of the text: "se presenta como memoria: no como diario de vida, sino como rememoración de sucesos pasados. El solapamiento cronológico que se produce entre el tramo de lo narrado y el tramo de la narración indica que el contenido es un pasado progresivo . . ." (15).

It is interesting to note that Ursula leaps from one temporal dimension (the time of the actual writing) to another much more remote (a particular point in time in which the first significant events are recollected), through the use of the verb "contaba." Ursula Suárez relies on memory to initiate the course of her recollections of the past and these "memorias" do not always follow a clear time frame. The ability to translate a life into a narrative sequence presupposes that the author is going to make a clear effort to keep a certain order for the sake of orienting the reader. In the *Relación*, memory is generated by a series of verbal encounters which took place during childhood and are projected in the present by a common or group consciousness, "después de grandesilla of contar esto" (103). The nature of the entire notebook will take the shape of a quilt in which the past is reconstructed through the accumulation and the juxtaposition of patches in which different voices are introduced by the same verb, "contar." The mother initiates the first patch or voice, "contaba mi madre;" it is followed by a general or generic consciousness, "según se contaba," which very likely incorporates the mother's voice but also calls in others which are not entirely identifiable. Ursula skillfully combines the voices and reflects them through dialogue. This technique becomes an authentic part of the narrative as it facilitates the revelation of oneself through others.

The author chooses to involve the reader directly in the discourse

by focusing on her calling and by accentuating the opposition she faces from her mother: "cuando grandesilla seré la rosa entre las espinas, que he de ser monjita" (91). This device will allow the reader to be immediately immersed into the conflict between mother and child and to seek more information and perhaps a resolution of the tension established early in the narrative. Consequently, the reader will welcome statements such as "ella me desta" or "y le respondía yo" as necessary indicators of the nature of the relationship between Ursula and her mother or aunt. The author confers upon herself the choice of the selection of the events and the words reproduced, even if they are at times undeniably vague, "yo desto no me acuerdo, sino de lo que puedo acordarme es . . ." (93). Gradually the entire notebook reflects a series of confrontations and arguments between child, mother and grandmother expressed through direct speech. We must inevitably accept the fact that memory cannot reproduce the exact words exchanged by the personages. The author must rely on hearsay and imagination in order to capture the nature and content of the conversations. However, it is important to note that the nun makes a conscious effort to provide the reader with a lively representation of the scenes and events she has experienced as Ursula reproduces conversations which took place when she was only four years old.

We must also keep in mind that dialogue serves the purpose of revealing antagonistic relationships while maintaining authority over the narrative. The combination of voices allows the author to weaken the effect of adversarial discourse. All of the characters' utterances are in a certain sense filtered and bear the intention of the author. The dialogic exchange of voices grants Ursula the ability to control the delivery and the reception of the utterances. Although the discourse may appear at first glance objectified, it could also be used strategically to weaken the opposing intentions as is the case, first with the mother and then with the multitude of characters present in the narrative.

Ursula imposes her voice on the text through a process of manipulation and a series of attempts to seduce the reader. The author knows that she will win the reader's trust. The reader will neither question nor doubt the accuracy of the content of the text since writing has already been characterized as a painful imposition. We must also keep in mind that the author does not limit herself to the past as she remembers it because the present bears a direct consequence on the past. Fully aware of the fact that the notebook is intended for her spiritual confessor, Ursula constructs her text according to a desire to convince or even seduce the reader into a narrative which blends self revelation and the revelation of others in the most deliberate manner. She has been able to shift the dread of

writing into the "plaisir du texte," as Roland Barthes calls this particular quality of discourse. In so doing, she creates a common ground for both the reader and the writer: "vuelvo a lo de que la miel iba diciendo, porque vuestra paternidad no diga nos quedamos con ella en los labios o que por ser tan dulce me había empalagado, y así lo había dejado"(100). The author (and woman) indulge in the pleasure of telling and the notebook becomes charged with words. The notion of "jouissance," as it is expressed by the French feminist theorists who take their lead from Barthes, seems particularly appropriate to express the relationship of writing to sexual difference. Honey becomes a more appropriate signifier because it connects the author with the reader without sacrificing the concept of "jouissance." French theorists of the feminine have claimed that milk could also be understood as an alternative to the phallogocentric representation, as Sidonie Smith points out: "Seemingly silent and repressed, woman comes to speak loudly as she intervenes in the phallic drive of the masculine discourse with her alternative language of fluid, plural subjectivity" (13).

At first glance, there seems to exist a paradox between the resistance to the act of writing expressed by Ursula and the abundance of dialogue present in the first notebook. A closer analysis of the discourse suggests that the use of dialogue has transformed silence into a resolution to write and a desire to reconstruct certain specific moments of childhood. Dialogue becomes the tool which validates the flow of events narrated, brings the past into the present and ultimately justifies the use of this particular literary device. The narrative is charged with a sense of energy produced by a constant opposition between Ursula's speech and that of other characters. This phenomenon appears to contradict Ursula's avowed repugnance to writing. However, we must concede that dialogue favors a dramatic recounting of the past and allows her to "stage" the entire series of interactions to her advantage. It is therefore fitting that this device be used extensively.

The author blends interjections, complaints, statements, questions and direct addresses in order to dramatize the events and gain the reader's support. The tension expressed through the first notebook stems from several factors: a somewhat mischievous nature (several examples are given to confirm this tendency which she calls "niñerías"), a stubborn resolution to become a nun in spite of the mother's objections (again in this case, several instances are produced to illustrate the nature of the conflict), and finally a tension between mischief and holiness (a feature present in the entire text). Dialogue becomes the preferred form of expression because it enables the author to mold consciously the manner in which she chooses to

express herself to the reader. At the same time, dialogue inverts the traditional hierarchy, thus transforming absence into presence and silence into the expression.

After a rather emotionally charged and linguistically rich first notebook, the author builds the second one with a particular emphasis on introspection and dialogue. Although several "burlas" are narrated with the aim of showing that she was indeed "mala, traviesa y callejona," the constant allusion to the body, and the introduction of a dream sequence suggest that a delicate sexual awakening is taking place. This second notebook is particularly interesting because it provides the reader with a more complex psychological make up of the young girl. The expression of the body is reflected through dialogue in two distinctive manners: first, through a seduction scene played out in disguise; secondly, through a sustained opposition between the mother's will to see her daughter married and the child's irresistible interest for the life inside the convent. The interactions will permit the child to discern at an early age the opposition between mischief and holiness.

Soon after this awakening, language and disguise become vehicles for a seduction scene played out on a man. The behavior is motivated by a desire to avenge a community of abused women. On the one hand, deceiving the man may be seen as just another form of mischief born out of Ursula's irresistible playfulness; on the other hand, it may represent an act of subversion. Having listened to a conversation between her mother and a friend (a linguistic exchange which has a profound effect on the child), Ursula reveals that the two adults talked about a woman who was "engañada, burlada por hombres." In a sudden act of "prise de conscience," she internalizes a desire for vengeance, reinforced by a profound dislike for men and expressed by a wish to fool them just as they have fooled women. Ursula claims the authority for avenging women on the conviction that all the other female voices are encapsulated in her own consciousness: "y con ansias deseaba poder ser yo todas las mujeres para esta vengansa" (113). Furthermore, she will create and act out a different or alternative script or discourse with the intent to deconstruct the male model. The nun will complete her intention by combining will and wit in one amusing episode, while at the same time commending her efforts to God: "hise la intención de no perder ocasión que no ejecutase engañar a cuantos pudiese mi habilidad . . . como hiciese a Dios en el estado presente servicio muy bueno" (114). She executes her plan in the most convincing manner. The reader is given a few general statements about the nature of the initial contact, "él estaba tan fervoso que su aliento llegaba a mi cara como un fuego," but not provided with the entire exchange of words.

The victory is announced as a result of Ursula's command of language and her art of deceit. More importantly, it represents the imposition of a female model that erases the male text and restores women's dignity: "te [he] engañado, tontaso; tan mal animal que de mí se dejó engañado" (115). Ursula does away with the patriarchal authority previously established by the male script and wishes to assess her own identity and voice. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar address the issue of the female representation in male texts in the following terms:

They attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of self that is, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer. (48)

Ursula Suárez has overcome "the anxiety of authorship" and replaced the existing narrative with a model of her own in which she assumes the role of an active and resisting agent against men's attempt to seduce and deceive women. The scheme has been well thought out and completed with a perfect command of language and discourse. She calls the attention of the reader to the skills involved in the duplicity, as well as to the pleasure she derives from listening to the man retell the adventure: "estuvo tan necio que contó el cuento, haciendo espantos de lo bien que yo le había hablado . . . no era posible que yo fuese, que si no había otra grande" (115). The prediction enunciated by the man--"esta niña ha de ser santa o gran mala"--seems to echo the traditional categories of the female figure in literature "angel" and "monster" posited by Gilbert and Gubar. The success of the undertaking, so well orchestrated through her use of spoken language at such an early age, will have a direct consequence on the process of writing the *Relación*. Ursula has internalized a discourse in which dialogue helps to deconstruct the pre-established authority and claim an alternative, subversive female inscription. The woman autobiographer is aware of the existence of the male model and the impositions his text places on her process of writing. Smith points out that:

her self-representation reveals both contextual and textual forces of signification. Thus the autobiographer confronts personally her culture's stories of male and female desire, insinuating the lines of her story through the lines of the patriarchal story that has been autobiography. (19)

By choosing to reflect the multiplicity of voices and discourse, Ursula Suárez takes the risk of transforming the narrative into chaos. Dialogue demands a constant flow of voices which can easily destroy or disseminate the initial narrative voice. A vast array of voices either blends harmoniously or else competes for the same authority in an attempt to control or stifle the dominant discourse. Ursula Suárez takes the risk and firmly establishes her desire to welcome the different and possibly divergent discourses, using dialogue as a tool to bring order, control and meaning to a series of episodes and relationships.

In the subsequent notebooks, dialogue remains an essential component of the narrative. It serves to initiate a debate between a voice that Ursula calls the "habla" and her inner self. The interaction allows the nun to expose some of the injustices she has suffered and denounce the censorship imposed upon her by a former confessor. Dialogue is featured in almost all the notebooks, whether they relate "engaños" that recall aspects of the picaresque tradition or voice a woman's quest for freedom of expression and action. At times, Ursula must make a deliberate effort to direct the narrative toward a more lofty purpose without sacrificing the pleasure of telling. The nun is, however, continuously evaluating the dichotomy between self-revelation (language) and mute obedience to ultimately rejoice in her ability to master language. Ursula will even set up a dialogue in the eighth notebook between God and herself, in which she playfully acquires the authority of the supreme being "si yo fuera Dios . . .," in order to reassess the relationship between God, human beings and the universe.

In the *Relación autobiográfica* the use of notebooks enables us to assess the evolution of Ursula's command of the narrative and to trace the relationship between dialogue and the quest for control and authority. Dialogue represents the basic fabric of the text. Ursula's decision to use dialogue responds to both an aesthetic and a polemical choice. It is above all a commitment to disclose the episodes and conflicts of her life in a deliberate manner. The constant interaction and exchange of voices remain regulated by a dominant authorial presence that sustains the control of the narrative. The reader is invited to welcome and perhaps approve the construction of a text born of a female consciousness. Ursula believes in the power of language and trusts its effectiveness as she guides the flow of the narrative. The *Relación* ultimately calls for a celebration of the word and a freedom of composition of a woman's spiritual autobiography dictated by a female voice. Its expression is genuine, playful, serious, and uncompromising: a veritable tour de force.

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# FERRAL OF LA CONDITION HUMAINE: THE DISSOLUTION OF THE KARMIC CYCLE OF INDIVIDUALISM

*Nina S. Tucci*

The development of neo-Oriental religious movements in recent history have popularized terms such as karma, dharma, cosmic consciousness, enlightenment etc. However, various aspects of Oriental spirituality have fascinated French intellectuals (and Western intellectuals in general) since the early nineteenth century (Cox 9). It was not until after World War I, however, that they seriously looked to the Orient for alternate modes of thought. Yet, before broaching the specific aspect of Malraux's orientalism indicated in the title of the present essay, an explanation of the surge of interest in Oriental thought in the post World War I period and its considerable impact on Malraux is appropriate.

The upheaval of World War I had shattered all values, putting the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Occident on trial. One essay especially worthy of note which expressed the disquiet of the times was Paul Valéry's "La Crise de l'esprit" in which the author deplored the inability of Western knowledge, be it religious, scientific or philosophical, to define the nature of man and his place in the universe, thereby giving a meaning to human existence. He asks the poignant question: "... intellect européen, que vais-je devenir?" (993). Spengler, in the *Decline of the West*, which was to have such an impact on the post-war intellectuals, predicted the waning of European civilization. Most importantly, however, Occidental man had lost the notion of the divine principle, God. The Nietzschean phrase "God is dead" tolled the knell of Christianity. Marcel Arland sums it up: "Toutes questions se ramènent à un problème unique, celui de Dieu, . . . Dieu, l'éternel tourment des hommes, soit qu'ils s'attachent à le créer ou à le détruire . . . [et] ce n'est pas en quelques années que l'homme se consolera de la perte de Dieu" (157). Romain Rolland describes the demoralization of the leading intellectuals of the time in his preface to the *Dance of Siva*, a collection of essays by Ananda Coomaraswamy: "There are a number of us in Europe for whom European civilization no longer suffices -- dissatisfied children of the Spirit of the West, who feel ourselves cramped in our old abode. . . . We few look toward Asia" (377).

André Malraux, permeated by the metaphysical anguish of his time and imbued with the Nietzschean concept of a heroic life and of a humanism in which man owes nothing to the gods, set out on a quest

to find a new Reality for himself and, by extension, for Occidental man.<sup>1</sup> The Orient opened up to him a world of possibilities. Much later, Malraux was to define, in retrospect, his fascination for the Orient which indeed never waned throughout his varied career. Kommen Becirov, in an interview with the then celebrated author makes the following observation:

On trouve dans la plupart de vos livres une présence essentielle: c'est celle de l'Asie, de ses arts, de ses religions et de ses multitudes . . . Cette rencontre avec l'Asie remonte très loin dans votre vie, à l'époque de *La tentation de l'Occident*. . . Pourriez-vous nous parler de cette découverte de l'Asie qui s'est ensuite révélée tellement décisive dans votre oeuvre et dans votre destin?

Malraux answered: " Je pense que c'est assez simple. Il y avait une première donnée, c'était le sens du possible. Dans mon adolescence, . . . j'ai été fasciné par: qu'est-ce qui est possible pour l'être humain en dehors de sa propre civilisation? L'Asie m'a apporté un possible élaboré."<sup>2</sup>

The most important initial result of Malraux's intense study of Oriental texts and two trips to Indochina (1923, 1925) is *La tentation de l'Occident* (1926), an epistolary work in which the Westerner, A. D. and the Chinaman, Ling delineate two poles of thought and sensibility. Ling states that the major qualitative difference between Orient and Occident is that: The Oriental wants "to be" ("être") and the Occidental wants "to do" ("faire"). In this statment, he summarizes the gamut of the possibilities of the psyche East and West, which are contained in the opposite rhythms of the philosophical concept of Yin Yang, the most basic being the notions of permanence or the non-transitory aspect of man, and transformation, or the transitory aspect.<sup>3</sup> Ling informs us that for the Oriental, man has no intrinsic value. He strives to find in the rhythms of the universe those ideas which permit him to transcend human ties: "L'esprit oriental, . . . n'accorde aucune valeur à l'homme en lui-même: il s'ingénie à trouver dans les mouvements du monde les pensées qui lui permettent de rompre les attaches humaines" (*Tentation*, 55). He clarifies his thought even further: "L'action de notre esprit est d'éprouver lucidement notre qualité fragmentaire et de tirer de cette sensation celle de l'univers . . ." (*Tentation*, 111). Ling wants us to understand that for Oriental man, "being" is that mode of existence which minimizes the ego, the transitory part of the personality and gives priority to the Self, the non-transitory factor in man. Moreover, Oriental man, according to Ling, can become one with the rhythms of

the universe through sustained meditation: ". . . la contemplation . . . fait [monter] jusqu'à la perte de toute conscience, qui est la communion avec le principe, l'unité des rythmes ne se retrouvant qu'en lui" (*Tentation*, 161-62). This means, then, that the true Self resides in both the individual and in nature.

This metaphysical orientation is diametrically opposed to the Occidental concept of the supremacy of the individual in the order of the cosmos. The self-aggrandizement which led Occidental man to declare himself master of the universe through the dialectic of action ("to do"), as Ling points out, comes from the Greco-Christian tradition. Through the gradual exteriorization of the Self, Occidental man became synonymous with his actions and lost contact with, or denied the presence of a Supreme Being: "Vous vous confondez avec vos actions," asserts Ling (*Tentation*, 46). Deprived of a spiritual framework, alienated both from the world and from himself, the Occidental risks succumbing to the absurd. A.D. depicts the moral drain of an Occident fully aware of the twilight of individualism: "Les Européens sont las d'eux-mêmes, las de leur individualisme qui s'écroule, las de leur exaltation" (*Tentation*, 139).

Contact with the East made A.D. keenly aware that an almost exclusive concentration on the individual in the West had resulted in a loss of universal consciousness or the ability "to be." This repressed psychic possibility for "being" became available to him because it was mirrored by his polar opposite, Ling. Ling's statement could be equally applied to his Western counterpart: "Comment me trouverai-je sinon en vous regardant?" (*Tentation*, 77). In his book *Turning East*, Harvey Cox sheds light on this particular point:

Societies like individuals develop some traits at the expense of others. But the repressed elements never simply die. They lurk there in the psyche seeking some means of expression. Consequently, every people harbors a fretful fascination for its polar opposite, its "shadow" self. As the Yin of the Western Yang, its power to fascinate the Western mind is infinite. (9)

In addition to the delineation of the philosophical differences between two cultures, the treatment of the East as Western man's "shadow," as Cox points out, also gives added dimension to the Nietzschean cry that "God is dead." The turn East is the logical outcome of the death of God because both on the individual and cultural levels, the Western Yang ("to do") had exhausted all possibilities of healing the West's metaphysical wounds. (*Turning East*, 102).

In *La tentation de l'Occident* Malraux initiated an intellectual

dialogue with the Orient. However, intellectual awareness only constitutes the first step in the quest for a new Man. Emotional assimilation of psychic content requires that one submit to a process of initiation. Western man, then, has no alternative but to take upon himself the responsibility of bringing his "shadow" to consciousness and transforming it. This would mean, then, that literal Oriental concepts as they were outlined by Ling must be transformed in order to be reborn again in their Western form. Malraux felt that in investigating another civilization one should try to understand its concept of perfection ("La conception qu'on y trouve de la perfection") but not to imitate it: "Traduire en mythes la pensée des hommes essentiellement différents de nous: former de ces mythes une expérience. . . Expérience de la pensée humaine? Non: . . . Expérience de nos possibilités, de nos tendances larvaires, de tout ce qui, en nous, peut prendre forme et participer à notre vie profonde? Oui, et très étendue" ("Journal de voyage d'un philosophe" 886). His protagonist, A.D. had chosen to stand outside Western civilization to escape its familiar rhythm and this permitted him to look at it with "une curiosité désintéressée." If Western man was to find a new Reality, an objective re-evaluation of his own culture was essential, for bringing the "shadow" to light, says the noted theologian, John Dunne, amounts to "forming the self-image, an initial expression of the self, or else, the representation of the self to be realized" (144). From the optic of the Oriental-Occidental dialogue, the story of the Asiatic trilogy (*La voie royale*, *Les conquérants* and *La condition humaine*) is one of the decentralization of Western individualism. It is no longer a clear cut exchange of ideas as in *La tentation de l'Occident*, but rather a delicate absorption of Oriental-Occidental modes of thought brought to life by the heroes, each engaged in his own initiation process, each adding to the concept of an individual of wider dimension.

To illustrate an aspect of Oriental influence on André Malraux, we have chosen to discuss Ferral of *La condition humaine* and his previous incarnation, Perken of *La voie royale*. To our mind, Ferral represents the dissolution of the karmic cycle of exacerbated individualism in Malraux's fictive universe. From the Oriental perspective this reappearance of like characters from one novel to another can be explained through the Buddhist concepts of "samsara" and "karma." In Sanscrit, the word "samsara" refers to the succession of individual existences in transmigration. "Karma" means actions or deeds. Buddhist doctrine teaches that when a life ends, only the effects of the karma accumulated in its character transmigrate and thereby determine future behavior in another life. In a word, it is a man's character or his thought forms that go on, and not the man

himself. Another important aspect of rebirth is that of psychological maturation. When the youth becomes a man, that too, says Ananda Coomaraswamy "is a transmigration, a wandering, a new beginning" (144). The youth, to allude to another karmic pattern in the Asiatic trilogy, is the terrorist, Hong of *Les conquérants* who, having succumbed to the temptation of Occidental individualism, found himself straddled between two cultures. Hong's initiation into terrorism was guided by Rebecca, an anarchist. But as a neophyte emerging from the anonymity of the Oriental masses, his goals were ill-defined. The initiate's new level of consciousness did not develop past the emotional stage of destruction. The karmic impulse of his terrorist action is transmitted to and brought to fruition by Tchen, the consummate terrorist of *La condition humaine*. The furrows of Ferral's karmic substance, on the other hand, were seeded largely by the already mature, legendary adventurer of *La voie royale*, Perken. Like Perken, Ferral goes to the East to create an empire. Like Perken, Ferral's basic ethic is action through constraint. Like Perken, Ferral professes an Oriental-like disinterest in his personal biography: "Professant qu'aucun être ne s'explique par sa vie, . . . il voulait être distinct de son action--moyen de se croire supérieur à elle" (*La condition humaine* 95, 182). And when Ferral's empire begins to crumble around him, he, like Perken, turns to woman as a compensatory measure. However, the seeds of an antecedent karma, which comprise its propensities, trends, habits, inclinations etc., grow, ripen and are transformed to suit the circumstances of the new individual (Zimmer 324). Ferral is not a raw adventurer, rather an educated, sophisticated Frenchman, who, after his downfall in France, goes to Asia to recoup his losses.

Though the will to power through constraint remains the basic incentive, Ferral's professional persona unlike Perken's, is that of a European capitalist who exploits the East-West socio-political situation for his own aggrandizement. And when he avails himself of an Oriental, it is most assuredly not Perken's anonymous prostitute, but an elegant, instructed courtesan, who, if she cannot palliate his metaphysical anguish, she, at least, does not ruffle his aesthetic sensibilities. A further rehashing of the oft-told tale of Ferral's personal and professional defeat would be less fruitful at this point than more speculative reflection on Ferral's character in terms of karmic maturation and dissolution.

Karma, as previously defined, is an accumulation of thought forms that transmigrate from individual to individual. Though Ferral is a more nuanced and refined version of Perken, he does not undergo a qualitative metaphysical change of perception. From the angle of karma, there can be at least two possible readings for this: first, the

individual can be repeating the inherited karmic accretions unconsciously in a state of 'status quo'; second, the karmic tendency (or tendencies) has spent itself and is ripe for dissolution. The second reading is germane to our view of Ferral's presence in *La condition humaine*.

Of the final stages of karma, Heinrich Zimmer says: "... when every particle of karmic substance has been burnt out, no influx of new seeds having been permitted, there remains no longer any possibility of maturing a new experience" (257). Zimmer's statement can certainly add new dimensions to the recurrent critical remark that Ferral is the last representative of an exacerbated individualism ("... son besoin illimité d'être préféré...") in Malraux's novels. Ferral, it seems, went East to revalidate himself through obsolete Western values, at least within the context of Malraux's universe. In his last encounter with Gisors, he makes his position clear on 1) the Western value of action: "l'acte, l'acte seul justifie la vie et satisfait l'homme blanc... Un homme est la somme de ses actes, de ce qu'il a fait, de ce qu'il peut faire. Rien d'autre". 2) the nature of intelligence: [L'Intelligence c'est] "la possession des moyens de contraindre les choses ou les hommes." 3) the arrogance of white supremacy: "Rouges ou bleus... les coolies n'en seront pas moins coolies; à moins qu'ils n'en soient morts." 4) woman; "... l'homme peut et doit nier la femme" (*La condition humaine* 183-85).

This last remark comes in the wake of a humiliating experience meted out by Valérie, not an Oriental prostitute, rather his social, professional and personal equal: Ferral "sentait en elle un orgueil semblable au sien" (*La condition humaine* 95). And in the interest of our suggestion of a waning karmic pattern, it would be worthwhile to dwell a moment on the importance of eroticism as a link between man and his interpretation of Reality. A.D. had already defined eroticism in *La tentation de l'Occident*: "être soi-même et l'autre; éprouver ses sensations propres et imaginer celles du partenaire... Tout le jeu érotique est là" (*Tentation* 102, *author's italics*). This imaginative confusion of "he" and "she" which is an integral part of Occidental eroticism also belongs to many Oriental rites where initiation into higher states of being are achieved through sexual union.<sup>4</sup> For the Oriental, woman's irresponsibility is simply part of the cosmic plan over which she has no control. His point of departure is the transcendental where human will plays no part. Perken's experiment to authenticate the Self through eroticism fails because he was unable to successfully fuse constraint (Occidental will) and Oriental detachment. Oriental detachment remains a surface pose as Perken seeks to humiliate woman by alienating her freedom while retaining his own. This cerebral concept of love does not assuage

Perken's metaphysical anguish, and he remains imprisoned in his own individuality: "Jamais, jamais, il ne connaîtrait les sensations de cette femme, jamais il ne trouverait dans cette frénésie qui le secouait autre chose que la pire des séparations. On ne possède que ce qu'on aime" (*La voie royale* 158). Ferral and Valérie's relationship is at cross purposes in a similar manner: "Ferral ne devinait pas . . . qu'elle était sa maîtresse pour qu'il finît par l'aimer. [Valérie] ignorait . . . que la nature de Ferral, et son combat présent, l'enfermaient dans l'érotisme, non dans l'amour" (*La condition humaine* 95).

The Ferral-Valérie couple heralds the final demise of eroticism as a means of transcending the human condition, for constraint between equals or otherwise is divisive and is the antithesis of transcendence. Ferral recognizes once and for all the absurdity of negating one's partner so as to be both "he" and "she": "C'est idiot; elle se sent en fonction de son sexe comme moi en fonction du mien, ni plus ni moins" (*La condition humaine* 99). Indeed, Ferral epitomizes the ultimate distorted phase of Perken's legacy of eroticism as a bridge to Reality: "L'érotisme . . . c'était le cauchemar" (*La condition humaine* 181).

There is another aspect to be considered when speaking of inherited karmic tendencies. The composite deeds of an individual are not passed on in their entirety from one lifetime to another. The gains of the soul cohabit with old perceptions and meander in and out of subsequent existences. Malraux was obviously influenced by the Oriental concepts of Karma and Samsara for in the postscript to *Les conquérants*, he had said: "C'est chez l'héritier que se produit la métamorphose d'où naît la vie" (232). Yet, in substituting the word metamorphosis for transmigration he imposes his own interpretation of the Oriental canon. In an interview with Tadeo Takemoto, Malraux says: "La transmigration, je la vois du dehors. Je ne me pense pas, moi, dans la transmigration. Je me pense dans la métamorphose, puisque je nous pense tous dans la métamorphose. . . . Ce qu'il y a, c'est la réincarnation universelle" ("A propos de la réincarnation" 398-99, author's italics). For example, Perken's glimpse of illumination as he neared death was carried forward and enhanced by many of the characters of the novels in varying intensity and purpose. Coexisting with this was the attitude of constraint which also wound its way through the novels, markedly evident in Perken, Claude and Garine, before surfacing in its integral strength in Ferral.

Zimmer explains this dual procedure: "The process of life itself consumes the karmic substance, burning it up like fuel, but at the same time attracts fresh material to the burning center of vital

operation" (249). What relevancy might this have for the characters that people Malraux's universe? Simply that they crossed over to the East to reclaim the introverted tendency of the mind which is the psychic heritage of all men, thereby creating a balance between the inner man and what he "is" and the outer man and what he "does." On one level, Ling called it Yin Yang. C.G. Jung, the twentieth century Swiss psychologist called it balancing the tension of the opposites. In each path, there was the burning of the old and the integration of the new. It was a gradual and an uneven process. Yet, there comes a point in the evolutionary process when life circumstances no longer support an outmoded form of behavior. Old karmic material is primed for dissolution. Ferral's value code as delineated in his conversation with Gisors is untenable in light of the new concept of man that is emerging in the novels. Another way to explain Ferral's psychological and spiritual frustration is through the archetype of death and rebirth. It is counter-productive to descend into one's being to uphold the past. This leads to regression, even psychic paralysis. Ferral never tasted that moment of self-possession, of liberation from his finite condition, (transitory as it was) experienced by many of the other characters. Instead, the immense energy expended to sustain an obsolete strand of Western man's consciousness exhausted him. He sought refuge in sleep: "Allons dormir. . . . Le sommeil e'était la paix. . . . Dormir, c'est la seule chose que j'ai toujours souhaitée, au fond, depuis tant d'années. . ." (*La condition humaine*, 187).

And it is fitting that the thread of extreme individualism, woven into the fabric of the novels and ultimately portrayed by Ferral should be cut by the individual whom we consider to be the shaman of the Asiatic trilogy, Gisors. Gisors' expanded human awareness and considerable knowledge of human nature makes it impossible for him to further authorize the severe limitations of Ferral's egocentric concerns. In the last conversation between the two men, Gisors decides to no longer sanction Ferral's ideas: ". . . Gisors était résolu à ne plus jouer le justificateur" (*La condition humaine*, 185). Ferral's withdrawal to the East and return to the West was a unilateral move. His removal from the scene is more than defeat. It is the dissolution of a karmic cycle, a mode of being in the Asiatic trilogy, indeed in the novels of André Malraux.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Clara Malraux describes the profound unrest of her generation and the effect it had on her husband and herself: "Jamais nous n'avions eu autant besoin de Dieu qu'après cette guerre dont aucun Walhalla n'avait accueilli les héros.... Dans ce vide des valeurs, chacun acquérait une nouvelle importance. Nous réaliser selon nous-mêmes devenait l'unique mission que nous voulions assumer: "Fais de toi le plus irremplaçable des êtres," nous disait l'un; l'autre n'allait pas tarder à nous parler de "morale ouverte." Seuls comptaient pour nous les héros, les artistes et les saints." *Nos vingt ans*, vol. II of *Le bruit de nos pas*. (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1963) 60-64.

<sup>2</sup>"Consolation ou apaisement, je ne crois pas" (19). Interview on Yugoslavian Radio-Television which also appeared in the weekly Belgrade newspaper, *Nin*, 5 May, 1969.

<sup>3</sup>"Le monde," says Ling, "est le résultat de l'opposition de deux rythmes qui pénètrent toutes les choses existantes. Leur équilibre absolu serait le néant; toute création vient de sa rupture. Ces deux rythmes n'ont de réalité que dans la mesure où ils servent à exprimer humainement l'opposition, depuis celle du masculin et du féminin, jusqu'à celle des idées de permanence et de transformation." André Malraux, *La tentation de l'Occident*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1926) 55. All further references will be included in the text.

<sup>4</sup>A pertinent example would be the tantric view of love which states that the way of enlightenment or realization is not achieved only "through world negation and asceticism but also through the profound experiences of human love and sensual bliss" (Ross 45).

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# LA MUJER Y LA TRAMPA DEL ESPACIO ENAJENADO; LA TRAMPA DE MYRNA CASAS

*Barbara Guthrie Trovato*

Con Myrna Casas (1934, San Juan), se destaca en el teatro puertorriqueño la presencia de mujeres perceptivas, inteligentes, de gran estabilidad y fuerza interior. *La trampa* (estrenada en 1964) será la culminación del arte de esta dramaturga. Tal como sus obras anteriores--*Cristal roto en el tiempo* (1960), *Absurdos en soledad* (1963), *Eugenia Victoria Herrera* (1963)--*La trampa* ofrece al público unos personajes femeninos que resultan unidades semióticas de gran diversidad connotativa. Desde múltiples perspectivas, *La trampa* explora, deconstruye y juega con los papeles que le han sido tradicionalmente válidos a la mujer puertorriqueña. Las técnicas absurdistas empleadas sirven para exponer las connotaciones a las cuales puede que el público esté ciego; y la naturaleza espacial del teatro del absurdo, o sea, el hecho de que no se puede asimilar lo comunicado hasta percibir la última imagen presentada, hace que la comprensión final sea asombrosamente inmediata para una época en la que ya no se confía en las palabras. Para instrumentar tal empresa, *La trampa* acude a un recurso destacado en el medio multidimensional del teatro: el arreglo espacial.

Partiendo de la temática absurdista, *La trampa* presenta al ser humano enajenado en el ambiente isleño de postguerras y postindustrialización. El arreglo espacial refleja la soledad absoluta que padece y, por lo tanto, es instrumental al proceso de comunicación entre escenario y público. Minuciosamente desarrollado, este arreglo espacial se basa en dos encierros--el de la casa y el de afuera--cuya relación recuerda las cajas chinas de los cuentos borgianos. El espacio de adentro se caracteriza por la seguridad aplastante, con tal de que no se piense. El de afuera parece una extensión del enajenamiento humano dentro de la casa, con tal de que no lleve. Ambos espacios se definen por el arreglo y la función de los componentes mínimos del espacio de la casa en que se esconden los personajes del drama. Aunque no es posible determinar con exactitud si los personajes han escogido tales encierros o si se los han impuesto otros, es aparente que todos han terminado por aceptarlos y, además, por mantenerlos para lo que ellos consideran, aunque no conscientemente, su propia protección.

Uno de los personajes encerrados es la abuela, que nunca se presenta en el escenario. Esta queda secuestrada en el cuarto de

atrás, quizás en contra de su voluntad, porque escapa de vez en cuando, pero más probablemente con su consentimiento, consciente o no, puesto que no escapa a menudo, tan sólo cuando Papito la incita a hacerlo. Las connotaciones semióticas comunicadas por el signo de esta abuela encerrada e invisible son múltiples. Todas subrayan el enajenamiento existencial generalmente reflejado en las obras casianas.

Primero, aunque no hay en *La trampa* ningún indicio de la raza de la abuela, la situación general y las reacciones y palabras de Nena cuando Juan desea conocer a la abuela parodian las tramas, sean poéticas o dramáticas, creadas por autores puertorriqueños como Fortunato Vizcarrondo y Francisco Arriví. En éstas, se esconde a la abuela con sangre africana para que la nieta pase por europea y se case bien. Así, una connotación posible de la abuela como unidad semiótica es la autonegación penetrante que puede caracterizar a un pueblo largamente colonizado por otro.

A la vez, la acción de salir al jardín, el cual se puede interpretar como el jardín edénico perdido antaño por la autonomía femenina, le asigna un aspecto sexual al personaje. Esta connotación se relaciona íntimamente con la anterior, la posibilidad de que la abuela sugiera la herencia africana largamente negada, puesto que la literatura puertorriqueña incluye una tradición establecida de representar a la mujer de color como la encarnación de una sensualidad vital. En *La trampa*, la abuela encerrada será la sexualidad convencionalmente reprimida por la mujer, inculcada en la necesidad de vencer la Eva que lleva dentro tan sólo por haber nacido mujer. Se ve que las mujeres, quienes deben ser marianas según su papel tradicional, son las que se encargan de captar y re-encarcelar a la abuela (expresión sexual) cuando ésta se les escapa. Sin embargo, es notable que, a pesar de tal actividad conformista, tanto Nena como Mamá sean personajes de mando. Es cómicamente obvio que no tienen que seguir ninguna convención que no les convenga en un escenario que ellas mismas controlan. Subrayada por las técnicas vanguardistas, que necesariamente prohíben el acercamiento afectivo del público a los personajes, y también por la inversión aparente de los papeles tradicionales, que rompe el proceso habitual de inferir significado, esta dramatización de las repercusiones genesianas funciona para desenmascarar la perpetuación ingenua de la tradición mariana. O sea, el choque con las expectativas culturales, hecho cómico por la representación, permite que el público se dé cuenta de las connotaciones usualmente camufladas por la convivencia cotidiana. A la vez que expone el poder, sutil pero sumamente efectivo, inherente en el papel mariano,<sup>1</sup> sugiere que ya no se puede seguir culpando del encierro femenino tan sólo al viejo tapiz de los mitos sociales.

Según Papito y Juan, la lluvia es el elemento que le corta a la abuela el escape la única vez que ésta sale al jardín durante la representación. Puesto que se puede asociar este jardín con el paraíso edémico y, por lo tanto, con la expresión sexual de la mujer, en el contexto simbólico, es posible que una de las connotaciones del signo de la lluvia sea una asociación con las aguas maternas del nacimiento. Será una representación nada imposible dada la transformabilidad de la lluvia como unidad semiótica en la obra. Tradicionalmente, la procreación entrega a la mujer al encierro espacial (pacíficamente abrazado) del hogar. Por lo tanto, la interpretación de la lluvia por parte de los varones Papito y Juan como agente de encierro cabe dentro de un determinado marco convencional. Sin embargo, la literatura puertorriqueña de las décadas recientes presenta la potencia procreadora desde unas perspectivas no contrarias pero sí distintas. Una de ellas la celebra como fuente asombrosamente poderosa en asociación con las aguas mitológicas de la creación. Tal parece hacer esta misma obra de Casas. Al fin y al cabo, es Nena, la nueva generación de mujeres puertorriqueñas, engendrada por la abuela encerrada e invisible, la que rechaza tanto los estereotipos tradicionales como las paralizantes inseguridades existenciales; se lanza a la lluvia-vida para renacer de su propia potencia procreadora.

Ultimo comentario en cuanto a la abuela: por su papel de engendrar una nueva estirpe de puertorriqueños, existe un paralelo destacado entre esta mujer y la figura de doña Gabriela de *La carreta* (1952) de René Marqués. La diferencia se encuentra en la ideología trazada por las parejas antecesora-sucesora. La Nena liberada al final de *La trampa* es producto de la enajenada clase burguesa muy crecida por la industrialización de Puerto Rico; es una mujer que se hace existencialmente auténtica por aceptar el presente como realidad imborrable que ella puede superar por atreverse a vivir plenamente en medio de los cambios. Al contrario, la Juanita que sustituye a doña Gabriela en *La carreta* es producto del sistema patriarcal latino que anhela recobrar una época efectivamente anulada por la invasión nortea de 1898. La orientación de *La trampa* se dirige hacia adelante en el hecho de que las mujeres se definen a sí mismas en términos que posibilitan, existencialmente, a muchos puertorriqueños contemporáneos; la de *La carreta* se dirige hacia atrás ya que sus mujeres siguen idealizando un pasado no sólo irrecuperable sino opresivo para la mayoría de los isleños.

Las connotaciones comunicadas por el signo de la abuela encerrada en el cuarto de atrás son múltiples, todas comunicadas simultáneamente. Además de las connotaciones freudianas de la subconsciencia reprimida que les resultan especialmente sugerentes a

las mujeres, se evocan inferencias de implicación cultural para todo el pueblo puertorriqueño. Los espacios restantes del drama seguirán el desarrollo temático dentro del mismo marco.

Tal como el encierro en que se encuentra la abuela, el encareamiento de Tití figura en el escenario. Contra su voluntad, ésta se limita al piso de arriba, y, como la abuela, no aparece nunca en el escenario. Se concluye que está loca por la asociación familiar con los dos hermanos que murieron de sed en el manicomio. El fallecimiento por la sed indicará la falta de la lluvia-vida negada en el encierro del manicomio (réplica espacial que refleja los encierros de la casa), y le inspira a Tití a dedicar sus millones a comprarle fuentes para llevar agua al manicomio, acción aparentemente fútil que no obstante la conecta definitivamente con el símbolo del agua (vida) dentro del marco de la obra. Otra sugerencia de su "locura" serán los horribles gritos y carcajadas con que viola el espacio de la casa desde arriba. Su encierro, al estilo de *Jane Eyre* representa, en términos freudianos, lo reprimido que resurge. A la vez que sugiere la sexualidad negada, será, más ampliamente, el impulso de escapar del enajenamiento impuesto por la condición humana contemporánea. Puesto que originalmente se había fugado con un hombre--y, según Nena, "Eso no se hace . . . en esta familia" (20) --, su locura consistirá en nada más que el valor personal de haber buscado el amor y la comunicación. Este deseo latente de liberarse del estancamiento diario, aunque ella nunca más intenta realizarlo, cabe bien con el refrán popular que refiere a la visión penetrante de los locos cuyos sentidos no les han sido entorpecidos por las convenciones sociales. Ella sí se da cuenta de lo que hay que hacer para vivir aunque lo deja para que Nena, también sucesora espiritual suya, lo lleve a cabo.

Otro encierro dentro del espacio de la casa es el de Papito. Tal vez, como a la abuela, le fuera impuesto originalmente--Nena a Mamá: "Y tú le pusiste ahí"--o tal vez lo escogiera Papito mismo--Mamá a Nena: "Yo no. Se fue por su gusto" (47). De todos modos, es evidente que ahora, en el presente ficticio del drama, él acepta la lata de aluminio en el sótano de muy buenas ganas.

Este encierro de la lata también es el espacio de Juan. Cuando el joven entra en la familia por el compromiso con Nena, Papito se lo ofrece, y Juan lo adopta como suyo. Aunque parecen compartir el mismo espacio físico, la incomunicación entre los dos hombres allí abajo es tan absoluta como la que se mantiene en los otros encierros; se ve, por ejemplo, al final de la obra, cuando Juan insiste en que Papito está muerto, sólo para verlo salir cantando "Feliz Cumpleaños"

encerrarse en la lata. Sin embargo, hay que tener presente la reacción inmediata de madre e hija (las supuestas autoras de los otros encierros). Juntas, ellas cierran la trampa y se ríen a carcajadas como si el hecho fuera la culminación de un plan desarrollado minuciosamente. Se piensa inmediatamente en una exageración de la mujer tradicional, supuestamente inerte e imposibilitada, que se dedica al cultivo fanático de todo lo que atraiga a los hombres para poder captarse uno que los cuide a ella y a los suyos: Mamá a Juan: "De ahora en adelante usted se hará cargo de esta familia" (34). En efecto, Papito se disculpa por no escapar explicándole a Juan que no vale intentarlo precisamente porque las mujeres "[e]stán en todas partes" (56).

La trampa, con su lata adentro, es el encierro más destacado del escenario. Es el que le da título a la obra. Además, como signo, se queda fuera de lo esperado, más asombroso que el cuarto de atrás, el piso de arriba, el cuarto de Nena, la nevera de Mamá o el closet de Los Otros. El choque con lo esperado hace que se enfoque la atención en ella. Así que, la trampa sirve de sustitución metonímica en el escenario. Delinea todos los encierros espaciales que se ofrecen en la representación simultáneamente y le comunica al público, también simultáneamente, los varios niveles connotativos, todos de impacto más fuerte que cualquier significado denotativo a solas. El signo de la trampa también resume el mensaje del prólogo breve cuyo significado le debe venir al público, de golpe, al telón final: "En la trampa, / todos han de caer. / En la trampa, / todos han de ser libres para salir. / En la trampa, / pocos podrán decidir." El hecho de que los espectadores conciben este mensaje espacialmente enfatiza la importancia del arreglo espacial como unidad semiótica.

A pesar de la apariencia de una mayor autonomía, Nena y Mamá también mantienen espacios particulares. El de Nena es un cuarto que nunca presenciamos en el escenario (véase la pág. 121). El de Mamá es la nevera a que se retira en el segundo acto. Ambos encierros parecen ser autoimpuestos, dado que nadie en el escenario tiene más autoridad que ellas. Sin embargo, aunque no aparece ningún personaje que se los imponga, el público se da cuenta de que, en gran parte, el agente culpable será la sociedad. Ni Nena ni Mamá están conscientes de su colaboración con su victimización social durante la mayor parte de la representación. Las dos se engañan por las ilusiones de seguridad que les son reforzadas por la costumbre sancionada por la aprobación social.

El espacio final es el del closet dentro del cual Juan y Nena guardan a Los Otros. Connotativamente, el closet funciona como símbolo popular de lo no aceptado socialmente. Como los otros personajes del drama, Los Otros tampoco tienen nombre que los

individualice, pero, por su mismo papel de amantes, tienen aún menos probabilidad de abandonar su encierro. Se puede conjeturar que es su posición social marginalizada la que deja que Los Otros oigan el llanto-rixa que no acude a los oídos de los otros personajes. Sin embargo, esta misma posición que los privilegia los condena. A pesar de su contacto más inmediato con algo fuera del estancamiento diario, ambos se mantienen al extremo objetivizado de la semiosis escénica, estereotipos icónicos de Juan, el burgués por excelencia. En todo, recuerdan el prólogo profético: "En la trampa, / todos han de ser libres para salir. / En la trampa, / pocos podrán decidir."

Como signo, el closet es tan significativo como el encierro de la trampa. Funciona en paralelo con el espacio general de la casa del matrimonio y así ayuda a delimitarlo para el público que se ve encargado de interpretar el conjunto después del telón final.

Una de las semejanzas entre el closet y la casa es la coincidencia exacta en el patrón de salir que los habitantes de ambos espacios sostienen. Los Otros nunca abandonan el closet a la vez--o El Otro o La Otra puede salir. Los dos esposos tampoco abandonan la casa juntos; Juan o Nena siempre se quedan atrás. Además, si El Otro está fuera del closet, debe regresar antes de que el cónyuge que está fuera de la casa vuelva, e igual para La Otra y Nena. Mientras la llegada de uno de los esposos dicta el encierro de Los Otros en el closet, lo que les controla el regreso a la casa a los esposos es la amenaza de la lluvia; o Juan o Nena, él que esté afuera, debe regresar antes de que llueva. Es notable también que el diálogo entablado sea tan semejante, tan absurdo, entre las distintas parejas; la misma "palabrería hueca" (93) existe entre Juan y La Otra o Nena y El Otro como entre Juan y Nena.

Otra semejanza entre el espacio del closet y el de la casa es el arreglo físico de los dos; ambos espacios contienen encierros individuales que no se comunican entre sí. Dentro del closet, El Otro siempre tiene calor (representativo de la supuesta pasión machista) mientras que La Otra tiene frío (representativo de la supuesta frigidez mariana). Esta discrepancia indisoluble indica que Los Otros se quedan tan enajenados el uno del otro como lo están Papito y Juan en la lata, envueltos en su propio encierro aunque comparten la misma zona física. Dentro del marco de la casa, Juan y Nena también se separan al encerrarse, Juan en la lata y Nena en su cuarto. La separación refleja la falta absoluta de cualquier forma de comunicación verdadera.

En cuanto a lo de afuera, para los del closet, "afuera" se representa por el espacio cerrado de la casa. Para los esposos, no se sabe exactamente. Sin embargo, los paralelos en el patrón de salir, en la jerigonza dialógica y en el arreglo físico hacen que la situación de

Los Otros parezca una réplica diminuta de la de los esposos. Así, se implica que lo de afuera del closet, lo que sí presenciarnos, no es más que una réplica espacial diminuta de lo de afuera de la casa. Por lo tanto, el afuera de Juan y Nena será otro encierro que tendrá otro afuera que será otro encierro que tendrá otro afuera en una serie hipotéticamente sin fin. Sólo la lluvia ofrece una ruptura en el patrón: Juan a Nena: "Si llueve no podrás volver" (123).

Partiendo de la filosofía sartreana, de gran influencia en la temática absurdistas, el encerrarse en los espacios de *La trampa* representará el intento desesperado, aunque irónico, de los personajes por escaparse de la angustia de la soledad. Según Sartre, el ser humano, por su misma naturaleza, desea y necesita compartirse con otro y sufre horriblemente cuando no le es posible (Owens 342).

Que no les es posible a los personajes de *La trampa* es definitivo. Se presencia la falta absoluta de cualquier forma de comunicación por la mutilación semiótica de los cinco sentidos humanos. Esta mutilación representa la frustración del medio más concreto por el cual el ser humano puede establecer contacto con su universo. El padre de Juan tiene trece fábricas de ojos para los sordos que Mamá confunde con oídos para los mudos (32); Papito no respira (no huele) dentro de la lata; La Otra dice del closet que "ahí adentro no se oye nada," y Juan le responde: "Al igual que aquí afuera" (112); Nena acusa a Juan de estar cada día más sordo, a lo cual Juan le contesta "Peor es estar ciego" (115). Esta mutilación es sólo parte de la incomunicación. También el trance del aburrimiento ensimismado les es importantísimo a los personajes, ocupados por esconderse el uno del otro. En efecto, las referencias explícitas al aburrimiento en el texto son numerosas (50, 78, 80, 84, 96, 106, 109, 114, 118, 120). Por fin, los personajes se enajenan también por el lenguaje. Es un lenguaje hecho absurdo por el empleo del clisé, la interpretación literal o sencillamente errónea, la asociación libre, la incorporación connotativa de refranes y creencias populares, la repetición, la deformación semántica de las convenciones sociales, lo dicho opuesto por las acciones, el razonamiento invertido, etc. En general, la falta de comunicación nutrida por los personajes de *La trampa* con una desesperación tragicómica no les permite experimentar nunca el fracaso que puede resultar de cualquier intento de acercamiento del uno al otro. Les enmascara el enajenamiento que actualmente padecen para no verse obligados a intentar abandonarlo para la responsabilidad aplastante de la vida auténtica.

Como se puede imaginar, la familia mantiene la fachada protectora a gran precio. No se puede pensar El Otro: "No pienses. Es peligroso. Puede llover, ¿sabes?" (90); no se puede escuchar a nadie que piense; --Nena: "No he dicho tonterías." / Juan: "Las dirás

y no quiero oír las" (118); y, por fin, no se puede dejar que nada que pueda provocar una crisis existencial penetre el espacio estancado y seguro de la casa--Juan: "Yo no quiero saber nada" (123). Si una crisis existencial se define por el momento en que uno se da cuenta de su situación verdadera, en que uno debe seguir negándose por la inactividad o actuar para abandonar la inautenticidad (Van Kaam 112-13), la crisis existencial de Juan y Nena les viene con el llanto-risa que oyen Los Otros. Juan opta por seguir negándose por la inactividad; propone retirarse a la lata. Al contrario, Nena se anima a desafiar su terror de la lluvia porque "[q]uizás los encuentre . . . a los que lloran y ríen" (124). Dispuesta a sufrir las consecuencias de no poder nunca más volver a la seguridad de la casa, sale a lo desconocido.

El llanto-risa, este sonido ambivalente que pertenece al mundo de fuera de la casa, les presenta a los espectadores una unidad semiótica exquisitamente tallada. Lo incógnito del signo refleja que, para los 60, este mundo ya había perdido la seguridad ilusoria del positivismo científico: ya no se podía definir y explicar todas las facetas de la realidad; ya no se sabía con tanta certeza cuál era el papel del ser humano dentro de tal realidad. Además, el contacto extenso con el Norte andaba borrando aspectos culturales antes firmemente respetados y se había perdido cualquier inminencia potencial de identidad como nación latina y autónoma. A la vez, se desarrollaba la pérdida de la fe en la autoridad bondadosa de la iglesia católica. En efecto, muchos intelectuales se sobreponían, en la literatura si no en la práctica, por dejar de lado un cielo cuya existencia ya se pasaba por alto o se negaba definitivamente. En *La trampa*, entonces, el signo del llanto-risa enfatiza el elemento monumental de todo lo incógnito de la existencia puertorriqueña de aquellos años.

A la vez que comunica lo desconocido aterrante de la vida, el llanto-risa le incita a Nena a que salga de tal existencia, a escapar la falta de vivir sostenida dentro de la casa. Ya para el segundo acto, la casa se ha reducido a un reino de autónomos en que uno puede sentirse seguro porque, en efecto, nada sucede nunca dentro de sus confines; cualquier acción escénica se anula por la repetición esforzada por personajes desesperados por que no ocurra nada que no haya acontecido antes. Así que la casa delinea un reino de la muerte-en-vida y, dentro de la casa, no se puede distinguir entre los vivos y los muertos. Mamá dice que Los Otros en el closet son cadáveres aunque acabamos de observarlos hablando y caminando; Nena dice que todos menos Mamá están muertos aunque Papito sale de su lata y conversa, y el telón cae sobre las carcajadas de Tití. Además, hay mucho juego de palabras acerca de la muerte-en-vida: Juan: "¿Y cómo respira?" / Nena: "No respira" (38); Papito: "¿No

puede hablar? Cres que dijiste que nadie había muerto" (41); Nena: "Son los vivos los que tienen la culpa . . . De ser igual que los muertos" (116); Juan: "Los muertos no ríen ni lloran" (122); Nena: "Nosotros no hemos llorado nunca" (88); Nena: "Los niños . . ." / Juan: ". . . también son muertos" (123). Por fin, basta notar que la tendencia a encerrarse aumenta con el paso del tiempo: Papito sale de la lata cada vez menos y Juan, que ni siquiera pertenece al sistema de espacios al principio, acaba por considerar la lata su refugio predilecto al final. También Mamá, que parece no tener ningún encierro particular en el primer acto, acude a la nevera en el segundo. La tendencia a encerrarse más y más representará un intento de evitar la muerte deshumanizándose, irónicamente, como si no fueran más que objetos inertes. Los objetos, por no vivir, no pueden morir jamás (Slote 27). Como dice Mamá: "No hay nada como una nevera para detener el tiempo" (126).

Al nivel semiótico, este reducirse a objetos extraña el proceso acostumbrado por el cual se suele atribuir significado a lo que se presencia, técnica característica del teatro experimental de mediados del siglo. Recuerda los propósitos brechtianos de distanciar al público del drama para que analice a los personajes en vez de identificarse con ellos. El teatro del absurdo va más allá de lo analítico. Propone que el choque haga que los espectadores experimenten ellos mismos lo absurdo de su propia realidad. Si los personajes se convierten en accesorios teatrales, si son todos estereotipos despojados de individualidad, se implica que los espectadores son iguales.

Es posible acercarse a la salida final de Nena desde varias perspectivas. Por una parte, se puede pensar que sencillamente enfatiza la ausencia de cualquier acción real en el escenario dramático por establecer definitivamente la estructura circular que suele caracterizar al teatro del absurdo: Nena sale de la casa tal como la abuela y Tití lo habían hecho antes de ella. Puesto que tanto la abuela como Tití terminaron nuevamente encerradas, se podrá esperar el fracaso final del escape intentado por Nena también. Esta repetición dramática se refuerza por la asociación de Nena con la locura de Tití por parte de los otros personajes. La última frase que Juan le dice es: "Has perdido la razón" (125), y todavía se oye a la madre comentar: "¡Qué espanto! ¡Cómo se repite la historia!" (128).

Por otra parte, hay diferencias entre las salidas frustradas de la abuela y Tití y la de Nena. Primero, la abuela sólo sale incitada por Papito y sale a un jardín que, en el primer acto, no amenaza a las apresadoras (Mamá y Nena) y que ya para el segundo acto no existe. Nena, al contrario, sale por su propia voluntad y sale a un "afuera" fértil de lluvia a que nadie más se atreve a introducirse, ni Papito que incita a la abuela y que se regocija con el atrevimiento de la hija, ni

Mamá, desesperada y furiosa por las circunstancias. En cuanto a Tití, ella sale por el amor de un hombre que "seguramente encontró otra" (22) después. Nena no sale por ningún hombre. Tal como la Nora de Ibsen, sale por sí misma, a descubrirse.<sup>2</sup> La lluvia será la abertura por la cual es posible escapar. Será la vida auténtica con la responsabilidad aplastante pero renovadora de crearse a uno y al universo.

Influida grandemente por el teatro del absurdo, la cohesión absoluta entre los componentes del drama hace que *La trampa* sea una de las obras que han convertido las técnicas revolucionarias en las bases sólidas por las cuales se puede proyectar una realidad humana interior que sería de otro modo inexpresable. Además, va más allá de la temática absurdista por atreverse no sólo a presentar el enajenamiento humano sino también a sugerir una abertura estrecha por la cual se ojea la solución a la angustia existencial del individuo de los 60. La solución ofrecida no es ni más ni menos que la repetida y urgente necesidad de confrontarse con lo absurdo de la existencia. Así que, al abandonar la casa, Nena sale de la trampa que estorba su desarrollo como ser verdadera y plenamente realizado, y se dedica a sufrir (piénsese en el llanto del signo del llanto-risa), a gozar (la risa del mismo signo) y, en fin, a vivir. Esta trampa se representa por el minucioso arreglo espacial que le comunica al público un significado más inmediato que cualquier otra expresión teatral al romper los confines de nuestra percepción cotidiana. Es así que esta obra explora, deconstruye y juega con los papeles que le han sido tradicionalmente válidos a la mujer puertorriqueña, a la vez que ofrece las acciones de Nena como indicio del camino hacia la autenticidad existencial para los enajenados dentro de la nueva sociedad. Técnica y temáticamente, *La trampa* ha sido obra radical en las letras isleñas de los 60.

*La Salle University*

#### NOTAS

<sup>1</sup>Evelyn Stevens insiste en el poder inherente en el papel femenino tradicional en su artículo "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America" en *Female and Male in Latin America: Essays*, eda. Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

<sup>2</sup>La salida a la lluvia de Nena sigue la tradición establecida por la salida de Nora en *A Doll House* de Ibsen. En efecto, la casa de los espacios de Nena recuerda, precisamente, una casa de muñecas.

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MY (M)OTHER, (MY)SELF: TEXTUAL  
MATERNITY AND SELF-PROPAGATION IN  
SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S  
*MÉMOIRES D'UNE JEUNE FILLE RANGÉE*

Mari H. O'Brien

In the past, many critics have been less than kind in their assessments of Simone de Beauvoir's *oeuvre*. As Toril Moi points out in her 1990 analysis *Feminist Theory and Simone de Beauvoir*, most of this hostile criticism, which Moi thoroughly documents in her study, faults Beauvoir for lacking femininity, reproaches her for being devoid of the maternal instinct, and disparages her writing as overly autobiographical. The end result, Moi concludes, amounts to a systematic attempt to discredit Beauvoir's right to speak in her own voice as the subject of her own discourse--a practice which has permitted her critics to avoid engaging in polemic with her ideas.

We cannot deny the centrality of the autobiographical impulse in Simone de Beauvoir's writing. Even Beauvoir's landmark work *Le deuxième sexe* can be read, as Luce Irigaray suggests, as autobiography wrapped in careful research (*Je, tu, vous* 9). Moreover, Beauvoir's autobiographical corpus comprises four substantial volumes. Yet even her autobiography proper has been denigrated. Philippe Lejeune, for example, casts doubt on *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée's* very status as autobiography, citing the lack of an explicit "pact" or "contract" between autobiographer and reader and a paucity of subjective interventions on the part of the narrator--features he considers structural requisites for reading a given text as autobiography (79-80). Similarly, Leah D. Hewitt cannot seem to overcome this need to fit the *Mémoires* into the mold of conventional autobiography.

...the work...seems to surface out of the blue for its readers....Within the *Mémoires*, she does delineate an ample social and historical context for the narrative of her youth, but the presence of the narrator remains in the shadows. (26-27)

I would argue, however, that if the narrator's explicit interventions are few, the reader still glean, albeit *implicitly*, a solid idea of Beauvoir's reality at the time of writing. In any case, it seems misguided to attempt to force the writing of a woman who flaunted convention into the parameters of conventional autobiographical form.

In perceiving an autobiographical propensity in her fiction and essays and branding that tendency as negative, perhaps critics have taken their cue from Beauvoir herself, who, in *Le deuxième sexe* (published in 1949), takes women's writing in general--and women's autobiography in particular--to task, discounting such writing as overly narcissistic, inauthentic, and thus inferior:

Le narcissisme de la femme, au lieu de l'enrichir l'appauvrit; à force de ne faire rien d'autre que se contempler elle s'anéantit...elle ne découvre pas dans ses écrits son authentique expérience....il y a...des autobiographies féminines qui sont sincères et attachantes: mais aucune ne peut se comparer aux *Confessions* [Rousseau] ou au *Souvenirs d'égotisme* [Stendhal]. Nous sommes trop préoccupées d'y voir clair pour chercher à percer par-delà cette clarté d'autres ténèbres. (632-35)

The paradox Beauvoir neglects to recognize--along with some of her critics--is that in writing an autobiography, the autobiographer cannot avoid self-contemplation and at least some degree of narcissism. Autobiography is a literary form which by its very nature demands sustained focus on self and which cannot avoid self-absorption and self-display. Moreover, in the Western tradition, autobiography has always been a site that privileges subjectivity and authority. At least in her autobiography, Beauvoir can claim the right--as can every autobiographer, male or female--to make of her life--her experience, her personality, her essence--the subject of her own discourse and to relate that experience in her own voice, according to her own lights.

The other negative assessments are, at least on the surface, less easily dispatched. Beauvoir's conscious rejection of bourgeois motherhood and all the social and intellectual limitations it represented for her is no secret. Furthermore, as Hewitt suggests, stylistically speaking Beauvoir's writing evidences a clarity and a straight forwardness more frequently associated with male writers (hence one source of the charge that she is "unfeminine"):

In her writing, de Beauvoir does strive toward a "neutral, transparent," no-nonsense style that acknowledges its indebtedness to a male discourse of logic and reason, because de Beauvoir can envision no other legitimate form of expression; there is no "feminine writing" as such. (15)

Choosing to write in male-centered, phallo(go)centric language,

however, does not necessarily preclude the expression of feminine identity and voice. In fact, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, the initial volume of Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, documents both her belief in her femininity and her personal struggle to reconcile through language--albeit androcentric--her rejection of traditional bourgeois expectations for women with her own very real maternal aspirations (suggested by the numerous maternal metaphors and references found in part I of the volume as well as the anticipation she depicts of fulfilling her "destin de femme" [*Mémoires* 77]). Reconciliation of this simultaneous desire for and renunciation of motherhood is achieved through the "gestation" and "birth" of the autobiographical self--in this case, "une jeune fille révoltée"--a textually constructed self diametrically opposed to the "jeune fille rangée" of the title. Moreover, we discover that the strategies Beauvoir employs to deconstruct the "dutiful daughter" of the title amount to nothing less than a systematic *mise en question* of patriarchal, androcentric discourse combined with an equally systematic attempt to subvert that discourse and authenticate her own voice.

*Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* is, ostensibly, an account of Beauvoir's early life (she is 21 as this first volume closes) as the obedient young bourgeoisie, bent on fulfilling filial expectations and female destiny. As the narrator looks back on and assesses her childhood, she reveals her contentment with her gender and how she, as a child, looked forward to the promise of maternal fulfillment which "female destiny" normally entailed in her socio-cultural moment:

...j'aimais ma féminité....Dans mes jeux, mes ruminations, mes projets, je ne me suis jamais changée en homme; toute mon imagination s'employait à anticiper mon destin de femme. (*Mémoires* 77; emphasis added)

Even much later, in Part IV, she recalls being decidedly satisfied with her womanhood, reiterating: "Je ne regrettais certes pas d'être une femme; j'en tirais au contraire de grandes satisfactions....Je ne reniais...pas ma féminité" (412-413). By this point, however, she is well aware that part of her female destiny--at least according to her bourgeois mother's vision--includes marriage and biological motherhood, states which, even at a young age, Beauvoir abhors as inimical to her "désirs d'indépendance" (*Mémoires* 104):

Je ne me souviens pas d'avoir ruminé les phénomènes de la grossesse et de l'accouchement, ni de les avoir intégrés à mon

avenir; j'étais réfractaire au mariage et à la maternité...  
(*Mémoires* 120)

The vicissitudes of adolescence lead her, however, to contemplate once again the possibility of submitting to the gendered imperatives of her bourgeois milieu, as the narrator reveals: "...je rêvais à ma propre existence....Je souhaitais seulement l'amour, écrire de bons livres, avoir quelques enfants" (*Mémoires* 446). Yet the reader soon learns that this vision has once again lost its attraction: "J'aperçus un jour au Luxembourg Nizan et sa femme qui poussait une voiture d'enfant, et je souhaitai vivement que cette image ne figurât pas dans mon avenir" (*Mémoires* 454). In her autobiography, Beauvoir thus problematizes motherhood as a state both desirable and necessary yet unimaginable and inappropriate, inconsistent with her aspirations. Perhaps Beauvoir comprehends implicitly what Irigaray theorizes in 1981, that "nous sommes toujours mères dès lors que nous sommes femmes. Nous mettons au monde autre chose que des enfants, nous procréons, et créons autre chose que des enfants..." (*Le corps à corps* 27), since Beauvoir's solution, at least in this volume of her autobiography, is to assume, in a sense, the persona of "mother" to the rebellious self whose contours are shaped in the pages of the text.

The wealth of maternal metaphors found in Part I of the volume strongly suggests that, as narrator, Beauvoir adopts a maternal stance relative to the developing textual self. As she recounts her initial foray into writing (at the ripe old age of eight), we learn of her sense of fulfillment in having written a story "qui me devait l'existence" (*Mémoires* 73). Books in a library are described as pure potentiality, almost as embryos in utero: "Enfouis dans le silence, masqués par la sombre monotonie des couvertures, toutes les paroles étaient là, attendant..." (*Mémoires* 73). Relating the profound joy she takes in playing teacher to her younger sister, she writes:

Constatant les progrès accomplis par ma soeur, je connaissais la joie souveraine d'avoir changé le vide en plénitude; je ne concevais pas que l'avenir pût me proposer entreprise plus haute que de façonner un être humain. (*Mémoires* 79; emphasis added)

Even when we learn of her aspirations to reject biological maternity, she does not abandon her dream of motherhood and continues to envision her future in maternal terms:

Tel était le sens de ma vocation: adulte, je reprendrais en main mon enfance et j'en ferais un chef-d'oeuvre sans faille.

Je me rêvais l'absolu fondement de moi-même... (*Mémoires* 79)

Indeed, Beauvoir the autobiographer fully comprehends the linguistic nature of her maternal undertaking:

Avoir des enfants, qui à leur tour auraient des enfants, c'était rabâcher à l'infini la même ennuyeuse ritournelle; le savant, l'artiste, l'écrivain, le penseur créaient un autre monde, lumineux et joyeux, où tout avait sa raison d'être. C'était là que je voulais passer mes jours... (*Mémoires* 196)

In her role as genetrix, she will propagate a textually constructed "offspring": the rebellious self emerging from the pages of her autobiography: "En écrivant une oeuvre nourrie de mon histoire, je me créerais moi-même à neuf..." (*Mémoires* 198).

Beauvoir's rendering of her life in this volume attests to the fact that as a writer and as a woman, she is empowered by her life experience. Such strength allows her to attend to "cette voix en moi qui sans répit chuchotait: je suis là" (*Mémoires* 112) and to substitute a linguistic maternity for a biological one in order to fulfill that very real corporeal maternal ambition--but on her own terms. As autobiographer, then, she assumes the role of "mother" to her rebellious self. Her nurturing of this *corps textuel* will involve above all seeing it through all its sobering confrontations, all its frequently painful skirmishes, with patriarchal language.

From her earliest recorded memories, Beauvoir portrays this developing self as continually questioning the validity, analyzing the exploitative potential, and exposing the duplicitous nature of patriarchal discourse. "Je m'étais toujours débattue," she notes, "contre l'oppression du langage" (*Mémoires* 266). She recognizes that the language of adults--particularly bourgeois adults, men or women--springs from a patriarchal consciousness, whose utterances have the power to hold her in thrall, as an object:

...je me sentais la proie de leurs consciences [des adultes]. Celles-ci jouaient parfois le rôle d'un aimable miroir; elles avaient aussi le pouvoir de me jeter des sorts: elles me changeaient en bête, en chose. "Comme elle a de beaux mollets, cette petite!" dit une dame qui se pencha pour me palper. (*Mémoires* 20)

When she finally acquires sufficient speech to respond to such outrages, she quickly learns to restrain her language, lest her

responses reveal her burgeoning rebelliousness and offend her mother, whom she dearly loves. She discovers not only that the language of the status quo is inadequate to express her reality, but that it is often full of traps when she does attempt to appropriate it for her own use:

Les conversations les plus innocentes recelaient des pièges; mes parents traduisaient mes propos dans leur idiome et m'imputaient des idées qui n'avaient rien de commun avec les miennes. (*Mémoires* 266)

Rebelling against this violation of her voice, refusing to be molded by the hegemonic discourse--that of the bourgeois patriarchy--she clenches her teeth against the words adults would have her speak: "Je serrai les dents; je refusai qu'on introduisît de force des mots dans ma bouche" (*Mémoires* 218). They interpret her restraint as yet another indication that she is "une jeune fille rangée," a "dutiful daughter." In the textual self engendered by the autobiographer's words, however, we recognize quite another being, one who resists discursive assimilation: "Je refusais de céder à cette force impalpable: les mots..." (*Mémoires* 19).

While Beauvoir understands that her rebellion against the dominant discourse stems in large part from her status as a non-adult, she is nonetheless acutely aware that the language of traditional bourgeois patriarchy fosters rigidly circumscribed gender roles and that by virtue of being female, she is excluded from full discursive participation. She recognizes early on, for instance, that males in her society are privileged, regardless of their intellectual prowess: "La plupart des garçons que je connaissais me semblaient disgracieux et bornés; je savais pourtant qu'ils appartenaient à une catégorie privilégiée" (*Mémoires* 168). Such privilege allows her cousin Jacques autonomy in selecting reading material while her own reading is highly censored:

Il connaissait une quantité de poètes et d'écrivains dont j'ignorais tout; avec lui entraient dans la maison les rumeurs d'un monde qui m'était fermé: comme j'aurais voulu y pénétrer!... Jacques et ses camarades lisaient les vrais livres, ils étaient au courant des vrais problèmes; ils vivaient à ciel ouvert: on me confinait dans une nursery. (*Mémoires* 169)

Moreover, Beauvoir's dialogic encounters with adults of either sex sometimes result in betrayal and humiliation. For example, the narrator describes how her father's cavalier remark on the occasion of

her first menstrual period reveals that language among women is subject to phallogocentric intrusion:

Je supportais sans trop de gêne que ma mère chuchotât avec ses amies. En revanche, quand le soir nous eûmes retrouvé mon père...il fit en plaisantant une allusion à mon état: je me consumai de honte. J'avais imaginé que la confrérie féminine dissimulait soigneusement aux hommes sa tare secrète...je me sentis à jamais déçue. (*Mémoires* 141)

In addition, her participation in the discursive universe is neither encouraged nor cultivated, as is Jacques's (and later only reluctantly sanctioned by her family's inability to provide her with a dowry). For instance, Simone's free expression in writing is suppressed when her mother and that of her best friend, Zaza, insist on reading their daughters' correspondence, resulting in self-censoring on the girls' part, thwarting their attempt to establish a female discursive space. Her dilemma is compounded by her father's repeated regrets at his daughter's misfortune in being born female but having the intellect "of a man": "Simone a le cerveau d'un homme. Simone est un homme.' Pourtant on me traitait en fille" (169) and later "Quel dommage que Simone ne soit pas un garçon; elle aurait fait Polytechnique!" (246). The lessons of her bourgeois upbringing have made her keenly aware that whereas males are provided every opportunity to define themselves in phallogocentric discourse, her self-definition must be achieved *against* the dominant code.

Beauvoir never supplants the hegemonic discourse with some *écriture féminine* of her own invention (as Hélène Cixous tries to do). Rather, Beauvoir discovers a way to exploit phallogocentric language for autobiographical self-creation. By exhaustively exposing all it contains that is alien to her, by characterizing her rebellion as a revolt against patriarchal language and its proscription against full participation by women, she engenders her own voice and identity as authentic and female.

Near the end of Part II of the *Mémoires*, that voice begins to envision and effect self-authorization and self-authentication in language: "Ma vie serait une belle histoire qui deviendrait vraie au fur et à mesure que je me la raconterais" (234). Soon after we learn that, at the age of 15, she has begun to keep a journal, a place where she can not only critique language and engage in self-questioning and self-analysis, but also where she can recognize her metamorphosis into the defiant, self-sufficient being she is becoming: "...dans mon journal je dialoguai avec moi-même...j'étais le paysage et le regard: je n'existais que par moi et pour moi" (*Mémoires* 264). Moreover, this "dialogue"

is extended into the autobiography proper; citing frequently from her journal--directly, judging by her use of quotation marks--the narrator reveals the existence of a contiguous voice: the voice of the autobiographer touches that of her youthful self, reflecting on, reacting to, interrogating its utterances. Although many autobiographers use diaries and journals as resources when constructing their autobiographies, they rarely, if at all quote those sources directly. As Beauvoir's faith in her voice grows, her confidence in citing herself increases--which she does with greater and greater frequency in Parts III and IV--validating her voice as authentic and her textual self as anything but dutiful. By citing from her *journal intime*--a form frequently favored by women writers, which Felicity Nussbaum has shown to be potentially subversive in its power to "disrupt authorized versions of experience...and endanger authorized representations of reality" (136-37)--Beauvoir goes outside the established norms for constructing an autobiographical self, further deconstructing the "jeune fille rangée" of the title, solidifying the emergence of the resolute, rebellious self incarnated in the narrator's present reality. In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, Beauvoir--working from within the hegemonic discourse, but in the persona of "mother"--disrupts and modifies the phallogocentric order--embedded in phallogocentric language--by exposing the tyranny of that language and throwing off its shackles. In so doing, she creates a self that refuses to be subordinated to--to be fashioned, to be determined by--that language. Drawing on the record of her unauthorized discourse--her *journal intime*--allowing that voice to "touch" and mingle with that of the autobiographer--she legitimizes her identity as female, her "self" as defiant rather than dutiful, and her autonomy as authority/author/subject. Never relinquishing her admiration for the logical, rational attributes of the discourse in which she writes, Beauvoir manages to escape its pitfalls and ingeniously to turn patriarchal, androcentric language to her own purposes, liberating the "dutiful daughter" from entrapment in an alien idiom.

\* \* \* \*

In Hewitt's estimation, Simone de Beauvoir has, in this first volume of her autobiography, managed both to avoid the quandaries most autobiographers face when constructing a written self and to elude the issue of gender identification:

Wary of the narcissistic potential of women's writing in general, not to mention the even greater dangers of autobiography, de Beauvoir tends to turn away from the problematic construction of the *self* in *writing* and banks instead on an intentional project that focuses on the *life* and

is legitimated through the "observation of facts"....By assuming the authoritative, authorial voice of truth, she inscribes her work in a masculine tradition in which her gender is not an issue, because the implicit goal is a "neutral" truth, independent of her sex. (20-21)

Hewitt concedes, nonetheless, that the question of textually inscribed, culturally constructed gender can be discerned "lurking in the interstices of de Beauvoir's texts" (21). With these words, Hewitt unwittingly invites the reader to follow the narrator's *implicit* textual directives for apprehending the metaphors of self which emerge from those very interstices: the defiant yet creative "mother" generating the text, and the equally defiant autobiographical self--the "jeune fille révoltée"--whose (textually inscribed) insurrection against patriarchal, phallogocentric language very clearly underscores Beauvoir's "gender choice" in spite of the perceived masculinity of her discourse or the alleged "neutrality" of her truth. Fortunately for us, Beauvoir ignored her own caveats about women's autobiography and gave us, in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, convincing proof that gynocentric space and identity are alive and well, even within the confines of androcentric language.

Wright State University

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## (RE)ESCRITURA DE LA FIGURA MATERNA EN *CENIZAS DE IZALCO* DE CLARIBEL ALEGRÍA

Rose Marie Galindo

En las obras literarias escritas dentro de los postulados de la sociedad patriarcal, frecuentemente la figura de la madre es representada de manera negativa, como una figura ausente en el texto literario, como una figura cuya subjetividad no se articula, o a veces como un modelo del cual el héroe o la heroína tienen que desidentificarse para alcanzar la madurez y la liberación personal. Como Marianne Hirsch señala en *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, aun autoras femeninas e incluso feministas reproducen en sus obras esta tendencia, en su afán por separarse de una figura que se concibe más bien como "a constraining rather than an enabling force in the girl's development, and an inadequate and disappointing object of identification" (169).

A primera vista *Cenizas de Izalco* de la escritora centroamericana Claribel Alegría también se sitúa en la línea anterior: en ella la figura materna central está muerta y es el discurso de la hija el que predomina en el texto. Al mismo tiempo, la obra parece presentar en Isabel de Rojas un modelo negativo para la hija: Isabel ha sido a los ojos de familiares y amigos la encarnación de la esposa modelo y de la madre "perfecta," intachable y abnegada, viviendo hasta el final, y sin quejarse, las infidelidades de su esposo y el tedio de la ciudad provinciana. De ese modelo negativo es que ha querido huir su hija al marcharse al extranjero a la edad de diecisiete años, en un intento de construir su vida de manera distinta a la de la madre.

Sin embargo, y como demuestro en este trabajo, *Cenizas de Izalco* viene a ser un texto que se aparta de la tendencia anterior, al ficcionalizar una figura materna que difiere significativamente de la representación literaria de la madre en la sociedad patriarcal.

La concepción de la muerte como el espacio que posibilita la palabra femenina y la afirmación de la subjetividad escondida es un tema que se encuentra presente ya en *La amortajada*, de María Luisa Bombal. La obra de Alegría retoma esta idea pero con una variante: aunque en *Cenizas de Izalco* también la figura materna central está muerta, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en *La amortajada*, en la obra de Alegría la autoconciencia que la madre tiene en vida de su problemática y de la opresión sufrida no se va con ella a la tumba, sino que es articulada y transmitida a la hija. Este acto se concretiza en el legado que la madre hace a Carmen, a la hora de la muerte, del diario del norteamericano Frank Wolff. Este documento contiene el

relato de una parte de la vida de la madre que tanto Carmen como todos los demás miembros de la familia desconocen, como es su fugaz romance con Wolff. Al mismo tiempo, el diario aporta datos todavía más importantes como son la plena conciencia que la madre tiene de la opresión a que la condenan el medio y su condición de mujer, su preocupación constante por el destino de Carmen, y, por último, la imposibilidad materna de romper definitivamente con el medio, marchándose con el amante.

Mediante la ruptura de su silencio a la hora de la muerte, la figura materna de *Cenizas de Izalco* transgrede una de las más importantes funciones que el sistema patriarcal le asigna a la madre. Como Adrienne Rich señala en *Of Woman Born*, todo sistema patriarcal espera que la madre actúe como una influencia conservadora en la vida de los hijos, transmitiéndoles los valores patriarcales: "She is, in fact, expected to prepare them to enter that system without rebelliousness or 'maladjustment' and to perpetuate it in their own adults lives" (61). Esta transgresión fundamental de la madre genera en *Cenizas de Izalco* una serie de transgresiones a distintos niveles: en primer lugar, le permite a la hija la (re)lectura de la vida de la madre y la inscripción textual de un yo materno no tradicional. En segundo lugar, la herencia materna posibilita el reconocimiento que la hija emprende de su propia vida. Por último, ese acto materno posibilita la restitución de la relación madre-hija, perdida en vida. En este sentido, la figura materna de esta obra se define no sólo como una presencia en el texto sino como una figura en oposición y desafío al sistema patriarcal.

La lectura del diario del norteamericano Frank Wolff que realiza Carmen a su regreso a Santa Ana pocos días después de la muerte de Isabel de Rojas constituye su primer encuentro con la existencia de un rostro materno hasta ese momento desconocido: "Regreso a mi dormitorio, abro la segunda gaveta de la cómoda y saco el diario de Frank. Hay cosas que todavía no entiendo. La imagen que dibuja de mamá es demasiado extraña, no he podido asimilarla" (35). Como frecuentemente ocurre en la relación madre-hija en el sistema patriarcal, Carmen se ha separado de la madre a una edad temprana tanto física como psicológicamente y los recuerdos que guarda de ella son exteriores, centrados precisamente en las funciones que definen la maternidad en la sociedad patriarcal, especialmente la maternidad de la mujer de clase media latinoamericana de los años treinta: la dedicación al esposo y a los hijos, la atención al hogar y el desempeño diligente de los deberes sociales. "Mamá ni siquiera iba al mercado, era la Cata. Después del desayuno, planear el menú con la cocinera, ver si están brillantes los pisos y los cobertores estirados . . ." (16). "Cuántos recuerdos de mamá. Vestida de negro y con mantilla para ir

a un entierro. Con su sombrerito de paja y velo para asistir a una boda" (15). El rostro materno que surge en el diario le resulta ajeno. En primer lugar, el diario de Frank le revela a Carmen una Isabel inteligente y vital, que percibe el ambiente que la rodea como rutinario y mediocre, y para quien su condición de mujer casada y con hijos no es suficiente como realización personal. Consciente de las limitaciones de su mundo provinciano y, sobre todo, de las limitaciones que el medio le impone por ser mujer, Isabel se manifiesta a través del texto de Wolff como una mujer que, entre proyectos inútiles de "crochet" y "salsas francesas" (141), se asfixia en Santa Ana y se desvive por vivir otra vida más acorde con sus posibilidades intelectuales. Para ella, su mundo se caracteriza por el encerramiento y la opresión: "Aquí tiene Usted mi mundo, Mr. Wolff: cuatro paredes lo limitan; es tan opaco y provincial como Santa Ana" (91). En el diario, la veracidad de las observaciones de Frank es corroborada por la palabra materna, que resuena a través de las páginas, crítica y amarga: "Nuestras madres nos enseñan a preparar cuatro o cinco platos exquisitos, pero nunca la cocina de todos los días. Aprendemos a conducirnos como si fuéramos hechas de vidrio, incapaces de inclinarnos a recoger un papel del suelo" (114). Y luego: "Veo a Carmen crecer aquí y me angustio pensando que va a caer en la misma red estúpida, insípida, convencional, que me atrapó a mí" (115). Al final del diario, también es la propia voz materna --desgarrada entre sus impulsos y la identidad impuesta por la sociedad patriarcal-- la que afirma su imposibilidad trágica de escapar del ambiente que la limita: "Me he preguntado una y otra vez si es sólo miedo a lo desconocido lo que siento. ¿Es que estoy atada a mi casa, a mis sirvientas, a la protección que me ofrece Alfonso?" (166).

A partir de esa lectura que desestabiliza y quiebra la imagen de la madre perfecta, abnegada y sumisa, la búsqueda del verdadero rostro materno se le plantea a Carmen como una tarea ineludible:

Después de leer el diario de Frank me siento desorientada, como si casi no la hubiese conocido. Tengo que ordenar mis memorias, precisar mejor sus rasgos, su carácter, rescatarla del caos . . . Quizás así pueda borrar esta sensación de que casi me fue desconocida . . . (4)

Es así que la hija inicia una evocación reflexiva que constituye el eje narrativo central de *Cenizas de Izalco*. Esta evocación reflexiva tiende a concentrarse en la época de juventud y madurez de su madre y se caracteriza por ser un discurso monologado en el cual el recuerdo se combina con la reflexión que en ella ha suscitado el diario de Frank. En este sentido el texto se convierte en el espacio de (re)creación y de

(re)escritura de la figura materna.

La subjetividad que surge de este proceso corrobora y ahonda la visión del diario. En sus rememoraciones la hija descubre una figura materna dividida entre un yo interior creativo y vital, que pugna por expresarse, y los roles tradicionales de esposa y madre, que el medio y la institución matrimonial patriarcal le asignan:

Vieran que raro sueño el que tuve. Iba por la calle con una gitana descalza, de falda verde y delantal rojo, que me llevaba de la mano . . . Entonces me tomó de las dos manos y me dijo en francés que no le tuviera miedo, que ella y yo éramos una.  
(95)

Reducida a la inmanencia de la vida cotidiana, la alienación y el desarraigo son las características más importantes de la vida de Isabel de Rojas: "-Es raro, Carmen- me dice mientras caminamos por una calle de Santa Ana-, a pesar de haber vivido aquí toda mi vida me siento como de paso, como si no perteneciese a este lugar" (53).

Sin embargo, a través de la evocación de la hija, Isabel de Rojas surge también como una mujer en lucha permanente por no sucumbir a la opresión del medio patriarcal. Los viajes y las lecturas son sus principales estrategias de resistencia. Es así como hechos antes inexplicados en la madre se le vuelven ahora inteligibles a la hija: el aferramiento de Isabel de Rojas a las lecturas y su amor por París, el empeño con que todas las semanas visitaba a las monjas de la Asunción para hablar en francés de historia y de literatura clásica, los frecuentes viajes a San Salvador: "Las memorias más nítidas que tengo de ella son mientras hace preparativos para escaparse: visitas a San Salvador . . . escasos viajes a Guatemala o México con el pretexto de ver a parientes que en realidad no le importan . . ." (16). Y luego:

Por las noches, mientras papá tenía la radio a todo volumen escuchando la onda corta con noticias de Nicaragua, ella se sentaba a leer, levantaba una muralla invisible que la separaba de nosotros, de papá, de la casona. Leía sus libros gota a gota, racionándolos, como un náufrago en su tabla."  
(16)

Dentro de esta misma línea de resistencia, también se ubica la relación de Isabel con Frank Wolff. De acuerdo con Annis Pratt, en las novelas que señalan la alienación de las heroínas y su encarcelamiento en las redes de la sociedad patriarcal, con frecuencia surge la figura no patriarcal que ella llama "el amante del mundo verde." Por lo general, "el amante del mundo verde" se opone a la

figura patriarcal que atrapa a la heroína y es quien la inicia hacia un renacer, más allá de las normas sociales establecidas (140). En el texto de *Alegría*, Frank Wolff parece encarnar esa figura. A diferencia del doctor Rojas--y como escritor--Frank comprende el mundo interior de Isabel de Rojas y tiene la capacidad de introducirla en el viaje imaginario que la libera de sus limitados espacios y la acerca a su autenticidad: "Hoy por la tarde, cuando me traiga el refresco, voy a llevarla en un tour por la Ile de Cite" (111). Además, en cierta forma Frank parece encarnar para ella todo lo que el mundo patriarcal y tradicional en que vive le niega por ser mujer, en especial, la autonomía y la libertad para decidir su destino: "Un hombre como usted es libre, puede darse el gusto, sentir el hormigueo de la aventura, pero una mujer . . . -levantó un hombro con tristeza" (92).

No obstante su imposibilidad de romper definitivamente con las normas patriarcales, escapando con Wolff, Isabel de Rojas mantiene hasta el fin de sus días el recuerdo de Frank como baluarte que también la separa del medio. Reflexionando sobre ese aspecto de la vida de la madre, Carmen señala:

Frank fue una muralla en su camino, nunca supo como desplazarla o demolerla. Si él no hubiese aparecido, mamá tal vez hubiera aceptado mejor esta vida, las convenciones, las esporádicas infidelidades de papá, su papel de madre y de ama de casa. Pero Frank le abrió la puerta hacia otro mundo factible. ¿Quién cerró esa puerta definitivamente? ¿Fue él o fue ella? Quienquiera que haya sido, ella nunca pudo olvidar ese vislumbre, nunca pudo amoldarse a Santa Ana después de eso. Se trocó en enigma para papá: un rompecabezas chino que él nunca pudo resolver. (141)

De esta forma, y mediante el discurso de la hija, la subjetividad materna es deconstruida y reconstruida en el texto: "Aquí, en este mismo patio, bajo la misma luz, le descubrí . . . otro rostro" (175).

Adrienne Rich observa: "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (246). En el caso de *Cenizas de Izalco*, la conexión que la madre establece con la hija, a partir de la entrega del diario, y la revelación de la subjetividad materna que de ello resulta posibilitan el cuestionamiento radical que la hija emprende de su propia vida y la articulación de su propia subjetividad. Desde el lado de la muerte, la vida de Isabel la interpela de manera silenciosa y le sirve de espejo.

En ese reconocimiento, diferentes aspectos de la vida de Carmen son enfocados bajo una luz nueva, por ejemplo, su matrimonio y su

vida en el extranjero. Ante la lectura y (re)escritura de la vida de la madre, su propia vida cobra dimensiones antes no advertidas. Lo primero que le resulta evidente es que a pesar de vivir en un medio con mayores oportunidades para desarrollarse intelectualmente, como es Washington, su alienación es peor que la vivida por Isabel. Rodeada de aparatos domésticos y sin ningún apoyo femenino, su vida gira alrededor del mundo logocéntrico de su marido:

Washington es más grande que Santa Ana. Hay teatro, parques, museos, pero pensándolo bien mi vida es parecida a la de mamá y quizá peor. No tengo hermanas, ni siquiera una amiga íntima con quien desahogarme. Todos los días hacer las camas, pasar la aspiradora, lavar los platos, cocinar." (26)

En otras palabras, Carmen adquiere la conciencia de que no es el lugar lo que determina sus limitaciones sino su ubicación dentro de la institución matrimonial patriarcal. Por otra parte, a diferencia de Isabel, Carmen carece de estrategias de resistencia. Las máscaras y las etiquetas definen su identidad y tras ellas Carmen intuye un angustiante vacío:

¿Quién sería yo si no llevase conmigo mis etiquetas de esposa y madre? . . . . A Paul le gustan sus etiquetas (burócrata, marido, padre) . . . . ¿Quién es Paul? ¿Quién es Carmen? ¿Qué tendrían que decirse si dejaran a un lado sus papeles? (111).

El espejo le devuelve un rostro muerto, sin vida, "con el vacío adentro, rechinando" (142).

A través de este cuestionamiento y de la comparación con la vida materna que hace Carmen, a primera vista la obra de Alegria pareciera sugerir que la hija también se halla destinada a vivir, como la madre, una vida de alienación y soledad, sin romper nunca definitivamente con las estructuras que la oprimen. Sin embargo, entre la vida de Isabel y la de su hija media ahora la comunicación establecida por la madre: a través del diario, ésta ha hablado a la hija, en un gesto mudo y silencioso que la muerte carga de fuerza, instándola a liberarse. Ese es el mensaje cifrado de Isabel y la respuesta a la constante pregunta que se hace Carmen:

¿Por qué me dejó mamá este diario, este cuaderno amarillo, escrito de prisa, tachado, con la tinta desteñida después de treinta años? . . . ¿Qué la impulsó después de haber guardado

el secreto todos estos años, a entregármelo así, sin palabras, sin explicaciones, como un golpe repentino en la cara a través de la tumba? (123)

Si como Marianne Hirsch señala, "the silence of mothers about their own fate and the details of their lives, ensures that those lives, those stories will be repeated by daughters" (67), es lícito pensar que la ruptura de ese silencio abre el camino a lo contrario. Por otra parte, el texto mismo de *Alegría* también aporta signos que apuntan en esa dirección: a diferencia de Isabel, quien sella con la muerte su destino, Carmen no muere en la obra. El final abierto y el suspenso en que la obra deja al lector con respecto al futuro de la hija sugieren la posibilidad de su liberación.

En los últimos años, algunas críticas feministas han planteado la importancia de la relación madre-hija y cómo ésta ha sido evaluada dentro de los postulados del sistema patriarcal. Por ejemplo, Adrienne Rich señala:

Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies . . . one of which has labored to give birth to the other. . . . Yet this relationship has been minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy. . . . Like intense relationships between women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been profoundly threatening to men. (226)

En *Cenizas de Izalco*, la herencia materna también produce otra transgresión de las leyes del sistema patriarcal: el fortalecimiento y la restitución de la relación madre-hija. Como ya se señalara con anterioridad, durante la vida de Isabel esa relación está signada por la ruptura y la separación. Desde su perspectiva juvenil, Isabel se le presenta a Carmen como un modelo negativo, que rechaza. Por otra parte, concentrada en su propia frustración con el medio y en sus preocupaciones de adolescente, la hija no tiene tiempo para comprender lo que ocurre en la interioridad de la madre: "Frank sintió la tristeza de mamá. Yo en cambio nunca me di cuenta" (16). Tiempo después, la relación de ambas está marcada por la distancia geográfica y por una cordialidad sin intimidad. Por ejemplo, aunque su madre la visita en Washington, hay hechos, como su aborto, de los que Carmen no puede hablar con ella. La entrega del diario de Frank cambia de golpe esta relación. Funcionando en la obra como un signo de plena comunicación, éste abre avenidas entre la madre y la hija. Por primera vez, la madre se revela ante la hija, sin máscaras, como

una subjetividad en conflicto y en lucha permanente no sólo por ella misma sino también por el destino de Carmen. Por primera vez, también, Carmen se da cuenta de que, a pesar de sus intentos por disfrazar el fracaso de su matrimonio, su madre ha comprendido su frustración. A pesar de la muerte, entre madre e hija se establece un lazo de solidaridad y es la madre, en la vida de la hija, la fuerza que más la impulsa a su liberación.

*University of Wisconsin*

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## POUR UN PLURIEL SINGULIER: NATHALIE SARRAUTE

*Véronique Flambard-Weisbart*

Nathalie Sarraute aime parfois à éprouver la dextérité du lecteur à jouer au jeu de l'écriture. Elle lui tend, par exemple, des pièges. Par plaisir ludique, le lecteur doit se conformer à toutes nouvelles règles, et se laisser engager sur toute nouvelle piste où l'entraîne le mouvement de l'écriture. Les sens aux aguets, il se prépare à jouer. Ainsi, dans *L'usage de la parole*, Sarraute propose littéralement à son lecteur un jeu qui consiste à prononcer quelques paroles, et à analyser ensemble le certain "pouvoir," la certaine "magie" qu'elles ne manqueront pas d'exercer par "leur seule apparition." Le but ultime du jeu sera de faire surgir un tropisme d'entre les lignes. Ces paroles sont: "Si tu continues, Armand, ton père va préférer ta soeur" (49).

Tous les indices textuels semés par Sarraute, dirigent le lecteur vers un tropisme particulier qui sera une conséquence directe du jeu de l'écriture. Le lecteur se repaît du privilège singulier de connaître la règle du jeu d'une part, et de jouer habilement d'autre part. Il devine que ce sont les mots "si tu continues ... va préférer" qui sont générateurs de mouvements psychiques infimes. Sarraute est pourtant sur le point de lui dire qu'il se trompe:

Ah cette fois, il me semble que nous y sommes. Vous êtes avec moi cette fois, vous avez perçu comme moi... Je vois vos sourires complices... "Ton père" "ta soeur"... Quels mots, n'est ce pas? pour s'adresser à son propre enfant. (59)

La surprise est authentique, car le lecteur se sentait guidé vers "autre chose." Sarraute feint la surprise à son tour. Se serait-elle mal expliquée? Est-il possible que le lecteur n'ait pas bien compris la règle du jeu, ou encore qu'elle l'ait elle-même transgressée sans le vouloir?

Ah il ne s'agit pas de ça?... Pas de "Ton père. Ta soeur"?... Mais alors de quoi? Pourquoi avez-vous eu l'air tout à coup d'acquiescer, de participer, vous paraissiez tout excités... Ah, c'était pour ça? . . . Je n'y avais pas fait attention, vous ne me croirez pas, mais je n'avais pas remarqué: "Si tu continues... va préférer..." (59-60)

Après ce rebondissement, le lecteur se sent tenu à l'écart. Il hésite encore: à quel point du texte a-t-il suivi une fausse piste? A quel

moment la séparation s'est-elle produite? Sarraute tente alors de rassurer le lecteur; *nous* sommes maintenant tout pareils:

"Ton père. Ta soeur"... Non? rien ne bouge? la paroi est toute lisse, immobile. "Ton père. Ta soeur"?... vous devez avoir raison... il n'y a rien... rien qui puisse bouger, s'ouvrir, pas de paroi. (62)

Loin d'être rassurant, le rétablissement de la complicité est au contraire inquiétant. Le lecteur a trop fait confiance au lieu commun du texte pour appréhender le sujet. Il en est resté si proche qu'il n'a pas su garder la distance nécessaire. En s'attachant de trop près aux mots il s'est trouvé malavisé. Il n'a pas joué du caractère double du *lieu commun*:

car ce beau mot a plusieurs sens: il désigne sans doute les pensées les plus rabattues mais c'est que ces pensées sont devenues le lieu de rencontre de la communauté. (Sartre 10)

Le lieu commun est dangereux en ce qu'il rend toute séparation impossible, tout en excluant pareillement l'éventualité d'une osmose. De là un sentiment de *porte-à-faux*. Sarraute a utilisé le porte-à-faux dans cet exemple pour se particulariser. En rendant le lecteur lucide et complice de ce porte-à-faux, Sarraute propose à ce dernier un marché d'autant plus attrayant qu'il est périlleux. Elle l'entraîne à partager un plaisir proche de celui que la fascination du vide exerce.

Le lecteur doit rester sans arrêt à l'écoute du lieu commun, en examiner les moindres déplacements, et ne s'arrêter ni sur l'un de ses aspects ni sur l'autre. Il devient de la sorte plus flexible, son regard se fait plus sensible. L'interprétation du pluriel du lieu commun est la condition essentielle pour appréhender le sujet authentique.

En invitant le lecteur à participer au jeu de l'écriture et en lui dévoilant que la littérature occupe une double fonction--d'une part, en produisant l'illusion d'un réel, d'autre part, en en marquant simultanément l'artifice--Sarraute apprivoise le lecteur et lui apprend à interpréter le lieu commun. Toute approche du sujet sera nécessairement doublée d'une chute dans l'abîme; aussi, on doit s'accommoder du sentiment d'ambivalence qu'implique l'expérience de la littérature. On devient de ceux qui,

... se mentent à eux-mêmes. Leur désir de guérir se double le plus souvent d'une répugnance non moins grande à renoncer aux avantages, aux satisfactions (hé oui, il faut bien le dire, malgré les souffrances, très réelles, je ne le nie pas)

que leur procure leur maladie. (*Portrait 75*)

En d'autres termes, il faut valoriser la vie depuis l'espace *entre* la vie et la mort du lieu commun.

Pour comprendre "l'autre aspect," il est nécessaire de "toucher le fond" (*Portrait 26*). A cet effet, le plongeon dans l'abîme du hors-texte est indispensable. On ne peut ignorer le vide sous peine de passer à côté du sujet authentique. Mais un tel plongeon est rarement sans danger, une certaine discipline est nécessaire pour le tenter. Se placer dans le lieu commun est un point de départ. Le repérage des mouvements à l'intérieur du lieu commun est de loin la tâche la plus astreignante car il est contre-nature de remettre en question ce qui est accepté de soi et de tous, du *nous*. Il faut se contraindre à soulever chaque mot, à le peser, le regarder de toujours plus près, s'assurer que l'on est attentif au moindre mouvement. Ce travail méticuleux prépare l'avènement du tropisme--marquant la présence du sujet authentique.

Le jeu comporte de grands dangers. En effet, à vouloir trop s'assurer que l'on est bien maître de chaque mot, de chaque parole, on court le risque d'étouffer le sujet:

sans mots, il n'y a rien, de vagues rêveries. Mais il arrive que l'écriture écrase ces mouvements intérieurs. J'ai essayé de le montrer dans *Entre la vie et la mort*: comment à force de travailler le langage, la sensation initiale disparaît et on se retrouve dans l'académisme. Ça paraît très beau, et quand on le relit, c'est mort. La sensation n'est pas passée. Il ne faut pas que le langage attire sur lui l'attention par sa beauté. La langue académique n'a pas de vie. Elle est belle...  
(Alphant 23)

Peser ses paroles est certes essentiel, mais il faut savoir le faire avec juste mesure. Il subsiste toujours un risque de le faire trop ou pas assez. On provoque alors respectivement soit la mort du sujet--écrasé par les mots--soit l'impersonnalité du sujet--resté à un degré trop général dans le lieu commun.

Pour parvenir à "l'autre aspect" sans risque pour la vie du sujet, Sarraute pratique le "regard scindé,"

une sorte de tour d'adresse à exécuter, assez semblable à ces exercices auxquels invitent certains dessins-devinettes, ou ces images composées de losanges noirs et blancs, habilement combinés, qui forment deux dessins géométriques superposés; le jeu consiste à faire une sorte de gymnastique

visuelle: on repousse très légèrement l'une des deux images, on la déplace un peu, on la fait reculer et on ramène l'autre en avant. On peut parvenir, en s'exerçant un peu, à une certaine dextérité, à opérer très vite le déplacement d'une image à l'autre, à voir à volonté tantôt l'un, tantôt l'autre dessin. (28)

De fait, pour que les méthodes pour toucher à "l'autre aspect" puissent réussir, il faut savoir préserver une juste distance--un degré zéro?--entre les divers aspects du lieu commun, un écart où la vie, le mouvement sera encore possible.

Il ne s'agit jamais pour Sarraute de s'approprier l'autre par l'écriture et de faire croire que l'écriture plurielle dit avec une parole subjective: "Je ne dois pas pour cela . . . chercher à me rapprocher des choses, essayer de les amadouer pour les rendre anodines, familières--cela ne me réussit jamais" (28). Il est au contraire souhaitable de créer avec l'autre un rapport tout *littéraire* en l'écartant de soi par l'écriture, afin d'imposer la juste distance qui permettra l'existence du tropisme:

. . . mais au contraire m'en écarter le plus possible, les tenir à distance, les prendre un peu de loin, de haut, et les traiter en étranger. Un étranger qui marche dans une ville inconnue. Et comme on fait souvent dans les villes inconnues, appliquer sur les choses et maintenir en avant des images puisées dans des réminiscences, littéraires ou autres, des souvenirs de tableaux ou même de cartes postales. (29)

La distance prend une dimension *universelle* en ce que basée sur des lieux communs.<sup>1</sup>

Sarraute appuie la mise en mouvement de l'écriture plurielle sur des lieux communs, des *citations*. Elle ne croit pas à l'originalité des premières impressions. Toute impression est en effet déjà prédéterminée par l'extérieur, les livres que l'on a lus, les photographies que l'on a regardées, ce que les autres en ont dit... Le texte en soi ne fait donc que répéter ces lieux communs, sans être "original." Ce manque d'originalité n'est pas préoccupant outre mesure, car le texte n'est pas écrit pour être original ni pour motiver des sentiments "propres." Par contre, le sens du texte est contrôlé par l'auteur. Le texte essaie de reconnaître des récurrences extra-linguistiques qui se placent au-delà du mimétique ou du référentiel et que l'auteur essaie de restaurer par le biais de l'écriture. Nathalie Sarraute cherche à capturer "l'autre aspect," le sujet authentique et extra-linguistique. Dans ses textes, les citations sont productrices car

elles donnent à lire les mouvements extra-linguistiques du sujet. Sarraute donne donc à l'intertextualité une valeur de performance et de productivité. En affirmant sa conviction qu'il n'existe pas de parole subjective à l'origine de son écriture, Sarraute n'a pas de scrupule à citer, et elle se donne en cela le champ libre pour réorganiser les lieux communs d'une manière créatrice. Elle se donne l'opportunité d'être subjective dans les limites de l'objectivité.

On conçoit alors mieux que, chez Sarraute, le sujet extra-linguistique naissant des citations ait simultanément un caractère pluriel et singulier. Le mouvement extérieur/fragmenté/ordonné des citations, laisse pressentir la vie intérieure/singulière/désordonnée du sujet. Le sujet est *pluriel* parce que composé de lieux communs. Mais il organise les lieux communs de façon toute subjective, et en cela il est *singulier*. Le sujet est un *nous* qui dit *je*, ". . . nous--la multitude innombrable des habitants d'un 'je'. 'Notre masse agitée' et ses mouvements intérieurs qui sont autant de personnages gesticulant et mêlant leur voix." <sup>2</sup>

Sarraute tire une jouissance certaine du jeu de l'écriture. C'est un jeu dangereux car il s'appuie sur la citation, le lieu commun. Si l'on ne sait pas jouer le jeu, on peut anéantir le sujet à cause du contact trop pressant de l'extérieur. Par contre, quand on le joue avec dextérité, le sujet s'affirme depuis le lieu commun. La connaissance de "l'autre aspect," de "l'Inconnu" (Sarraute 94), du sujet authentique, est toujours une question de juste limite.

La jouissance qu'implique ce type de connaissance est ambiguë par définition:

Une jouissance nouvelle, encore pleine de la saveur des plaisirs défendus, mais qui s'apparentait à la joie que j'éprouvais en allant retrouver mes fétiches, les objets de mon culte. (95)

Elle est basée sur un discours pluriel. Le texte veut à la fois se poser comme *point de départ* pour appréhender le sujet par le biais du lieu commun et marquer le *passage* du sujet par le lieu commun. *Le plaisir du texte* tient donc lieu d'une part de l'appréhension de l'inconnu, mais aussi de la reconnaissance du lieu commun. En d'autres termes, ce plaisir relève de l'appréhension de "l'inconnu" dans la mesure où il est une marque de la transgression du lieu commun; mais il n'est paradoxalement possible *que* dans la mesure où il rappelle le lieu commun.

Cette jouissance est, par bien des côtés, perverse. Le tropisme, le sujet, se place au-delà du langage et de son ordre; il se réclame pourtant un produit direct de l'écriture plurielle. Le sujet est

"semblable au criminel qu'une impulsion morbide pousse à revenir hanter les lieux du crime, attiré par le besoin de jouer avec [soi]-même un jeu dangereux, malsain" (81): il frôle l'impersonnalité au contact du lieu commun, mais il ne peut surmonter son désir de revenir au lieu commun au moment où il se singularise, au risque cette fois de s'anéantir pour de bon. Mais Sarraute se complait dans ce jeu qui consiste à glisser dans l'impersonnalité du hors-texte, car elle sait la maîtriser. Elle pousse toujours plus loin le jeu du lieu commun pour y rendre plus vivant, plus "absent" encore le sujet. Elle marque par là, d'une façon particulièrement symptomatique, l'ambivalence d'un sujet ne pouvant se particulariser que depuis la généralité, en vue d'un retour à cette généralité.

La singularisation du sujet aboutit paradoxalement à un retour au lieu commun. Contrairement aux apparences, la quête du sujet ne revient cependant pas au *même*. En effet, la quête du sujet chez Sarraute correspond à la quête de la *non-identité*, de l'*autre*. D'où le caractère ambivalent du tropisme, enjeu du jeu de l'écriture plurielle: il est simultanément libérateur et aliénateur.

Le tropisme est libérateur en ce qu'il détache le sujet de tout ce qui lui est extérieur. Il le singularise en le libérant de l'écriture. Il est aliénateur en ce qu'il crée un lien intime avec le sujet qui ne se sent plus seul. Ce nouveau lien permet au sujet de tout partager, ce qui le rassure et lui ôte toute envie de se libérer. Le tropisme met en présence une conscience subjective qui doit son *authenticité* à son aliénation intérieure, à sa division intérieure en alter-ego.

Le désir d'aliénation du sujet est moins étrange qu'il y paraît d'abord. En effet, en se libérant de son rapport à l'écriture plurielle, le sujet se libère de ce qui lui est *extérieur*. Avec le tropisme, le sujet est fragmenté de l'*intérieur*. En d'autres termes, tandis que l'écriture plurielle fait naître le tropisme en soulignant le pluriel extérieur du sujet, le tropisme révèle son pluriel intérieur. Il montre que le sujet ne se singularise pas au sein du pluriel afin de se fixer, mais au contraire de se disséminer, de se métamorphoser, toujours et encore.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Sartre précise que l'universel est appréhendé chez Sarraute par le biais du lieu commun, dont il dit: "C'est par essence la généralité; pour me l'approprier, il faut un acte: un acte par quoi je dépouille ma particularité pour adhérer au général, pour devenir la généralité. Non point semblable à tout le monde mais, précisément, l'incarnation de tout le monde. Par cette adhésion éminemment sociale, je m'identifie à tous les autres dans l'indistinction de l'universel" (10-11).

<sup>2</sup>Alphant analyse "ce nous qui dit je" (22).

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## HISTORY AND METAFICTION IN LOURDES ORTIZ'S *URRACA*

*Lynn McGovern*

In *Urraca* Lourdes Ortiz utilizes metafiction as a vehicle to challenge both written history and the historical novel, recasting archetypes and myths in the reader's mind. Using parody, Ortiz underscores the serious and ironic treatment of the historical character by putting epic heroes and other sacred figures in their historical places. This process illuminates literary metaphors and conventions that are at the center of Western culture, while underscoring Ortiz's belief that language is power. Queen Urraca writes her own story and as she wrestles with her chronicle, the identification between the historical author and the "fictional" heroine becomes progressively more apparent.

Undoubtedly, the historical novel is the preferred genre of many female writers since it allows them to tie the present to the past and create new possibilities for the future. Linda Hutcheon uses the term "historiographic metafiction" to describe some major distinctions between the concept of current historical novels, like Ortiz's *Urraca*, and previous concepts of the historical novel. Her explanation of historiographic metafiction, which shows how new theories of history have influenced fiction writers, will provide a useful construct for reading *Urraca*.

Hutcheon enumerates common characteristics that provide a frame of reference to begin understanding this subgenre. In order for a novel to be representative of this genre, the protagonist must be a marginalized or peripheral figure. This concept is in direct contrast to Lukács' description of the historical figure and novel. Lukács thought that the protagonist of the historical novel should be a synthesis of the general and particular, a prototype. He felt that the novel could enact the historical process by presenting a microcosm which generalizes (*The Historical Novel* 39). The entire reality represented in *Urraca* is not a microcosm of medieval times, for women were not agents of action and are almost completely shadowed in traditional literature of the period. Therefore, how can even a Queen be a microcosm that generalizes? *Urraca*, like any other member of a minority, must be considered a marginal figure or member of a muted group.

Expanding on this notion, Hutcheon uses the term "ex-centric" to describe the marginal figure ("The Pastime of Past Time" 294). In *Urraca* both the text and the person are "ex-centric" and "dialectical." The decentered vision, derived from the self-conscious nature of

metafiction, and the melding of the present and the past, forms a web that stretches backwards and forwards through past and future times creating a double-coded narrative.

One of the most interesting aspects of historiographic metafiction is the rebellion against the traditional historical novel in which, according to Lukács, details were insignificant (*The Historical Novel* 59). Historiographic metafiction's details are in keeping with the various "historical" accounts, so that these accounts can be subverted, scrutinized or trivialized. This concept leads to Hutcheon's next characteristic of historiographic metafiction, the deliberate manipulation or falsification of details of accepted narrative "truth." In the classical historical novel (*Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott is an example) detail was not important. Lukács saw detail only as a means to achieve historical faithfulness in terms of a particular concrete historical situation, whereas the authors of historiographic metafiction manipulate details of both truth and lies of the historical record in order to subvert it. An illustration of this point is the historical figure and protagonist El Cid who was revered during the Franco era even though there is evidence (in the poem itself) that Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was motivated by lust for booty and was capable of torture and killing. To counter this myth, Ortiz combines traditional (El Cid's version) and revolutionary (Urraca's version) forces as she emphasizes the less-known, yet at least equally true, historical account. By emphasizing certain negative aspects of the Cid's behavior and legacy (the word means "lord" in Arabic), Ortiz highlights numerous contradictions, implying that he was not as saintly nor as "Christian" as tradition suggests. Through the narrative author's voice, Ortiz/Urraca deliberately subverts the predominant image of the hero using irony and a dual-coded discourse as the main rhetorical mechanism for activating the reader's awareness of the existing contradictions. Irony, an element of parodic discourse, is the key strategy in which duplicity is revealed and is one of the ways that women and other "ex-centrics" set up and then challenge the conventional male tradition (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 31).

Through Queen Urraca's chronicle we become superficially acquainted with historical characters (El Cid, Alfonso VI el Bravo, the great Bishop Gelmírez of Santiago de Compostela, the Archbishop Bernardo of Toledo, Alfonso el Batallador) who are unexpectedly on the periphery of her story. In other words, for the first time Urraca has a forum for discussion of personal and public matters and thereafter, her interpretations will align themselves alongside other stories, including the ones that the troubadours tell, and others that Roberto's medieval miniatures tell. Because she deconstructs heroic figures, their deeds gradually seem less heroic or life-like. As her

chronicle advances the reader becomes progressively more sensitive to the notion of the relativity of "truth."

As Urraca's consciousness and chronicle evolve, it becomes apparent that it is not truth that she seeks nor is it revenge for her imprisonment, but rather a power achieved only through writing. To this end she wants to be heard on her own terms, desiring to be remembered by future generations. Thus, she is determined to make her own story different from other versions for in it she will be as beautiful as her father's concubine, Zaida, she will have the savvy of her mother, the political prowess of her father, and the compassion of a good mother and a good Queen. But suddenly, there is an awkwardness in the dialogue because we (Urraca and the reader) realize that these characteristics are the ones she desires, not those she possesses. Her perfect images, her desires, her various roles (public and private), her own expectations and those of others become a jumble of "truths" that are impossible to record. In short, it becomes evident that it is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to write an "objective," "factual" chronicle. The reader begins to wonder if, in fact, truth can exist outside human invention. Yet the chronicle continues and Urraca becomes more and more aware of the power of the word to create fiction.

Urraca's thoughts continue to transport her back to childhood when her father conquered Toledo, and she remembers how he wanted to pillage the mosque and convert it into a cathedral. Those thoughts are tempered by thoughts of her mother, Constanza, and of the songs she would sing and the stories she would tell young Urraca. Equally important as these songs was the dominant presence in her childhood, and in the text, of the troubadours and the court story-tellers. They were the "real" chroniclers of the kings and queens and in their words lived the many struggles for power. After all, these singers seized upon bits of information regardless of accuracy and more often than not, the singers themselves interpreted the results of their majestys' struggles. Certainly they must have had an enormous influence over the opinion of the rulers' subjects. As Urraca recalls the ballads of the troubadours and the other official story-tellers, it occurs to her that she must "set the record straight," or at least problematize their versions, by creating another version for the troubadours to spread.

Urraca disperses the stable narrative voice by inscribing subjectivity into history, thus problematizing the historical record, which is another of Hutcheon's considerations for historiographic metafiction. Here Urraca wants to "set the record straight" and, to this end, she will manipulate her chronicle to influence her subjects and future readers in a way that reinforces "her truth:" "Ellos

escribirán la historia a su modo; hablarán de mi locura y mentirán para justificar mi despojamiento y mi encierro. Pero Urraca tiene ahora la palabra y va a narrar para que los juglares recojan la verdad y la transmitan de aldea en aldea y de reino en reino" (12). Hence, by the end of the chronicle Urraca will create her own counter-myth that will align itself with the other more common and traditional myths that abound in the novel.

As Urraca continues to recount her childhood, she remembers how miserable her parents' marriage was, especially in light of the numerous women Alfonso VI would take to bed. One memory is a scene in which she sleeps in her father's room and observes his love-making with a Moorish woman whom he had appropriated as his earlier in the square. Urraca herself describes Alfonso's sexual habits in the following passage: "repartía sus dones entre las muchas doncellas que el reino y cruzada conducían hasta su cama" (14). For Alfonso, sex is power and domination over women. Expanding on this notion of sex and power, Biruté Ciplijauskaitė notes that throughout the work there are references to the "need" of Urraca's father and her two husbands to change lovers frequently and the fact that the people admire this trait in a king (153). Urraca as a small child sees this "need" manifest itself and uses it, in the same way, to her advantage in later years. This is apparent with regard to Urraca's many love affairs, "por medio de yuxtaposición, se sugiere . . . que una mujer que reina podría tener antojos semejantes" (153). The implication is visible and we recognize the double-standard whereby promiscuity is lauded when it is initiated by the male gender, but condemned when it is a woman who betrays sexual desire.

Urraca soils her father's honor again when she calls to mind that he, in fact, killed his own brother Sancho II, imprisoned his other brother García in a tower, and chose his own sister Urraca for a lover. Despite the notorious deeds of her father, she nevertheless maintains that he will be remembered as a hero in history books read by future generations. This recognition prompts Urraca to become ever more determined to demand what corresponds to her. Urraca's anger is warranted according to some of the few historians who have mentioned her in their accounts of the period. In Father Flórez's historical record, Alfonso el Batallador (one of Urraca's husbands) is said to have attempted to appropriate Alfonso VI's kingdom upon the king's death, never considering Urraca to be a serious threat to his sovereignty. Even after marrying Urraca, there is evidence that he continued to harbor that same plan: "[*La Historia Compostelana*] declara que el de Aragón invadió los estados de doña Urraca por muerte de su padre. Por esto [Urraca] le llama repetidas veces 'tirano' pues usurpó lo que no era suyo" (Flórez 324). Ortiz's Urraca

is livid as she remembers these subtle and not so subtle disparaging attitudes toward her.

Urraca learned another early lesson involving sex by observing her mother and father's relationship. She had seen her mother manipulate her father through a combination of feminine wiles that dealt with "la sonrisa que sabla ser oferta aplazada, el lecho abierto cuando conviene, la mano levantada a tiempo y esa dulzura no agresiva que a todos tranquiliza" (20). Yet with hindsight and with all things considered, she admires her mother's skillfulness in garnering support and protection from the Pope in order to prevent Alfonso from divorcing her. She remembers her own sexual maneuvers while still an adolescent, when she engaged a young squire in a sword fight. As her defense weakened and as she was losing ground she remembered her mother and she recalls, "dejé que se abrieran la cintas de mi corpiño. Allí, ante la mirada del escudero, mis dos pechos saltaban; nuevo e inesperado, el cuerpo de Urraca parecía ofrecérsele" (21). When he hesitated, she struck her final blow. Although this worked in her favor at the time, she also realized that her own future would have to be more than manipulation behind the scenes, as her mother had done, because her strategy would include (her father's) more direct appreciation of power. In conclusion, it is significant that at a very young age Urraca aspires to rule the Empire by combining her father's political prowess and her mother's skills. To this desire can be ascribed Urraca's androgynous ideal.

It is as if from birth Urraca is marked by the struggle for political power: thus she begins early to associate sex with that power. Urraca also is aware that her father's first wife Inés de Aquitania's death was a conspiracy between the French monks and the Pope in order to put a French Borgoña on the throne. We are told that Inés de Aquitania was killed to make room for Constanza and the House of Borgoña. That is to say, circumstances were manipulated so that Constanza could marry Alfonso VI and as a consequence Urraca herself was born. Politically motivated sexual activities, involving nobles and clergy, are commonplace throughout the novel, demonstrating that sex and power are intricately intertwined.

As a matter of fact, in quick succession we see that every sexual relationship that Urraca has is viewed in political terms. The most extreme case of the importance of sex in the realm of power is the consummation of her marriage to her second husband. Reputed to be homosexual and to have never "known a woman," Alfonso el Batallador still accepts the marriage proposal. But because of opposition to the union, and because the two are second cousins, Urraca knows that only a marriage consummated before witnesses will prevent a request to the Pope for its annulment. Fully aware of el

Batallador's sexual preference and seeking evidence for an annulment of the marriage, Archbishops Gelmírez and Bernardo hide behind a curtain in the bedroom on their wedding night, hoping to verify that the marriage has not been consummated. She recounts the scene: she encourages her husband to penetrate her and he does. Thus the political alliance between Castile/León and Aragón is solidified.

The importance of the political use of sex is clear, yet Urraca is not as cold-blooded as one might imagine. She has another side of herself that she allows us to glimpse at from time to time. It is a compassionate side that corresponds to Zaida, her father's devoted and long-time concubine. There is a basic dichotomy within which Urraca functions that she expresses near the end of the novel: "Elegir ser reina y no cabfan Zaidas dentro de mi piel" (194). It is during her quiet moments that we see signs of her compassionate self. As her thoughts about her relationship with her mother begin to surface, she feels a deep connection to her, yet, acknowledges her inadequacy as a daughter. For the first time Urraca understands her mother's loneliness as she realizes that neither of them has had a "Zaida" to give them unconditional love. Wondering if her political downfall has been her own inability to integrate the two sides of herself, the Zaida and the queen, she contemplates her marriage, speculating that if she had been able to do this, she and Alfonso el Batallador, with whom she constantly feuded, would have been able to unite the Empire (the Spanish Empire that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella would unite four hundred years later) (195).

Yet her recurrent anger prompts her to remember the men in her life that have dominated her and other women by jealousy, envy, temptation, and dependence. The identification between the historical author and the "fictional" heroine becomes progressively more apparent. The merging of author and character is illustrated by the manner in which el Batallador's unusual sexual habits are recounted; Urraca/Ortiz boldly transgresses social taboos that were very much in effect during the years of the Franco dictatorship. El Batallador calls Urraca insulting names, as the following passage indicates: "[P]uerca, sucia, vieja. Eres sucia como todas las bembas, más sucia que ninguna, y yo por acercarme a ti, el más repulsivo de los hombres" (97). Another of el Batallador's lovers, Castán, discovers that el Batallador goes to Urraca on the days she menstruates to consume her blood, an illustration of el Batallador's desire to appropriate Urraca's feminine mystery while Urraca, herself, craves the power that has been associated with the male gender. Both appear to be searching for an androgynous ideal.

The eighth characteristic of historiographic metafiction lies in the loss of faith in our ability to know (unproblematically) reality. The

following description of Urraca's relationship with Roberto is an illustration of precisely this point inasmuch as the reader vicariously experiences Urraca's confusion through her self-conscious questioning of reality. The queen's last affair is with the monk. In this relationship both sides of Urraca come into play. She tends to express a tenderness and genuine attraction to him: "¡Ah, Roberto! me parece tener a mi lado tus cabellos rojos, y este rayo de sol que se engancha en mi toga enciende luces en tu cabeza" (137). Just a few sentences later confusion is evident: "Quizá, monje, esta nostalgia por tu ausencia se parezca al amor" (137). The reader is left guessing about her romantic intentions: Does she truly love him or has she invented this desire in his absence?

Notwithstanding, she openly talks about her seduction of him and her manipulation of power through sex: "Para él ha sido bueno y a mí ha dejado un sabor poderoso, cargado de imágenes . . ." (122). It is not only Roberto's position as her guardian, for after all he is her jailer, that she wants to control but also his word as chronicler and the power of his paintbrush. She had mentioned the power of the paintbrush only indirectly before, when speaking of one of the troubadours in her father's court. His name was Pierre de Tours, and she described his story-telling in terms of a painting metaphor: "adornaba la historia con pinceladas mágicas" (151). It becomes evident to the reader that even Roberto's paintings cannot be trusted for the "truth" they convey, for as Roberto and Urraca's relationship evolves, his paintings begin to reflect her story. At the beginning of the novel, his art is rooted in the religious; but Urraca challenges his assumptions and her presence is established in his paintings: "[P]ero sus impulsos marianos han dejado paso a un antiguo fervor por lo maravilloso, desde que el cuerpo de la doncella se ha aproximado y puede penetrarse" (153). Eventually Urraca is influencing or "penetrating" him to the extent that he paints what she tells him to paint, in the same way he writes what she tells him to write. After quoting a passage from Ibn Saraf's account of a battle, Urraca asks Roberto to be her Ibn Saraf: "De este modo quisiera yo, Roberto, que tu complementarás mi crónica, introduciendo la metáfora, jugando con las palabras" (203). As her words suggest, she wants him to make her as flowery as Ibn Saraf's letters make the battles in his epic poems. It finally becomes clear that Urraca is asking Roberto to adorn or elaborate the "truth." In other words, she is beginning to demythify or deconstruct "what is" by creating her own myth.

The third and last part of the book is the most self-conscious. It culminates in consciousness-raising for both the reader and Urraca. Urraca makes love with Roberto and thinks of the double standard that exists between men and women. She is bombarded by numerous

thoughts that begin to surface as another level of consciousness takes shape. She realizes that it is not the physical battles but the battles for power that she misses and, accordingly, she thinks about the men who have surrounded her. Suddenly at this moment, she realizes that they only wanted more wealth; she, on the other hand, only wanted what was rightfully hers. She is transformed for she realizes that her writing increases her awareness and through it she discovers that which corresponds to her as Queen, as woman, and as one half of the human equation.

The story ends with a problematizing of the possibility of historical knowledge. We see clearly that history is written for some time and for someone (or a particular audience) and although Urraca admits that she needs her interlocutor to proceed with her chronicle, she, at the same time, feels that his presence constrains her discourse. This is the last fundamental feature that distinguishes historiographic metafiction from the traditional historical novel. The postmodern concern for multiplicity and dispersion of truth(s) is opposed to the conventional historical novel's concern, which might have had Urraca discover some concealed truth in order to present one other version of history/story. Urraca is learning how to engage her interlocutor and manipulate power in the discursive arena.

As has been said, the focus of Urraca is on power, sex, and female authorship. All media of discourse, from visual to spoken, come under scrutiny as "facts" are reinterpreted from a position that is outside the power structure, a de-centered position. The relationships between history and individual psyches and the politics of sexual identity are explored as Urraca recounts the story of her life. The reader beholds hidden and unacknowledged gender roles and cultural values that teach us more about men and women (incidentally, this notion is further developed in Ortiz's *Camas* in 1989) as the making of history/fiction renders itself more complicated. The distinction between male and female authorship begins to take shape as Urraca struggles with the ghosts of epic heroes (el Cid) and the sexual secrets and violence of the men in her life. Urraca's determination to express herself and to be heard become the reader's struggle as well. In any event, by the end of the novel Urraca has separated herself from her childhood psyche and creates a new mode of adaptation to all the subtle struggles and open conflicts in which she has engaged her whole life. In brief, Urraca has discovered textual power through writing and will use this power in the same way she has used sexual power to her advantage in the erotic. To put it differently, she proposes to teach Roberto about sex and also about the word. The imprisoned Urraca is liberated when she discovers that the one who controls the pen or paintbrush is the winner; for according to Urraca,

communication is achieved not only through intercourse but through discourse as well. Thus, Urraca finds the path to empowerment through her writing. In the final analysis, it is this very act of writing that proves to be Urraca's most powerful tool.

*Bridgewater College*

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# THE PASSE-BLANC: BORIS VIAN AND THE NEW FRENCH LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT

*Christopher M. Jones*

The Liberation of Paris in 1944 brought something less than peace. The war still needed to be finished; young Frenchmen were called up to join the existing *Forces françaises de l'intérieur*, which were then integrated into regular army units. The euphoria of the liberated was quickly followed by resentment of "les nouveaux occupants" (Rioux 8) and 'U.S. go home' graffiti began to appear. Brasillach was tried and shot. Countless others were shot without trial, in the streets, for their collaborationist sins. De Gaulle consolidated his power and the idea of the Resistance as a basis for a post-war political renaissance proved chimeric.

It was in this ambience that Sartre started *Les temps modernes*, a journal which became the focus of intellectual ferment and reflected the contradictory pressures facing public figures as the world prepared to plunge directly from a hot war into the Cold War. Sartre's friends all contributed; a new friend named Boris Vian was invited to write a column. Material conditions of existence in France improved little with the departure of the Germans; only with the inception of the Marshall Plan in 1948 would the country be able to make effective progress toward the economic rebirth of the Fifties, yet Saint-Germain quickly regained for Paris the title of intellectual center of the 'civilized' world.

Immediately after the war, Vian's particular attributes and interests vaulted him into the spotlight of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Sales of his mock translations under the name Vernon Sullivan gave him the financial liberty to participate extensively in the nocturnal life style. His knowledge of jazz and his membership in the Claude Abadie band contributed to a profile, substantially based in his knowledge of American culture, which came to epitomize Saint-Germain. Briefly he was beloved of virtually everyone, including members of the Sartre group who were emerging from the war in a position to dominate Left Bank intellectual discourse. Vian's Gallimard publication of *L'écume des jours* in 1947 constituted an apogee of sorts. The novel mixed a unique sensibility with subtexts of American jazz and Saint-Germain in-crowd ruminations and found favor with seemingly everyone who counted.

Vian's marginal obsessions had become mainstream, at least on the Left Bank. They were soon to become marginal again as Vian, in a

parallel to Sullivan's *passe-blanc* metaphor, found that his difference was ultimately unacceptable to many in the literary establishment. His *Chroniques du menteur* columns began to be refused at *Les temps modernes*. Vian's peculiar amalgam of Americana, satire, and verbal inventiveness was judged insufficiently serious. His popular successes and musical obsessions, at first distinctive, became a liability. Growing anti-Americanism cut at the very basis of Vian's self-image. By the Fifties Vian was living in relative isolation.

After the Liberation of Paris, Saint-Germain-des-Prés began to develop its attraction beyond the hard core of "la bande à Prévert" and "la famille Sartre" at the Flore. It was discovered that a tiny place called the Tabou on Rue Dauphine stayed open all night through a special dispensation. It became an after-theatre, after-closing, after-party, after-concert gathering spot: "Le Tabou est adopté. Cela se dit au Flore, au Montana, au Bar Vert, chez Chéramy. Maintenant on sait où trouver, entre minuit et sept heures du matin, Juliette Gréco, Anne-Marie Cazalis, Michel de Ré, Alexandre Astruc, Jean-Pierre Vivet, Jean Rougeul, Marcel Pagliéro, Daniel Gélin, Radiguet..." (Hanoteau 70).

At about the same time, Claude Luter had begun having jazz *matinées* in the *cave* of the Lorientais. The *patron* of the Tabou mentioned that he also had a *cave*. Bernard Lucas took up the challenge and thought immediately of Boris Vian to organize the music. It is this move which ultimately would cause Vian to be remembered as the 'Prince' of Saint-Germain, though the Tabou in its primary manifestation as an after-hours gathering spot for the post-war intellectual elite only lasted for six months. Such was the coherence of the *quartier* at the time that the Tabou filled immediately and stayed filled until the neighbors got it closed: "Camus y descend presque chaque soir, Queneau, Merleau-Ponty, Tzara, Soupault y viennent souvent, Sartre, deux fois" (Hanoteau 74). It was a tiny, damp, smokefilled, subterranean hole, where it was hard to breathe and sit, much less dance. Yet it came to represent a post-war spirit in France which recognized the desperate absurdity of recent history, but did not sink beneath the burden. Vian himself, with his extensive knowledge of an alternative (American) reality, his trumpet cocked to the side of his mouth, his ability to orchestrate a good *surprise-partie*, his growing circle of literary acquaintances, and his whacky sidekick, the Major, personified the new spirit. Vian was the right person, in the right place at the right time, as Hanoteau, the principal chronicler of Saint-Germain, implies: "Boris a fini par conquérir Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Il lui a suffi de mieux se faire connaître (74).

If, in the popular conception, Sartre became identified with a way of looking at the world without inherited belief systems, Vian seemed

to furnish a *mode de vie* without relation to recognized social codes of behavior. They appeared to be two sides of the same coin. Of course neither popular conception was true. Sartre always conceived of himself as a man of letters in the grand French tradition and synthesized his ideas from the best German and French sources, from Hegel to Merleau-Ponty to Marx. Vian, in spite of his heterogeneous concerns, was by no means a libertine and was also vitally interested in the approval of the French literary establishment. He was crushed by the denial of the Prix de la Pléiade for *L'écume des jours* in June of 1946, given to a priest named Grosjean instead. His situation recalls that of Céline, whose *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was denied the Goncourt literary prize in a close vote in 1932 and who subsequently produced a body of vitriolic anti-semitic pamphlets. It would be impossible to claim cause and effect for Céline, any more than for Vian, whose four scandalous Vernon Sullivan pseudo-translations appeared after the Pléiade disappointment, but certainly in both cases an existing tendency towards marginalization was reinforced.

However reductive the simplification, Sartre and Vian personified, for the press and Parisian popular opinion, the moral vacuum to blame for the continuing French weakness as a nation. When the first Sullivan novel, *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*, was discovered beside a murder victim, with the novel open to the page where the protagonist kills his mistress, it confirmed their worst fears about the influence of the Saint-Germain tribe on French society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Vian would spend a substantial portion of the rest of his life countering accusations of moral deviance with assertions of the right to poetic licence. It wasn't exactly what he had had in mind.

Boris Vian was accepted as a bright, talented youngster in the newly purged French literary circles, at least for a while. Vian, however, could not resist his inherent satirical bent and soon began to take potshots at the leaders of the pack, notably Jean-Paul Sartre.

Vian's first novel, *L'écume des jours*, is an odd sort of requiem for love, in which two pairs of lovers, Colin and Chloé, Chick and Alise, watch their love and their lives deteriorate in a world where both language and the phenomenological realm are unstable, or even hostile. If the emotional sphere is a motivating force in the novel, however, there is also a recurring element of social satire and parody which has its most obvious equivalents in Rabelais and in Céline. By the novel's end Vian has effectively skewered the Church, sex roles in society, the military-industrial civilization, office culture, the intellectual establishment, pharmacies, medicine, and the funeral industry. A continuous satirical thread in the novel is the character of Jean-Sol Partre and his accomplice la Duchesse de Bovouard. At the outset, everyone is taken with Partre. Nicolas, the cook, is

"Président du cercle philosophique des gens de maison de l'arrondissement" where "[i]l y sera parlé de l'engagement. Un parallèle est établi entre l'engagement d'après les théories de Jean-Sol Partre, l'engagement ou le rengagement dans les troupes coloniales, et l'engagement ou prise à gages des gens dits de maison par les particuliers" (27).

Chick is obsessed with Sartre memorabilia. As his fascination deteriorates more and more into a self-destructive fetish, the mention of Partre and Partrean artifacts comes gradually to connote a regrettable vice. Vian's capacity for word play maintains a certain level of humor: Colin cites Partre's seminal work *La lettre et le néon*, while Chick rebinds his rare editions of Partre in *peau de néant*. The climactic scene is the orgy of adulation surrounding Partre's lecture, probably based on Sartre's Club Maintenant *conférence* of October 29, 1945 in a hall on the Rue Jean-Goujon. At the time, according to Sartre's biographer Annie Cohen-Solal, "...he fascinated and seduced: people fought to meet him, to know him, to watch him think" (259). In *La force des choses* Simone de Beauvoir describes the lecture as follows: "...il vint une telle foule que la salle ne put la contenir: ce fut une bousculade effrénée et des femmes s'évanouirent" (Rybalka 86). Vian's description of the Partre conference carries these notions to their logical extreme, with people dying like flies in their attempt to be present at the lecture:

Certains arrivaient en corbillard et les gendarmes plongeaient une longue pique d'acier dans le cercueil, les clouant au chêne pour l'éternité, ce qui évitait de les en sortir pour l'inhumation et ne causait de tort qu'aux vrais morts éventuels dont le linceul se trouvait bousillé. D'autres se faisaient parachuter par avion spécial (et l'on se battait aussi au Bourget pour monter en avion). Une équipe de pompiers prenaient ceux-là pour cible et, au moyen de lances d'incendie, les déviaient vers la scène où ils se noyaient misérablement. D'autres, enfin, tentaient d'arriver par les égouts. On les repoussait à grands coups de souliers ferrés sur les jointures au moment où ils s'agrippaient au rebord pour se rétablir et sortir, et les rats se chargeaient du reste. (72)

Of course, "les purs, les au courant, les intimes" had no such difficulty, slipping behind police lines into the hall. Partre himself arrives on an elephant, with his guards opening a way through the crowd with hatchets.

Hearing the lecture was impossible, given the excessive and unruly

nature of the crowd. A certain climax was achieved: "Partre s'était levé et présentait au public des échantillons de vomi empaillé. Le plus joli, pomme crue et vin rouge, obtint un franc succès" (77). Shortly thereafter the ceiling collapsed under the weight of fans straining to hear and the event ended in chaos.

Chick and Alise are doomed by Chick's obsession with his Partre collection. Chick uses his salary, a portion of his friend Colin's fortune, his unpaid taxes, Alise's jewels and whatever else he can find to help satisfy his craving.

Alise's heart is figuratively torn from her by the vultures who aliment Chick's passion for Partre, the intellectual superstar, at her expense. She responds by literally tearing the heart from Partre, then the booksellers, one by one, with a brutal medieval weapon, the *arrache-coeur*. Vian's habit of embedding satirical detail even in emotional bombshells<sup>2</sup> detracts little from the impact of the killing:

Alise rassembla ses forces, et, d'un geste résolu, elle planta l'arrache-coeur dans la poitrine de Partre. Il la regarda, il mourait très vite, et il eut un dernier regard étonné en constatant que son coeur avait la forme d'un tétraèdre. Alise devint très pâle, Jean-Sol Partre était mort maintenant et le thé refroidissait. Elle prit le manuscrit de *L'encyclopédie* et le déchira. Un des garçons vint essuyer le sang et toute la cochonnerie que cela faisait avec l'encre du stylo sur la petite table rectangulaire. Elle paya le garçon, ouvrit les deux branches de l'arrache-coeur, et le coeur de Partre resta sur la table; elle replia l'instrument brillant et le remit dans son sac puis elle sortit dans la rue, tenant la boîte d'allumettes que Partre gardait dans sa poche. (156)

Alise then burns the bookstores in a futile attempt to save her lover from himself. She dies in the fires while Chick is killed defending his collections from the fiscal police who come to seize his belongings in lieu of taxes.

Sartre and Beauvoir liked the book and Vian himself. At the time of its publication, Vian was still producing columns for *Les temps modernes*. The *tarte-parties* given chez les Vian, named after Michelle Vian's culinary contributions, were appreciated by all and sundry, even gaining a certain degree of importance in the history of existentialism by being the site of the first major disagreement between Camus and Sartre, when Sartre sided with Merleau-Ponty against Camus, who left in a huff (Cohen-Solal 332). Vian was primarily a social critic, his parodies of existential thought were restricted to word-play using lexemes skimmed from the surface of

Sartre's work, especially nausea (from *La Nausée*). Michel Rybalka supplies a list of nausea-related Sartre works collected by Chick: "...le *Paradoxe sur le dégueulis*, le *Choix préalable avant le haut-le-coeur* (édité sur "rouleau hygiénique non-dentelé"), le *Vomi*, le *Remeugle*, *Renvoi de fleurs...*" (85). Vian also played extensively with *engagement*, *néant*, *existence*, and so on, but never at the level of doctrine. His critique of the Sartrean phenomenon in *L'écume des jours* was primarily of the social mechanisms of cult worship, with which Vian was already extensively familiar. Sartre himself found this worship initially irritating, though he quickly realized that it brought him a power in French and international affairs unheard of since Victor Hugo, with name recognition abroad second perhaps only to De Gaulle. At this level Sartre would have found Vian amusing, though when Vian extended his critique to the editorial practices of *Les temps modernes* and published his critique in the pages of the journal itself, his welcome began to wear thin.

Vian had met Sartre and Beauvoir at the beginning of 1946, with good impressions on all sides, though Beauvoir initially found Boris to be superficial. Vian was as yet unpublished. *L'écume des jours* was mostly finished but would not be officially issued until 1947. Thus the first installment of his *Chroniques du menteur* in *Les temps modernes* in June of 1946 was to be his first publication under his own name.

Vian's *Chroniques* were free-swinging affairs from the very beginning. He was unafraid of alienating members of the intellectual establishment in critical pieces which careen wildly from one genre to another. In his first column, for example, he counters an apparently widely held conception about a Georges Lacombe film with the following comment: "...ses mérites sont certains, mais il paraît au Menteur que l'on est en train de commettre à son endroit une de ces erreurs monumentales--toutes proportions gardées--auxquelles Georges Sadoul tente d'accoutumer ses lecteurs depuis bientôt quelque temps" (*Chroniques du menteur* 16).

He salts his commentary throughout with the names of writers he disdains--Claudel, Valéry, Aragon ("...l'on se rappelle que ce pseudonyme cache l'évêque de Béziers")--in a way which assumes in the reader a commonly held belief in the essential absurdity of their work.

His second published *Chronique* is even more delicate, given the post-war context in which it was written. Under the title "Quelques révélations sur des gens connus", Vian begins: "Dans une conjoncture telle que l'actuelle, il apparaît quasiment inévitable de parler, tôt ou tard, politique. Il y a beaucoup de gens à tuer dont on ne s'occupe pas assez: Maurice Schumann, parce qu'il n'a pas de pantalons sous sa soutane et fait de l'obscurantisme, Christian Pineau, parce que c'est

un synarque et un affreux..." (29). Here Vian is parodying texts which are still open wounds in the French body politic, ranging from the war-time denunciations in *Je suis partout* to the corrective post-war medicine of the *Comité national des écrivains*. Vian even details a plan to prove that his pronouncements are non-partisan: "Pour leur montrer ma bonne foi, je tuerais Merleau-Ponty aussi, (c'est lui le gérant, mais personne ne s'en doute). C'est un capitaliste et il prend trop de pages dans cette revue, je n'aime pas les égoïstes" (31).

Once begun, Vian's critique of *Les temps modernes*, its editorial board and practices, its material presentation (cover, choice of paper, type style) and its content became a constant in his columns. He lamented the seriousness of the enterprise, which for him constituted a sort of censorship: "En fait, si l'on veut écrire n'importe quoi dans *Les temps modernes*, on ne peut pas. Il faut du sérieux, du qui porte. De l'article de fond, du resucé, du concentré, du revendicatif, du dénonciateur d'abus, de l'anti-tyrannique, du libre, du dégagé de tout. Du vent du large et du souffle d'air pur dans la géhenne d'ici-bas. Ce n'est pas assez. Place aux autres. Place aux gens qui croient encore à l'efficacité des méthodes non totalitaires et qui ne se bornent pas à dire: 'C'est comme ça', mais proposent un remède: des canons, des prisons, des fusillades, de la guerre, du vivant, quoi! Citoyens! Assez de baratin!" (16).

This current climaxed in June of 1947 when he discussed the practice of cutting articles submitted for publication. In the scene below, the journal's director, Merloir de Beauvartre [sic], discusses cuts to be made:

-- ...Mon dernier article, "Le Yogi, le Bilan et l'Ambiguïté", fait deux cents pages... voyons... je peux en couper deux...non... disons une. Mon petit Machin (Machin, c'est un comparse)...

-- Oui? dit Machin.

-- Prenez cet article de Bronzavia...

[...]

-- Oui... dit Machin.

-- Alors, prenez ça et coupez-le... Moi-même, je vais faire des coupures dans le mien, mais il faut que tout le monde y mette du sien, puisque Beaupont de Sarmertrelepy a fait des blagues.

-- J'en coupe combien? dit Machin.

-- Ben... euh... ça fait dix pages?... coupez-en huit et demi.. neuf, peut-être. (62-63)

The column following the above was the last appearance of the

*Menteur* in the pages of *Les temps modernes*. In the meantime, two were refused by the editors.

In June of 1946 Vian submitted a column entitled "Impressions d'Amérique", perhaps intended for the August-September special issue on the United States. Sartre himself was writing constantly about the States, having gone there immediately after the war with Camus' sanction as a journalist for *Combat*, then having returned in 1946 to lecture and spend time with a new lover, Dolorés. To Sartre, Vian's stream-of-consciousness imaginings about the U.S. must have been irritating, at best. Sartre had been there, and had made a serious effort to get to know the great mythical beast which had fascinated the French intellectual establishment for twenty years. Vian had read American literature intensively, and immersed himself in jazz, but little of that comes through in the *chronique*.

In Vian's chronicle he arrives with Alexandre Astruc by submarine, thus missing the Statue of Liberty. His description of New York City is cursory to say the least: "C'est une ville ravissante. Le devant du port est peint en vert, avec de gros anneaux nickelés pour accrocher les sous-marins, et il n'y a pas la moindre poussière" (82). His heroes appear conveniently, though to little effect: "La première personne que j'ai rencontrée, c'était Hemingway. Comme je ne l'avais jamais vu, je ne l'ai pas reconnu; lui non plus, aussi nous nous sommes croisés sans rien dire; quelle ville passionnante" (83). He visits the Empire State Building only to find that it has been demolished, all except for the elevator, which he takes to the top floor.<sup>3</sup>

Vian is writing quickly enough to leave his errors on the page, as when he and Astruc go into a 'drugstore' for a triple-zombie, then Vian the author realizes that you can't do that in a drugstore in the U.S. and has Astruc correct the narrative from within by affirming that it must not have been a drugstore after all.

When the intrepid adventurers head off in search of André Breton, they have a real surprise:

J'ai fini par rencontrer André Breton en plein Harlem, dans une petite boîte assez crasseuse, ça s'appelait Tom's; pas de doute, c'était lui. Mais quel camouflage!... Il s'est passé au noir; on dirait absolument un vrai Nègre, il a même des grosses lèvres de Nègre et des cheveux crépus, et il parle comme un Nègre. Il se fait appeler Andy, les autres n'ont pas l'air d'avoir beaucoup de respect pour lui. Je lui ai demandé s'il comptait venir en France et il m'a répondu: "...man. Ah'll stay wid' ma black gal and ma black kids. I'am't no use, man, goin' all' round de world catchin' sea sick, crabs an' claps an' lookin' always for fuck. Lawd don't likes that man, sure Lawd

don't likes that." C'est une perte pour le surréalisme..., a murmuré Astruc. (88-89)

This passage satirizes the French obsession with black art of primitive origin (be it American or African). It also reveals Vian's attention to Faulkneresque transcriptions of poor rural black speech. At the same time the passage employs the most basic stereotypes about black people to frame the satire: big lips, kinky hair, and aversion to water travel and sexual obsessions. Astruc's comment reminds us that we are dealing with a member of the French literary establishment, and increases the distance between the reader and the parodied black man. Of course it is Vian himself who will adopt a black persona as the author Vernon Sullivan whose *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* was written a short two months later.

Equally stereotypical is the following passage: "Nous avons attendu toute la matinée devant la porte de l'hôtel, en espérant voir lyncher un nègre, mais les New-yorkais sont décidément amorphes. Il paraît que dans le Nevada, on trouve encore des durs. Nous tâcherons d'y passer" (94). Vian here, as in certain Sullivan sequences, is treading on the thin ice between satirizing racist attitudes and inadvertently fostering them; the editors at *Les temps modernes* may have opted for the latter interpretation. An argument in favor of satire is that, as we noted earlier, a lynching episode had become the *sine qua non* of publishing success for the American novel in France, as well as forming the basis for Sartre's 1946 play, *La putain respectueuse*.

Vian ended his "Impressions d'Amérique" with a visit to the French expatriate colony in Hollywood, who seem somewhat lost: "...ils sont tous assez gentils mais ils n'ont pas l'air de connaître très bien la France, je leur ai promis de leur envoyer un film que je vais faire en rentrant, avec Pierre Brasseur dans le rôle de Jésus-Christ et François Mauriac qui sera la fille perdue. Je pense aussi à Paul Claudel pour la dame des lavabos.[...] Je demanderai les dialogues à Jacques Duclos, il a l'habitude, ils ne sont plus que deux au PC, et on nous annonce encore des élections bientôt" (102-103).

The other *chronique* refused by the editors was a tightly reasoned, if farcical, anti-military tract which concludes with a *Petit manuel d'anéantissement du militaire*. The piece is written in Vian's pseudo-technical style, mastered in his days as a civil engineer. He gives specific recommendations on how to destroy each rank, beginning with the Maréchal and ending with the common soldier. He lets no one who bears arms for whatever reason escape: "Le Colonel F.F.I.<sup>4</sup>, qui pullule en cas de résistance, est facilement amadoué au moyen de tractions avant transformés en booby traps" (117). The common soldier is much more simply disposed of: "Enfermer le soldat de

première ou seconde classe dans une pièce tranquille en compagnie d'un costume civil et rouvrir la porte au bout de quarante-cinq secondes" (119).

Including the F.F.I. in the list of targets, or in the earlier piece Jacques Duclos, had implications which contradicted positions carefully worked out by the Sartre group, positions which in hindsight might be called 'libertarian socialism'. Sartre accepted the basic tenets of a historical materialism and the premise of a primary role for the proletariat, while at the same time criticizing the totalitarian tendencies and anti-intellectual strictures of the Communist Party. A critique of the F.F.I. was in this particular context, according to Sartrean thought, to forget that one was *en situation*, that such a critique, without an articulated justification, implied an endorsement of collaboration.

Sartre constantly attempted to articulate a Third Way. During the Occupation, this required a tightrope walk between Collaboration and Resistance; in the post-war period, it meant serving neither the bourgeoisie nor the Communist Party, neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. One must choose, commit, become *engagé*, and one is free to do so, yet this liberty is neither Danton's liberty, nor Voltaire's, it is a liberty conditioned by the specific historical circumstances in which one lives.

Vian, on the other hand, though he took positions related to contemporary conditions, did not feel himself limited or defined by history. His anti-militarism was not confined to Nazi militarism; he lumped together Germans, French, Chinese, Americans and Russians in the same category. His position is idealist (with its flip side of cynicism), thus separating him irrevocably from the existentialist foundations of *Les temps modernes*. This difference is the root cause of his marginalization from the *Temps modernes* group (which was coming to represent the French intellectual mainstream), and his isolation in the late Forties and early Fifties. Vian only began to feel he 'belonged' again when he joined the resolutely marginal *Collège de Pataphysique*, a group inspired by Alfred Jarry's *Gestes et opinions du Docteur Faustroll* which glorified the particular, the individual against all repeated, collected or mass phenomena.

Like Sartre, Vian subscribed to the personal doctrine of 'no more heroes'. Any true member of the Sartre 'family' had to make an exception to that doctrine for Sartre himself. Boris Vian might have done as much for Duke Ellington, but not for Sartre. As Vian moved away from the Sartre group, his Vernon Sullivan novels gained him a dubious notoriety in the popular press as a pornographer and purveyor of violence. Literary circles began to look askance at his eccentric profile. He no doubt wondered whether the *passe-blanc* theme which formed the basis of his first two Sullivan novels could not

be applied metaphorically to himself: was he not indeed a man of a different color, a different breed, who had successfully fooled the new brahmans of the French intellectual establishment into thinking he belonged, if only for the brief honeymoon of the Saint-Germain period? It would be only after his death, with the arrival of a new generation of readers, that Boris Vian would regain a place of honor in French letters, his Sullivan and Vian novels being placed with his poetry, drama, criticism, and songs as merely two facets of a brilliant and multidimensional creative activity.

*Bentley College*

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Dans un hôtel de Montparnasse, un ancien milicien, Edmond Rougé, étrangle sa maîtresse, la très jolie Anne-Marie Masson. Près du cadavre, on trouve le roman *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* ouvert à la page où le héros tue sa maîtresse. Aussitôt, Vian est traité par la presse d'assassin par procuration" (Rybalka 178).

<sup>2</sup>Partre, realizing he is going to die, has a sudden realization: "Comment voulez-vous que je touche mes droits d'auteur si je suis mort?" (155).

<sup>3</sup>This image recurs in *L'herbe rouge*, the third Boris Vian novel, where an elevator-like machine standing alone in the middle of a "Carré" permits the character Wolf to warp time and revisit his past.

<sup>4</sup>*Forces françaises de l'intérieur*, the umbrella for a large number of Resistance organizations. Vian's satire is based on the last-minute mass adherence to the FFI. Referring to the Liberation of Paris, Azéma writes: "Like everywhere else, the capital had its share of those who showed indifference or scepticism, its busybodies who spread alarm over the telephone and its many eleventh hour members of the FFI" (205).

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*LE VICE-CONSUL:*  
COLONIAL MIMICRY AND 'PARTIAL WRITING'

*Pascale Bécél*

Characteristically, studies on Marguerite Duras's writings have ignored the colonial/racial issue while focusing on gender and/or formalist considerations. It is true that Duras's occasional commentaries on "feminine writing" and her declarations against representational art and politics<sup>1</sup> have encouraged critical studies to dismiss socio-political and historical analyses. I believe however that her repeated evocation of colonial and/or exotic sites, viz., former Indochina, India and Japan, precludes any summary dismissals of such references from her texts. In the case of *Le vice-consul*, attention to contextual elements is all the more pressing since differences between Durassian women (Anne-Marie Stretter and the Cambodian beggar) across racial and social barriers, seem to fade to the point where sexual difference can be said to subsume all other differences, and produce essentialist readings of women.

Unlike other Durassian works, *Le vice-consul* has in fact attracted commentaries on the colonial situation (Bailey; Bal; Skoller). From a sociological perspective, for example, Ninette Bailey examines how the text undermines a high white society's ideological discourse predicated on social and racial stereotypes. However, I want to question her paradoxical conclusion which advocates the subversion of the dominant colonial discourse on account of the erasure of all differences. Accordingly, my interpretation of the mimetic effects and exchanges of identities--primarily across the racial/colonial line, but also across the sexual line--will rely on Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry and his formulation of "the same but not quite." More specifically, rather than underlining problematic equivalences across the socio-racial boundary, I will examine how the ambivalence of colonial discourse functions in Duras's novel and undermines the colonizer's presence and self-identity. Colonial mimicry in *Le vice-consul* becomes manifest through the contaminating effects between male and female instances: between the beggar woman (the lepers) and, respectively, Anne-Marie Stretter, and the vice consul; quite convincingly also, between the beggar woman and a French diplomat, Charles Rossett, on whose encounter I will primarily focus. Lastly, I will turn to the problem of authorizing dominant discourses, which inevitably affect the writer as colonizer and as a member of the literary institution, framed by Duras in her own fiction.

Two stories essentially organize the novel: the Cambodian beggar's story told by the British writer Peter Morgan, a minor character in the "main" narrative which revolves around the French embassy in Calcutta, especially, around the ambassador's wife, Anne-Marie Stretter, her lovers, and the vice-consul in Lahore, Jean-Marc de H.. When the novel opens, Morgan is writing his book on the young beggar woman who, expelled from her homeland, Cambodia, elects Calcutta as the place of her exile. There, at the French embassy and outside of Morgan's fiction, white society's concern and conversations focus on the vice-consul who shot at Indian lepers.

In his article "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," Bhabha concentrates on the exchange of identities across racial barriers as a manifestation of mimicry. His main contention is that the articulation of mimicry can destabilize the unity and sameness of the dominant authority and its subjects. According to Bhabha, the (colonial) dynamic of mimicry constitutes a compromise between the pressure of the dominator and the counter-pressure of the dominated. On the one hand, mimicry is moderated by the colonizer who initiates the "proliferation of inappropriate objects": a diffusion of "partial" objects which provides a sameness ("but not quite") between the colonial context and the metropole in order to give the colonial subject a sense of identity with the latter (127). On the other hand, mimicry returns as a threat to the colonizer's presence and identity from the very fact that colonial mimicry rests upon the repetition of "partial" presence. As such it unsettles the "narcissistic demand of colonial authority" (129). In other words, mimicry alienates the colonizer from self-identity and, more generally, colonial authority from claims of universality.

In *Le vice-consul*, the discourse of mimicry is fairly limited with regard to the diffusion of "partial" objects. I will mention one close instance concerning food which functions as a symbol of that "partial" diffusion. At the end of every reception given at the embassy, Anne-Marie Stretter has the leftovers distributed to the population of lepers--a sharing in metropolitan goods which helps keep the natives alive. Additionally, the beggar woman never mistakes the island where the hotel of the *Prince of Wales* is located, a famous and magnificent hotel where she will get some of the white people's food in order to survive. In this case, the colonizer's presence and oppression is "alleviated" through the distribution of white society's leftovers (or parts of metropolitan objects). I believe this example of partial diffusion all the more appropriate since one of the moments when mimicry returns as a threat to the colonizer's identity coincides with the beggar woman offering (back) food or a live fish to the French diplomat, Charles Rossett.

In the concluding pages of the novel, an edifying passage brings these two characters in contact for the first time. Rossett, newly arrived in India, is invited to spend a weekend on the island where the ambassador's seaside residence and the *Prince of Wales* are located. The topography of the island is quite unambiguous: "L'île est grande, à l'autre extrémité il y a un village très bas, qui touche la mer. Entre ce village et l'hôtel un grand grillage s'élève et les sépare. Partout, au bord de la mer, dans la mer, d'autres grillages contre les requins" (177). Railings against beggars or railings against sharks, a symptomatically sharp dividing line exists between the indigenous population and white (high) society. These railings are symptomatic in that they urgently exclude and rise against native contamination as a guarantee of the integrity of the colonizer's self-identity. However, on his way back from the Stretter's residence to the hotel, Rossett crosses over the colonizer/colonized barrier when he steps on the other side of the railings (202). This motion and the ensuing encounter between the diplomat and the beggar woman elicit some effects of what Bhabha has analyzed as the ambivalence of colonial discourse and power, or colonial mimicry.

More to the point, this scene effectively brings to the fore the confrontation between the Cambodian woman and the French man as an unsettling experience for Rossett, the colonizer's representative. In fact, their meeting further stigmatizes the already diseased colonial presence, readable as such through characters like Anne-Marie Stretter and the vice-consul, both alienated from the putative self-presence and identity of the colonizers' community. White society has explicitly rejected Jean-Marc de H., for his mad gesture (rather than for the actual killing of Indian lepers). As for the ambassador's wife, she is implicitly condemned by the rumors about her nightclub outings and her unusual behavior. Like the vice-consul, she is a "plaie" who does not fear leprosy. Speaking of the *Bluemoon*, a club she regularly visits, she says: "Les Européens n'osent pas y aller à cause de la lèpre, alors ils disent que c'est un bordel" (158).

Immediately preceding the scene of the encounter between the diplomat and the beggar, the actual situation and physical being of the Cambodian woman further duplicate Anne-Marie Stretter's own situation and physical being. At the same moment, the two women are described getting out of the water on their respective side of the railings, while their bodies are defined as "maigre" (202, 205). Reflected even in the syntax, this sameness between the two women--that is, the colonizer and the colonized--constitutes the prologue to Rossett's self-(mis)recognition in the mirror of the Cambodian woman's gaze as well as the prologue to his threatened self-identity.

This episode of the novel, in which sameness turns out to be not quite the same, builds through two different moments: first, a castration scene which provokes the white man's fear and experience of loss across both the sexual and the racial/colonial boundaries; second, a chase in which the beggar woman, following on Rossett's heels, physically articulates the unsettling return of colonial mimicry.

Elle cherche dans sa robe, entre ses seins, elle sort quelque chose qu'elle lui tend : un poisson vivant. Il ne bouge pas. Elle reprend le poisson et, lui montrant, elle croque la tête en riant davantage encore. Le poisson guillotiné remue dans sa main. Elle doit s'amuser de faire peur, de donner la nausée. Elle avance vers lui. Charles Rossett recule, elle avance encore, il recule encore, mais elle avance plus vite que lui et Charles Rossett jette la monnaie par terre, se retourne et fuit vers le chemin en courant.

Ces pas derrière lui, ce sont les siens, réguliers, ceux d'une bête; elle n'a pas ramassé l'argent, elle court vite, il court plus vite qu'elle. . . . Voici, vite, le *Prince of Wales*, ses grillages, sa palmeraie interdite à elle. (205-06)

In this passage, the displacing effect of colonial mimicry is both concretely and symbolically played out when the young woman presents the French man with food. Her gesture towards Rossett duplicates the giving away of leftovers to the native population, but, in a mimetic fashion, those "partial" objects also return the mark of otherness: the beggar woman hands over to the French diplomat a live fish. However, Rossett only fully acknowledges the menacing presence of difference in the following sequence. When the woman bites off the fish head, she forces him to recognize an othering self and compellingly triggers his fear and flight. The woman's singing which functions as an echo of Anne-Marie Stretter's piano music closes the episode in a comparably edifying manner: "On chante : le même chant qu'un moment avant. La bouche pleine du poisson eru, elle chante" (206). This song, most likely distorted, further insists on returning to the colonizer the evidence of his/her "partial" presence only.

The diplomat also experiences loss and displacement as the beggar's gaze of madness, her othering gaze, returns and additionally contaminates his narcissistic colonial presence. The railings themselves function to reinforce this argument. Meant for the white population's protection and, consequently, for the native population's surveillance, they paradoxically form a prison cage around the dominant presence--a prison which Rossett suddenly feels and wants

to escape (202). Once he has found his way out of the enclosure, the Cambodian woman's gaze stresses the ambivalence of the colonial situation since the putative observer (Rossett/the colonizer) becomes the observed, undergoing the displacing gaze of otherness which he calls "le regard des fous" (206).

The fetishistic character of the scene provides additional evidence of the operation of colonial mimicry in *Le vice-consul*. Rossett both recognizes and denies otherness, equated with madness in this scene. He acknowledges it in the woman: "Elle est folle. Son sourire ne trompe pas" (205). He deviously recognizes it in himself:

[C]'est à devenir fou cette chaleur de la mousson, les idées ne se rassemblent plus. . . . Charles Rossett pense qu'il ne sait pas ce qui lui arrive. . . . La folie, je ne la supporte pas, c'est plus fort que moi, je ne peux pas... le regard des fous, je ne le supporte pas... tout mais la folie... (206)

At the same time, Rossett urgently denies his othered self and his fear of the beggar woman, to which he finds substitute explanations: the heat ("c'est à devenir fou cette chaleur") and his fatigue ("Pourquoi cette peur? Charles Rossett sourit maintenant. La fatigue, pense-t-il" [206]). The French man's covering up of his alienated identity in fact betrays the colonizer's attempt to hide the counter-pressure of colonial mimicry or the returning gaze of the othered self. This process of camouflage echoes the castration scene proper, which, following Freud, we can understand as the basis of fetishistic constructions.

It is interesting for my present argument that Bhabha explicitly draws a parallel between mimicry and fetish, for "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (126). Mimicry repeats with a difference--a "distortion" which has then to be displaced--maybe, to a stereotype. In this respect, the representation of the beggar woman is to a great extent made to conform to a stereotypical "primitiveness": her comparison to a beast and her biting off of the head of a live fish, for instance. However, the latter metonymy of presence (Bhabha's other qualification for the stereotype) hides another scene which is not only that of the colonizer's self-alienation, but also the scene of the de-authorization of his/her discourse. In the role of the "primitive" other, the beggar woman mimes and undermines the discourse authorizing her social castration through a symbolic castration. In other words, this scene emphasizes the beggar woman's mimicry as a disavowal of her otherness. The ambiguity inscribed in the following lines highlights her performance: "la peur règne, et elle seulement. Elle est à cent

mètres de lui [Rossett]" (206). Fear/the beggar woman prevails.

At this point, it is necessary to go back to the particular conditions under which the beggar woman's story is known in *Le vice-consul* itself. After all, the Cambodian is discontinuously the object of Peter Morgan's book--a circumstance which has various effects on the representation of the colonial situation and on the discourse of mimicry. Most emphatically, the beggar's life story literally materializes as the product of a Western imagination--Morgan's imagination. The latter clearly stresses his own narrative in the telling of her narrative, that is, in his invention of her story: "Peter Morgan voudrait maintenant substituer à la mémoire aboïe de la mendiante le bric à brac de la sienne. Peter Morgan se trouverait sans cela, à court de paroles pour rendre compte de la folie de la mendiante de Calcutta" (73). However, within *Le vice-consul*, the beggar woman is not simply a fictional entity, merely and entirely created by Morgan. She lives in Calcutta among the lepers, waits for the food after every reception at the embassy, sings during the night and hunts for fish. In fact, Morgan's fictional account essentially covers the first third of Duras's novel. As a consequence, the bulk of the beggar's story limits itself to an imaginary relation between a writer and its creation, also a colonizer and a colonized. In his narrative, what Morgan insists on is the young woman's expulsion by her mother, her long walk and her hunger over the ten years it takes her to travel from her parents' home in Cambodia to Calcutta. She finally stays there: "A Calcutta où elle trouve l'abondance, les poubelles pleines du *Prince of Wales*..." (71).

Within the perspective of colonial mimicry, what becomes striking in Morgan's narrative is that the Cambodian woman purposefully follows a trajectory leading through white colonial posts. Accordingly, she meets and notices an increasing number of white people, to whom she gets accustomed: "Le premier poste blanc? Va-t'en. . . A Long-Xuyen, elle voit des Blancs par-ci par-là dans les rues. Poste blanc. . . A Sadek, elle voit encore des Blancs. . . A Vinh-Long il y a encore des Blancs, qu'il y en a!" (53). There, she even follows a white woman and her daughter to their house and waits in the garden while people take care of her infant before it finally dies. At that point, she does not fear the white man any more (67). Although this white man refers back to the medical doctor sent for to save her child, the phrase "l'homme blanc" calls for a broader interpretation which takes stock of the beggar woman's growing closeness to and confidence in the colonizer. Later, in Calcutta, we also know from Morgan's and from his friends' accounts that she always follows white people (174, 181, 199).

I therefore contend that much of Morgan's story reads as an

allegorical account of the pressure of the colonizer's presence, of the colonizer's "partial provision" for the other's needs--in this case, medical assistance and, later, food. The diffusion of "partial" assistance, like the distribution of leftovers, qualifies as the diffusion of "partial" objects, and further directs the beggar woman's steps towards white people and communities. The colonizer has thus triggered her "discourse" of mimicry that ultimately becomes her following Anne-Marie Stretter and her singing echoing both the ambassador's wife's and the vice-consul's piano pieces.

However, the counter-pressures of the colonized's returning mimicry, which surfaces in moments of "contamination" between the beggar woman and Anne-Marie Stretter, or Jean-Marc de H., belong outside of Morgan's novel--that is to say, outside of the colonizer's imaginary relation to the "other."<sup>2</sup> From the perspective of colonial mimicry, these moments attest to the ambivalence of colonial discourse, to the unsettling return of the colonized's authorized discourse. Similarly, the episode of the encounter between the beggar woman and the French diplomat, Rossett, tells a more complete story than Morgan's since it further exemplifies the counter-pressure of colonial mimicry. This scene also literally escapes the imaginary level since it belongs outside of Morgan's creation to meet the "real" of the colonizer/colonized situation.

Yet, where is that "real" since once the reader is thrown out of Morgan's fiction he/she still remains within Duras's? As author, her position is also inevitably one of power since she can manipulate and multiply discourses within her creative work. In *La volonté du savoir*, Michel Foucault in fact underlines the proliferation of discourses as a strategy used by dominant institutions to recuperate potential counter-discourses. One of Duras's merits, therefore, lies with the emphasis she places on the framing of a writer's narrative, on its limitations and, as a consequence, on the limitations and biases of her own writings. More specifically, if Morgan's writing enterprise openly stages manipulations and displays his control over the Cambodian woman's life story, this self-sabotaging of his author-ity is also shown as leaving untouched and unexpressed the crisis in the colonial situation. In other words, his narrative conveniently contains the young woman's story, and reduces her contacts with the white community to the colonizer's ("partial") provisions for the poor "native." My suggestion is that Duras keeps addressing the questions of authorship and dominant discourse all the more defiantly in *Le vice-consul* where she has elected the colonial space as the space of her writing.

A last question then arises: Can Duras, turning to former British India and French Indochina, avoid re-colonizing their sites? I argue that, in reality, the French author writes on the edge, in-between the

appropriative writing (of a dominant discourse) and a "partial" writing (returning through mimicry). On the one hand, contributing further to the exotic/colonial literary tradition, she invites the observation of an Asian/Oriental "other" as delinquent, insane, poor, primitive and woman.<sup>3</sup> However, this stereotypical and monolithic representation of the "other" is not stable either, since it returns infectiously to the place of its production, that is the colonizer's space. Another point reflecting appropriation is that the marginalization of contaminated figures such as Anne-Marie Stretter and Jean-Marc de H. also indicates the normalization of colonial mimicry in *Le vice-consul*. Charles Rossett and the group of intimates surrounding the ambassador's wife might join the two outcasts in the long run, but the remainder of white society appears little affected by India's pain. In other words, while Duras's practice of writing involves a mimicry of Morgan's discourse, it also ends up reverting to separations and marginalizations.

On the other hand, expanding on Madeleine Borgomano's remark that the Cambodian's story constitutes a "cellule génératrice" of Durassian writing, (479, 488), I also advocate a relationship between the beggar's figure and Duras's writing practice--a relationship whose effects return as "partial" writing. Contributing a distinctive colonial context to the Durassian literary and cinematographic production, the Cambodian's story constitutes Duras's obsessive memory with her childhood in Indochina. The "hysterical" reminiscence of her fictions is quite like the beggar woman's obsessional memory with the place of her expulsion. If exchange of identities there is, it will however not be with the Cambodian woman. In an interview with Jacques Grant, Duras asserts: "If I put myself in the place of the beggar woman, I would be lying. I put myself in the place of Anne-Marie Stretter, who is, like myself, a bourgeoisie, a White woman, a woman I could have been."<sup>4</sup> If the author is not to be taken at her word, I still believe that, between Duras's obsessive memory and the beggar's obsessional memory, colonial mimicry works its ambivalence in a writing which, carried through repetitions and syntactic disruptions, is contaminated by the figure of the Cambodian woman and returned as "partial" writing.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a commentary on textual silences, the "feminine," and women's spaces, see Marguerite Duras & Xavière Gautier's *Les parleuses*, and Marguerite Duras & Michelle Porte's *Les lieux de Marguerite Duras*. In relation to politics, see Duras's *Le camion*, and *Outside: papiers d'un jour*.

<sup>2</sup> A most telling example of the vice consul's affinities with the beggar woman occurs when he is thrown out of the embassy. His screams then mix with a woman's song and other screams which lead to awareness of the beggar's presence (151).

<sup>3</sup> Describing nineteenth-century conceptions of the Oriental, Edward Said writes in *Orientalism*: "The Oriental was linked . . . to elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien" (207).

<sup>4</sup> Duras is in fact referring to *India Song*: Jacques Grant, "Entretien avec Marguerite Duras," *Cinéma 75* 200 (July-Aug. 1975): 109, qtd. in Christine Anne Holmlund's "Displacing Limits of Difference" (17-18).

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# MISE EN ŒUVRE DES PERSONNAGES DANS *LA LÉZARDE* D'ÉDOUARD GLISSANT

*Christiane Szeps*

*La Lézarde*, publié en 1958 est sans aucun doute un roman rébarbatif pour le lecteur empreint de quelques assurances traditionnelles. Pourtant, l'intrigue en est simple et suffisamment linéaire: en 1945 à Lambrianne, grosse commune coloniale de la Martinique, un groupe de jeunes gens a décidé d'éliminer Garin, un renégat sauvage, chargé d'étouffer les révoltes populaires. Afin d'embroniller les soupçons, Thaël, jeune montagnard, est désigné pour cette mission qu'il réussira en noyant Garin dans la mer. Grâce à la complicité de Tigamba, un agent de police, Thaël ne sera pas inculpé. Entre-temps, l'amour se noue, se dénoue entre les jeunes gens et, les élections réalisées, chacun reprendra son chemin. Valérie, finalement conquise par Thaël, sera malheureusement tuée par les chiens de ce dernier (Laplaine 56).

Si *La Lézarde* étonne et agace à la fois, ce n'est pas en raison d'une intrigue compliquée mais plutôt à cause de la forme d'une écriture allégorique qui fait constamment vaciller le lecteur entre un événement et une digression poétique ou symbolique. En fait, ce n'est qu'à travers la tangibilité des personnages qu'on peut, pour ainsi dire, rattraper l'équilibre et la cohérence de l'oeuvre. Or, le génie de Glissant est de mouler ses personnages sur le modèle de son écriture tout en les faisant jouer dans diverses représentations d'identification. En effet, c'est avec une extraordinaire habileté qu'il les fait apparaître, évoluer et disparaître en les fusionnant aux méandres de la structure narrative de l'oeuvre. Par conséquent, se pencher sur les différents aspects de la mise en oeuvre des personnages dans *La Lézarde*, c'est aussi décoder l'écriture particulière de Glissant et découvrir la valeur littéraire et la beauté du texte.

L'attention ininterrompue que prête l'auteur à l'écriture se manifeste tout d'abord par les nombreuses identifications du personnage-clé de *La Lézarde*, soit le narrateur-enfant. En effet, le narrateur omniscient, omniprésent, philosophe, porte-parole de Glissant, "Celui qui découvre la mer a soudain un goût de pain noir dans la bouche" (143), est de surcroît un des personnages du roman, l'enfant du groupe: "J'ai entendu ces mots, pourtant je n'étais qu'un enfant... Je fus le témoin et l'objet: celui qui voit, celui qui subit, qu'on appelle et qu'on façonne" (16).

A vrai dire, la présence de ce narrateur-personnage brouille les perspectives des protagonistes, ce qui interrompt la trame narrative.

En définitive, à cause de la présence envahissante du narrateur, l'activité d'écriture prend la mesure de l'acte primordial de la révolution: "Fais une histoire dit Mathieu. Tu es le plus jeune, tu te rappelleras... Fais un livre avec toute la chaleur. Fais-le comme une rivière avec ses secrets" (224). Or, ce narrateur-personnage a vécu une aventure dans laquelle il a éprouvé une transformation comme il nous le confie au début du roman: "Et moi enfant...est l'enfant de cette histoire qui grandit à chaque mot" (31). Pareil à la rivière qui descend des montagnes, traverse les plaines pour se jeter dans la mer, il devient le fil conducteur du roman qui suit un parcours épique, s'identifiant à l'expérience nouvelle que son pays est en train de subir: "Ce pays est comme un fruit nouveau qui s'ouvre lentement dévoilant peu à peu (par-delà les épaisseurs et les obscurités de l'écorce) toute la richesse de sa pulpe, offrant la richesse à ceux qui cherchent, à ceux qui souffrent" (31-32). Et ce trésor que le narrateur-personnage détient est l'histoire qu'il nous raconte.

Si le narrateur est à la fois instrument du message de Glissant et personnage chargé par les autres protagonistes d'entreprendre cette épopée par écrit, il se fait l'écho de Thaël, instrument d'exécution de l'acte. Justement, Glissant ouvre son roman par "Thaël quitta sa maison" (11) et le clôt sur l'image du jeune homme, de retour chez lui: "Et les chiens...couchés près de lui... lui léchaient les pieds" (251). L'image de Thaël quittant sa maison au début de l'histoire, et celle de ses pieds au repos à la fin, supposent un voyage accompli, interprète de la recherche d'une identité martiniquaise.

Pour Glissant, la recherche d'une identité martiniquaise, et par extension, antillaise, doit se faire par la reconquête culturelle. C'est une reprise culturelle réalisée d'une part, par un parcours à rebours se souciant de l'origine, et d'autre part, par un parcours d'engendrement qui appelle l'histoire, afin d'articuler le passé et l'avenir. Donc, il est nécessaire de remonter le fil de l'histoire qui se trouve sous la surface, en dessous du désordre apparent, du chaos des événements, des différences qui semblent irréductibles, d'où le titre "La Lézarde," mot lourd de signification. En effet, si "La Lézarde" est le nom de la rivière dont il s'agit ici, le mot "lézarde" veut aussi dire "une fente dans un ouvrage de maçonnerie, par suite de tassement ou de mauvaise liaison des matériaux" (*Larousse*). Il faut donc fouiller la source de l'origine pour trouver le chemin entre la légende et la réalité, le conte et l'histoire, la terre et la mer, la Lézarde et la mer, l'esclavage et le peuple libre. Il s'agit, par une telle découverte, de capturer au passage le temps pur et immobile, "la terre d'abord intouchée dans cette solitude primordiale où ne frappait nul écho de l'ailleurs" (*Quatrième siècle* 276). Il faut rejoindre un espace avant le Temps et ses saccages en répondant par un défi à l'autorité du colon (André 117-18). Par

conséquent, il est tout naturel que Glissant offre à Thaël, descendant du marron primordial, le rôle premier. En effet, le "Nègre marron" étant l'esclave insoumis, c'est-à-dire celui qui, à l'origine, a fui l'emprise du colon, il est tout naturel qu'il représente l'élément fondateur du peuple martiniquais libre. Et ceci dit, ce n'est qu'à partir de ce négateur que la création d'une société affranchie peut se réaliser.

En ouvrant son roman par le mot "Thaël," Glissant exclut dans son personnage toute forme d'antécédent, tout passé, toute histoire première. En effet, on ne voit aucune trace dans le roman d'un événement attribué à Thaël antérieur à son entrée en scène, aucune digression temporelle avant son apparition, ce qui n'est pas le cas pour les autres personnages dont certaines actions passées sont relatées après leur première mise en oeuvre. Par exemple, le lecteur qui découvre Mathieu pour la première fois dans le premier chapitre, le retrouve au deuxième chapitre dans des activités précédentes. Thaël, lui, n'a pas d'histoire passée, et de plus, il vit en solitaire dans les montagnes avec ses deux chiens. Et si Glissant choisit de lui faire jouer le rôle de l'orphelin du groupe qui affirme: "Je ne sais pas, madame, je suis orphelin" (185), c'est qu'il doit apparaître tout à fait seul, et "Tel l'enfant trouvé du conte, il lui faut se produire lui-même, s'inventer" (André 124). "Thaël avait poussé tout seul comme un arbre de la montagne" (185). Et c'est pourquoi le jour de sa descente des montagnes, point de départ de son voyage missionnaire, tout est devant lui: "Devant l'homme, l'allée de pierres continue vers l'argile du sentier" (11). "Première chaleur du premier jour," tout est à refaire, et c'est à lui, homme des montagnes, refuge des révoltés, à lui, descendant du marron primordial, porteur de légendes, que revient le rôle de se débarrasser des légendes afin d'arriver à la vérité et à la vraie liberté. "Nous avons vécu trop de légendes" (15) dit-il à Mathieu. En désignant Thaël comme le héros de son roman, Glissant met en pratique ce qu'il souligne dans *Le discours antillais*: "le Nègre marron est le seul vrai héros populaire des Antilles, dont les effroyables supplices qui marquaient sa capture donnent la mesure du courage et de la détermination" (104). Mais avant de tout refaire, il faut tout défaire, et c'est là où l'image de sa sortie et descente des montagnes prend une valeur symbolique: "Or tout se défait en Thaël à mesure qu'il descend" (12). Avant de suivre la descente de la Lézarde vers la mer, il va forcément devoir la remonter pour en découvrir sa source. Il doit savoir le commencement pour arriver à la fin (Cailler 54-55). Il doit littéralement faire le chemin à rebours: "Alors Thaël remonte aux sources de la rivière, dans cette région qui lui était familière quand il n'avait pas encore connu la ville plate" (87).

A l'entrée du roman, Thaël est sur le point d'entreprendre un

voyage qui va le mener du monde des légendes au monde historique et rationnel, du connu vers l'inconnu guidé par le soleil: "Thaël quitta sa maison, et le soleil baignait déjà la rosée mariée aux points de rouille du toit... Résolument il accompagna le soleil" (11). D'ailleurs, l'auteur fera apparaître le soleil aux côtés de notre voyageur dans chacune de ses étapes, inscrivant son personnage dans un contexte prophétique jusqu'à son retour chez lui où "bientôt le soleil brûlerait sur le toit de tôle" (251). Cette dernière image suggérant l'espoir et la résistance fait écho à celle du nègre de Césaire à la fin de *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*: "Et elle est debout la négraille...debout sous le soleil... debout et libre" (61-62).

Thaël surgit dès sa première entrée en scène comme un voyageur pressé, qui n'a pas une minute à perdre, traduisant l'urgence de la mission: "Le soleil venait d'apparaître, Thaël l'avait devancé" (13). Sa course devient de plus en plus effrénée à mesure qu'il descend, emporté par sa propre volonté, "Tournoyant sur l'appui du pied gauche, Thaël fit le toboggan avec la main droite...Moulin-rivière-goyaves-pluie-route-remblais-soleil-moulin-rivière-goyaves-pluie" (13). A ce moment précis, il entre dans le monde historique avec son ordre social, "moulin-rivière-goyaves-pluie-route-remblais-soleil-moulin-rivière-goyaves-pluie," ordre auquel il aspire. Plus tard, se mesurant aux habitants de la plaine, il pense: "Ce sont des hommes lucides et méthodiques, ils cherchent la légende. Moi, je cherche l'ordre et la lucidité" (21).

Si Thaël, le rebelle, décide de descendre vers la plaine, vers l'ordre social, c'est qu'il ne peut pas se réaliser tout seul, car isolé sur sa montagne, il est improductif (Silenieks 633). Il ne doit pas suivre les traces de Papa Longoué, le vieux quimboiseur, lui aussi descendant des marrons, vivant seul sur une montagne, immobilisé et figé dans le passé, et que Glissant inscrit dans un espace nocturne: "La case de Papa Longoué est tout en haut d'un sentier sombre..." (78). L'obscurité évoque aussi bien le côté mystérieux et énigmatique de Papa Longoué que sa stérilité.

Thaël détient, comme Papa Longoué, l'origine et la légende, mais elles seules ne suffisent pas pour trouver "le temps avant le temps, la succession avant la succession et ses pertitions, le moment immobile et pur" (André 120). Il faut en plus de cela la connaissance de l'histoire répertoriée, de la ville et de la plaine que Mathieu symbolise: "Mathieu s'était présenté avec un geste large dans la direction des maisons, comme s'il avait voulu signifier que cela s'appelait Mathieu (et non Lambrienne)" (14). Mais Mathieu n'est pas seulement l'historien dont le travail consiste à mettre à jour les archives de la ville, il brûle lui aussi du désir de savoir le vrai commencement à l'état pur. "Il faut remonter si loin avant d'entrevoir

les premières lumières. L'histoire de notre peuple est à faire, et ainsi nous nous connaissons" (81), dit-il à Thaël.

La rencontre de Thaël avec Mathieu, agent de l'ordre et de la lucidité, est inévitable et indispensable car si Thaël porte en lui les accents du premier réveil du Martiniquais, il doit aussi se réconcilier avec son pays en entier, la montagne avec la plaine et la mer, afin de bien mener son acte missionnaire. Or, Glissant fait justement surgir Mathieu pour la première fois au moment précis où Thaël est en pleine descente pour s'introduire dans l'ordre de la plaine: "Moulin-rivière-goyaves-pluie... lorsqu'il s'immobilisa, dans le prolongement de la main, apparut, comme un enfantement de la vitesse et du vertige, Mathieu" (13). Voilà Mathieu qui fait sa première entrée en scène d'une façon quasiment miraculeuse à la manière d'un personnage biblique. En effet, l'auteur, en identifiant son apparition à un "enfantement", suggère à la fois l'idée de naissance, production et création. Il est clair que la rencontre des deux hommes, se tendant la main symboliquement par le geste que l'on retrouve dans les mots "dans le prolongement de la main apparut.. Mathieu," signifie le moment de soudure de la montagne et la plaine, et il n'y a plus maintenant qu'à réconcilier terre et mer en faisant disparaître le traître Garin dans cette dernière.

Contrairement à Thaël et Mathieu qui ont une mise en oeuvre franche et nette, entièrement en accord avec leur personnage, Garin apparaît d'une façon progressive, procédé de mise en scène conforme à son caractère sournois. Garin, c'est le renégat, le traître, celui qui vend les siens au maître, un lâche, un homme dangereux dont la maison se trouve juste sur la source de la Lézarde. Le lecteur le découvre donc pour la première fois à travers le narrateur, quand ce dernier relate les événements qui ont mené le groupe à la décision de l'éliminer: "Nos amis décidèrent...de museler la bête" (19). L'auteur ne lui assigne pas encore de nom. On l'appelle "l'homme", "l'officier" ou plus exactement "la bête", lui retirant toute identité précise, avant même qu'il n'entre en scène. Il n'apparaît en réalité que dans la deuxième partie du roman, quand Thaël va le dénicher dans sa maison de la source pour le leurrer vers la mer: "Il est invisible dans la profondeur, Thaël voit en bas, dans la niche, séparée de lui par toute l'épaisseur de la nuit, deux hommes: leurs voix résonnèrent calmement" (94). Là encore, le lecteur ne le découvre pas franchement, le voyant en cachette, de loin. Il est là, mais il ne le voit pas entièrement. Ce procédé de mise en scène du personnage évoque au lecteur les manifestations furtives d'une bête prête à sauter sur sa proie. Garin est le trompeur par excellence dans le roman; assis sur sa source, il est la source du problème antillais. Et si Glissant choisit un des leurs et non le béké pour jouer ce rôle, c'est précisément pour

mettre en évidence, d'une part, le manque de solidarité entre les descendants d'esclaves, et d'autre part, la gravité du danger qu'il implique comme le remarque André Ntonfo, "n'est-ce pas les Africains eux-mêmes qui se chargeaient de rassembler et de conduire à l'intérieur du continent, vers la côte, des colonnes d'hommes et de femmes pour les vendre comme esclaves" (158-59)? En fait, Garin est le contraire de Thaël, le contre-négateur comme l'indique Bernadette Cailler dans *Conquérants de la nuit nue*: "Dans *La Lézarde*, la contre-négation s'incarne dans le renégat Garin, le gèreur, dont le meurtre, par Thaël, s'accomplira sans haine ni remords, meurtre quasi rituel, nommé simplement "l'acte, nécessaire à la fécondité de la terre, à la pureté de la rivière" (110).

La naissance symbolique de l'homme antillais n'est pas réservée exclusivement à l'île où sont nés les jeunes gens de Lambrianne, mais elle s'étend à toutes les îles d'alentour. C'est ce que précise le narrateur de *La Lézarde*, "Tu leur diras toutes les îles...pas seulement celle-ci où nous sommes mais toutes ensemble" (226)! La recherche d'une identité n'est possible qu'au prix de l'acceptation des autres. Voilà pourquoi Mathieu rejoint Thaël pour en définitive ne former qu'un seul personnage. En effet, leurs différences sont complémentaires: l'un est la montagne, l'autre la plaine, l'un la vaillance, l'autre la lucidité, l'un l'héroïsme, l'autre le travail, l'un la légende, l'autre le projet. L'un cherche en l'autre ce qu'il n'a pas.

L'apparition miraculeuse de Mathieu aux côtés de Thaël traduit l'équilibre que ce dernier recherche et trouve dans son compagnon. On se souvient que c'est Mathieu qui arrête la descente folle de Thaël: "L'intrus interrompt son tourbillon, cassait net son ivresse" (13). C'est forcément à Mathieu que revient cette tâche puisque c'est lui "qui rassemble, bâtit, reconstitue, met de l'ordre enfin" (André 137). D'ailleurs, Glissant fait souvent apparaître les deux hommes prenant la relève l'un de l'autre, ce qui en quelque sorte fait écho aux différents chapitres que l'auteur entrelace dans leur chronologie, semblables à la rivière qui fusionne avec la mer, la légende avec l'histoire. "Tout un versant de l'oeuvre romanesque d'Edouard Glissant est constitué par la tentative ultime d'associer l'homme, le sol et la langue en un même destin" (André 116).

Si Glissant évoque la nécessité de dépendance et de solidarité entre Thaël et Mathieu, il met aussi en évidence l'importance du collectif qu'il associe au reste du groupe de jeunes et met en oeuvre dès le deuxième chapitre: "Sur la place, un groupe s'était réuni à l'écart du mouvement de la foule (mais à tout moment interpellé par cette foule d'amis)" (17). Or, si ce groupe se détache du reste de la foule, l'auteur le réintègre entre parenthèses à la collectivité générale. Puis, suit la présentation de ces jeunes, Margarita et Gilles, Luc et

Michel, Pablo et Mycéa, deux par deux comme pour souligner la nécessité de dépendance, chacun cerné par un qualificatif caractériel. Par exemple, il y a une Margarita mystérieuse, un Gilles discret, un Luc et un Michel bien solides, un Pablo princier et une Mycéa rétive. Glissant met en scène une collectivité universelle à travers ce groupe d'amis. Ils sont là tous ensemble parce que le moment est grave, et la vie de chacun est entre les mains de tous. A la fin, la victoire des élections annoncée, ils sont encore tous réunis, "Peut-on dire que Thaël était seul responsable de la mort de Garin? Non, cette question était idiote. Ils avaient tous décidé... Nous, nous tous" (200).

Glissant tend aussi à traduire un système d'équilibre en mettant en scène un nombre égal de femmes et d'hommes. On remarque aussi que les jeunes portent des surnoms, et le jeu des portraits auquel ils se livrent à corps perdu, relève de la clandestinité révolutionnaire. En fait, "plus que le nom propre importe le type qui répond à une vocation" (Laplaine 59). Et ce n'est qu'après la mort de Garin, mission accomplie, que Glissant leur restitue leurs vrais noms: "Vous permettez que je vous appelle Raphaël, je sais que votre surnom est Thaël" (183). Noms et identités retrouvés traduisent société de liberté recapturée où l'homme vit en accord avec lui-même.

Si Valérie, la fiancée de Thaël, est le personnage du groupe qui apparaît rarement avec les autres, c'est qu'elle va subir un tout autre destin. En effet, Glissant l'inscrit sous le signe de la malédiction et de la fatalité. En outre, avant qu'elle n'entre en scène, le lecteur se doute que le couple Valérie-Thaël n'aura pas d'avenir, ou plutôt que son avenir sera sourd et coupé: "Cependant Mathieu arrivait quelquefois à la hauteur de Thaël et criait alors vers l'azur ébloui: Valérie, Valérie! mot que son compagnon (Thaël) n'entendait pas" (15). Si la lumière du soleil qui auréole Thaël traduit l'espoir, en revanche, l'ombre de la mort de Valérie lui rend compte de la naïveté de croire qu'un seul acte politique peut résoudre tous les problèmes et effacer toutes les souffrances: "Combien c'est de mentir que de croire que nous avons tout fini" (250).

En somme si *La Lézarde* est un roman qui est dans son ensemble aussi dépourvu de détails domestiques quotidiens qu'une tragédie de Racine, et qui dérouté le lecteur par ses phrases qui "prolifèrent à partir d'elles-mêmes, se dédoublent, se reprennent, se répètent indéfiniment et vibrent" (Laplaine 58), il ne s'écarte pour ainsi dire pas de certains romans conventionnels quant à la mise en oeuvre de ses personnages. En effet, faisant apparaître ses protagonistes dans un dispositif d'images bien arrêté, Glissant les manipule dans un jeu d'ombres et de lumières, de symboles et d'archétypes évoquant ainsi leur être, leur raison d'être et leur devenir.

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## UN REFUGE DE L'IDÉOLOGIE DU NARRATEUR: LA STRUCTURE PRÉSUPPOSITIONNELLE

*Rachel Sauvé*

En cette décennie du nouvel ordre mondial, nul vocable n'est plus maltraité que le mot *idéologie*, qui rappelle une grisaille communiste dépassée, qui évoque non seulement l'appareil d'État, mais aussi l'appareil lexical imposant dont il s'entourait à l'époque de la lutte des classes. Et pourtant, par définition, l'idéologie n'emprunte pas de gros sabots; au contraire, elle se glisse à pas feutrés dans les discours sociaux. Plus l'idéologie domine, plus elle est discrète: nul besoin, en effet, de crier tout haut ce que chacun pense tout bas. Il en est de même dans le texte littéraire. Par conséquent, les personnages dits porte-parole et les narrateurs-je ne doivent pas être considérés comme les porte-étendard exclusifs du discours idéologique. L'emploi de la comparaison, cette figure de style si commune qu'on s'attarde rarement à l'observer de près, constitue l'un des modes privilégiés de ce discours, et je vais tenter de démontrer, dans les pages qui suivent, les mécanismes de la rhétorique, de montrer comment, en toute tautologie, la rhétorique devient la rhétorique, comment expression et persuasion ne font qu'un. Je m'empresse d'abord de définir la structure présuppositionnelle sur laquelle repose la comparaison. Pour cela, je ferai appel à la linguistique, et particulièrement à Ducrot. Voici comment il décrit le présupposé dans *Le dire et le dit*: "Une évidence, un cadre incontestable où la conversation doit nécessairement s'inscrire, comme un élément de l'univers du discours" (20). J'insiste sur le caractère d'indéniabilité du présupposé. En effet, lorsque je dis: "Ma mère va mieux," je ne peux nier avoir voulu dire qu'elle a été malade. Second exemple: "Je t'ai dit que tu allais prendre froid, mais tu ne m'as pas écouté." On doit conclure, pour des raisons purement grammaticales, que le destinataire de l'énoncé a pris froid. A moins, bien entendu, d'être un personnage de Ionesco. Prenons la première réplique de *La cantatrice chauve*, donnée par Mme Smith: "Nous avons bien mangé ce soir. C'est parce que nous habitons dans les environs de Londres et que notre nom est Smith" (11). Je laisse à Ducrot le commentaire: "En introduisant une idée sous forme de présupposé, je fais comme si mon interlocuteur et moi-même nous ne pouvions faire autrement que de l'accepter" (20). Si le présupposé est inacceptable, la communication se fêle, et l'absurde se glisse dans ses interstices.

La comparaison repose elle aussi sur une présupposition, à savoir que le comparé et le comparant ont au moins un sème en commun.

C'est pourquoi le vers d'Eluard, "La terre est bleue comme une orange," nous laisse perplexes. Mais pourquoi le passage de Flaubert qui suit apparaît-il davantage comme une jolie trouvaille que comme une absurdité? Il écrit: "Les affections profondes ressemblent aux honnêtes femmes; elles ont peur d'être découvertes, et passent dans la vie les yeux baissés" (199). Nous voici en présence de deux assertions, le posé portant sur les affections profondes, le présupposé sur les femmes. Il semble que le message principal de l'énoncé réside dans le présupposé plutôt que dans le posé, phénomène bien défini par Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni: "Je parlerai de trope présuppositionnel dès lors qu'un énoncé est manifestement utilisé pour informer d'abord de ce qu'il présuppose" (116). Notons que l'énoncé flaubertien comporte deux procédés qui interpellent le lecteur et révèlent le contenu idéologique: l'emploi du mot *ressemblent*, articulateur de la comparaison, d'une part, et le passage au temps présent, d'autre part, qui opère une coupure avec l'ensemble du récit rédigé au passé simple, et universalise l'énoncé.

Chez Balzac, le rythme du texte est relié à la récurrence des universalisations, dont je ne donnerai qu'un exemple:

Habitué à tous les changements de physionomie et aux singuliers caprices produits par l'indécision ou par la rêverie qui caractérisent les gens processifs, les clerks continuèrent à manger, en faisant autant de bruit avec leurs mâchoires que doivent en faire des chevaux au râtelier, et ne s'inquiétèrent plus du vieillard (c'est moi qui souligne). (30)

Dans *Reading in Detail*, Naomi Schor souligne que cette importance accordée aux détails et aux comparants tient de la mise en abyme: "The comparison is thus foregrounded, functioning as a *mise en abyme* of the very act of detailing: it really is a detail of a detail" (47).

Or l'élégance du style exige souvent que l'on sacrifie à la concision les articulateurs de la comparaison, ce qui, du même coup, accentue l'aspect implicite du présupposé. Je m'expliquerai à partir d'un passage de *La fortune des Rougon*: "Ce rugissement de la révolte, cet appel à la lutte et à la mort ... lui causait une de ces angoisses voluptueuses de vierge martyre se redressant et souriant sous le fouet" (66). Il s'agit ici du personnage de Miette, qui participe à la rébellion populaire de 1851. Mais c'est le comparant qui nous importe ici, en l'occurrence les vierges martyres, dont le narrateur rappelle, au souvenir du lecteur, les angoisses voluptueuses bien connues qu'elles éprouvent, souriantes, lorsqu'elles se redressent sous le fouet. Le narrateur a beau jeu, fort peu de vierges martyres ayant survécu pour le contredire. Tout absorbé qu'il est dans la diégèse, le lecteur ne voit

dans la comparaison qu'une image illustrant ce qu'éprouve le personnage, sans s'attarder au bien-fondé de l'image en question, qui est représentée, via l'emploi du participe présent et du déictique "un de ces...", comme extra-diégétique, et par conséquent renvoyant au réel, à la réalité, au vrai.

Comme je puiserai l'ensemble de mes exemples dans l'oeuvre de Zola, je voudrais souligner que Clive Thomson s'est intéressé à ce phénomène dans *Les trois villes*. Il y a relevé ce qu'il appelle les clichés sociaux, mais je crois que le mot *cliché* crée une ambiguïté, car il s'agit plutôt d'énoncés qui veulent passer pour des clichés. Très souvent chez Zola, toute forme verbale est escamotée dans la proposition comparante, et le déictique fait place à un déterminant: c'est la structure présuppositionnelle, telle qu'on la retrouve dans cette phrase de *Pot-Bouille*: "Elle souriait, grasse, avec le visage blanc et reposé d'une soeur tourière" (164). De quel personnage s'agit-il? Peu nous importe, car ce qui nous intéresse, c'est le contenu du comparant, à savoir que les soeurs tourières ont le visage blanc et reposé. Présupposé fort contestable, sans doute, mais inoffensif et anodin. Peut-on en dire autant de l'assertion suivante, tirée celle-là de *La conquête de Plassans*? "Les collégiens n'ont pas le goût des femmes pour les brutalités" (208). Décodage du présupposé: les femmes ont du goût pour les brutalités.

Revenons maintenant à l'idéologie, dont, je tiens à le spécifier, la structure présuppositionnelle n'est qu'un des véhicules. Le discours extra-diégétique sous toutes ses formes doit être considéré comme lieu idéologique, que ce soit l'aphorisme, la digression balzacienne, l'incompatibilité des niveaux de langue dans le style indirect libre, etc. Tous ces procédés donnent au texte un aspect ampoulé, émaillé d'excroissances, pour emprunter à Genette sa métaphore du kyste, cette enveloppe qui, dans le corps humain, recèle parfois une tumeur: "Le discours inséré dans le récit reste discours et forme une sorte de kyste très facile à reconnaître et à localiser" (66). Notre structure présuppositionnelle se distingue justement par l'incognito dont elle bénéficie. Le narrateur choisit ses comparants en fonction de leur qualité évocatrice et de la présomption que le lecteur saura les décoder sans trop d'effort; autrement, une tension s'établit et le lecteur risque de mettre le code gnomique "ventre en l'air", comme le souhaitait Barthes dans *S/Z* (107). A notre époque politiquement correcte, le lecteur réagit spontanément devant l'exemple cité plus haut à propos du soi-disant goût des femmes pour les brutalités: voilà qui dénote que le contexte idéologique a évolué. Mais la ruse de l'idéologie, c'est que de nombreux présupposés qui courent toujours échappent à la lecture, en partie parce qu'ils ont la vie dure, et aussi parce qu'ils sont disséminés dans un texte ou un oeuvre entier. Dans

*La conquête de Plassans*, de Zola, le personnage principal, François Mouret, se voit qualifié, au fil du texte, de railleur, épais, prudent, curieux, tranquille, soigneux:

- ... du ton railleur d'un bourgeois qui croit avoir conclu une bonne affaire (14);
- ... son épaisseur de commerçant retiré (35);
- Toute sa prudence de bourgeois paisible se réveilla (57);
- Toute sa curiosité de bourgeois inoccupé s'était calmée (110);
- ... ses tics de bourgeois satisfait (398);
- ... son petit pas tranquille de bourgeois flâneur (409);
- ... en bourgeois soigneux qui entend faire les choses comme elles doivent être faites, de façon réfléchie (421-22).

Les sèmes ainsi distribués contribuent à caractériser le personnage et à le rendre plus réaliste et plus typique. Mais chacun de ces sèmes est aussi attribué, par le biais de la structure présuppositionnelle, à l'ensemble des bourgeois, et je dirais que le ton railleur est beaucoup plus celui du narrateur que celui du personnage. Voici par contre un stéréotype, physique, puis psychologique, celui de la vierge, dont le paradigme se construit au fil de plusieurs textes, et qui servira de point de départ à quelques remarques sur le discours que tient le narrateur zolien sur les femmes:

- ... avec son visage pur de vierge;
- ... toute rose comme une vierge (*Nana* 238);
- ... avec sa face muette de vierge (*Nana* 372)];
- ... une jeune femme aux cils de vierge;
- ... l'impudique naïveté des vierges (*La fortune* 217);
- ... désirables et tendres comme des vierges qui reviennent du bain;
- ... sa maussaderie de fille vierge et bien élevée (*Pot-Bouille* 84);
- ... avec l'ébahissement d'une vierge (*Pot-Bouille* 100).

A la naïveté, la pureté, la sérénité, l'ébahissement des vierges viennent s'opposer les caractéristiques très physiques de la "femme faite", expression énigmatique chère à Zola, et dont voici un échantillon:

- ... ses rires gras et souples de femme faite (*La fortune* 49);
- ... le balancement de hanches d'une femme faite (*La curée* 125);
- ... sa honte de femme faite (*La curée* 151);
- ... des bras et des épaules de femme faite (*La conquête*

258);

... les rondeurs pleines, l'odeur mûre d'une femme faite  
(*Nana* 360).

La récurrence de cette expression laisse croire qu'il s'agit d'un syntagme relativement usuel à l'époque de Zola. Pour nous, lectrices et lecteurs du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle, il comporte un certain flou: s'agit-il de la femme mûre qui s'empâte légèrement, de celle qui a vécu quelques maternités, ou tout simplement de la femme déflorée, mariée ? Je ne prétends pas, ici, que l'on doive détenir cette connaissance d'ordre encyclopédique pour comprendre le texte: il suffit de constater que ce paradigme s'oppose, dans l'univers zolien, à celui de la vierge et à celui de la "fille", autre terme qui désigne la femme délurée, la Parisienne pleine de bagou, que nous, lectrices modernes, aurions tendance à qualifier de "femme libre, ou indépendante"! Toutefois, on constate qu'il était possible à cette époque d'utiliser ce syntagme sans plus de définition ou d'explication: c'est dire qu'il renvoyait à un signifié accessible aux lecteurs comme au narrateur.

La même structure sert d'assise à des énoncés, lourds de portée idéologique, où un trait moral est associé, par raccourci, à une condition sociale, comme dans ces exemples tirés de *L'assommoir*: "... voleur comme une fruitière (91), "... ses préjugés inquiets de bourgeoise" (198). On trouve aussi chez Zola des syntagmes comme "... son regard bleu de fille hardie" (*La curée* 122), ou encore "... son honnêteté de femme laide" (*L'assommoir* 155), procédé considéré comme tout à fait littéraire, et par lequel la comparaison se double d'une espèce d'hypallage qui se distingue, toutefois, de l'hypallage traditionnelle, cette figure de rhétorique traditionnelle par laquelle les attributs d'un mot, dans une phrase, sont rattachés de façon innovatrice, et par raccourci, à d'autres mots de la même phrase. Dans les exemples qui précèdent, l'attribut est rattaché à un syntagme (l'honnêteté est un trait de la femme laide en général, non pas de cette femme en particulier) par le lien de nécessité qui unit, dans la structure présuppositionnelle, le thème et son prédicat, mais plus encore, un fait de nature, la laideur, à un fait de culture, l'honnêteté. Par définition, le discours idéologique tend à lier nature et culture, ou plutôt à faire passer pour naturel ce qui est culturel.

Et pourtant, il est difficile de croire qu'aucune des lectrices de Zola n'a sourcillé en lisant ce passage de *La fortune des Rougon*: "Elle qui avait dans sa jeunesse oublié d'être mère pour être amante, éprouvait les voluptés divines d'une nouvelle accouchée"(180). Dans un roman subséquent, ironiquement intitulé *La joie de vivre*, Zola donne la description minutieuse d'un accouchement qui n'a rien de voluptueux, et qu'il compare à l'acharnement du bûcheron:

C'était l'enragement, le han! éperdu du fendeur de bois, qui abat sa cognée depuis des heures sur le même noeud, sans avoir pu seulement entamer l'écorce;

.....  
 Il ne restait que l'humanité douloureuse,  
 l'enfantement dans le sang et dans l'ordure, faisant  
 craquer le ventre des mères, élargissant jusqu'à  
 l'horreur cette fente rouge, pareille au coup de hache  
 qui ouvre le tronc et laisse couler la vie des grands  
 arbres. (308, 322)

On connaît la réaction d'au moins une lectrice, non autorisée, il faut le dire, de ce roman. Colette raconte, dans *La maison de Claudine*, comment elle a lu *La joie de vivre* en cachette: "Si elle en garde, après, de la honte, une fille de quatorze ans n'a ni peine ni mérite à tromper des parents au coeur pur" (40). Signalons l'aphorisme qui tend à universaliser des sentiments tout personnels. Colette réagit donc ainsi au texte, et plus précisément au récit de l'accouchement:

Une assez douceâtre histoire d'hérédité l'emplissait, mon Dieu, comme plusieurs autres Zola. La cousine robuste et bonne cédait son cousin aimé à une malingre amie, et tout se fût passé comme sous Ohnet, ma foi, si la chétive épouse n'avait connu la joie de mettre un enfant au monde. Elle lui donnait le jour soudain, avec un luxe brusque et cru de détails, une minutie anatomique, une complaisance dans la couleur, l'attitude, le cri, où je ne reconnus rien de ma tranquille compétence de jeune fille des champs. Je me sentis crédule, effarée, menacée dans mon destin de petite femelle. (40)

Le témoignage de Colette met en cause le caractère universel et les présupposés du récit de l'accouchement. On peut considérer le texte de Colette comme tout aussi particulier, mais il met en lumière l'ignorance où nous sommes quant aux réactions du lectorat féminin, en partie à cause de l'interdiction faite aux filles de lire Zola. Le présupposé, enfin, ne fonctionne que dans un cadre où le destinataire et le destinataire du message partagent le même environnement idéologique. C'est pourquoi le roman à thèse, qui veut convaincre, promouvoir, influencer, dédaigne la présupposition au profit de la prise de position, comme l'a bien démontré Susan Suleiman. Le roman à thèse constitue, explique-t-elle, un acte perlocutoire dont le but avoué est de modifier l'opinion ou le comportement du lecteur; c'est dire que le discours du narrateur entre en conflit avec la *doxa*,

qu'il est, du moins au moment de la rédaction, marginal par rapport à elle. Bien que l'on retienne, de Zola, l'image d'un contestataire en butte à son époque, on connaît de mieux en mieux l'habileté avec laquelle il a mis en scène bon nombre de ses conflits avec la presse et les autorités. Dans les *Rougon-Macquart*, la démonstration se passe, le plus souvent, de plaider. Et le discours idéologique maintient un profil modeste. Dans les *Quatre évangiles*, par contre, le ton change, et l'idéologie, loin de se glisser entre les lignes, saute au visage du lecteur. Dans *Fécondité*, le narrateur adopte le ton prêcheur du croisé, fait l'apologie de la fécondité conjugale et du colonialisme avec véhémence. C'est l'époque où le malthusianisme connaît une nouvelle vogue, ce qui a entraîné une baisse importante du taux de natalité et fait craindre pour la sécurité des frontières de la France. Un court passage, où il est question d'allaitement, suffira à illustrer le type de discours qui domine dans ce texte:

Toute une gloire chantait, gloire à la source de vie,  
gloire à la mère véritable, à celle qui nourrit après  
avoir enfanté, car il n'en est pas d'autres, les autres  
ne sont que d'incomplètes et lâches ouvrières,  
coupables d'incalculables désastres. (244)

Voilà l'idéologie avec ses gros sabots, celle qui n'est pas encore dominante. Ironiquement, c'est au moment où Zola devient l'apôtre des valeurs traditionnelles (non seulement dans son oeuvre, mais dans son militantisme) qu'il est le plus marginal.

Difficile, de nos jours libéralistes, de parler d'idéologie sans faire figure d'ancêtre; et pourtant, dépouillons ce mot des connotations sibériennes et autres qui s'y étaient greffées, réapproprions-le-nous, afin de garder présente à nos esprits l'opposition nature/culture, car, comme le dit si bien Ionesco:

"C'est une précaution inutile, mais absolument nécessaire" (*La cantatrice chauve* 63).

University of Toronto

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