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Graft and Transplant: Identities in Question

Metaphysics and Translating. An Exodus-quotation in Medieval Vernacular Literature

Edit Anna Lukács (University of ELTE Budapest)

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Becoming a Monstrous Text? The Process of Grafting in the Work of Jean Genet and Jacques Derrida's Glas

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Alvise Sforza Tarabochia (University of Kent)

Reaching out to the Other? Bora and the Wind of Forgiveness

Gregoria Manzin (Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne)

Catalan Identity in Post-Franco Era: Writing Desencant in Torrent's Un Negre Amb Un Saxo

Jaume Silvestre i Llinars (University of Kent)

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Skepsi editorial board's aim is to honour the spirit of School of European Culture and Languages working hard to take advantage of its unique position as a crossroads in academic studies in Europe. Our hope is to develop collective thinking processes in the context of academic research, and to become a forum for European postgraduate researchers and postdoctoral scholars.

Our title, *Skepsi* — which means 'thought' in Ancient Greek — symbolises our will to explore new areas and new methods in the traditional fields of academic research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Originality and creativity in the approach of thought and of texts are crucial for us: to enhance and to promote these aspects will be our contribution to the tremendous range of existing academic publications.



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Contents

Foreword	4
Edit Anna Lukács: University of ELTE Budapest	
Metaphysics and Translating: An Exodus-quotation in Medieval Vernacular Literature	5
Abstract	5
Enrico Santangelo: Royal Holloway University of London & Università di Torino	
Renewal through the Classics: Irony, Parody, Intertextuality in the <i>Decameron</i>	14
Abstract	14
Mathias Degout: Université Paris IV Sorbonne	
Aphorisms from French to English: Translations of La Rochefoucauld's <i>Maxims</i>	23
Abstract	23
Sophie Vergé-Djigo: Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens	
From Concept to Analogy: An Investigation into Singularity	32
Abstract	32
Fabien Arribert-Narce: University of Kent and Université Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle	
Photographs in Autobiographies: Identities in Progress	47
Abstract	47
Claire Lozier: University of Kent and Université Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle	
Becoming a Monstrous Text? The Process of Grafting in the Work of Jean Genet and Jacques Derrida's <i>Glas</i>	56
Abstract	56
Alvise Sforza Tarabochia: <i>University of Kent</i>	
Grafting and de-grafting mental illness: the identity of madness	65
Abstract	65
Gregoria Manzin: Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne	
Reaching out to the Other? <i>Bora</i> and the Wind of Forgiveness.....	74
Abstract	74
Jaume Silvestre I Llinars: <i>University of Kent</i>	
Catalan Identity in the Post-Franco Era: Writing <i>Desencant</i> in Torrent's <i>Un Negre Amb Un Saxo</i>	88
Abstract	88

Foreword

The practices of grafting and transplanting, understood both literally and metaphorically, raise a series of questions with regard to the concept of identity: the unity of the subject; becoming; the Other; the in-between. Grafts and transplants set up a relationship between a donor and a receiver, be they human beings, texts, literary genres, images, languages, concepts, cultures, genders or historical periods. It involves the transposition of a part of something into something else. How might these different entities be said – or made – to co-exist? In what sense might the existence of such aggregates involve (or indeed require) a form of grafting and transplanting? Is their coexistence the result of an act of intrusion and violence or a mark of hospitality?

Skepsi's first issue explores the process of becoming-other or (re-)building an identity which the graft and transplant entail. It honours the interdisciplinary spirit of the journal by considering the switches, relays and connectivities at work in a wide variety of literary, artistic, philosophical, cultural and linguistic assemblages. It covers an ambitious field of knowledge – translation and intertextuality, monstrosity and abnormality, personal and cultural identities – without losing the feeling of a shared project. Indeed, all articles have been written by European researchers, and are related to Europe in a broad sense of the term: for this reason, Skepsi's first issue is – as we hope – a good example of a successful graft, despite the differences between vernacular languages and national identities.

In this inaugural issue of Skepsi, the reader will find a selection of papers given at the first annual postgraduate conference held at the University of Kent in May 2008, whose topic was: 'Graft and Transplant'. These papers are published here along with external contributions.

Skepsi editorial board

Metaphysics and Translating: An *Exodus*-quotation in Medieval Vernacular Literature

Edit Anna Lukács

University of ELTE Budapest

Abstract

The *Speculum maius*, encyclopaedia of Vincent of Beauvais – and in particular the section titled *Speculum historiale* – was one of the most popular objects of vernacular translations in the 14th century. The first chapter contains a metaphysical expository, with some relevant quotations on the divine substance, among which appears the biblical auto-definition of God (*Exodus* 3:15): ‘*Ego sum qui sum, hoc nomen mihi est in aeternum*’. The translation of Jean de Vignay (Paris, Antoine Verard, 1496) renders this sentence with an alternative meaning: ‘*Je suy ce que ie suy et ce nom est a moy en pardurablete*’. Another manuscript version produced by an anonymous translator in Metz (*Abrégé lorrain*, ms. fr. 9558 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France) chooses to transcribe the Latin, then the French version: ‘*Ego sum qui sum. Je suy qui suy. Cilz noms mest pardurables.*’ As a matter of fact, Gilson interprets the whole medieval philosophy as an amount of individual positions to the *Exodus*-manifestation of God.

How do these two vernacular accounts behave towards the metaphysics of the *Exodus*, which philosophical position do they adopt among other *Exodus*-adaptations? Is it possible to differentiate in this sentence a theological point of view from that of the translator? What’s the relationship generally between the two texts and their translators who consider their work of translation slightly differently?

This article highlights at the same time the use of quotations and the textual equivalence in translations. Questioning this particular case can evaluate the degree of philosophical consciousness and the work of translation in the Middle Ages, exemplified in two philological rarities.

Keywords:



The Middle Ages offer a unique point of view on texts in terms of grafting and transplanting: blamed as an epoch of plagiarism, of mediocrity or even of infinite and indefinite repetitions, the identity of the authors remained often veiled, denied or had doubt cast upon it. In this context, to question an essential point of the metaphysics, the *Exodus* self-

definition of God is to hold a mirror to the identity of the medieval authors, translators or other followers, for whom all, God was the creator of the universe.

To open the discussion, the following question: is metaphysics dependent on the language that articulates it? From the medieval point of view, there was no place for this question, since the domination of the Latin – *lingua franca* of the culture and the sciences – was so strong that the situation could not broaden so far. It is during the Late Middle Ages that the facts change, that the emergence of vernacular languages leads not to the consciousness of a problematic, but to something that from a modern point of view we could call a ‘problem’, which has to be questioned and analyzed. In any case, the debate on the language of the metaphysics is one century old and the positions are as multiple as they are various. Instead of enumerating them, I propose to approach directly the question from a specific point of view: from that of medieval metaphysics and its transposition into vernacular languages.

First of all, I intend to agree about the sense of metaphysics. The definition of metaphysics appears very condensed to Etienne Gilson, historian of medieval philosophy, of which he stated, it was the most original creation of the Middle Ages: ‘There is only one God, and this God is the being: this is the rough edged stone of the entire Christian philosophy, and not Plato, not even Aristotle, but Moses has set it down.’¹ Moses set down this supposed rough edged stone in questioning the divinity on his name. The answer is well known, however it remains no less vague and no less debated in whichever language it appears: ‘I am the one who is’ (*Exodus* 3.14). Even if the position of Gilson consisting in giving greater importance to being among medieval theological categories appears sometimes contentious, the importance of the divine self-definition is pointed out from earlier times: from the Church Fathers, the first self-definition of the Christian God is interpreted and explained. Following Augustine, the medieval thinking transposed in God the principle of intelligible determination and of stability through the being, a principle that the classical Greek philosophy expressed by the means of the substance (*ousia*). Even Thomas Aquinas did not deny this medieval tradition.² Nevertheless, he laid down the preeminence of the divine existence only with the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, although Exodus 3.14 had not had before the same significance for him. This ambiguity stands out in the whole medieval history of the Exodus-quotation: this is what I want to prove here.

Detached from the context, the Exodus-revelation is in fact difficult to understand, since real parallels in the Ancient Testament or even in Hebrew literature are scarce. As a

¹ Etienne Gilson, *L’Esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), p. 51. My translation.

² Emilie Zum Brunn, ‘La “métaphysique de l’Exode” selon Thomas d’Aquin’, in *Dieu et l’être*, ed. by Paul Vignaux (Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1978), p. 252.

consequence of this, in particular in Antiquity, authors choose to transcribe the Hebrew instead of translating it.³ Although the Latin version appears unanimous – *Ego sum qui sum* – the situation will be different with the vernacular languages. It is fastidious for them to remain as compact as the Latin: there was no let-out, the sentence had to be translated, positions adopted, choices made. In order to extract the various visions of medieval metaphysics from this sentence of *Exodus*, I will examine a very popular encyclopedia in monastic environment, which I will follow in its translations in Old French addressed to various social classes.

1. The ‘first’ Exodus

Vincent of Beauvais, an author of the 13th century, composed a huge encyclopedia, the biggest of his time, divided into three parts: *Speculum Naturale*, *Speculum Doctrinale* and *Speculum Historiale*. The historical part, the ‘Mirror of History’ was the most popular of the three pieces: it is this one, which crossed the doorway of the monasteries and opened the encyclopedia from the Latin to the Ancient French and its dialects.

The first chapter of *Speculum Historiale* entitled ‘*Epilogus de Unitate Divinae Substantiae*’ [Epilogue on the Unity of the Divine Substance], a chapter of transition between quotations on the utility of history and the beginning of the historical narrative, contains a consideration of the essence of God. As an encyclopaedist, Vincent had no obligation to give an exhaustive account of theology: this was henceforth the task of the *summae*. Moreover, his work offers a huge repertory of quotations: in our chapter, it is possible to establish the origin and the reference of each sentence. Both qualities are joined together in an affirmation of the author in the Prologue of his work: ‘[...] I am not writing a treatise, I am only doing compilation.’⁴

The ‘initial presence of God’, recorded in medieval encyclopedias as a necessity,⁵ could not avoid the quotation of the Exodus, it is the only excerpt from the Bible in the chapter, while other quotations are ascribed to Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, etc. When one compares this section with the corresponding chapter of the *Speculum Naturale*, similarities between the references to this ‘divine presence’ are even more obvious. Chapter Four of *Speculum Naturale*, entitled ‘*Quid sit Deus*’ [What is God], presents the same dogmas through almost the same quotations as are in the first chapter of *Speculum Historiale*. Nevertheless, the Exodus quotation is missing in *Speculum Naturale*, though it appears in first position in *Speculum Historiale*. This difference can be explained by the

³ André Caquot, ‘Les énigmes d’un hémistiche biblique’, in *Dieu et l’être*, ed. by Paul Vignaux, p. 19.

⁴ Marie-Christine Duchenne and Monique Paulmier-Foucart, *Vincent de Beauvais et le Grand Miroir du Monde* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), p. 42. My translation.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

dissimilarity the underlying emphases of each book: the ‘Mirror of Nature’ gives a description of the living world comprehending the spiritual one, while the ‘Mirror of History’ replaces the beginning of human history with the divine one into its temporality. In this perspective the self-definition of God appears as the beginning of a presentation on his substance: the *Exodus*-revelation speaks in fact about the subject’s identity. The position of Vincent of Beauvais on the metaphysics expressed in the sentence is highly explicit, thanks to the sentences that introduce the biblical verse:

hoc solum videlicet esse de ipso propriissime dici videtur quoniam omnia caetera ipsius essentiae comparata merito non esse dicuntur: unde ego sum ait, qui sum; hoc nomen mihi est in eternum: Itaque dicere, quid est Deus secundum substantiam, est impossibile, meliusque innotescere poterit ex omnium rerum ablatione.⁶

*[it seems that only being can be said of him [God] properly, because any other thing is said, by means of a comparison to his essence, not to be: therefore, I am the one, he says, who is; this is my name for the eternity: thus to say, what God is as a substance, is impossible, he can better be known from the removal of all things (my translation)].*⁷

Vincent takes position on the side of those who preach in favour of a God, whose essence is being and of whom no other qualification appears possible – a position, which is not only an option for God as being, but also a refusal of the capacity to assert anything else about his essence: this remains veiled by the negative theology stated by the author in the rest of the chapter, and emphasized through many quotations from Pseudo-Dionysius. As I mentioned above, the Latin version of the biblical verse *Exodus* 3.14 was unanimous: it only had to be comprehended by the authors as stating the being as the substance, as the name of God – which was the situation assumed by Vincent of Beauvais. Nevertheless, this simple vision of God as being is among those that will not exactly be adopted by his avatars.

⁶ Vincent of Beauvais, ‘*Speculum historiale*’, in *Speculum quadruplex* (Douai: Belleri, 1624), II, 4.

⁷ I chose a word by word translation through this article for a better reflection of the differences between the texts.

2. The translation by Jean de Vignay

Jean de Vignay is a well-known prolific translator of his time. In fact, he translated eleven works, which are sometimes quite voluminous: the *De re Militari* of Vegetius, the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacques de Voragine, the ‘*Speculum Historiale*’ of Vincent and the *Speculum Ecclesiae* of Hugues de Saint-Cher, etc., but he is nowadays almost debated. According to specialists his translations, especially from the ‘first period’ – of which the translation in question constitutes a part – are of a mediocre quality, either because he would only have had a scanty knowledge of Latin, or he would not have been an erudite person, or his readings would have remained limited.⁸ I think that the situation is in reality different and I will attempt to elaborate on this fact the episode of the Exodus.

The translation of Jean de Vignay is a word-for-word translation. However, his work on the first chapter of the ‘*Speculum Historiale*’ contains a number of simplifications, which are conceived to shorten sentences that are too long — I will avoid giving examples —, and some mistakes or omissions. He translates for example *insopitus oculus*, ‘indelible eye’ by *oeil sans clignier* [eye without twinkling], or ‘*omnia [...] movens ipsaque mutu predata sempiterno*’ by ‘*mouuvent toutes choses par luymesmes par signe pardurable*’, which means ‘everything is moved by him by the means of an eternal sign’, instead of ‘moving everything while he also is moved by an eternal movement.’ His translation of the Exodus-quotation reveals a specific diversion; Jean de Vignay seems to give another sense not only to the biblical verse but also to all the sentences that accompany the divine self-definition. His translation is as follows:

Et tres proprement l'en peut dire de luy que toutes les autres choses generalmente qui sont ne sont nulle chose a acompaigner a son essence. Et pour ce dist il. Je suis ce que ie suys et ce nom est a moy en pardurablete. Et pour ce a dire que dieu est autre chose selon sa substance ce est impossible.⁹

[And very properly we can state of him that all the things which generally exist are nothing to accompany his essence. And for this he says: I am what I am and this is my name for the eternity. And for this, to say that God is another thing according to his substance, is impossible (my translation).]

On a first reading of the text, we could be misled by a bad translator, but at a careful looking the logic sustaining the section becomes specific. Several basic ideas of the original text are transformed. They can be revealed from one sentence to another: first, what is stated ‘very properly’ about God is not that, apart from being, nothing else can be asserted about his substance, but that every other thing appears as secondary comparatively to his substance. The degree of the denial changed: instead of a categorical refusal of other characterizations as being,

⁸ Christine Knowles, ‘Jean de Vignay’, in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises* (Paris: Fayard, 1964), pp. 432-433.

⁹ Vincent of Beauvais, *Miroir historial*, trans. by Jean de Vignay (Paris: Vêrard, 1496), I, 1.

we have an ambiguous one. Also, the assertion of being of God is partly omitted, transformed.¹⁰ Secondly, the divine self-definition is not concerned with being, it is no longer ‘I am the one who *is*’, but ‘I am *what* I am.’ Indeed, in the two cases we have a refusal to assert anything openly: either God is simply the being – which must have been a quite obscure metaphysical statement to the reader –, or he is something, that he [God] refuses to say openly, briefly, an impenetrable essence. Here again, we find a subtle change in the degree of assertion: the translation of Jean de Vignay by ‘I am *what* I am’ is equal to a refusal more categorical to say what the divine essence is, because even being is not asserted about it.¹¹ It remains that the meaning of the sentence must be oriented on an ‘eternal’ name, difficult to find in Jean de Vignay’s version. Is it the ‘inexpressible essence’, the ‘*what I am?*’ Probably, but it is impossible to say more about it, apart from the persistence, the stability of the name ‘for the eternity’. Finally, in the last sentence of the passage, which is abridged by the translator in making an amalgam with the next phrase of the Latin version, instead of giving a verdict about the impossibility of describing the divine essence, the translator maintains that it is impossible to state that God is ‘another thing according to his substance’. How should we interpret this disconcerting sentence? It seems to me difficult to imagine that Jean did not understand the sentence, simple as it is, so the response must be a logical one. Two meanings appear plausible to me: (1) to state something else about the substance of God than ‘what he is’, is not justified for a metaphysical or theological reason because he only knows himself and because he does not want it to be known more exactly, etc.; (2) it is impossible to assert any other statement about God than what has already been said, and this by the means of the logical impossibility that sets up the entire metaphysics of Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1005b 19-20): every being is identical with himself. It is in this sense that the divine self-definition can be apprehended as a strictly individual name.

The transformations introduced into the text of Vincent by Jean de Vignay are discreet, but carry at the same time a wholly different message from the original and are entirely coherent within the meaning of the passage. Accepting the concept of the divine ‘essence’, but not of the divine ‘being’, the theology of Jean de Vignay is no less a negative one than is that of Vincent of Beauvais, and in this way, Jean de Vignay manifests himself to be a follower of an important side of the other’s thought. For if God is more, less or simply another thing than being, he no less remains inaccessible, unapproachable and incomprehensible. And the entire interest on this

¹⁰ I maintain here the possibility that the translator rashly misunderstood the phrase.

¹¹ This interpretation has an interesting tradition in Jewish approaches of the Exodus.

translation lies here: after the image of the mistake-laden Middle Ages, which transform the texts by the preferences of the copyists or of uncountable anonymous writers, until they give an impression of a generalized cacophony, we have here an example of a translator who fulfills another philosophical vision through polished changes.

A question even sharper is the reason of his position: why would Jean de Vignay assume a metaphysical position other than that of the author he is translating? We have no autonomous writing from him. The sequel of his translation is to be inscribed into the line of thought of Vincent of Beauvais, which turns to other subjects, like the omnipotence or the divine laws: impossible to get further information about the Exodus-metaphysics. But, another translation helping, it appears that the vernacular language can remain faithful to the original, a piece of the evidence that the version of Jean de Vignay subscribes to an individual position on the metaphysics of the divine essence.

3. An abridged version and its extended Exodus

The *Abrégé lorrain du Miroir historial* [The Summary Lorraine Version of the Mirror of History] is not, as its title indicates, a word-by-word translation: it is a shortened version supposed to bring forth the most important ideas of the original text. We unfortunately do not possess any information about the translator who put the text into the Lorraine dialect, and all that is known about it is what can be gleaned from the manuscript itself. This is contained in a codex dated to the 14th century, the anonymous owners of which belonged to the bourgeoisie of 14th -15th century Metz.¹² In comparing this version with the translation of Jean de Vignay, their independence can be pronounced without contestation.

The importance of the Exodus-quotation filters through the *Abrégé*: while some paragraphs are entirely neglected and removed by the abridger – who reduces the theological matter of Vincent by a quarter –, the three sentences we successively examined by Vincent and in the version of Jean de Vignay, are rendered in his translation. The version is however different from that of Jean de Vignay:

Et pour ce proprement estre appartient a deu car totes aultres chozes compareez a la semblance de deu sont niant. Dont il dit en sa persone: Ego sum qui sum. Je suy qui suy. Cilz noms m'est pardurables. Pour quoi demonstreir, quelz choze deus est selonc la substance, est impossible.¹³

[And for this, being belongs properly to God, because all other things compared to the semblance of God are nothing. Concerning this he says personally: Ego sum qui sum. I am the one who is.

¹² Serge Lusignan, 'En passant par la Lorraine... une traduction partielle et anonyme du *Speculum historiale* de Vincent de Beauvais', in *Le Nombre du temps. En hommage à Paul Zumthor* (Paris: Champion, 1988), p. 156.

¹³ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (BN), MS fonds français 9558, fol. 54^v.

This name is perpetually mine. For this, to demonstrate what God is according to the substance, is impossible.(my translation)].

The divergence is striking. In translating ‘I am the one who is’, the anonymous author is clearly settled by the vision of God as being, an interpretation that corresponds to that of the ‘*Speculum Historiale*’ of Vincent of Beauvais. From sentence to sentence: firstly, it is a fact that being belongs to God, the rest is worth nothing; secondly, the self-affirmation is completed by a ‘personally’, which was added by the translator – this additional word and the Latin ‘*Ego sum qui sum*’ are his unique ‘deviation’ from the original text. The quotation of the sentence in Latin sounds like a confirmation of the otherness of God – a difference which was supposedly pronounced in another language – and reminds one of the practice of the authors of antiquity to transliterate the Hebrew instead of translating it, even if the mark of the Latin culture is immediately followed by the dialectal, vernacular version. This redundancy puts even more emphasis on the importance of the divine definition, given that the translation is in fact a summary version: the Supreme Being speaks out in Latin; the exact reference is set in front of the readers – who did not comprehend at all, or only very little, Latin. God remains, as he is by Vincent, ‘the one who is’. Consequently, it appears impossible to demonstrate what God is according to his substance – which is a translation wholly faithful to the original text of Vincent of Beauvais.

The quotation of the Latin *Exodus*-version requires a thorough reflection. Why did the anonymous translator give the original version while writing for an audience probably unable to understand this language of past times? Beyond the importance laid on the biblical verse with this double quotation, an incontestable effect is the presence of the translator, so that it is possible to interpret this fact as a testimony-appeal: the translator cites the Latin to prove his expertise. But it reveals another aspect probably appearing in the mind of the Lorraine readers: God speaks another language than the translator or the reader; he speaks Latin when he wishes to express his identity, an act confirmed by the ‘personally’, an addition of the anonymous writer in the sentence. More simply, this Latin quotation refers to the language of the liturgies and to that of the biblical passages read in the churches: it is a fact that to everybody in the Middle Ages, God spoke in Latin. In this perspective, the translator only sends back to a still existing common sense of the epoch: grafting and transplanting are plainly assumed here.

Curiously enough, with regard only to this passage, the anonymous translator of the *Abrégé* appears more a translator than a philosopher in comparison to Jean de Vignay, a proportion that is reversed in the following episode of his presentation. For, given a summary version of the original, the anonymous translator had to select certain affirmations, to eliminate others, briefly,

to make choices that can be qualified as philosophical ones. Now in translating the Exodus-verse the anonymous writer remains a translator, whereas Jean de Vignay is a philosopher. Between the two possibilities, the metaphysics of the Exodus remains a field of interest.

The medieval period of graft and transplant activity on texts appears indeed more varying and more conscious than originally supposed. A Latin encyclopaedia and its two translations offer three different identities: Vincent of Beauvais appears as the conventional monastic author; Jean de Vignay is the clever, self-fulfilling translator; the Lorraine anonymous writer is present as the loyal, but autonomous abridger.

If, for Gilson, the rough-edged stone of the metaphysics was set down by Moses, it could sometimes be removed and transferred by translators. This does not constitute a problem, but a sort of answer to the question of the authority of the language on metaphysical subject matter.

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Renewal through the Classics: Irony, Parody, Intertextuality in the *Decameron*¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse some of the numerous textual references to classical literature which characterise Boccaccio's *opus maius*. Through a process of allusion, 'sympathy', irony and parody Boccaccio manages to renew — i.e. reconstruct — a new world, which has been defined as the 'Fall of the Middle Ages'; but whilst the medieval models (apart from obvious quotations from Dante and Petrarch, Boccaccio's masters) are often ironized or parodied, the classical ones are contemporised and used as tools for the (re)composition of a new literature and a new society.

Keywords:



This article, consistently with the theme of *Skepsi*'s first issue, is meant to examine grafts and transplants in Boccaccio's vernacular masterpiece, the *Decameron*. Both the practice of irony and parody through a rereading and reuse of the arts of rhetoric, and also recontextualisation which diachronically questions authorial identities are widely featured in Boccaccio's *ars contaminandi* [art of contamination], intertextuality and renewal of classical and medieval traditions. Such literary results are achieved at their best in the prose fiction of the *Decameron*.²

¹ This article is a longer version of the conference paper delivered at the AAIS Convention 2006, Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, May 25–28, 2006. All translations from languages other than English are mine, except for the *Decameron*, for which I used *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio faithfully translated by J.M. Rigg* (London, 1921), available at <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameron/engDecIndex.php>. Some language revision and correction seemed appropriate at 6, 7, 14–16; 6, 10, 7.

² Boccaccio's *ars contaminandi* in its practical applications within and without the *Decameron* (vernacular prose and Latin poetry) has been one of the main themes studied in my Ph.D. Thesis (E. Santangelo, 'Reading and writing, writing through reading: a study on *imitatio* in Petrarch and Boccaccio' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2007, chapters 1, 5, 6). *ars contaminandi*, as argued in that work, is Boccaccio's personal interpretation of *ars imitandi*, i.e. literary imitation. A modern survey of literary imitation in Italy in the Renaissance is in M. McLaughlin, *Literary imitation in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995). No need to mention that I am strongly indebted to this study. Useful reflections on theory and practice of imitation in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were developed in H. Gmelin, 'Das Prinzip der *Imitatio* in den romanischen Literaturen der Renaissance', *Romanische Forschungen*, 46 (1932), 83–360, where a general survey of imitative techniques is carried out. The important contributions by G. Pasquali, *Pagine stravaganti di un filologo II. Terze pagine stravaganti, stravaganze quarte e supreme*, ed. by C.F. Russo (Florence: Le Lettere, 1994), pp. 275–82 and

Days 1 and 6 give us plenty of material in this sense. Topics, language, style and characters of the *novelle* (diegetic level) provide the reader with a wide range of examples of irony and parody, achieved through the instruments of intertextuality and contemporisation of literary models.³ Intertextuality also leads to *contaminatio* [contamination] and, again, contemporisation/renewal of classical and post-classical models as far as the storytellers in the *cornice* [the framework's intradiegetic level] are concerned. Particularly significant features are displayed by Elissa in the *cornice* framing Days 1 and 6. Elissa has little to do with irony and parody, but she nonetheless represents a thriving example of renewal of traditions.⁴ In this paper I wish to draw the reader's attention to the diegetic level of the narration. For this reason, I chose to analyse the traits of ser Cepparello (1, 1), Madonna Filippa (6, 7) and Fra Cipolla (6, 10).

The characters of the *Decameron* and their sayings, in most of the dramatic and dialogic parts of the *novelle*, feature that humanistic realism studied by Muscetta and Baratto.⁵ Such a realism points to the principles of classical rhetoric. The portraits of ser Cepparello (1, 1), Guccio, Imbratta and Nuta (6, 10) accomplish that *imitatio veritatis* [imitation of truth] recommended to the good orator by Cicero and Quintilian (Cicero, *De inventione* I, 21; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* IV, 2, 52).

The description of *turpitude* [moral baseness] and *deformitas* [ugliness] and the device of delaying the reader's expectations, enacted in the *novella*-confession of ser Cepparello, do confirm in detail Boccaccio's comic and realistic purpose, pursued through a contemporary application of classical recommendations (Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 58, 236, ff).

F. Ulivi, *L'imitazione nella poetica del Rinascimento* (Milan: Marzorati, 1959) date to the 1950s. Several post-war Italian scholars have also contributed to my research. The studies of Giuseppe Billanovich (may I only mention here *Petrarca letterato. Lo scrittoio del Petrarca* and *Restauri boccacceschi* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1947)), Guido Martellotti (*Le due redazioni delle Genealogie del Boccaccio* (Rome: Ed. Storia e Letteratura, 1951)), Giuseppe Velli (*Petrarca e Boccaccio. Tradizione, memoria, scrittura* (Padua: Antenore, 1995)), Vittore Branca (two for all, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* and the editions of the *Decameron* with their numerous reprints: in this study I used respectively: Milan: Sansoni, 1998 and Turin: Einaudi, 1992), together with the editions of the complete works of Boccaccio (*Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by V. Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–1998)) shed some light on the intertextual fabric of the Latin and vernacular works of Petrarch and Boccaccio.

³ Contemporisation, a new coinage nowadays quite accepted in the domain of Boccaccio's literary criticism (see V. Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* (Milan: Sansoni, 1998), pp. 347 ff.), implies recontextualisation and updating of the original sources, as shown by the characters illustrated below. Such a process of contemporisation implies a graft onto a new literary body.

⁴ As argued in E. Santangelo, 'Per aspera ad astra. Una metamorfosi onomastico-semantică nel *Decameron*', *Linguistica e Letteratura*, 1-2 (2003), 11–14. In the article is examined the intertextual metamorphosis undergone by Elissa as a character-storyteller throughout Boccaccio's vernacular works up to the *Decameron* and beyond (*Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*).

⁵ C. Muscetta, *La letteratura italiana. Storia e testi* (Bari: Laterza, 1972), vol. 2.2, p. 307; M. Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1970), pp. 17–19.

The moral traits of ser Cepparello in *Decameron* 1, 1, 10-15, correspond to all the above. If his baseness [*turpitudine*] and his *insignis improbitas scelere iuncta* [remarkable and criminal wickedness] would possibly distinguish him from the burlesque characters described by Cicero, we have nonetheless to observe that Boccaccio, starting from Cicero's advice, builds up a character who is a *facinerosus* [criminal], well deserving to be hit (=described) *maiore quadam vi quam ridiculi* [with something stronger than the burlesque], but still provoking laughter in the reader. Cepparello, detestable man, provokes his readers to amusement and sympathy, and Boccaccio achieves this result through a clever application of classical principles, transplanted into a medieval setting (characters and environment). The widely used hyperboles (such as the exemplary '*egli era il piggior uomo forse che mai nascesse* [he was, perhaps, the worst man that ever was born]', 15), and that rhythm of three words and three phrases ('*mali, inimicizie e scandali* [ill-feeling, enmities, dissensions]', 12, and '*Invitato a uno omicidio [...], senza negarlo mai, volenterosamente v'andava* [Set him on murder [...], he never hesitated, but went about it with alacrity]', 13), certainly render this 'lord of evil' a grotesque character. Cepparello's traits are so rhetorically stressed that he almost loses his realistic aspect, as proved by the insistent use of hyperboles and exaggerations. Yet another model for Cepparello is Matthieu de Vendôme's Davus. '*Scurra vagus, parasitus edax, abjectio plebis, / est Davus, rerum dedecus, aegra lues; / fomentum sceleris, mundi sentina, ruina / justitiae, legum laesio, fraude potens* [A wandering buffoon, a greedy parasite, people's despair, / this is Davus, shame and sick plague of everything; / cause for crime, bilge-water of the world, ruin / of justice, scorner of the law, skilful in fraud]' (*Ars versificatoria* 53, 1-4). Cepparello, close to the end, wants to show his gratitude to those who gave him hospitality, preserving their safety and meanwhile saving usury from possible riots: '*per che, non assoluto, anche sarà gittato a' fossi. E se questo avviene, il popolo di questa terra, [...] veggendo ciò si leverà a romore* [and so, dying without absolution, he will still be cast out into the ditch. In which case the folk of these parts, [...] will seize their opportunity, and raise a tumult]' (1, 1, 25-26). This is, finally, a 'disinterested' gesture (the ultimate one) and the Church and the gullibility of the people are the target of this *beffa* (the very first one in the *Decameron*).

Cepparello asks for a '*santo e valente frate*' willing to hear his confession and give him Extreme Unction: his last enjoyable entertainment appears to be this extreme *beffa*. At this point, Boccaccio deploys the device of delayed expectation, a typical mechanism of the comic style, introduced to the West by Plautus and later theoretically illustrated by Cicero (*De Oratore* II, 71, 289) and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* VI, 3, 24, 43). But what decidedly attracts the

attention of the reader is the parody of the Sacrament of Confession, enacted by Boccaccio to delay the expectation about the fate of Cepparello and his hosts. Boccaccio and the reader know, in other words, that Cepparello's confession is a false and burlesque confession, and thus it is perceived as a parody. However, the fact that the characters of the *novella* seem to find it true starts the process of literary ironisation: a true problem (the condition of the sinner) and a true device to solve it (the ritual Sacrament of Confession), for an intrinsically false result (true but ineffective absolution).

The first *novella* of the *Decameron* therefore provides the reader with an example of Boccaccio's irony and parody. Classical and medieval models of comic and rhetorical characters are mingled together and contemporised (in other words: grafted) into a late medieval setting. Moreover, Sacraments and devotional literature (lives and deeds of the Saints, collected in the typical medieval form of the hagiography) are reinterpreted through a process of literary ironisation (approaching, in this case, parody). In this respect, the *novella* may be considered as one of the purest examples of renewal of diverse traditions.



The core of two *novelle* of Day 6 is two outstanding orations, a 'natural' gift of the speaking characters reflecting the sound rhetorical background of the writer. Rhetorical structures (especially the classical *facetiae*) abound in both of them. With a shrewd effective speech, Madonna Filippa escapes conviction (6, 7), and the sparkling oration of Fra Cipolla saves the speaker from scorn (6, 10). A genuinely persuasive speech, and not just the usual prompt reply (as in the *novelle* of Abraham the Jew, Melchisedech, the Marchioness of Monferrato and Bergamino, all in Day 1), gets the two protagonists out of trouble, when life and honour are at stake. In this respect, the orations of Madonna Filippa and Fra Cipolla possess all the characteristics of the *suasoriae*, a late classical form of *oratio* described by Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria* III, 8, 1, ff).

Madonna Filippa broaches the issue *in medias res*, challenging the judge with an *argumentatio* divided into two parts, *reprehensio* and *confirmatio*.⁶

⁶ *Confirmatio* and *reprehensio* are the two parts in which the *argumentatio* is divided, according to Cicero (*De Inventione* 1, 19 ff). A deductive syllogism is underpinning this *argumentatio*. This part of the syllogism is presented as a *reprehensio*, a rebuke against the common points of view of Madonna Filippa's milieu. Madonna Filippa starts from a sheer admission of guilt (the syllogism's statements are rendered in non-italics): 'egli è vero che [...] nelle quali io sono [...] molte volte stata, né questo negherei mai'. A general remark about the necessity of communal consent in legislation (major premise): 'le leggi deono esser comuni [...]', is then followed by a minor premise concerning a particular law and a specific group of discriminated people, i.e. women: 'le quali cose di questa [legge] non avvengono [...] ché essa solamente le donne tapinelle costringe', who possess a peculiar characteristic: they 'molto meglio che gli uomini potrebbero a molti sodisfare'. What follows is the *confirmatio* of

La donna, senza sbigottire punto, con voce assai piacevole rispose: –Messere, egli è vero che Rinaldo è mio marito e che egli questa notte passata mi trovò nelle braccia di Lazzarino, nelle quali io sono, per buono e per perfetto amore che io gli porto, molte volte stata, né questo negherei mai; ma come io son certa che voi sapete, le leggi deono esser comuni e fatte con consentimento di coloro a cui toccano. Le quali cose di questa non avvengono, ché essa solamente le donne tapinelle costringe, le quali molto meglio che gli uomini potrebbero a molti sodisfare; e oltre a questo, non che alcuna donna, quando fatta fu, ci prestasse consentimento, ma niuna ce ne fu mai chiamata: per le quali cose meritamente malvagia si può chiamare (Dec. 6, 7, 13-14).

[*The lady, no wise dismayed, and in a tone not a little jocund, thus made answer: 'True it is, Sir, that Rinaldo is my husband, and that last night he found me in the arms of Lazzarino, in whose arms for the whole-hearted love that I bear him I have oftentimes lain; nor shall I ever deny it; but, as well I want you know, the laws ought to be common and enacted with the common consent of all that they affect; which conditions are wanting to this law, inasmuch as it binds only us poor women, who may be much more liberal than men; but the consent of no woman, furthermore, was asked before that law was made nor were they asked for their view of it; for which reasons it justly deserves to be called a bad law.'*]

The following *confirmatio* is the enquiry addressed to her husband through the judge.

— avanti che a alcuna cosa giudicar procediate, vi priego che una piccola grazia mi facciate, cioè che voi il mio marito domandiate se io ogni volta e quante volte a lui piaceva, senza dir mai di no, io di me stessa gli concedeva intera copia o no. A che Rinaldo, senza aspettare che il podestà il domandasse, prestamente rispose che senza alcun dubbio la donna a ogni sua richiesta gli aveva di sé ogni suo piacer concesso (15-16).

[*'I pray you, go not on to try this matter in any wise, until you have granted me this trifling grace, i.e. to ask my husband if I ever gainsaid him, but did not rather accord him, when and so often as he craved it, complete enjoyment of myself.'* Whereto Rinaldo, without awaiting the Podestà's question, forthwith answered, that assuredly the lady had ever granted him all that he had asked of her for his gratification.]

The oration ends with a sarcastic question, founded upon a semantic *ambiguum*.

Adunque – seguí prestamente la donna – domando io voi, messer podestà, se egli ha sempre di me preso quello che gli è bisognato e piaciuto, io che doveva fare o debbo di quel che gli avanza? debbo io gittare a' cani? non è egli molto meglio servirne un gentile uomo che più che sé m'ama, che lasciarlo perdere o guastare (17)?

[*'Then', promptly continued the lady, 'if he has ever had of me as much as sufficed for his solace, what was I or am I to do with the surplus? Am I to cast it to the dogs? Is it not much better to bestow it on a gentleman that loves me more dearly than himself, than to suffer it to come to nought or worse?'*]

The acuity of the joke lies in the interpretation of '*prendere quello che bisogna o piace*', a semantically ambiguous expression open to metonymic interpretation. Quality (i.e. 'what has to be taken') is exchanged for quantity (i.e. 'how much has to be taken'), and an extensive meaning ('*prendere quello che piace*' here generically stands for 'satisfying one's own sexual appetite') for a restrictive one ('*prendere [solo] quello che piace*' implies the turning down of what is left).

Filippa's point: '*non che alcuna donna, quando [questa legge] fatta fu, ci prestasse consentimento, ma niuna ce ne fu mai chiamata: per le quali cose meritamente malvagia si può chiamare*'.

Classical rhetoric accepts the use of ambiguous or polysemic expressions, especially if the oration is meant to provoke laughter and it may also apply to perilous situations like the one skilfully untangled by Madonna Filippa (see respectively Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 62, 253–54 and II, 61, 250).



Fra Cipolla makes a clever and humoristic use of Cicero's and Quintilian's rhetoric.

Era questo frate Cipolla di persona piccolo, di pelo rosso e lieto nel viso e il miglior brigante del mondo: e oltre a questo, niuna scienza avendo, sí ottimo parlatore e pronto era, che chi conosciuto non l'avesse, non solamente un gran rettorico l'avrebbe estimado, ma avrebbe detto esser Tulio medesimo o forse Quintiliano: e quasi di tutti quegli della contrada era compare o amico o benvogliente (6, 10, 7).

[*Fra Cipolla was little of person, red-haired, jolly-visaged, and the very best of good fellows; and therewithal, though learning he had none, he was so excellent and ready a speaker that whoever knew him not would not only have esteemed him a great rhetorician, but would have pronounced him Cicero himself or, perchance, Quintilian: and he was gossip or friend or lover of all the countryfolk.*]

Fra Cipolla's oratorical skills merely come from his prompt and acute intelligence, *nulla arte*, according to Cicero's suggestions (*De Oratore* II, 54, 217). So great is his reputation for that natural gift, that the people of Boccaccio's village mistake him for a trustworthy Master of Rhetoric. One of his 'students' is Guccio Porco, who clumsily tries to seduce Nuta with the power of *his own* eloquence.

E [...] cominciò con costei [...] a entrare in parole e dirle che egli era gentile uomo per procuratore e che egli aveva de' fiorini più di millantanove, senza quegli che egli aveva a dare altrui, che erano anzi più che meno, e che egli sapeva tante cose fare e dire, che domine pure unquanche (6, 10, 22).

[*And fell a gossiping with Nuta [...] and told her that he was a gentleman by procuration, and had more florins than could be reckoned, besides those that he had to give away, which were rather more than less, and that he could do and say such things as never were or might be seen or heard forever, good Lord! and a day.*]

If Guccio is probably the *scurra*, so condemned by Cicero (*De Oratore* II, 60, 244, 247) and Matthieu de Vendôme, Fra Cipolla manages instead to persuade and fascinate his audience. His speech (37-52) is a real state-of-the-art oratorical performance.

The storyteller Dioneo says little about Fra Cipolla's gestures, but we can be fairly sure that his eloquence leads to a performance which is much higher than that of a *scurra*. It indeed provokes hilarity: the distinction is again made by Cicero in *De Oratore* II, 61, 251, ff. This new '*Tulio medesimo o forse Quintiliano*' manages to achieve his goal and persuade the people of Certaldo through a contemporisation of the principles of classical rhetoric, the same process enacted by Madonna Filippa. He also operates all the rhetorical skills and the device of delayed expectation which we have seen enacted in Cepparello's confession.

Fra Cipolla's speech, as well as Cepparello's confession, is an oral *beffa* displaying an ironical and parodistic interpretation of the Sacraments and devotional literature. Consistently with a particular kind of *elocutio*, useful for preserving the speaker from scorn, in the rhetorical tools of this *beffa* one may find the *facetiae*, *ambigua*, *subabsurda* and emphatic obviousness defined by Cicero and Quintilian.⁷ Fra Cipolla is, in fact, forced to use *facetiae*, *ambigua* and *subabsurda* in order to save his reputation, and this is, for other reasons, the case of Madonna Filippa and ser Cepparello. Cicero and Quintilian are not kind to these ambiguous expressions, otherwise called 'amphiboly' (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VI, 3, 47), except for a particular case: when they are used to tackle a difficult situation (*De Oratore* II, 54, 218; 56, 230 and *Institutio Oratoria* VI, 3, 13). In the oration of Fra Cipolla, however, amphiboly, amphibology, *ambigua*, *subabsurda* and emphatic obviousness are all aimed at deceiving the gullible audience of Certaldo, in this sense ironising on the devotional texts which recount travels and miracles of the Saints or the itineraries of the 'holy relics' in the Middle Ages. For example, certain substantives or phrases belong to the category of the *ambigua*, since their meaning is amphibolic within the syntactic organisation of the sentence: this is the case of the metaphorical places of paragraph 38, where each geographical name may recall two different locations, one in Florence (areas, neighbourhoods), the other abroad. The overall meaning of the sentence is that, in the end, Fra Cipolla has not set foot outside Florence.

— Per la qual cosa messom'io in cammino, di Vinegia partendomi e andandomene per lo Borgo de' Greci e di quindi per lo reame del Garbo cavalcando e per Baldacca, pervenni in Parione, donde, non senza sete, dopo alquanto pervenni in Sardinia. Ma perché vi vo io tutti i paesi cerchi da me divisando? Io capitai, passato il Braccio di San Giorgio, in Truffia e in Buffia, paesi molto abitati e con gran popoli; e di quindi pervenni in terra di Menzogna, dove molti de' nostri frati e d'altre religioni trovai assai [...] (38–39).

[On which errand I set forth, taking my departure from Venice, and traversing the Borgo de' Greci, and thence on horseback the realm of Algarve, and so by Baldacca I came to Parione, whence, somewhat athirst, I after a while got on to Sardinia. But wherefore go I about to enumerate all the lands in which I pursued my quest? Having passed the straits of San Giorgio, I arrived at Truffia and Buffia, countries thickly populated and with great nations, whence I pursued my journey to Menzogna, where I met with many of our own brethren, and of other religious not a few.]

In the following paragraphs of the oration we notice that *caldo* at paragraph 43 refers both to 'bread' and 'weather' ('l'anno di state vi vale il pan freddo quattro denari e il caldo v'è per niente [In summer cold bread costs four deniers, and hot bread is to be had for nothing]'), and the '*piagge di Monte Morello in volgare* [the acclivities of Monte Morello in the vulgar]' and

⁷ See respectively Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 54, 217; II, 61, 250 and 62, 253–54; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VI, 23 and 99. In the quotations Fra Cipolla's amphibologies, *ambigua*, *subabsurda* and emphatic obviousness are underlined.

‘*alquanti capitoli del Caprezio* [some chapters of Caprezio]’ (par. 46) are real geographical places and metaphorical places of Fra Cipolla’s body. The *subabsurda* (nonsense and *adynata*) and the emphatic obviousness of certain expressions perfect the use of amphibology in this *novella*.

Nonsense is indeed names such as ‘*Truffia*’, ‘*Buffia*’, ‘*Terra di Menzogna*’, ‘*India Pastinaca*’, ‘*Nonmiblasmete Sevoipiace*’, ‘*Verbum-caro-fatti-alle-finestre*’; *adynata* (the Latin ‘*impossibilia*’) are such expressions as ‘*il dito dello Spirito Santo*’, ‘*il ciuffetto del serafino che apparve a San Francesco e una dell’unghie de’ gherubini*’, the ‘*vestimenti della santa Fé catolica e alquanti de’ raggi della stella che apparve ai Magi in Oriente, e una ampolla del sudore di san Michele quando combatté col diavole, e la mascella della Morte di S.Lazzero*.’⁸

The emphatic obviousness of several expressions of Fra Cipolla possesses a phonetic and performative aspect which cannot be rendered in writing. In Mortara-Garavelli’s words such a process consists in ‘*dare a intendere più di quanto sia esplicitamente detto* [make one understand more than what is being said]’,⁹ by giving each phrase an extra-meaning it does not originally possess. This is the case of sentences generating amazement in the audience.

— Signori e donne, voi dovete sapere che, essendo io ancora molto giovane, io fui mandato dal mio superiore in quelle parti dove apparisce il sole [...], alle montagne de’ Bachi pervenni, dove tutte l’acque corrono alla ‘ngiú. E in brieve tanto andai adentro, che io pervenni mei infino in India Pastinaca, là dove io vi giuro per l’abito che io porto addosso che io vidi volare i pennati, cosa incredibile a chi non gli avesse veduti (37–42).

[*Ladies and gentlemen, you are to know, that when I was yet a very young man, I was sent by my superior into those parts where the sun rises [...]. And leaving them, I arrived at the mountains of the Bachi, where all the waters run downwards. In short I penetrated so far that I came at last to India Pastinaca, where I swear to you by the habit that I wear, that I saw pruning-hooks fly: a thing that none would believe that had not seen it.*]

Finally, in the glittering conclusion marking the social achievement of Fra Cipolla before the community of Certaldo, we read: ‘Ma prima voglio che voi sappiate che chiunque da questi carboni in segno di croce è tocco, tutto quello anno può viver sicuro che fuoco nol cocerà che non si senta [but first of all I would have you know, that whoso has the sign of the cross made upon him with these coals, may live secure for the whole of the ensuing year, that fire shall not touch him, that he feel it not]’ (52). All these natural and unsurprising events are obviously presented as *mirabilia*, again a classical figure of speech featuring the *ornatus* of any excellent *suasoria* (Institutio Oratoria VIII, 3, 6). The two *suasoriae* of Madonna Filippa and Fra Cipolla, together with the portraits of moral wickedness (Cepparello) and physical ugliness (Guccio and

⁸ Relevant translation at:

www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameron/engDecShowText.php?myID=nov0610&expand=day06

⁹ B. Mortara-Garavelli, *Manuale di retorica* (Milan: Bompiani, 1994), p. 177.

Nuta), all reflect certain rhetorical issues originally codified by Cicero and Quintilian, then somehow developed by Matthieu de Vandôme, and finally contemporised – if not ironised or parodied – by Boccaccio in the *Decameron*, in this sense undergoing a process of grafting. Boccaccio's *ars contaminandi* consists in the combination of pre-existing models,¹⁰ often not adequately mingled together (as in the case of the Latin eclogues of the *Buccolicum Carmen*). The construction of the fictional character of Elissa in the *Decameron* shows instead how Boccaccio developed those mere juxtapositions of the models into a mature form of intertextuality, in which *ars contaminandi* means combination, contemporisation and occasionally, as we have seen, ironisation and parody of the models.

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¹⁰ Above, n. 3.

Aphorisms from French to English: Translations of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims

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Abstract

This article raises the question how aphorisms can signify stable ideas without being grounded in any particular or explicit context, which makes them virtually compatible with any other body of discourse. Aphorisms, being linguistic units in themselves, can be easily transplanted from one discursive situation to another. The article also discusses their translation, which is to some extent an attempt to graft them from a language to another. Observing how aphorisms translate reveals their complex use of language. These observations find a particular echo in the understanding the effects of the grafting process affecting language.

Keywords:



Aphorisms represent forms of sentences that are used outside any particular context and make sense in themselves: most of the time, they are referred to as proverbs, apophthegms, maxims or aphorisms. I will try to illustrate how such forms play with various linguistic features so as to constitute autonomous utterances, or in other words, a minimal form of discourse.

The main reference I will use for the examples is the French 17th c. writer François de La Rochefoucauld, who wrote a well-known collection of maxims in which he wittily deals with societal concerns. La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* are headed by a programmatic epigraph which is of all the maxims that follow:

Nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices déguisés.
[Our virtues are usually only our vices in disguise.]

The *Maxims* almost always proceed the same: a notion taken from the moral discourse (in the epigraph, *vertus*) is put in a paradoxical relation with another notion, *vices* here.

Other examples are:

322. Il n'y a que ceux qui sont méprisables qui craignent d'être méprisés.¹
322. *Only the contemptible are afraid of being treated with contempt.*

40. L'intérêt, qui aveugle les uns, fait la lumière des autres.
40. *Interest blinds some while making others see.*

As maxims 322 and 40 show, La Rochefoucauld wrote sentences which aim at unveiling the deceptive value of virtues, and as he did so he crafted the literary genre of maxims. I have to point out that the genre-defining influence of La Rochefoucauld will not be further developed in this paper, the purpose here being to study the linguistic functioning of these forms of literature.

1. Aphorisms and the aphoristic character

1.1 Terminology issues in the classification of brief forms of language

Quotations, proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, riddles may all be most unambiguously referred to as 'brief forms of language'. This purposely vague label allows paradoxically for better clarity. From a literary point of view, these forms have been best defined by the formula SHORTNESS, SENSE and SALT.

Short assertions are generally grasped according to literary concerns. They are categorized according to heterogeneous criteria such as their historical context of production, social function or literary purpose. Traditionally, there are, as defined by the French Academy's dictionary:

- Maxims: a general proposition which serves as a principle or rule in some art or science.
- Apophthegms: a noble saying from an illustrious person. It is also the term for any sentence similar to a maxim.
- Sayings: apophthegm
- Proverbs: common sayings
- Sententiae: a famous saying, apophthegm, or maxim which encapsulates a dense concentration of meaning; well formulated moral principles.

The overlap between these various terms and definitions is due to the literary character of the classification, which stresses the content of discourse rather than linguistic features and roles. 'Maxim' belongs to the moral literature, 'apophthegm' to antique writings, the 'sententia' is a rhetorical term borrowed from the Romans and 'sayings' and 'proverbs' are more common short assertions. Literary critics distinguish short assertions according to the period they were

¹ The number indicated ahead of the maxim refers to the number of the maxim as given in the fifth edition of La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*. See Bibliography.

written in (apophthegms), modalities of their use (epitaphs for tombs) and rhetorical purpose (common sense, moral prescription, satire).

However, these forms of discourse also attract linguists' interest and studies to understand what their grammatical features have undergone since the beginning of the twentieth century. To the linguist, the abundance of labels used to designate brief forms of discourse is at the same time deceiving and unsatisfying from a scientific point of view. If the common property of these forms of discourse is their brevity (they are expressed with great economy of words making them easy to memorize), they do not always have the same pragmatic function. Neither do they interact similarly with their context of enunciation.

1.2 Aphorisms and short assertions

The word 'aphorism' is another term for these so-called brief forms of language. The term derives from Greek *aphorismos*, itself deriving from the verb *aphorizein*, which means to delimit, to circumscribe, and to define. It is used in literary criticism to refer broadly to fragments or quotations. As a linguistic label, it points to a semantic property of certain sentences to define general situations.

Let's consider:

260. *La civilité est un désir d'en recevoir, et d'être estimé poli.*

260. *Civility is but a desire to receive civility, and to be esteemed polite.*

Maxim 260 asserts the dynamics of the concept of civility. It reveals that what is perceived as an abstraction, a moral value, is actually a social game. This maxim defines the general social situation in which the practice of civility occurs. In this way, M260 is an aphorism.

Proverbs also define similar situations: 'a rolling stone gathers no moss', which may mean either:

- A person who is active will not grow stale.
- A person who does not stay in one place very long will not develop roots or meaningful connections with others.

However, their meaning is more often non-compositional (i.e. they are not understandable from the reading of their components) and they need to be paraphrased to be meaningful.

It may be relevant to add that for a sentence to be aphoristic, it is necessary for it to constitute what could be termed as 'a minimal form of discourse'. For example, proverbs like the one given above would not fall into the category of aphorisms for they do not really make sense in themselves. On the other hand, aphorisms are immediately and invariably understood,

even when they have not been heard before. Aphorisms would be meaningful units, substitutable to a whole discourse, but enclosed in a very limited space.

The point I will now make concerns the linguistic properties of these marginal forms of language.

2. Aphorisms as textual scions

As in botany, where a scion is a flexible and easily grafted plant, aphorisms may be seen metaphorically as ‘textual scions’. Aphorisms, as instances of minimal discourse, can indeed be construed as such, since they are manifestations of language which virtually fit any context of enunciation, any other discourse. They can be grafted into various places within oral or written speech to trigger discussion, illustrate a point or sum up a whole argument. The grammar of such forms raises questions from a linguistic point of view. The semiologist Greimas considered in his book entitled *Of Meaning* that proverbial forms (what I would term as aphoristic forms) may be treated on a par by grammars.² He grounded this assertion on the fact that no other instance of language may be considered strictly autonomous. In pragmatics, the field of linguistics which studies the way interaction between speakers modifies syntax and meaning, aphorisms are exceptional because they may not necessarily originate from a specific speaker neither are addressed to a specific addressee. The question to be raised is: what are the grammatical features of such forms that render them into textual scions?

2.1 The grammar of aphorisms

Several studies have tried to formalise the linguistic structure of aphorisms. The linguist Serge Meleuc tried to list all the grammatical constructions of La Rochefoucauld’s Maxims but concluded the impossibility of being able to take into account more than 25% because they were grammatically too complex. Pagliaro addressed the problem from a half-semantic, half-syntactic perspective, establishing a typology of aphorisms, classifying them as being either Expository or Paradoxical, and within the paradoxical type as being either polar or non-polar. Charlotte Schapira places aphorisms into two types: DEFINING maxims and PRESCRIPTIVE maxims. These classifications all associate a semantic or pragmatic purpose (definition, prescription, expression of contrast) to a set of more or less precise grammatical structures which are often contradicted by examples. Because these studies are highly useful to better

² A. Greimas, 1970: *Du sens*, t. I., p. 309: ‘[on postule] l’existence d’un domaine sémantique indépendant, en affirmant le statut formel autonome d’éléments sémiologiques qu’on appelle traditionnellement proverbes et dictions.’

understand the grammar of aphorisms, I would like to focus on two very broad properties of aphorisms that may account for their propensity to be transplanted from one context to the other.

First of all, aphorisms express generic meaning:

102. L'esprit est toujours la dupe du coeur.
102. *The head is always fooled by the heart.*

The noun phrases 'the head' and 'the heart' have a generic value, they represent everyone's head and everyone's heart, without exception. The generic interpretation not only derives from the determination of the subject and object of the sentence but also from the fact that no personal pronoun is expressed. There is no 'I' or 'We' to specify the origin of the utterance. When personal pronouns are used, they are highly generic like 'our', referring to the totality of people:

38. Nous promettons selon nos espérances et nous tenons selon nos craintes.
38. *Our promises are made in proportion to our hopes, but kept in proportion to our fears.*

The generality of the expression is not the only common feature of aphorisms. Most of them are also articulated through a relation of identification, often expressed by BE:

78. L'amour de la justice n'est en la plupart des hommes que la crainte de souffrir l'injustice.
78. *In most men, love of justice is simply fear of suffering injustice.*

The structure of the maxim establishes an equivalence between LOVE OF JUSTICE and SUFFERING INJUSTICE. Aphorisms have a defining value: they function like dictionary entries, giving a definition of a first term.

However, the definition provided by aphorisms is deceptive: in Maxim 78, the equivalence is only structural because of the presence of BE between the two phrases. The definition of LOVE OF JUSTICE provided by the sentence is perfunctory. It actually leaves the real meaning of JUSTICE to the personal interpretation of the addressee while associating its signification with its origin.

A defining value is always to be found in aphorisms, even when there is no relation of identification explicitly expressed by BE:

86. Notre défiance justifie la tromperie des autres.
86. *Suspicion in our part justifies deceit in others.*

The relation between SUSPICION and DECEIT is articulated around moral considerations, implied by JUSTIFY. This aphorism does not define, in the strict sense of the term, the word SUSPICION, yet it associates it with a general situation, that of being deceived.

Aphorisms can be construed as sentences that anchor a departing term into a generic situation, establishing a domain of validity for a term mentioned. In Maxim 86, DECEIT is said

to exist, or to be active when SUSPICION occurs. Even though there is no strict definition expressed, a close association between two generic terms is established.

2.2 Contextual compatibility and linguistic/pragmatic features

Free from contextual bonds, dense in meaning and compact in form, aphorisms are extremely fit for textual transplantation. What allows the compatibility of aphorisms with virtually any context is their recourse to generic reference and implicit definition. Being self-referential keeps them independent from a particular context, which would normally be a necessary condition for a discourse to be meaningful.

The quotational status of aphorisms pertains to pragmatic specificities on both sides of the author and users or addressees. Indeed, when aphorisms are transplanted and used in a target text, they are selected for their impact and concentration of meaning. But, one aspect not often dealt with, is that authors of aphorisms like La Rochefoucauld intend attributing the status of ‘quotation’ to their aphorisms. This implies a complex set of strategies which are better revealed through the analysis of their translation.

We are going to see briefly that while their formal features matter so much, they are especially problematic in translation.

3. La Rochefoucauld’s *Maxims* and their translations: grafting meaning

La Rochefoucauld published the first edition of his collection of maxims in 1660. They were immediately very successful even beyond the French borders. From 1670 until today, his *Maxims* have been translated at least thirty-seven times in English. This substantial number of translations is explained by the difficulties encountered by translators in the structure of aphorisms which is based on both idiomatic specificities and grammatical particularities in order to condense meaning. A literal translation is hardly ever possible and leads, almost invariably, to misleading interpretations.

Examples can be found where a translation which follows the French too closely can produce serious mistranslations. The word for word translation produces a counter interpretation of the maxim, as we can see in:

325. Nous nous consolons souvent par faiblesse des maux dont la raison n'a pas la force de nous consoler.

325. *We often comfort ourselves by the weakness of evils, for which reason has not the strength to console us.* (BF)³

³ The initials between parentheses specify the identity of the translator: BF stands for Bunds-Friswell (1871) and T for Tancock (1959).

This translation dating back to 1871 betrays a misreading of the original maxim. In French, ‘par faiblesse’ is not a MEANS ADJUNCT but a CAUSAL ADJUNCT. The weakness evoked is not to be related to ‘evils’ but to ‘comfort’. A correct translation from a 1959 edition gives:

325. *Often, simply out of weakness, we get over troubles for which reason is powerless to console us.* (T)

However, it requires a thorough rearrangement of the elements of the maxim.

There are traditional methods of translation that help provide satisfying versions in the target language by changing the grammatical category of words, or the whole formulation, so as to adjust the specifications of the original language.

Here is an example of a transposition, which consists in changing the grammatical category of a word:

135. *On est quelquefois aussi différent de soi-même que des autres* (added emphasis).
135. *We sometimes differ more widely from ourselves than we do from others* (added emphasis).

The verb ‘differ’ in the English version is an adjective in French.

An example of modulation, which can be defined as a change of point of view:

423. *Peu de gens savent être vieux* (added emphasis).
423. *Not many know how to be old* (added emphasis). (T)

The quantifier of paucity ‘peu’ in French is turned into a negation of the multi-quantifier in English: ‘few’ becomes ‘not many’. The meaning remains the same, but the words used and features pertaining to enunciation in aphorisms change.

It is possible to consider that the aphoristic character of the original sentences is somewhat distorted in these examples. In numerous examples, the translation of aphorisms triggers or imposes a dramatic loss of aphoristic features:

171. **Les vertus** | se perdent ₁ | dans l'intérêt, ₂ | comme les fleuves ₃ | se perdent
₄ | dans la mer. ₅

The vertical bars indicate the meaningful units of the maxim and the figures subscript their order according to the position of the units. The word in bold characters is the THEME of the maxim. One of the translators translated maxim 171 as:

171. *As rivers ₃ / are lost ₄ / in the sea ₅ / so are ₁ / virtues / in self.*₂ (BF)

The pattern is transformed from an initial: **Th** -> 1 -> 2 -> 3 -> 4 -> 5 into: 3 -> 4 -> 5 -> 1 -> **Th** -> 2.

While brevity is preserved and the general meaning still the same, the aphoristic character of the maxim is lost. Indeed, the French version plays on a rhythmically balanced pattern (‘se

perdent' is repeated) which thematically departs from the mention of VIRTUE. The English translation changes the informational structure of the maxim as well as its rhetoric strategy. The carefully studied prosody of the French version emphasises the impact of what is said, while the English tends to flatten it by reorganising its material.

An extreme example of variation of the aphoristic nature of an enunciation can be illustrated by Maxim 351:

351. On a bien de la peine à rompre, quand on ne s'aime plus.
351. *How hard is it to break with somebody we have ceased to love!* (T)

Here it is no longer possible to consider the translation an aphorism: the exclamatory mood of the English translation perverts the initial strategy of La Rochefoucauld.

However, some translations seem to renew the aphoristic properties of the initial sentence:

155. Il y a des gens dégoûtants⁻ avec du mérite⁺, || et d'autres qui plaisent⁺ avec des défauts⁻.

Maxim 155 establishes a double antithesis, i.e. 'dégoûtant' is opposed to 'qui plaisent' and 'mérite' to 'défauts'. Also, a symmetry of lexical polarity is posed (− + || + −). This is a canonical aphorism: its theme is elaborated into a formally balanced construction, reminding us of the defining value of aphorisms.

In one of the translations we found that these complex features have been successfully transposed:

155. *There are some persons who only ₁ disgust ₂⁻ with their abilities, || there are persons who please ₂⁺ even ₁ with their faults.* (BF)

The aphoristic nature of this maxim is translated very cleverly: it indeed preserves both the double antithesis (which is rather a proper antithesis 'disgust / please' and an implicit opposition 'abilities / faults') and the symmetry, which is no longer polar but positional (adverb₁ verb₂ || verb₂ adverb₁). However, if the initial structural pattern is preserved, the meaning is greatly modified since the initial meaning of the French is that "there are disgusting persons who are deserving and others who are popular but flawed". This not what the translation signifies.

The translations almost invariably have to choose between betraying the meaning or flattening the aphoristic character of aphorisms.

4. Conclusion: translation and transplantation

The basic properties of aphorisms are their brevity and autonomy of enunciation. Their concision allows them to have an immediate impact on the addressee, or they can be used to illustrate an argumentation. They also elaborate the aesthetics of brevity which makes them

memorisable and memorable. Brief forms of language are also said to be free from any dependence on context: they need not be embedded in a logically constructed discourse, such as a dialogue or written pieces of writing, to have an immediately promptly intelligible meaning. In actuality, they tend to house the context of the discourse they are inserted in because they characterize a general situation and formulate a rule or principle exemplified in the context of their enunciation.

These briefly exposed examples show how complex the relation between aphorisms and their translations is. What the study of the translation of aphorisms shows is that aphorisms, in an even greater degree than poetry, build their meaning not only upon the words they use but particularly upon the structural features they display. Aphorisms, grammatically speaking, reveal a way of signifying that which relies on contrasts between lexemes, and semantic contrasts which are paralleled by a syntactical organisation. The very organisation of the words in aphorisms is significant in itself since it participates in a rhetorical strategy. Translation adds a number of constraints linked to the particularities of the target language, which in turn makes it difficult, if not occasionally impossible, to render any given aphorisms into another language. One may say that while aphorisms might have an optimal nature towards being transplanted, they have a minimal propensity towards being translated.

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From Concept to Analogy: An Investigation into Singularity

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Abstract

What would ‘a man without qualities’ be? Obviously, we always resort to some properties to describe someone’s identity, and these attributes seem to feature someone’s character. Thanks to these qualities, we are able to recognise each individual, who appears as a gathering of properties. This concept of the identity, which eventually confounds the identity and the similarity, is the target of the satiric tone in Musil’s novel *The Man without qualities*. The article aims to show how the satiric tone devaluates this ‘identity-similarity’ and how it also constitutes the starting point of an investigation of the singularity. The satiric tone manages to express the voice of the singularity and to turn from a general point of view to a peculiar one.

The article focuses on the ethical dimension of this quest of identity, since the issue of the identity is particularly sharp in ethics. It seems that we need to know who we are to make up our mind and to know how to live. It demonstrates how satire is a key to a double passage. First, the satiric deflation reveals that the identity-similarity is neither believable nor respectable and that we need to think of identity in another way, in order to account for the singularity. Secondly, the satiric voice tackles the generality of the concept, which is unable to deal with peculiar situations or to express the Self. The passage from the concept to the analogy should help us improvise and find the right attitude or behaviour in each given context.

The hypothesis of the article is that satire reveals the inadequacies and the limits of the identity-similarity and that it could be a plausible candidate to bring about an alternative concept of the identity, centered on the singularity. Moreover, satire could provide a kind of literary experiment which would be able to give ethical indications: the satiric tone in moral communication has the power to make us feel concern. From the reading of Musil’s novel, the article suggests that satire, as an expression of the voice of the singularity, plays an invaluable role in moral communication, in so far as it conveys a non-conceptual analogical use of language.

Keywords:



What would ‘a man without qualities’ be like? We always resort to properties to describe someone’s identity, and these attributes seem to feature someone’s character. Thanks to these qualities, we are able to recognise each individual, who appears as a gathering of properties. These properties play a decisive role in many philosophical conceptions of the individual. For instance, Leibniz considers individuality as a substance enveloping all its properties, both monadic and relational. Properties are also predicates which are inherent in the subject, according to the principle of inherence. But even if the notion of a substantial individual is abandoned, properties remain, as in Russel’s *Human knowledge*, where this notion of substance is reduced to a body of physical repetitive qualities, a particular complex of co-presence. I suggest that we refer to such conceptions which involve repetitive properties in order to determine the individual as conceptions of identity-similarity. In fact, it is the repetition of the same properties in a certain organization which allows someone to recognise an individual in duration, no matter if the properties are inherent in a substance or are organised in a complex. This conception of identity, which confounds the individual with a sum of stable properties, is the target of the satiric tone in Musil’s novel *The Man without qualities*. I will try to show how the satiric tone devaluates the concept of ‘identity-similarity’ and instigates an investigation into singularity. The satiric tone manages to express the voice of singularity and to turn from a general point of view to a peculiar one. In fact, satire is a key to a double passage: first, the satiric deflation reveals that the ‘identity-similarity’ is neither believable nor respectable and that we need to consider identity differently in order to account for singularity. Then, the satiric voice tackles the generality of the concept, which is unable to deal with peculiar situations or to express the particular

I shall point out the fact that the recognition of someone — and therefore someone’s identity — presupposes the idea of self-knowledge. We should be able to know exactly who we are and establish a determined acquaintance with ourselves in order to understand our own identity. My hypothesis is that this self-knowledge is a phantasm, which is responsible for the reduction of identity to similarity. It imprisons the self in a stable configuration of determinations and it conveys the syndrome that Musil diagnosed as ‘a lack of inner substance’. If the conceptual use of language fails to grasp identity, an alternative should be to resort to analogy in order to give a picture of ourselves. The purpose of analogy is to grasp subjectivity, to deal with things which define the individual and its singularity, and can’t be explained in a conceptual way.

On the one hand, Musil is very critical of the intuitive uses of analogy. For instance, he disapproves of Spengler's use of dubious analogies and calls for a 'truce' concerning the hypertrophied reference to intuition in German literature. But he also admires Spengler's attempt to deal with the world of motivation instead of the logical world of causality, with the 'non-rational' instead of the 'rational'. The concept is powerless in front of this affective and emotional field, so that analogy is needed:

There is also a kind of purely rational intuition. Even there, however methodical the presentation might have been, the decisive idea appears suddenly before consciousness, as if it came from outside. The purely rational thought which seems to be completely unrelated to sentiment, can also be stimulated by more intense feelings. How far especially the thought we call here non-rational, whose strong penetration and internal velocity of propagation depend precisely on words' vitality, on this kind of cloud of thought and feelings which envelops the insignificant conceptual nucleus.¹

Musil's ambition is to try a rational use of analogy in order to grasp extra-conceptual experience and contents. As he had already said in his study on Mach's epistemology, the objective description of the observed things must be completed with hypothetical or analogical elements. I think that this point is very interesting, since Musil tries to distinguish between conceptual and extra-conceptual contents, and at the same time show how it is possible to rationally understand the latter. The main idea is that there are two different kinds of meaning: a conceptual or logical one, which can be easily grasped by understanding, and an analogical or moral one, which needs a specific form in order to be understood and expressed. The first one relies on the fact that some of the observable facts comply with the logical categories, whereas the second one blurs or resists this rationalization.

1. The satiric devaluation of the 'identity-similarity'

Satire is a literary genre defined by Quintilian and Roman poets, but I will not study this classical satiric form, rather I will focus on a tone which is ironical and aggressive. I will also look at satire as an art of contrast, underlining the dissimilarity between speech and reality. We can get a general definition of satirical work from the following quotation: '[The satirist] pictures the inflated, the fragmented, the jumbled; he shows us men whose language is indecorous and whose pretensions to decency and honor are as much a sham as their speech.'²

Hence, satire uses particular devices: it can use irony; it can use exaggeration, in order to underline a shortcoming or to ridicule a behavior; deflation, which is a devaluation of something considered to be great; juxtaposition, which consists in putting on the same level a great thing

¹ Robert Musil, 'Esprit et expérience', in *Essais: conférences-critique aphorismes et réflexions / textes choisis*, translated by Philippe Jaccottet (Paris: Seuil, 1978). My translation.

² Alvin Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 32.

and a low one, in order to operate a devaluation again. Furthermore, satire has a specific purpose, which is presented by Jacques Bouveresse in these terms: '[satire should be] the will at least to sort some things out because they do not appear believable or respectable, without thinking that it is necessary to put something else instead.'³

Following the work of Bouveresse on Karl Kraus,⁴ I shall suggest that this struggle concerns philosophical conceptions or systems as well as individual attitudes and claims. Indeed, the satiric text always appears aggressive and impertinent since it often attacks something; it tries to unveil things or persons that claim or are claimed to be something or someone else than what or who they really are. Satire also has a privileged target: *it aims at spotting imposture*.

In fact, I think that one of the greatest interests of a satirical piece is its ability to remain vigilant and to maintain rational control over our speeches, and over the relationship between speeches and behaviours. It seems to me that Musil, following the tradition of the moralists, chose to use satire in order to express his criticism, and peculiarly, in order to criticise the notion of identity-similarity. I would like to show how he ridicules 'the men with qualities', pointing out that the moral consequences of such a conception of identity are that one is brought to indifference. In the 88th chapter of the first volume of Musil's novel entitled 'On being involved with matters of consequence', we find a perfect specimen of the deflationist activity of the satiric tone. After an ironic description of the romantic passage from the intimacy of the self and personal experiments to a general noble and rational point of view, the satirist concludes that 'Those of us who prefer to live with greatness — first and foremost among whom will be found those great souls for whom little things simply don't exist — find their inward life drawn out of them involuntarily and stretched into an extended superficiality.'⁵ This passage from a deep verticality of the self to a pure horizontal surface is a metaphor of several impostures: (1) the tendency to conceive the Self as a kind of vacuum inside us. This interiority is presented by the satiric text as 'a lack of inner substance', 'a big, vacuous, round O'; (2) the idea that Great Things should bring a kind of plenitude and elevation to human beings. The satiric text insists on the danger of adopting this view, in that it creates a propensity to make abusive generalizations, and the gain of generality is proportional to the lack of personality. The

³ Jacques Bouveresse, *Le Philosophe et le Réel. Entretiens avec Jean-Jacques Rosat* (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 1998), p. 17: 'la volonté de régler au moins leur compte à des choses qui ne paraissent pas crédibles ni respectables, sans se croire nécessairement obligé de les remplacer par autre chose.' My translation.

⁴ For instance, Jacques Bouveresse, *Satire et prophétie, Les voix de Karl Kraus* (Marseille: Agone, 2007). He shows how Kraus used satire in order to attack his contemporaries, for instance political leaders or journalists.

⁵ Robert Musil, *The Man without qualities*, tr. by Sophie Wilkins (London: Picador, 1995), p. 432.

individual is torn between two extremities: the general extremity of the world and the personal one; i.e. a perfectly objective attitude towards the world and a subjective one.

The first imposture relates to our conception of identity, especially our idea of the self. The text provides an impressive and ironic image of the vacuity of the substantialist conception of the self, which considers the self as an internal entity characterised by several stable properties. The title of the novel itself already suggests that identity cannot be thought of in terms of qualities or properties anymore. This statement results from an experiment made by Ulrich himself while reading the newspaper: in the thirteenth section of the book, Ulrich realises that he possesses the same properties as a horse. Wondering about a paper presenting a ‘racehorse of genius’, he realises that the combination of qualities that claim to define everyone fails to grasp what is individual and unique in everyone. We can draw up an inventory of the qualities that constitute our personality and compare it with those of a racehorse: strength, rapidity, boldness or caution, impatience or placidity and so on. Consequently, according to this substantialist view, our identity seems to be a particular, stable combination of general properties. Furthermore, we share these properties with other beings, humans as well as animals. Some of these properties are innate, others are acquired, and the sum of them sketches the lines of our individuality and can be summarised in a precise report that explains our ways of acting and reacting.

Thereby, in this case, identity is thought as similarity: the person is identified by a set of properties that remain similar in the course of time. What, then, is the principle that unifies these disparate properties? And is similarity the key to identity? The unity of all properties requires an unchanging entity that possesses these attributes and is also predicated by them: it is the essence of the individual, the Self considered as an immaterial and invisible substance. Indeed, idealism will be the privileged target for the satiric attacks, since it works hand in hand with the mythology of the substantial Self. The problem is that this conception refers to an unobservable entity, for instance, the Soul or the Essence of the individual.

Musil is not embarrassed by the idea of the soul, but by the pretension to deal with this idea as a physical object, ignoring the problems that such a notion involves and lacking the precision such an investigation requires. He notices that most of his contemporaries take the liberty of saying anything about the Soul and subjectivity, invoking intuition or internal visions regardless of precision, truth or rationality. As a result, the notion of individuality and identity loses its content and spreads out, until people don’t know who they are or how to live. This second consequence is a recurrent motif in Musil’s works and justifies the urgency to resort to satire.

The satiric tone operates an anti-metaphysical deflation of all the beautiful and noble ideas, especially that of the soul. When serious philosophers, metaphysicians and romantics agree to bend on their knees in front of the Soul, Ulrich compares the possession of the latter with that of a bank account, mysticism with kickboxing and morals with a system of individual tricks. The satirist reveals the contrast between the way most people speak about identity, passionately claiming that they have an intuitive knowledge of their soul and that they're elevating it, with the way they really behave: replacing generosity with personal accumulation of wealth, mystic ecstasy with the sportive loss of consciousness and the universal laws of morals with personal arrangements that follow one's own interests.

The aim of the satiric text is not to replace identity (considered as similarity) with something more believable, but to reveal our fondness of representing an interior space that has to be filled and the conviction that we can bring together all our objective determinations in order to elaborate a self-knowledge. The fact is not that some ideas are particularly valuable, but that we consider as eminent thoughts that would be ridiculous or uninteresting if they were not accompanied with so much respect. So satire asks the question: why do we give so much respect to any thought connected with things we consider as 'Great'? What determines the fact that we consider a particular kind of things as 'Great'? Many of these things are metaphysical: God, the Soul, the Heart, Duty, and so on. I think that there is a tendency to use metaphysical concepts as if they were ordinary notions or scientific concepts, but without enough precision. The fact that these ideas are metaphysical seems to *excuse* people from dealing with these ideas more accurately. If I do believe that I must do my duty, it does not tell me concretely how I should live. If I believe that I possess a soul which is unique and distinguishes me from other individuals, it does not tell me who I am. And the consequence of this vagueness in our use of these notions finally is, according to Musil, an indifference to our identity and our behaviors; why should I be this rather than that? Why should I do this rather than that? The lack of precision in our conception of identity leads to a lack of motivation in our actions.

I read the symptom of the 'lack of inner substance' as a sign that one should not feel concerned by what happens to oneself, or to another. It expresses the impossibility to give a personal meaning to things or statements. In front of too general and abstract things, we tend to lose our personal connection with them and to adopt a mere conformist attitude. Ulrich, the main character of the novel, experiences this lack of inner substance himself in the first volume: he feels unfamiliar to himself! Since his character disappears in the flow of general properties, he's no longer able to grasp his own identity and he cannot find a sufficient reason, for instance,

to help the murderer Moosbrugger rather than condemn him. He has lost the motivation to act. One can understand a moral statement in a certain way, because it is said or written in one's language and one can identify the words, the structure of the complete statement and so on. But the statement has no resonance for them; it does not arouse anything in them. We should therefore wonder what understanding a statement means. If it merely means that we recognise the language, that we can develop an answer, is it sufficient? Certainly not. When we talk about understanding a statement, especially in ethics, we mean something different, something that supposes a recognition that is close to complicity; an ability to say 'Yes! That is exactly what it is! I know what you mean, I experienced it!' What is at stake is our life, and we feel concerned because it is our business.

2. Singularity, attitude, self-estimation

I now propose to compare Ulrich's adventures with the following remark extracted from the conversations between Wittgenstein and Bouwsma: 'No account of himself can stand before his own attitude towards it. He is at the end without any character at all, as far as his own estimate or inspection is concerned.'⁶ This remark is a reminder of the distinction between knowledge, especially self-knowledge, and attitude. In fact, the first volume of Musil's novel tells Ulrich's experiment of the impossibility of a self-knowledge. This impossibility is linked to the fact that one's life is not a phenomenon, that there is something extra-factual in our identity. We cannot describe who we are with concepts. First, we are not imprisoned by a constant unchanging character. The fiction of the character comes up against the experiment of introspection. The analysis of the properties which constitute a character reveals the non-coincidence between someone and their own character. There is a rip in identity and a kind of split between the subject of enunciation and the person who should be described by a list of properties. Ulrich's own evolution during the novel enlightens this point: he was a kind of modern cynic trying to live according to a certain abstention, since he was unable to motivate any choice. But from the meeting of his sister Agathe, he becomes an activist, finding new motivations, even if they are not rational, to leave with Agathe to the sea and to help Moosbrugger escape from his asylum. Nevertheless, there is a kind of continuity in his experiences, which is the will not to remain imprisoned by a fixed character. In the second part of the volume, he is often confronted with the perplexity of the members of the group 'Parallel

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, O.K. Bouwsma, *Conversations 1949-1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), p. 70.

Action'. They continue to see him as a cynic mathematician, indifferent, passive and sometimes cruel. But it is no more the case.

The conception of the identity-similarity presupposes that our personality should be described as a phenomenon, by identifying regularities and constant features. It is a static conception of identity which appears as a state, or a fact: the observable fact 'to be someone'. Therefore Ulrich, as a scientist, is peculiarly attentive to facts and his attention is also linked to an epistemological requirement of the adjustment of statements to facts. This is probably a resurgence of Mach's principle of economy, since we know that the young Musil studied philosophy at the university and wrote his PhD dissertation, a criticism of Mach's theory, with Carl Stumpf. The demand of precision is important in the quest of identity: the description of identity should be scientific and as exact as a physical description. Ulrich is clearly motivated by a strong desire of objectivity and he would like to know himself with perfect objectivity in order to find the concept of himself. But he is disappointed because his choice of following a general point of view in every case, of living in an impersonal and indifferent way is not satisfying. His lack of satisfaction comes from his lack of inner unity and motivation. He finally envies the murderer Moosbrugger because he possesses something Ulrich needs: purposes, motivations, and concerns.

Ulrich's voice entails a distance between the object of the description and the subject of enunciation. But what happens when the subject and the object are the same? Is it possible to conceive an objective description of someone's identity? In a way, this description is possible, and we can find such descriptions of the individuals in literature. The author or an omniscient narrator presents the other characters and has an external point of view which grasps the others. Think about *Mme Bovary*. Externality secures objectivity, but the problem is that, in our personal case, we are not satisfied by such a description which conveys again an identity-similarity. The determinations or the self-determinations of a character are not sufficient to give the feeling that her identity has been surrounded. We need something more in order to grasp our identity: a description of the 'internal' world.

Hence, Ulrich's self-observation and criticism leads him to eliminate all his properties, since he cannot decide why he should be rather this or that. When he tries to report who he is, he's always disappointed, because his properties don't have the element of necessity that he's looking for. There is no necessary reason to be a soldier rather than a mathematician, to be sweet than to be rough, to act according to the law or to be a criminal. In his attempt to elaborate a self-knowledge, Ulrich eventually discovers the Principle of Insufficient Reason. Whereas

scientific laws rely on necessary reasons, so that when we throw an object in our world, it must fall on the earth, there is nothing necessary in our singular constitution. In other words, Ulrich discovers that our identity is neither a fact, nor a phenomenon, and that he cannot grasp it by choosing the right properties, the right attributes.

Here are also the limits of Mach's inheritance: the principle of economy does not apply to the Self, and it is not possible to build a description of ourselves which fits with who we are. In fact, according to Mach, science should be considered as a 'question of minimum',⁷ and should aim at describing the facts with the least expenditure of intellectual energy. The scientific language is economic since it consists in direct descriptions of facts, in 'a purely conceptual apprehension of the facts which contain nothing more unessential.'⁸ The principle of economy is a demand of exactitude and correspondence to the facts, so that each of our statements should get rid of what is unproved. The unessential elements are those which are not guaranteed by experiment and observation. But if psychology is devoted to such an economic description of the 'non-ratioïd', Musil wants to take account of these unessential elements. There is an inversion between the two fields of the ratioïd and the non-ratioïd: what is insignificant in the first one becomes the most important in the second one. The conceptual description won't grasp these elements, but analogy will.

Ulrich's attempt to describe himself cannot resist the introspective attitude. When he wonders who he is, he cannot be satisfied with an objective description of his properties. Here I shall make two remarks, first on the importance of self-estimation, then on the dissociation between the factual features of a character and the description of interiority. In fact, self-estimation has nothing to do with self-knowledge; on the contrary, estimation entails the idea of an evaluation, which tackles the traditional dichotomy of facts and values. This dichotomy claims that there are two aspects in our statements: a factual one, which is behind controversy, and an evaluative one, which is neither true nor false and cannot lead to a universal agreement.⁹ The phantasm of self-knowledge is directly connected to this dichotomy, since in Ulrich's mind, it refers to a purely factual knowledge and therefore, it involves the reduction of identity to a group of facts. The demand of objectivity becomes the objectivation of the person. Everyone should be summarised in a sum of determinations and external events. Here is the 'lack of inner

⁷ Ernst Mach, *La Mécanique, exposé historique et critique de son développement*, translated by E. Bertrand (Paris: Librairie scientifique Hermann, 1904), p. 457; cited in Musil, *Pour une évaluation des doctrines de Mach*, Etude Préface 'Musil, lecteur de Mach', P.-L. Assoun (Paris: PUF, 1985), p. 27.

⁸ Musil, *Pour une évaluation des doctrines de Mach*, p. 90.

⁹ For a criticism of this dichotomy, see Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

substance'. In fact, if our personal identity and actions have no values for us, if we are not able to judge them, how could we escape to Ulrich's first indifference? Contemporary epistemology showed that even sciences involved a part of evaluation, linked to the common preference for one or another theory. It is even more so the case for our relationship to ourselves. So, the description of our identity implies both factual features and evaluative contents.

I think that this lack of inner substance emerges from the absence of a personal point of view and self-estimation. This point of view is not an epistemic one: there is a relationship to the self which precedes the epistemic requirement. The failure of the identity-similarity reveals this pre-epistemic attitude to oneself. Ulrich is not short of knowledge but he experiments that the grasp of his identity implies a pre-epistemic attitude. At the end of the first volume, the turning chapter describes Ulrich's change of attitude from a general objective point of view to a peculiar and personal one which includes all his feelings and internal emotions. A previous chapter already presented this distinction: the general point of view considers that every event and every action receive its meaning from its place in the causal chain of phenomena. This point of view is described as 'a challenge to one's intellectual power', and I suggest that it corresponds to the 'epistemic attitude', the demand of knowledge. In the thirty-ninth chapter, the narrator describes this point of view as 'a self-examination', and later, he's saying that the difference between the man who feels as a stranger to his own identity and properties and the man who experienced his determinations and has a personal relationship to himself is 'only a difference in attitude', a difference in 'the degree to which one saw one's life as a general manifestation or an individual one.'¹⁰

This leads me to my second observation: the change of attitude is linked to the discovery of the duality of the subject. I said that the conception of identity-similarity succeeded in understanding the factual aspect of a person, but was blind to their singularity. The concept of singularity is very difficult and romantic, since it might convey esoteric references to intuition and interiority. Now, the attempt to grasp singularity entails the risk to succumb again to the metaphysical temptation and to create a 'Great' idea of singularity or a mythic interiority. In order to avoid this risk, let's come back to the novel itself; as a reader, I can experience the discovery of singularity. Indeed, even if Ulrich's properties disappear, even if his identity-similarity breaks up, I can nevertheless recognise him since I keep hearing his voice, the expression of his point of view. If the subject is not reduced to a mysterious silent subjectivity, I can recognise him without knowing him. Even if I cannot describe him with the right

¹⁰ Musil, *Ibid.*, p. 157.

properties, and give an objective report on Ulrich because he changes during the novel, I can follow his word. His singularity, his personal attitude is given in his speeches. Ulrich experiences the difficulty to express his singularity, but this singularity is already present in the existence of the subject of enunciation, more precisely, of his voice and words. As far as Ulrich speaks or thinks, as far as I can read his words, I can recognise him.

Singularity should not mean something substantial, and neither a mysterious and unchanging nucleus or interiority in everyone. Singularity seems rather to be a point of view, the personal attitude to the world which entails that I'm concerned by what happens to me and what I am doing. It is more an ethical attitude since we do not need reasons to deal with the others and the world this or that way, we simply do it, for instance with a subjective conviction, or merely without being convinced at all. As Musil said, it refers to the fact that I can perceive the same event as a suffering, or an insult, or in a sporting sense, as an obstacle, and so on. The investigation into singularity requires this change of attitude and the novel relates this change, since in the second volume, Ulrich will focus on his experiment and concentrate on the question 'How to live?' Then, the quest of his singularity will be mediated by the meeting with his sister, and this event opens to a dialogical approach that should be commented on.

3. Sacred conversations and analogies

Ulrich's indifference towards who he is or how to behave ends with the meeting of his sister Agathe. I think that it is not a complete breaking, as Ulrich had always been crossed by contradictory aspirations; on the one hand, as a man of his time, he followed the excessive positivism which considers everything with the curiosity and sometimes the cruelty of the scientist, wishing to get rid of what he called 'the waste of feelings', applying the principle of economy in the organization of the concepts as in his way of life. On the other hand, Ulrich had always been skeptical to this 'positivist' attitude and his satirical remarks about the scientists, who are so precise in their restrained technical field but unable to deal with essential, i.e. ethical questions, prove that from the beginning he was very sensitive to moral issues and unsatisfied by the contemporary response.

I propose to distinguish two aspects in Ulrich's attitude: the first one is a reaction to an unbearable irrationalism becoming more and more seductive in the beginning of the 20th century. Does Musil have a premonition about the European tragedy to come? It is sure then that he couldn't bear fallacious uses of language, especially Spengler's analogies, and that he was extremely wary of the resort to intuition without precision and the lack of exactitude in the new irrationalism of the 'philosophy of life'. That's why he peculiarly recommends writers to

be as precise in literature and philosophy as mathematicians in mathematics. Even if moral issues do not belong to the purely rational field as far as they involve feelings and emotions, it is not sufficient to abandon reason and leave morals to subjectivism. That's why Ulrich seems to take part in the pervading positivism, for instance when he wishes scientists to have mystical experiences so that mystical reports might be more precise. Ulrich never abandons the demand for rationality and exactitude. Hence, Musil reproaches contemporary writer's expression of 'mere impulses', who 'give rise only to vague thoughts and vague mind's shakings.'¹¹

Therefore, we must understand Musil's resort to analogy as a way to express as precisely as possible non-conceptual contents. That is the second aspect of Ulrich's attitude, which doesn't find sufficient expression in the first volume but can finally arise through the conversations with Agathe. It corresponds to what Musil already theorised in his essays, for instance in *Elements for a new aesthetics*, when he distinguishes two states which characterise the human condition: the normal one and the 'other' one. The normal state refers to a kind of positivism, based on interest, entertainment, measure, efficiency, power, domination and nihilism. In this case, reason is the instrument of an aggressive human domination of the natural world and of other human beings. It is also submitted to a technical purpose and the idea of the progression of humanity. On the contrary, the other state is exceptional, and refers to love, feelings, contemplation and mysticism, involving a refusal of the world and a scorn of power. I suggest that Ulrich's scepticism was not an expression of nihilism but of scorn for the race towards power and profit. Ulrich does not discover the possibility of another state at the end of the first volume, but he realises that he needs someone else to achieve it.

Therefore, Agathe's role is directly linked to this 'other state'. In fact, the change of attitude, from indifference and abstention to the 'other state', supposes a dialogical approach and moral imagination. This aspect is very important since the experience of the 'other state' is the only one which is able to grasp singularity and give ethical orientations, and since analogies are the only way to express statements about singularity. As Musil wrote in his essay entitled *Mind and Experience*: 'The rigid concept is replaced by the breathing representation, equation by analogy, truth by probability: the fundamental structure is no more systematic, but creative.'¹²

In fact, there are two major ways of expression: concepts and analogies. Musil's argumentation relies on the hypothesis that there is a non-conceptual content which cannot be

¹¹ Robert Musil, 'Mind and Experience', *Essays*. My translation.

¹² Robert Musil, 'Mind and Experience', *Essays*. My translation.

grasped through scientific experiments and logical categories, and which corresponds, as far as I am concerned, to what Aristotle called the field of probability. In fact, Aristotle distinguished between the field of exactitude, which is explored successfully by natural sciences and mathematics, and the field of probability, which is characterised by different degrees of certainty, and is investigated by dialectic. Musil seems to inherit this concept and defends the distinction between a 'ratioïd' and a non 'ratioïd' area and, as a result, between two means of expression: concept and analogy. Analogy has to find as much precision as possible in the second field in order to express probable thoughts.

In order to answer both fundamental issues which are linked: 'Who am I?' and 'How to live?' Musil follows this distinction between two states and suggests that the other state is the only way to become aware of our singularity, since it involves self-estimation. It is a personal experience through which anyone can find a personal meaning for his relationship to the world and to other people, what Musil calls 'the personal point of view', and through which anyone feels concerned about what happens to him and to other people. The normal state works as a normalization of our behaviours and therefore, of our identity, i.e. we are characterised by general features and properties so that we become transparent and with a stable character which should explain why we act such or such a way. The 'other state' tries to catch our attention to particular experiments, to singularity and subjectivity. In my opinion, Musil's originality relies, on the one hand, in the demand of precision in order to describe this subjective world and the role of subjectivity in moral life and, on the other hand, in the resort to analogy in order to describe singularity.

We can find such an example of Musil's use of analogy in the 12th chapter of the second volume, 'Sacred conversations'. I shall refer to the famous example of the vision of the cattle, when Ulrich tries to describe how the aesthetic experience of the 'other state' leads to a new attention to the world, which is paradoxically purged of any selfish element and included in subjectivity, taking part in interiority. The picturesque vision of the cattle is interrupted as if a curtain has torn, and is replaced by an 'emotional swaying', as if 'everything has lost its limits and has become part of you.'¹³ There is no scientific description of these experiences since they are not externally or physically observable. Analogy is devoted to describing internal, intimate and emotional experience.

That's why Agathe's presence is needed. In fact, analogy increases moral imagination so that the individual is able to take his subjective experience into account and to elaborate ethical

¹³ Robert Musil, *L'Homme sans qualités*, t. II, p. 117. My translation.

orientation in particular contexts. In other words, singularity is linked to moral communication: the ability to express what we feel involves a pre-epistemic relation to ourselves and a bond to others, in order to share our experiment and also to show who we are. The narrative should not offer an objective description of our identity, but it should give an idea of our attitude to the world through the use of analogy. It may be an attempt to be understood by others, and in this sense the understanding is not a kind of knowledge, but requires a capacity of empathy. The resort to analogy provides an image of who we are, of the way we are trying to live, and not an anatomic report of ourselves.

We could wonder why the analogical use of language develops only in the dialogical configuration. I shall finish on this point, suggesting four elements. First, I think that the meeting with Agathe awakens Ulrich's forgotten feelings. He never had such intimacy with anyone since his romantic passion with the chief warrant officer's wife. If we are surprised by Ulrich's distance towards his mistresses, like Leone, we can be all the more astonished by the immediate proximity with Agathe. Blood relationship allows this intimacy and spares many social constraints, so that the scene of the meeting is fascinating: Ulrich and his sister are both dressed in Harlequin-style clothes and they appear as twins, each of them regarding the other as their own double. The world of feelings is vivid again, and it changes Ulrich's perceptions. I would like to refer to Iris Murdoch's concept of attention: in fact, Ulrich seems to experience the passage from an egoist point of view, blind to otherness and to the world and to an open, altruistic point of view. Paradoxically he's more able to care about his own feelings, the world and others, than when he was only paying attention to his interests and to facts. He abandons self-interest for love and this loss opens to a new perception of his own subjectivity. Listening to his feelings, he tries to behave differently. The discovery of singularity through the attention to feelings breaks Ulrich's indifference and leads to another way to behave, based on the agreement of perception, feelings and reason.

The second point is the will to avoid the confusion of the feelings by expressing them as precisely as possible. And this is the task of analogy: it has to create a vivid image of our feelings, of thoughts which have not the same degree of certainty as in sciences. If our moral statements, for instance, are merely personal and probable opinions, nevertheless they have to be clear and justified. In fact, Musil mistrusts people who behave irrationally and claim that they do it according to their feelings. It leads to irrationalism and relativism. He is convinced that even the expression of our feelings can be regulated by reason, and I suggest that this point of view is close to the Aristotelian idea of practical reason. The constraint of communication

involves clarity and precision: if I want to express my feelings, I am compelled to deal with language, words and it should bring some clarity to the internal confusion. In order to be understood by the other one, I have to make an effort of clarification.

That's why moral communication is so important: it allows Ulrich and Agathe to share their feelings and their experiences and to give one another particular examples of behavior in concrete situations. For instance, Ulrich refers to his relationship with the chief warrant officer's wife in order to warn his sister about passionate love and its consequences and Agathe refers to her first marriage in order to arouse moral imagination and to reflect on happiness. These conversations induce empathy and appear as moral experiences themselves. The mere act of speaking with each other involves a use of imagination and increases our own experience, our number of examples of particular actions and possibilities in particular contexts. The dialogical approach brings ethical 'solutions'.

These four elements: attention of a high quality, precise analogical expressions of feelings, conversation as an exchange of particular examples of behaviours and ethical solutions, and conversation as a moral experience involving empathy, all justify Musil's approach and his resort to analogy. The quest of identity leads to ethical concerns, since attention to singularity through awareness of feelings brings new motivations to act and suppresses indifference. In this perspective, the presence of the other is not only the condition of empathic experiment, but also the guarantee of a clarification of subjective thoughts and of a high precision in the description of the emotional sphere.

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Photographs in Autobiographies: Identities in Progress

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The article deals with the use of photographs in several French contemporary autobiographies (Roland Barthes, Annie Ernaux, Denis Roche, Hervé Guibert, Marguerite Duras). Its aim is to present this corpus of works grafting photographs onto various kinds of texts, works that can be called *photobiographies*. In the second part, the article analyses several issues raised by this new literary field. In particular, the article explains why the use of photographs changes the forms and the conditions of the autobiographical expression. Indeed, photographs problematize the representation and the construction of personal identities.

Keywords:

Photography has manifested its influence on literary works since its creation in the nineteenth century, either praised or despised by the authors referring to it. In the contemporary period its presence has strengthened more particularly in the novelistic field and in autobiographies. As regards the latter, the publication of *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes in 1975 and *La Chambre claire* (*Camera Lucida*) by Barthes in 1980 opened a new era in French literature. These books, both of which combine photographs and texts in an original attempt at self-representation, deeply influenced French critics and writers of the time. Hervé Guibert's *L'Image fantôme* (*Ghost Image*) published in 1981 and Marguerite Duras's *L'Amant* (*The Lover*) from 1984 followed directly in Barthes's footsteps. This corpus of works using photographs in an autobiographical context¹ has continued to increase since this period.² Annie Ernaux's *Les Années*, published in February 2008, whose structure is directly determined by a series of pictures and films representing Ernaux throughout her life, is probably the latest example of this kind of work.

¹ I am using here a minimal definition of *autobiography*, referring to works that attempt at representing the story of one's life. The scope of this definition encompasses experimental projects and works playing with the border between reference and fiction, between truth and invention.

² The corpus of works we are considering here encompasses the last forty years, and is very diverse. It includes authors as different as Denis Roche, Sophie Calle, Raymond Depardon, Christian Boltanski, Jean Rouaud, Hubert Lucot and François Bon.

This trend can be easily explained if we consider that photographs are precious documents for autobiographers. As Michael Sheringham puts it: ‘for a majority of Westerners in our time photographs are the most telling and evocative tokens of the individual past.’³ Nowadays it even seems that if someone wants to write about his or her own life, he or she will soon be confronted with an unfathomable number of photographs, digital or otherwise, and maybe even with videos. It would be certainly difficult to avoid them, or at least to avoid their influence on personal memory.

My aim in this paper will be to explore this corpus of French recent autobiographical works that graft photographs onto various kinds of texts, examining in particular the extent to which the use of photography changes the forms and the conditions of autobiographical expression. Indeed, grafted photographic bodies involve a tension between two forms of structure, the Narrative and the Album, and between two forms of reception, seeing and reading.⁴ How can these antagonisms prompt a renewal of the genre, with an increasing importance of ‘sense’ beyond the mere level of autobiographical ‘significations’?⁵ Finally, this particular kind of grafting process has major consequences on the way one can perceive and communicate one’s own identity, which gives the impression of dealing with ‘identities in progress’, as we talk of ‘works in progress’. Indeed, the use of photographs by autobiographers suggests that modern identities appear to be dynamic processes rather than well established entities.

1. Photobiographies: a contemporary autobiographical trend characterised by various kinds of grafting processes

1.1 Photobiographies as grafting processes: the scope of a definition

It is tempting to call works combining photographs and autobiographical texts ‘photobiographies’. This neologism was used for the first time in French by Gilles Mora in his *Manifeste photobiographique* published in 1983 and co-written with Claude Nori.⁶ But in this book, the term has a narrow meaning, referring roughly to a diary illustrated by photographs. The term is now commonly used by publishers to sell commercial illustrated biographies such as *Che: The Photobiography of Che Guevara*.⁷ However, several academic researchers mainly

³ Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 315.

⁴ I don’t mean here to oversimplify the complex issue of the relationship between *reading* and *seeing*. Of course, it can be argued that *reading* is a kind of *seeing*, and that it is possible to *read* an image. I am supporting here a clear distinction between these two activities for the sake of my analysis.

⁵ I am borrowing this distinction between *sense* and *signification* from Jean-François Lyotard. I shall come back to it later.

⁶ Gilles Mora, Claude Nori, *L’Été dernier. Manifeste photobiographique* (Paris: Éditions de l’Étoile, Écrit sur l’image, 1983).

⁷ Christophe Loviny, *Che: The Photobiography of Che Guevara* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1998).

in France and in the United States have been trying to redefine it since the end of the 1990's, that is to say to link it to the corpus of works referred to earlier. This paper intends to contribute to this effort.

The first difficulty is to delimit the scope of a definition. In this respect, we can consider that photobiography encompasses a series of contemporary works characterised by an autobiographical design and in which photographs play a major role, however they are used. The evocation of a photograph in an autobiography can trigger memory and narrative processes. But it can be described as well with more or less precision, which implies an *ekphrasistic* process. An *ekphrasis* is, indeed, a rhetorical trope referring to the description of a work of art (traditionally a painting or a sculpture). This is for example the case in Annie Ernaux's *Les Années*, already mentioned.⁸ Finally, photographs can be materially reproduced in an autobiographical work and are then co-present with a certain number of texts, be they captions, descriptions or narratives. This is what is to be found in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* which opens with an album of private snapshots, with captions provided by Barthes himself.

Moreover, photographs can be used to express autobiographical content. Various writers such as Denis Roche have combined a practice of photography with a writing of the self.⁹ But the status of photographs is intrinsically closer to a portrait or a self-portrait than to a proper autobiography.¹⁰ Indeed, a single snapshot does not have the necessary scale to represent the story of one's life. This situation can change when this snapshot is put into an album, whose status is closer to a narrative. I shall return to this problem later. In any case, photographs do not *express* their content in the way texts do. Photobiographies thus confront two different modes of expression and of reception (that is to say, reading and seeing). This grafting process has major consequences for the construction of autobiographical identities.

1.2 Between referentiality and fictionality: the problematic status of photographs in autobiographies

Academic works dedicated to photobiography have mainly focused on the referential possibilities offered by photographs. Indeed, their spectator is thought to believe, more or less spontaneously, that what they represent is *real*, authentic (this is, however, less the case for

⁸ The photographic *ekphrasis* has specific characteristics which are due in particular to the referential status of photos and to the fact that most of the family snapshots can't be considered as works of art. To define the exact nature of the photographic *ekphrasis* is one of the main issues related to the study of photobiographies.

⁹ See for instance *La Disparition des lucioles* (Paris: éditions de l'Etoile, 1982) and *Photolalies* (Paris: Argraphie, 1988). Denis Roche is a writer and a photographer. He uses photography to support his meditation on time, taking for example several snapshots of the same place at different periods of his life.

¹⁰ It does not mean that an autobiography, understood as an attempt at representing the story of one's life, cannot include portraits and self-portraits.

digital snapshots).¹¹ Thus their use in an autobiography could reinforce the reader's belief in the truth of the author's discourse. In a way, they could prove that what the autobiographer refers to does exist.

Photographs are, indeed, commonly used to authenticate things and, in particular, identities (on identity cards, driving licences). But one should not confuse here legal identities with autobiographical ones. Indeed, they often do not coincide for the simple reason that autobiographical identities are complex puzzles and are more often than not constructed against the arbitrary graft of names upon photographs. In photobiographies the effects produced by a picture depend on its various interactions with texts. Captions and narratives can problematize its interpretation and can even make it fictional if there is an obvious discrepancy between what is said and what is shown. This very discrepancy signifies for the reader/spectator that his or her take on the text or the snapshot could be wrong. His or her natural reaction is to have suspicions about the two and about the relationship between them. Photographs can thus be used as elements of fiction or can even produce a 'fiction effect' if their spectators realize that they do not match the text.¹² Besides, photographs have an intrinsic fictional dimension, which is due, for example, to our natural tendency to pose when we are photographed and to the various means of faking a snapshot.

Finally, the use of photographs renders the reception of autobiographies more complex. They seem, in fact, to provoke autobiographical writing in both senses of the term, that is to say to trigger, to call it (*pro vocare*) and to defy it, to problematize its status.

2. Between images and texts: a series of struggles between photographic and (textual) autobiographical bodies

2.1 A Foucauldian approach: the photobiographical possibilities offered by a dynamic opposition

Several theoretical analyses related to the relationship between images and texts are relevant as far as photobiographies are concerned. In particular, I would like to refer here to the work of Michel Foucault, who describes this relationship in terms of a power struggle. In this respect, in *This Is Not a Pipe*, with regard to René Magritte's painting of the same name, he writes: 'we must therefore admit between the figure and the text a whole series of intersections – or rather

¹¹ See Kendall Walton, 'Transparent Pictures. On the Nature of Photographic Realism', in *Marvellous Images. On Values and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 79–109.

¹² Such a mismatch between pictures and their captions can be found, for example, in Christian Boltanski's *Les Modèles* (Paris: Cheval d'Attaque, 1979). In the section of this book entitled 'Les portraits photographiques de C.B.', nine photographs are reproduced accompanied by a caption and a date. They are said to represent the author aged between two and twenty years old. But these pictures are obviously not showing the same person and the reader/spectator is soon inclined to doubt about their referential status.

attacks launched by one against the other, arrows shot at the enemy target, enterprises of subversion and destruction, lance blows and wounds, a battle.’¹³ The relationship is understood here as a battle field where the bodies of the text and of the picture are trying to capture one another. I used the expression ‘battle field’ implying the presence of a place, a ground common to images and texts, whereas Foucault himself only talks of a ‘non-place’ and of a ‘non-relation.’¹⁴ Indeed, for him they are by nature radically different and can only be brought together in the space of a book. And the configuration of this very space depends on a series of pressures and mutual influences. For Foucault, moreover, language, as a determining form, has a primacy over the visible, which is a determined and passive form. But despite this primacy, its relationship with the visible is ‘infinite’. That is to say, it keeps *relating to* it but is never able to *get the better of* it. In other words, if texts, be they captions, commentaries, descriptions or narratives, can influence the reception of images, they can never erase completely the specificity of the visible.

What can we make of this Foucauldian epistemological ground as far as photobiography is concerned? First of all, we can consider that this kind of work is characterised by a series of micro power struggles between two rival and heterogeneous agents – the visual and the textual. In this respect, writing can expand *against* the photographic body to reduce its space of expression. This might explain why actual photographs have disappeared from photobiographical works, that is to say, why they are not materially reproduced. In Hervé Guibert’s *Ghost Image* for example, a book which describes or evokes a series of virtual or actual photographs linked to Guibert’s personal story, pictures are no more than mere negatives, ghosts. Their only role is to trigger the text, to allow its development. As Guibert puts it: ‘[the] text is the despair of the image, and worse than a blurred or foggy image — a ghost image’.¹⁵ The text casts out the frustration provoked by photography, which is unsatisfactory for Guibert because of its ontological limits. And finally, it replaces the actual snapshots.

Regarding photographs, they can introduce into the space of the page a dense block attracting the gaze of the reader/spectator, stopping, or hindering the linear textual progression. Their status as indexical icons (that is to say, as pictures produced by a direct recording of reality) particularizes the way they interweave with texts. They can fix the spectator’s attention; fascinate him or her like no other images — such as paintings or drawings. This is what Barthes

¹³ Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, translated and edited by James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 26.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 41 and p. 36.

¹⁵ Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1996), p. 16.

suggests in *Camera Lucida* when he describes photography as a ‘pure deictic language’.¹⁶ And when a snapshot is not actually reproduced in a photobiographical work, it can still leave a trace of its existence in the text, a trace manifested for example by a characteristic fragmentation, a discontinuity inherited from photography.

2.2 How do photographs affect autobiographical discourse? A tension between the Album and the Narrative

Finally, the use of photographs in autobiographies introduces a struggle between two forms of structure and of progression, the album and the narrative. At first sight, photographs seem to tend to the former and autobiography to the latter. But their relationship of exchange and influence changes this situation. For example, although actual pictures are absent from their works, Ernaux’s texts in *Les Années* and Barthes’ in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* take an album-like shape. As for captions, even when they only indicate a name, a date, a place, they tend to insert pictures into a minimal narrative structure.

Once again, the relationship between the narrative and the album is probably to be thought of in terms of a representative rivalry consequent upon either, the photobiographer’s will to show or to conceal himself or herself or the dichotomy between the continuous and the discontinuous. These two forms keep intersecting. A whole series of intermediary configurations are possible between the two absolute limits of photobiography: the pure Album, having excluded all textual presence, and the pure Narrative, in which all photographic traces have disappeared.

3. A conflict at the heart of the photobiographical process of reception: between ‘sense’ and ‘signification’

3.1 ‘Sense’ and ‘Signification’: a Renewal of the Autobiographical Genre?

Regarding the reception of photobiographical works, this power struggle at the heart of the creative process confronts two activities which can be viewed as radically opposed — seeing and reading. If photographs can somehow be read and interpreted by virtue of the rational and cultural background that Barthes calls the *studium* — opposed to the purely emotional *punctum* — the elements of information we can get from them always remain uncertain. They cannot be reduced to pure texts and their interpretation does not depend only on the textual indications related to them.

The reader of a photobiographical work has thus to make an effort of adaptation, of accommodation. The mode of reception required could correspond to the type of reading that

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 5.

Jean-François Lyotard refers to as ‘dancing’ in *Discours, figure*. In this case, the reader’s eye is not only grasping linguistic signals but is attracted as well by a material substance. As Lyotard puts it, ‘il y a aussi matière pour le corps’ (there is also matter for the body).¹⁷ The very presence of photographs generates indeed an instability which prevents the reader from seizing a clear autobiographical *signified*. There are two orders of meaning that intersect in photobiography. Lyotard refers to them as ‘sens’ (‘sense’) and ‘signification’ (‘signification’). The latter is expressed in language through linguistic signs – it can only be read, whereas the former concerns mainly the fields of the sensible and of the unconscious and is expressed in particular in what Lyotard calls ‘l’espace figural’ (the space of the figure).¹⁸

An autobiographical content cannot thus be *signified* by a photograph and can only be communicated *sensibly*. Besides, a photographic document (that is to say a snapshot that has not been specifically taken by its author to express something about his or her own life) can only show a biographical content — or ‘biographemes’ to use Barthes’s expression — that the photobiographer will have to change into an autobiographical one. The aim of the text is then to set up a network of significations from this document, allocating it a role in an attempt at self-expression. Because of their status as fragments which do not communicate their context of creation in a direct manner, their *before* and their *after*, it seems that photographs have to be supplied in several ways by autobiographical discourse, being subjects of a dynamic of appropriation whose minimal stakes are names, dates and places. As Jacques Derrida writes in *Lecture de Droits de regard (Right of Inspection)*, ‘[a photograph] wants names, wants more than names, the name itself. And more than discourse, nomination itself, this exemplary instance, the singularity of a single proper name, as random as it is necessary.’¹⁹ He obviously refers here to the patronymic name.

3.2 Identities in interactions: between the individual and the collective, memories and images

Indeed, photographs constitute, like any autobiographical work, crossroads between the individual, the personal and the collective,²⁰ between the common and the proper. Family

¹⁷ This translation is mine. *Discours, figure* has not yet been translated completely into English.

¹⁸ Lyotard’s distinction between *sens* and *signification* seems to overlap partly with Barthes’s one – in *La Chambre Claire* – between *punctum* (involving affects, desires) and *studium* (cultural and rational interest). From this perspective, we could argue that instead of a strong opposition between *seeing* and *reading*, photobiographies involve two modes of reception dividing each of these activities. One engages a process of intellection and searches for significations and signifieds whereas the other concerns the body, the desiring self, and is attracted by signifiers, by words and pictures’ materiality.

¹⁹ Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection*, text by Jacques Derrida, trans. by David Wills (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), p. XIII.

²⁰ *Individual* refers to the process of individuation whereas *personal* evokes the classical concept of ‘person’.

albums are, for example, in a way all similar, being characterised by recurrent contents (events such as births, birthdays, and weddings) and ways to represent them. The individual story is embedded in collective patterns and the photobiographer's identity takes shape on this background of the in-between. This is particularly striking in Annie Ernaux's work in which she uses private photographs as memory as well as sociological traces allowing her to tell the story of a period, of a whole generation. But, on the contrary, a photobiographer can be tempted to defy this dimension of interchangeability characterising family pictures and to reassert against them the violence of a personal story, of desires and fantasies, and of shameful secrets: in other words, he or she can be tempted to write everything which is not shown by photographs, which is the case for Hervé Guibert in *Ghost Image* and of Marguerite Duras in *The Lover*.²¹

This coded and collective dimension of photographs stresses their particular relationship with memories. Indeed, they are more often than not treated as if they were equivalent to memories. It is probably one of the main reasons why people take so many pictures. However, if a snapshot can trigger or, on the contrary, block a memory process, the way it functions and represents is completely different from that of a proper memory. It belongs, in fact, to a larger network of pictures related to the personal past including, in particular, mental images – or, in other words, latent photographs. It is in this framework that snapshots are reworked by the Imaginary and by the Unconscious. Whether memories are constructed thanks to them or against them, photographs never replace them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of photographs in autobiographies allows a renewal of this literary genre. Indeed, it problematizes if not refutes the status of autobiographical discourse. What is at stake in this context extends far beyond photographs' mere authenticatory function in everyday life. On the contrary, it is at the core of a grafting process involving different kinds of texts, from titles, captions to descriptions and narratives. This dynamic process aims at the construction of a complex identity combining contradictory signs and which I have described as a struggle. If a picture can trigger autobiographical writing, writing itself can tend to neutralize it, framing it in a network of significations, or even serving to erase and to replace it in an *ekphrasistic* manner. Indeed, photographs are fundamentally unsatisfactory and their meanings always elude us. Besides, if they are characterised by a representative plenitude – as Roland Barthes puts it

²¹ In *Ghost Image*, Guibert explores the subversive and invisible stories related to family snapshots. In *The Lover*, Duras tells the whole story of her relationship with a Chinese man developing — textually — an introductory picture supposed to represent her just before her first meeting with her lover.

in *Camera Lucida*, everything is *there* in a photograph – they never show *everything*. It is then the text's task to supply them and to relate them to their off-frames. Photographs are finally shown or hidden, operated or mutilated by texts according to the image that the photobiographer wants to leave of himself or herself and of his or her life.

To the assertion of the absolute presence of photographs, of its particular *being there*, the photobiographical text opposes the construction of an autobiographical signified and tries to replace a *writing of the Referent* by a *writing of Meaning*. To use Barthes's terms in *Camera Lucida*, it is the writing process that achieves the transition from the 'that has been' to the 'that is it', from the biographical to the autobiographical.

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Becoming a Monstrous Text? The Process of Grafting in the Work of Jean Genet and Jacques Derrida's *Glas*

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Abstract

The article analyses the connections between grafting and writing in both the work of Jean Genet and also Jacques Derrida's analysis (synthesis?) of Genet's work. Grafting and writing share a common etymological root: the Greek *graphein* ('to write'). It is particularly interesting to examine the relationship between these terms in Genet's biographical works (mainly *The Thief's Journal* and *Miracle of the Rose*), as his writing involves a many-layered grafting process. In addition, Derrida's book on Genet, *Glas*, besides reflecting on the link between writing and grafting in Genet's work, is essentially constructed out of quotations from Genet's texts that Derrida grafts onto his own writing. The article first considers the different modalities of grafting that are used in Genet's and Derrida's writing, before examining the reasons why such a process is at the core of their respective texts. Finally, it considers the extent to which this process leads these texts, made as they are from imported, sutured limbs, to become monstrous — examples of what we could call a 'teratography'.

Keywords:



The processes of grafting and writing are not generally compared to each other even if they are in fact very closely related. The word 'graft' comes from the Latin *graphium* that originally designates a stylus, a steel point or an etching needle, that is any kind of instrument that was used for engraving and writing. The common origin of the grafting and the writing processes becomes even more obvious if we go back directly to the Greek etymon of the word — that is the verb *graphein* — which literally means 'to write'. In this article, I would like to analyse the connections and interactions between the grafting and the writing processes both in the work of the French writer Jean Genet and in the book Jacques Derrida dedicates to Genet's work, *Glas* (1974) where this issue acquires a central and specific role.

The inherent relationship between grafting and writing is indeed central in their respective texts as well as in their relationship to each other. In Genet's autobiographical novels, most

notably *The Thief's Journal* (1949) and *Miracle of the Rose* (1946), the link between grafting and writing is explored and developed both as a thematic and as a literary device: if there is a process of grafting enacted in his texts, his writing also grafts bits of former texts onto new ones. In *Glas*, Derrida reflects on Genet's writing in terms of its use and practice of grafting, while at the same time grafting Genet's texts into his own writing and commenting on this process.

This then leads us to ask such questions as: can the grafting process be understood as a text involving a palimpsest that is to be read and deciphered according to its incorporation in the new text? Conversely, can the writing process be thought of as a graft of an element onto another one?

In trying to answer these questions and to shed some light on the links between, on the one hand grafting and writing and, on the other, Genet's work and Derrida's text, the first part of this article focuses on the different modalities of grafting that are used in Genet's autobiographical novels and in Derrida's *Glas*. Subsequently, I consider the reasons why the grafting process might be seen as the core of Genet's writing and, after him, of Derrida's writing in *Glas*. Finally, I consider how far such an intensive use of the grafting process leads their respective texts, made from imported limbs sewn together, to become monstrous and the extent to which they provide examples of what we could call a 'teratography', or monstrous writing.

1. Modalities of the grafting process in Genet's autobiographical novels and in Derrida's *Glas*

In the writing of Jean Genet, the grafting process appears as much as a thematic, aesthetic and a poetic one. First, it is a theme that has already something monstrous about it, when, in *Querelle de Brest* (1953), for example, the twin brothers Georges and Querelle (who look exactly the same) desire to graft themselves onto each other during one of their fights:

The two brothers were watching each other, knife in hand, their bodies upright, almost peaceful, as if they were about to march calmly one against the other to exchange, arm raised, the Florentine oath that is only to be uttered dagger in hand. Perhaps they were about to cut each other's flesh in order to sew themselves together, to graft themselves onto each other.¹

In *The Thief's Journal*, we find another example of the thematic graft that is especially important as it works as a symbol for the aesthetic of the graft in Genet's writing. This example concerns Stilitano, a Serbian legionnaire deserter whose right hand has been amputated and with whom Genet falls in love. The overly virile and homosexually repressed Stilitano habitually pins a fake bunch of grapes inside his trousers, just in front of his genitals. This

¹ Jean Genet, *Querelle de Brest* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 124. My translation.

grafted deformity makes him look like a monster and scares the men who try to seduce him. As Stilitano has only one operative hand, it is Genet's job to hang and to remove the bunch of grapes every day, a duty that he performs religiously. We read:

With a gesture of his vivid hand, he motioned to me that he wanted to undress. As on other evenings, I got down on my knees to unhook the bunch of grapes. Inside his trousers was pinned one of those imitation bunches of thin cellulose grapes stuffed with cotton wool. (They are as big as greengage plums; elegant Spanish women of the period wore them on their loose-brimmed, straw sun bonnets.) Whenever a queer at the Criola, excited by the swelling, put his hand on Stilitano's basket, his horrified fingers would encounter this object, which he feared might be actual balls.²

But Genet is also perfectly aware of the function of this artificial bunch of grapes which in fact plays the role of a prosthesis for the missing hand:

He wants to baffle and hurt, to disgust the very people who desire him, I say to myself when I think of him. As I ponder it more carefully, I am more disturbed by the idea – which I find pregnant with meaning – that Stilitano had bought a fake wound for that most noble spot (I know that he was magnificently hung) in order to save his lopped-off hand from scorn.³

In *Glas*, Derrida comments on the symbolic meaning and importance of this figure. For Derrida, Stilitano stands as an emblem of the writing process. Derrida pays attention to the signifier 'stilitano' and notes that the name refers to the stylite, namely he or she who holds the stylus that is used for engraving and writing — even if or, indeed, especially because, Stilitano's right hand is missing, that is to say the hand that usually holds the pen and therefore accomplishes the engraving or writing process. As such, Stilitano is also the stylist or style designer. This is why we find the bunch of grapes replacing his right hand, being both a representative for another stylus, the phallus, and standing for the rhetorical flowers (mainly metaphors and similes) that flourish in Genet's writing. Moreover, these highly elaborate and numerous rhetorical flowers are grafted onto thug's slang, which Stilitano can easily embody metonymically (as the thugs' boss, he is also the one who is in control of their specific language), and the mix of these two different uses of the language creates precisely Genet's very specific style made both of classical literary and learned French language and vulgar Parisian thieves' slang.

Finally, there is a third modality of grafting in Genet's writing: the quotation process. In his autobiographical novels, Genet quotes repeatedly and consistently his former texts, importing the limbs of old texts to new bodies of texts. In so doing, Genet builds his texts from each other in a kind of closed circuit whilst commenting on his own writing and literary choices in several reflexive ways: from direct commentary to the use of footnotes. This constitutes the

² Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 52.

³ Ibid., p. 54.

poetical aspect of the use of the grafting process in Genet's writing. Furthermore, the use of quotations then acquires retrospective importance as it is precisely such a process that is at the core of Derrida's writing in *Glas*.

Derrida's text on Genet is indeed replete with quotations from Genet's texts and produces at the same time a reflection on the overwhelming presence of the graft in his own writing. In *Glas*, the quotations can be short or very long (several pages), they appear randomly inside a sentence or more unexpectedly (but very frequently) inside a word and are disseminated in fragments, columns or paragraphs that are typographically distinct from each other and arranged in a patchwork manner on the same page. One can say, then, that Genet's body of texts is truly grafted onto Derrida's. In this regard, Derrida writes:

The graft that sews itself the substitution of the supplementary *seing* 'constitutes' the text. Its necessary heterogeneity, its interminable network of listening lines *en allo*, in hello, that compels reckoning with the insert, the patch. Reading — its works with a prosthesis. Whose sound does not, as one could believe, on the contrary. It works and it sings with parenthesis in its body.⁴

Derrida's text is indeed grafted as it sews together bits of Genet and his own commentaries, as well as literally welcoming Genet's signature in his own text. His text is also heterogeneous as it includes something that is alien and refers to the outside, trying out different typographical and structural methods for hosting the texts of the other. Derrida's own body of text is willing to open itself to Genet's and to try to do so in every possible manner. Why, then, is the grafting process so important in their writing?

2. Etiology of the grafting process in Genet's autobiographical novels and Derrida's *Glas*

In his autobiographical novels, Genet grafts similar elements onto each other, either on a thematic level, with Georges and Querelle, whose likeness as twin brothers seems to be the reason for their desire to be grafted onto each other, or on the narrative level, with the grafting of elements taken from former books onto new ones. We might call this a form of intratextuality. The situation, then, is essentially different from the one we found in *Glas* as, for Genet, the grafting process is not a case of heterogeneity but, on the contrary, of homo or autogeneity (in botany, scientists speak of homo or autografts on the one hand and of hetero or xenografts on the other).

A graft (this time in the physical sense of the word) is usually made when a piece or lump of the receiving body is either missing or inoperative, such as the missing hand that is replaced

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 118.

by the bunch of grapes in the Stilitano example. In Genet's case, we know that what is missing is the knowledge of origin. Indeed, as a state-fostered child, Genet never knew who his parents were, nor did he have any family; for him, there was no close 'other' on whom to rely. This original lack and its role in his writing have been analysed by most of his critics, and especially by Sartre who gives it a full ontological dimension in his *Saint Genet*.⁵

Focusing on the onomastics of the name 'Genet', Nathalie Fredette finds the presence of this ontological lack inscribed in its signifying. According to her, Genet is the name of privation *par excellence*, both on an ontological level ('*Je n'est*', 'I is not') and on the level of possession ('*Je n'ai*', 'I have not'). She writes: 'in this regard, the enunciative project of he whose very name makes both negation (I do not have, I am not) and birth (I am born) intervene will be one of the most complex, and certainly rich in contradictions.'⁶

While we may wish to resist such a Cratylistic conception of the proper name and its relation to an individual's life, we can nevertheless demonstrate the manner in which Genet's work signals paradoxically and continuously that nothing is less original than the origin. To do so his texts constantly reread, quote and re-quote each other in order to create the illusion of finding their roots in themselves. Thus, Genet makes of his own text both a *cliché* of himself and a text by someone else. Consequently and paradoxically, the self-transplantation process that pretends to create an illusory autogenesis opens finally onto the other.

As we have seen in *Glas*, Derrida uses the same device in reproducing Genet's grafting practice and applying it to his own critical writing. In this regard, he writes:

What is it about, all in all? Quoting, reciting the broom ['genet' in French] page upon page? An anthology? What right do we have? And the complete text, is it to be concealed inside? Bits of anthology, which invite us, if possible, to link up, and in any case to reread. Backwards and forwards, starting over at every turn.⁷

In his text, Derrida certainly mimics and amplifies Genet's grafting practice but at the same time also solves Genet's desire for origin and the other. In a retrospective twist, Genet becomes both the origin of Derrida's text and the embodiment of the other, who is constantly quoted, grafted.

However, in being made from imported and sutured limbs (in Derrida's case), in pretending to negate the ideas of the origin and the other (in Genet's case) and, as such, asking to be perpetually linked up and reread, do the texts finally not become some kind of monsters? Even, are they not just monstrous?

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet. Comédien et Martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952).

⁶ Nathalie Fredette, *Figures baroques de Jean Genet* (Montréal: XYZ, 2001), p. 16. My translation.

⁷ Derrida, *Glas*, p. 92.

3. The texts as monsters: two cases of teratography?

There is, of course, a real interest for and concern with monsters in Genet's texts. Most of his characters — the numerous murderers, thieves, traitors, prisoners, male prostitutes, pimps and transvestites — are very often designated as monstrous. He is fascinated by what he calls the 'beautiful monsters', that is to say good-looking men with evil souls. We also saw that this *teratophily* (from the Greek *teratos*: 'monster' and *philos*: 'love') is willingly taken over by what we could call a phenomenon of *teratogenesis* (or 'creation of monsters'). Genet likes to create monstrous entities, be it physical ones, such as the two brothers Georges and Querelle (who, in addition to being called monsters, are imagined being sewn and grafted together as a two-headed monster) or Stilitano (whose hand is missing and genitals deformed), or textual ones.

Thus, one can wonder whether Genet's texts are monstrous due to the self-transplantation process they use so willingly in order to mask the double absence of ontological origin and otherness. In this regard, however, Derrida does not argue that Genet's writing is monstrous but that it is *colossal*. According to him this colossal writing is a writing that doubles itself and creates a double of Genet who can then find his origin in another who is also himself. Derrida plays here with the etymology of the word '*colossus*' that designates in Greek a statue representing an absent or dead person. In doubling his characters and his texts by continuously grafting and quoting them, Genet creates in his books his own double, or *colossus*, that replaces the dead person of the missing origin.

Interestingly, we find a completely different definition of the colossal in Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* which is precisely opposed to the monstrous:

An object is monstrous if by its magnitude it annihilates the end which its concept constitutes. The mere presentation of a concept, however, which is almost too great for all presentation (which borders on the relatively monstrous) is called colossal, because the end of the presentation of a concept is made more difficult if the intuition of the object is almost too great for our faculty of apprehension.⁸

Are Genet's texts colossal, then? One can argue that the absence of origin and of otherness, while too great for our apprehension, is nevertheless given a form — as something that is almost too great — in Genet's texts. He creates in his writing an illusion of absence of origin and otherness that can be apprehended. Genet's texts would then fit into the category of the colossal. Furthermore, in his texts, the grafted elements from other texts are seamlessly incorporated and

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 136.

assimilated, conceptually, structurally and syntactically. The graft takes: the two entities constitute a homogeneous whole.

Derrida's *Glas* seems, on the contrary, to fit with the monstrous in several respects. To start with, if we understand the term 'monstrous' as that which is shown or shows itself, remembering that the word 'monster' comes from the Latin *monstrare* that means 'to show', Derrida's *Glas* can be said to be monstrous because it exhibits its use of the graft as its main writing process and comments upon it openly. The grafting of Genet's texts and of dictionary definitions (which also play with etymology) are left as such in the text and none of them introduced with colons, speech marks, explanatory or presenting sentences.

Subsequently, the text and its writing can be described as monstrous precisely because of this dismembered and fragmented aspect. It shows itself as a body, a *corpus* that has been made out of different kinds of limbs, not unlike Frankenstein's creature constructed out of bits of different bodies, the stitches and sutures remaining visible. One could even go further in saying that the pieces seem just to lay still next to each other. In this regard, the graft does not take as well as it does in Genet's texts. It is in fact Derrida's own text and not Genet's that needs to be continuously reread in order for the reading (and therefore the reader who becomes a kind of doctor) to make the graft work by linking, sewing the pieces together and realising the stitching process. Derrida implicitly acknowledges this aspect of his text whilst portraying it as a hideous and repulsive monster:

what affords reading affords readings by citations (necessarily truncated, clippings, repetitions, suctions, sections, suspensions, selections, stitchings, scarrings, grafts, postiches, organs without their own proper body, proper body covered with cuts, traversed with lice).⁹

Moreover, Derrida's text is also distorted and deformed by the abundance of grafted quotations we find in it. It seems to crack, to pull on its borders and to be about to explode like an over-inflated balloon whose surface will soon be torn apart. Derrida's writing is so grafted that it seems, to use Kant's words, to 'annihilate its end which its concept constitutes', and we are therefore not surprised to note that *Glas* ends with an unfinished sentence and no final full stop. These are the last words of *Glas*: 'What I had dreaded, naturally, already, republishes itself. Today, here, now, the debris of.'¹⁰ As it overtakes its own end and finality, the text is well and truly monstrous.

The grafting process at work in Derrida's writing makes it an example of what we could call a *teratography* or monstrous writing (a writing in which the graft of quotations imported

⁹ Derrida, *Glas*, p. 168.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 262.

from other texts does not work by itself, leading the text to overtake its own end and finally to explode), while the grafting process at work in Genet's writing remains a classical case of intratextuality (the graft of quotations takes well and the new text, even if *almost* overtaking its own end, is eventually both autonomous and homogeneous).

Conclusion

Having compared the use of the graft both in Genet's autobiographical novels and in Derrida's *Glas*, we have been able to point out the specificities of their respective writing practices in this regard. For both of them, grafting is as much a thematic as a poetics: their writings address the graft at the same time as they practice it. Nevertheless, if Genet's grafting process can be described as an example of intratextuality (quotation of his previous texts in a new one) or even sometimes infratextuality (he quotes the text he is actually writing, as is the case in *The Thief's Journal*), Derrida's could be described at first sight as an example of intertextuality, a description I have shown to be inaccurate.

Genet uses this self-quotation process in order to compensate for the constitutive lack from which his work emerges, thus creating the illusion of a self-created origin and paradoxically introducing the notion of otherness at the very core of sameness. In *Glas*, Derrida mimics and amplifies Genet's grafting process and, in so doing, inverts the situation: Genet becomes the very origin of his text and embodies the other. Derrida's text is kept open whereas Genet's texts create the illusion of being closed upon themselves.¹¹ The illusion is also a visual one, since Genet's texts are written in consistently long and serried rows with very few chapters and indentations (occasionally none at all), whereas Derrida's is replete with gaps and blank spaces.

In this respect, Genet's texts could be thought to be monstrous: they refuse the notions of origin and true otherness at the same time as they openly express their fascination for monsters and monstrous figures that they willingly create. However, Derrida describes Genet's writing as 'colossal', which means that his texts stand as a double of the missing original other. In addition, Genet's writing can also be called colossal in a Kantian sense as it presents concepts that are almost too great for our apprehension: the lack of origin and otherness would be too great to apprehend if it were real but can be apprehended as it is mere illusion.

Finally, it appears that Derrida's writing can be said to be monstrous: it exhibits its grafting process and it is made from different imported limbs grafted onto each other. However, the

¹¹ From a Derridean perspective, Genet's texts are of course open for the simple reason that they are texts and in virtue of using language. His texts are also obviously open by virtue of the use they make of intertextuality (numerous references are implicitly made to major texts such as the Bible, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, picaresque novels, etc.).

graft does not seem to take — and this is its work — as the pieces are simply put next to (sometimes into) each other, requiring the reader to realise the stitching process during his or her own reading. Furthermore, the text is so grafted that it becomes cracked and distorted and eventually annihilates the finality of its own end.

If the grafting process enables Genet's writing to hold itself together, on the contrary it leads Derrida's to explode and, as a consequence, to tear apart the bits of Genet.

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Grafting and de-grafting mental illness: the identity of madness

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Abstract

The article begins with a statement by Foucault, how considers, in concluding his *Histoire de la folie*, madness as a graft onto the world of reason. The social implications of this thesis cross all of his work: as a plant grafted onto another plant not only produces a new species but also depends on the host for nutrition, so happens with madness. There is no autonomous space for something like an identity of madness in the contemporary culture. The social body defines its reason setting against an excluded background and affirming itself in a negative fashion. This social graft has an important echo in each individual be it sane or insane. The age of the asylum opened the gates to the so-called positivist psychiatry. In turn, this current could be said to graft onto man's nature mental illness, rendering him corrupt and dangerous in his very essence. In order to overcome this discriminating reductionist naturalism, phenomenological psychiatry introduces a new relationship between the physician and the patient, modelled on the idea that both their subjectivities have to be called into question. This is achieved primarily through and *epoché*: the psychiatrist has to bracket all his illusions of objectivity, as well as any organicist categories, in order to approach a fellow human being. This perspective is adopted and yet surpassed by Franco Basaglia, the psychiatrist who reformed Italian psychiatric health care. Not only should the psychiatrist bracket his assumptions in order to avoid treating madness as a graft onto the nature of man, but he also has to fight the asylum, that physical and metaphorical space from which madness could live only grafted, according to Foucault, onto the world of reason. Therefore, if there is something like an identity of madness, from these three perspectives we understand that it has to be sought to a paradoxical return: a return from a state in which it is grafted; a return to a state in which it has never been.

Keywords:



Michel Foucault's first thoughts on power stemmed from a series of insights on psychiatry and the asylum.¹ Surprising as it may seem, one of the concepts that can account for these first insights is largely neglected. In fact, *graft* is not often associated with Foucault, let alone with any theory on madness. Yet Foucault uses it several times — if only between the lines. It is convenient to refer from the beginning to what I believe is the most clarifying statement that concerns the practice of *grafting* and its relationship with madness:

For this new reason which reigns in the asylum, madness does not represent the absolute form of contradiction, but instead a minority status, an aspect of itself that does not have the right to autonomy, and can live only *grafted* onto the world of reason.²

In the present article, I wish to discuss the implications of using the practice of *grafting* in order to define madness, as it is the case in Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Folie*.

1. Introduction

I shall start by answering a trivial question: what is commonly known as a graft? In botany, different plants can be grafted to form new species. We take two different species, and we form a new one. But when we extend the practice of grafting from botany to a conceptual - and possibly metaphorical – level, an uncanny implication emerges. The relationship between the two plants is not equal: if plant A is grafted onto plant B, it is the latter that gives everything that the new AB species will need to survive (nutrition, water, ...). If in botany graft is mainly an exchange and a creation, on a conceptual level it is also — and possibly above all — a relationship of power.

When Foucault refers to madness as a graft onto the world of reason it is because this graft unveils a discrimination rather than defining a fusion, or, even better, it defines a fusion insofar as there is an original discrimination. In order to participate to the totality of the social body, madness has to be first discriminated, separated, marked as different, then grafted onto reason, from which, as a grafted plant, it gets all of its sustenance. Besides, the social body, for what concerns madness, seems to build its continuity through a graft.

Therefore, madness lives in a subaltern state to reason, and the identity of madness is precisely what reason needs to exclude in order to define itself. Starting from this point of view, this article wishes to address how the identity of madness is affected by this subaltern position, by this graft, as it can be inferred from Foucault's position. In fact, it is clear enough that,

1 This article was first presented as a paper on the occasion of the inaugural Skepsi conference *Graft and Transplant: Identities in Question* (24th May 2008, University of Kent, Canterbury). Thanks to Wissia Fiorucci (University of Kent), for her patient revision and support. Also many thanks to Dr. Lorenzo Chiesa (University of Kent), whose constant help and supervision motivated and guided my research.

2 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.489

through his *Histoire de la Folie*, Foucault wished to let emerge the “unsaid” conditions for such a graft. Thereby, on a first level of analysis I wish to focus on the social aspect of this graft and on the Foucauldian social identity of madness.

This social identity is rooted on a conceptual graft that is enacted on each single individual. In this article, I will articulate this subjective aspect of the graft through the shift between positivist psychiatry (where madness is understood as an organic dysfunction of man’s nature) and phenomenological psychiatry (where madness is considered as an alteration of man’s being-in-the-world). Briefly, I will consider mental illness as a device for the social graft: all the stigma associated with the social category of madmen, through XIXth century positivist psychiatry, is grafted onto the very nature of the human being. In order to undo the effects of such a deep graft, phenomenological psychiatry enacts an opposed movement. That is to say, a sort of eidetic reduction (*épochè*) capable of restoring a more authentic relationship with sick subjects.

Last but not least, I will show how, in the work of Franco Basaglia (1924–1980), the Italian anti-institutional psychiatrist, the two perspectives converge. On one side, Basaglia needs a therapeutic approach capable of recognising and fighting what was grafted onto the suffering human being: the image of madness as a disease, mingled with social prejudices such as danger and scandal; that is to say a perspective capable of treating madness as a human condition, and madmen as human beings and subjects. On the other hand, according to Basaglia, the asylum has to be destroyed: the space in which madmen were confined, once fallen, allows them to return into society. The destruction of the physical space of the asylum is the destruction of the conceptual space from which madness was grafted onto the world of reason: the conditions of this graft no longer subsist, and madness is unconditionally allowed inside society.

In substance, it seems that, in these three different perspectives, defining an identity of madness relies on a graft. What these perspectives tell us is that, if there is something like an identity of madness, the strategy to conceptualise it has to undertake a movement of return: a return from a conceptual state and a physical space from which madness is grafted onto the world of reason. An unconditional return to a state to which madness may have - paradoxically - never belonged and to a space which it may have never inhabited. In this article, I wish to show how the concept of graft can account for both the traditional relationship between reason and unreason and also for the paradoxical movement of return that could subvert such a relationship.

2. Michel Foucault on the asylum and positivist psychiatry

Madness becoming a graft onto the world of reason is, according to Foucault, the birthmark of a form of repression and exclusion that was once associated with lepers. After the era of the great confinement, when madmen were associated indiscriminately to criminals, poor and indigents, after Pinel's and Tuke's moral treatment, madness is now to be secluded in a more sophisticated and specific place. In the asylum, under the cover of a new born medical science, and in the name of public decorum, economic conditions produce an overlap in legal and medical powers aimed at containing social scandal and at curing what was soon to be known as mental illness.

Thus, madness shifts from extreme passion, animality and unreason to a disease, whose primary characteristic is not — as one would expect from an illness — a specific medical symptom, but its undefined liaisons with social dangerousness. Therefore, this shift forces madmen to become a minority inside society itself, defined only by the means of the ruling culture and in exact opposition with its moral dictates: the humanitarian act of dividing the sick from the criminals and freeing them from the chains is certainly 'not unreason liberated, but madness long since mastered'³.

The age of the asylum created a specific space (both physical and conceptual) for madness. This space was soon delivered to the influence of what is commonly referred to as positivist psychiatry: a current stemming from Wilhelm Griesinger's (1817–1868) definition of mental illness as a brain disease⁴. Understood and treated only in medical terms, madness is grafted onto the very nature of human being, giving start to a peculiar form of naturalistic reductionism. Man, reduced to his nature, carries into his very being his dysfunction and is consequently treated as corrupted and dangerous in his own nature. On an individual level, this is the perfect device to enact the social graft: sick human beings, in becoming inmates of the asylum, are eradicated from society, secluded in a special space, delivered to the only ones able to deal with this new form of social dangerousness: physicians. Therefore, reason declines itself setting against an excluded background, negating its opposite and, eventually, grafting onto itself the uncomfortable burden of a huge minority, carefully guarded from sane eyes, and closely studied by the psychiatrists, its custodians. Henceforth, the identity of madness will depend entirely on the world of reason to be defined, to be spotted, to be confined and to be healed, and this is why Foucault can refer to it as a graft.

3 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 489.

4 Wilhelm Griesinger, *Mental Pathology and Therapeutics* (New York: Hafner Pub. Co, 1965).

3. Phenomenological psychiatry

This twofold exclusion — from society and from reason — is what phenomenological psychiatry and the Italian work of psychiatric deinstitutionalisation aim at overcoming. In the wake of Husserl's motto ('To the things themselves!'), Karl Jaspers — who is regarded as the founder of phenomenological psychiatry — wrote his masterpiece (*Allgemeine psychopathologie* — 1913), in order to appreciate and describe the subjective phenomena as experienced by the patients themselves. Jaspers' aim was to overcome the positivist objectification of mental illness, which moved from the explanation of natural psychic phenomena, categorising them into pre-determined systems of symptoms and syndromes. In other words, positivist psychiatry's categories refer to *a priori* models of health and illness, whereas Jaspers sought an *a posteriori* approach.

To "go back to the things themselves", for Jaspers, means to return to the immediate contact with the patient's subjectivity, rather than cataloguing his symptoms into given organic categories. Clearly, such a contact has to proceed from a dialogue. What Freud debatably inaugurated, that is to say, an approach based on dialogue as opposed to external observation, is emphasised by the most renown of Jaspers' followers and one of the key influences of Basaglia's thought: Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966). Psychiatrist and director of the Kreuzlingen sanatorium, Binswanger was the first to articulate Jaspers' psychopathology with Heidegger's existential analysis, thus creating a psychiatric research method known as *Daseinsanalyse* (or anthropological phenomenology). According to Binswanger, there are two ways of practising psychiatry:

one leads away from ourselves toward theoretical determinations, i.e., to the perception, observation, and destruction of man in his actuality, with the aim in mind of scientifically constructing an adequate picture of him (an apparatus, "reflex mechanism", functional whole, etc.). The other leads "into oneself", but not in the mode of analytic-psychology (which would again make us into objects), nor characterologically (which would objectify us with regard to our individual psychopathological "class").⁵

Avoiding any form of categorisation, his *Daseinsanalyse* was based on a completely equal relationship between the psychiatrist and the patient (he called it the "loving encounter"). This relationship relies entirely upon dialogue. As opposed to psychoanalysis - which in the patient's words would have sought the emergence of a traumatic event - the *Daseinsanalyse* tried to rebuild the patient's totality as a human being.

⁵ Ludwig Binswanger, 'Freud's Conception of Man in the Light of Anthropology', in *Being-in-the-World. Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger*, ed. by Jacob Needleman (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc, 1962), p.171.

In this context mental, illness is understood not as an organic dysfunction but as a modification of the patient's being-in-the-world, or, in other terms, as a different modality of existence. Sane and insane inhabit the same world and share the same nature. Therefore, they are not any more divided by the walls of a positive science: madness and reason are then understood as different modes of being in such a common world.

Clearly, the therapeutic outcomes of this position are at least very debatable, and the practical resonance of Binswanger's theory belongs to a restricted niche. Moreover, he has never been able to overcome the general idea that

the essence of madness is the delirium, that is to say it is not an error or a series of errors but it is a completely mistaken relationship with the real.⁶

On the contrary, he has possibly strengthened this concept.

4. The *epochè* in psychiatry

Yet, something very interesting emerges from both Jaspers and Binswanger, especially in their use of words: in fact, when they refer to this immediate contact with the patient, with the sick, they always seem to imply a return and not an act *per se*. It is a return because psychiatric perception is already corrupted by *a priori* categories, that in turn need to be bracketed to achieve such an immediate relationship with the patient. Although this operation resembles husserlian *epochè*, it is not until recently that this concept assumed a consistent role in psychiatry.

Raymond McCall - psychologist and professor of philosophy of psychiatry - following Husserl, refers to different levels of eidetic reduction, or *epochè*, in psychiatry: one is the bracketing of all the non-psychological elements of his investigation (such as behaviour, physical reality, ...). Another one is transcendental reduction, aimed at referring the subject only to his self-consciousness. The latter is the proper phenomenological reduction, which prompts "to overcome the illusions of perfect objectivity". Only through these reductions the psychiatrist is able to access the patient's subjectivity.⁷

Conversely, Franco Basaglia gave *epochè* a central role in his entire work. Franco Basaglia is known for reforming Italian psychiatric health care, and especially for regulating compulsory hospitalisation and decreeing the closing of asylums, henceforth entrusting only small territorial centres with psychiatric health care.

6 Michel Foucault, 'Le Supplice de la vérité', in *Dits et écrits*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 331. Translated from French by the author of this article.

7 Raymond J McCall, *Phenomenological Psychology: An Introduction* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 56–59.

In Basaglia's own words, all of his work was marked by the

attempt to bracket mental illness as a definition and codification of unintelligible behaviours, in order to remove the super-structures given by institutional life and in order to identify in the process of destruction of the sick which part was played by the disease and which by the institution.⁸

Far from considering mental illness entirely as a social product - as was the general anti-psychiatric idea - Basaglia urges himself and his colleagues to abandon *a priori* categories in order to approach the sick in his subjectivity.

It is in these acceptations that *époque* is to be considered as the conceptual device of a de-grafting. Mental illness, once grafted onto man's nature, is returned through an *époque* to the totality of human being, insofar as objectivity is sacrificed in order to appreciate the subject and his existence.

5. Franco Basaglia and the paradoxical return of madness

As we have seen, the social and the subjective perspectives converge in Franco Basaglia's thought and work: the destruction of the asylum aims at deleting not only that physical space in which madmen were secluded, but also that metaphorical space from which madness could live only grafted onto the world of reason. Through the aforementioned *époque*, on the one hand, madness is returned to the domain from which it was excluded (reason). On the other hand, free from objective categories, the psychiatrist is able to reach the totality of the patient's subjectivity without reducing him to his nature. In Basaglia's opinion, then, madmen and society, on one side, and, on the other, psychiatrist and patient should recover an equal relationship, which is not based any more on a conceptual graft.

Yet, it is a strange restitution, a strange recovery: there is not such moment in history during which madmen belonged to society, during which madness belonged to reason or during which there was an equal relationship between sane and insane. The paradox is clear to Basaglia, who made of the very concept of contradiction one of his key theoretical assumptions:

To underline contradictions means to create the opening of a fracture. [...] In the time that elapses from the explosion of the contradiction and its covering (for nothing else can happen), an occasion is determined: that of a consciousness rising on the part of public opinion.⁹

Therefore, keeping these contradictions open is the key element of Basaglia's strategy. In order to deploy such a strategy, we need to unveil the devices that kept the contradictions of madness silent, one of which is the *doppio della follia* (the double of madness). This double -

⁸ *Scritti (1953-1968). Dalla Psichiatria Fenomenologica All'esperienza Di Gorizia*, ed. by Franca Ongaro Basaglia, (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), p. xxii. Translated from Italian by the author of this article.

⁹ Franco Basaglia, 'Conversazione: A Proposito Della Nuova Legge 180', in *Scritti* (1980), pp. 481-82. Translated from Italian by the author of this article.

that is what society and medicine made of madness - is grafted onto madness itself, understood as a human condition, as subjective suffering, as a modality of existence. That is to say, on one side this double is a condition confused with public scandal, delinquency, indigence and on the other it is what remains of a message muted by the monologue of reason.

6. De-grafting madness

During one of his Brazilian Conferences, Basaglia said:

I don't know what madness is. It can be everything or nothing. It is a human condition. Inside us, madness exists and it is present in the same way as reason is. The problem is that society, in order to define itself as "civil", should accept both reason and madness. Conversely, this society acknowledges madness as a part of reason, and reduces it to that reason as long as there is a science entrusted with its elimination. The asylum needs to exist as long as it makes the irrational become rational. When someone is mad and enters the asylum, he ceases to be mad to become ill. He becomes rational insofar as he is ill. The problem is to untie this knot, to overcome institutionalised madness and to recognise madness where it begins: in life.¹⁰

To untie this knot - or should we call it "graft"? - means to destroy the asylum, the space where, marginalised and secluded, madness could live only as grafted onto the world of reason. To abate the walls of this marginal space means to return madness to that society to which it always belonged but from which it was originally excluded.

At the same time, mental illness as a category imposed by the dominating culture has to be de-grafted from madness as a human condition, in order to return madmen to their responsibility as human beings, because

in our opinion, madness is life, tragedy, tension. It is something serious. Conversely, mental illness is the void, the ridiculous, the mystification of something that there is not, an *a posteriori* construction built in order to keep the irrational concealed. The only one allowed to speak is Reason, the reason of the fittest, the reason of the State and never that of the outcast, of the emarginated, of those who don't have.¹¹

In conclusion, these three different perspectives tell us that if there is something like an identity of madness it has then to be sought through a paradoxical return. It is a return to a time and space where it always belonged but where it has never been. For madness did never participate to the world of reason nor to the dominant social sphere. It did so only as the primary excluded, against which reason and society could set to define themselves in a negative fashion. In other words, madness never participated to the world of reason, if not as a graft. Therefore, this paradoxical return also means to acknowledge that madness inhabited everyday life as a graft, confined and controlled in a space (both physical and conceptual) from which it has to be

10 Franco Basaglia, *Conferenze Brasiliane* (Milan: Cortina Raffaello, 2000), p.28. Translated from Italian by the author of this article.

11 Franco Basaglia, 'Presentazione Inedita', in *Non Ho L'arma Che Uccide Il Leone*, ed. by Giuseppe Dell'Acqua (Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa, 2007), p. 5. Translated from Italian by the author of this article.

de-grafted, if we want to let the long forsaken *stultifera navis* sail once again, this time to return madness, with all its open contradictions, inside society and inside reason.

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Reaching out to the Other? *Bora* and the Wind of Forgiveness

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Abstract

At the end of WWII, the former Italian areas of Istria and Dalmatia were handed over to the then Yugoslavia. After the 1947 Paris peace treaty, approximately 350.000 ethnic Italians left these regions. The massive wave of migration which followed in the years after the treaty has been later referred to as the Istro-Dalmatian exodus. The exodus led to the creation of an aftermath society: the one of the Istrian Italians. But such a community suffered as a result of a further internal division, having been split into the *andati* (gone), the 350,000 who left after the Paris treaty; and the *rimasti* (stayed), the few who decided to stay in their hometowns.

Through the analysis of *Bora*, an epistolary novel co-authored by two women belonging to the two communities, this paper examines various aspects of the question of identity presented by this case of border shift. Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani challenge the barriers separating the two parties which for decades rejected each other, moved by a mutual sense of betrayal. These letters are the effort at reaching out to the Other, dismantling the high wall erected between the ones who left Istria and Dalmatia and the ones who stayed behind. However, in this arduous process of re-union of the subject, the two writers acknowledge the existence of another, common to both parties, Other: the Other who took their home-country away.

Mori and Milani face here a long neglected, and until then, still open question. Despite the different processes of becoming undergone by the two writers, Mori and Milani prove that co-existence is achievable through forgiveness. In doing so, they also implicitly open the path towards a wider form of reconciliation: the one still needed among all the inhabitants of a very troubled little piece of land.

Keywords:



In 1998 Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani published a book entitled *Bora*, named after the northern wind blowing through the city of Trieste and along the eastern coasts of the Adriatic Sea. *Bora* is a collection of letters exchanged between the two writers and can be considered as

an open dialogue between two women who are both members of the ethnic Italian community of Istria, formerly an Italian region, but now part of Slovenia and Croatia.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, the 1947 Paris peace treaty established that Istria and Dalmatia, two areas on the Adriatic coast to the east of Trieste, were to be handed over to former Yugoslavia. Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, both children at the time of the war, were born in the now Croatian town of Pula/Pola. Mori's family is part of the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Italians who decided to leave the area after the Paris treaty and move within Italy's newly re-defined borders. This community is often referred to as the community of the *andati* [gone] and stands in opposition to the one of the *rimasti* [stayed], a label used to indicate those ethnic Italians who decided to remain in their hometowns, such as Milani's family. *Bora* alternates passages from letters written by Mori and addressed to Milani with passages taken from Milani's replies and vice versa. This alternation is organized in such an intertwined fashion as to shape a narrative a *due voci* [double voiced], as stated on the book cover. Readers can easily attribute the passages to their legitimate authors through a stylistic device that sees Milani's texts printed in italics.

This collection of letters clearly outlines the gravity of the identity dilemma triggered by the handover of Istria to former Yugoslavia and also abruptly unveils the fracture between the communities of the *andati* and *rimasti*. Such sharp scission acted on and exacerbated an already severe situation: the attempt to transplant two communities onto a new social (sociolinguistic in the case of the *rimasti*) tissue. In this article, I will argue that the identity dilemma disclosed in this correspondence operates on two different levels. On the one hand, the writers initially acknowledge the internal division of the Istrian Italian community. The *andati* and *rimasti* are indeed comparable to two sides of a coin: both part of a whole, they are connected to each other but stand in a relationship of mutual exclusion; perpetually back to back, they look in opposite directions. From this perspective, I argue that *Bora* can be read as an encounter between two individuals looking to overcome the distance separating them from the (reciprocal) Other. Within this context, I then recognize forgiveness to be the crucial element able to spark the re-union of two opposites. However, on the other hand, this successful process of reaching out to the Other will almost surrender to the recognition of a further opposition. In *Bora*'s last chapters this co-existence (which has just been reinvented through the narrative process) seems to be sealed in the face of a third extraneous element, which is then identified as a new Other: the non-Italians who subtracted Istria from the ethnic Italian community.

Let me start this analysis with a quote from Bora's opening chapter, in which Milani addresses Mori:

Lei mi ha raccontato di essere andata via da Pola ragazzina. Come gli altri trantaduemila. [...] Figli dell'esodo: la breccia, la lunga e frastagliata rottura, quella che ha generato moncherini, quella che ha aperto nella coscienza una ferita inguaribile. Noi che siamo rimasti abbiamo dovuto adattarci psicologicamente alla situazione reale, e in ognuno di noi si notano tracce di questo adattamento. La metamorfosi degli esseri non si procura: accade. Si sono venuti formando gli 'italiani speciali', esseri umani nel cui io più profondo sono avvenute strane fusioni fra ciò che sono stati e ciò che sono diventati nel luogo in cui sono nati, qualcosa di simile a una redistribuzione di molecole sconfinare in geometrie impreviste. Nessuna forza al mondo potrebbe più riportarci allo stato pristino.¹

[You have told me you left Pola when you were a child. Like the other thirty-two thousand [...]. Children of the exodus: that breach, that long and jagged rupture which created stumps and opened an incurable wound into the conscience. We, the ones who stayed, had to adapt psychologically to reality and, in every one of us, you can note traces of this process of adaptation. The metamorphosis of the human beings is not caused: it happens. The 'special Italians' are the results: human beings whose innermost self has suffered strange fusions between what they used to be, and what they have become in the place where they were born. Like a redistribution of molecules strayed into unexpected geometries. No existing force could take us back to our original state (my translation).]

A few pages earlier, the first chapter started with Mori's description of an old black and white photograph of a little girl. The picture portrays Mori when she was a child and, observing it many years later, she comments:

Si può vivere senza la bambina o il bambino che si è stati, poco o tanto tempo fa, senza i suoi luoghi e magari anche i luoghi comuni della sua infanzia, senza i suoi ricordi di ambiente, i volti e parole, senza le certezze conquistate contemporaneamente all'uso della parola, prima, e poi della parola scritta [...]?²

[Is it possible to live without the child we were, a short or a long time ago; without her own places and even without the commonplaces of her childhood; without the memory of her environment, of the faces and the words; without those truths conquered together with the capability of speaking, first, and writing later [...]?]

Right from the initial pages of this correspondence, it is clear that the *lunga e frastagliata rottura* [the long and jagged rupture] mentioned by Milani will be a recurrent theme of this co-authored narrative. The letters can thus be read as an attempt at incorporating the scar tissue resulting from the long process of wound healing into one's own map of identity.

However, it should also be pointed out that this collection unveils the existence of a twofold dilemma. On the one hand, there is the dramatic condition of the living stumps: 'special Italians' generated by the rupture between the *andati* and *rimasti*. As Mori plainly affirms:

Il nostro nemico siete diventati voi: perché restando avete sminuito il nostro andarcene [...]. Il vostro nemico siamo diventati noi. Perché, andandocene, vi abbiamo lasciato più soli, più deboli, impotenti a difendere la vostra identità di italiani in un territorio che non era più italiano.³

¹ Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, *Bora* (Milan: Frassinelli, 1998), p. 11 (my translation).

² Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 5 (my translation).

³ Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 218 (my translation).

[You became our enemy because, by staying, you belittled our decision to leave [...]. We became your enemy because, by leaving, we left you even more alone, weaker and powerless in front of the necessity to defend your Italian identity in a territory which was no longer Italian.]

On the other hand, a further identity issue is addressed explicitly in the last pages of *Bora*, although its effects are at work throughout the collection. It is the sense of otherness separating *noi* [us], Italians, from *loro* [them], Slavs:

E incomincia a questo punto un viaggio ignoto al resto d'Italia e degli italiani in genere: il viaggio tra il 'noi' e i 'loro'. [...] Per gli italiani d'Istria, e qui sono assolutamente uguali 'i partiti' e 'i rimasti', 'lori' sono gli altri: croati o sloveni, a questo punto non fa differenza.⁴

[At this stage another journey starts, one unknown to the rest of Italy and to all Italians: it is the journey along the border separating 'us' from 'them'. [...] For Istrian Italians (and here there is no difference between the andati and the rimasti), 'they' are the others: and it does no longer matter if they are Croats or Slovenians.]

In order to understand this further level of Otherness, it is crucial to bear in mind that the starting point of this dialogue is the mutual recognition of a shared grief. Indeed, such a grief originated from the same historical events, but developed following separate routes. This initial acknowledgement is accompanied by the will to understand the voice on the opposite side of the border. In other words, through this dialogue, the two authors are able to recognize each other as equals; even if in this case it means being equal in their misfortune. In this sense, it is a dialogue marked by the patience to listen to the 'other version', and the courage to open a conversation on uneasy memories. Such recollections, despite their intrinsic problematic nature and the interlocutor they are directed to (a threatening counterpart), do not give rise to any form of aggressive resistance. The hostility dividing the two communities is explicitly recognized but here it is accompanied by a sense of resignation more than resentment:

Figlie della stessa, spaventosa, guerra e dello stesso orrendo e ingiusto dopoguerra. Perché i tuoi ricordi e i miei — che peraltro abbiamo in comune con due grandi eserciti di umanità diversamente e ugualmente vinta e disperata, l'umanità alla quale tu appartieni che viene definita dei 'rimasti', e la mia degli 'andati' [...] —, se non sono propriamente identici, sono però molto simili: ricordi che corrono paralleli e incomprensibili gli uni agli altri, anche perché da sempre, per quel che ci riguarda, che riguarda la nostra patria comune e in modi diversi perduta da entrambe, c'è sempre stato qualcuno che ha soffiato sul fuoco.⁵

[Children of the same horrible war and of the same horrid and unfair post-war period. My memories and your memories — which we share with armies of differently and yet equally defeated and desperate human beings: on the one hand, your army, the rimasti; on the other, mine, the andati [...] — if not identical, they are at least very similar. These memories run parallel and yet are incomprehensible to each other also because, since ever, for what we and our fatherland are concerned (a shared fatherland later lost, in different ways, for both of us) there has always been someone who blew the fire.]

⁴ Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 200 (my translation).

⁵ Milani and Mori, *Bora*, pp. 77–78 (my translation).

Now that I have shed light on the nature of the twofold dilemma previously mentioned, I will analyse the first level of Otherness which characterizes this correspondence. In the last quote, Mori points out how Istria ended up to be for both parties the '*patria comune e in modi diversi perduta da entrambe*'. She thus suggests the necessity to put aside the hostility that for years has divided the *andati* and the *rimasti*: even if it was via different paths, both communities have experienced the same dramatic loss. The purpose of these letters is, therefore, '*capire, raccogliere i fili sparsi o interrotti, mettere a confronto le idee ricevute, andare a vedere*. [Understanding, gathering the scattered or interrupted threads, confronting the ideas previously accepted, verifying]'.⁶ In other words, this collaboration is an attempt to overcome the brutality of history and politics, which not only transformed a community into a mass of refugees or internally exiled people, but also managed to separate the two resulting parties by igniting a strong sentiment of reciprocal rejection.

Such a long history of rejection between the two communities, combined with the intention behind this double voiced narration, suggests the crucial importance of the issue of forgiveness. Jacques Derrida regards the essence of writing as a request for forgiveness coming from the person who writes and directed to the readers:

Si domanda al lettore, apostrofato come giudice [...], di perdonare – ed è forse la verità di cui parla il testo come verità di ogni scena di scrittura e di lettura: domandare perdono al lettore confessandosi. Si scrive sempre per domandare perdono [...].⁷

[The reader, addressed as the judge [...] is asked for forgiveness — and, perhaps, this is the truth spoken by the text as well as the truth of every setting of writing and reading: confessing oneself, asking the reader for forgiveness. One always writes in order to ask for forgiveness [...].]

I argue that these letters enact the ultimate reflection on the act of forgiveness between the *andati* and the *rimasti*: *Bora* exposes such an issue in its blatant bareness by calling for the attention of a reader who is the immediate recipient of the apology it acts out.

These letters are written for a specific addressee (Mori writes for Milani, and Milani writes for Mori) and have then been published for a general readership. Forgiveness can be explored on the level of the correspondence between the two writers. Subsequently, we can extend the validity of this act, widening its scope. The moment of publishing aims at two objectives: (1) it enacts an offering for the readers who partook in the events (other members of the two communities); and (2) it highlights the value of an open dialogue that does not aim at establishing new truths or solutions, but rather seeks a mutual understanding.

⁶ Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 8 (my translation)

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Perdonare*, trans. and ed. by Laura Odello (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2004), p. 102 (my translation).

This observation calls for a second one, likewise deriving from Derrida's reflections. One of the first questions about forgiveness relates to the possibility or impossibility, or better the appropriateness or inappropriateness, of formulating a request for forgiveness addressed to a community. Is it admissible to ask for forgiveness to a plurality of individuals? Derrida writes:

Si può, si ha diritto, è conforme al senso del 'perdono' domandare perdono a più di uno, a un gruppo, una collettività, una comunità? È possibile domandare o concedere il perdono a un altro che non sia l'altro singolare, per un torto o un crimine singolare?⁸

[Is it possible, and does one have the right to, is it consistent with the sense of 'forgiveness' to ask for forgiveness to more than one person simultaneously, to a group, to a collectivity, to a community? Is it possible to ask for or to grant forgiveness for a wrong or a singular crime to an other who is not an individual?]

Bora presents an attempt to define the writers' positions on two different levels: we recognize moments in which Mori and Milani speak as individuals, especially when they write about their own experiences and childhood memories. However, in other passages, their attempts at explaining or understanding move along the tracks represented by the dichotomy *andati* and *rimasti*. On these occasions, events are then presented or questioned from acknowledged perspectives: their words speak for their respective communities of belonging.

Yet this dialogue never really loses its peculiar character of a face to face confession: two worlds stand in front of each other without any mediation. And the theme of forgiveness finds its context within the microcosm constructed through the letters. The authors' words might depict the point of view of their own community, but the issue of forgiveness at stake here is actuated on an individual level. Undoubtedly, we come across some passages written in the plural, especially the ones authored by Milani. Yet, through such use of this personal pronoun, neither of the writers intends to claim a collective validity of her thoughts. Even if at times these letters do utter a collective discomfort (expressed through the use of the plural grammatical subject), the confrontation at stake is undeniably one between two individuals:

Io ... E Nelida: tu, e io ...

Ed è successo che Io è andato a cercare quel 'Tu': con un viaggio dentro e fuori da sé, nei ricordi da confrontare con altri ricordi, e nei chilometri sulla costa o all'interno dell'Istria, su strade in mezzo a boschi di ginepri. [...] E il 'tu' ha risposto con una voce sottile, prima timida, quasi fioca, poi dura e imperiosa: 'Non ho niente da dire....'

Io ha insistito: è andato a cercarla per parlarle di persona.⁹

⁸ Derrida, *Perdonare*, p. 31 (my translation).

⁹ Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 10 (my translation).

[I... and Nelida: you, and I...

And what happened is that I went looking for that 'You': through a journey within and outside the self; inside memories to be confronted with other memories; travelling for kilometers on the coast or through the Istrian inland, along roads cutting through juniper woods. [...]

And that 'you' replied with a thin voice, firstly shy, almost faint, and later harsh and imperative: 'I have nothing to say...'

I insisted and went looking for her to talk to her, face to face.]

It follows that, in response to Derrida's questions, we can here exclude the presence of a collective request for forgiveness. Mori's choice to refer to this dialogue as one arising from a quest of an *io* [I] who decided to look for a *tu* [you], unquestionably reveals the confidential and personal nature of this exchange.

The use of these two personal pronouns to address the encounter acted out through these letters brings to mind Martin Buber's observations on the binomial I-you (and indeed Derrida makes a brief reference to Buber's work). In his work *I and Thou*, Buber explains existence precisely as a moment of encounter between 'I' and 'you'.¹⁰ According to him, the capacity to address a human being as 'you' determines a passage from experience to relationship. The other person is no longer shaped through a grid of references: saying 'you' means overcoming the limits of a world made of contents, to use Buber's own words. It means being able to overpower the distance that ordinarily separates individuals. As a matter of fact, Buber differentiates two possible attitudes towards the world: one that is regulated by the basic words 'I-you', and one dominated by the basic words 'I-it'. The 'I-you' mode of existence implies a capacity to overcome experience (which instead dominates the 'I-it' attitude) in order to enter into relation with another human being. Such a relationship demands the absolute commitment, on the part of the self, to abandon the 'I-it' mode in order to dwell in the 'I-you' relationship. The 'I' enters a moment of presence through the relationship with 'you'. Experience is abandoned (because it is part of the 'I-it' relationship) and so is the past, in that it characterizes everything that is experienced. In the 'I-it' mode, the 'I' is surrounded by objects: contents, as specified before. Such contents are transient, they pass. By virtue of this feature ascribed to objects (the possibility to experience them), objects are then located into the past. In short, entering into relation with 'you' means overcoming the distance that separates the subjects in the 'I-it' mode of existence:

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.¹¹

¹⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner, 1970).

¹¹ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.

This brings me back to *Bora* as a moment of encounter between ‘I’ and ‘you’. Buber asserts the necessity to enter into a relation with ‘you’ in order to become ‘I’. In the opening of the book, Mori addresses herself as *la bambina-Io* [I-the child], referring to the black and white photograph that she describes in *Bora*’s opening page. But before uttering this identification, she writes: ‘*Una bambina, poi una ragazza grassa e infelice. Dopo ancora...: finché tutto, faticosamente, si riunisce un giorno in unico “io”*’ [A child first, then a fat and unhappy teenager. Until one day, with great effort, everything is recomposed into a single “I.”].¹² The unity of the subject is achieved only after, first, the confrontation (the encounter), and then, the acceptance (through forgiveness) of the Other. The process that led Mori to reunite all the ‘splints’ of the self into a complete *io* has to pass through the moment of encounter with ‘you’, namely Milani.

The same can be said for Milani, although there is no passage in *Bora* in which she explicitly comments on this necessity. The reason for this absence is most likely to be found in the genesis of the book. This encounter was pursued by Mori; she was the one who initiated this exchange with her attempt to establish the first contact. Milani initially blocked Mori’s initiative but eventually the two writers found a fruitful channel of communication through the letters. Again Buber writes: ‘[T]he You encounters me by grace — it cannot be found by seeking [...]. The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus, the relationship is election and elective, passive and active at once.’¹³ From this perspective, we can deduce that the correspondence between the two authors flourished in the moment where such an encounter became ‘election and elective’ at the same time. The encounter happened when it was no longer perceived (by Milani) as an act initiated by the ‘I’ (Mori) and imposed on the ‘you’. The relationship therefore became reciprocal; and, in fact, reciprocity is another feature that Buber attributes to the moment of relation.

Having established that the encounter witnessed in *Bora* revolves around two individuals, it is important to understand why forgiveness is relevant in this case. Derrida attributes a confessional nature to the moment of writing. According to him, when writing, the writer is moved by a request for forgiveness addressed to the readership. Therefore, the next question is: what is the ‘perjury’, as Derrida defines it, calling for forgiveness? The answer to this question also implies some considerations on the readership: who is taking up the role of the reader in *Bora*?

¹² Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 6 (my translation).

¹³ Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.

Let me start with the last question. This is a collection of letters; therefore, the primary addressee of this narrative is the recipient of the letter. However, through the publication of the correspondence, the letters cease to exert the function of private communication. The ethical moment behind the birth of *Bora* is to be recognized in the urge to tell a story. Once started, this compulsion generates into the will to get the story across. Therefore, alongside the private and therapeutic function of this correspondence, the option of a future publication of the letters immediately offered to the two writers a second motivation: the opportunity of attracting public attention to a topic until then avoided.¹⁴

Precisely because the act of publication consigns a personal exchange to a public space, I suggest the necessity to proceed here with two different readings. The first stems from a point of view that looks at *Bora* as a personal exchange between the two writers: the addresser of the letter is writing to a specific addressee. The second reading focuses on the writers' decision to publish their correspondence. When considering Derrida's reflections, it is necessary to distinguish between these two levels. In other words, we need to bear in mind the existence of two separate narrative levels also when we move to individuate the nature of the perjury mentioned in *Perdonare*. Since this narrative addresses two readerships, the stimulus behind it (the 'perjury' indicated by Derrida) needs to be identified within the respective levels.

I will begin by considering the nature of this perjury within the first narrative level (the letters as a personal exchange between the writers). In this context, Mori and Milani inhabit the roles of both writer and reader. Given this duality, it follows that the perjury to be forgiven resides on both edges of the dichotomy *andati* and *rimasti*. *Bora* presents all the features of testimonial writing and the authors can be considered, in this regard, as representatives of an aftermath society. We therefore face a situation in which two antithetic concepts mix together: guilt, which implies the existence of a perpetrator, and victim. In our case these concepts are mixed together.

The sense of guilt here also resides within the victim, precisely because of the separation of the aftermath society into the two communities of the *andati* and the *rimasti*. The original victims of the traumatic event, the ethnic Italians, are split into two groups that grew into reciprocal enemies, rejecting each other. In other words, *Bora* represents an effort to surpass that sense of isolation, generated by post-war events, which was later aggravated by the scission of the aftermath society into two subcultures hostile to each other. In view of this attempt

¹⁴ Only in 2005, seven years after the publication of *Bora*, did the Italian government officially dedicate a day to the commemoration of the dramatic post-war events experienced by the Istro-Dalmatian Italians (*Giorno del Ricordo*, celebrated on the 10th of February).

undertaken by Mori and Milani, the ‘perjury’ Derrida refers to here intersects with the reasons which led these two groups to consider themselves victims; victims not only of historical events, but also of the ‘perjury’ committed by the other community. Mori writes:

La cosa più semplice, la più naturale, di fronte a una tragedia — e la nostra è stata, resta una tragedia, alla quale però non è stato ancora riconosciuto fino in fondo il diritto a essere tale nelle pagine di storia — è prendersela con qualcuno: datemi un nemico, e vi solleverò il mondo [...]. Perché ve ne siete andati?
E voi, perché siete rimasti?
Ha senso continuare a porsi questo tipo di domande?¹⁵

*[The simplest, the most natural reaction in front of a tragedy — and our was a tragedy, it still is a tragedy which has not been granted the right to call itself so in the pages of history — is to blame someone: give me an enemy, I will raise the world [...].
Why did you leave?
And you, why did you stay?
Does it make any sense to still ask these questions?].*

These lines clearly show the recognition of a ‘reciprocal perjury’ that has further worsened an already dire situation. In this passage, Mori underlines the pointlessness of these reproachful questions. Forgiveness is, in this sense, to be interpreted as the will to accept that, for each of these questions, there is an equivalent one coming from the counterpart. Forgiveness means the resolution to stop chasing an enemy.

It follows that the dialogue enacted through these letters is not aiming at establishing new truths. It represents rather the effort to acknowledge the fact that both parties involved in the post-war events have suffered a dramatic loss. Writing about the *andati* and the *rimasti*, Milani comments:

Realizziamo all’interno di un dialetto comune, mondi concreti non condivisibili, la reciproca estraneità di due orizzonti concettuali privi di punti di contatto, perché prodotti da due contesti molto diversi. Solo il mondo affettivo è condivisibile, quello della nostra infanzia e adolescenza. E i mondi immaginari. Il mondo istriano come te lo immagini tu da lontano, il mondo italiano come lo immagino io.¹⁶

[Through a common dialect, we shape concrete worlds which we cannot share with each other. It is the reciprocal extraneousness of two conceptual horizons with no contact points, the result of two very different contexts. The affective world is the only one we can share, because it is the one of our childhood and adolescence. And the imaginary worlds too. The Istrian world as you imagine it from far away, and the Italian world as I can imagine it.]

Here Milani acknowledges that years of separation and a life spent on opposite sides of the border have irrefutably caused a fracture between the two communities. However, this fracture appears different from the *lunga e frastagliata rottura* she mentioned in her first letter to Mori. This correspondence seems to have restored the integrity of the affective sphere. The hostility towards Mori’s first attempts at establishing a contact has disappeared and has been substituted

¹⁵ Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 218 (my translation).

¹⁶ Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 224 (my translation).

by a form of hospitality, in that both writers are able to host each other in their own process of remembering.

In short, the urge behind the writing of these letters is the desire to break the circle of mutual silent accusations that keeps feeding sentiments of hostility and resentment between the two communities. This is achieved through the appreciation of a possible different perspective coming from the other side of the borderline. The choices made after the Paris treaty divided the aftermath society and were the origin for distinct points of view. This correspondence underlines the importance of remembering the status of injured party common to both communities.

This last reflection brings me back to the second reading of *Bora* mentioned earlier. We have seen how the use of the two personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ underlines the encounter of two individuals who embark on a journey aiming at mutual understanding. However, there is a further situation that needs to be explored, one in which we witness an opposition between *noi* (we) and *loro* (they): the plural used by the authors in the last chapters of the book unveils the second aspect of the identity dilemma at the origin of these letters.

Paradoxically, the additional borderline that separated Slovenia from Croatia after the civil war in former Yugoslavia re-unites the two communities. However, this is a negative reunion in that it creates another opposition which sees the Italian community standing against what is perceived as another form of Other. Mori underlines that both the *andati* and the *rimasti* share the same feeling of hostility towards the new power-holders. The resentment towards the Yugoslavian governing class is also explicitly articulated in various pages authored by Milani.¹⁷ Both authors agree that the two communities adopt the same attitude. The main factor behind this resentment is the ‘non-belonging’ to the ethnic Italian community. *Loro* are part of the generic category of the Other, therefore the distinctions between the single elements included in such a group are not relevant. It is evident that these pages marked by *noi* and *loro* bring to light a sentiment of hostility between the ‘autochthonous Istrian inhabitants’, as the ethnic Italians often address themselves, and the Yugoslavian citizens (today, and already when *Bora* was published, not Yugoslavians anymore but Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, and so forth). This is a further dimension that adds to the dynamics that led to the social isolation of the ethnic Italians.

¹⁷ ‘*Venne il malvagio e ci sottrasse la bolla di sapone* [The evil arrived and stole the bubbles we were happily blowing.]’. Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 214 (my translation).

Loro are the common enemy, the perpetrators who have taken control of the Istrian peninsula. Yugoslavia emulated the strategy previously employed during the fascist domination: cultural repression of the foreign culture. The lack of public recognition of the injustice suffered by the Italian community is the factor that hindered the process of healing of this wound. In this sense, *Bora* sums up the consequences of a trauma that, far from being contained within the realm of the past, has deepened its roots until reaching the present, feeding on feelings of hostility, resentment, mistrust and derogation of the Other. We have seen how Mori emphasizes the status of ‘tragedy’ that should be attributed to the experiences suffered by the ethnic Italian community of Istria and Dalmatia. She also highlights that history had failed (at least until then) to grant these events the right to be officially recognized as a tragedy. In other words, this tragedy has been denied and this denial has transformed the original event into a surviving trauma; a trauma that persists in the present.

From this perspective, the publication of *Bora* also aims at claiming public attention and recognition. With regard to this point, Ross Chambers underlines that testimonial writing has to be considered a symbolic practice.¹⁸ It performs a captatio on the readers, in that it wins their attention in order to focus on what he defines as the ‘obscene’. The obscene is something that society is not willing to look at. What I am suggesting here is that Mori and Milani’s aggressive tones towards Yugoslavians can be read as an act of what Chambers defines ‘impertinence’. I defined *Bora* as an act of writing committed to understanding and forgiveness, an attempt to put aside any form of hindrance in order to listen to another voice without any anticipation. In this context, the resentment emerging from these pages written along the opposition between *noi* and *loro* surprises the reader, because here there is no space for that attempt at listening to the counterpart. The mutual availability to hearing out the voice on the other side of the border is the core element of this communication between the *andati* and the *rimasti* up until *Bora*’s last chapters. Chambers writes about ‘im-pertinence’:

Since the obscene is wholly or partially excluded from the set of genres that constitutes a given culture, and so liminalized, witnessing writing is obliged to exercise its indexing function through the performance of a generic act of catachresis: in the same discursive act whereby the attention of its readers is turned in an unwonted direction, it turns a conventional genre to new purposes [...]. But such an outcome [...] is further dependent on there being what I have called a meta-etiquette capable of canceling normal rules of appropriateness and politeness, so that, instead of being received as an error to be shrugged off and ignored [...], the testimonial intervention is read instead as an intended act of im-pertinence, and hence achieves a status of meaningful utterance.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions. Aids Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, p. 36.

Thus, the sharp and at time derogative tones characterizing these pages are to be interpreted as an attempt at raising the readers' awareness of the distress suffered by the Italian community, which has passed unnoticed for too long. What I am suggesting is that, at an instinctive level, we witness the release of sentiments of reprisal dictated by the necessity to finally bring to the fore the policy of cultural repression undergone by ethnic Italians under Yugoslavian rule. Like the fascists before the Second World War, the Yugoslavian government acted out (within its own geographical borders) a cultural and linguistic repression of the Italian community.

In this context, the publication of *Bora* with a major Italian publisher represented the possibility to scream about the injustice undergone by the whole Italian community. Perhaps the writers did not disdain the possibility of eliciting some feelings of guilt in the general readership: the public has ignored this situation for too long (because they are unaware of it, if young readers; or because of an unwillingness to look in that direction, if old enough to remember the post-war events). The decision to publish these letters reveals therefore the intent to bring to light the obscenity, to provoke the readership and force it to face what was known but not acknowledged.

In summary, this analysis of *Bora* has recognized two different narrative levels which are moved by separate intentions. On the one hand, I underlined the autobiographical dialogic character of these letters. In this respect, the relevance of this dialogue lies in the effort to create a link between two individuals belonging to opposing communities, divided for decades by a sentiment of rejection. The letters provide a comfortable and safe space for confession; they grant the writers the possibility to open up the Pandora's box of their memory. Within this first narrative level, I have suggested the relevance of Martin Buber's studies on the 'I-You' relationship, and subsequently pointed out how this correspondence can be interpreted as the encounter between an 'I' and a 'you', finally able to enter in relation.

In this context, forgiveness is the turning point able to tear down the barrier separating the two communities. It is the element allowing for an openness which might wipe away previous feeling of intrusion. Forgiveness is the secret motor behind this correspondence: the writers confront the 'original perjury' (the acceptance of a further borderline between the *andati* and the *rimasti*) and work together to surpass it.

I also drew attention to the motivations behind the publication of these epistles. Here the issue at stake is no longer forgiveness but rather the wish to break down the barrier of denial erected around the post-war events on the North-Eastern border of Italy. From this perspective, *Bora* aims at achieving a public recognition of the drama suffered by the communities of the

andati and the *rimasti*, hoping therefore to terminate the surviving character of the trauma experienced.

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**Catalan Identity in the Post-Franco Era: Writing *Desencant* in Torrent's
*Un Negre Amb Un Saxo***

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Abstract

Imagine Spain as a tree, with different branches politically and culturally standing for its different cultures. What would it happen if these branches, except one, were transplanted to a shadowy area? Probably they would dry up and the Spanish tree would grow with just one branch, as *monoarboreal* formation. This metaphorical image may represent the Spanish State that Franco so enthusiastically envisaged. With his death and the establishment of democracy, the Spanish tree experienced a grafting process. The forgotten and dehydrated branches were grafted into the old tree. As is known, the success of grafting depends on the host for nutrition, developing in our case into a grafting ‘complex’: how would these fit in the new democratic Spain (1978–1986)?

The Catalan writer Ferran Torrent focuses on this context to point out that the host, the Spanish host, resembles too much the Francoist one. In consequence, Torrent makes an explicit criticism of his contemporary democratic society regarding the failure of the culture that would represent his graft, Catalan culture.

Always bearing in mind the cultural realm, others have used this metaphorical tree to represent contemporary Spanish society — a nice metaphor but the tree is finding it quite difficult to thrive, since as Torrent highlights, the trunk of that tree is rotten after years of Franco’s fascist dictatorship.

Keywords:



I say what I say without cowardice.
But I also know the price of that.
Sooner or later, I will get the sentence.
Since it does not interest who does not lick with patience.
They will isolate me, saying that I isolated myself.
Ovidi Montllor¹

When one is considering cultural identity, the Spanish State is a vast and fertile field that offers complex areas of research. Different nations and nationalities have shaped its cultural past coexisting with Spain in a push-pull relationship. That is why the image of Spain as a multicultural tree comes to mind; a metaphor that several organizations like DENAES (Foundation for the Defence of the Spanish Nation) have used to imagine and to protect all the branches that represent it.

However, in order to understand it we need to go back in time in order to understand this Spanish tree. In a European context the nineteenth century witnessed the creation of the Nations-State, causing the majority of the modern states that we know today, like Germany or France. In the Spanish State the romantic and liberal ideas exalted the Catalan, Basque and Galician peripheral nations. These nations experienced an unimaginable cultural and political impulse at the beginning of the 20th century: the Catalan Renaissance, the Galician Rexurdimento, and the postulates of Sabino Arana in the Basque Country.

However, the imposition of the fascist Francoist regime shattered any possibilities of a multinational State, establishing the model *una, grande y libre* (one, big and free). That is to say, Franco's aim was emphatically to cut and dry up the different branches to leave one Castilian branch: a monoarboreal formation.

With the death of Franco Spanish society saw the death of years of imposition of a totalitarian government, which suppressed individual and national freedom. The years named 'transition to the democracy' were keys to end with the pro-Franco ballast, but did all the affairs pertaining to this historical period really finish? Following with this arboreal metaphor, how would these forgotten and dehydrated branches fit in the new democratic Spain (1978-1986)?

My article will explore the role of Catalan culture and identity after Franco's dictatorship, particularly during the first ten years of democracy (1977-1987). Specifically, I will consider the latency of the revisionist critique of contemporary Catalan culture and history: how Catalan contemporary literature must be approached within a wider revisionist critical turn on the

¹ 'Però també sé el preu de tot això/ Mes tard o d'hora, m'arribarà sentència./ Car no interessa qui no llepa amb paciència./ M'aïllaran, dient que m'he aïllat./ Diran o diuen, que ja sóc acabat./ No pense pas donar-me per guanyat.' Ovidi Montllor, 'Autocrítica i crítica', in Ovidi Montllor, *Bon Vent i Barca Nova* (Ariol, 1978).

Spanish Transition period (1976-1978), the consolidation of the democracy (1978-1980) and the *desencant* (disenchantment) experienced with regard to the new political situation.

The Catalan writer Ferran Torrent (València, 1951) focuses on this context to stress the disenchantment that Catalan culture felt with the new democratic situation. In this way, Torrent makes an explicit criticism of his contemporary democratic society and the failure of grafting Catalan culture to it. The reason, for Torrent, would be the host — Spain and the Spanish government — since the trunk of this old tree would be rotten after years of Franco's dictatorship. That is why Torrent would also criticize organizations like the aforementioned DENAES, which support a Spanish nation that is intrinsically centralist and Castilian nationalist. To explore these ideas, I will focus on the Catalan writer born in València, Ferran Torrent (1951), and the analysis of his novel *Un negre amb un saxo* (A Negro with a Sax) (1987).

The story is set in the eighties (1987), following ten years of complex democracy in Spain. The action takes place the city of València, which Torrent explores in order to offer a sharp criticism of its society.²

Thus, Torrent narrates the story of Hèctor Barrera, ex-boxer and journalist for the newspaper 'El Camí', a tough but principled character who submerges himself in the marginal environments of the apparently democratic València ruled by the socialist PSPV (Partit Socialista del País Valencià – Socialist Party of the Valencian Country) government. The pretence of the journalist is designed to discover a net of prostitution of minors and of drug trafficking that splashes high positions in Valencian civil society. For this reason, the night, the sex, the drugs and the prostitution will be daily spaces that Barrera will have to confront with procurers like Sandokan or corrupt judges like Ferragut. Curiously enough, Barrera will be assisted by marginalized and outlawed characters like the thieves el Xino and Penjoll, and by the illegal detective Butxana.³ Finally, after facing the Valencian night, Barrera feels disappointed and frustrated, having witnessed the passivity of his periodical and of the supposedly official and civil society in general.

² In this context, NS can be considered a thriller in a Valencian city, which Torrent correlates with the Barcelonan genre tradition; and, especially, with black genre films and literature, in which we can point out E. Mendoza, A. Martín, R. Tasís, M. de Pedrolo or F. Bellmunt among others.

³ Toni Butxana is a usual detective in the literary universe of Ferran Torrent that it is rescued for NS. We find him in *No emprenyeu el comissari* (1984), *Penja els guants*, *Butxana* (1985) *Semental, estimat Butxana* (1997) and *Només Socis* (2008). Moreover, the journalist Hèctor Barrera is also the protagonist of *L'any de l'embotit* (1992); and, like in NS, these two characters share narratologic space in *Cavall i rei* (1989) and *Cambres d'acer inoxidable* (2000).

1. A folkloric graft

As we have just mentioned, one of Franco's obsessions was the construction of a state based on the idea of the artificial unit of Spain under the control of Castile, creating a territorial concept of Spain which suppressed the different historical nationalities. In this way, Franco's national conception sought a Machiavelli-like ideological control; not an original idea by the dictator, since its roots can be traced back to the fifteenth century with the Catholic Kings. The idea permeated in the twentieth century, with philosophers like Ortega y Gasset who, affected by the fin-de-siècle crisis, mourned that 'Spain is today not so much a nation as a series of water-tight compartments'.⁴

As a consequence, the possibilities of development for the different cultures within the Spanish State were simply unattainable, since this imagined Castile community prevented them from it. Instead, for forty years Galicia, the Basque Country and the Catalan Countries were subjugated by totalitarianism whose 'purpose was to build a version of Spain that made their particular view of Spanishness (*Hispanidad*) "the only possible."' ⁵

However, with the death of Franco in 1975 a new context arose putting an end to almost forty years of a fascist dictatorship. His death meant a political change that dramatically influenced Spanish culture. The transition to the democracy (1976-1978)⁶ was perceived as a great opportunity for cultural minorities in the State to experience a rebirth after the repression carried out by Franco. Certainly, in this new milieu the historical nationalities' claims were adamant about receiving from the central government a huge level of protection and concessions after Francoism.

The 1978 Constitution assured a democratic transition in Spain; at the same time, they looked for a territorial organization that would finish with the conflict of Spanish identity. This Constitution was welcomed by most of the political powers in Spain, although with some scepticism from these nationalities. This young democracy was consolidated in 1982 when the PSOE (Spanish Workers Socialist Party) won the elections. It is in this context that Torrent focuses NS, as well as a large amount of his works.

Why is this decade important for Catalan culture and especially for Torrent? In 1982, the Socialist Government impelled the Spanish Constitution, recognizing officially Catalan, Basque and Galician languages, and most of these autonomous regions had, or were in the

⁴ Cited by E. Hansen, the critic explains that 'he was despairing of the difficulties of national political integration that were created by the disparate nature of the regions making up the Spanish body politic'. In Edward C. Hansen's *Rural Catalonia Under the Franco regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 24.

⁵ In Triana-Toribio, Núria *Spanish National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 38.

⁶ These dates are the ones that the majority of political scientists have agreed upon, like Redero

process of passing, their Statutes of Autonomy.⁷ A revival of these languages was certainly expected, which would increase the use and consumption of Catalan language and literature. Precisely, as Torrent has commented several times,⁸ one of the reasons for him to start to write in Catalan was the socio-cultural environment that augured a huge increase in the demand of Catalan culture.

Certainly, a revival was needed as we can perceive from NS due to the lack of cultural referents in the noir València that Torrents presents us. Torrent reinforces the idea of a poor society in a cultural way with the allusion to one of the most important symbols for the Catalan Countries, the King Jaume I. The King, a symbol for the spreading of Catalan language, as well as Christianity, is forgotten and devalued as such, certainly through an erosion process initiated by Franco. Ironically, one of the King's statue in the city is no longer surrounded by the royal guard, but in 'company of a bunch of whores in typical tasks of the branch' (NS, p. 49). In addition, if the statue had to coexist during the night with whores, by day he was not saved either, since the growing consumer society was spreading an amnesiac atmosphere: 'The Corte Inglés [a big Spanish department store] tortured him with the techno-pop novelties' (NS, p. 49). Nevertheless, Torrent still sees space for nationalistic claims that they had so much power at the end of the '70s and beginning of the '80s, but that seemed to spoil with time. Torrent retrieves this nationalist feeling that seems to have a ghostlike appearance, a fossil in the capitalist society arisen after Franco's death; hence, Jaume I was claimed as a nationalistic symbol since 'some lost *maulet* [Catalan nationalist] placed a national protest painting on his pedestal' (NS, p. 49).

Therefore, these images may refer to this idea of showing spaces that were suppressed during Franco's dictatorship; so, the fact of portraying them can be understood as a catalyst to retrieve the historical connections and cultural normality.

It is a criticism of the regionalist folklore conception of València as subordinated to Spain, a conception inherited and imposed by Franco that predisposed a servile city spa of Spain. Franco's cultural process of uprooting Catalan culture evolved into a Valencian society understood as a folkloric graft. As Barrera ironically states in the novel 'we, Valencians, have always been fucked. Here a lot of artist, a lot of fireworks and a lot of flower. And it goes like that for us: "Spa of Spain"' (NS, p. 47).

⁷ In this way, Catalonia and the Basque Country were the precursors, achieving the first Statute after Franco in 1979; then Galicia in 1981, the Valencian Country in 1982 and Balearic Islands in 1983.

⁸ We refer to the interview by Vicent Martí to Torrent in 1986. In Vicent Martí 'Açò és Hollywood, Ferran Torrent', *El Temps*, 24th February 1986, repr. in Ferran Torrent, *Tocant València* (Barcelona: Columna, 1995–2001), pp. 149–59.

València is then depicted as a poor cultural city, whose symbolism is essential in order to recuperate its cultural leadership. Hence, as Rosentone mentions, the pretension of Torrent might be understood in this post-Franco context as a desperate need for ‘historical connections [...] societies recovering from totalitarian regimes or the horrors of war; ethnic, political, social, or sexual minorities involved in the search to recapture or create viable heritages.’⁹

2. Francoist ghosts: possibilities of re-grafting?

But why is the cultural situation as poor as described by Torrent if the story is contextualized in the mid-80s when the democracy was fully consolidated? The reason for this is clear for Torrent – and I would add for most of the civil society: politicians.

In this sense, the reality of the Statutes of Autonomy, although without denying their importance, was quite different and the claims made by the historical nationalities remained just as a statement of intentions. In this way, as Santacreu and Garcia put it when referring to Torrent’s context, Valencians achieved all the formal and social liberties, but ‘it was also necessary an economic and cultural effort from all Valencians due to the deep changes to be generated, [by] the young Spanish democracy that seemed not to settle down.’¹⁰

Hence, Torrent’s NS would represent this cultural effort.¹¹ However, the text oozes a sharp and ironic criticism towards the local and central governments due to their lack of implication in the Valencian and Catalan cultural recovery, a criticism known as a period of *desencant*.

In this way, Torrent’s criticism is related with this idea of *desencant* with the democracy that was experienced by large sectors of the left, mainly communists, and nationalists. In this way, this *desencant* aesthetics would imbricate with the era of postmodernity. The sense of despair, of disillusion would share some of the aesthetics of this philosophical trend. As Dennis Smith considers when analysing *Zygmunt Bauman*, ‘the sense of ambivalence is linked with a deep scepticism about modernity: an unwillingness to believe its promises and a reluctance to be taken in by its ‘big stories’ or meta-narratives (about socialism, democracy and so on)’.¹² In this sense, following Smart, ‘the concept of postmodernity has been invoked to describe

⁹ R. A. Rosentone (ed.), *Revisioning History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 5.

¹⁰ The authors carry on to stress the difficulties of establishing a ‘normal’ society: ‘socially the efforts that all the social agents had to made in order to overcome the tunnel in which Valencians were, demanded, on one hand, a notable endeavour in the government investments concerning infrastructure and, on the other, a pact between the government and the unions, that would guarantee the support to a huge number of workers facing unemployment’. In J.M. Santacreu Soler and M.Garcia Andreu, *La transició democràtica al País Valencià* (Simat de la Vallidigna: Edicions la Xara, 2002), p. 83.

¹¹ Other artists that promoted Catalan culture include J.F. Mira, Andreu Fabregat, Quim Monzó or Francesc Bellmunt.

¹² In Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 154.

developments in a number of areas [like] the erosion of cultural hierarchies.¹³ In the Spanish context we find the erosion of Franco's cultural hierarchy, but as Torrent makes clear, its perpetuation undermines the possibilities of expression for Catalan culture.

From the beginning, Torrent begins an ironic game when referring to the young democrat and their presumed defence of freedom since the sceptic journalist Barrera considers that she was from those that they call progressives [read it as socialists], since during the trials she quoted constantly the constitution, the freedom of speech and a pair of jokes more, a lot in the line of the young democrats (NS, p. 17).

Torrent certainly is being ironical about the progressives identified with the PSPV, since through the novel we can trace a series of references that undermine their good democratic predisposition. An example in this context is the criticism of the socialist president of the Generalitat Valènciana [the government of València], Joan Lerma. He is disapproved of for not desalinating the waters from Castelló and for damaging the farmers; another politician criticized is the socialist president of the Spanish central Government, and its president Felipe González, who led the law LOAPA of 1982 (Organic Law on the Harmonization of the Autonomy Process). This law had an intrusive character in the Statutes of Autonomy that so much craved the historic nationalities of the State, because it limited the transfer of competences from the State to the autonomies, particularly Galicia, the Basque Country and Catalonia.¹⁴

Politicians again are described as cynical and corrupted due to their implication in the net of prostitution dismantled by Barrera, among which there are progressive left-wing candidates too, like 'A deputy of the party Left Majority' (NS, p.196), as well as active members of the transition.

In consequence, the cultural relationships between Catalonia and Madrid were not satisfactory during these first years of democracy, due to the promotion through political spheres of a Spanish culture based on the Castilian language.¹⁵ The possibilities of re-grafting Catalan culture in this new society seemed to be far away from what was expected. The convention of Castilian and Catalan intellectuals celebrated in Sitges in 1981 demonstrates this

¹³ Barry Smart, *Postmodernity. Key Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 13.

¹⁴ For more information about the Law, consult 'La España democrática', in Álvaro Soto, *Transición y cambio en España, 1975-1996* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2005), p. 241.

¹⁵ Thus, it is necessary to remember the frustration reflected politically, since in the first elections of 1977 there was not a Minister for Culture, and it is not until 1991 that we had a Minister from Catalonia. Moreover, in the two first general elections (1977 and 1980) the nationalist Catalan party *Convergència i Unió* achieved a low representation, with only 8 seats. To check the results of the general election, consult www.congreso.es/elecciones/index.htm (3/01/07).

desencant. In the inaugural speech of the former Catalan President Jordi Pujol the tension can already be appreciated between both cultures:

This meeting was necessary. There must be something that, either does not work properly, or that does not work enough in the dialogue between languages and culture in Spain [...] There are some elements of the political Spanish development in these last times that do not satisfy us [...] the essential about this Spain that we are building, is the respect of the foundations of our identity as a nation: a fact of language, of culture, of historical consciousness, and collective will.¹⁶

In the same convention, the poet Goytisolo reviews the inequality of cultures when affirming that Castilian and Catalan languages have to have the same rights and ‘the same possibilities of teaching and diffusion. But until today, this relationship has been unlevelled catastrophically against Catalan language’ (Generalitat 1981: 50).

Especially, one of the aspects that Torrent wants to stress about this new born democracy is the survival of Franco’s spirits, which does not seem to disappear. Thus, Torrent seems to reinforce the theory of the ‘false’ Spanish transition, specified in a purification of the Francoist sectors that were reinstated again in spheres of power. This was possible, according to Colmeiro, ‘due to the pact of collective amnesia with which was signed the Constitution, and the consequent disenchantment that would turn a utopian ideal more and more distant and unattainable, and because of its conversion into nostalgia and fetish-memory’.¹⁷

In the novel, Torrent leaves footprints of this survival of Franco’s regime in democracy; like the reference to the police and one of the waiters of the police station, who ‘boasts a Spanish flag in the flap of the jacket, white and with stains of red wine. In the other flap he wore an insignia of the Real Madrid. The Spanish flag did not show any ideological additive, either the hen [the Francoist eagle] or the constitutional sticker. He must be a neutral cop’ (NS, p. 80).

There is a mention of the police repression embodied by the GAL (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups), the terrorist organization created by the Spanish State to fight against terrorist groups, mainly ETA and GRAPO (Grupos de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre — First of October Antifascist Resistance Group). It is important to mention the way Torrent censures this terrorism of the Spanish government and binds it with the State in a moment in which the GAL was still operating (in assets until 1989). In the novel, the vice-chairwoman of Barrera’s newspaper mentions that ‘the GAL is a question of state, you know it, and I add: with the connivance of the government’ (NS, p. 102). The GAL is then a threatening and repressive entity that it seems to transport us back to Franco’s regime, despite having a left-wing

¹⁶ In *Generalitat de Catalunya Relaciones de las culturas castellana y catalana. Encuentro de intelectuales*. Sitges 20-22 diciembre 1981 (Catalunya: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1983), pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ José F. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural. De la postguerra a la postmodernidad* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), p. 147.

government. Thus, Torrent associates Franco's dictatorship with democracy and censorship, since the GAL makes impossible the informative task of the newspaper where Barrera works since its director restricts his discoveries because 'the series about the GAL ended on your director receiving a threat of death' (NS, p. 101). The terrorist organization has been a thorny subject in the Spanish context, which has been tackled just recently in cultural and political terms with the release of two films: *Lobo* (Wolf, Miguel Courtois, 2004) and *GAL* (Miguel Courtois, 2006). This is why it is important to stress clearly these references about the GAL since it was criticized in the novel during its activity.¹⁸

Finally, Barrera seems to be alone in this task since the editorial staff prevents him from publishing the articles that may jeopardize the reputation of high members of the society.

- You are a good journalist, Barrera, but your way of working does not fit in with the interests of the company.
- I thought that the company was interested in selling diaries.
- Not, if it is not playing by the rules of the game. And the implications of your report borders on the limits (NS, p. 205).

They censor Barrera for intending to publish articles in the newspaper that would uncover a net of corruption in which politicians and civil representatives, considered as holy cows during the first years of democracy, are implied. Therefore, we find an informative self-censorship that, as Torrent insinuates, represents a Francoist inheritance, since 'I was annoyed by their incapacity of rebellion. Thirty years working in a newspaper forced, I suppose, to revise some attitudes' (NS, p. 206).

What is inferred from the dialogues between Barrera and the director of the newspaper is basically the controversy to combine the new society that was being gestated after the death of Franco and those elements of the dictatorship that were towed during the transition. It is a conflict that dragged on for years in Spanish society due to the fear of the return of a military dictatorship, bearing in mind the recent coup d'état by the Guardia Civil Tejero in 1981, just six years after Torrent wrote the novel.

3. Conclusion

Barrera's personal situation and the censorship taste can be extrapolated to the conformism that a large part of the society had assumed once they acquired the democracy. That is why, Barrera

¹⁸ The book *Los años oscuros de la transición española* by Eduardo Pons is quite useful in understanding the pact of silence and the incorporation of members of the dictatorship into the new democratic system. Pons mentions the case of Martínez Torres who was decorated by the Home Secretary, Barrionuevo. He quotes the criticism towards this policeman by a group of citizens indignant about it, since he was an "infiltrated democrat" in the sinister Social-Politic Brigade and took part in the usual duties (to arrest democrats, imprison them, hit them), although his subsequent "loyalty" to the institutions'. In Eduardo Pons Prades, *Los años oscuros de la transición española* (Barcelona: Belacqva Ediciones, 2005), p. 303.

considers that there is not enough with the ‘understanding left’ of the Socialist party. In this way, as Stuart Hall mentions (1992: 7), modern societies are social formations, constructed according to distinctive social, political, economic, and cultural processes. Certainly true, but I would add that in this case Catalan society and the political-cultural determining are narrowly linked in a subordinated relationship. In this way, Torrent wants to make clear that in this society ruled by capitalism, industrialization, secularization, urbanization and nationalization, politics and Catalan and Spanish politicians subjugate culture due to the new tenets of this capitalist society that forged the socialist government in Spain during the ’80s. In this sense, to the idea of Hall by which ‘the meaning of a cultural symbol is given in part by the social field into which is incorporated’,¹⁹ I would stress that in the post-Franco’s Catalonia that social network is highly politicized.

Certainly, this idea can be linked with the feeling of frustration of sectors of the Catalan and Valencian society, especially nationalistic, whose cultural aspirations were truncated in the democratic process, with examples like the LOAPA, with the deployment of the statutes of autonomy, or the government of the PSOE. A dispute was originated, then, among political and cultural sectors, which certainly conditioned this feeling of frustration of Barrera in the end of NS: ‘What is the aim of a newspaper? The shit continues growing and newspapers serve to use the paper, for cleaning your arse.’²⁰

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¹⁹ Cited by L. Grossberg, ‘History, Politics and Postmodernism. Stuart Hall and cultural studies’, *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996–2001), p. 157; first published in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* (1986), 10(2), 61–77.

²⁰ We have to refer as well to the political frustration, since after the first general elections in 1977, there was not a Culture Secretary in the Spanish Government. Besides, in the first two democratic elections in 1977 and 1980, *Covergència i Unió* (Catalan nationalist conservative party) achieved a dicreet representation in the Spanish Parliament. Indeed, it was the only Catalan party to be represented. For more information, check the statistics for the general elections (www.congreso.es/elecciones/index.htm 3/01/07).

Volume 1 (1)

GRAFT & TRANSPLANT

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