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*Narratives  
of FEAR and  
Safety*

Edited by

Kaisa Kaukiainen, Kaisa Kurikka, Hanna Mäkelä,  
Elise Nykänen, Sanna Nyqvist, Juha Raipola,  
Anne Riippa and Hanna Samola

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# Introduction

## Affective spaces in European literature and other narrative media

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On 18 August 2017, less than a week before the 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress of the European Network for Comparative Literary Studies (ENCLS) “Fear and Safety” took place in Helsinki, Finland, a Moroccan asylum seeker, Abderrahman Bouanane, stabbed ten people in the south-western city of Turku, less than 200 kilometres away. The Turku knife attack constituted the first crime legally classified as a terrorist act in Finland and led to the death of two female victims. In June 2018, Bouanane was found guilty of two murders and eight attempted murders with terrorist intent. Bouanane considered himself a soldier of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), whereas the police judged him to be “a lone wolf” with no direct contact with the organization. The attack was followed by a public discussion about the need

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to enhance national security through more rigorous intelligence and surveillance practices, possibly even by enforcing the deportation of rejected asylum seekers such as Bouanane. On the other hand, in her tweet on 19 August 2017, the Interior Minister of Finland, Paula Risikko, emphasized the need for collective tolerance and trust: “Terrorists want to pit people against each other. We will not let this happen. Finnish society will not be defeated by fear or hatred”.

Like the debate following the Turku attack – or the more recent discussion on the global COVID-19 pandemic – demonstrate, fear and a sense of safety are not only physiological and biological states or processes. When emotional experiences are expressed in the media, political arena, or everyday communication, they become communicative practices that trigger further social interaction and action. As such, emotions can become driving forces that trigger far-reaching historical developments in communities. As Ute Frevert (2014, 9) points out, emotions start “a chain of communication” that enables people not only to experience emotions, but also to consciously “work on them, mold them, and change them in a dynamic process”. The very nature of emotions, serving as social fuel and a powerful instrument of rhetoric (and manipulation), has made them a susceptible object for many intellectuals in favour of reason and rationalization. Emotions have historically been considered a threat *per se*, paving the way for uncontrollable and primitive mass behaviour and hysteria if not properly regulated. (Ibid., 6–7.)

The essays in this volume examine how various issues of fear and safety are represented, worked on, and re-assessed in European literature and other narrative media, as well as considering what kinds of affective spaces are created in the process. The essays are based on the presentations given in the bilingual ENCLS/REELC (Réseau européen d'études littéraires

comparées in French) congress “Fear and Safety” that took place on 23–26 August 2017 in Helsinki. The variety of essays reflects the wide range of topics discussed in the congress amongst the globally transforming events of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Due to the efforts of ENLSC/REELC to support linguistic diversity and international cooperation between researchers, the essays are written in English and in French. Even though the use of languages in this conference proceedings is limited to these two languages for practical reasons, the book aims to a wider cultural inclusion by introducing works from a variety of European cultures. Each article addresses local and transnational contexts, genres, and aesthetic practices that affect the ways in which the works of art are produced, circulated, and translated in and between “systems” of cultures and cultural peripheries inside and outside Europe (cf. Moretti 2000, 58). The representations of fear and safety are approached on two different levels. Firstly, we examine how fear and safety are represented and expressed by using genre-specific means of world-making in literature and other narrative media. Secondly, we explore the ways in which the artistic representations of fear and safety shape and reshape the cultural conceptions of emotion that have dominated in European societies. How do works of art influence the social and collective emotions that frame our everyday experience?

The main themes of this volume – fear and safety – are approached from various perspectives that touch upon the challenges that the European community has encountered. In addition to terrorist attacks, Europe continues to face the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, refugee crisis, economic depression, climate change, and military interventions. Many of these challenges pose existential threats that influence our lives on a global level. As Linke and Smith (2009) argue, the neoliberal, capitalist world-order has also introduced new forms

of nationalism and patriotism that feed on cultures of fear. According to them, such words as ‘safety’, ‘security’, ‘protection’, and ‘defense’ are used in public discourse to justify the control and surveillance of citizens, including different minority groups, and to legitimize war and other acts of violence in far-away countries. In Europe, the refugee crisis has produced border militarism and a border war as a consequence of national boundary fortification, which seeks to protect space from the invasions of enemy outsiders. The cultures of fear, delineating new territories in geopolitics, threaten the ideals of civil society, human rights, and diplomacy that were held dear by 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal-democratic states. (Linke & Smith 2009, 3–4.)

The normalization of militarism relates to the erosion of trust in capitalist security states. Modern, liberal-democratic societies were built on what Frevert (2014) calls “moral economies of trust”. The instrumental value of trust adheres to the role of trust as a glue that makes social integration and cooperation possible, whether we are talking about business, politics, or any other domain of social life. Without trust, societies fall apart. In the service industries of Western economies, the language of trust, however, has come to serve the goals of global capital, which has emptied out its original meanings of equality, mutual dependency, fairness, and generosity. Trust is generally accompanied by moral obligations, including the acknowledgement of the potential vulnerabilities of both parties in the exchange. The diminished sense of financial and social stability in neoliberal capitalist states is connected to the instrumentalization of trust in the strategic semantic politics used by banks and corporations. (Frevert 2014, 20, 33–41.) Recent events, such as Brexit, show us that today’s global environment is characterized by people’s distrust towards political and economic elites. New kinds of threats arise from this landscape of insecurity and unpredictability, including the

fear of technology. The Brexit campaign and the 2016 Trump presidential campaign exemplify how the algorithms created by transnational technology giants to engage consumer-citizens can have unexpected effects on global politics. In collecting and reselling their customers' data, Facebook weakened their customers' privacy but potentially also the stability of the democratic system.

The cultural politics of fear are connected to experiences of threat, both imagined and real. A sense of security arises from the absence of threat, which allows communities to create emotionally balanced societies. The emotional economies of European societies are challenged especially by humanitarian crises that pose serious ethical questions about the value of human life and suffering. The refugee crisis, in particular, has called for the critical evaluation of the European community's moral integrity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, those under the greatest risk are people staying in refugee camps, the homeless, and minority groups living in the most densely packed and poor neighbourhoods in big cities. European countries face problems that are caused not only by crises themselves but also by post-conflict situations, which prevent people from accessing a more peaceful future. Even when people are able to escape their unsafe home countries, conflicts leave people injured and traumatized. The regimes of fear and othering also follow people from their home countries to refugee camps, and further, to the public places of their new home countries, where distrust and aggression towards those who are not "us" prevail. (Linke & Smith 2009, 12, 14.) Europe as a whole is divided into several territories that are not all included in the "ideal Europe":

European Union territories, like other federated entities (the United States), are defined by "open" borders in the interior – the so-called Schengen space

– where European citizens can traverse national borders without passport and identity checks. This inner “open” space, which guarantees the freedom of mobility for nationals, is protected by the simultaneous fortification of exterior borders. This is one snapshot of fortress Europe: an imagined political community with an interior borderland that is envisioned as open, liberal, democratic, and an exterior security border that is monitored, policed, and protected against refugees, immigrants, non-Europeans, and political enemies. (Linke & Smith 2009, 7–8.)

The artistic representations of fear and safety that are analysed in the essays of this volume show that social inequalities emerge also in the lives of European citizens. People might fear for their financial future or their threatened cultural identity, but also for their gender or sexual identities or their personal safety and integrity. Not everyone within the fortress Europe has equal opportunities to experience peace, freedom, security, and justice. *Narratives of Fear and Safety* tackles all of these aspects of fear and safety as experienced by collectives and individuals in life and artistic representations.

## Theoretical approaches to fear and safety

Following Nelson Goodman’s philosophical ideas in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), this collection of essays perceives literary texts and other narrative media as forms of cultural imaginings of worlds. In other words, the essays in this volume approach the cultural representations of fear and safety from the perspective of creative world-making. In literary and artistic works, alternative worlds of fiction are built from our everyday experience or from

already existing imaginary worlds that we know from other works of art. They can also be inspired by scientific or pseudo-scientific discourses. In what follows, we outline a conceptual framework of fear and safety as sensibilities that generate affective spaces, that is, affectively demarcated imaginary worlds.

In neuroscience and psychology, fear is often listed among the basic or core emotions that are more or less universal and can be distinguished on the basis of facial expressions and other physiological, bodily responses. In everyday communication, the notions of ‘emotion’, ‘affect’, and ‘feeling’ are often used interchangeably, yet they are defined and employed differently in different disciplines. One way of making a distinction between these notions is to perceive of emotions as intentional mental states (being directed at or triggered by a particular object) or culturally coded interpretations of affects. Unlike emotions, affects or feelings can remain pre-intentional or non-conscious even when they influence one’s experiences and actions (e.g. Sedwick & Frank 1995; Ratcliffe 2015). The sense of unsafety, for instance, can stem from the emotion of fear (which is triggered by a particular object or situation), but it can also become an overall state of being in the world: a mood (*Stimmung*) of fearfulness (*Furchtsankeit*) or anxiety (*Angst*) in the terms of Heidegger (1978, 179–182, 228–235).

Fear – and its relative emotion, anxiety – are among those emotions that are maintained by “a host of cognitive processes, including rumination, abstraction, risk assessment, mental time travel, and mental projection/simulation” (LaBar 2014, 751). From a biological perspective, the emotion of fear is useful in the sense that it helps the human mind to concentrate when it is engaging with unexpected and unpredictable circumstances, such as a global pandemic. On the other hand, a sense of risk and safety are social constructs that are interwoven into the

overall atmosphere or mood of a given time or historical period. (Furedi 2002, viii, 8.) How we verbalize, express, and cognitively process our emotions influences the ways in which we feel them. Fear, for instance, has a long evolutionary history that we share with other species. However, the expression of fear – and the defensive mechanisms of aggression or avoidance that follow it – can be culturally learned (LaBar 2014, 762). Literature and other forms of artistic expression are communication practices that participate in this social regulation and negation of emotional norms and codes by creating affectively stimulating alternative worlds (Reddy 2001, also Polvinen 2017). They also affect and subvert the cultural narratives that circulate in the public domain.

As the preceding discussion on the present-day politics of fear and safety shows, cultural narratives often work through the intensification of threats and risks – or they can do cultural work as counter stories that question culturally prominent master narratives (e.g. Nelson 1995). In the global economy of fear, narratives of othering flourish. Nationalist narratives, for instance, separate “us” from “them” and create what Ahmed (2014, 44–45) calls “affective economies” of hatred. The culture of fear often leads to racial profiling, as anybody can be suspected of being a terrorist or criminal and thus become a “passing object” of fear (ibid., 1, 75). Stereotypical figures, such as the international terrorist, illegal immigrant, or bogus asylum seeker, are used to categorize threats that might actualize in the present or future: “The more we don’t know what and who it is we fear the more the world becomes fearsome”, Ahmed (ibid., 69) writes.

Conservative and populist political movements systemically use narratives of crisis to secure social norms in the present or to gain power by actively painting images of future threats. In far-right nationalist rhetoric, the love for one’s nation is often attached

to the idea of defending one's people (especially "our women") against invading others who are less rational, less human, and less "white". These narratives also tap into the collective fears that the (collective) self might become other: more passive and feminine, more primitive and animal-like, softer and more easily manipulated. Often, it is the fear of emotionality itself that permeates cultures struggling to maintain their prominent social hierarchies. (Ahmed 2014, 2–3, 76–77.) The rhetoric of hardness serves as a way of justifying actions that stem from the culture of fear and hatred towards foreigners, while they are claimed to be actions of love and care for the nation.

Emotions like fear or anxiety are "sticky" in the sense that they can cause mass behaviour. In psychology and sociology, there has been an ongoing discussion on "emotional contagion" and its relevance in studying collectively shared emotions and group psychology. (Le Bon 1895; McDougall 1920; von Scheve & Salmela 2014; see also Ahmed 2014, 9–10.) However, the idea of our age as an age of fear (see e.g. Furedi 2002) or an age of anxiety is not new. The psychology of masses was among the interests of the political theorist Franz L. Neumann. In his classical text "Anxiety and Politics" (1957), Neumann examines the political impact of anxiety. He uses alienation as a starting point for his inquiry into the historical situation after the Second World War. Drawing from Hegel's, Marx's, and Freud's theories and critique of ideology, Neumann states that anxiety and alienation define the existence of modern man (or woman<sup>1</sup>) in political, economic, social, and psychological terms. This alienation – which haunts members of any class – explains why fascism and other regressive political movements remain actual threats in capitalist, wealthy societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1957, Neumann's text reflects the gender politics of his time.



According to Neumann, the affective identification of masses with the leader is always two-fold. The origin of identification is in the individual members' anxiety. The feeling of anxiety may be based on the actual state of affairs, yet more often, it is alienation that manifests itself as "neurotic anxiety".<sup>2</sup> It is this type of anxiety that is intentionally intensified by regressive political movements through manipulation, the personification of evil, and false concreteness. Together these strategies result in a blurring of history: "[W]herever affective (i.e., caesaristic) leader-intensifications occur in politics, masses and leader have this view of history: that the distress which has befallen the masses has been brought about exclusively by a conspiracy of certain persons or groups against the people", Neumann argues. People blindly follow leaders who promise deliverance from their distress, strive to maintain the status quo, and manage to create a desired sense of safety in a world that is full of risks, contingency, and uncertainty. (Neumann 2017, 612, 617–622; see also Duprat's article in this volume.)

Neumann's (2017, 614) conception of a modern man as alienated from his 'nature' is acutely relevant in the age of climate emergency and climate denial. In Western societies, the personal experiences of pain, suffering, and lethal disease have decreased

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<sup>2</sup> Following Freud's theory, Neumann (2017, 615) draws a distinction between "real anxiety" (*Realangst*) and "neurotic anxiety": "The first true [sic] anxiety – thus appears as a reaction to concrete danger situations; the second – neurotic anxiety – is produced by the ego, in order to avoid in advance even the remotest threat of danger. True anxiety is thus produced through the threat of an external object; neurotic anxiety, which may have a real basis, on the other hand is produced from within, through the ego". This distinction made by Neumann comes close to Ahmed's (2014, 11) analysis of the emotion of fear as something that arbitrarily moves and sticks to passing objects of fear that may or may not impose real danger. Identification with organizations, however, can also be non-affective when it takes place due to coercion or material interests and actualizes itself either in bureaucratic-hierarchic or in co-operative form. (Neumann 2017, 618.)

## *Introduction*

in number and become replaced by fears and anxieties related to more theoretical and large-scale risks. In April 2020, at the time of writing this introduction, however, expert evaluations concerning the rapidly spreading coronavirus and the climate crisis show the actual risks to and vulnerabilities of the global network. The expert analyses circulating in the media feed on the collective imagination, even on apocalyptic thinking. In a culture of fear, crowd panic is created by misinformation and conspiracy theories, not only by scientific knowledge. The collectively shared atmosphere of fear and anxiety also generates new forms of solidarity, as citizens and nations around the globe struggle together to survive and tackle the crisis. On the other hand, the public debates concerning imagined threats around such issues as vaccination, food, and new technologies have shown that people continue to fear, even if their personal safety is not threatened. “The scare stories that we continually transmit to another indicate that society feels uncomfortable with itself”, Furendi (2002, vii–viii) argues. In addition to these fears, political crises involving nuclear threats, or the global ecology warn us about the real dangers of technologies that prove humanity’s ability to destroy itself (Lindberg 2017). At the beginning of 2020, the nuclear crisis between Iran and the US, among other world superpowers, highlighted a nuclear arms race familiar from the Cold War era.

In this volume, the affective spaces of fear and safety are analysed in the context of representation, production, and reception of literature and other narrative media. What can the representations of fear and safety reveal about the social and cultural significance of these affective states? From whose perspective are we invited to consider and reconsider them, and why? How do artistic representations change the ways in which we perceive ourselves and the world around us? The

essays focus on the two main themes of the volume: fear and safety. They also address other emotions or affectively influenced states that are related to the representations of fear and safety or constitute defining elements of certain genres. There are many negative emotions and moods that can gain positive relevance in art reception, like the emotion of fear in the context of horror fiction. “[U]nder proper circumstances, nostalgia, melancholy, sorrow, anger, even grief can become sources of satisfaction or fulfilment”, Reddy (2001, 23) argues. Artistic representations of negative moods such as isolation and alienation generate affectively ambivalent imagined worlds. Collectively shared negative emotions can also have positive, ritualistic power as they foster a sense of solidarity and cohesion (cf. von Scheve & Salmela 2014, xiv–xv). The collective experiences of loss and injustice fuel and feed emotions of anger and hope that are needed in order to create spaces for social change and alternative futures.

Many of the essays in this volume discuss dystopian and utopian fiction, genres that portray human hopes and fears. Dystopia has been extremely popular in literature and film during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and one can even talk about a dystopian turn in culture starting at the turn of the millennium (Ahlbäck & Lahtinen 2018, 144; Baccolini & Moylan 2003, 3–4). The genre of dystopia is connected to the older genre of utopia, and in several articles of this volume, utopia and dystopia are discussed together. According to Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (2003, 7), critical dystopias of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century tend to be open-ended, ambivalent stories that are more hopeful than those of previous classical dystopias. This optimism combined with gloomy visions of the future is prevalent especially in young adult dystopias, which have been popular since the success of Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010) and its film adaptations (2012–2015).

Contemporary dystopian fiction has moved from depicting oppressive totalitarian states to portrayals of more complex threats in which changes in climate and the environment have serious negative consequences. Since climate change is among the major threats today, ecological dystopia and climate fiction have turned out to be popular subgenres of dystopian literature (Lahtinen 2018, 81). Dystopian fiction has also discussed neo-fascism, discrimination, and terrorism. For example, Johannes Anyuru's novel *De kommer att drunkna i sina mödrars tårar* (2017) depicts a future Sweden that has turned into a fascist and discriminatory state. Those immigrants who do not sign a citizen's contract are categorized as enemies of Sweden. The novel begins with a description of a terrorist attack in a comic bookstore in which three supporters of ISIS murder a comic book artist who has mocked Islam in his art. This novel is an example of a contemporary Nordic fiction that portrays visions of a collapsed welfare state and the rise of xenophobia, as well as traumatic events that have unpredictable consequences.

## Structure and contents of the volume

In the following essays, the affective spaces of fear and safety are analysed from cultural and genre perspectives. Structurally, the volume is organized around five sub-themes: I Cultural politics of fear and safety; II Fear and safety across genres; III Cultural and transcultural perspectives on fear and safety; IV strategies of Coping with fear, and v Cultural ecologies and ecological disasters. Comparative literary studies serves as one of the most relevant theoretical frameworks in the essays that map the transnational, "international literary space" (Casanova 2004, xii), which transcends the national borders of European

literatures. In addition to French and British literature, the essays in this volume discuss Finnish, Polish, Ukrainian, and Irish fiction. Furthermore, some of the articles address how European cultures interact with African, Indian, Japanese, Russian, and American cultural realities or tackle with representations of otherness experienced by individuals in between cultures. The essays examine fear and safety in the context of various fields of study from risk theory, genre theory, adaptation and translation studies to myth and folklore criticism, trauma studies, and women's studies. The range of genres extends from short stories to novels and drama, from cinema to graphic narratives and comics, and from dystopias to thrillers and horror stories.

Articles in the first chapter, "Cultural politics of fear and safety", discuss risk narratives as well as stories of wars, immigration, and economic crisis. Anne Duprat opens this section with her article, "L'œuvre, la peur et le temps : pour une saisie du risque par la littérature", which discusses threats and fears depicted in literature. According to Duprat, literary formulations of threat involve a warning about a possible future reality as well as human attitudes towards the changed reality. Anna Notaro's article, "Knocking on Europe's door: How narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia shape collective perceptions of immigration", highlights how the narratives of fear, insecurity, and nostalgia have found new vigour online and, in particular, in the visual propaganda of the Brexit Leave campaign. Particular attention is paid to the rhetoric of the narratives of fear in their articulation across various media. Notaro states that online discussions on immigration share similar traits with dystopian fiction, such as *The Camp of Saints* (*Le Camp des Saints* 1973) by Jean Raspail and *Submission* (*Soumission* 2015) by Michel Houellebecq. Serafina Martins's article, "Pro loco et tempore : la littérature portugaise à l'épicentre de la crise économique", focuses on

depictions of the 2008 economic crisis in Portuguese literature. These literary works often denounce malpractice and personify the consequences of the crisis.

The second chapter, “Fear and safety across genres”, focuses on utopian and dystopian literature and their subgenres, including young adult dystopias and totalitarian dystopias. Also Underground literature, horror fiction, thrillers, and the adaptations of the yeti myth are discussed in this section. Maria Laakso examines positive and utopian undertones in contemporary Finnish young adult dystopias in her article “We have to fix this world now: Hope, utopianism, and new modes of political agency in two contemporary Finnish young adult dystopias”. Laakso argues that “although often considered a negative and hopeless genre, dystopian works addressing young audiences also feature utopian tendencies and the hope for a better future”. However, dystopian fiction reflects the fears and threats of humankind, and it is often considered a harbinger of possible negative tendencies. Orlane Glises de la Rivière analyses how dystopian fiction may warn about possible threats in her article “La sécurité ou l’exacerbation des peurs au profit d’une liberté provisoire”. According to her, dystopian novels show that technological surveillance does not necessarily originate from a state machinery but also from individuals themselves as they are conditioned to voluntarily observe others, which results in the climate of mistrust and fear of one another.

Christiana Pugliese’s article, “Mind the gap: Fear on the London Underground”, examines horror stories and thrillers inspired by the London Underground, which is often associated with the archaic and mythic underworld. According to Pugliese, Underground literature expresses fears and anxieties about travelling below the Earth’s surface. The topic of Brigitte Le Juez’s article, “Peur du chaos et retour à l’humain : le mythe du

yéti selon Hergé et Castelli-Manara”, is the anthropomorphic, monstrous, and legendary creature that is the Yeti, stories of which are typical especially in the Himalayan region but in the literature of other areas as well. Le Juez’s article examines the adaptation of the Yeti myth in two comics: *Tintin au Tibet* (1960) by Hergé and *L’uomo delle nevi* (1979) by Alfredo Castelli and Milo Manara.

The third chapter, “Cultural and transcultural perspectives on fear and safety”, includes articles on the transition era of 1989 in Polish literature, Irish and Ukrainian famine fiction, Sharon Dodua Otoo’s transnational writing, contemporary Russian cinema, and the theme of instability in a contemporary novel by the Indian-American author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The first article in this chapter is Olga Szmids’ “Fear of unjust memory or desire for secure identity? Remembering the era of 1989 transition in contemporary Polish novel”, which explores the affective foundations of the transition era in the contemporary fictions of Dorota Masłowska, Michał Witkowski, and Dominika Słowik. Szmids shows that these literary works use socially marginalized characters to comment on individuals’ simultaneous desire and fear regarding a new Polish identity, and their resistance towards unification in a post-communist country that yearns to be “normal”.

Tatiana Krol’s article, “Fear of the other: Representations of otherness in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions”, discusses the process of othering in Irish and Ukrainian novels that depict famine. The article offers imagological analyses of *The Silent People* (1962) by Irish writer Walter Macken and *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life* (1934) by Ukrainian author Ulas Samchuk. Krol argues that in these novels, the fear of the other is generated by a power imbalance between the ruling and the ruled classes, the oppressor and the oppressed. In her article, “The fear of

cultural belonging: Sharon Dodua Otoo's transnational writing", Nora Moll analyses two narrative texts of the British Ghanaian writer and activist Sharon Dodua Otoo, who has lived and worked in Germany since 2006. According to Moll, "aside from being dealt with from the standpoint of the majority culture, over the last decades cultural conflicts, persisting racism and the lack of a broader acceptance of plural identities" have been thematised and elaborated by several 'Afropolitan writers'. Moll explores the dialectic between the fear and the effort towards cultural belonging in Otoo's works.

Beata Waligórska-Olejniczak's essay, "Fear and safety in contemporary Russian cinema: A transcultural perspective", discusses three contemporary Russian films as representations of fear and safety using Mikhail Epstein's concept of 'transculture' as a methodological tool. Waligórska-Olejniczak demonstrates how each of the three directors uses fear as the core emotion in portraying their protagonists' individual and social struggles in a manner that overcomes cultural barriers. In her article, "Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess*: Overcoming fears and instabilities" Metka Zupančič analyses Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2016), which features strong yet often distressed female protagonists who have experienced major life challenges linked to their difficulties in adapting to situations in which they feel insecure. Zupančič argues that Divakaruni's work can be approached as a tool for healing, as her readers are offered an opportunity to witness the female characters' growth after major adversities.

The fourth chapter of the volume, "Coping with fear", includes articles on post-traumatic stress disorder depicted in graphic novels, trauma narratives, surrealism and humour, and post-apocalyptic narratives. Lisa DeTora's article, "Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as posthumanity in graphic



narratives”, applies narrative trauma theory (such as the works of Caruth, Felman, and LaCapra) most often associated with literary studies or historiography to comics, since this medium “enables the simultaneous mobilization of multiple elements on the page”. To the three established graphic novel genres – children’s entertainment (such as Peyo’s *The Black Smurfs*, 1963), more adult-oriented, ‘serious’ fiction and memoir (Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, 1986), and the superhero adventures published by the likes of DC and Marvel – DeTora adds a fourth genre, which is a sort of hybrid: A comic book series like Bill Willingham’s *Fables* (2002–2015) reinvents classic fairy tale characters by investing their supernatural immortality with the perpetual necessity to battle trauma in order to claim their posthuman heroism.

Nathalie Ségeral’s article, “Of murdered babies and silenced histories: Gendering memory in two francophone trauma narratives”, explores gendering in traumatized memory in Algerian Malika Mokedamm’s *Je dois tout à ton oubli* (2008) and Rwandan Scholastique Mukasonga’s *La Femme aux pieds nus* (2008). These works revolve around motherhood, infanticide, and mother-daughter relationships as crystallizations of memory issues. Ségeral analyses how Holocaust metaphors provide an echo chamber in narratives dealing with other traumas, such as the Rwandan genocide, colonial and postcolonial Algeria, and women’s oppression. Despite of the depiction of traumatic events, the works studied in the article move beyond victimology. Jean-Marc Moura’s article, “Peur et humour : le cas de l’humour noir”, focuses on dark humour, ‘humour noir’. Moura examines the notion of humour, especially dark humour, and its conceptual ambiguities and its links to fear. Jasmin Hammon’s article, “L’Autre dans la fiction post-apocalyptique du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, discusses post-apocalyptic fictions that imagine the end of the

modern civilisation and the reorganization of society. Hammon argues the apocalypse represents a moment of nothingness for humanity. In doing so, Hammon refers to Jean-Paul Sartre's existential understanding of *néant*, nothingness.

The final chapter of the volume, "The End of the world? From cultural ecologies to ecological disasters", focuses on disaster and catastrophe narratives, for example stories of the Fukushima accident. Sam La Védrine's article, "Michel Deguy's *l'être-comme* and the poetics of ecological comparativism", studies Michel Deguy's poetic theories of *l'être-comme* and cultural ecology. La Védrine argues that the analogical potential of poetry comes to offer a vast but intimately radical alterity for community with others by speculatively creating a non-dialectical and therefore necessarily paradoxical expression of the ecological comparativism of planetary space. La Védrine positions Deguy's work on cultural ecology as a continuation of this binding alongside questions of scale in ecocritical discourse. Laure Lévêque's article, "*Sans dessus dessous* (1889) de Jules Verne : dernier avertissement avant l'Apocalypse", discusses man's will to power in the works by Jules Verne. The glorification of man's unstoppable might is generally thought to be the main feature in Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), but the will to power concealed behind this mastery has fallen into relative oblivion. Verne's novels *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and *Topsy-Turvy* (1889) depict conquests due to force and violence, embodied by the Gun Club society, whose members launch the projects. Lévêque shows that the themes of failed conquest and mass extinction of the planet's inhabitants are used by Verne as a form of final warning, to point out that something is rotten in Western civilisation.

In her article, "Le Japon de Fukushima comme lieu de discours pour des auteurs francophones", Sabine Kraenker examines the

possibility for French-speaking writers depicting an ecological catastrophe that happens far from their home. Contamina asks what kind of discourse a foreign writer can have on Fukushima, and what kind of limitations the author may face when writing on a catastrophe that happened in Japan in 2011. Catastrophes are discussed also in Sandra Contamina's article, "L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : une invention renouvelée à la croisée de la littérature, de l'histoire des sociétés et de l'histoire environnementale", in which she studies the notion of catastrophe in literature, the history of societies, and environmental history.

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I

## **Cultural politics of fear and safety**



# L'œuvre, la peur et le temps

## Pour une saisie du risque par la littérature

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La relation de l'art à la peur a sa propre histoire, qui regarde directement celle de la littérature comparée aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, tant celle-ci est liée à l'émigration des philologues d'Allemagne et d'Europe centrale en Europe occidentale, puis aux Etats-Unis à partir du milieu des années 1930. Cette histoire a connu de nouveaux rebondissements depuis le début du millénaire, lorsque les réflexions sur le rôle joué par les formes littéraires dans l'appréhension collective des menaces qui pèsent sur les sociétés ont rejoint des débats plus vastes sur la capacité des représentations esthétiques à rendre compte du monde post-11 septembre, et l'ère du risque écologique avéré.

On se souvient que dans la première décennie du millénaire, la dénonciation d'une incapacité fondamentale de la littérature

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contemporaine sous toutes ses formes à prendre en compte notamment le phénomène catastrophique, y compris sous son aspect spécifiquement humain qu'est le terrorisme, avait dominé ces débats<sup>1</sup>. Le présent ouvrage, où sont abordés aussi bien la relation du littéraire à la violence guerrière et politique ou à l'éco-catastrophe que la prise en charge des phénomènes de migration et d'exil par de nouvelles formes verbales, graphiques et ludiques témoigne d'un passage à une phase bien différente de la compréhension du rôle joué par la littérature dans la terreur. C'est ce que montre aussi le livre récent du critique Alexandre Gefen assignant à la littérature du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle la louable mission de réparer le monde (Gefen 2017), de même que la valorisation récente, dans le sillage des politiques et des poétiques du *care*, de la vulnérabilité comme objet d'étude légitime non seulement de la philosophie, de psychologie et de la sociologie<sup>2</sup>, mais également de la critique littéraire.

Particulièrement signifiant, le couplage de la peur et de la sécurité permet d'aborder sous un autre angle le rôle spécifique que peut (à nouveau) jouer la littérature au sein de l'ensemble des productions culturelles, dans la gestion d'une ère de la peur désormais mondialisée. L'association habituelle des deux notions, notamment sous la plume des journalistes d'actualité fait en effet apparaître par défaut la sécurité comme le milieu neutre, l'état normal à la fois existentiel et métaphysique que la menace serait venue interrompre. Le traitement médiatique de la peur a donc pour corollaire l'implicite invention d'une situation de sûreté perdue, grâce à laquelle le danger nouveau peut être décrit et redouté comme un événement, plutôt que d'être pensé comme

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<sup>1</sup> Voir notamment William Marx, *L'Adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation, XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2005) mais aussi Yves Citton, *La passion des catastrophes* (2009) cités par Françoise Lavocat (2012).

<sup>2</sup> C'est ce que montre le dossier consacré par Sandra Laugier et Marie Gaillé aux 'grammaires de la vulnérabilité' (Laugier & Gaillé 2011).

un état permanent, comme un mode d'existence possible et historiquement avéré des sociétés. Or, la littérature envisage bien la peur et la sécurité comme deux états alternatifs indissociables de notre rapport au réel. Ses effets s'étendent de l'alarmisme le plus visionnaire, avec le repérage et la dénonciation de dangers y compris inexistantes ou non encore advenus comme forme extrême que peut prendre l'appréhension du nouveau, jusqu'à la ré-assurance culturelle la plus conservatrice, avec l'intégration de tout événement inédit possible dans un *continuum* de représentations humaines déjà connues.

Entre ces deux pôles, formes et genres s'ordonnent en fonction de leur implication plus ou moins dans une description du réel, et de l'engagement particulier dans le monde que prévoit leur programme d'écriture. D'une certaine façon, chaque mise en forme littéraire d'une menace engage cependant toujours un avertissement sur ce que devient le réel, dans son imprévisible nouveauté, ainsi que l'expression de nouvelles attitudes humaines vis-à-vis de cette réalité – ne serait-ce que celle de l'auteur. Surtout, elle propose des éléments pour une qualification à la fois éthique et esthétique de cet état d'appréhension qu'elle engage, invente ou décrit.

C'est à cette dernière fonction que je voudrais consacrer les quelques remarques qui suivent. Elle se trouve au fond de la plupart des discours qui portent sur le rôle de la littérature dans la propagation ou dans la constitution de la peur, qu'ils relèvent de l'histoire des formes culturelles ou de la critique littéraire proprement dite. En quoi le fait d'être terrifiant ou d'être rassurant, c'est-à-dire de constituer dans la représentation un état de peur ou de sécurité, peut-il être compris comme une dimension esthétique du réel qui serait simplement révélée ici par l'expression littéraire, et non créée par elle ? C'est la question

que pose le rapport de l'art à l'angoisse générée par le réel, et par une réalité collective.

## La peur comme effet

Ce rapport repose pour la critique littéraire sur un premier paradoxe. D'un côté reconnaître la part de la terreur dans l'effet produit ou cherché par une forme littéraire revient souvent à signaler les limites de l'investissement esthétique dont elle témoigne, en montrant l'empreinte laissée par le réel sur le monde figuré ; de l'autre la peur en elle-même relève directement d'un effet de l'art.

Ainsi, à mesurer dans les romans sentimentaux français, puis anglais des années 1790 à 1800 ce qui est directement inspiré aux auteurs et surtout aux auteures, de Germaine de Staël à Olympe de Gouges ou Isabelle de Charrière par le souvenir de la Terreur, on ne réduit pas la portée des innovations formelles qui y figurent<sup>3</sup>. L'évolution par exemple de la conduite du récit épistolaire y témoigne d'une adaptation à un monde dans lequel la confiance dans le fonctionnement sûr du modèle aristocratique de communication des émotions et de l'information par la lecture a disparu, sans pour autant déclencher l'abandon de ce modèle resté indispensable au déploiement de la fiction sentimentale. De là l'expérimentation de techniques narratives dont la fortune sera considérable ensuite – que l'on pense à l'œuvre de Jane Austen – dans le cadre d'un genre pourtant déjà senti comme obsolète dès 1820.

On peut faire la même remarque en ce qui concerne le jugement de conservatisme longtemps porté par la critique

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<sup>3</sup> L'anthologie des romancières de la période révolutionnaire réunie par Huguette Krief (2005) le montre amplement.

littéraire sur le roman policier à énigme, dont on connaît le développement considérable en Europe pendant dans l'entre-deux guerres, parallèlement à celui de l'art surréaliste. La fonction 'ré-assurante' largement attribuée alors à ce genre y est opposée à la féconde inquiétude suscitée au contraire par l'explosion des formes abstraites ou non figuratives dans la peinture et de la déconstruction du récit en littérature. En concentrant l'attention sur le jeu que constitue l'élucidation rationnelle d'un meurtre singulier, dans un dispositif toujours identique séparant avec précision deux plans de récit<sup>4</sup>, la fonction du roman-problème populaire aurait été de réduire à des proportions acceptables pour l'imaginaire l'insupportable irruption du meurtre collectif dans la vie privée des Européens, et l'angoisse suscitée par la menace d'une seconde guerre mondiale de plus en plus imminente. Pourtant, la construction de cette structure répétitive, nécessaire à la vente en série des volumes d'un genre voué au divertissement témoigne en elle-même d'un autre malaise, profond et lié au premier : celui que suscite la conscience de lire dans un monde irrémédiablement divisé par la mécanisation industrielle et par les débuts de l'envahissement technologique, autant que par la violence guerrière et politique directe des totalitarismes.

Signaler ce qu'une forme littéraire doit à la pression d'une menace contextuelle existante, et à la nécessité d'y réagir par compensation, évitement ou souci de réparation vient donc certes d'un souci de marquer la fin de ce qui relève de l'art et le début de ce qui relève du geste inscrit dans un espace social. La peur cependant est aussi, et avant tout, un *effet* dans tous les sens du terme ; en cela elle relève directement d'une esthétique. Du songe médiéval au drame sanglant élisabéthain, du roman gothique au conte cruel et à la nouvelle post-holocauste, la peur constitue en

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<sup>4</sup> Voir par exemple Uri Eisenzweig, *Le récit impossible : forme et sens du roman policier* (1986).

elle-même une façon d'être à l'art et d'être de l'art plutôt qu'une façon d'être au monde – comme le fait en miroir la ré-assurance, en particulier dans la fiction romanesque européenne d'Ancien Régime. C'est notamment le cas lorsque la seule façon d'être au monde, pour un phénomène ou pour une expérience, est d'être dans l'art, puisqu'il n'y a plus de place ailleurs pour son existence. On pense bien sûr aux littératures de la migration ou de l'exil, à l'histoire des oubliés, à toutes les constructions utopiques ou dystopiques dans lesquelles les communautés détruites créent l'espace nouveau dans lequel leur unité pourrait se dire. Cet espace non mimétique, premier dans l'ordre de la représentation, ne peut relever que d'une histoire, d'une sociologie et d'une géographie nouvelles.

La peur est-elle donc un effet propre de l'art, ou un signe de ses limites dans la mesure où elle trahirait l'inscription de l'œuvre dans le monde ? L'opposition n'est qu'apparente. Elle tient au fait que l'on peut, pour évaluer le rôle que joue la peur dans ses productions, traiter tout d'abord la littérature comme un média. Ce que l'on repère alors, c'est la façon dont une forme littéraire saisit, synthétise et relaie un état de peur existant, qu'il soit latent ou non. De fait, la littérature s'empare de ce qui dans le réel angoisse, et organise une réaction à ce qu'elle-même constitue comme danger. Cette réaction peut s'arrêter au constat de sidération – qui est déjà une sortie du sidérant –, ou s'exprimer dans la déploration, l'alarme, la provocation, ou dans les divers modes de la réassurance, depuis la compréhension jusqu'à la compensation, la remédiation ou le divertissement. En revanche, en considérant l'œuvre non comme un média mais comme un modèle, et la littérature comme une modélisation première du réel, la critique saisit ce qui dans le littéraire constitue fondamentalement de l'angoisse, et symétriquement ce qui est

premier dans la construction d'un état de sécurité dans et par la littérature.<sup>5</sup>

C'est donc dans le cadre de cette saisie des productions littéraires comme structures capables de modéliser le monde que l'on propose de préciser le rapport qu'entretient le littéraire avec le prévisible et l'imprévisible, comme modes premiers de l'appréhension du temps.

## Politiques du danger : re-présentation et pré-vision

On vient de le rappeler, le problème de la peur et de la sécurité tels que l'art les suscite est intimement lié à la saisie du nouveau par la représentation. Il concerne donc la façon dont la littérature gère l'inouï, le non imaginable, ce qui n'est encore jamais entré dans le cercle de ses représentations. Les catastrophes bien sûr, les événements rares, les situations résultant d'une modification radicale des conditions de l'expérience humaine, mais aussi les simples manifestations *a priori* insignifiantes du hasard entrent dans cette définition. Dans la mesure où l'événement fortuit, la situation aléatoire ne sont pas amenés par une chaîne causale racontable, leur apparition remet en question la faculté même du réel à être construit en séquence narrative, à faire l'objet d'une explication au sens littéraire mais aussi épistémologique du terme.

Une première attitude face au problème que constitue l'appréhension du nouveau consiste à lier le rôle joué par la représentation dans la gestion du risque avec sa capacité à

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<sup>5</sup> Martine Roberge étudie ainsi la place occupée par la mise en récit de la peur au croisement des paradigmes du réel, de l'imaginaire et du possible, dans *L'Art de faire peur : des récits légendaires aux contes d'horreur* (2005).

fabriquer de la prévisibilité et du prévisible. Cette capacité, elle, peut faire l'objet d'une description historique, puisqu'elle se signale notamment dans la succession des formes littéraires et artistiques toutes les fois où une pensée de l'incertitude cède la place à une pensée du risque, annexée à une pratique, qui est celle de la projection de scénarios possibles pour l'avenir.

Un exemple de cette opération est donné par les célèbres fresques dites du 'Bon et du mauvais Gouvernement' commandées en 1338 à Ambrogio Lorenzetti par le régime des Neuf pour orner les murs de la salle du gouvernement du palais communal de Sienne. On y voit en effet clairement apparaître la place qu'occupe la prévision dans l'opposition entre l'état de peur et l'état de sécurité. Ceux-ci sont représentés respectivement sur les murs Est et Ouest de la salle avec le même degré de réalité, comme deux états permanents du rapport de l'homme au monde, et comme deux versions possibles de la normalité sociale, séparés par l'allégorie de la paix qui préside sur le mur Nord à l'administration du bon gouvernement. L'ensemble de ce dispositif bien connu et souvent commenté jette en outre un éclairage significatif sur la question du rôle joué par la figuration artistique elle-même dans la perception de ces deux états, dans la mesure où il montre en quoi l'image est là pour constituer la dangerosité du réel en même temps que pour créer les conditions de la réponse à ce danger, dans la mise en évidence d'une responsabilité humaine dans l'obtention et le maintien constants de l'état de paix.

Sur le mur droit, les effets du bon gouvernement offrent une vision écologiquement cohérente du déroulement des activités en tant de paix, en ville comme à la campagne : on cultive, on vendange, on se livre au commerce, à la danse et à la chasse, on se marie et on rend la justice sans peur et sans menace. Sur le mur opposé – et dans un état de conservation

bien plus altéré, en apparence au moins<sup>6</sup> – la représentation du mauvais gouvernement et de ses effets, ponctuée par la présence d'allégories de la violence, de la cruauté, de la cupidité et de l'injustice. Sous l'égide de *Timor*, la Terreur, destructions, vols, pillages et meurtres se donnent libre cours dans un paysage martyrisé où 'personne', déclare l'inscription exhibée par l'allégorie de la Terreur, 'ne passe sans craindre la mort, car tout s'y dérobe, à l'extérieur comme à l'intérieur'.<sup>7</sup>

Un aspect important du dispositif réside dans le fait qu'il détache le problème de la peur et de la sécurité de la question du sacré. Les éléments de la représentation ne relèvent pas directement de la grammaire scripturale et biblique de la peur ; l'unique élément qui signale la présence du religieux dans le paysage en paix, la coupole du Duomo de Sienne, apparaît à la fois décentré et inscrit dans un paysage urbain qu'il ne domine pas. Les deux états possibles du monde sont le résultat direct de deux modes de gouvernement humains, et la différence des univers est produite par le politique comme aboutissement dans le réel du choix et de la décision. Le pire est à cet égard présenté comme aussi prévisible que le meilleur ; ce n'est pas le caractère aléatoire, transcendant ou inaccessible à la raison des événements qui est source de danger, mais au contraire le lien indéfectible entre la cause et la conséquence, en tant qu'il définit la responsabilité politique.

L'historien Patrick Boucheron, dans la remarquable analyse qu'il a consacrée en 2013 à ces fresques et à la politique de l'image qu'elles véhiculent, souligne d'un côté comme de

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<sup>6</sup> L'état bien meilleur des fresques des murs Nord et Est, où figurent l'Allégorie de la paix et les 'Effets du bon gouvernement' est en effet largement dû à des réfections successives qui pourraient avoir éloigné davantage encore l'aspect qu'on leur connaît aujourd'hui de ce que devait être l'œuvre originale.

<sup>7</sup> 'NO(N) PASSA ALCVN SE(N)CA DVBBIO DIMO(R)TE/ CHE FVOR SIROBBA E DENTRO DALEPORTE', cartouche de la Terreur, mur Ouest (je traduis).



l'autre la libre circulation du sens entre les différents degrés de représentation exemplifiés dans ces fresques, les images de type fictionnel (les citoyens montrés dans l'accomplissement de leurs projets et de leurs activités) égalant les représentations abstraites et allégoriques dans leur puissance de signification (Boucheron 2013). Cet accès de l'ensemble des éléments du monde à la possibilité de signifier, mais aussi à la projection des conséquences de leurs actes dans le temps, c'est-à-dire à la responsabilité personnelle et collective est caractéristique du fonctionnement de l'ensemble du dispositif de représentation. Comme le dit la plus ancienne chronique qui mentionne la réalisation de ces fresques en 1425, celles-ci ont été commandées et placées dans la salle du palais communal dite de de la Nouvelle Seigneurie, 'afin que chacun puisse les [y] voir'. De même que, sur les autres fresques du palais, la représentation d'un paysage caractéristique et reconnaissable atteste du droit de propriété de la commune sur les terres représentées, de même ici, l'image a force contractuelle pour l'ensemble des spectateurs, siennois et étrangers, qui les voient. Elles sont le signe de l'engagement du politique dans la configuration du monde.

Le discours que tiennent les fresques de Sienne sur le rôle que peut jouer la représentation dans l'appréhension du monde, dans les sens du terme – à la fois dans la constitution du monde comme dangereux et dans un engagement à s'emparer de ce danger – se retrouve dans l'essor contemporain d'une ambition semblable pour la littérature profane, typique de la première Renaissance italienne, et exemplifiée par le succès du *Decamerone* de Boccaccio dès 1348. Mais elle me semble également faire écho à la mission que de nombreux économistes, philosophes, sémioticiens et sociologues tentent d'assigner à la représentation et à l'expression artistiques depuis une dizaine d'années, telle qu'on la voit par exemple résumée dans les

travaux du philosophe Jean-Pierre Dupuy sur l'évolution de la pensée politique en matière de prévention des risques depuis le 11 septembre.

Celui-ci part en effet d'un premier constat paradoxal : bien qu'on soit incapable de croire à une catastrophe (écologique, nucléaire, climatique, humaine) pourtant annoncée, parce qu'on ne peut pas croire à ce qui ne s'est encore jamais produit, le surgissement lui-même de l'événement catastrophique s'impose en revanche toujours par sa normalité absolue, au moment précisément où il sort de l'impossible en se produisant effectivement. Jean-Pierre Dupuy évoque ainsi, dans son essai *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé*, Henri Bergson s'étonnant le 4 août 1914 de la facilité avec laquelle lui-même accepte le déclenchement d'un premier conflit mondial qui semblait encore impossible la veille, et qui vient par son surgissement de devenir non seulement normal, mais surtout rétrospectivement prévisible (Dupuy 2004, 12). A partir d'une analyse du fonctionnement de la prévision, et d'une décomposition notamment éthique des difficultés posées par l'application politique du principe de précaution, Dupuy proposait il y a quinze ans de réagir à une catastrophe climatique annoncée en partant de l'idée que si le pire n'est pas toujours sûr, on ne peut en revanche l'éviter qu'en le considérant comme inévitable, et qu'en agissant en fonction de son entrée prochaine dans l'ordre du réel.

Or au principe d'une telle action, il y a avant tout la représentation, et notamment la représentation scénarisée en tant qu'elle propose à ses auditeurs/lecteurs/spectateurs/joueur un contrat qui me semble comparable à celui que déployaient déjà les fresques de Sienna. Parmi les formes qu'elle peut prendre, c'est curieusement celle du récit entendu au sens large du terme – dont la seconde moitié du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle avait tant imaginé l'obsolescence –, qui se révèle récemment la mieux

apte à combler le vide logique qui existe entre l'impensable et sa réalisation concrète. Ce n'est pas un hasard : le scénario littéraire installe de façon particulièrement efficace ce rapport au crédible comme préalable nécessaire à l'action, à l'inscription d'une attitude d'engagement dans le réel. Cette mission que le roman réaliste avait entièrement assumée au xix<sup>e</sup> siècle en Europe change-t-elle fondamentalement à l'ère post-post-moderne, celle de la destruction possible du sujet de la représentation, et peut-être de tout sujet possible de la représentation ? Ce qui est certes nouveau, comme l'écrivait Hans Jonas dès 1985 dans *Sur le fondement ontologique d'une éthique du futur*, c'est que 'ce n'est plus comme jadis la nature, mais notre pouvoir sur elle qui désormais nous angoisse, et pour elle et pour nous'<sup>8</sup>. Mais le rapport du sujet à la totalité de la destruction envisagée préexiste à cette récente inversion : il a toujours accompagné l'angoisse causée par la perspective de son avènement. La description que fait Homère dans l'*Illiade* du bouclier d'Achille englobe déjà tout l'univers connu par les Grecs au moment où les poèmes sont produits, et c'est cette totalité qui est concernée par les deux états du monde représentés sur le bouclier : la guerre et la paix. Fondamentalement, la représentation met en jeu la peur et la sécurité comme les deux états possibles du prévisible, l'un reposant sur le principe éristique, l'autre sur le principe érotique d'organisation du cosmos.

## Croire en l'inouï : un problème de récit

La conscience du risque motive le renouvellement de la force contractuelle des représentations, renouvellement qui à son

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<sup>8</sup> Texte repris dans Jonas 1998, p. 105.

tour détermine la réinvention des grammaires stylistiques et sémiotiques qui structurent celles-ci. De fait, à lire les chroniques et les correspondances comportant des récits de catastrophes, de la fin du Moyen Age au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (récits de peste, d'inondation, d'incendie ou d'éruption volcaniques) on s'étonne souvent de voir que les auteurs de ces récits, du chroniqueur au médecin, au clerc de notaire ou aux édiles s'intéressent moins à l'explication de ces phénomènes qu'au geste même de l'écriture, c'est-à-dire à la consignation de la catastrophe. Tout se passe comme si, dans le déroulement d'un épisode de peste, l'acte même d'enregistrer la progression concrète et contingente de la contagion, celle des mesures prises pour l'endiguer – quel que soit le succès apparent ou non de celles-ci – puis les étapes du retour à l'état de sécurité contribuait simplement à l'enregistrement d'une structure temporelle modélisante, d'une figure dont le sens ne pourrait apparaître que plus tard, au moment de la répétition d'un scénario semblable, puisque la catastrophe est toujours comprise comme inouïe, et pourtant inévitablement récurrente. Comme l'indique Françoise Lavocat, il faut pour donner tout son sens à cet investissement sur la représentation elle-même dégager l'interprétation qu'on fait aujourd'hui de ces récits d'une grille de lecture systématiquement orientée vers la recherche des causes attribuées à la catastrophe, et visant donc uniquement à y repérer les signes d'une évolution vers une explication laïque et non plus religieuse de son apparition (Lavocat 2012, 13).

De fait, les très nombreuses relectures récentes suscitées par l'ère post-9.11 des formes pré-modernes d'écriture des catastrophes visent la plupart du temps à souligner l'apparition au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de ces motifs rationnels d'explication notamment des désastres résultant d'un risque climatique et géologique, et le difficile combat des promoteurs de l'observation expérimentale contre la vision théocentrique de l'univers qui aurait retardé

jusqu'à la découverte de leurs causes véritables. Certes, c'est cette recherche qui a permis de montrer la séparation progressive dans l'histoire des idées entre la catastrophe naturelle (tremblement de terre, éruption volcanique) et la catastrophe humaine exemplifiée avant tout par la violence guerrière. L'enjeu d'une telle distinction est bien sûr l'identification progressive des facteurs humains qui peuvent contribuer au déclenchement de catastrophes apparemment naturelles (famine et épidémies), découverte indispensable à la prescription de moyens de prévention de ces risques. On ne peut cependant que remarquer à quel point cette séparation aura été de courte durée, puisqu'elle arrive maintenant au bout de sa pertinence, depuis que la responsabilité humaine est directement engagée dans l'ensemble des menaces qui pèsent sur la suite de l'existence de la planète, et des peuples qui l'habitent<sup>9</sup>. Il apparaît donc d'autant plus intéressant de se pencher sur une écriture de la peur antérieure à cette séparation, et qui n'est justement pas concernée par elle.

La représentation fictionnelle de la catastrophe devient dès le début de la Renaissance en Italie un objet littéraire incontournable, puisque c'est le moment où elle devient un corollaire de l'invention littéraire profane, notamment dans l'essor des recueils de nouvelles qui, comme celui de Boccace, commencent par un tableau de la peste de Florence, la peste noire qui traverse l'Europe en 1348, vide en quelques mois ses cités d'un cinquième de leur population – emportant notamment Ambrogio Lorenzetti, le peintre des fresques de Sienne, le 9 juin de cette année. Dans le prologue du *Décameron*, sa description vient motiver l'ouverture d'un espace protégé de l'épidémie qui fait encore rage, entièrement dédié à l'invention fictionnelle

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<sup>9</sup> En 1987, le livre consacré par Jean Delumeau et Yves Lequin à l'évolution des pensées du risque en France dédiait déjà son dernier chapitre à la question de 'L'effacement du risque naturel ?' (Delumeau & Lequin 1987, ch. 22).

et à l'échange des contes. Un dispositif qui commande alors l'invention d'un nouveau mode de surgissement des événements dans la fiction, inconnu de la narration romanesque médiévale. La catastrophe qui menace de détruire l'humanité n'y est pas évoquée, crainte et redoutée pour la fin du recueil, sous la forme d'une menace qui planerait sur l'univers fictionnel, à l'image de ce qui se produit dans l'univers tragique. Elle est au contraire entièrement présentée dès le début du livre, avant même le début des récits qui vont le composer. Libéré dès le prologue du poids de l'anticipation, puisque ni le Salut ni la Mort ne sont attendus comme le résultat des actions qui vont être contées, le recueil peut montrer de façon ouverte ce qui se passe dans un monde où les jeux de la Fortune, de l'esprit humain (*ingenio*) et de l'amour deviennent objet d'émerveillement esthétique. Les événements s'y succèdent selon une logique qui n'obéit qu'aux lois du récit lui-même, introduits par la formule-clé dans laquelle Karlheinz Stierle avait repéré l'inauguration d'un nouveau rapport du récit au hasard : 'alors, il arriva que...' [*e allora avvenne che*] (Stierle 1998).

On a beaucoup commenté la révolution constituée par cette apparition, dans la littérature de la première Renaissance, du hasard comme imitation du déroulement effectif des événements humains, par opposition aux schémas providentiels, apocalyptiques ou cycliques qui régissaient la structure temporelle dans les fictions antiques et médiévales. L'innovation figure en bonne place dans la célébration d'une évolution historique des conceptions esthétiques du prévisible vers une modernité périodiquement redéfinie. On peut cependant interpréter cette innovation de deux façons différentes, dans la mesure où elle ouvre sur deux conceptions séparées du rapport du littéraire à la peur et à la sécurité, au temps comme danger et au monde comme espace menaçant et menacé.

D'un côté en effet on peut considérer que Boccace, contrairement à ce que font Dante et Pétrarque, *commence* par installer l'humanité dans la pleine conscience de sa finitude pour mieux libérer ensuite l'espace qu'il ouvre pour ses contes de la perspective de cette mort annoncée, et de sa réalité absolue et indépassable. Une fois cette réalité admise, l'attention des auditeurs peut se consacrer à ce qui arrive aux personnages ouvertement fictionnels des contes. Le recueil crée ainsi un périmètre de danger contrôlable, qui ne concerne que le monde représenté, et à l'intérieur duquel un certain nombre d'événements peuvent arriver pour menacer ou restaurer la paix. La structure du *Décameron* fonctionne à ce titre comme un modèle de pensée de la vocation divertissante, consolatrice et réparatrice d'une littérature profane enfin dégagée de la préparation à la mort qui avait été la mission première de la culture littéraire depuis Sénèque et Cicéron jusqu'au Moyen Age chrétien – et qui le restera d'ailleurs encore, plus marginalement certes, jusqu'à la fin de la période classique.

Mais on peut aussi prendre au pied de la lettre le dispositif mis en place par les contes, qui consiste à proposer de fait dans la structure fictionnelle qui permet le surgissement des événements un modèle ouvert pour la compréhension de ce qu'est le temps humain réel, en tant qu'il est irréparablement marqué par la contingence. La catastrophe n'est pas à l'horizon de ce temps-là, elle est toujours déjà là, dans le tissu même des événements, sous la forme de la tension narrative entre peur et sécurité qui l'organise globalement.

Ce deuxième modèle a l'intérêt d'expliquer la vocation de la tension narrative à constituer en elle-même une expérience sur le temps et sur le hasard, qui a pu prendre des formes très différentes dans les littératures d'Europe, depuis l'invention du suspense dont le critique Terence Cave a mis en évidence

l'invention, dans la redécouverte que fait l'Europe en 1548 du roman grec, ce récit d'aventures amoureuses à rebondissements multiples où le lecteur se voit plongé dès l'ouverture *in medias res* (Cave 1999). Une invention dont on connaît la fortune, poursuivie dès le siècle suivant avec le développement des formes théâtrales classiques présentant la réalisation imprévisible d'un événement à l'issue pourtant déjà connue, en passant par les manipulations virtuoses du destin fictionnel des personnages qui marquent l'évolution du roman sentimental en Europe au cours du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Elle pourrait être suivie, au-delà du roman réaliste français et anglais imitant le surgissement contingent des événements, jusqu'aux expériences de composition aléatoire, multi-scénarisées ou discontinues du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais aussi jusqu'aux expérimentations des années 1930 sur le contrefactuel, cette possibilité du récit à démentir l'histoire, en racontant ce qui aurait pu se passer si la succession effective d'une série d'événements avait pris un tour différent.

Rien n'arrive certes par hasard en littérature, dans la mesure où le texte fictionnel mime toujours le surgissement contingent de l'événement, y compris dans les formes poétiques axées sur la production aléatoire du signe lui-même. La fiction pourtant est la seule à pouvoir *présenter* ce mode d'apparition de l'événement et son appréhension par le sujet sous la forme du danger et de la menace, ce que ne peuvent faire ni la pensée ni le discours analytique. C'est ce qui a donné aux formes littéraires une place aussi importante, historiquement parlant, dans l'émergence des probabilités (Hacking 1975) qui voit la transformation au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'incertitude en risque – transformation qui se produit lorsque l'incertain devient l'objet d'un calcul possible. Là où l'on avait une simple suspension de la capacité de prévoir, génératrice d'angoisse majeure face à l'avenir, la fiction peut donner corps aux différents scénarios possibles pour l'avenir.



Surtout, elle permet d'engager une attitude face à ces possibilités, fondée non seulement sur l'évaluation de leur probabilité mais sur un investissement émotionnel dans leur réalisation.

La transformation des modes de perception de la vraisemblance relève du même ensemble de phénomènes. Là où la vraisemblance d'un scénario classique s'appréciait au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans sa perfection interne bien sûr, c'est-à-dire dans la cohérence de ses éléments, mais aussi et surtout dans son rapport à une valeur absolue du vrai, on jugera à partir des années 1720–1730 et de l'essor du roman bourgeois en Angleterre puis en France que le scénario vraisemblable est celui qui présente les événements qui ont le plus de chance statistiquement parlant de se produire – cette chance se mesurant elle-même avant tout de façon pragmatique, c'est-à-dire par rapport à l'opinion que se fait un certain public de cette probabilité.

Cette opération par laquelle la littérature participe à la transformation de l'incertitude en prévision engage le rapport particulier qu'entretient le littéraire – fiction et non-fiction – avec le temps, et en particulier au passé en tant qu'il permet de modéliser l'avenir.

## La peur, le temps et l'imagination

Jean-Pierre Dupuy plaçait en exergue de son essai évoqué plus haut (2004, 3) la réflexion qu'inspire au narrateur de la *Recherche du Temps perdu* (1913–1927) de Marcel Proust l'irruption dans sa vie d'un 'mal entièrement nouveau' – le départ imprévu de son amie, dans les premières pages d'*Albertine disparue* (1925). Même s'il avait pu anticiper ce départ, sa réalité lui serait restée inaccessible :

Pour se représenter une situation inconnue l'imagination emprunte des éléments connus, et à cause de cela ne se la représente pas. Mais la sensibilité, même la plus physique reçoit comme le sillon de la foudre la signature originale et longtemps indélébile de l'événement nouveau. (Proust ed. 1946, 14.)

En indiquant la capacité de la perception sensible à saisir la nature réelle du nouveau, à recevoir une impression exacte de qui ne s'est jamais produit, Proust souligne bien sûr par contraste le conservatisme de l'imagination, l'impuissance de l'imagination prévoyante à se figurer l'événement à venir dans sa réalité inédite. Faut-il pour autant voir dans l'imagination littéraire le modèle de cette production artificielle et donc essentiellement conservatrice des représentations ? Pour représenter l'inconnu, la fiction romanesque en particulier intègre de fait celui-ci aux structures et aux événements déjà présents dans le répertoire des formes qu'elle emploie : en ce sens elle est culturellement conservatrice. Pourtant les pages qui suivent, à l'image du projet même de *La Recherche*, montrent à quel point le temps humain, dans son lien avec la construction esthétique et phénoménologique de l'identité, est justement saisi dans et par l'œuvre, au point d'apparaître littéralement imprésentable en dehors d'elle, et de l'expérience qu'en fait le lecteur. De même que l'« armature intellectuelle » du narrateur d'*Albertine disparue*, en « reliant ensemble des faits tous faux » lui avait pourtant donné « la forme juste et inflexible » de la catastrophe à venir, de même l'imagination littéraire, en construisant à partir d'éléments déjà connus de nouveaux modèles de compréhension du monde, peut dégager ce qui dans le présent porte déjà la signature de l'événement nouveau, et lui donner forme et crédibilité.

Le paradoxe engagé par le rapport de l'imagination littéraire au temps n'est donc, lui aussi, qu'apparent. Certes, l'invention

fictionnelle fait appel à des éléments déjà présents dans le répertoire des objets culturels connus. Même la littérature dite d'anticipation construit ses modèles à partir d'informations sur le monde qu'elle constitue comme déjà existantes – c'est bien ce qui fait qu'elle peut repérer et dénoncer une situation présente comme potentiellement dangereuse. Mais par ailleurs, l'imagination littéraire permet d'amener à l'existence, et de faire entrer dans le cercle des choses perçues, des expériences faites, des émotions ressenties et des attitudes adoptées face à des situations non encore advenues. En ce sens, elle crée de l'imaginable et du prévisible, préalable nécessaire à un engagement éthique dans l'action, et dans la modification d'un avenir catastrophique.

Seules l'allégorie de la Paix et les effets du Bon Gouvernement figurent sur le site du Google Art Project ; les fresques dystopiques du mur Est n'y sont pas reproduites. Ce choix, dont Patrick Boucheron soulignait la radicalité (Boucheron 2013, 124) est significatif d'un traitement historiographique de l'effroi, qui associe une époque à un aspect unique et distinctif de son rapport esthétique à la peur et à la sécurité<sup>10</sup>. La pastorale de la peur au Moyen Age, l'angoisse baroque ou romantique, l'espoir des Lumières dans le progrès, la confiance positiviste dans la prévisibilité du monde au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle ou la polarisation binaire des représentations de l'avenir entre les blocs Est et Ouest pendant la guerre froide exemplifient et découpent ainsi dans l'imaginaire historique des sociétés contemporaines des moments particuliers d'une histoire de l'angoisse collective. C'est cette réduction qui nous permet par contraste de sentir comme fondamentalement

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<sup>10</sup> Ces associations sont certes souvent liées à la périodisation retenue par les grandes histoires de la peur, telles qu'elles ont été formulées dans les différentes aires culturelles ; dans le cas de la France, les études de Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)* et *Le Péché, la Peur, la culpabilisation en Occident*, respectivement parues en 1978 et 1983 ont été essentielles à cette historicisation.

nouvelle, parce qu'elle serait la seule à être complète, l'expérience que l'on fait aujourd'hui de la menace globale qui pèse sur le monde, et de la perspective d'une destruction qui ne serait plus partielle.

Pourtant, de même que c'est la totalité du monde qui était envisagée dans chaque ensemble de représentations – on l'a souligné plus haut – de même chaque époque fait aussi une expérience totale de son rapport au temps. C'est ce que montre bien dans les fresques de Sienne l'étrange mélancolie qui marque le visage de la Paix, ou les motifs insolites des robes portées par les villageoises qui dansent sur la place de la ville en joie, et qui sont couvertes d'insectes et vers, signes de mort et de décadence : l'ensemble des formes du temps est saisi là. De même l'innovation littéraire – invention de formes, de genres, de types de représentation – saisit-elle pour la rendre visible et sensible la forme inquiétante en elle-même que prend le changement des temps, en construisant ensemble traces, indices et signes pour en faire un modèle de pré-compréhension du monde. Ce modèle peut être plus ou moins habitable, de même qu'une représentation visuelle peut être plus ou moins figurative : il n'en constitue pas moins un support essentiel à la projection dans l'avenir.

C'est ce qui fait aussi qu'Henri Bergson pouvait écrire en 1930, à propos de l'œuvre nouvelle, que lorsqu'elle apparaît elle inscrit d'elle-même sa possibilité rétrospectivement dans l'histoire. 'L'artiste', précise-t-il dans *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 'crée du possible en même temps que du réel. [...] Au fur et à mesure que la réalité se crée, imprévisible et neuve, son image se réfléchit derrière elle dans le passé indéfini ; elle se trouve avoir été, de tout temps, possible ; mais c'est à ce moment précis qu'elle commence à l'avoir toujours été' (Bergson 1991, 1110–1111).

L'œuvre crée la peur et la ré-assurance. L'une des dimensions de la catharsis est bien là : c'est en suscitant une terreur inutile

et une pitié sans force – puisque leurs objets n’ont jamais existé, n’existent plus, ou pas encore – que la littérature installe les conditions de l’expérience future. Sans doute est-ce pour cela qu’il est urgent, peut-être indispensable, en tout cas toujours nécessaire de se pencher sur ces mirages d’un avenir aboli que sont les peurs, les projets et les songes des formes littéraires. Elles disent quelque chose de ce qui, par l’effet seul de l’imagination, évite à l’impossible de devenir certain.

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# Knocking on Europe's door

## How narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia shape collective perceptions of immigration

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*We ought to reflect on courage to banish fear*  
(Baruch Spinoza)

### Europe's founding ideals

In March 2012 former Bonn correspondent for *The Observer* Neal Ascherson gave a lecture at the British Museum about Europe, its pasts and its possible future for the London Review of Books (Ascherton 2012). The topic was not uncharted scholarly territory, and yet besides the freshness of Ascherton's first hand observations deriving from spending many years in Germany,

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Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*.  
Tampere: Tampere University Press, 59–90.  
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which taught him: ‘not to sneer when young Germans said earnestly that they felt European, not German’ because ‘Europe to them meant neutrality, reconciliation, open frontiers,’ there was a lot more of interest to his lecture. It evoked the history of Amikejo, ‘a tiny sliver of land between Belgium and Germany which had been overlooked by the surveyors as they drew new European frontiers after the fall of Napoleon’ (Ascherton 2012)<sup>1</sup>. The significance of this story, first narrated in a Polish novel and then corroborated by the American historian Steven Press (2010), is for Ascherton that it represented an example of how ‘a tiny Europe could exist *sans frontières*, or at least without enforcing them.’ It was ‘a wormhole through time into our Europe of the Single Act and the Maastricht Treaty. No customs barriers, no closed frontiers, military conscription almost a memory, no national currency’ (Ascherton 2012). Another overlooked episode in Europe’s political history, Ascherton points out, regards the Resistance Spring between 1943–48. Resistance movements to totalitarian regimes put forward a vision of post-war Europe which was remarkably different from the technocratic model of statesmen like Jean Monnet and Robert Schumann, theirs was a federal Europe of the People of Europe. That vision, Asherton notes, ‘originated in a document drawn up on the Italian island of Ventotene by three men, Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, who had been interned on the island along with some 800 others opposed to Mussolini’s regime’ (Ascherton 2012). The Ventotene Manifesto, written on cigarette papers and concealed in the false bottom of a tin box, in order to be smuggled off the island had at its core the following ideal ‘A free and united Europe is the necessary premise to the strengthening of modern civilisation, that has been temporarily halted by the totalitarian era’ (Ventotene Manifesto 1941). Such an ideal went

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<sup>1</sup> For maps of Amikejo see (Jacobs), no publication date available.

on to influence the Manifesto of the European Resistance which read:

The Federal Union must be based upon a declaration of civil, political and economic rights which would guarantee democratic institutions and the free development of the human personality, and upon a declaration of the rights of minorities to have as much autonomy as is compatible with the integrity of the national States to which they belong (Draft Declaration of the European Resistance Movements 1944).

In the UK competing and contrasting visions of the European political project and of European 'ideals' and 'values' have long coexisted, from the Ventotene-inspired one of Winston Churchill who, in 1948 declared:

We hope to see a Europe where men of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land, and that without losing any of their love and loyalty of their birthplace. We hope wherever they go in this wide domain, to which we set no limits in the European Continent, they will truly feel Here I am at home. I am a citizen of this country too.

Before concluding: 'the aim and the design of a United Europe, whose moral conceptions will win the respect and gratitude of mankind and whose physical strength will be such that none will dare molest her tranquil sway,' (Churchill 1948) to Margaret Thatcher who, in an often quoted passage declared: 'Europe is not based on a common language, culture and values ... Europe is the result of plans. It is in fact, a classic utopian project, a monument to the vanity of intellectuals, a programme whose

inevitable destiny is failure; only the scale of the final damage done is in doubt' (Thatcher 2002, 359).

It is hard to miss the extraordinary topicality of the above contrasting perspectives, as they perfectly illustrate how the 'idea' of Europe and its founding 'values' has not only shifted over time – not exclusively in the UK – but also how such shifts underpin what I define as the *narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia* which are shaping European public opinion's perception (and EU policies) of immigration. It is exactly such shifts which explain the contradictions and apparent lack of unanimity with respect to what such values are in the view of Europeans themselves. In August 2015 German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for EU action on the migrant crisis, suggesting that 'If Europe fails on the question of refugees, if this close link with universal civil rights is broken, then it won't be the Europe we wished for' (*Oman Observer* 2015).<sup>2</sup> As recently as January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Guy Verhofstadt warned in a tweet that 'We should be wary of narratives based on the defence of so-called "national values", which are used to mask racist hate campaigns fuelling anxiety against migrants and refugees' followed by the #ValuesFirst.<sup>3</sup> More on such narratives later, in the meantime suffice to note that Germany has taken the lead, presenting itself as the *Weltmeister* in the refugee crisis, while also asking for pan-European solidarity (in the form of a redistribution of refugees across the Union), a value Germany inexplicably seemed not to endorse in the case

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth remembering that in 2013 the then UK Justice Secretary, Chris Grayling, and the Home Secretary Theresa May started lobbying for the UK to quit the European Convention of Human Rights, a decision that Ken Clark, former Justice Secretary, described as a 'political disaster', because it would unravel 'fundamental liberties established under Europe's post-second world war settlement' (Bowcott 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Guy Verhofstadt (@guyverhofstadt) is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group in the European Parliament and Brexit coordinator for the European Parliament.

of the Greek economic crisis (from late 2009 – ongoing). The country has since 2015 struggled to cope as the first destination of choice for the world's economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, to the point that plans of housing some of them in the Buchenwald barracks, a former Nazi concentration camp have been considered. History, as philosopher Emil Cioran once wrote, is 'irony on the move' (2010, 152).

While the watershed moment in public opinion caused by the powerful photograph of a dead Syrian child on a Mediterranean beach is welcome, it is unacceptable for EU policies in this area to follow the fickle, populist<sup>4</sup> moods of the national electorates. This is exactly what has happened with regard to the immigration debate, which not only has conflated crucial legal distinctions between a migrant, a refugee and an asylum seeker,<sup>5</sup> but also has predominantly reflected the views of the populist mob over those of the democratic crowd. As an example of the former I shall consider neoconservative political commentator Douglas Murray (2017) who in a video aptly, from his point of view, entitled "Europe belongs to Europeans"<sup>6</sup> links the current refugee crisis to the Jewish one during ww2 while attacking (Holocaust survivor) businessman George Soros for advocating a 'Europe without

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<sup>4</sup> An examination of populism is beyond the scope of this article, however it is relevant in this context to mention political economist Francis Fukuyama, who identifies three causes for the rise of populism: 1) globalization 2) weakening of decision making and 3) cultural anxiety. (Münchrath & Rezmer 2017.) Also it is alarming that 'populism is more widespread than previously assumed. ... and debates in tabloid media are not more populist than debates in elite media' (Rooduijn 2014). See also Rooduijn 2015.

<sup>5</sup> According to a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation prior to the Brexit referendum people 'talked about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers interchangeably', and 'felt that immigration created pressure on public services, in which they and their family were likely to lose out' (Walker 2016). See also Smith 2015.

<sup>6</sup> The comments to the video are representative of the intended audience and its distorted and ultimately ignorant view of European history.

borders’ which would, as a consequence, attract ‘mass migration from the third world’ (Murray 2017). The images used in the video are a roughly assembled remix of ww2 footage depicting Jewish refugees and rose-tinted, nostalgic views of Europe from the 1950s with white young women happily sipping wine on a sunny day, followed by iconic images of British national identity (Buckingham Palace), before pictures of Houellebecq’s novel *Submission* (to which I shall return later) and Muslims praying are introduced. The video concludes with a plea: not to give up the only home Europeans have due to ‘pangs of guilt’ they might feel for the continent’s colonial history and past behaviour towards the Jews. Burke’s famous quote ‘history is a pact between the dead, the living and the yet to be born’ is hijacked to remind Europeans of their duty towards future generation not to transform their societies (‘we don’t wish Stockholm to look like Mogadishu!’), while the very last images linger upon street riots, the collapse of the Twin Towers and an ISIS execution for maximum emotional impact.

This is not the place to analyse in depth the root causes of current international conflicts and what is only the latest chapter in humanity’s history of migration and refugees crisis.<sup>7</sup> It might be worth recalling though that political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in the article “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993) put forward a theory according to which:

the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating

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<sup>7</sup> The late Zygmunt Bauman observed that ‘History braids continuity with discontinuity; those two qualities are in an “and-and,” not an “either-or,” relation. Each chapter of history simultaneously preserves and innovates. The current refugee crisis is *not* – can’t be – an exception to this rule. ... “Being another chapter” does not mean that there is *nothing* different taking place’ (Bauman 2018, 1–3).

source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

## Dystopian narratives of fear

I don't fully share Huntington's theory<sup>8</sup>, however I do believe that literature provides us with the most useful insights into the cultural underpinnings of the complex political phenomena of our time. *The Camp of the Saints* (Raspail 1973) a French apocalyptic novel depicting a not too distant future when mass migration leads to the destruction of Western civilisation, eerily foreshadows current discussions about European (Christian) values, and their national variants – British values, French (Republican) values and so forth. *The Camp of the Saints* tells the story of a poor Indian demagogue, named 'the turd-eater' because he literally eats shit, and the deformed, psychic child who sits on his shoulders. They lead an 'armada' of 800,000 impoverished Indians, inhumanely described as 'wretched creatures', sailing to France. European politicians, bureaucrats and religious leaders, including a liberal pope from Latin America, debate whether to let the ships land and accept the Indians or to do the right

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<sup>8</sup> Criticisms of the clash of civilizations thesis, which I share, is best summed up as follows: 'The epistemological critique condemns the clash of civilizations thesis on grounds of its realist, orientalist and elitist outlook. The methodological critique attacks its monolithic, inconsistent and reductionist/essentialist attitude while the ethical critique denounces it for being a purposeful thesis that fuels enemy discourse and, in the process, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy' (Shahi 2017).

thing – in Raspail’s view – recognize the threat the migrants pose and kill them all. As a consequence of the Indian invasion all the non-white people of Earth, the book poses, will rise up and overthrow white Western society. In the end the French government gives the order to repel the armada by force, but it is too late because the army has no will to fight. What was feared happens, the Queen of England is coerced into marrying her son to a Pakistani woman; the mayor of New York is forced to house an African-American family at his official residence, while the defenders of white Christian supremacy all end up dead. As it has been rightly noted (Blumental & Rieger 2017), the book suggests that ‘The white Christian world is on the brink of destruction ... because these black and brown people are more fertile, while the West has lost that necessary belief in its own cultural and racial superiority.’ Ultimately, *The Camp of the Saints* – which draws its title from Revelation 20:9 – is nothing less than a call to arms for the white Christian West, to revive the spirit of the Crusades and steel itself for bloody conflict against the poor black and brown world without the traitors within’ (Blumental & Rieger 2017). As Raspail wrote in the Afterword to the 1982 edition of the novel: ‘Our hypersensitive and totally blind West ... has not yet understood that whites, in a world become too small for its inhabitants, are now a minority and that the proliferation of other races dooms our race, my race, irretrievably to extinction in the century to come, if we hold fast to our present moral principles.’ The end result for Raspail will be ‘the certain immolation of France ... on the altar of an aggravated utopian humanism’ and the deterioration of “‘Republican values” ... *ad infinitum*’ (Raspail 1982, 317).

In December 1994 *The Atlantic Monthly* dedicated its cover story to the novel. The piece is so relevant that it might have been written today. Here is its sobering conclusion:

One thing seems to us fairly certain. However the debate unfolds, it is, alas, likely that a large part of it – on issues of population, migration, rich versus poor, race against race – will have advanced little beyond the considerations and themes that are at the heart of one of the most disturbing novels of the late twentieth century ... (Connelly & Kennedy 1994).

It has been noted that a 'Camp of the Saints-type invasion' has become Stephen Bannon's – President Trump's former chief strategist – favourite metaphor to describe the largest refugee crisis in human history (Blumental & Rieger 2017). Bannon is not alone in adopting 'Camp of the Saints-type' *topoi*, right-wing commentators Pat Buchanan (2002) and Ann Coulter (2016) rehearse similar themes in their books. For Buchanan the USA is a conglomeration of peoples with almost nothing in common facing the dangers of: declining birth rates, uncontrolled immigration of peoples of different colours, creed and cultures and a rise of anti-Western culture antithetical to established religious, cultural and moral norms. Such works contribute to a narrative of fear that feeds on the anxiety of white America and exploits it for political gains.

Earlier I noted that Douglas Murray's video included a reference to Houellebecq's novel *Submission* (2015), in the context of the plea to Europeans to preserve Europe as their home. Perhaps more explicitly than in the case of *Camp of the Saints*, *Submission* which features the election of an Islamist to the French presidency, against the backdrop of a disintegration of Enlightenment values, is 'one of those exceptional instances when politics and art arrive simultaneously' (de Bellaigue 2015). In fact it was an extraordinary coincidence that on the same day of the *Charlie Hebdo* fatal shooting, Houellebecq's controversial novel was published and the author himself, represented as a



wizard predicting a near future of dental decay and Ramadan celebration, was on the cover of the satirical magazine.

*Submission*, which Houellebecq defined as ‘political fiction’ (in Bourmeau 2015) is set in 2022 when far right wing politician Marine Le Pen has just lost the presidential election to the fictional Islamist leader of a new Muslim party. France swiftly becomes an Islamic patriarchal society, women are forced to leave the work force and wear a veil; liberty is curtailed but, crucially, there is more security.

The novel is written from the perspective of a male literature professor whose progressive personal decadence (as a new convert to Islam he enthusiastically welcomes his right to better pay and polygamy) mirrors the decadence of his country (France) and of Western civilization. ‘As time went on,’ he reflects, ‘I subscribed more and more to Toynbee’s idea that civilizations die not by murder but by suicide’ (Houellebecq 2015, 213).

The ‘suicide’ of Western civilization is due, in the words of another new convert (who also extols the virtues of polygamy) ‘to the simpering seductions and the lewd enticements of the progressives, the Church had lost its ability to oppose moral decadence, to enounce homosexual marriage, abortion rights and women in the workplace ... Europe had reached a point of such putrid decomposition that it could no longer save itself ...’ (Houellebecq 2015, 230–31).

As it was the case for several of Houellebecq’s previous novels, *Submission* also stirred controversy, some described the feeling of having been ‘tarnished’ by his writing which transmits hate, xenophobia and fear (Gary 2014),<sup>9</sup> while others

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<sup>9</sup> In his open letter Gary (2014) pertinently asks: ‘Tu pouvais pas mettre ta plume au service d’une réconciliation, plus que d’une division?’ (‘Couldn’t you put your pen at the service of reconciliation rather than division?’ *translation mine*)

credited Houellebecq with having the same visionary quality of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley (Carrère 2015). In his study dedicated to Houellebecq's whole *œuvre* Louis Betty (2016) interprets *Submission* not as an Islamophobic novel, but rather as an 'apologetics for a modern, Westernized Islam' that can 'return humanity to a religiously grounded order' (17). For Betty Houellebecq's novels are 'morally compelling fables of the psychosocial horrors of materialism' that explore 'the individual and collective ... consequences of God's death' (46). Betty's interpretation seems to be confirmed by the author himself when, in an interview, he declared the end of the Enlightenment – 'the Enlightenment is dead, may it rest in peace' – and affirmed his Comtean view of the world, 'I don't believe that a society can survive without religion' (Bourmeau 2015). Later in the interview Houellebecq unconvincingly dismisses the hypothesis that *Submission* reflects Renaud Camus' theory of the 'Great Replacement'<sup>10</sup> – that is Muslim immigrants thanks to demographics are 'colonising' France, 'mutating' the country and its culture permanently – because his book is neither about race nor immigration.

Pressed by the interviewer as to whether the plot of *Submission* 'takes us into the politics of fear' Houellebecq concedes, 'Yes, the book has a scary side. I use scare tactics' (Bourmeau 2015). One of most scaring aspects in the novel, in

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<sup>10</sup> On Renaud Camus' 'The Great Replacement Theory' see <http://www.great-replacement.com/>. and the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMxhMtv1qvE> from July 2016 where he connects Donald Trump's views on immigration to his theory and to the fears of replacement.

Unsurprisingly, 'The Great Replacement Theory' is very popular with Alt-Right activists like Lauren Southern who discusses this 'serious subject' in the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTDmsmN43NA> and the torch bearers, neo-Nazi activists who marched on University of Virginia's grounds in Charlottesville, shouting, 'You will not replace us,' and 'Jew will not replace us' in August 2017.

my view, is how quickly the protagonist is ready to entertain a complete reconsideration of the values of Western morality, particularly with regard to equality between the sexes. *Submission* is an unashamedly misogynistic text, ‘Certainly a feminist is not likely to love this book. But I can’t do anything about that’ (Bourmeau 2015), Houellebecq acknowledges, before adding, ‘I show how feminism is demographically doomed. So the underlying idea, which may really upset people in the end, is that ideology doesn’t matter much compared to demographics’ (Bourmeau 2015). As it has been perceptively observed ‘Houellebecq’s plot seems totally unrealisable, and yet there is truth in his moral tableau’ (de Bellaigue 2015), this is exactly where, I would suggest, the topicality of the book lies, *Submission* is an admonitory tale, one that demonstrates how complacency and self-assurance can blind us to the loss of what we have come to view as permanently acquired (individual) rights.

## Brexit and the visual politics of fear

I would argue that the dystopian prefigurations considered above with their toxic mix of fear for the future and nostalgia for the past have found new vigour in the visual propaganda of the Brexit Leave campaign.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, post-referendum data has shown that: those who voted Leave had the least exposure to migrants, while those with the most exposure to them were most likely to vote Remain, hence ‘It was *fear* of immigration, not immigration itself, which led the Leave camp to victory – not

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<sup>11</sup> On the crucial role of images in political campaigns see Schmuck and Matthes (2017). I share the authors’ conclusions that ‘more media literacy programs which inform citizens about the process of stereotyping through political ads are required.’

the *reality* of migrants, but the *idea* of them' (Travis 2016). How could this possibly happen? Visual culture scholar Ray Drainville (2016) has provided an astute analysis of several key images used by the Leave campaign, starting with the 'profoundly deceptive' Breaking point billboard which showed a long queue of brown-skinned migrants on their way to Britain, with the caption 'We must ... take back control of our borders.'

The deceptiveness resided in the fact that the picture, taken by Glaswegian photographer Jeff Mitchell,<sup>12</sup> was of migrants moving across borders in Eastern Europe, not coming to the UK but, as Drainville (2016) notes, 'its intention was not to be journalistically accurate; it was meant to evoke fear, specifically of an uncontrollable mass of people' who happen to be brown-skinned. 'People moving into and across the European Union include those of many different ethnicities,' Drainville acknowledges, 'but the image here reduces the larger complexity, homogenizing the mass into a gigantic, monolithic Other.'<sup>13</sup> Also, as it was quickly noted, the billboard was strikingly similar to Nazi propaganda, where a long queue of Jewish refugees are described as 'parasites undermining their host countries' (Stewart & Mason 2016).

Drainville (2016) considers also another flyer available on the Leave campaign web site, in this case:

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<sup>12</sup> With regard to his photograph being used by the Leave campaign Mitchell commented: 'Photographers are there to record stories, as they happen and when they happen, in the best way we can. But what happens after that, how our images are used, can be out of our control, especially in the digital age – which is unfortunate, particularly in this case' (Beaumont-Thomas 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Sociologist S. Seidman has rightly argued that 'The concept of the Other must be analytically distinguished from that of 'difference' ... Otherness is fundamentally about cultural denigration and exclusion ... The Other inhabits an existential space between the human and non-human' (2013, 3–6).

There is virtually no difference in color between countries they claim are “set to join” the EU (such as Turkey) and one that has nothing to do with the EU (Iraq). Syria is also highlighted, albeit in a slightly different shade, but the suggestion that it may also be set to join is there (again, it’s not). What’s more, the graphic doesn’t simply imply that the populations of these countries will soon enter the EU. The figures of people concentrated in this area are all pointed, with a massive, gradient-hued arrow, toward the UK. The imagery is strongly reminiscent of one of the original forms of data visualization: battlefield maps. An arrow is just as much a part of the visual language of invasion as a photograph of a lengthy queue of people who look different from “us.” (Drainville 2016.)

In fact, we are aptly reminded, ‘invasion arrows were used in the introduction to the British World War II TV comedy *Dad’s Army*,<sup>14</sup> which was popular in the 1970s – among those aged 45 or over, the largest population to vote Leave’ (Drainville 2016).

Interestingly, Drainville expands upon the criticism received by the rhetoric used by the Leave campaign by recalling philosopher Jennifer Saul’s concept of the ‘figleaf’

which differs from the more familiar dog whistle: while the dog whistle targets specific listeners with coded messages that bypass the broader population, the figleaf adds a moderating element of decency to cover the worst of what’s on display, but nevertheless changes the boundaries of acceptability. The example Saul uses to illustrate the idea is Donald Trump’s infamous description of Mexican immigrants to the US “bringing

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<sup>14</sup> See the *Dad’s Army* Appreciation Society web site which features in its logo the arrow of the Nazi invader <http://www.dadsarmy.co.uk/>.

drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists" – and then he introduces his figleaf, the "get-out" clause: "And some, I assume, are good people."<sup>15</sup>

For Saul the linguistic drift of increasingly intolerant speech can lead to racist violence, 'as our standard of what is acceptable to say (or not say) shifts, which in turn opens up possibilities for how we may act' (Drainville 2016).

To prove the soundness of Saul's insight one only needs to consider that following the Brexit referendum there has been a spike in hate crimes across the UK (Dearden 2017).<sup>16</sup>



*Fig. 1 Hate Graffiti  
photo taken by Paul Roberts outside  
the Health Centre in Torquay, UK  
(reproduced with permission)*

The intolerant rhetoric of the referendum campaign is not an unexpected occurrence, rather the latest rehearsal of traditional racist *topoi* about the threat posed by the (brown) Other, or simply by any Other. Over several decades the British popular press has provided incessant negative coverage of EU-related

<sup>15</sup> With regard to the 'Dog Whistle' concept see (Haney López 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Since the Referendum hate crimes have been collected on social media under the hashtag #PostRefRacism, See also the Twitter handle @PostRefRacism for resources on reporting an incident.

matters and exploited every xenophobic immigration cliché, thus perpetuating old fallacies while stirring new fears. Researchers found negative coverage of the EU increased from 24 per cent to 45 per cent between 1974 and 2013, at the ‘expense of positive and neutral coverage’ (Copeland & Copsey 2017). So it is hardly surprising that, according to an Ipsos Mori study “What Worries the World” (Anonymous 2016) Britain was the country most concerned about immigration than any other polled. The reason for such fear resides, for Barbara Gibson, in the fact that ‘even though there are differences between the BBC and the *Express*, during the EU referendum campaign they all have driven a narrative of conflict, which inflates fear and creates the feeling of “us against them.”’ (In Anonymous 2016.)<sup>17</sup> The root cause of such behaviour for Gibson is that ‘the UK, its government and media are “interculturally incompetent”’, which means that they view British culture as ethnocentrically superior. Thus, immigrants have become synonymous with ‘crisis’, they abuse the social benefit system, ‘grab’ the natives’ jobs and ultimately, similarly to the armada in *Camp de Saints*, they are described as an unstoppable ‘flood’ unless appropriate measures are taken. This was the scope of the ‘Return’ pilot scheme of 2013 which involved two advertising vans with the slogan ‘In the UK illegally? Go home or face arrest’ and a phone number for people enquiring about repatriation to call.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See also Groh and Vishwanath (2016).

<sup>18</sup> I first discussed the ‘Go home’ vans in a blog post (Notaro 2013). This article is the culmination of reflections on fear, security and immigration initiated then.

## The securitization narrative

I believe that there is a common thread of intolerance which links the 2013 'Go home' vans to the xenophobic billboards of the Leave campaign, only the former ones made use of a 'fig leaf', to echo Saul's concept, represented by the legal versus illegal immigrants distinction, (not all immigrants are bad, only the illegal ones, the legal ones are tolerated) – such a distinction might be missed by the general public. Also, as it has been noted: 'The vans employed a close-up image of a border guard's uniform and handcuffs, the juxtaposition of this imagery aligning the Home Office publicity with a securitisation narrative seen to be played out in "the fortification of state borders [and] more aggressive forms of border surveillance and policing"' (Jones 2017, 5).

As Didier Bigo (2002) has persuasively argued:

Migration is increasingly interpreted as a security problem ... the popularity of the security prism is not an expression of traditional responses to a rise of insecurity, crime, terrorism ... it is the result of the creation of a continuum of threats and general unease in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs ... the professionals in charge of management of risk and fear ... transfer the legitimacy they gain from struggles against terrorists, criminals ... towards other targets, most notably ... people crossing borders, or people born in the country but with foreign parents. This expansion of what security is taken to include ... results in a convergence between the meaning of international and internal security ... particularly important in relation to the issue of migration, and ... who gets to be defined as an immigrant (63–92).



Security framing adds another crucial element to the narrative of fear drawn up in this article, in fact as political analyst Jeff Huysmans acutely observes, if one frames refugees as a humanitarian question one allows for compassion, whereas framing the same issue as a security question ‘sustains fear of refugees and policies of territorial administrative exclusion’ (2006, xii). Moreover, understanding practices of securisation in Europe in relation to migration is a welcome development in security studies particularly if such a framework includes a consideration of language as playing ‘a central role in the modulation of security domains’ (8).<sup>19</sup> For Huysmans the politics of fear plays an important role in structuring insecurity. Securisation is a political and administrative rendering of a domain of policy and politics in which fear of outsiders ‘is both a political currency and an organization principle ... it manages detrimental political effects by focusing on dangerous outsiders ... it buys political and professional legitimacy’ (52).

This is because ‘Fear is not simply an emotion that security framing instigates in social relations’ Huysmans posits, ‘It is ... an organizing principle that renders social relations as fearful. An important characteristic of this principle is that it arranges social relations by objectifying an epistemological fear of the unknown through the identification of existential dangers’ (54).

Therefore, Huysmans concludes ‘the politics of insecurity is always also a politics of knowledge that is not simply about what is dangerous but also about sustaining the epistemological certainty that what is identified as dangerous is indeed dangerous’ (54). Links between security politics and identity politics are also established in Huysmans’ work, in particular on the issues of European and/or Western values and their

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<sup>19</sup> This is an important point which chimes with this article’s interest in the role of language, both in its visual and textual expression.

contradictions discussed at the start of this article. Huysmans notes how 'articulating an Islamic threat, for example, facilitates nurturing an idea of unity without having to make its concept explicit (52).<sup>20</sup>

## The nostalgia narrative

The reference to 'nurturing an idea of unity' is a suitable conduit to the final piece of the narrative puzzle under construction here, that is the role that nostalgia plays in 'nurturing' false truths about the past, while fuelling contemporary political agendas.

Svetlana Boym (2007) distinguishes between two types of nostalgia: 'Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition' whereas 'Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt' (13). Boym highlights an inherent paradox in modern nostalgia, in that,

the universality of its longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, and yet the moment we try to repair that longing with a particular belonging – or the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity and especially of a national community and unique and pure homeland – we often part ways with others and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia* (or longing) is what we share, yet *nostos* (or the return home) is what divides us (9).

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<sup>20</sup> Huysmans' reflections are reminiscent of Foucault's conceptualization of the *monster*, the one whose very presence violates the laws of society and threatens the accepted 'order of things' (Foucault 2005).

As observed elsewhere (Notaro 2018), the above passage is not only persuasive, but exemplary in its understanding of contemporary intolerance towards migrants and related, misguided intentions to build walls, ‘unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters,’ (10) Boym writes echoing Goya’s motto for his famous etching “The Sleep of reason produces monsters” of 1799. For Boym it is apropos that the ‘global epidemic of nostalgia’ has appeared when we are at most fascinated with cyberspace and the virtual global village. In fact ‘there is a yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world.’ In this sense, nostalgia works as ‘a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals (10). The historical upheaval most relevant to our discussion regards what I earlier described as the latest chapter in humanity’s history of migration and refugees crisis. On this issue Zygmunt Bauman (2018) pertinently remarked that it was Umberto Eco who asked the crucial question: ‘Is it possible to distinguish immigration from migration when the entire planet is becoming the territory of intersecting movements of people?’ Eco’s reply: ‘What Europe is still trying to tackle as immigration is instead migration. The Third World is knocking at our doors, and it will come in even if we are not in agreement ... Europe will become a multiracial continent – or “colored” one ... That’s how it will be, whether you like it or not’. Bauman then recalls Ulrich Beck’s observation that ‘we have been, collectively, cast in a cosmopolite situation (in the sense of becoming irretrievably dependent on each other and bound to exercise reciprocal influence) but we haven’t yet started in earnest to develop ... a matching cosmopolitan awareness’ (Bauman 2018).

To expand upon Beck’s insightful comments, I would suggest that just like we have still to develop legal, ethical and cognitive frameworks to deal at best with contemporary (and forthcoming)

technological advancements, we also urgently require a new *global understanding* of social phenomena like migration (in Eco's definition of the term). The globalization of economic markets has not been tantamount to the cosmopolitanism of the marketeers' minds. Only intercultural competence, to use Barbara Gibson's definition, can sustain such 'heroic migration narrative' and save us from the pitfalls of 'restorative nostalgia', the kind of which is behind the description of plans for Britain's post-Brexit trading relationship with the Commonwealth as 'Empire 2.0,' or a minister's preposterous claim, in a tweet, that 'The United Kingdom, is one of the few countries in the European Union that does not need to bury its 20<sup>th</sup> century history' (Andrews 2017). It is restorative nostalgia that underpins the obsession with 'decline' or decadence which in countries like France has become a booming industry (Donadio 2017).<sup>21</sup> The power of (restorative) nostalgia as a historical emotion cannot be underestimated, hence it becomes even more pressing to debunk the myths on which it is based and construct alternative narratives, this is exactly the task of scholars, novelists and artists alike. I find political scientists Christina Boswell and James Hampshire's suggestions particularly useful when they argue that false beliefs about immigrants

will not be shifted by bombarding voters with data, since people rarely change their minds when presented with contrary evidence. *Paradoxically, therefore, a more rational debate about immigration cannot be purely rationalistic.* Instead, politicians who want to challenge ignorance and prejudice need to construct narratives about immigration and its place in our society which

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<sup>21</sup> Although not mentioned in Donadio (2017), one could include Houellebecq's *Submission* among the spate of books describing a narrative of French decadence. It is also worth noting that the word 'déclinisme,' or 'declinism,' entered France's Larousse dictionary in 2016.

draw on existing public philosophies of openness and inclusion. These public philosophies do exist and they have been mobilized in the recent past. They can and should be resuscitated (*emphasis mine*) (2017).<sup>22</sup>

In line with the need for new migration counter-narratives is Shada Islam's exhortation to all countries across the globe 'to develop a new, more heroic migration narrative in which diversity is lauded and living together is not only viewed as necessary, but also embraced' (2017).

## Debunking myths

A myth in urgent need of being debunked is the one according to which 'large swaths of displaced populations – from Syrians to Nigerians and Afghans to Eritreans – are picking Europe as their destination of choice. As international security expert Vicki Squire (2017) points out, 'research ... indicates that this assumption is a myth. While some people do of course leave their homes in order to reach Europe, many do not. This myth needs to be rejected so that the wider public debate on migration can move beyond a politics of fear'.

Fear finds its best expression in dystopian narratives, *à la Camp de Saints* where past mythologies about national identity are mourned and 'decline' inspired ones *à la Submission* and yet, as novelist Moshin Hamid notes, 'One thing that art and literature can do is imagine futures for us'. Unfortunately what we are seeing at the moment, he continues, is 'a failure of imagination.

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<sup>22</sup> Ford (2018) has noted that 'the data suggest the electorate is more receptive to a positive case for migration than it has been for many years – yet these polling findings are not widely known and discussed'.

No-one is articulating plausible desirable futures for us as human beings. What we are hearing articulated is dystopias – that life will be terrible in the future – or vehemently nostalgic, divisive, chauvinistic visions’ (in Green 2017). Hamid has contributed himself to an alternative narrative about migration with his latest novel *Exit West* (2017) which reflects his firm belief that ‘inevitably humanity is going to come to a place where the notion that people can move and choose where they live will be thought of as a right that is as fundamental as the right to speak as we want or worship as we want’ (in Green 2017).

Some artists have taken to task the EU migration policies with regard to the right to freedom of movement for everyone, in fact they have argued that, by ignoring article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which reads: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state,’ a ‘necropolitics of leaving some [migrants] to drown, others to be turned back’ has come about.<sup>23</sup> This is an interesting point which connects to the initial discussion about Europe’s founding ideals and values, and shows how the EU legal framework (the European Convention of Human Rights 1953), might not be perfectly aligned with universal ideals of human rights.<sup>24</sup>

However, art itself is not immune from inconsistencies when tackling as sensitive a topic as migration, this is what emerges from Maya Ramsay’s “Reframing the debate: The art of Lampedusa” (2016) which considers the art that has been produced in relation to the subject of migrant deaths at sea, with a focus on artworks that refer to the island of Lampedusa. Critics

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<sup>23</sup> This is the concern underpinning many of the artistic works produced in the context of the AHRC financed programme “Responding to Crisis: Forced Migration and the Humanities in the Twenty-First Century” (Chambers 2017).

<sup>24</sup> I don’t intend to labour the legal issue, however it is worth referring the reader to Ahmed and de Jesús Butler (2006).

and audiences alike have been divided as to whether some of the work produced has turned into a tourist attraction, not to mention the ethical issues tied up with making art from objects that belonged to dead migrants, or simply the work has been deemed not ‘aggressive enough’ in light of the scale of the migration tragedy. Even renowned artist and political provocateur Ai Weiwei has not been immune from criticism when he posed as drowned toddler Aylan Kurdi to raise awareness of the plight of Syrian refugees.<sup>25</sup> I don’t fully share some critics’ ‘wider critique on the ability of contemporary art to deal with such sensitive subjects’ (Dabashi quoted in Ramsay 2016), in fact in spite of the occasional sensationalism there are plenty of artistic examples which address the migration tragedy with the universal *pathos* that it deserves. This is the case of Maya Ramsay’s own *Countless project* (2016–18), which includes a series of graphite rubbings made from the graves of unnamed migrants who died whilst trying to reach Europe by boat,<sup>26</sup> and Mimmo Paladino’s *Porta d’Europa* (*Door to Europe*). In Ramsay’s own description of the piece:

Installed in 2008 ... this open portal symbolizes both a warm welcome towards migrants and a modern day ‘Door of No Return’. With its enticing golden surface *Porta d’Europa* combines both beauty and horror. At the top of the gateway are a series of jumbled numbers,

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<sup>25</sup> In a video for the UN Refugee Agency, Ai Weiwei stated: ‘Refugee issue is not a local or regional issue. It’s a human rights issue, it’s about fundamental values which touch everybody’ (Cafolla 2016).

<sup>26</sup> The *Countless project* can be viewed at <https://www.mayaramsay.co.uk/work.php?s=countless-graves>. Also commendable was the European Commission-funded research project on “Museums in an Age of Migrations” (2011–15) reflecting EU concerns about migration as a critical issue for Europe, <http://www.mela-project.polimi.it/>. One of the contributors, Christopher Whitehead (2018), writes in particular about the implications of using lifejackets as exhibits to think through immigration in museums.

'98357345'–, referring to the unknown numbers of migrant deaths. Heads, hands, shoes and broken bowls project from the sculpture, like archaeological finds unearthed from the seabed ... *Porta d'Europa* functions as a memorial on the island, a place for people to gather and to reflect on the subject – as the doors to Europe close ever tighter (Ramsay 2016).

Emanuele Crialesi's *Terraferma* (2011) is another successful example. Set in the beautiful island of Lampedusa the film tells the story of a poor family of fishermen who defy the law of the state, according to which only the local police patrol can rescue illegal immigrants at sea, and follow the traditional 'Law of the Sea' thus becoming unwitting criminals. The moral dilemma that the Lampedusa fishermen, (and Europe), face is reminiscent of the one rehearsed in the classic tragedy *Antigone* by Sophocles. According to the Law of the state Antigone's brother, viewed as a traitor, could not be buried and yet in a scene that has lost none of its poignancy, under a bright mid-day sun Antigone wildly flings handfuls of dirt on the rotting corpse of her slain brother declaring that 'great unwritten, unshakable traditions' take precedence over the laws of the state. In *Antigone* Sophocles asks which law is greater, the gods' or man's; in devising our migration laws, the film seems to suggest, we should make sure that the moral imperative of one does not come into conflict with the algid, in-humane character of the other.

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated how narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia contribute to construct a distorted image of immigration which exploits comprehensible anxieties with regard to European and national identities in order to achieve specific political aims (as in the case of the Brexit Leave campaign). The article has also crucially hinted at broader debates concerning the distinction between immigration and



migration (as identified by Umberto Eco) and illustrated some examples of *counter-narratives* in the form of scholarly and artistic interventions which have the potential to debunk myths and challenge prejudice.

Spinoza's words which served as an epigraph to this piece remind us that 'we ought to reflect on courage to banish fear', however courage alone might not be sufficient what the messy boundaries of Europe require are a sense of common purpose and a renewed 'cosmopolitan awareness' (Beck 2006) based on dialogue and imagination. Europe must re-articulate its Ventotene-inspired founding values of respect for political and civil rights within a legal framework that speaks the universal idiom of human empathy, so that no human being knocking on its door could ever be declared illegal.

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# Pro loco et tempore

## La littérature portugaise à l'épicentre de la crise économique

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Au Printemps 2011, les portugais ont marché tout au long de Avenida da Liberdade (Avenue de la Liberté), à Lisbonne en protestation contre l'inquiétude qui gagnait du terrain dans le pays, à la suite de la chute du Lehman Brothers. La manifestation n'avait, en arrière-plan, ni des partis politiques ni des syndicats ; la société s'organisait, à ce moment-là, pour contester le chômage surtout parmi les jeunes et leur conséquente émigration massive, principalement vers l'Angleterre ; on parlait – et ceci est devenu un cliché productif – de la génération la plus qualifiée du Portugal' : des infirmiers, des médecins, des chercheurs en sciences exactes et en sciences humaines ; dans l'un des plusieurs panneaux, une jeune femme avait écrit qu'elle voulait rester au Portugal, tomber



enceinte, avoir sa famille, un slogan qui, en portugais, avait un effet de rime : « Eu não quero emigrar, eu quero engravidar. »

Surtout parmi les classes sociales urbaines et plus informées, on pourrait déjà reconnaître une prise de conscience des grandes transformations qui troublaient l'esprit triomphale de la fin du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle ; à cette époque-là, le chômage était résiduel, le crédit bancaire finançait l'achat de maisons, de voitures, de voyages exotiques, de petits-riens ; la consommation absorbait les pensées et les actions. On peut dire que la Grande Exposition Mondiale de 98 (Expo 98) a été l'acmé de cette façon de vivre, compte tenu du fait que sa réalisation a transformé la décadente zone orientale de Lisbonne en un quartier de luxe et nous a fait envisager sans inquiétudes idéologiques l'esprit collectif de fierté nationale.

Douze ans après – en 2010 – le chômage avait atteint 10.9 % de la population et les jeunes – mais pas seulement – percevaient le départ pour l'étranger non comme une solution, mais particulièrement comme une conséquence de la crise économique qui a vu le jour en 2008 et qui s'est, progressivement, enracinée au Portugal ; au mois de Mars 2010, le premier ministre, José Sócrates, présenta le PEC 1 – c'est-à-dire, Programme de Stabilité et Croissance (économique). Le départ des jeunes était une réponse aux événements du présent au Portugal et non pas une démarche obéissant à un plan pour l'avenir. Le futur se dissipait entre le manque d'emploi, l'appauvrissement et la fin du pacte fiduciaire qui, pendant quelques années, avait rapproché l'État et les citoyens. Dans le texte-manifeste du petit groupe organisateur (Geração à Rasca) de la manif historique de 2011 (diffusée sur Internet), on parlait de trahison du présent, d'insulte du passé et de confiscation de l'avenir. Les milliers de personnes qui, partout au Portugal, sont sorties de leurs maisons protestaient contre une vague de circonstances résumées dans ces trois acerbes métaphores.

## La littérature portugaise contemporaine et la crise

Il n'est pas possible d'imaginer l'art et, en particulier, la littérature de cette décennie éloignée de la fissure humaine et historique provoquée par la crise. Il ne s'agit pas d'un procès affolant comme une guerre ou des cataclysmes naturels qui ont des conséquences massives, mais de l'effondrement de notre capacité pour prendre des décisions confortables sur notre vie, une façon de sentir tragique et inductrice de réactions dissidentes. Le lieu commun selon lequel la littérature n'a plus un rôle dans les constructions politiques – c'est-à-dire, il n'y a plus de littérature d'intervention – a été conçu, peut-être, ayant comme modèle les démarches artistiques qui envisageaient les projets sociaux selon un dessin idéologique très défini – c'est le cas du socialisme. La dégradation des idéologies et des formes utopiques enracinées dans le processus historique, la réification d'un monde global et, surtout, le combat politique en dehors d'une construction projective et tout à fait compréhensible (pensons, par exemple à l'activité des Anonymous) peuvent faire croire que la littérature de résistance a perdu sa voix dans le monde contemporain. On ne peut pas oublier, quand-même, que l'engagement est, avant tout, un enregistrement de la réalité, un tableau des forces supra-individuelles qui conduisent la vie, des réseaux du pouvoir, des déséquilibres. Paulo de Medeiros, dans un article publié en 2013, nous présente cette déclaration : « it has always been one of the roles of literary representation and of the poetic voice to speak to power, that is, to denounce the abuses of power that constantly threaten to engulf human societies » (82).

Il faut aussi tenir compte que l'activisme politique dans la littérature n'est pas éloigné des transformations qui se produisent dans les processus esthétiques. De même, il n'est pas

raisonnable de comprendre les textes littéraires du *xxi*<sup>e</sup> siècle ayant un propos interventionniste par la reprise des tableaux interprétatifs du siècle précédent ; le réalisme social, qui, au Portugal, a pris le nom de « néoréalisme » (contemporain du mouvement cinématographique du même nom en Italie), a vu sa fin vers les années 60, non à cause de la cessation des problèmes sociaux, mais parce que les écrivains cherchaient alors un autre langage et prétendaient affirmer leur vitalisme générationnel. Dans la transition entre les deux siècles, il n'était pas difficile d'identifier la prédominance de traces postmodernistes tantôt chez des auteurs reconnus, tel que José Saramago, ou António Lobo Antunes, tantôt chez des auteurs nés dans les années 70 qui cherchaient à gagner leur place, tel que Afonso Cruz (1971), Valério Romão (1974) et Gonçalo M. Tavares (1970). L'hybridation génologique, le néo-fantastique, le manque de territoire explicite, l'indéfinition temporelle et la sécheresse stylistique sont partout, comme des signes de leur temps artistique.

Aujourd'hui, à la seconde décennie du *xxi*<sup>e</sup> siècle, il faut se poser des questions. Le corpus de cet essai est totalement rempli par des textes publiés après 2011 et leurs auteurs n'avaient encore pas atteint la quarantaine, à l'exception de Luís Filipe de Castro Mendes. Sont-ils différents de ceux de leurs prédécesseurs immédiats? Est-il acceptable de faire des distinctions quand l'intervalle temporel est presque exigü?

Dans la critique portugaise, on ne trouve pas encore de réponses pour ces interrogations. À vrai dire, la réception de l'art de la crise économique est bien plus développée dans le cinéma que dans la littérature ; les auteurs, non plus, n'appartiennent pas encore au premier cercle de l'univers littéraire portugais. Je crois, quand-même, que le trauma de la crise économique et de ses effets démentiels a provoqué un décalage thématique, aussi bien qu'idéologique, en présentant la mimesis pour la rapprocher

beaucoup des problèmes en cours, d'un lieu – un État – et d'un temps. Dans un très intéressant article, Peter Boxall (2012) nous explique comment dans le roman anglophone s'est mis en page, après le 9/11/2001, le mouvement de rupture vis-à-vis les orthodoxies du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle. *Mutatis mutandis*, la crise a été notre surface pour déplacer les tendances artistiques vers le nouveau millenium, notamment par une transmutation de thèmes et d'idéologie.

Quelle idéologie ? Celle de l'action contre les corporations globales, la dictature du profit, les forces économiques non humanistes, la disparition du sujet. L'amplification et la transformation du subjectif est, me semble-t-il, l'étape finale souhaitée par les auteurs que nous verrons dans les pages suivantes, et qui envisagent la transformation des émotions pénibles, comme celle de l'insécurité. Où se trouve le travail, le bonheur, ou l'onirisme un peu magique de faire des projets ? Les œuvres analysés dans ce texte extériorisent des mots et des sentiments qui peuvent nous approcher d'un autre tableau mental. Je cite Nykänen et Samola : « Even though reading fiction does not necessarily make us more moral or empathic human beings as some scholars have suggested [...], fiction reading can offer possibilities to practice our empathic and emotional sensibilities through mental projection » (2020).

## Nous et notre circonstance : Quoi faire ?

La pièce de théâtre de Rui Pina Coelho *Combien d'années se sont déjà passées, a-t-il demandé* (*Já passaram quantos anos, perguntou ele*, 2013) est à l'avant-garde de la production littéraire/artistique qui dessine les pas de la crise au Portugal. L'action principale se passe dans un temps parfois imprécis, parfois identifié – 2011 y

prédomine ; il faut souligner que la pièce a débuté justement au mois de Novembre 2011. Sur scène, quatre adultes encore jeunes – deux hommes et deux femmes – déploient devant le public un quotidien où l'échange de paroles se substitue à l'action, plus exactement au travail, qu'ils n'ont pas. La situation de chacun des personnages – Cláudio est un stagiaire, Alice prépare une thèse de doctorat et dépend d'une bourse de recherche, Jaime est au chômage, Helena est actrice – nous permet de dévoiler un premier et général apport de la crise, à savoir, la fin d'une vie organisée en fonction de trois étapes que l'État sociale nous a garanti : acquisition de savoir, apprentissage et travail. La transformation économique et sociale a provoqué, avant tout, un changement générationnel qui consiste dans le clivage entre la vie des *baby-boomers* et les attentes manquées de ceux qui sont nés vers 1980.

C'est justement de cette génération que Rui Pina Coelho nous parle dans la pièce. Les spectateurs et lecteurs qui connaissent la jeunesse portugaise, son histoire récente, peuvent même y trouver des références à une démarche de protestation, historique, qui commence, selon Seixas (2005), en 1994, avec un mouvement contre les épreuves obligatoires pour accès aux Études Supérieures, qui se développe à la fin du siècle et aboutit à la manifestation de 2011. Dans un épisode qui se passe le 24 Avril 1999 (donc, la veille de l'anniversaire de la révolution démocratique), Jaime et Cláudio écrivent sur des panneaux un pot-pourri de phrases-slogans que notre mémoire collective reconnaît ; par exemple : « Não pagamos ! Não pagamos! » ; « ou bien « Propinas não! », que je traduis au pied de la lettre : « Nous ne payons pas! Nous ne payons pas ! » ; et « Non aux frais d'inscription ! ». La traduction de la première phrase, malheureusement, annule les effets rythmiques originaux et, surtout, la mélodie du quatrain au long duquel elle se répétait.

Les phrases antérieures sont écrites avec un enthousiasme qui, pour un moment, soulage les problèmes qui prennent place dans l'œuvre. Quand même, petit à petit et jusqu'au bout de la scène, Jaime et Cláudio s'interrogent sur les bénéfices de leur activisme, ils comprennent peut-être que le revivalisme n'ajoute rien au présent – « Trouves-tu que ceci sert à quelque chose ? »<sup>1</sup> (63) – et retournent à leur passivité. On trouve ici un double renoncement : à la parole et à l'expression sociale de la dissidence.

À ce moment-là, l'œuvre semble plonger dans les *topoi* contemporains de la fin des idéologies et de l'incapacité pour édifier des doctrines et formes d'action envisageant la justice sociale. Les personnages semblent accomplir deux ou trois pauvres rôles que le déclin économique, aussi bien que le mépris des droits humains, ont forgés: la plainte, les efforts un peu agoniques pour avoir un emploi, la perte de l'identité, impressionnant chez Cláudio à cause des humiliations qu'il subit en tant que stagiaire.

C'est pourquoi le premier acte de la pièce est tellement frappant. Les personnages habitent tous dans un petit appartement (Hélène n'est pas permanente) ; au début, Jaime, Cláudio et Alice parlent, parfois entre eux, parfois s'adressant plutôt au public, comme s'il agissait d'un soliloque. Le mélange entre les différents modes communicatifs souligne l'individualité des cas, c'est-à-dire, le drame qui résulte d'une projection des effets de la crise sur la personne; ce mélange permet, aussi, la participation du public et, à l'époque ou la pièce fut mise-en-scène, une identification qui résultait de l'expérience, car chacun des spectateurs connaissait quelqu'un comme Jaime, Alice, etc.

Au premier acte, Jaime rapporte un entretien d'embauche, en reproduisant les questions et les réponses. Ce qui pourrait être

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<sup>1</sup> La traduction des textes portugais est personnelle, révisée par une traductrice bilingue.

simplement une parodie ayant comme cible les questionnaires typiques des ressources humains nous révèle l'inhumanité du pouvoir économique et la fin des expériences plurales et de l'imagination qui s'ensuit. Les questionnaires, dont j'ai fait mention, se répètent dans l'œuvre, tel que les idées apocalyptiques de Cláudio, qui nous annonce la fin du monde évoquant : des faits incertains pris sur Internet (mort massive d'animaux) ; des prophéties bibliques ; la multi-médiatique prophétie maya selon laquelle le monde prendrait fin le 21 Décembre 2012.

Face à ceci, nous serions portés à croire que ce texte est le porte-parole d'idées sur la victoire d'une nouvelle soumission au destin: l'argent, le profit des corporations, l'oubli des droits humains, l'inaction, l'effondrement des communautés réelles sont ce destin que les faits renouent. Cependant, dans le dernier acte, après une très belle litanie dont le thème est « Mon monde est fini » (98), Jaime et Alice sont pris par un élan qui envisage l'effort contre la débâcle ; Jaime parle « d'une certaine virilité de la pensée et de l'esprit » (100) en expliquant qu'il s'agit d'une « certaine force de la pensée qui puisse se transformer en actions » (100). Il est très important de noter que le langage qui transmet le désir d'intervention n'a rien à voir avec les mots technocratiques des entretiens ; l'épilogue dispense les mots et les répétitions ; les dernières paroles font usage de métaphores, pour montrer, peut-être, la valeur de l'imagination. Pour respecter l'apparat scénique, il faut qu'il y ait un écran où se projette ce titre des R.E.M. : « It's the end of the world as we know it ». La projection doit inclure aussi la phrase complète, traduite en portugais : « É o fim do mundo tal como o conhecemos, e eu sinto-me bastante bem ! ». Donc, « It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel [quite] fine ».

Les personnages de *Combien d'années se sont déjà passées, a-t-il demandé* ont des nuances qui empêchent leur typification.

Toutefois, on les reconnaît comme les représentants d'un groupe ou plutôt d'une génération encadrée dans un contexte historique qui lui a refusé une vie en plénitude. Les événements que la pièce représente sont tellement récents qu'il est difficile d'en parler sans mélanger l'art et les circonstances empiriques (pour nous tous, surtout les portugais). Le regard critique ne peut pas être ici indépendant des préoccupations sociologiques et Jaime, Alice, Cláudio, Helena ... sont nos fils, nos amis, nos cousins.

Aujourd'hui, le dénouement de la pièce – la prise de conscience que l'action transformatrice est possible – nous fait penser au jeu des possibles duquel la vie dépend. Que s'est-il vraiment passé entre 2011 et 2020? Cette « génération offensée » (selon les mots de l'auteur de la préface du livre, Maria Helena Serôdio) n'a peut-être pas enlacé l'enthousiasme révolutionnaire; cependant, la pièce constitue artistiquement une réponse, la construction intellectuelle d'une variation pour un *modus vivendi* qui dépend d'une autre architecture morale. J'accompagne des déclarations de José Jiménez (1997), selon lequel l'art a la capacité d'ériger « des univers de valeurs alternatifs à ceux qui dominent socialement » (95).

Et s'il s'agissait non pas seulement d'une génération (l'épithète qui la qualifie, au Portugal, est très difficile à traduire), mais d'un pays, y compris ses systèmes de classes, son organisation politique, son histoire, langages, symboles, préjugés, territoires, son insertion institutionnelle ? En fait, tout ceci s'agglutine dans le roman de Pedro Sena-Lino *Dépays : Comment suicider un pays*, publié en 2013, donc, à l'épicentre de la crise économique. Le chômage total atteint 16.2%, 38.1% parmi les jeunes (moins de 25 ans), et le taux de fécondité était aux 7.9 %, le plus bas niveau dès 2000<sup>2</sup>. En 2012, le 15 Septembre, une énorme manifestation a occupé les rues de

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<sup>2</sup> La source de ces informations est l'important site web PORDATA – Base de Dados do Portugal Contemporâneo : <https://www.pordata.pt/Home>



plusieurs villes portugaises, contre la *troika* (conciliation du FMI, Union Européenne, Banque Centrale Européenne) et les projets fiscaux du gouvernement. Organisée dans les networks, elle a eu comme points de départ, génériquement, les circonstances socio-économiques et, particulièrement, la nécessité de « faire quelque chose d'extraordinaire », selon une déclaration proclamée dans le blog du mouvement. On peut y lire aussi : « Ce silence nous tue. ... Il faut faire quelque chose contre la soumission et la résignation, contre le platement des idées, contre la mort de la volonté collective<sup>3</sup> ».

*Dépays : Comment suicider un pays* est un roman à plusieurs voix. Entre elles, nous trouvons Bartolomeu Henriques, un journaliste, l'historien, dont le nom est inconnu, Mark, un photographe et journaliste américain, et Sebastião Afonso, le premier ministre ; d'autres personnages circulent devant nous, ayant des rôles secondaires, mais dépliant l'ensemble d'une population abimée par la destruction de sa vie et des possibilités d'ancrage. Le tourbillon financier, le chômage, les maisons hypothéquées et perdues, la chute de l'État social, le déséquilibre moral, les élites corrompues – ce tout interrompt un pays où la crise prend la face d'un décès. L'atmosphère tragique impliquée dans l'œuvre est le résultat d'une amplification des faits connus et d'une construction dystopique dont l'action prend place à l'année 2023. Le processus de destruction du pays est irréversible ; sa dissolution formelle est proposée par un groupe de l'extrême droite qui veut un référendum ; le gouvernement vend des morceaux du pays à des entreprises étrangères.

Ce texte part de la constatation selon laquelle l'idée d'état et son programme d'organisation sociale ont échoués. Après le chapitre 0, une prolepse qui devance le quasi-dénouement de l'œuvre et où

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. le site web *Que se lixe a troika* : <http://queselixeatroika15setembro.blogspot.pt/>

il est dit que le dernier km<sup>2</sup> du pays a été vendu à une entreprise asiatique, le chapitre 1 accueille plusieurs déclarations d'une multitude de personnages que le lecteur ne connaît pas encore – comme nous n'avons pas un narrateur externe pour arbitrer une histoire brisée en fragments, on dépend de la progression du texte pour comprendre l'action. Parmi ces déclarations, trois – du gestionnaire, de Manuel Sancho, leader du referendum, et de l'historien – semblent commencer le récit de l'histoire du pays, mais on vérifie qu'il s'agit plutôt d'un concert à trois voix pour signaler la dissimilitude de points de vue, organique dans le texte. La voix à mettre en relief est celle de l'historien, où se dévoile un très important parti-pris idéologique :

Voici l'histoire du plus vieux pays de l'Europe. Et du seul qui va ressusciter, sous une autre forme. C'est le début d'un nouvel ordre [...] C'est l'histoire d'un pays, qui s'est transformé seulement en peuple, seulement une énorme masse humaine qui va changer pour toujours le chemin de l'Histoire. Un mouvement d'êtres qui va effacer pour toujours l'Histoire équivoquée des pays-nations, le grand mensonge historique des états (18).

L'historien résume ici la solution pour le cataclysme qui va se déplier au long des 300 pages suivantes. Très éloigné, du point de vue structurel, de la narrative commune, modelé par le XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, il s'agit, tout de même, d'un roman à thèse dont la formulation est bien claire. Selon l'idéologue du texte, faisant partiellement écho de la pensée rousseauienne, « L'État, comme groupe de tous les individus » (55), était tombé et demeurerait, en 2023, « une machine contre le peuple et chaque individu » (55).

Le décès du contrat social se manifeste dans l'imposition du pouvoir économique, dont la seule valeur à protéger est d'ordre monétaire. Les gens ont tout perdu, l'emploi, les commodités –

la vie d'un couple avec ses deux enfants nous montre ce tableau –, la retraite. On trouve les coupables : d'abord, les forces abstraites des finances globales – qui sont prétexte d'action pour quatre organisations : la Banque Centrale Européenne, l'Union Européenne, le Fond Monétaire International et la FICO, acronyme de Financial International Corporation ; ensuite, ceux qui imposent les *dictata*, en participant, en pleine conscience, de la fin du pays. Pedro Sena-Lino rassemble les caractéristiques vraisemblables de ce type d'agents surtout dans deux personnages – la représentante de la FICO et le ministre des Finances, une figure putride, point de convergence de tout ce que l'on conçoit comme abus de pouvoir et d'abjection.

On y trouve aussi, naturellement, les conséquences de la crise, l'objet principal de *Dépays*. Le lecteur se choque, très probablement, quand un père est obligé de prostituer sa fille. Il n'est pas moins choqué avec l'importance croissante de l'hypothèse du referendum, saisissant progressivement le peuple, les anonymes, au même temps que les groupes politiques de la gauche à l'extrême droite. On doit joindre aux supporteurs, non exactement du referendum, mais de l'idée de refondation du Portugal, les voix de sagesse, y compris le président de la République et Bartolomeu Henriques, qui constitue le noyau de la raison et de la sensibilité tragique du roman.

Il faut dire que cette œuvre de Pedro Sena-Lino, comme pièce littéraire, a une qualité moyenne ; on vérifie, par exemple, un manque de connaissance plus solide de l'histoire du pays, aussi bien que l'enfermement dans quelques références culturelles contemporaines (Zigmaunt Baumun, Pierre Bourdieu). Cependant, le mélange entre histoire et philosophie sociale permet à l'auteur de dessiner une thèse – la fin de l'État, mentionnée auparavant, l'État et son rôle comme agent de violence symbolique – et surtout de concevoir une réponse

extrême pour la méga-crise portugaise. Le paroxysme des évènements mène la diégèse à une solution radicale. Les utopies anarchiques, la reconfiguration de la vie en société (devenue plus au moins primitive), la violence physique – tout ceci y est présent, mais ne triomphe pas, car il faut une autre imagination pour dépasser les problèmes. Un speech du président nous éclaire :

En cette heure grave, en cette heure gravissime, notre pays meurt. Détruit par la dette, massacré par les politiques de récession, blessé par la division interne que le referendum représente. [...] C'est l'heure, l'heure gravissime, où les états finissent et les nations commencent. C'est l'heure, l'heure définitive où chacun désobéit ... pour refonder son pays (201).

Cette exhortation constitue l'antichambre du dénouement ; ensuite, le referendum prend place, les institutions s'effondrent, le pays est vendu. À la disparition du territoire correspond, au long du récit, la suppression des symboles, comme le Monastère des Jerónimos et les panneaux de S. Vicente. À cause de tout cela, Bartolomeu Henriques, le journaliste, débuche et perfectionne le départ des gens de la terre solide pour aller en mer – les portugais deviennent, selon le roman, des « nomades maritimes », entreprenant un voyage dont la fin est inconnue. Les « lusomades » (un néologisme) sont part d'un peuple qui, selon l'auteur dans un entretien, ont perdu leur avenir – la crise « nous a volé le futur et nous a emprisonné dans un présent immédiat de survivance » (324).

La crise économique au Portugal a permis, d'une façon plus au moins subliminaire, de transmettre des messages moralistes qui nous impliquaient à tous dans les évènements. La plus pénible et aussi la plus simpliste nous disait que nous étions tous coupables – c'était l'expression littérale. La culpabilisation

des citoyens exigeait implicitement l'acceptation des mesures prises par les institutions pour faire la « traversée du désert », une métaphore biblique convenable dans cette ambiance de culpabilité bâtie notamment par le discours politique. Le point d'arrivée à atteindre était l'acceptation de la pensée prépondérante d'une forme pacifique – la reconnaissance des impositions.

À l'année 2011 et jusqu'à aujourd'hui, l'autorité de la littérature, outre sa force interprétative, son pouvoir de représentation et son universalité, est le résultat de l'incorporation que les écrivains (et d'autres artistes, comme les metteurs en scène) ont fait du discours dominant pour le déconstruire. Cette intéressante caractéristique est visible dans *Combien d'années se sont déjà passées, a-t-il demandé* et dans le roman visé plus haut. Les mots économiques, la novlangue des bureaucrates, les pléonasmes des commentateurs sont partout dans ces deux textes, en dégageant des effets variables, entre la satire et la mélancolie. C'est le cas, aussi, d'un très beau livre de poésie dont le titre associe le langage de la crise et le travail du poète ; il s'agit de *La miséricorde des marchés* (*A misericórdia dos mercados*, 2014) – par Luís Filipe Castro Mendes, ministre de la culture au Portugal. D'une façon non narrative, il nous raconte le drame ouvert de la chute économique. Les protagonistes sont parfois le « je » du poète, parfois un « nous » qui projette le collectif, où bien les deux.

On y trouve des textes qui thématisent explicitement les problèmes, non moins intéressants que ceux écrits par Luís Filipe Castro Mendes d'une façon allusive, mais sans aliéner le sens ; c'est justement le cas de « Réveiller » (« Acordar »): « Je ne reconnais pas les matins / nous sortons du sommeil et du rêve pour entrer dans un monde / étranger et divers / composé d'angles droits et de brouillard dense. // Seule la coutume nous fait croire doucement / que ceci est la réalité. Peut-être » (30). Dans le poème « Essai sur le quotidien » (« Ensaio sobre o quotidiano »),

le sujet principal c'est l'attribution de la culpabilité par ceux qui commandent les consciences: « La vie nous fait mal, mais on dit que nous le méritons » (24). Les vers cités et des poèmes entiers manifestent l'intériorisation du discours général ; l'autonomie du sujet semble être limitée à un exercice verbal mélancolique, embellit par les métaphores : « Tout en nous s'est fermé dans une conque si froide / que personne ne sait plus comment adjurer sa fortune » (42).

Ces poèmes nous présentent un simulacre, celui de la réciprocité entre langue extérieure et vie intérieure de l'homme construite par les instances sociales qui cherchent, par des exercices de pouvoir, la symétrie et le nivellement des mentalités – la pensée unique. La littérature de la crise, comme j'ai dit plus haut, s'insurge contre le discours dominant faisant usage de ce discours. Dans *La miséricorde des marchés*, on observe une démarche contre la situation dont les ustensiles principaux sont : i) la démonstration que les mécanismes verbaux de la politique peuvent être utilisés pour rendre visible leur écart des citoyens; ii) la défense de la poésie comme instrument de résistance. Luís Filipe Castro Mendes éclaircit ce principe citant Hölderlin : « À quoi bon des poètes en temps de détresse ? » (10). Il s'agit du titre d'un texte où le poète hésite ; il y a un doute sur l'importance de la parole poétique « en temps de détresse ». Cependant, l'évolution du texte et surtout les derniers quatre vers révèlent une réponse contre l'indigence contemporaine : « Résister, tel que les humiliés ont toujours fait. / Retenir des mots anciens. / Les répéter, pour qu'ils ne soient pas oubliés, / à ceux qui sont à venir » (10).

Il n'est pas possible de faire un bilan uniforme de ce livre. La tristesse du poème « La miséricorde des marchés » déséquilibre l'espoir – « Nous vivons de la miséricorde des marchés. / Nous ne sommes pas nécessaires » (81) –, mais la verve d'ironie et opposition déstabilise le renoncement : « je me refuse à

penser comme vos esprits, / vous me regardez et je ne suis qu'indifférence » (87). L'intensité de l'œuvre, au-delà de sa beauté, provient de la position excentrique prise vis-à-vis la chute du pays et les blessures symboliques dans les gens. Je crois que l'un des plus sérieux messages de cette anthologie est l'importance donnée par l'auteur à la subjectivité, c'est-à-dire, à l'autonomie cognitive et à l'authenticité personnelle. Il ne faut pas perdre l'identité, ce qui chez nous est vraiment solide, dès que nos yeux soient ouverts. C'est pourquoi il faut dénoncer la rhétorique du pouvoir et faire des jeux de mots avec les paroles qu'elle utilise, parler poétiquement pour contrarier le propos d'apprivoiser les signes, leurs attribuer un sens unilatéral.

Je crois qu'il y a des similitudes entre ce livre de Castro Mendes et *Dette souveraine (Dívida soberana)*, publié par Susana Araújo en 2012. L'utilisation du jargon économique – le titre en est l'exemple – fait un parcours systématique dans l'œuvre, en renouvelant les aspects sémantiques d'une terminologie spécialisée dont le partage social n'a pas été, malheureusement, arbitraire. La crise n'a pas imposé uniquement l'austérité ; la période qui commence en 2008 ou peut-être en 2011 a élargi notre vocabulaire et Susana Araújo en fait le répertoire: « dette souveraine », « impôt », « macroéconomique », « montant de change », « *spread* », « austérité », « durabilité économique », « programme de stabilité et croissance », etc. Ce sont des mots sans histoire, quelques-uns ; d'autres sont étrangers à cause des exigences de la communication globale. Toutefois, l'auteur refuse ce vocabulaire pénible en l'utilisant comme dispositif esthétique ; on peut observer ceci, par exemple, dans un très beau poème érotique, intitulé « *Spread* », où l'abondance d'expressions bancaires (« change », « extrait », « capital », « investissement ») traduit le rapport dual. Encore une fois, il s'agit de manifester la

voix individuelle et sa prévalence vis-à-vis la déshumanisation des circonstances.

Naturellement, c'est aussi par la métamorphose poétique que l'écrivain nous représente les faits collectifs, comme la performance de l'État et des institutions européennes pendant les années les plus graves de la crise (2011–2015), dans le poème « Spéculation » (« Especulação »), qui se développe à partir du poème de William Blake « Europe : a Prophecy ». Un « nous » communautaire (symétrique du « nous » que l'on trouve dans le roman et dans *La miséricorde des marchés*) partage les stigmates que le contexte nous a infligé : « La Tropix agrège les titres du marché, nous / sommes le produit humain gaspillé » (25). Un regard panoramique fait des synthèses et manifeste la durée des choses : « La terreur c'est ce qui commence ici / la foule se réunit en vain dans / les balcons aveugles pour ce que deviendra // L'homme jeté sur la ligne du tram / Ne prend pas sa médication depuis des mois / il sourit absent, ses bras tendus sur le goudron // Il n'existe pas d'anesthésie pour disséquer / ces membres sans nation / Européens qui respirent encore » (24).

Dans toutes ces œuvres, on trouve un impératif, celui de l'articulation de l'écrivain avec la réalité. Leur absolue contemporanéité, le fait d'avoir été écrits à l'époque où tout se passait créent un mix de sociologie et littérature et ces quatre livres se ressemblent comme entreprise pour dénoncer les mécanismes et les effets de la crise ; cependant, ils se séparent parce qu'ils proposent des stratégies différentes. Le roman, à cause de son radicalisme, nous présente une demi-solution qui, en bonne vérité, est un peu aporétique ; le voyage des lusomades, où va-t-il aboutir ? ; la pièce de théâtre convoque la révolution ; *La miséricorde des marchés*, le plus idéaliste des textes, envisage la poésie comme réponse à l'indigence ; *Dette souveraine* utilise la



parodie du langage pour miner le processus social et économique à partir des stratégies de communication.

## Bilan final

On ne peut pas dire que la littérature portugaise s'est renouvelée massivement pendant les années de la crise. Elle a, tout de même, reçu un nouveau filon qui sera très probablement autonomisée par l'histoire littéraire. La contribution des écrivains pour ce filon n'a pas encore terminé, ce qui signifie qu'il faut laisser passer le temps pour que l'on puisse faire une histoire plus précise de ce processus ; des livres comme *L'installation de la peur* (*A instalação do medo* ; Rui Zink 2012), *Si tu ne peux pas les joindre, tu dois les vaincre* (*Se não podes juntar-te a eles, vence-os* ; Filipe Homem da Fonseca 2013) *Du mouvement ouvrier et autres voyages* (*Do movimento operário e outras viagens*; Ernesto Rodrigues 2013), *Les voilà ceux qui partent* (*Ei-los que partem* ; Júlia Nery 2017) élargissent le corpus minimal choisi pour cette étude. On doit aussi envisager la nécessité d'établir un network comparatif entre différentes expressions artistiques de la même période, parmi lesquelles la plus remarquable est le cinéma. J'utilise le mot remarquable au sens littéral, à cause de la diffusion plus ample des films dans le pays et à l'étranger – le langage cinématographique est universel, la traduction plus agile, l'information et la critique plus immédiates, le circuit des festivals a un impact global. Aujourd'hui, à 2020, les plus importants « films de la crise » au Portugal sont *Les mille et une nuits* (*As mil e uma noites* ; Miguel Gomes 2015), *Saint George*, luso-français (*São Jorge* ; Marco Martins 2016) et *La fabrique du rien* (*A fábrica do nada* ; Pedro Pinho 2017).

Hormis le croisement des différents arts portugaises, il faut franchir les frontières nationales et suivre les démarches créatives sur la crise économique récente autour du monde; en imaginant, par hypothèse, des cercles comme celui qui inclurait les pays qui ont subi l'intervention de la *troika* (Grèce, Espagne, Italie) ou ayant comme point de départ la chute du Lehman Brothers et ses conséquences mondiales. Il faut aussi réfléchir sur des sujets méta-textuels ou plutôt méta-artistiques : le rapport entre les œuvres de la crise et les plus notables caractéristiques de la figuration contemporaine, par exemple, la multiplication des voix dans les narratives, le récit fragmentaire, la représentation néo-fantastique – comme en *Dépays* et *Les milles et une nuits* –, l'absence de dénouements, la parodie linguistique ; la prévalence d'un *imago mundi* dystopique. Finalement, il faut penser sur nouvelles déclarations politiques, liées directement aux faits économiques et sociales de la crise. Le repérage du présent et l'immédiatisme des réponses artistiques nous dévoilent des artistes-témoins qui mettent au premier plan les faits empiriques, portant sur scène le rôle social de l'art en tant que véhicule d'information et de questionnement du réel, ayant donc une forte intensité vitale.

Cette dernière question a des liaisons avec un sujet classique, celui de la capacité de l'art pour intervenir pragmatiquement dans la vie communautaire. La lecture de « Failed-state fiction » (2008), un essai où l'auteur, John Marx, analyse le roman de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Half of a yellow sun*, nous présente une comparaison entre la littérature et les sciences sociales, d'où peuvent se distinguer deux arguments : 1) les sciences sociales envisagent la réalité comme matière quantifiable traduite en statistiques, la littérature, pour sa part, humanise cette réalité : « Social scientists who acknowledge literary efforts tend to think of fiction as giving crisis a human face » (598) ; 2) les sciences

sociales vérifient et valident les *data*, la littérature présente des alternatives à la neutralité des numéros : « ... fiction does not simply flesh out social-scientific practice. Instead, it shapes a counter discourse » (599).

La description des textes qui a été faite auparavant a eu justement l'objectif de proposer que la littérature de la crise, en tant que *case study* de l'art, constitue une réaction à la pensée unique et, pourrait-on dire, aux mots-clés qui la constituent. La crise, comme bien d'autres événements traumatiques, déclenche l'urgence du changement, de la résolution des choses au nom de la paix. Dans les pays démocratiques, comme c'est le cas du Portugal, les citoyens ont bien compris que la chute économique a eu comme conséquence une suspension de la démocratie, car le gouvernement était fait par des gens qui n'avaient pas été élus selon un programme soumis à suffrage ; on méconnaissait la main invisible du pouvoir, on était invisibles pour le pouvoir. Parmi d'autres importants aspects, les œuvres analysées prétendent la restauration de la démocratie, et pour cela il faut éloigner les oligarques et la culture abstraite des chiffres – un recentrage dans l'individu, dans la vie collective, dans la parole efficace.

Un recentrage aussi dans l'Histoire contemporaine et dans des faits qui, malgré les terribles vicissitudes qu'ils provoquent, ont quand-même un intérêt intellectuel et créatif. On dirait que les œuvres *supra* interrompent la poétique de la littérature globale, en particulier les traits de déterritorialisation et atemporalité, parce qu'ils nous parlent de situations concrètes. Cependant, la crise économique a été transnationale ; la situation portugaise est peut-être méconnue (pour des raisons faciles à concevoir), mais je crois que l'on peut y trouver un index des événements qui ont bouleversé le monde entre *circa* 2008, *circa* 2016. La séparation des espaces, pour des raisons géographiques et géopolitiques, est de plus en plus imaginaire. Un effondrement financier, le Brexit, un

papillon et ses effets, un virus funeste – tout cela peut provoquer, disons, la faillite d'un producteur de vin en Argentine ou bien la naissance de plusieurs films. L'art de crise, indépendamment de sa nature, nous permet de dialoguer et de soulager nos effrois.

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**II**

**Fear and safety across genres**



# “We have to fix this world now”

## Hope, utopianism, and new modes of political agency in two contemporary Finnish young adult dystopias

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Literature for children and juveniles is often considered utopian by nature. For many centuries, the Western tradition of children’s fiction has cherished the myth of childhood being an innocent, happy, and idyllic time. As Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry suggest in their introductory chapter to *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003, 5), there are two reasons for the deeply rooted association between childhood and utopia in Western thinking. First, there is a long tradition of regarding childhood itself as utopian, as a space and time apart from adult

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life and all its worries. Secondly, the utopianism and utopian writing seem to play an important and unique function in the socialization and education of children.

Considering this connection between childhood and utopianism, it is very interesting that a considerable amount of twenty-first century fiction addressing young readers involves antithetical themes: young adult (YA) literature has tended toward dystopian visions of the near future. World-famous and commercially successful crossover authors like Suzanne Collins and Veronica Roth have embedded the dystopia genre indelibly into contemporary western young adult fiction.

Dystopian works always reflect our fears. The political landscape of our time is filled with horror visions of the future, such as climate change and huge economic crises, so it could be claimed that our cultural conversation has strong dystopian undertones. Some theorists even talk about the millennial obsession with the apocalypse (see, for example, Barton 2016, 5). Although often considered a negative and hopeless genre, dystopian works addressing young audiences also feature utopian tendencies and the hope for a better future. In particular, such works often depict young characters with the power to change society. In this article, I will take a closer look at hope, utopianism, and the new modes of agency that contemporary YA dystopias seem to offer to young readers.

Literary scholars have already written much about the current popularity of YA dystopias. Indeed, anthologies have been published about the topic, such as *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults* (2013) and *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults* (2003). Researchers have been keenly interested in international bestsellers and dystopian YA fiction published in English. However, the dystopian boom in many other Western language areas has been overlooked. For

example, the amount of contemporary dystopian fiction aimed at juvenile readers in the Nordic Countries has been remarkable.

In this article, I consider Finnish contemporary YA dystopias, a genre that has seen pronounced growth over the last ten years. In general, the whole genre of dystopian fiction is relatively young in Finnish literature. There are some early examples, but the genre began to take off in the 1990s. Specifically YA dystopian literature entered the scene even later – mostly in the 2010s. Considering the relatively brief existence of Finnish YA dystopias, it is surprising that so many works have been published. Finnish authors such as Emmi Itäranta, Siiri Enoranta, Laura Lähteenmäki, Anu Holopainen, Salla Simukka, K. K. Alongi, and Siri Kolu have established the dystopia as a genre in Finnish YA literature. In addition, Finnish dystopias for child and pre-teen audiences have recently been published by Vuokko Hurme and Timo Parvela (with the Norwegian author Bjørn Sortland). So far, the only internationally known Finnish YA dystopia is Emmi Itäranta’s *Memory of Water* (2012), which is available to the international audience because the author wrote and published the book simultaneously in both English and Finnish.

I will take a closer look at two Finnish YA novels: Siiri Enoranta’s *Nokkosvallankumous* (*Nettle Revolution* 2013) and K. K. Alongi’s *Kevätuhrit* (*Spring Sacrifices* 2015). Neither of these novels has been translated, and all quotations are my own translations. Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution* is an example of dystopian YA fantasy. The novel describes a future world so contaminated that the sun no longer shines and the land is covered with endless clouds of pollution. Plants barely grow because of the lack of sunlight, and food scarcity is a major issue for ordinary people. To make matters worse, nuclear accidents have contaminated the land and water, making people sick. The authorities – the evil and corrupt Ministry – have long pretended to operate according

to the rules and principles of democracy, but in reality, they have allied themselves with the unscrupulous “perinists,” who wish to rule the world uncontested. In the novel, nation states have collapsed, and the world is dominated by a totalitarian regime, though many rebel organizations fight against it. K. K. Alongi’s *Spring Sacrifices* is more of a post-apocalypse, and compared to Enoranta’s fantasy novel, *Spring Sacrifices* is very realistic. It is set in Helsinki – the capital of Finland – in the near future. One seemingly ordinary day, almost everyone in Helsinki, Finland, and apparently the whole world mysteriously dies. Only a few teenagers survive.

Dystopian worlds, especially in the post-disaster stories that both *Nettle Revolution* and *Spring Sacrifices* represent, are often dark and gloomy. Nevertheless, they also convey hope for a better future or opportunities for the young protagonists to change the damaged world they inherit. In both novels, the young characters have both the opportunity and the obligation to change the ruined world around them. Scholars of dystopian fiction seem to agree that in the case of YA dystopias, the element of hope is a necessity. As Alexa Weik Von Mossner (2013, 70) writes, the young reader expects and needs stories that at least promise the possibility of a better world. I would not claim that this is something young readers themselves need, but rather something that we adults (want to) believe that adolescents need. However, a certain amount of hopefulness seems to be distinctive to YA dystopias as a genre.

## YA dystopias falling between the dystopia/utopia dichotomy

Dystopian fiction brings our greatest fears to life and lets us experience terrifying visions of future through experience of fictive characters. Dystopian literature is often opposed to utopian fiction. M. Keith Booker (1994, 3) defines dystopia as literature that positions itself in opposition to utopian thought and warns against the potential negative results of arrant utopianism. He notes that dystopian literature constitutes a critique toward existing conditions or political systems in two ways. Firstly, it extends those conditions or systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws, and secondly, it critically examines the utopian premises upon which those conditions or systems are based. Booker’s definition covers important aspects of dystopian fiction and it is a good definition for classical dystopian literature (about classical dystopia, see, for example, Moylan 2000, 121). Contemporary dystopian fiction, however, seems to be a more open genre that often borrows from other literary traditions. Many theorists (like Bradford et al. 2008; Day et al. 2014, 8) have classified the dystopia as a mode rather than a genre, meaning dystopian features may appear in texts that would more generally be considered to represent broader genres. In YA dystopias, for example, certain generic features of young adult literature intermix with the generic features of dystopia.

When it comes to YA dystopias, the most problematic aspect of Booker’s definition is its apparent exclusion of the apocalypse or post-apocalypse from the umbrella term of “dystopian literature.” Apocalyptic works portray the end of the world, so they are eschatological narratives. Eschatology in a theologian sense refers to the end of the world, the end of the time, or the ultimate destiny of humanity. Outside eschatological religious narrative

texts, apocalypses hardly ever portray the end of the entire world. In modern apocalyptic narratives, the apocalypse is more likely to be some form of catastrophe (Heffernan 2008, 6). Post-apocalyptic fiction tells stories that depict life after the apocalypse or great catastrophe. As a genre, post-apocalyptic fiction therefore depicts human survival after some great catastrophe. These kinds of stories do not fit into Booker's definition, since the cause of the bad and terrifying future depicted in post-apocalyptic narratives may not be caused by "arrant utopianism" but rather by the pure recklessness, extravagance, or irresponsibility of humankind – or just by uncontrollable natural forces. Therefore, I consider contemporary dystopia as an open genre, that explores fearful visions of future.

In Finnish contemporary YA dystopia, the cause of the suffering in the fictive world is most often some kind of climatic or ecological catastrophe. In Alongi's novel, the cause of the epidemic is not revealed in the first book of the trilogy. In *Nettle Revolution*, however, it is clear that ecocide and food shortages have created a power vacuum, leading to an unequal and totalitarian society. These kinds of ecological themes are also common in contemporary dystopian YA fiction in other European cultures. Our current climatic and ecological fears seem to make the post-apocalypse the more current and topical genre than the classic societal dystopia when considering humankind's future in the face of climate change. This does not mean that dystopian YA novels do not utilize the generic repertoire of the classic dystopian tradition, where an evil, corrupt, and unequal society lies at the center of the narrative. The same story can be a post-apocalypse and a societal dystopia, as we will later see. In this article, I use the broader understanding of dystopian fiction, meaning stories that depict a grim, corrupt, and fearful future.

Here, I understand the apocalypse and the post-apocalypse as subgenres of dystopian fiction.

Nevertheless, the connection between utopia and dystopia in Booker’s definition is very important. The concepts are often understood as simple binary oppositions of each other. Tom Moylan (2000, 122) has argued, however, that dystopias are located on a spectrum ranging from utopia to anti-utopia. A dystopia is not the reverse of a utopia. Often a dystopia extends a utopia to its extreme, and every dystopian society has some utopian undertones. The dystopia is therefore more of a liminal genre (Moylan 2000, 122; Basu et al. 2013, 2; Day 2014, 9). This is especially important in YA dystopias, which seem to include more hope than dystopias aimed at adult readers.

Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution* utilizes the conceptions of utopia and dystopia in a clever way. The novel has a structure based on two parallel worlds. Most of the narration concentrates on the dystopian present of the novel, but the two protagonists and firstperson narrators – Vayu and Dharan – are able to visit a place they call paradise. This parallel universe is a kind of pastoral idyll, where there is a flowery summer, the fields are fertile, and people live in the sort of abundance that the inhabitants of the primary world could scarcely comprehend:

The city was surrounded by a zone, up to a hundred meters wide, filled with such a flaming color that I found it difficult to breath, and I did not instantly understand what they were: flowers, millions of different flowers, every color that could be imagined. I just had to guess it would smell like that in the garden of the gods. We stared at it for a long time in astonishment, but we didn’t talk about it yet. We would not go there yet. Not now. The free land, wind, grass, water, and both of us understood that everything there was built with respect for nature, not to its cost. (*Nettle Revolution*, 109)

The depiction resembles a mythical story of a paradise lost. In the fictional world of the novel, this secondary world shows the planet as it would have been in the present moment if humanity had not destroyed the Earth. The parallelism between these two worlds interestingly thematizes time, history, and causality, which are all important themes in the dystopian genre. This parallel structure between the two fictive worlds also seems to question the strict dichotomy between utopia and dystopia.

## New political agency of adolescents in YA dystopias

Many theorists have noted that YA dystopias often utilize some elements of the *bildungsroman* genre (see Lauer 2013, 44; Hintz 2002, 255). This is only natural when considering adolescent literature as a whole, as it has its origins in this genre. However, when we compare the two traditions of dystopian fiction and the classic *bildungsroman*, we notice that the actual ethos is profoundly different when it comes to the relationship between the young protagonist(s) and society. In the classical *bildungsroman*, the young – usually male – protagonist discovers himself and his social role often through hard experiences of the realities of the world (Lauer 2013, 45). By contrast, in traditional dystopian YA fiction, society is so bad that children or teenagers cannot rely on the adults already in power. Their task is no to adapt to the society around them, but to change it. I find this difference important: dystopian fiction for young readers is often subversive by nature.

The *bildungsroman* traditionally depicts a young protagonist's development from childhood toward adulthood and all the responsibilities adults have in society. This is the fundamental

idea behind the whole concept of growing up. Dystopian YA fiction, however, seems to challenge the ideology of children learning from the adults and becoming fully authorized members of society. In YA dystopias, adolescent heroes learn that adults in authority are not necessarily good or trustworthy, and they must take matters in their own hands (Lauer 2013, 46).

In the post-apocalyptic reality of *Spring Sacrifices*, all the adults are dead, only teenagers (and not even all of them) are left alive. There exists an important difference between older and younger teenagers. Teenagers over 17 years old have transformed. They look the same, but they have started to act aggressively. They torture and kill everyone they see. The teenagers closer to adulthood are therefore dangerous and sick, and the young protagonists have no one other than their same-age peers to trust. In the dystopian world of *Nettle Revolution*, few people live long enough to grow old. People tend to die when they reach adulthood due to radiation poisoning and starvation; only the ruling powers have enough supplies to stay sufficiently healthy to live to old age. Therefore, adolescents at least partially hold power in both fictional worlds.

This is of course not the case in our contemporary reality. The role of young people in society could be said to be liminal when considered in the context of political structures and institutional practices. In some contexts, young people are treated as competent, responsible, and liable, whereas in other contexts, they are perceived as incompetent, irresponsible, and unreliable. This liminality or “in-betweenness” in relation to the state’s legal and political practices makes young people interesting and unique political subjects (Skelton 2010, 145).

When discussing adolescents as political subjects, we must also discuss citizenship. The application of citizenship to minors is challenging, especially since as political actors, underage



citizens are only partly entitled to participate in political decisionmaking. Thus, children are marginalized within the framework of modern Western citizenship. Dystopias, especially the postapocalyptic sort, offer interesting opportunities for social agency and make it possible to look at young people in a new way. I argue that this kind of child citizenship often becomes thematically important in contemporary YA literature. In post-apocalyptic or dystopian worlds, the old social hierarchies have collapsed or decisively changed: the social separation of powers is redefined, and the young characters are offered a new range of functional opportunities or obligations. Whereas contemporary society does not seem to offer teenagers much sense of political agency or an ability to influence society, dystopian fiction gives young people a role as political subjects.

Today's dystopian YA literary problematizes the role of young people as citizens and members of their community or nation. As we know, one of the main tasks of literature for children and youths has often been to raise its readers to become good citizens and obedient, helpful, and productive members of society. Literature aimed at young audiences in general aims to help young souls become socially eligible adults. In this respect, it is interesting that contemporary dystopian YA literature challenges the model of good citizenship. The central question in these dystopias often concerns what it means to be a good citizen in a society that is in some way corrupt, destructive, and evil (Flanagan 2013, 248).

Frequently – and especially in post-apocalypses – the world is going through some kind of post-nationalist stage where the nation is no longer a category that defines the world and its political power relations. This is the case in Enoranta's *Nettle Revolution*: Young people start a resistance movement called the “nettle children.” The movement consists of children and young

adults under 25 who are led by Dharan, one of the two first-person narrators of the novel. Dharan is only 16 years old, but he is already an experienced and sure-handed leader of a rebel group. He gives passionate political speeches, and he has the ability to win children and young people over to his side:

We are the nettles and our roots are stronger than theirs [the enemy’s]. ... Tonight, we will eat and the night after that too, but this food will not last long. This is less than we need. This is less than we deserve. We have to grow, my nettles, we have to grow stronger. And we have to beat the perinists. We are moving toward a new world where old attitudes have no place. (*Nettle Revolution*, 61)

Although young, Dharan wields real political power in the dystopian world of the novel. During the course of the story, the oppression grows, and hundreds of ordinary people come to join the rebel group, which is finally able to start a war against the oppressive regime. The adolescents are able to challenge the adults and take their future into their own hands. This kind of political agency is important and a common motif in contemporary YA dystopias.

As the above speech by Dharan shows, he can make rebellious nettle children believe that a new world is about to come. Dharan is a complex figure, and he often loses faith in his own abilities and goals – and in their purity. Still, he always has the ability to bring hope to the suffering children and young people. Hope is an important motif in both *Nettle Revolution* and *Spring Sacrifices*. Hope is, in general, a prerequisite for survival in a dystopian setting. In *Spring Sacrifices*, the brave teenagers in the middle of the fearful post-apocalypse want to give up more than once, but they are driven on by the hope for a better life.

Hope is also closely connected to resilience, something that gives people the ability to face difficulties and stops them giving up (McDonald & Stephenson 2010, viii). According to the philosopher Nancy Billias (2010, 20–22), hope is something that enables humans to exist in the present as well as in the future. The resilience that is achieved through hope enables humans to be in time and act in the world. To be human is to exist in a time that is always simultaneously the present and future. Hope gives humans the potential for agency: “Even minimal, nascent awareness of one’s existence as temporal, agential and relational demands one hopes; otherwise one cannot act.” This is always the timeline of dystopian fiction. The characters do not experience themselves in the eternal present, but rather “always in a present that is open to the future” (Billias 2010, 22).

The notion of development is an important and distinctive feature of the dystopia genre. As Margaret Atwood (2005, 93) notes in her essay “Writing Utopia,” utopia and dystopia are genres that tend to be produced only in cultures based on monotheism and that postulate a single goal-oriented timeline. Other cultures based on polytheism and the circularity of time do not seem to produce utopias or dystopias. As Atwood writes, “How can you define a good society as opposed to a bad one if you see good and bad as aspects of the same thing?” (Atwood 2005, 93) Dystopia always relies on the causal reasoning process, and dystopian fiction conceptualizes humans as beings with a future-oriented consciousness (Billias 2010, 23). The future belongs to the children and young people, and it is therefore no surprise that dystopian fiction so often chooses to depict young protagonists. Of course, the whole concept of the warning that is inevitably connected to the dystopian ethos is connected to hope. If dystopian fiction provides a warning, there must also be the potential for change.

## Growing up under fearful conditions

In a sense, post-apocalyptic fiction is nostalgic, since it cherishes the idea of happier times prior to the current scenario. This is obvious in *Spring Sacrifices*, where the teenage protagonists suddenly lose everything. All the luxuries that adolescents in the industrialized West take for granted are suddenly gone. There is no more electricity or running water, and mobile phones stop working. There are no more adults to take care of them. The habitual lifestyle of the ordinary Finnish teenager vanishes in the blink of an eye. In *Spring Sacrifices*, the hardest hit by this is Susette, who had been the most popular girl in school before the catastrophe. The Barbie-like Susette has always been obsessed with her looks: “If she had been told two days ago that she would survive in the mornings without a shower, hairdryer, or hair straighteners, she wouldn’t have believed it” (*Spring Sacrifices*, 66). In this new, dystopian world, she must concentrate on more important things.

Susette and the other characters in the novel learn to survive without the conveniences of modern society, and they finally learn to be proud of their new abilities. Therefore, after the first shock, the new post-apocalyptic world order may lead to new solidarities, new modes of agency, and new value systems. For Jade, another girl character, the preponderance of death seems to have paradoxically made the world a better place. The whole story begins with Jade, who (as is later revealed) was planning to kill herself by jumping from a bridge. Jade is a marginalized problem teenager who had been shunted from one foster home to another. Her rebellious nature first prevents her from getting along with her peers, but during the story, she finds the courage to feel and to trust another human being: “Jade was used to the fact that nobody needed her, and that she didn’t need anybody, but over

the last hour she has finally begun to understand that maybe it was time for her to change that opinion” (*Spring Sacrifices*, 286).

YA fiction often deals with the theme of growing up and becoming independent. An important condition for adolescents to gain their independence is having time and space to experiment apart from adults. In the realistic world of *Spring Sacrifices*, the total disappearance of communications technology also allows the young characters to grow up and become independent. This seems to be an especially important motif at a time when adolescents are constantly connected to their parents through their cellphones and therefore lack the freedom to develop their own distinct sense of self (Demerjian 2016, 131).

Although Alongi’s novel is an extreme scenario – i.e., children completely exempt from adult supervision – the story is quite common in Western children’s literature. In many books addressing young readers, young characters are isolated from adults and therefore forced to leave the safety of their homes. This is necessary in order for adventures to happen, but time away from the parents’ tender care also gives child characters the opportunity to grow up. For the very same reason, robinsonades – tales of a shipwreck and survival in nature – are such a common motif in children’s fiction. In fact, post-apocalypses can often be read as modern robinsonades, as the story centers on the survival of the protagonist(s) and isolation is the spur that makes mental development or growth possible. In Alongi’s novel, all the teenage characters change and develop – in other words, they grow up. They make mistakes, argue, and get tired or frustrated, but they also learn to take care of themselves and each other.

In Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution*, the milieu is important to the theme of the novel. The novel’s nettle children live in Huhtikaunaa, an abandoned amusement park, which is highly symbolic:

“We have to fix this world now”

Quickly calculated there, where about thirty rides in Huhtikaunaa. They squatted in the darkness like gigantic, sleeping insects. Children lived in the structures of almost every ride. There were dozens and dozens of them, like small birds in their nests. ... “This is the ghost ride, that is where I live, and over there is the jungle carousel – mostly girls live there. Behind the glowworm are the toilets and from the restaurant kitchen, one can get food twice a day, if we have any. ... On the top of the love boats we have built a rainwater system so that you can take a shower.” (*Nettle Revolution*, 78)

The eerie and empty amusement park emphasizes the premature end of childhood; this safe, innocent and happy time is lost in the dystopian world. Then again, the park is filled with nettle children and more arrive every day. They fill the abandoned rides like little birds. The amusement park environment becomes a utopian setting, with the adolescent’s own innovations and wealth and luxury built by their own hands. By using the amusement park for their own purposes, the nettle children take possession of power and remold the childhood milieu built by adults to suit their own needs.

## Our saviors?

One of the main themes of contemporary dystopian fiction in general is the search to find a way to save the ruined world. Older dystopias are quite often narrated from the perspective of an adult male protagonist. In contemporary dystopias, the protagonist is most often adolescent and female. Barton (2016, 14–16) has analyzed contemporary female protagonists of dystopias as

“Artemisian” heroines, who are strong and independent saviors. The Artemisian woman survives violation, exploitation, and all the awful things she must confront without being traumatized. On the contrary, this type of heroine empowers herself. Such characters can be found, for example, in *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010), the *Divergent* trilogy (2011–2014), and the film *Children of Men* (2006).

The YA dystopias of the 2010s seem to exploit the motif of the child savior inherited from Romanticism, where a child or a young person is presented as the savior of a doomed humankind. The motif is connected with a rebellion plot that is common in the so-called critical dystopia. It is typical in YA dystopias that the protagonist becomes a Harry Potter-like savior (Lauer 2013, 40). In this plot type, the dystopian or totalitarian society can be defeated by rebellious individuals. For example, in Enoranta’s novel, the social responsibility for resistance is thrust upon young people. I find it surprising that enormous hopes are placed on children and young people in many contemporary YA dystopias.

Hope is one of the main attributes connected to children and adolescents in Western thinking, and it is associated with the temporal distance between children and adults. Children and young people are the future, and in this sense, the association of hope with children and young people is understandable. As the main actors in YA dystopias, young people are situated in an interesting way with respect on the axis of hope and despair. Youth appears as a liminal time between childhood and adulthood. As I mentioned before, liminality can also be seen as a typical feature of the dystopian genre in general. According to Moylan’s (2000) thinking, utopia and dystopia belong on the same spectrum: dystopian utopia is just an extreme form, a utopia that has turned against itself. In this sense, dystopia as a genre examines the complex boundaries between utopia and

dystopia, hope and despair, and past and future. In YA dystopias, this liminality also extends to the boundaries separating age groups.

Apocalyptic thinking signals the foreground experience of the loss of a former way of life. Apocalyptic and dystopian fiction can be read as a projection connected to cultural and technological shifts. As Barton (2016, 5) claims, humans start to write apocalypses when “some traditional mores, beliefs and societal constructions no longer resonate with an emerging zeitgeist.” It could be claimed that we live in an age of dystopia. Many dystopian themes have indeed become less speculative and more familiar.

YA dystopia is an interesting phenomenon also when considering the rhetoric of the contemporary political conversation about children and adolescents. It is especially interesting that the temporal distance between children, young people, and adults is often utilized in political rhetoric. The question of “what kind of world we leaving to our children?” is very often used when discussing global or local problems. We could claim that YA dystopias are providing answers to this question. Using the tools of speculative fiction, YA dystopias really describe what kind of a future our children (future teenagers) might face if the current developments continue.

YA dystopias are therefore permeated by adult guilt. Against this feeling of guilt, it is interesting how strongly these novels seem to expect that it will be children and young people who will rescue the world. YA dystopias might be somewhat brighter and more optimistic compared to dystopias aimed mainly at an adult audience, but it is also noteworthy that the burden passed on to the future generations is a heavy one. In this sense, YA dystopias are often politically conservative by nature. Change does not



have to happen here and now, because the possibility of change lays in the future, on the shoulders of young people.

For example, the young guerrilla fighters in Enoranta's novel often develop an outright messianic tinge. This happens with the expedients of fantasy fiction. In Enoranta's novel, the teenage protagonists Dharan and Vayu are the descendants of the great stone gods, as is Vayu's sister, Pavan. Their names are written on the wall in a hidden cave in the parallel universe, a wall showing the family tree of the stone families. Their destiny is to save the world and humankind. Pavan suggests that she and Dharan should rule together and procreate. Dharan does not agree:

I feel like the lineages of the stone families are not meant to continue. I feel like this is our last chance. ... I just feel ... if we don't succeed now, there won't be another chance. We have to fix this world now and if we can't, we're not worth it. If we don't succeed, everything is lost. Our children wouldn't even have anything to fix. There'd be nothing left. (*Nettle Revolution*, 304)

One reason Dharan and Vayu are not meant to be together is that they are both male and therefore cannot reproduce. In the novel's worn-out world, reproduction is immoral. The most important message behind this address is the idea that responsibility can no longer be escaped. The task given to the young heroes is binding. They cannot transfer their duties to the future generations. The change must happen now. This is an important and quite explicit theme in Enoranta's novel.

## Conclusion

Above, I have analyzed two Finnish dystopian novels aimed at young readers. In Enoranta’s *Nettle Revolution*, the task of changing the oppressive society falls on the shoulders of the young protagonists. In Alongi’s *Spring Sacrifices*, teenagers are left alone to survive in a fearful and partly hostile environment without any help from adults. As I have shown, both works question the dichotomy between dystopia and utopia. Although the dystopian setting in both novels is terrifying, both works still offer their readers hope for a better future. The dystopian world order also offers young protagonists a space to become independent and fulfill their potential. Especially in *Nettle Revolution*, teenagers are also given a level of political agency that is usually not extended to minors in Western societies.

Particularly important in all this is the discourse that closely binds together young people and the hope for a better future. This seems to show that the recent boom in dystopian writing for adolescents is not simply a marketing trend. Instead, the YA dystopia has become the most important contemporary genre because of its examination of the political power structures between adults and juveniles. Furthermore, the genre reveals how we construct the concept of adolescence in our time.

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# La sécurité ou l'exacerbation des peurs au profit d'une liberté provisoire

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Le genre dystopique permet de se situer sur différents plans temporels. En effet, tandis que *1984* dénonce les dérives des régimes nazis et staliniens, il met en garde le lecteur sur ce qu'est devenu son présent et ce que pourrait devenir son avenir. Son intemporalité se prouve d'ailleurs avec la rupture de stock de ces ouvrages depuis l'élection de Trump aux Etats-Unis. Il est en ce sens un lanceur d'alerte, et il n'est pas le seul entre *Nous Autres* (1920) de Zamiatine, *Le Meilleur des mondes* (1932) de Huxley ou plus récemment *La Zone du Dehors* (1999) d'Alain Damasio. Il s'agit pour chaque œuvre de dénoncer les dérives d'une société dont elle est issue. Sans pour autant tomber dans la caricature et

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J.,  
Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*.  
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la paranoïa, la littérature est un vecteur de ‘mentir-vrai’ qui tend un miroir au lecteur : à lui de décider ce qu’il veut y voir.

Or, l’avenir fictionnel des œuvres dystopiques a un point commun qui les relie tous : celui de mettre en scène une société qui n’a de cesse d’être sous contrôle. Elle se construit comme un vaste théâtre où rien n’échappe à sa surveillance, sous prétexte d’augmenter la sécurité. Pourtant, cette sécurité n’est-elle pas révélatrice des peurs de la société dans son ensemble ? Ne fait-elle pas au contraire encore plus les exacerber ?

Ainsi, nous verrons dans quelle mesure la sécurité est avant tout une mise en scène pour ensuite analyser la place de la surveillance qui exacerbe la peur de chaque individu. Enfin, nous nous demanderons quelle place ambiguë tient le libre-arbitre au sein de ces sociétés de contrôle.

## Mise en scène de la société dystopique

Utopie et dystopie sont deux facettes d’une même société : selon le regard que pose le personnage sur elle, cela permettra au lecteur de décider s’il s’agit d’une utopie ou d’une dystopie. Le but originel d’une société utopique passe par le bonheur des individus. A l’origine, la quête de bonheur se retrouve déjà chez Aristote dans *Ethique à Nicomaque* (–334) avec la notion de ‘Bien Suprême’ : ‘Sur son nom en tout cas, la plupart des hommes sont pratiquement d’accord : c’est le bonheur.’ (Aristote 1997, 40.) Il s’agit avant tout de créer une société où l’homme vivra heureux afin de retrouver un âge d’or grâce à un monde sans défaut. Le concept d’utopie vise un bonheur commun et universel, ce qui, par définition, irréalizable. En effet, un bonheur commun passe nécessairement par la sécurité qui permet l’uniformité de la société. La gestion d’individus hétéroclite demande une société

hiérarchisée dans laquelle règne le concept du *logos*. Le *logos* renvoie à la raison, au sein de ce qui a d'abord été un mythe, comme le souligne Corin Braga dans son ouvrage *Les Antiutopies classiques* (2011) : 'Souvent couplée aux traités politiques et aux programmes législatifs, l'utopie est devenue une sorte de fiction à valeur d'exemple, destinée à donner une carnation visuelle à des projets de rénovation logique de la société humaine' (Braga 2011, 13). Il s'agit donc de tendre vers un monde plus juste, en se laissant guider non plus par des idées fantaisistes mais par la raison. L'idée est d'ailleurs reprise par la théologie chrétienne qui voit dans le désordre quelque chose de diabolique contrevenant au dessein divin.

Cette apologie de la raison permet d'abolir, en partie, l'inconnu. La peur de l'inconnu, synonyme de danger et de menace, est le moteur principal de la société utopique où tout doit être ordonné et, pour ce faire, prévisible. L'idée de la sécurité est omniprésente : particulièrement visible dans notre société actuelle, elle met en garde chaque individu en lui listant tout danger potentiel. Derrière une fausse bienveillance, cela vise surtout à se déresponsabiliser. L'exemple qu'en donne Alain Damasio dans *La Zone du Dehors* (1999) est particulièrement parlant :

Déconseillé aux vélos dépourvus de système électronique de freinage et de recycleur de boue. Un déclassement forfaitaire pourra être appliqué [...] Les personnes souffrant de difficultés pulmonaires ou cardiaques, insuffisamment ou peu entraînées doivent entreprendre l'ascension avec la plus grande prudence et ne pas hésiter à faire de fréquentes haltes afin de ménager leur organisme. Des sanitaires sont disposés à intervalles réguliers dans la pente pour assurer une hygiène optimale des promeneurs (Damasio 1999, 98).



Le panneau indiqué à l'entrée du parc est représentatif de la société à laquelle il s'adresse. Il n'y a aucune obligation explicite mais la menace est présente. Les termes 'insuffisamment' ou 'peu' sont assez flous pour que la majorité des personnes se sentent visée, laissant planer tous les dangers. Façon de mettre toute la responsabilité à un cycliste trop aventurier, c'est symbolique d'une société protégée, guidée et dirigée sous prétexte de sécurité. Le bonheur se définit alors par l'abolition de toute forme de danger, mais aussi de toute forme de vie. Pour Freud (1929), 'L'homme civilisé a fait l'échange d'une part de bonheur possible contre une part de sécurité'. C'est là où les idées généreuses glissent subrepticement vers la tyrannie par un truchement entre sécurité et contrôle total.

Or, si *Utopie* a pour origine étymologique 'lieu de nulle part', le 'dys', d'origine grecque signifie 'mauvais', mais également 'erroné'. Cela peut être perçu comme un monde factice, car tout est mis en scène, prévu pour ainsi dire, dans un monde clos, figé, voire mortifère. Si, pour Calderon, le monde est théâtre, cela vaut d'autant plus dans une société dystopique. Chaque récit pose un décor afin que les habitants ne puissent s'aventurer en coulisse. Chez Zamiatine dans son roman *Nous Autres* (1932), elles sont séparées par un immense mur vert dont l'au-delà est inaccessible. Ce mur symbolise l'interdit, ce qu'il ne faut pas voir, mais également l'inconnue  $x$  dans une équation rationnelle, en l'occurrence I330, personnage féminin imprévisible. Ira Levin utilise également ce stratagème dans *Un Bonheur insoutenable* (1970), lorsque Papa Jan montre à son petit-fils Copeau ce qu'il considère comme le 'vrai UniOrd' :

Ce n'étaient pas vraiment des murs, en fait, mais des rangées de gigantesques blocs d'acier placés bord à bord, glacés, et couverts d'une fine buée. [...] Pas de jeunes membres en bleu pâle avec de jolies ardoises

en plastique. Pas de lumière rosée ni d'harmonieuses machines roses. [...] Vide et froid et dénué de vie. Laid (25).

Le cœur de la société est une fois de plus représentatif de ses habitants, même si le tout est maquillé. Les 'membres en bleu pâle', les lumières, tout renvoie aux faux-semblants théâtraux et à la mystification. L'envers du décor permet de symboliser les véritables rapports entre chaque individu qui sont inexistantes et artificiels. Mais la séparation peut également être d'ordre naturel comme c'est le cas dans le roman de Boualem Sansal intitulé *2084* (2015), écrit en référence à George Orwell, dans lequel les frontières de l'Abistan sont représentées par des montagnes prétendument infranchissables. Plus exactement, cette frontière est rendue inexistante pour les habitants, persuadés que leur monde est le seul qui vaille d'être habité : 'La route interdite !... La frontière !... Quelle frontière, quelle route interdite ? Notre monde n'est-il pas la totalité du monde ? [...] Qu'a-t-on besoin de bornes ? [...] Quel monde pouvait-il exister au-delà de cette prétendue frontière ?' (Sansal 2015, 25). La possibilité de fuite n'est pas seulement rendue impossible, elle est également inenvisageable. Il s'agit avant tout d'une frontière mentale et non physique, ce qui assure l'impossibilité de la franchir.

Il en est justement de même chez Orwell dans *1984* (1948) : la grande force du livre réside dans son sentiment perpétuel d'oppression car il n'y a réellement aucune échappatoire. Tout de moins, c'est ce qu'O'Brien prétend afin de faire ployer Winston. Il n'y a pourtant aucune preuve, ni certitude que cela soit vrai, même si O'Brien est sincèrement convaincu (là encore grâce à la double-pensée) : 'En outre, tout, en un sens, était vrai. Il était vrai qu'il avait été l'ennemi du Parti et, aux yeux du Parti, il n'y avait pas de distinction entre la pensée et l'acte' (Orwell 1948,

323). Les limites, entre un monde réel et un monde falsifié, sont extrêmement floues, d'autant plus avec le discours d'O'Brien repose sur le solipsisme. Le solipsisme considère qu'il n'y a pas d'autre vérité que celle construite par l'esprit : c'est l'arme principale du discours d'O'Brien. Ainsi, tout comme au théâtre, O'Brien crée grâce au langage l'illusion du vrai : elle ne repose que sur la croyance personnelle et subjective de chaque individu et n'a aucune valeur objective.

De ce fait, si la théâtralité a comme socle un monde clos, c'est avant tout par les individus eux-mêmes que le contrôle est le plus efficace, car eux aussi se mettent en scène. Dans *La Zone du Dehors* (1999), la condamnation du personnage principal passe par une mise en scène orchestrée par le public. L'adage 'du pain et des jeux' n'a jamais été aussi vrai dans une société où la mise à mort est laissée à la vindicte populaire. Le procès est entièrement filmé sous les yeux du public, à la manière d'un show télévisé. L'extrait se rapproche de l'expérience de Milgram : le public peut envoyer une décharge électrique à un patient en fonction de la justesse des réponses aux questions formulées par un médecin, ou un professeur ou encore un présentateur télévisé (patient qui en réalité simule les décharges électriques). L'expérience, qui s'est poursuivie jusqu'à la mort factice du patient, a révélé le poids très important que peut revêtir une figure d'autorité face à un public qui a l'habitude de s'y soumettre. Cette figure tutélaire tire son pouvoir de la société déjà hiérarchisée. La société inculque à l'enfant dès son plus jeune âge un profond respect de l'autorité. Il est par là-même habitué à recevoir des récompenses, ce qui se traduit ici par un sentiment de bien-être, et rejoint une fois de plus l'expérience de Pavlov. Dans le roman d'Alain Damasio, le public votant aura l'impression de faire son devoir de citoyen tandis qu'il s'agit d'une condamnation dont le jugement est d'ores et déjà orienté et donc contrôlé. Dans cette société, même

la liberté est feinte car 'tout bouge afin que rien n'arrive' : c'est un contrôle plus moderne et diffus qui, contrairement aux anciennes dystopies, montre un pouvoir horizontal et non vertical, comme il en sera question par la suite. Plus insidieux, tout un chacun peut avoir le contrôle sur l'autre. L'ironie réside justement dans le fait que l'augmentation du contrôle est proportionnelle à la peur de le perdre.

Ainsi, le théâtre est avant tout un art qui donne à voir, sens tiré de son origine grecque qui vient de 'theatron' qui signifie 'voir' et 'tron' qui désigne la totalité. Ainsi, c'est une vision qui est transparente non seulement pour le spectateur-lecteur mais également au sein même de la pièce qui y est jouée. En effet, chaque personnage peut s'épier et est à la fois le spectateur et l'acteur de sa propre pièce. Le monde totalitaire tend vers une vision omnisciente qui emprisonne les personnages derrière une sécurité illusoire.

## Transparence totale

Pour comprendre la place de la surveillance à la fois dans les romans dystopiques mais également dans notre société, et pourquoi elle est perçue comme une des clés de la sécurité, il s'agit de remonter un peu dans l'Histoire. Le contrôle se perpétue et se perfectionne au fil des siècles. Il est représenté sous la révolution française par la figure de Fouché, duc d'Otrante et ministre de la police, qui possédait des dossiers sur chaque homme politique. Jean-Claude Brisville dans sa pièce *Le Souper* (1989) lui fera d'ailleurs dire dans son face à face avec Talleyrand :

Le vrai pouvoir sera aux subalternes, aux espions,  
aux délateurs. Personne ne saura jamais s'il sera en  
règle, car la règle sera équivoque ... équivoque mais

redoutable. C'est ainsi que je veux la police : indéfinie, protéiforme, invisible et toute puissante. Elle sera dans chaque conscience. Alors là monsieur, ce sera l'ordre (Film d'Edouard Molinaro, *Le Souper* 1992).

Ces paroles prophétiques montrent que le contrôle réside avant tout dans la soif de pouvoir et non dans celui d'un rêve utopiste. Cette vision révèle à quel point la sécurité va de pair avec la terreur. Ce paradoxe met en lumière la nécessité d'un état permanent de peur, inséparable d'une société dite sécurisée. Plus précisément, c'est une fausse sécurité qui a un but de punition et non de protection. Elle peut d'ailleurs ne servir que de simple menace comme le confesse le narrateur de *Homo Sovieticus* (Zinoviev 1983) qui, en tant qu'agent du renseignement, possède des rapports pour chaque individu :

Ne croyez cependant pas que le rapport soit une opération bureaucratique superflue. C'est une puissante forme d'organisation des hommes en une seule et même société communiste. L'important n'est pas le contenu du rapport, mais uniquement le fait de son existence (Zinoviev 1983, 20).

Le cynisme de cette affirmation tend à montrer l'absurdité d'un tel fonctionnement, mais qui permet néanmoins de faire planer une menace au-dessus de tout un chacun. L'absence de sens d'une telle organisation rend chaque individu vulnérable, par le fait même qu'elle peut s'en prendre à n'importe qui (comme le démontre d'ailleurs le célèbre film *La Vie des autres* réalisé en 2006 par Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck qui retrace l'espionnage d'un agent de la stasi). Ce contexte historique rappelle le récit d'Alexandre Weissberg qui relate ses conditions de détention dans un témoignage intitulé *L'Accusé* (1953). Victime des purges

moscovites, le narrateur compare régulièrement ses accusateurs à des inquisiteurs et souligne l'absurdité de telles accusations, la plupart du temps reposant sur du vide :

Vous ne voulez pas tant nous faire croire que des millions de gens avouent des crimes sans qu'aucun d'eux aient commis la moindre faute. Il faut bien qu'il y ait quelque chose. [...] – Croyez-vous aux sorcières ? Non ? Eh bien sachez qu'au cours de trois siècles des centaines de milliers de femmes ont avoué qu'elles étaient des sorcières et ont été brûlées pour cela (Weissberg 1953, 384).

Les aveux s'obtiennent justement grâce à des compilations de dossiers, la plupart du temps imaginaires, ou tout du moins inoffensifs. L'essentiel n'est peut-être pas de surveiller, mais de faire en sorte que chaque individu en soit persuadé, là encore sous prétexte de sécurité.

De ce fait, la surveillance devient de plus en plus omniprésente en littérature puisqu'elle reflète la société de laquelle elle est issue. Or, c'est une société qui rêve d'habiter dans un palais de cristal tel que le définit Dostoïevski dans *Les Carnets du sous-sol* (1864) :

Vous avez foi en un palais de cristal à jamais indestructible, c'est-à-dire quelque chose à quoi on ne pourra pas tirer la langue en douce ni dire « merde ». Et moi, peut-être, c'est pour cela que j'en ai peur, de cette construction (Dostoïevski 1992, 50).

Cette phrase est annonciatrice d'une technologie toujours présente, au service d'une transparence totale dans laquelle la vision est omniprésente. Ce palais de cristal est repris par Zamiatine (1923) qui décrit dans son roman un monde entièrement en verre : 'Le verre des murs brille, de même que

les fauteuils de verre et la table' (Zamiatine 2013, 42). L'auteur est l'un des premiers à dénoncer les dangers d'un communisme mal employé : la transparence ambiante reflète le vide de chaque personnage, eux-mêmes transparents aux yeux de l'état. Pour Hannah Arendt, un état totalitaire prend son essor lorsque les frontières du public et du privé disparaissent, mais tous deux sont en quelque sorte remplacés par un nouveau concept. Ces propos sont repris par Claude Lefort (2001) : 'Ce qui surgit, en revanche, c'est quelque chose que l'on pourrait appeler le « social » comme vaste organisation, réseau de multiples rapports de dépendance, dont le fonctionnement est commandé par un appareil dominant' (Lefort 2001, 64). Ce système en rhizome permet une perméabilité totale pour tout un chacun mais surtout pour ceux qui le contrôlent. Cela peut se rapprocher aujourd'hui aux multitudes de données qui circulent sur internet : il ne s'agit plus d'un pouvoir vertical, mais horizontal et linéaire.

De fait, cette omniprésence du regard, et donc de la surveillance, peut encore gagner en influence grâce à l'essor technologique. Il est particulièrement symbolique chez George Orwell où la technologie permet une maîtrise complète de la société. L'omniprésence des télécrans impose à tout un chacun l'image de Big Brother accompagné de l'éternel son radiophonique, empêchant toute forme de solitude. Au fond, peu importe si les citoyens sont ou non surveillés, tant qu'ils sont persuadés de l'être. C'est ce que Michel Foucault (1975) appelle l'effet panoptique : 'induire chez le détenu un état conscient et permanent de visibilité qui assure le fonctionnement automatique du pouvoir' (Foucault 1975, 234). Alain Damasio reprend l'idée de la tour panoptique mais parvient à démontrer un effet inverse pour celui qui voit à travers elle :

Dire que la technologie mise à disposition se révélait  
jouissive participait de l'euphémisme. Assis à cette

table, les yeux dans les jumelles, je devenais Dieu. Je voyais tout. [...] J'étais partout. J'entrais partout. La chambre la plus noire devenait claire comme le jour (Damasio 1999, 109).

Tout un chacun peut ici espionner tout le monde : ce semblant de démocratie donne une illusion de liberté totale. Chez Damasio, cela va même plus loin dès lors que chaque individu analyse son classement dans la société, ses performances, il s'auto-évalue dans ce que l'on pourrait nommer une surveillance inversée. Steve Mann, chercheur canadien fondateur du Quantified self l'a nommé la 'sousveillance'. La technique dans laquelle il vit n'est qu'un prolongement de ce contrôle transparent : 'L'individu crée son propre espace connecté et devient lui-même un médium, c'est-à-dire un système d'information' (Mann 2016)<sup>1</sup>. Le roman d'Alain Damasio ne se situe d'ailleurs pas entièrement dans la fiction puisque Steve Mann étudie les technologies portables au sein de la société d'aujourd'hui, comptant entre autres les Google Glass, des vêtements connectés etc. Sans compter l'essor de la géolocalisation qui permet de suivre tout un chacun via son application portable, sous le prétexte fallacieux de 'je n'ai rien à cacher' ... On pourrait croire que Capt, le personnage principal qui est une forme allégorique de révolte face à ce système, est plus clairvoyant. Cependant, il ne devient voyant qu'à partir de l'instant où il se crève les yeux afin de supprimer les caméras que lui avait implanté le gouvernement à son insu. Pour Alain Damasio, c'est moins une référence au mythe d'Œdipe qu'une critique d'une vision toujours omniprésente : la surveillance aliène chaque individu à la société.

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<sup>1</sup> Article en ligne sans numéro de page. (<http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/2016/07/30/folle-histoire-corps-connecte-bidouilleurs-joggeurs-dimanche-264796>).



C'était surtout une façon de destituer la vision, une critique de l'optique que l'on trouve tout au long du livre. C'est un monde où domine l'image, les caméras de surveillance ... Le pouvoir est disséminé partout. Tout le monde est surveillé mais surtout tout le monde se surveille. Le pouvoir n'est plus transcendant mais immanent, horizontal, il est partout. La vision tue la spontanéité et le désir de puissance par le jugement. Episode de l'avion qui se crash : symbolique du projet Virilio : on tue par le regard (Damasio, entretien personnel 2015).

Le crash d'avion fait référence à la mort d'Obffs, tué à travers le regard de Capt qui avait guidé les missiles. Par cette révélation, Capt se libère de son véritable aveuglement : c'est en échappant à la vision qu'il parvient non plus à voir mais à percevoir en développant ses autres sens ainsi qu'à échapper à sa propre 'surveillance'. Ce n'est pas un hasard si le roman se clôt sur le Dehors, symbole d'un état sauvage sur laquelle la société n'a pas encore de maîtrise : elle ouvre sur un inconnu non plus aliénant mais libérateur.

Ainsi, la littérature dystopique résonne à travers les siècles et est sans cesse en lien avec la société qui la génère comme l'explique Jean Servier (1967) :

Ils ont jalonné l'histoire de l'Occident et marqué des moments de crise mal perçus par les contemporains, à peine discernés plus tard par les historiens. [...] Le lecteur du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, comme celui de tous les temps, éprouve en les lisant le sentiment ambigu du grotesque, au sens que Conan Doyle donne à ce mot : proche du tragique (Servier 1967, 315).

La tragédie de l'utopie est double : d'une part, elle pointe les défauts de la société et de l'homme, voué à l'imperfection. Mais surtout, elle dévoile le souhait intime de chaque individu : celui d'être libéré du poids du libre-arbitre pour embrasser une conscience collective et bienveillante où l'homme 's'emprisonne avec soulagement' (Servier 1967, 315). De ce fait, l'homme s'enferme deux fois : la première dans son propre système et la seconde dans sa propre volonté.

## Servitude volontaire des données

Dostoïevski, dans son chapitre sur le Grand Inquisiteur au sein de sa dernière œuvre *Les Frères Karamazov* (1880), expliquait que la plus grande peur de l'homme résidait dans la possibilité de sa liberté. Ce que révèle une société sécurisée est non seulement la peur de l'autre, mais également la peur d'une liberté pour soi. Il s'enferme ainsi dans ce que qu'Étienne de la Boétie, déjà en 1549, appelle la servitude volontaire :

Ce sont donc les peuples eux-mêmes qui se laissent, ou plutôt qui se font malmener, puisqu'ils en seraient quittes en cessant de servir. C'est le peuple qui s'asservit et qui se coupe la gorge ; qui, pouvant choisir d'être soumis ou d'être libre, repousse la liberté et prend le joug ; qui consent à son mal, ou plutôt qui le recherche ... (La Boétie 1549, 4).

La servitude volontaire pousse chaque individu à échapper à toute forme de liberté. Elle rappelle le conditionnement opérant observé des années plus tard par Skinner, déjà cité plus haut. Au sein du roman *Les Monades Urbaines* (1971) de Robert Silverberg, il est question de l'adaptation face aux changements de condition

de vie : comment un si grand nombre de personnes peut être ainsi entassé dans un espace réduit ? ‘Ceux qui sont restés se sont adaptés aux circonstances. Ils *aiment* la vie urbmonadiale. Cela leur semble naturel. – Mais est-ce réellement génétique ? On pourrait appeler ça un conditionnement psychologique, non ?’ (Silverberg 2000, 110). Or, ce conditionnement psychologique s’accompagne d’une adaptation de la technologie qui s’infiltré partout en classifiant et réutilisant toutes les données. Problème là encore éminemment actuel et déjà dénoncé non seulement par Damasio, mais également par Laurent Alexandre et David Angevin dans *Google Démocratie* (2011), par Philip K. Dick dans *Minority Report* (1956) ou encore *Identité Numérique* (2013) d’Olivier Merle.

Ce dernier roman dénonce la multiplicité des données collectées sous prétexte de sécurité : ‘Avant tout, il partageait avec les autres citoyens slodaves le sentiment rassurant que son pays offrait des garanties de sécurité et de liberté que des peuples entiers leur enviaient’ (Merle 2013, 87). De la même manière que dans le roman d’Alain Damasio, le personnage consomme par automatisme, laissant ainsi une multitude de données exploitées par les industries et l’Etat :

Il ne lui était proposé que des produits susceptibles de l’intéresser, si bien que ce flux continu de publicités et d’annonces, venant de nulle part, paraissait être envoyé par une personne qui connaissait ses goûts et le respectait suffisamment pour ne pas l’importuner avec des produits inappropriés (Merle 2013, 87).

Ces achats compulsifs ont presque quelque chose de l’ordre de la transcendance : les produits sont envoyés de nulle part et les désirs satisfaits immédiatement. La technologie est personnifiée car elle donne l’impression de connaître le personnage de

manière intime. Selon Marie Bénilde (2007), 'Il s'agit de se fondre dans une identité à la fois plurielle et, parce qu'elle s'adresse à chacun en tant que cible, singulière. Ce faisant, la publicité permet la mutation d'une société de classes vers autant de cibles qu'il y a des positions économiques à défendre.' (Bénilde 2007, 59). Pourtant, cette technologie se retourne contre lui puisqu'il finit par être accusé par ses propres données : 'Il est exact que vous n'avez encore rien fait d'illégal. Mais le fait est là : les données numérisées de votre comportement actuel révèlent, dans un avenir proche, un passage à l'acte' (Merle 2013, 208). L'individu n'a plus la possibilité de choisir ses actions, elles sont jugées répréhensibles avant même qu'il ne les mette en pratique, le transformant ainsi en une machine défaillante.

C'est également le même discours que tient Alain Damasio sur le monde moderne, qui rejoint la science-fiction : les données récoltées aujourd'hui par les Gafa [données numériques] permettent de limiter au maximum toute forme d'imprévisibilité, ce qui fait le propre de l'être humain<sup>2</sup>. Il s'agit de transformer chaque consommateur en un vaste algorithme qui détermine ses choix, avant même qu'il ne puisse les choisir lui-même. Sa volonté est totalement annihilée et son libre-arbitre est inexistant, le transformant une fois de plus en machine<sup>3</sup> ce que souligne également le roman d'Alain Damasio :

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. « Alain Damasio : poétique et politique de la Science-Fiction » émission du 30/12/16 sur France Culture (podcast : <<https://www.franceculture.fr/personne-alain-damasio>> consulté le 12/02/17).

<sup>3</sup> Ce dernier point peut également rappeler la problématique dostoïevskienne dans *Crime et Châtiment* : jusqu'au dernier moment, Raskolnikov a la possibilité de ne pas être un assassin en décidant ou non de tuer la vieille usurière. Cela prouve l'impossibilité de prévoir un comportement humain par avance, quelle que soit la précision de l'algorithme qui supprime par là-même la présomption d'innocence.

Toutes ces données bizarres au fond, que l'on nous prélevait continument et qui s'éparpillaient quelque part parmi des millions de fichiers : apprécié des étudiants, 72 kilos, gestion honnête des conflits, 1m79, masculin, 169, avenue du Ministre C2048, culture étendue, consciencieux [...] Toutes ces données, le Clastre les unifiait dans le miracle d'une note, dont il faisait un rang, puis un petit tas de lettres. [...] Le Clastre nous déstructurait, mais c'était pour mieux nous co-ordonner ensuite (Damasio 1999, 181).

Il s'agit de structurer la société mais elle ne peut se faire qu'en structurant chaque individu. Celui-ci est mécanisé par sa propre technologie. Il se retrouve asservi par l'auto-persuasion perpétuelle que la sécurité est avant tout pour son propre bien et qu'il s'agit de coopérer, au risque de paraître suspect à son tour.

Par où tout cela a-t-il commencé ? Toujours par l'idée de bonheur, mais qui semble après tout cela en inadéquation totale avec la liberté. O'Brien, dans *1984* (1948), reprend les propos de Dostoïevski : bonheur et liberté sont antagonistes, le peuple préférant un bonheur empli d'une servitude sécuritaire plutôt qu'une liberté sans cesse incertaine.

Il prévoyait ce que dirait O'Brien. Que le Parti ne cherchait pas le pouvoir en vue de ses propres fins, mais pour le bien de la majorité ; qu'il cherchait le pouvoir parce que, dans l'ensemble, les hommes étaient des créatures frêles et lâches qui ne pouvaient endurer la liberté ni faire face à la vérité [...] que l'espèce humaine avait le choix entre la liberté et le bonheur et que le bonheur valait mieux (Orwell 1948, 347).

Contrairement au Christ qui prend la liberté de refuser les tentations du diable, le peuple, et ce quelles que soient les époques,

s'asservit à ses propres désirs. Plus précisément, il souhaite échapper à la possibilité d'un choix qui engagerait sa conscience car la liberté est 'un pouvoir du bien et du mal' (Koninck 2002, 148). Paul Evdokimov parlera de 'liberté orientée' (2014, 122) : 'La liberté orientée vers le bien, déterminée par lui, privée de moment du choix, devient une nécessité dans le bien. La vraie liberté suppose que l'expérience du bien et du mal sont également possibles' (Evdokimov 2014, 122). La nécessité du bien fait naître une rassurante certitude, celle de ne pas faire d'erreur : 'Aurais-Tu oublié que la paix et même la mort sont plus précieuses à l'homme que le libre choix dans la connaissance du bien et du mal ?' (Dostoïevski 1880, 296). Dès que l'homme prend connaissance de sa liberté, celle-ci renvoie nécessairement à un choix. Ce dernier est ancré dans une peur irrationnelle, presque primitive de l'inconnu. Il préfère alors bâtir des certitudes qui permettent l'illusion de la sécurité.

Ainsi, la dystopie révèle peut-être moins la possibilité d'un avenir qu'une réalité présente. En effet, dans un monde clôt et perpétuellement falsifié, la société maintient chaque individu sous contrôle. Il y a une théâtralisation de la société dans laquelle les dangers potentiels sont mis en scène plus qu'ils ne sont réels. Cette sécurité renforce et légitime une surveillance omniprésente, qui se perfectionne et s'intensifie par la technologie. Mais c'est peut-être annonciateur d'une humanité plus robotisée, à la fois physiquement mais également psychologiquement avec la servitude volontaire que la surveillance – ou la sous-veillance – amplifie. La sécurité rime non plus avec une quête d'un bonheur collectif mais celle d'une servitude non plus subie mais souhaitée, car synonymes de certitudes.

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# Mind the gap

## Fear on the London Underground

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In 1866 George Eliot, in her novel *Felix Holt, The Radical*, referred to a futuristic method of long-distance transport she described as a “tube” asserting that, although “Posterity may be shot, like a bullet through a tube, by atmospheric pressure, from Winchester to Newcastle” such a journey “can never lend much to picture and narrative; it is as barren as an exclamatory O!” (as cited in Bryerly 2013, 155). Although the author was not thinking of an underground railway and, at the time, the tunnels of the newly opened London Underground did not have the characteristic tubular shape that subsequently gave them their name, her remarks are interesting in that she could not envisage how a journey without a view of the world outside could offer material for “picture and narrative”.

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And yet, in the last 150 years, the underground journey, far from being as “barren as an exclamatory O”, has inspired countless artists, writers and scholars, and provided the setting for an extensive body of works of fiction and non-fiction which could be described as Tube literature.<sup>1</sup> Many of these texts express the fears and anxieties, both rational and irrational, that a journey on the Tube generates. This article will look at the main fears and anxieties about travelling on the London Underground as expressed in Tube literature.

## The early years of the London Underground

The building of the Underground railway, beginning in the 1850s, opened the subterranean space to everyday human activity, something unheard of until then. Previously, it had been thought unfit for human habitation and had been portrayed in literature either as the mythical underworld inhabited by the dead or as a fantasy world in the emerging genre of science fiction. Moreover, in London, the inception of the Underground coincided with the construction of a much-needed sewage system between 1859 and 1863. This meant that they were seen together as expressions of progress and modernity, but also that, in the popular imagination, the negative associations of the sewers were extended to the railway.

In 1853 an underground railway was the only possible answer to the problem of transport in a town suffocated by traffic, but from the very beginning the idea provoked scepticism and even hostility and derision. On 10 January 1863 the Metropolitan Railway began to operate between Paddington (then called

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<sup>1</sup> Tube literature is so extensive that, even though my article is restricted to works which express fears and anxieties, it can only discuss a limited selection.

Bishop's Road) and Farringdon Street. It was 6 km long and had been built using the cut and cover construction method to create a tunnel only a few metres below street level. The trains that ran on the line were conventional steam engines and so down in the stations the steam, the dark, the flickering flames of the gas lamps, the clamour and the overcrowding reminded many early writers of an infernal landscape.

The journey in semi-darkness (two gas lamps were provided in first-class compartments but only one in second and third-class compartments) and absence of windows in the carriages contributed to feelings of bewilderment and disorientation. This is expressed very effectively by Edmondo De Amicis, an Italian writer and journalist who visited London and described his experience of the underground railway in *Ricordi di Londra* (Memories of London) published in Italian in 1874 and in English translation as *Jottings About London* in 1883:

I go down two or three stairs and find myself suddenly thrown from daylight into obscurity: lamps, people, screeching sounds, trains arriving and disappearing in the dark ... We run through the foundation of the city, into the unknown. At first, we sink into thick darkness, then we see for an instant the dim light of day, and again plunge into obscurity, broken here and there by strange glowings; then between the thousand lights of a station, which appears and disappears in an instant; trains passing unseen; next an unexpected stop, the thousand faces of the waiting crowd, lit up as by the reflection of a fire, and then off again in the midst of a deafening din of slamming doors, ringing bells, and snorting engines; more darkness, more trains and more streaks of daylight, more lighted stations, more crowds passing, approaching, and moving away, until we reach the last station; I jump down; the train disappears, I am

shoved through a door, half carried up a stairway, I find myself in the light of day ... But where? (De Amicis 1883, 24–5).

The crowded dark stations with their sulphurous atmosphere and deafening noise recalled images of hell and travelling underground is often described in both fiction and non-fiction as a descent to the underworld. But some writers described it more realistically as a hellish journey rather than a journey through hell. They expressed fears that were real enough on early steam trains, such as asphyxiation, as described by another visitor to London, the American journalist R.D. Blumenfeld in 1887:

I had my first experience of Hades to-day, and if the real thing is to be like that I shall never do anything wrong. I got into the Underground railway at Baker Street ... The compartment in which I sat was filled with passengers who were smoking pipes, as is the British habit, and as the smoke and sulphur from the engine fill the tunnel, all the windows have to be closed. The atmosphere was a mixture of sulphur, coal dust and foul fumes from the oil lamp above; so that by the time we reached Moorgate Street I was near dead of asphyxiation and heat. I should think these Underground railways must soon be discontinued, for they are a menace to health (as cited in Spragg 2013, 26–27).

Despite all this, the first underground lines were a huge success and the network grew rapidly, although in haphazard fashion as individual companies, often American, created their own lines independently and often in competition with each other. Consequently, from the very beginning, unprofitable stations or line extensions were closed and others opened. It was not

uncommon for new lines to be started and then abandoned. This became significant in literature many years later when this ‘ghost’ network of stations and tunnels, which makes the London Underground unique, caught the attention of the public and the media.

Trains were extremely overcrowded from the outset and passengers felt threatened by the mass of moving people, but at times when carriages were almost empty, especially in first class, they also felt threatened by their fellow passengers. The fear of strangers has been exploited in many murder mysteries and macabre stories set in empty coaches on overground trains, but undoubtedly an empty carriage on a train travelling *underground* was an even more frightening place: what could be worse than being trapped in semi-darkness in an enclosed space underground with a dangerous stranger?

In 1897 John Oxenham published “A Mystery of the London Underground” in serialised form in the weekly magazine *To-day*. It described the activities of a mass murderer who haunts the first-class compartments of Underground trains every Tuesday night and randomly shoots victims he finds sitting alone. It was one of the most successful detective stories of the locked room mystery type set on an Underground train. It seems that some people took it so seriously that they avoided travelling on Tuesday nights, provoking resentment on the part of the Underground management, who wrote “a complaint to the editor of *To-Day*, Jerome K. Jerome” (Welsh 2010, 48).

Travelling on the Underground became faster and more comfortable when the lines were electrified and the first deep-level cylindrical tunnels were constructed using shield technology. It was at this time that the abbreviation of tubular railway to the ‘tubes’ or the ‘tube’ became popular. In 1890 the world’s first deep tube line, the City and South London Railway, became

the first standard-gauge electrified railway in Britain and other Underground railways converted to electricity soon after. The original trains and carriages, which had been aptly compared to ‘padded cells’ because of their high-backed cushioned seats and lack of windows, were replaced with electric multiple unit trains. But feelings of claustrophobia and paranoia persisted. In 1906, George Sims, in his *The Mysteries of Modern London*, played with his readers’ fears of travelling underground, even suggesting that Jack the Ripper must have travelled on the Underground trains to reach Whitechapel, where he committed his horrifying crimes:

The series of diabolical crimes in the East End which appalled the world were committed by a homicidal maniac who led the ordinary life of a free citizen. He rode in tramcars and omnibuses. He travelled to Whitechapel by the underground rail-way, often late at night. Probably on several occasions he had but one fellow-passenger in the compartment with him, and that may have been a woman. Imagine what the feelings of those travellers would have been had they known that they were alone in the dark tunnels of the Underground with Jack the Ripper! (Sims 1906, 72).

If being alone with a stranger elicited fear of attack, the presence of more than one fellow passenger did not necessarily offer much protection. In fact, from the very beginning of Tube literature, we find references to the fact that passengers on the Underground avoided eye contact and abstracted themselves from their immediate surroundings by reading, literally hiding behind their newspapers. In Baroness Orczy’s “The Mysterious Murder on the Underground Train” (1908), a woman is found murdered at Aldgate station on the Metropolitan line. The only other passenger in her carriage had been so engrossed in his paper that he is unable to offer a description of the man who

talked to the woman and then left the train, and consequently the murderer cannot be identified by the police.

Although new electric trains and better lit stations and carriages may have helped to reduce feelings of claustrophobia and anxiety, the “invisible power” of electricity generated other fears, as is often the case with innovations in technology. In “The Invisible Force” (1903) F. M. White, the first author of fiction to use the word ‘tube’, albeit not with a capital T, (‘tubes’ was the common expression) describes a catastrophic explosion when a gas leak is ignited by an electrical fault. It destroys the Underground and leaves London “half ruined”: “A roaring gas main had poured a dense volume into the tube for hours; mixed with the air it had become one of the most powerful and deadly of explosives ... the damage was terrible ... huge holes and ruts had been made in the earth, and houses had come down bodily” (White 1903, 80–81).

Other advances in science and technology, which were meant to improve the quality and safety of the Underground railway, also generated new anxieties. The air-operated automatic sliding doors, which had replaced the manually operated steel gates in the 1920s, become a deadly trap for the protagonist of Gerald Bullet’s “Last Days of Binnacle” (1925). In the short story, Percy Binnacle rushes at the closing tube gates, but they shut on him and “like gigantic fingers, like the talons of fate, they seized the little man, nipped him smartly and held him, all wriggling arms and legs, in their cruel grip” (cited in Welsh 2010, 213). The result is that his legs are cut off just above the knees, recalling the image of a wounded soldier in the war that had ended only a few years earlier.

As well as the pervasive fear of being trapped in the doors, people were scared of stepping into the gap between platform and train, an accident so common that in 1968 the phrase “Mind

the gap” was coined for use in automated recorded and written warnings in the Underground. As early as 1919, Thomas Graham Jackson has George, the protagonist of “A Romance of the Piccadilly Tube”, fall victim to such an accident. This narrative is also interesting in that it vividly expresses what we may call the ‘fear of the unruly crowd’ as an uncontrollable mass with a will of its own, a fear we encounter in very early writings, whether fictional or non-fictional, about the Underground:

The platform was congested with people from the theatres which had just closed. Never had he seen such a crowd. The train came up and George was carried in the rush to the entrance of the car. It was over full already; his foot was on the step when the gate was slammed in his face; he could not extricate himself from the crowd; the train began to move, his foot slipped, and was caught between the car and the platform; the train went faster and faster; he was dragged down and down, and he knew no more (Jackson 1919, 37).

But the most dreaded accident of all, no matter how unlikely to happen in reality, is that of falling in front of a moving train. This is what happens, in the same short story, to George’s lawyer Mr Harvey, who dies when ‘the mob’ presses on him while he stoops to collect a document that had fallen on the platform. The crowd, which is pushing to enter the train, makes him “lose his balance and fall over the edge” (p. 28) just as the train moves and runs over him, proving that the mob can be as deadly as a lone madman.

Mr Harvey, who comes back from the dead to help George make an important decision, is one of the first ghosts of a person

who died in the Underground to appear in literature.<sup>2</sup> But he is not a threat to anyone, nor does he haunt the Underground like the ghosts we find in other works. For example, in Roy Vickers's "The Eighth Lamp" (1916), the protagonist, a railway worker, is haunted by the vengeful ghost of a colleague he murdered in the Underground. This story is one of the first to feature Underground staff, although overground workers had been the protagonists of many previous works (the most famous example is arguably "The Signal-Man" by Charles Dickens published in 1866).

## The Underground network grows

Threatening presences – be they ghosts, monsters or madmen – are quite common in those works that explore imaginatively the fear of strangers and the fear of being trapped underground. The Tube is often portrayed as an underworld from which there is no escape, or as a labyrinth concealing some kind of monster. By the 1930s, the Underground network had indeed become a complex maze of intersecting lines and numerous stations spread out under London, a real *under* world that could not be navigated without a map. However, the network was so complex that accurate cartographical representation would have been too confusing and impractical. The solution was found by an employee of the London Underground, Harry Beck. He created the iconic map, a version of which is still in use today. It is a diagram resembling an electrical circuit, which distorts the real geography of the network (and by implication that of the

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy, the protagonist of a popular humorous song "Timothy Tott or The Metropolitan Railway", which appeared in printed form in 1883, tells the story of Uncle Timothy who boards the Metropolitan line and is never seen alive again. He never manages to reach his destination and his ghost can still be seen riding the trains (see Ashford 2013, 25).



town above) so that passengers can make sense of the maze of interconnecting Underground lines they must navigate to reach their destinations.

Beck's ingenious map, first published in 1933, may have imposed an artificial order on a confusing (under) world, but it could not dispel the fears expressed in literature, for example of becoming lost or, worse still, trapped forever underground. Britain's poet laureate John Betjeman wrote a short story for the radio, which was broadcast on the Home Service of the BBC on 9 January 1951, entitled "South Kentish Town", the name of a station closed in 1924. On a fateful Friday night "there was a hitch on the line so that the train stopped in the tunnel exactly beside the deserted and empty platform of South Kentish Town Station" and "the man who worked the automatic doors of the Underground carriages pushed a button and opened them" to see what was wrong. Mr Basil Green, his eyes intent on his newspaper, mistakenly thinks it is his stop and, "still reading the 'Evening Standard', steps out of the open door" (Betjeman 1985, 138). By the time he realises his mistake it is too late. His attempts to find out a way out of the station all fail, and the unfortunate commuter, who loses all hope of escape, is eventually rescued by two railway night workers. The tone of the narrative is humorous, but the protagonist's ordeal is no laughing matter.

John Betjeman had a strong interest in the railways and their history and was one of the first authors to use a real abandoned station as a setting, unlike other authors who had their protagonists stranded in fictional stations or in some version of hell. If one of the most common fears is boarding the wrong train to an unknown destination, what could be worse than finding oneself, literally, at the "end of the line"? This nightmare is explored in many texts, for instance, in John Edgell's "All Change" (1982) in which a ghost train takes its passengers to a station that resembles

a cemetery,<sup>3</sup> or in John Wyndham's "Confidence Trick" (1953) in which four passengers find themselves on a ghost train that takes them to hell (and eventually back to London!). The idea of a Tube train stopping at a station in hell had become such a cliché that Ken Follett was able to reverse it in "The Midnight Train to Nowhere" (1975). In the short story, when the doors of a Northern Line train accidentally open, Janet inadvertently gets out and finds herself in what she (and the reader) believe to be a ghost station/hell. She thinks she is trapped there, but in a final twist she meets a Tube worker who tells her that she is actually at the Strand Station, which had been closed for a few years and was due to reopen.

In a number of supernatural narratives, the ghosts themselves travel on the Tube.<sup>4</sup> In R. Chetwynd-Hayes's short story "Non-Paying Passengers" (1974), for example, they sit side by side with the living, but without ever reaching a destination, in an endless loop, while "demons disguised as porters glared in through the grime-fogged windows" of the train (Chetwynd-Hayes, 1974, 190). In this version of hell, "it's always the rush hour ... eternally ... for ever and ever" (190). One of the protagonists of Laurence

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<sup>3</sup> It was possibly inspired by Brookwood Cemetery Station on the London Necropolis Railway. The railway (1854-1941) was an overground line, connecting a dedicated station near Waterloo in central London to the massive new Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey. The trains transported coffins and funeral parties from the centre of London to the cemetery. Although the railway is mentioned in several works about the history of London, it is surprising that only – to my knowledge – are centred on it: Andrew Martin's novel *The Necropolis Railway: a Novel of Murder, Mystery and Steam*, published in 2002, and the non-fiction work by John M. Clarke *The Brookwood Necropolis Railway*, originally published in 1983, and which has gone through several reprints.

<sup>4</sup> In the short story "In the Tube" (1923) by British author E.F. Benson, the protagonist Anthony Carling encounters a ghost from the future in an Underground train. He sees the "projection" of a man who, a few days later, will commit suicide by throwing himself under a train at Dover Street Station (present-day Green Park).

Staig's *The Network* (1989), a Transport Police detective, explains that "it was generally accepted amongst railway men that the Underground was littered with the ghosts of the dead" (Staig 1989, 168) and in the recently published *The Furthest Station* (2017) by Ben Aaronovitch ghosts from the Victorian age haunt the Metropolitan line at rush hour.

## The horrors of travelling on the Tube: supernatural and human threats

It is no surprise that fears connected with the Tube are often explored in horror narratives. The world in horror literature is a closed space and the genre is, by its own definition, one that describes, gives shape – provides a story – to our worst fears, allowing the quotidian and the supernatural to coexist side by side. In many horror and fantasy works, the Tube is the place where these two worlds and the different races which inhabit them, meet. This encounter is almost invariably fatal for the unwary commuter, like Foster in Jeremy Dyson's "City Deep" (2000). This short story exploits once again some of the themes often found in Tube literature. The protagonist, who suffers from claustrophobia and is terrified of bombs and accidents, is forced to take the Underground at night and ends up on a ghost train taking him to a ghost station inhabited by a race of monsters. In the train there is a retired Tube worker travelling with him explains that he had been unable to cope with life overground and had started exploring abandoned tunnels. Eventually, he had discovered in "London's ancient bowels" a community of

human-like creatures who “taught him many things” and to whom, it seems, Foster will fall prey (Dyson 2000, 88).<sup>5</sup>

The station has been portrayed as a portal to another dimension or to the underworld, from the beginning of Tube literature. In a modern urban environment it provides an easy access point to the underworld and a convenient way to transition from the real to the unreal. In the Underground the other world seems to be just steps, or stations, away. A traveller only has to take the wrong train or get off at the wrong station. Most of them do not intentionally enter the underworld, but inadvertently stumble into it, showing how easy it is to pass from the familiar and the quotidian to the eerie and the unknown.

The reality of underground travel can be frightening enough without a transition to the supernatural, and fears of violent crime, accidents and terrorist attacks are reflected in many narratives. Carl, the protagonist of Alex Garland’s *The Coma* (2004) is attacked while travelling on the last Tube home. He attempts to protect a young woman from a group of youths who want to steal her bag. As a result, he is beaten unconscious and enters a coma from which he never recovers. Ruth Rendell, writing as Barbara Vine, has one of the protagonists of *King Solomon’s Carpet* attempt to plant a bomb at a particularly vulnerable point in the network. The novel appeared in 1991 when three IRA incendiary devices were found hidden under a train at Hammersmith station, rousing once again the fear of terrorist attacks.<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of a non-human race which preys upon commuters with the assistance of a human helper may well have been inspired by one of the most interesting underground narratives (which takes place in the New York subway), “The Midnight Meat Train” (1984), published by one of the leading contemporary horror writers, Clive Barker. A film of the same title was released in 2008.

<sup>6</sup> One of the worst terrorist attacks in Britain took place on 7 July 2005 when four suicide bombers detonated bombs on three Tube trains and one bus, killing 52 people and injuring more than 770.

American writer Geoff Ryman records in his internet novel 253 (1998) the thoughts of the 253 passengers on the Bakerloo line in the seven and a half minutes before the train in which they are travelling, crashes. The character of the terrorist is still haunting more recent literature. In Max Kinnings's *Baptism* (2012), three extremists belonging to an evangelical Christian order hijack a crowded Northern line train. They force the driver to stop in a tunnel between Leicester Square and Tottenham Court Road while the protagonist, a hostage negotiator, is called in to talk to them. They have opened a shaft to an adjoining tunnel which brings water in to flood the train and they intend to drown ("baptize") the passengers.<sup>7</sup>

## More information, new inspiration

Since the late 1980s, and increasingly since the 1990s, much Tube literature takes place, at least in part, at abandoned stations and in abandoned tunnels. It was at this time that the closed lines of the Underground started to attract interest from the general public. As a result, an ever-increasing amount of material has become available on the internet, ranging from urban legends in blogs to articles and photos by urban explorers and geographers. Non-fiction books, TV documentaries and articles in newspapers and online have been dedicated to the subject of abandoned

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<sup>7</sup> Kinnings plays upon the fear of drowning in the Tube; this may have been inspired by the 1940 Balham Station disaster when a German bomb caused a tunnel to collapse, and ruptured water mains and sewers flooded the station and killed over 60 people who had been sheltering there from air raids. Ian McEwan's prize-winning novel *Atonement* (2001) mentions the Balham disaster, and it is featured in one of the most dramatic scenes in the film of the same title. The film was released in 2007 only a few years before Max Kinnings's *Baptism*.

stations and tunnels. The re-discovery of this hidden network seems to have had the effect of giving fresh impetus to the old fears of becoming trapped in the labyrinth and of falling victim to hidden threats.

This invisible network, which runs parallel to the one marked on Beck's map, also becomes the ideal hiding place for all those who are taking refuge from "London Above", to borrow the expression used by Neil Gaiman in *Neverwhere* (1996).<sup>8</sup> They are the derelicts, the homeless, the lost that nobody claims, the victims and rejects of society, but also the psychotic and the dangerously insane. Numerous thrillers feature serial killers who find refuge in the 'ghost' network. Munro, for example, in Nicholas Royle's *The Director's Cut* (2000) hides in the abandoned premises of the Wood Lane Tube station which was closed in 1959.<sup>9</sup>

Authors who want to explore the threats that lurk in these abandoned places may choose protagonists who work, live or hide there. They are Tube workers (e.g. Tobias Hill's *Underground* 1999, Christopher Fowler's "Down" 2010), homeless people (e.g. John Healy's *The Streets Above Us* 1990, Alice Thompson's "Killing Time" 1990, Christopher Golden and Tim Lebbon's *Mind the Gap: A Novel of the Hidden Cities* 2008), and dangerous criminals (e.g. Nicholas Royle's *The Director's Cut* 2000). In fantasy literature, the protagonists are often a lost race, ancient inhabitants of the subterranean space below London (e.g. Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* 1996, China Miéville's *King Rat* 1998 and

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<sup>8</sup> The novel *Neverwhere* was based on Neil Gaiman's script for the television series of the same title. In 2019 the author announced the forthcoming publication of the follow-up to *Neverwhere*, entitled *The Seven Sisters* after the name of a Tube station on the Victoria Line.

<sup>9</sup> In Frances Thompson's independently published humorous short story "The Ghosts of London Underground" (2014), the dead have moved from the cemeteries above to the disused Tube stations where they dwell in well-organized communities.

*Un Lun Dun* 2007).<sup>10</sup> In Laurence Staig's *The Network* (1989), which takes place entirely in the Underground, three types of protagonist, a homeless boy, a Tube worker and a British Transport detective, join forces to try and solve the mystery behind some gruesome murders.

Tobias Hill's *Underground* brings together a Tube worker, a homeless person and a homicidal maniac. The protagonist, Casimir, a Polish immigrant, works for the Underground and considers it his home. He falls in love with a girl who calls herself Alice (like Lewis Carroll's protagonist, whose adventures also take place underground), who has literally made the Underground her home and lives in its abandoned tunnels. She is pursued by a serial killer who is pushing young women under trains and who also inhabits this subterranean world.

The fear of being pushed under a train is one that many passengers experience and finds expression in Tube literature in the character of the 'pusher'.<sup>11</sup> A pusher, or rather a team of

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<sup>10</sup> More recently, in *The Tube Riders: Underground*, published in 2012, Chris Ward describes a group of homeless young people who live in abandoned Underground stations in a future dystopian London. They call themselves the "tube riders" because they play the dangerous game of jumping onto moving Underground trains and hanging onto them, not unlike the characters in Barbara Vine's *King Solomon's Carpet*. *The Tube Riders: Underground* is the first of four volumes of the successful Tube Riders Series, published between 2012 and 2016. It is the only one of the four that takes place in the Underground.

<sup>11</sup> The idea that a "pusher" might have been responsible for some accidents or apparent suicides that had happened in the Underground is central to Geoff Platt's non-fiction book *The London Underground Serial Killer* (2015). He argues that Kieran Patrick Kelly, who killed two people and died in jail, was also responsible for pushing at least 14 people under Northern Line trains between 1960 and 1983. The author, a former police detective, had extensive interviews with Kelly and believed his claims that he was a serial killer. Following the interest sparked by the book, Robert Mulhern produced "Anatomy of an Irish Serial Killer", a documentary for Irish radio in November 2016. He also published a book, *The Secret Serial Killer: The True Story of Kieran Kelly*, in 2019.

pushers, appear in Williams's *London Revenant*, published in 2004 and the police find themselves helpless to react:

[The Pusher] and his cronies ... were forcing up to a dozen people a day onto the rails, despite the huge increase in security cameras and guards on the platforms. They had varied their methods a lot, changing lines and causing huge delays. The extra security outfits were unable to pin anybody down because The Pusher and his team vanished into the tunnels as soon as they had committed their crimes (Williams 2004, 95).

Similarly, the murderer who pushes a woman down the stairs in a Tube station and another in front of a train in Christopher Fowler's *Bryant and May Off the Rails* (2011), and the kidnapper in Tim Weaver's *Vanished* (2012), do so in full view of commuters and CCTV, and are only identified thanks to the investigative skills of talented detectives.

Since the 1990s much of the factual information about the Underground which has entered the public domain, has found a place in works of fiction. In fact, in comparison to earlier literature, many works go into great detail about the history and workings of the Tube, as well as the urban legends, mysteries and ghost stories associated with it. In Oliver Bowden's fantasy novel *Assassin's Creed: Underworld* (based on the video game series of the same name), the protagonists find themselves in London in 1862 when the construction of the underground railway is under way. They meet two key figures in the history of the Underground, John Fowler, the leading railway engineer of the time, and Charles Pearson, the City solicitor who campaigned for the building of an underground railway. This gives the author the opportunity to write in some detail about the early history of the Metropolitan Railway.



Most writers provide such information through the voice of a character who has professional knowledge of and familiarity with the Underground. In *King Solomon's Carpet* (1991), a thriller completely centred on the Tube, Jarvis is writing a book about underground railways which allows the author to intersperse the narrative with informative excerpts from his book. Usually, however, the facts and figures are offered by Underground staff, whether they are the protagonists, like Casimir in *Underground*, or – more frequently – secondary characters who provide all sorts of information about the network.

Max Kinnings in *Baptism* (2012) has his protagonist Ed Mallory work together with an Underground expert, professor Frank Moorcroft of Imperial College London and they are assisted by Underground staff in accessing those sections of the Tube that are closed to the public. Further information is provided by the driver of the hijacked train.

Christopher Fowler devotes lengthy passages of *Bryant and May Off the Rails* to facts and figures about the Underground, including the story of Betjeman's unfortunate protagonist in "South Kentish Town", retold as an urban legend by an Underground staff member. The author also attempts to blur the distinction between fact and fiction, providing an explanation (and a perpetrator) for a real event, the King's Cross fire which killed 31 people in 1987. The fire was started by an unknown person, who dropped a match which fell beneath a wooden escalator. In the novel, the murderer, then a child, deliberately dropped the match to cause the fire and vindicate the death of his father, who had thrown himself under an oncoming train at King's Cross.

Disused Tube stations (and their ghosts!) continue to generate interest. New books are regularly published.<sup>12</sup> In his independently published novel *Under* of 2018 (based on his short story “Signal Failure” 2016), David Wailing recycles a wide range of Tube tropes: a lost underground race, ghost trains, disused stations, plague pits, Tube workers and even the Necropolis Railway all appear in the book, together with information about the history of the Underground commonly found in Tube literature. In a novel addition to the genre, he imagines another entire underground network hidden under the existing one.

The London Transport Museum has also recognized the public interest. In October 2019 it opened the “Hidden London Exhibition” which is completely dedicated to disused stations and exhibits archive photos, posters and decorative tiles. The museum also organises “Hidden London Tours” and events at disused stations.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the Underground continues to offer inspiration to writers: its subterranean, disorientating and labyrinthine nature make it the perfect setting for narratives that explore human fears. Many innovations over the years have made the Underground a safer and more pleasant environment. Every year, about 1.3 billion journeys are made on the Tube and statistics for 2018–2019 reported only 14.2 crimes per 1 million passenger journeys. In the same period, 5,541 passenger injuries were recorded of which only 145 were classified as major.<sup>13</sup> However, it seems that nothing will dispel the anxieties

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<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Nix, Holloway, Bownes & Mullins’ *Hidden London: Discovering the Forgotten Underground* (2019) and Will Underwood’s *Ghost on The Platform: Ghosts, crashes, suicides, murders and freak accidents on the London Underground* (2018).

<sup>13</sup> See *The Rail Safety Statistics* for 2018–2019 released by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) on 24 September 2019 and the *Crime & Incident Bulletins* issued by Transport for London in 2019.

that entering the Underground provokes, and which find their expression in literature. In life and fiction, the Tube continues to arouse some of our deepest – no pun intended – fears.

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# Peur du chaos et retour à l'humain

## Le mythe du yéti selon Hergé et Castelli-Manara

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Le yéti, ou selon l'expression galvaudée « l'abominable homme des neiges », est une créature anthropomorphe et monstrueuse du folklore de la région himalayenne. Il fait, depuis les expéditions successives tentant d'atteindre les plus hauts sommets de l'Himalaya, l'objet d'une fascination en Occident, aujourd'hui savamment entretenue à des fins touristiques. Daniel Loxton et Donald R. Prothero (2013) rapportent avoir vu sur les marchés népalais une panoplie d'artéfacts inspirés du yéti : une supposée fourrure, une présumée empreinte et des images de toutes sortes. L'une des plus importantes compagnies aériennes népalaises s'appelle d'ailleurs Yeti Airlines.

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J.,  
Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*.  
Tampere: Tampere University Press, 179–197.  
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-014-4>



L'idée du yéti n'a jamais cessé d'intriguer les esprits aventureux. Elle est particulièrement examinée par la cryptozoologie qui étudie les créatures dont l'existence ne peut être prouvée de manière irréfutable. En réalité, bien des scientifiques s'accordent à penser que le yéti ne serait autre qu'un ursidé. En effet, certains plantigrades, comme l'ours brun de l'Himalaya qui se tient souvent debout, peuvent à distance rappeler des silhouettes humaines. Le nom du yéti vient d'ailleurs peut-être de *Yeh-Teh* (animal des roches) ou de *Meh-Teh* (homme-ours), et l'un des noms utilisés dans *Tintin au Tibet*, « Migou », décrit en fait l'ours brun de l'Himalaya. Mais il est très lucratif, et parfois simplement amusant, d'entretenir la légende. Toutefois, nous n'allons ici nous pencher ni sur la légende, ni sur ses effets commerciaux mais, de façon analytique, sur la naissance d'un mythe littéraire grâce à deux ouvrages de bande dessinée, *Tintin au Tibet* du Belge Hergé (1960<sup>1</sup>) et *L'uomo delle nevi* (*L'Homme des neiges*) des Italiens Alfredo Castelli et Milo Manara (1976<sup>2</sup>). Ces deux ouvrages sortent en effet, comme nous le verrons, du lot important de représentations populaires du yéti. Ils permettent une approche plus artistique du sujet par le fait même qu'ils le hissent au rang de mythe littéraire. Les manifestations culturelles, de la simple évocation à l'hommage appuyé, associées au yéti, étant très nombreuses et en perpétuelle mutation, permettaient déjà au yéti d'accéder au statut de mythe. Cependant, comme le précise Pierre Albouy (2012), le mythe littéraire est un personnage hérité d'une tradition orale ou littéraire, que divers auteurs traitent et modifient librement et pour lequel, à chaque reprise, s'ajoutent nécessairement des significations nouvelles. Albouy identifie

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<sup>1</sup> *Tintin au Tibet* est le 20e album de bande dessinée des « Aventures de Tintin ». Il fut d'abord publié en feuilleton dans *Le Journal de Tintin* entre septembre 1958 et novembre 1959.

<sup>2</sup> La première traduction en français date de 1979.

différentes typologies de mythes littéraires, notamment ceux soit hérités, inventés, ou nés de l'histoire et de la vie moderne, et l'on constate d'ores et déjà que le yéti entre dans plusieurs de ces catégories à la fois.

Nous verrons ainsi les deux aspects présents dans la construction du mythe du yéti – l'ancienne légende, d'une part, et ses adaptations visuelles plus récentes, d'autre part –, et nous soulignerons le rôle que joue l'espace dans lequel le yéti se situe, l'Himalaya, une montagne à la fois réelle et elle aussi mythique par la peur mêlée d'attraction irrésistible qu'elle continue d'inspirer aux grimpeurs de toutes origines. Cet examen nous amènera à la signification du yéti chez Hergé et le duo Castelli-Manara. Comme le rappelle Pierre Brunel (1988), les fonctions du mythe sont de raconter, expliquer et révéler, ce qui s'applique également au mythe littéraire qui porte, comme tout mythe fondateur, des thèmes universels qu'il explore et affine à chaque réécriture.

## Le mythe littéraire

Jacques Lacarrière (2002) rappelle que le mythe est la fabuleuse et mystérieuse histoire de l'homme révélée et narrée par lui-même. C'est un récit sacré sur l'homme et sur tout ce qu'il ignore par la force des choses, à savoir ce qui s'est passé avant lui et ce qui se passera après lui sur la terre et dans le reste du monde. Comme nous le verrons, le yéti émane lui aussi d'une perplexité : qu'était l'humain à l'aube de son apparition et qu'est-il en train de devenir ?

Claude Lévi-Strauss définit un mythe par la somme de ses variantes. Elles sont cependant trop nombreuses concernant

le cryptide<sup>3</sup> yéti pour les mentionner toutes ici. Rappelons brièvement que Brian Hodgson (1832), naturaliste et ethnologue anglais en mission au Népal, est le premier occidental à faire référence à lui en 1832 et à voir en lui un grand singe anthropoïde du type orang-outang. En 1915, R.O. Gent, officier forestier en poste au Darjeeling, dit observer des empreintes de pied de type humain mais de taille exceptionnellement grande<sup>4</sup>. A partir de son rapport, et jusqu'à récemment, bien d'autres supposés témoignages similaires fleuriront – l'un des derniers a été relayé par l'AFP en 2008 : des Japonais partis à la recherche du yéti auraient photographié de grandes empreintes de type humain dans l'Himalaya.

Les attestations concordent souvent, même si elles varient quant à l'apparence physique du monstre. Castelli et Manara s'inspirent de ces divers écrits sur le yéti et des représentations visuelles qu'elles en présentent dans *L'Homme des neiges*<sup>5</sup>. Toutefois, certaines marquent une différence : le yéti ne serait pas un être solitaire ou isolé. En 1920, des grimpeurs lors d'une expédition, à 5000 m d'altitude, non loin de la face nord de l'Everest, voient à la jumelle plusieurs formes sombres se déplaçant sur un champ de neige élevé. Ils racontent que leurs empreintes faisaient trois fois la taille de celle d'un être humain. Les croyances divergent tout à fait, en revanche, quant à la nature

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<sup>3</sup> Le terme « cryptide » a été inventé par le biologiste écossais Ivan T. Sanderson (1965) et il désigne une science qui étudie objectivement le cas d'animaux connus par des témoignages, des pièces anatomiques ou des photographies de valeur apparemment contestable. Lorsque la recherche porte sur des êtres anthropomorphes tels que le yéti, on parle alors de cryptoanthropologie. Cf. Gilles Boëtsch et Jean Gagnepain (2008, 56).

<sup>4</sup> Dans *Sur les traces du yéti et autres créatures clandestines*. Cf. l'historique du yéti de Philippe Coudray, <http://www.philippe-coudray.com/Pages/Historique%20yeti%204.html> [12/03/2020].

<sup>5</sup> Voir image 9/12. <https://www.bede.fr/preview-bd-odysees-initiatiques-manara> [12/03/2020].

exacte du yéti, et maintes fictions ne manquent pas d'en exploiter les possibilités. Pour certains, le yéti serait une sorte d'homme primitif ou sauvage, peut-être même un hominidé considéré disparu de la préhistoire, c'est-à-dire un « Mammifère primate à locomotion partiellement ou totalement bipède, présentant de fortes aptitudes à la vie sociale et à l'apprentissage, tel que l'homme actuel et les espèces fossiles les plus voisines considérées comme des ancêtres possibles de notre espèce » (Larousse). Y correspondraient également le Bigfoot d'Amérique du nord ou l'Orang Pendek d'Indonésie.

Comme le rappelle Paul Ricoeur (1960, 25), le mythe est « un symbole développé en récit » – fortement structuré et fortement symbolique, il donne à penser. Ainsi, les deux récits ici sélectionnés usent, d'un côté, des stéréotypes qui entourent le yéti et conventionnellement l'érigent en monstre primitif, redoutable et répugnant, et, de l'autre, innovent en en faisant un être doté d'humanité et en examinant les peurs auxquelles il correspond dans la psyché humaine, en un portrait à l'extrême opposé de son personnage habituel.

## Rencontres avec le yéti dans la genèse de *Tintin au Tibet* et de *L'Homme des neiges*

Les deux albums s'emparent du personnage du yéti pour créer une transposition visuelle et novatrice de cet être mythique. Revenons brièvement sur leurs intrigues respectives. Dans *Tintin au Tibet*, le jeune Chinois, Tchang, que Tintin avait rencontré et sauvé lors d'un séjour en Chine et avec lequel il s'était lié d'une solide amitié (dans *Le Lotus bleu*), se rend en Europe quand son avion, pris dans une tempête, s'écrase dans l'Himalaya, ne laissant en apparence aucun survivant. Tintin fait un rêve

prémonitoire dans lequel Tchang l'appelle au secours, et contre l'avis de tous, décide de partir à sa recherche. Après bien des obstacles, notamment la peur du yéti de la part des montagnards népalais, il parvient à trouver un guide (*sherpa*) pour l'emmener sur les lieux de la catastrophe aérienne et, même plus loin dès que des signes de la survie de Tchang apparaissent. Comme toujours, Tintin parvient à ses fins et récupère son ami, adopté malgré lui par un yéti qui lui a sauvé la vie, et le ramène à la civilisation, loin de son bienfaiteur terrifiant à bien des égards. Durant son périple, Tintin est aidé par des moines tibétains qui le nomment « cœur pur ».

Notons au passage que *Tintin au Tibet* est différent des autres albums d'Hergé : les Dupont et Dupond n'y apparaissent pas, pas plus que le moindre criminel à combattre, le récit décrit la recherche désespérée à laquelle Tintin se livre pour retrouver un ami cher. C'est bien d'une aventure intérieure qu'il s'agit. Ce récit ne démontre pas seulement la valeur quasiment vitale d'une estime mutuelle, mais le fait qu'elle parvienne à vaincre tous les obstacles, et surtout les préjugés et la peur nés d'une méconnaissance, d'une ignorance, et aussi le fait que l'individu en sort grandi. Des émotions jamais vues dans les aventures de Tintin auparavant apparaissent ici. Tintin se laisse, par exemple, aller au désespoir quand il apprend le supposé décès de Tchang, d'une façon qui n'est pas du tout caractéristique du personnage.

Dans *L'Homme des neiges*, un journaliste au *Daily Telegraph* à Londres, Kenneth Tobey, écrit un article plutôt ironique sur une ascension avortée de l'Everest – échec dû à la peur que les sherpas ont ressenti à la vue de yétis. Tobey reçoit alors la visite d'un ancien explorateur qui lui assure qu'il ne devrait pas ridiculiser les grimpeurs et l'idée du yéti, et qu'il a lui-même vécu cette expérience. Cette rencontre parvient à le troubler. Le voilà accompagnant l'expédition suivante, en principe afin d'en

ramener un reportage. Durant l'ascension, le groupe doit essayer une avalanche, semble-t-il provoquée par un groupe de yétis. Il y a des morts et des disparus parmi les grimpeurs, et les survivants font demi-tour, sans savoir que Tobey, inconscient, a de son côté été emmené par des moines dans leur lamaserie, où il va bientôt découvrir un monde secret et sacré où il choisira de demeurer.

Comme nous l'évoquions plus tôt, les auteurs se sont clairement inspirés de certains des rapports, livres et articles se rapportant à des études de terrain à la recherche du yéti, dont ceux déjà mentionnés. Hergé, de son côté, s'est plongé dans une grande documentation : il s'est inspiré notamment des écrits de l'exploratrice Alexandra David-Néel, première femme européenne à rejoindre Lhassa en 1925, mais aussi de traités d'études des philosophies orientales, de photographies des environs de Katmandou et de Delhi, et de comptes-rendus de reportages ethnologiques d'après des expéditions effectuées par Maurice Herzog, vainqueur de l'Annapurna en 1950, et Fosco Maraini, alpiniste et écrivain dont les photographies furent l'objet d'expositions<sup>6</sup>. Les présumées traces de pas du yéti, par ailleurs, photographiées en mai 1955, lors de la première expédition française du Makalu, et dont plusieurs avaient été publiées dans *Paris Match*, ont été reproduites par Hergé et apparaissent en couverture de l'album<sup>7</sup>. De plus, le physique de son yéti s'inspire des dessins de Bernard Heuvelmans, zoologue belge, fondateur de la cryptozoologie et auteur de l'étude *Sur la piste des bêtes ignorées* (1955)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Herzog raconte son expédition dans *Annapurna, premier 8000* (1952). Maraini publia *Segreto Tibet* (1952 également), ouvrage orné de 68 héliogravures d'après les photographies de l'auteur.

<sup>7</sup> Voir <http://fr.tintin.com/albums/show/id/20/page/o/o/tintin-au-tibet> [12/03/2020].

<sup>8</sup> Concernant l'évolution du physique du yéti, voir <http://cryptomundo.com/cryptozoo-news/yeti-evolve/> [12/03/2020]. Voir aussi le yéti d'Hergé : <http://www.cryptozoonews.com/tintin-yeti/> [12/03/2020].

Nos auteurs se placent donc, au premier abord, dans une approche réaliste et factuelle du sujet. Castelli et Manara démarrent leur récit avec la célèbre expédition d'exploration de l'Everest, menée par Charles Howard-Bury en 1921, après laquelle un journaliste du *Statesman* de Calcutta, Henry Newman, a effectivement, comme Tobey, inventé l'expression « abominable homme des neiges » qui, bien qu'erronée, persiste de nos jours. Il s'agit d'une traduction fantaisiste de « Metoh Kangmi » (et non pas « Metch Kangmi », comme dans l'album en question), qui signifie en réalité « répugnant homme des neiges »<sup>9</sup>.

De façon significative, l'adjectif original correspond à une perception, que ce soit une peur ou un dégoût ; alors que l'adjectif galvaudé porte un jugement sur le personnage du yéti, cette figure inapprochable et nécessairement méconnue. C'est d'ailleurs ce terme qui démarre véritablement la transformation d'une croyance locale en un mythe moderne et universel. Ajouté à cela, bien que le yéti ait déjà été mentionné en Europe dès le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce sont les photos d'empreintes prises en 1951 par l'alpiniste britannique Eric Shipton qui le révèlent tout à fait au public occidental (Loxton et Prothero).

Les années 50 sont en effet marquées par le début d'un intérêt populaire international pour le yéti. Notons au passage deux films produits peu avant *Tintin au Tibet*, l'un, américain, *The Snow Creature* (1954) de W. Lee Wilder<sup>10</sup>, et l'autre, anglais, *The Abominable Snowman* (1957) de Val Guest, qui contiennent une partie des motifs que l'on retrouve chez Hergé et Castelli-Manara. Dans le second, la femme d'un scientifique est kidnappée par un

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<sup>9</sup> Voir image 4/12. [https://www.bede.fr/box/350x476/media/previews/odyssees-initiatiques/x03.jpg,q14666\\_014\\_56.pagespeed.ic.2hpQG9wrHq.jpg\[12/03/2020\]](https://www.bede.fr/box/350x476/media/previews/odyssees-initiatiques/x03.jpg,q14666_014_56.pagespeed.ic.2hpQG9wrHq.jpg[12/03/2020]).

<sup>10</sup> On y remarque certaines ressemblances physiques et narratives avec *King Kong* en termes d'intrigue, avec le premier acte situé dans un décor exotique, et le second dans une grande ville (Los Angeles).

yéti qui sera éliminé sans pitié, tandis que le premier propose l'idée que le yéti puisse être une autre forme d'humain, qui se préserve loin de toute civilisation destructrice de l'ordre naturel, dû aux vices qu'elle présente et à l'ignorance qu'elle entretient. Bien que ces films soient catalogués comme films d'horreur, une nouvelle approche du sujet est amorcée que nos deux textes poursuivent et développent radicalement, examinant le(s) sens possible(s) de l'engouement collectif mêlé de crainte pour le yéti, et des récits multipliés qui en découlent.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1985, 227) avance que « la pensée mythique procède de la prise de conscience de certaines oppositions et tend à leur médiation progressive. [...] [L]’objet du mythe est de fournir un modèle logique pour résoudre une contradiction ». Comme nous allons le voir, c'est ce modèle que *Tintin au Tibet* et *L'Homme des Neiges*, chacun à sa manière, nous proposent.

## Espace et révélation

Reflétant les oppositions rattachées au yéti, les auteurs créent des espaces contrastés, des lieux très peuplés et très organisés au début de leurs récits respectifs, que Guattari et Deleuze (1980) appelleraient des espaces « striés », à l'extrême opposé du vide des hauts sommets enneigés qui correspond à un espace « lisse » : le Londres des années 20 chez Castelli-Manara contrasté avec la montagne où Tobey se sent d'abord étranger mais qu'il adoptera ; le train-train bien réglé des vacances à l'hôtel, chez Hergé, avec les horaires fixes du dîner et les passe-temps du soir, contrastés avec l'existence dangereuse en montagne.

La menace ressentie ne vient pas du danger que pourraient représenter certains animaux sauvages. Il n'y en a aucun chez



Castelli-Manara, et chez Hergé, seul un yack, inoffensif, réveille fortuitement Tintin, lui permettant de donner l'alerte après une avalanche<sup>11</sup>. Le froid et la faim n'entrent pas non plus vraiment en considération. Le seul danger constamment perceptible réside dans la possible présence d'un ou plusieurs yétis. Mais ne s'agit-il pas plutôt d'une phobie ? Ou cette peur apparemment irrationnelle serait-elle le signe d'une mémoire ancestrale ? Quoi qu'il en soit, elle provoque une situation de dépassement de soi qu'on retrouve dans les récits issus de mythes, comme certains contes.

À cette réalisation de soi, qui est l'objectif de nos deux récits, s'ajoute le fait que l'espace du yéti est l'Himalaya, la chaîne de montagnes la plus élevée au monde<sup>12</sup>, ce qui fait de l'ascension difficile et périlleuse de cet espace une expérience spirituelle, intérieure et symbolique. Les neiges du Tibet, nous rappelle Sylvain Bouyer (1995, 89), « symbolisent l'éternité. Blanches, elles reflètent un idéal de pureté [...]. Infinies, elles affichent ce goût de l'étendue qui est aussi un refus d'un moi séparé de l'univers ». La montagne symbolise non seulement l'élévation de l'esprit, le détachement du matériel – et de manière significative, Tintin est appelé « cœur pur » par un moine tibétain et un autre lama dit à Tobey « ton esprit est pur » – mais elle symbolise aussi la remontée vers les origines, ce qui permet d'intégrer le mythe du yéti dans la catégorie des mythes ontophaniques qui, comme Mircea Eliade (1965) le rappelle, révèlent la manifestation plénière de l'être, à

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<sup>11</sup> Notons qu'à part la présence d'un gorille de garde dans *L'île noire*, qui se passe dans une autre terre de légendes, l'Ecosse, l'arrivée du yéti dans *Les Aventures de Tintin* présente pour la première fois la question des limites entre homme et bête (et le gorille de *L'île noire* est d'ailleurs lui aussi réellement inoffensif ; cependant, à la fin de l'histoire, tout le monde s'enfuit encore à sa vue).

<sup>12</sup> Située à la frontière entre cinq pays : le Népal, la Chine (région du Tibet), l'Inde, le Bhoutan et le Pakistan.

la fois ce que nous sommes et ce que nous avons été. Sur cette apparition singulière de l'être, Stéphane Vial ajoute que :

Par phénoménalité des phénomènes, nous entendons la manière dont l'être (ontos) nous apparaît (phaïnomenon), en tant que celle-ci induit une qualité particulière de se-sentir-au-monde. Nous l'appelons ontophanie, au sens étymologique du terme tel qu'il a été initié par Mircea Eliade et qui signifie que quelque chose se montre à nous (2013, 110).

On pourrait ainsi qualifier le mythe du yéti de hiérophanique (terme élaboré à partir de « hiérophante » – celui qui révèle le sacré) et proposé par Eliade dans son *Traité d'histoire des religions*, puisque, comme le souligne Philippe Cornu, il « désigne la manifestation du sacré, [...] dans un regard neuf sur ce qui nous entoure et sur nous-mêmes » (2013, 71).

Aucune histoire sur le yéti n'avait abordé ce côté transcendant avant le récit d'Hergé. Plongé dans des lectures sur le bouddhisme et le taoïsme à l'époque de la composition du volume, Hergé met ici en scène des valeurs telles que la compassion, la modération et l'humilité. De façon surprenante, son yéti altruiste recueille le seul survivant d'une catastrophe aérienne non pas pour en faire son dîner (comme la légende le suggérait) mais, au contraire, pour le sauver, car seul dans ces montagnes, c'est le froid et la faim qui auraient eu raison de Tchang. Il lui trouve une caverne où s'abriter, lui apporte à manger. Comparé au confort des vacanciers chez Hergé au début de l'album, l'extrême inverse des conditions d'existence du yéti et de son protégé montrent à quel point l'homme moderne s'est éloigné de sa condition première et des valeurs qui s'y rattachent. On voit alors que ce sont les principes éthiques liés à l'existence humaine qui sont au cœur même du sujet.

« L'abominable homme des neiges » porte donc bien mal son nom, car il en ressort que ce mastodonte est un être doué de sentiments, et capable de secourir un autre être, traitement qui ne lui serait pas réservé s'il venait à être capturé. Tchang exprime le souhait que cela n'arrive jamais « car on le traiterait comme une bête sauvage », dit-il, alors qu'il a agi envers lui « d'une telle façon [ajoute Tchang] que je me suis parfois demandé si ce n'était pas un être humain » – ce à quoi Tintin répond, et c'est le mot de la fin : « Qui sait ? ». La dernière vignette de *Tintin au Tibet* montre le yéti regardant s'éloigner la caravane qui emporte son seul ami, un peu son enfant (qu'il a nourri et porté dans ses bras dans le froid et à flanc de montagne), et l'image nous laisse deviner sa tristesse. Est-ce sa propre solitude que le yéti anticipe, ou le déplorable retour de Tchang parmi les civilisations corrompues<sup>13</sup> ?

S'ajoutant au thème humaniste, l'ouverture aux peuples non occidentaux s'impose à travers les personnes que les protagonistes rencontrent au cours de leurs aventures, c'est-à-dire les Népalais et les moines bouddhistes tibétains. Les dessins représentant ces derniers, en particulier, sont finement élaborés, ce qui les dote d'une substance et d'une crédibilité indispensable aux messages qu'ils véhiculent. Dans *Tintin au Tibet*, l'un d'eux dit : « ici, au Tibet, beaucoup de choses se passent qui vous paraissent incroyables, à vous autres, Occidentaux » ; et un autre, dans *L'Homme des neiges*, avance : « qui peut dire ce qui existe et ce qui n'existe pas ? ».

Par ailleurs, certaines pratiques inconnues des lecteurs sont introduites sans ironie. Prenons les interventions de Foudre Bénie. Ce moine de la lamaserie de Khor-Biyong, isolée en pleine montagne, lévite. Ses pouvoirs extrasensoriels lui permettent

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<sup>13</sup> Voir <http://fr.tintin.com/albums/show/id/20/page/0/0/tintin-au-tibet> [12/03/2020].

de rapporter des phénomènes qu'il est seul à pouvoir décrire. Il devient un allié inattendu pour Tintin, jusqu'alors bien seul à croire encore à la survie de Tchang. De façon intéressante, puisqu'Hergé associe ainsi son héros au moine tibétain, Tintin avait lui aussi fait preuve de capacité extra-sensorielle avec son rêve prémonitoire. Comme dans d'autres albums (*Le Temple du Soleil*, par exemple), il semble avoir hérité de sagesses ancestrales. Il représente une figure exceptionnelle d'intégrité morale, mais reste à la fois dans la normalité occidentale et apparemment indépendant de toute politique, philosophie ou foi religieuse.

L'approche que choisissent Castelli et Manara dans *L'Homme des neiges* est bien différente à cet égard. Leurs moines sont complètement dévoués depuis toujours à leur mission de paix et d'étude, et engagés à répandre la connaissance parmi les hommes. La question de savoir si, dans *Tintin au Tibet*, le yéti voulait sauver Tchang d'un monde impur, est résolue dans *L'Homme des neiges* par le fait même que Tobey est emporté loin de toute civilisation par les moines pour des raisons spirituelles, afin de retrouver son moi primitif, son « yéti », en quelque sorte. Alors que Tobey ne redescendra, volontairement, jamais de la montagne sacrée, Tintin, lui, retournera avec Tchang vers le monde ordinaire, profane, où il lui faudra continuer à lutter contre des criminels, à empêcher des complots, etc. De façon significative, alors que les deux récits donnent une dimension humaine au yéti, chez Hergé, il garde une apparence animale, alors que Castelli et Manara lui donnent son enveloppe humaine, révélant ainsi le yéti n'est autre que l'homme lui-même, transfiguré.

Ainsi, le yéti associé depuis toujours au thème de la peur s'avère, au contraire, représenter l'amour et la paix. Dans *Tintin au Tibet*, il était d'abord le monstre qu'on va devoir affronter une fois que le chaos s'est installé. Après que Tintin a lu dans le journal qu'un avion s'est écrasé au Tibet et alors qu'il est bouleversé à la

pensée de toutes ses vies brisées, il fait en effet, en public, ce rêve qui va tout déclencher, brisant la tranquillité bourgeoise d'un séjour à la montagne en criant très fort, exagérément, le nom de son ami, « Tchang ! ». Le bouleversement de l'ordre établi est ironiquement exprimé dans cette scène<sup>14</sup> où le chaos n'est a priori qu'un ensemble de choses ordinaires sens dessus dessous, d'expressions de surprise, mais qui évoque la possibilité d'un désordre extrême, une image de possible destruction. Une fois au Tibet, Tintin sera confronté à d'autres appréhensions, à des situations provoquées par des superstitions locales génératrices d'effroi et de fatalisme, qu'il devra aussi transgresser.

Chez Castelli et Manara, dès la première page du récit, la peur du pouvoir de la montagne réveille des angoisses ancestrales incontrôlables, qui mènent à l'échec de l'ascension. Ces croyances anciennes se heurtent par ailleurs au cynisme des journalistes dans des pays lointains où l'on vit selon des principes rationnels, où tout doit être scientifiquement justifié, rejetant de prime abord l'insolite et d'autres modes de vie. Les deux albums, démontrant la myopie des sociétés fermées sur elles-mêmes, se concluent sur un esprit d'ouverture, de loyauté et de responsabilité que Tintin et Tobey tous deux en viennent à représenter.

Que les héros arrivent de cultures qui viennent de subir une guerre mondiale, la première pour Tobey et la seconde pour Tintin, n'est peut-être pas étranger à la crise existentielle qu'ils traversent, une sorte d'expérience religieuse, comme l'avance Eliade, ce par quoi il entend une expérience qui « engage l'homme

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<sup>14</sup> Voir [https://www.grandpalais.fr/pdf/dossier\\_pedagogique/Dossier\\_pedagogique\\_herge.pdf](https://www.grandpalais.fr/pdf/dossier_pedagogique/Dossier_pedagogique_herge.pdf) [16/02/2020], p. 12 [p. 2 de l'album]. Notons au passage qu'à l'époque de la rédaction de l'album, Hergé continue à rechercher activement son véritable ami Tchang-Tchong-Jen qu'il finira par retrouver en 1981, les deux hommes s'étant perdus de vue depuis la création commune du *Lotus Bleu*, en 1934.

dans sa totalité, donc aussi les zones profondes de son être » et qui met en cause

... la réalité du monde et la présence de l'homme dans le monde. La crise est en somme 'religieuse', puisque, aux niveaux archaïques de culture, l'*être* se confond avec le *sacré*. [...] [C]'est l'expérience religieuse [...] qui transforme le 'Chaos' en 'Cosmos' et, partant, rend possible une existence humaine (c'est-à-dire l'empêche de régresser au niveau de l'existence zoologique) (1957, 16).

Pour Eliade, le monde ne paraît plus alors « évanescant et incompréhensible, comme il l'est dans les cauchemars, comme il le redevient chaque fois que l'existence est menacée de sombrer dans le 'Chaos' [...] lorsque aucun 'Centre' n'émerge pour assurer une orientation » (*ibid.*). Le mythe du yéti peut alors devenir, pour reprendre les mots d'Eliade, « le transpersonnel, le 'transcendant' – et d'autre part, [...] exemplaire, dans le sens qu'il institue des modèles à suivre » (1957, 17).

Sortant de leurs situations personnelles respectives, les deux héros dépassent ainsi le particulier non seulement pour accéder à l'universel, mais pour se donner à l'Autre. Le rêve prémonitoire de Tintin est en réalité un cauchemar, une crainte extrême pour l'ami ; et le rêve cauchemardesque mais révélateur qui bouleverse Tobey est en fait un plongeon dans son propre subconscient, dont il ressortira altruiste. Ces expériences occultes justifient les actions entreprises par la suite. Le yéti est l'élément catalyseur pour les deux protagonistes. Tintin lui fera face comme personne ne l'avait fait avant lui, sans désir de lui nuire, dominant ses inquiétudes pour accomplir son but, et découvrant un être digne de respect. Tobey comprendra que le yéti n'est autre que nous-mêmes et qu'il est l'aura que nous pouvons dégager quand

il est vital de protéger ce qui est essentiel. Tobey se projettera en yéti pour éloigner les possibles dangers et préserver intacte la lamaserie, et surtout sa bibliothèque infinie, au creux de l'Himalaya, loin du monde dit civilisé. Chez Castelli-Manara, le mythe du yéti devient cosmogonique, en ce qu'il revient aux origines du monde et des hommes.

Paul Ricœur affirme que les mythes continuent de vivre à travers un processus d'interprétation et de réinterprétation, et qu'il est important d'évaluer de façon critique le contenu de chaque mythe et des intentions qui l'animent à la base (Kearney 1982). C'est bien le but accompli par Hergé et Castelli-Manara concernant le yéti. Alors que la science des animaux anthropomorphes cachés tend aujourd'hui à perdre du terrain devant les preuves scientifiques qui nient l'existence de telles créatures, il est intéressant de remarquer que les frayeurs perdurent. La chaîne de télévision européenne Arte, spécialiste de documentaires culturels et de découverte, en 2013, a présenté un documentaire, intitulé « Yéti, y es-tu ? », référence à la comptine populaire et au grand méchant loup des contes, qui montre bien que le « monstre » intemporel persiste dans l'imagination collective.

Dans de récentes créations visuelles de yétis, les jeux vidéo ou DLC, comme *Far Cry 4 – La Vallée des Yétis*<sup>15</sup>, on note que certaines vieilles représentations du yéti résistent encore à l'évolution de la perception du personnage mythique. Cependant, en offrant des réponses surprenantes, positives et surtout humaines à des angoisses ataviques, nos auteurs ont participé au développement d'un mythe littéraire qui se rencontre de plus en plus fréquemment aujourd'hui dans la littérature de jeunesse et les films d'animation, y compris pour la télévision. Ce nouveau

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.jeuxvideo.com/test/419116/far-cry-4-la-vallee-du-yeti-un-tres-bon-dlc.htm> [26/05/2018].

personnage, même s'il s'appelle encore « yéti », ne donne plus de cauchemars : par exemple, le personnage principal du dessin animé américain *Yéti & Compagnie*, « Migo », un yéti très humain et fort sympathique, renverse le stéréotype en racontant des histoires de « petits pieds », d'humains en somme, aux enfants pour gentiment leur faire peur<sup>16</sup>. Entre ces deux exemples contrastés de transpositions de yétis dans les productions très récentes pour la jeunesse, le mythe littéraire du yéti persiste et évolue, dans les traces d'Hergé et de Castelli-Manara, et selon le principe même de la créativité adaptative qui permet la remise en question des idées reçues, à travers une continuité interprétative et un dialogue dynamique, critique et intermédial entre récits de tout temps.

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<sup>16</sup> Voir <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z54vXign9Oc> [12/03/2020]. Ce film d'animation, dont l'original s'intitule *Smallfoot*, est sorti aux Etats-Unis et en France en 2018.



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### **III**

## **Cultural and transcultural perspectives on fear and safety**



# Fear of unjust memory or desire for secure identity?

## Remembering the era of 1989 transition in contemporary Polish novel

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Contemporary Polish novel explores the memory about the era of 1989 transition not only in various poetics, but also in a contradictory way. The end of the Communist regime – the peaceful process of national transition into democratic and capitalist society, initiated by the ‘Solidarity’ movement<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Solidarity’ (full name: Independent Self-Governing Labour Union ‘Solidarity’) is a Polish trade union which initiated the non-violent revolution and the final political and economic transition of 1989. ‘Solidarity’ was a mass movement with approximately 10 million members in 1981. The most

– is undoubtedly the most crucial and founding event for contemporary Polish identity at its many levels: political, historical, and cultural. This variety of perspectives applies to ideology, visions of history, and national heroes as well as the definition of social justice. Contemporary novel does not necessarily share the point of view of previous historical, political, and also fictional narratives about this period. The era of 1989 transition is perceived as an equally ambivalent period. One could say that it raises dilemmas about the Polish People’s Republic as well as about liberal society of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The questions about the meaning of this social, economic, and political change have not been answered until today. The generation born in the 1980’s and in the early 1990’s takes part in this discussion in a surprisingly active way. Moreover, Polish artists and writers use the nostalgic wave in international popular culture to question, investigate and reconsider national experience. There is no doubt that the American or Western European nostalgia for the 90s is significantly different from its Central-Eastern European version. What is described as satiation of postmodernist culture as well as of late capitalist societies in Poland should also be considered as a colorful novelty, something awaited for a long time (Klein 2017, 6). The era of transition promises a long-awaited change, the advent of what was previously unattainable. At the same time, this revolution can be seen as a source of hidden fear of liberal and capitalist utopia. Lack of stability or unusual shift in framing of national identity are among the symptoms of more complex, transnational processes.

The younger generation of authors faces social and aesthetic challenges of the transition. Their personal memory of this period

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prominent leader and co-founder of the ‘Solidarity’ movement was Lech Wałęsa, who worked in the Gdańsk Shipyard as an electrician. Wałęsa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1983.

can sometimes be blurred or mediated by culture, but social imaginary seems to be rather vivid. The authors show interest in overlooked groups, but their paradoxical literary portraits carry more general observation of contemporary Poland and the country's most recent history. I would like to analyze three novels, in which the main characters are rather unknown to earlier Polish fiction. There are, for example, sadomasochistic transgender old men, poor matriarchal families living in Warsaw, or little girls who grow up in Silesian apartment blocks. The choice and depiction of the characters is probably the most recognizable change in the contemporary novels focused on the people's history of the transition and the period soon after 1989. For this purpose, I analyze a drama by Dorota Masłowska *Między nami dobrze jest* (We're All Good, no English translation, originally published in Polish in 2008), a novel by Michał Witkowski *Lovetown* (English translation by William Martin published in 2010; originally published in Polish in 2004 under the title of *Lubiewo*), and another novel by Dominika Słowik *Atlas: Doppelgänger* (no English translation, originally published in Polish in 2015). These three literary pieces are examples of literature published between 2004 and 2015 by authors born between 1975 and 1988. I chose them carefully from a larger group of writers of this trend due to the complexity and exemplarity of their works. I argue therefore that new Polish prose allows us to reconsider the national fear of unjust memory. It addresses multiple topics and perspectives such as the representation of people's struggle during the Communist regime. In particular, it concerns the choice or depiction of characters, omission of minorities and underprivileged groups while projecting the 'brave new world'. To bring forward an extreme example: the Polish right proposes the idea of re-writing the most recent Polish history in order to deprive Lech Wałęsa of his role as the leader of 'Solidarity' and



the position of the national hero. Consequently, he would be depicted rather as a coward and a traitor. But the idea of unjust memory does not have to produce radical historical and political examples to serve its goal. It is enough that it plays with the era of transition itself, memory of it and marginalized perspectives. The people's experience (represented in culture and expressed in the public debate) of the early stages of capitalism and the process of normalization can be seen as an act of oppression and unethical othering. Therefore 'just' memory is inclusive and varied, built on experience and social, economic and gender diversity. The above-mentioned fear of 'unjust' memory equals, in fact, the fear of social abandonment and the loss of identity in favor of recurrent uniformization. For younger writers, the process of exploring the idea of new forms of identity is not necessarily based on affirmative vision of nationality, religion (that is, Catholicism) and heterosexual masculinity.

Although Central-Eastern European intellectuals and opposition fighters are also represented in the works of fiction, these works seem not to challenge steady Polish imaginary. In contrast, I would like to focus on this kind of prose, which redefines, experiments, and questions national history, national norms of identity, and social roles. To put it another way, I would like to reconsider Polish contemporary novel not only as an act of criticism, but also as a part of the process of recreating the era of transition. In fact, influential poets and writers such as Czesław Miłosz (Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980), Zbigniew Herbert, or Tadeusz Konwicki would not find a common ground with the young generation of authors as to the visions of memory, national imaginary of the transition, or even the historical meaning of The Polish People's Republic. It can be safely assumed that the reason for these contradictions and discrepancies lies in the generation gap and significantly divergent experiences of the

Communist regime that these writers had. The above-mentioned authors survived the entire time of the Polish People's Republic, including the dark period of Stalinism. Even if they lived abroad for some periods like Miłosz, their perspective was deeply critical and often based on personal suffering; moreover, it mirrored the experience of painful lack of artistic freedom.

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that every form of artistic expression in this period was of a serious tone, expressing primarily moral concern. The criticism of the Communist regime found humorous and absurd forms especially in cinema. Stanisław Bareja, Marek Piwowski and other comedy directors presented highly influential portraits of Communist officials as well as of the whole socio-political system. Series of parodies, absurd jokes, unbelievable plots, and familiar characters (often turning into caricatures) are the most recognizable features of their movies. From this point of view, Poland of this period is also far from utopia, but it seems to be quirky and quaint rather than frightening. The Communist system, even if disappointing or tiring, seemed to be at least familiar, well-known, and somehow close to the people. Normativity of the current system in terms of identity formation seems familiar and possible to be overcome. Meanwhile, the normativity of the new system (presented as a promise of freedom) seems much more difficult to define. It can be even more difficult to see the limitations of new normalization, new freedom and, at the same time, new rules of exclusion.

## Norms and normalization after 1989 in Polish society and culture

Eventually, cultural and social innocence were not long-lasting due to national conflicts and ideological discussion about the

new Polish identity and evaluation of contemporary history. At the same time, with the deep economic reforms proposed by Leszek Balcerowicz, a sense of social injustice grew among underprivileged groups, especially among the former workers of State Agricultural Farms.<sup>2</sup> It has to be pointed out, however, that new problems such as unemployment, lack of social security, and new forms of democratic participation (i.e. freedom of speech, elections, political campaigns, influence of international institutions) were the most obvious, but not the most troubling in the long run. Permanent internal conflict pertaining to ideological fundamentals of the country can be internationally recognized up to this day. The clash between right-wingers and liberal democrats excludes other perspectives and pushes them to the margins. The false symmetry is one problem; the other is small social visibility of minorities and underprivileged groups, characterized by separate discourses. While neglected by public and political sphere, people unheard and people unseen found their representations in contemporary fiction. Obviously, non-fiction writers and directors of documentary films have paid attention to these groups and individuals for a long time. Even though former workers of State Agricultural Farms had the chance to share their experience in movies by Irena Kamieńska or Joanna Warecha, that kind of deep social change required artistic experiments to elicit complexity of the social transformation. Magda Szcześniak points out:

The only possible hero of the Polish transition is a  
“normal” man. What is at stake is the implementation

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<sup>2</sup> State Agricultural Farms were created in the late 1940's and existed until the fall of the People's Republic of Poland. The closing of the SAF (PGR in Polish) brought about a social and economic change, which was drastic especially for its workers and resulted in unemployment, social marginalization, poverty, or even hunger in extreme cases.

of the standard (black) as opposed to various non-normative behavior: nouveau riche's excesses and sexual diversity (white and other colors worn on the feet). It turns out, however, that being normal, understood as a kind of visual transparency, requires in fact constant attention and considerable effort. ... Another dimension of the concept of normality refers to the relationship between the state and citizens. Repeated in the press and colloquial statements, the desire for a normal state is connected with the need to stabilize the chaotic institutional changes and the transition of power. Western European countries become the pattern of normal relations. ... Normality in the culture of transition is understood not as the surrounding reality (norm equals everyday life), but as a state that has yet to be achieved, the goal of endeavor. (Szcześniak 2016, 14–23)<sup>3</sup>

The terms 'norm' or 'normalization' are crucial for understanding Polish ambitions accompanied by the common feeling of shame. Norm is seen as an object of desire or even an ideal position. Due to this point of view, Polish culture and society are seen as possibly excluded from European culture as something dirty, chaotic and impetuous. In spite of this observation, Polish society has to achieve or even grow up to universal standards by abandoning peripheral identity and shameful taste. This type of national distinction, to reframe Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) term, is co-created by the ideology of transition. Everything that was internal and familiar has to be not only hidden, but most of all surpassed. Polish national identity seems like a burden that drags the country to the bottom. In this case, Dorota Masłowska creates

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<sup>3</sup> All quoted fragments, originally written in Polish, are translated by me. The only exceptions are paragraphs from Michał Witkowski's book *Lovetown*, which has been translated and published also in English.

self-ironic monologue which re-uses internally contradictory Polish dreams of being European and at the same time develops a new Sarmatian identity:

LITTLE METAL GIRL: ... I have decided a long time ago that I am no longer a Pole, just a European. I've learned Polish from CDs and tapes, which were left by a Polish cleaning lady. We are not Poles, just Europeans, normal people! This is not my mother, this is our private saleswoman from Tesco. She carries Tesco on a forklift to our house, and we only show what we don't want and she carries it back. How she slides on the turns! This is not our neighbor, this is our private leaflet distributor. She is so fat that we keep her in the house, she won't sneak up to normal people in front of their eyes. She brings an underpass to us, and she gives leaflets here, she doesn't take them instead of us and she throws it away behind the first turn. And here is not my grandma, here is our cleaning lady. She is so old and transparent because she came on this wheelchair directly from Ukraine. We're all good! We're all good! We are no longer Poles, just normal people! We came to Poland from Europe for bio and real good potatoes from real soil, not those watery ones from Tesco, and we've learned Polish from CDs and tapes. (Masłowska 2015, 68–69.)

The new nomenclature (cleaning lady, private saleswoman, leaflet distributor) shows not only the artificiality of language, but also the incompatibility between characters' lifestyle and public discourse. While their life and jobs are demanding and socially underestimated, the new language of liberal society creates a gap between experience and expression. Przemysław Czapliński calls this literary strategy 'decycling' in contrast with 'recycling':

Recycling mental equivalent, but also primary product is a picture of closed circuit of symbols and things, where products turn into trash, while trash turns back into products. Due to this illusion of full circulation, in which dumpsite can be a part of the process of production, secondary products hide their trashy origin. ... Decycling as an artistic practice does not find a rapid exit from this circulation, neither it discovers any marvelous source of original and uncontaminated primary products. In this sense it belongs to the same culture of disordered circulation of preserves in which we are being immersed by capitalism. It is, however, different from re-usage practice by not hiding traces of its trashy origin, and it is also unpredictable. (Czapliński 2011, 9.)

Czapliński claims that the literary practice of 'decycling' stimulates development and progress of social and individual consciousness. As a result, it would be less autonomic and more fluid. No clear boundaries between texts allow us to think about literature and communication as a whole. The author also explores the idea that this perspective paradoxically favors forms which are 'weak, forbidden or defective' (Czapliński 2011, 10). Masłowska's drama effectively uses this aesthetic and ideological strategy. Traditional relationships between family members and neighbors are corrupted by their own language. Nevertheless, the new forms of language do not hide its origins or national roots. Its usage is therefore connected with family's aspirations and shame. Everything what is familiar has to be re-named to be modern and adequate. While the aesthetics and poetics of Masłowska's literature can be effectively described as postmodern, the society's ambitions and the process of normalization of the characters' lives should be labelled as

‘modern’ and ‘modernization’. Their separation from the new nomenclature is at the same time a separation from the shameful identity in the name of progress and standards of modern (in contrast with backward and provincial) society. The desire to be European equals the desire to be normal. Polish, as well as Polish identity, loses its value of something transparent and stable.

## Language of the transition

Discussing Polish complex identity during a period of change brings also the topic of the new language and its unusual forms. It is worth mentioning that the interpretation of Masłowska’s creative language finds unpredictable directions. For instance, Dorota Dąbrowska rejects the idea that *Między nami dobrze jest* criticizes Polish identity and national ideology. Her interpretation can be found controversial or wishful, but she rightly recognizes Masłowska’s focus on devaluing the narrative:

Although *Między nami dobrze jest* is full of grotesque and mockery, it bends towards the opposite extreme. It offers a perspective of overcoming the negation of Polishness as something imagined and aggravating with phantasms into its positive value. The point of criticism represented in the drama is directed precisely against devaluing narratives, it is intended to reveal their simplifying character. (Dąbrowska 2015, 90.)

Therefore, Masłowska’s characters’ fear of being left behind seems to be deeply connected with their fear of not being able to modernize themselves and their identity. The transition offers a new identity that is directly focused on the normalized Europe (or to be precise: the idea of normalized Western Europe). The

architects of the transition expect people – in a Faustian manner – to be unconditionally ready for a change and, moreover, to make place for modernity and progress. Marshall Berman suggests that:

Here the tragic dilemmas that Goethe defines have remained urgently in force. It has turned out – and Goethe could have predicted it – that under the pressures of the modern world economy the process of development must itself go through perpetual development. Where it does, all people, things, institutions and environments that are innovative and avant-garde at one historical moment will become backward and obsolescent in the next. Even in the most highly developed parts of the world, all individuals, groups and communities are under constant relentless pressure to reconstruct themselves; if they stop to rest, to be what they are, they will be swept away. (Berman 1983, 78.)

The expectation of people to pass happily from the socialist community to the capitalist market can be seen rather as a demand. Everyone who is left behind, stays behind. The cultural shaming that accompanies this ideology is striking in the case of Poland of this period. It applies to small cultural phenomena like color of socks, choice of restaurants, or counterfeit products (Szcześniak 2016, 10–15, 52–86). Moreover, it concerns personal and social ability to modernize, to leave former habits behind.

The main characters of *Między nami dobrze jest* are an old lady who constantly recalls the Second World War and the Warsaw Uprising, her daughter Halina who works in a hypermarket, and a granddaughter called Little Metal Girl. In a sense, they are constructed as a mockery of the ideal successful woman of the era of transition. The one that likes ‘modest, elegant fashion



instead of ostentatious jewelry and showy make-up' (Zborowska 2017, 30), is excited by new job opportunities in business while in her free time reads color magazines. A normal woman. Although the author depicts the characters very carefully, they are sketches rather than developed characters. The essence of the texts consists of grotesque dialogues about trivia, as well as fundamental modern and particular postmodern problems such as identity, the idea of nation, globalization, or social exclusion. Masłowska offers an insight into Polish complexes in particular and in general. The shame mentioned above is not only the effect of feeling uncivil, but also of feeling underestimated. These two problems need to be considered together. Poland is depicted in the drama as some kind of unjustly forgotten empire:

RADIO: In the old times, when the world used to be ruled by God's law, all people were Poles. Everyone was a Pole, a German was a Pole, a Swede was a Pole, a Spaniard was a Pole, everyone was Polish, just every every every one. Poland was a beautiful country back then; we had wonderful seas, islands, oceans, a sea fleet, which was sailing on them and still discovered new continents that also belonged to Poland, there was a famous Polish discoverer Krzysztof [*Christopher in Polish*] Kolumb [*Columbus in Polish*] who was obviously re-baptized to Christopher or other Chris or Isaak. We used to be a great empire, an oasis of tolerance and multiculturalism, and everyone who did not come here from another country (as we mentioned, there were no other countries) was welcomed here with bread... (Masłowska 2015, 64–65.)

RADIO: ... and salt ... But good times are finished for our country. First they took America, Africa, Asia and Australia from us. Polish flags were being destroyed and repainted with other stripes, stars and other

flourishes, the Polish language was formally changed to fancy foreign languages. Nobody knows these languages, nobody can speak these languages, and people use them only to make us, Poles, not understand them and not know them, and feel like the worst rags... (Masłowska 2015, 65.)

The messianic idea that Poland is Christ among nations, explored also by Polish romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, brings contemporary imaginary to its liminal point. Furthermore, Poland as a nation is taken care of by Virgin Mary (Czapliński 2011, 128) who is at the same time the queen of the country. The fear of being overlooked as a nation is brought to the extreme. Now it is not only about getting back the signature, but about finding Polish footprint on everything that has any value or is considered as important for the development of the 'civilized human being'. Masłowska uses popular phrases about Poland being 'an oasis of tolerance and multiculturalism' and implicitly confronts it with Polish xenophobia and social homogeneity. The absurdity of these paragraphs lies in the hyperbolic usage of Polish proverbs and catch phrases. The desire to be recognized as the chosen nation with a special role in the salvation of humanity also sheds light on the difficult history of Polish-Jewish relations. As Marek Radziwon states about Masłowska's drama:

... it is a grotesque, absurd joke about stupid advertisements, about artificial language that does not serve anything anymore besides informing about pseudo-promotions. The whole text, as it used to be in the previous works of Masłowska, is precisely stylized, as if glued from various scraps, trimmings and waste. Words, all sentences are worn out, taken out directly of advertising leaflets, they are like ready-made elements of a fiber wall pushed into a small resident of Little

Metal Girl. The characters can talk and think only by using such ready-mades. (Radziwon 2009.)

The characters are not able to think outside the new language of advertisement or business nomenclature, but they are also unable to think about Polish identity outside of the national-romantic framework. If the national complex is challenged, the only escape is the soulless language of normalization. The main dilemma is being 'too much' and 'not enough' at the same time: too much or not enough Polish and too much or not enough European and normal. The consequences of these presumptions are not obvious. Masłowska delves into the language of and after the transition in order to elucidate the clash between idioms and cultures that they represent. Everything that has any meaning is based on the self-reflection about the language and its transgressive forms. Moreover, Masłowska does not endow her characters with any kind of secure identity, but rather explores the idea of transition. By focusing on the oddity of the language she allows her literature to flirt with half-baked ideas and national imaginary which influences her Polish to the same extent as advertisement and media jargon do.

## Gender performance as an act of de-normalization

Dorota Masłowska occupies a very special place on the map of Polish literature. Her debut novel *Snow White and Russian Red* (English translation by Benjamin Paloff was published in 2005, originally published in Polish in 2002 under the title of *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną*) is undoubtedly one of the biggest literary scandals in the history of contemporary

Polish literature. In this respect she was accompanied by Michał Witkowski who published his novel *Lovetown* two years later. It could have been predicted that a novel focused on two transgender men with sadomasochistic tendencies would not be only a literary, but especially moral scandal. The novel is uncompromising in how the characters are depicted. Besides the portrayal of the characters such as Patricia and Lucretia, the scandalous aspect of the novel was its very brutal and vulgar language. The controversies concern especially the parts about characters' sexuality and sadomasochistic practices they engage in with strangers, including Soviet soldiers. Another key point is that both characters are cross-dressers. It is necessary to add that their performance of gender is not aimed to be perfect or transparent. Contrariwise, both of them are enjoying being bizarre versions of a hypersexual woman. The author characterizes them not as gender fluid people or transgender women, but as representatives of a non-binary camp identity straddling between the two normalized gender roles:

They refer to each other as she and her, call each other *sister* or *girl*, and it wasn't all that long ago that they were still picking up men – in the park, behind the opera house, and at the train station. Who knows how much is true, how much is legend, and how much is simply taking the piss. But one thing is sure: they're just two of the innumerable legion of sex addicts. Connoisseurs of cock! Even today, pot-bellied pensioners, they have a few tricks up their sleeves. Neither has ever heard of plastic surgery or sex-change operations. They get by with a flourish or two of their plain black satchels, which they call 'handbags'. They make do with what they've got – the quintessence of communist-era mediocrity. All they have to do is hold their cigarettes a little differently, shave every day, and put their words,

their language, to use. For their power lies in their words. They have nothing; whatever they do have they've had to make up, lie up, sing up. Today you can buy anything you want: your sex, your eye colour, your hair – there's no place left for the imagination. Which is why they would rather be poor and 'have a bit of fun'.

'Oh *stop*, darling!' Patricia gets 'dramatic' and pours tea into a chipped cup; old and grimy though it may be, it still comes on a saucer and with a serviette. Form, form is all that matters. And words. (Witkowski 2011, 5.)

The transgression of characters' identity performance lies in tiny gestures which de-normalize their social and gender positions. They do not hide their biological sex and do not try to make their gender performance perfect or even appealing. Their make-up is cheap, their gestures are exaggerated and melodramatically feminine. Their behavior, lacking solemnity or dignity, plays with stereotypes, gender clichés, and something that others might call self-hatred. As a result, they can be easily described in terms of camp strategies. As Maria Gołębiowska claims, following Susan Sontag famous work:

Camp is what is extravagant in a consistent and passionate way, that is, consistently aesthetic experience of the world, which at the same time commands to go beyond what is universally recognized and accepted. It expresses the victory of style over content, aesthetics over morality and irony over seriousness. A camp follower is trying to find entertainment and pleasure by ironically referring to what is considered noble and high, but also finds pleasure in the most primitive and common mass entertainment. (Gołębiowska 1999, 30.)

Patricia and Lucretia are socially underprivileged in almost every possible sense. They are not heteronormative, but they are also not accepted by the generation of young LGBTQ movement. They are transgender, but they do not profit from any kind of make-up veil; rather expose themselves in their imperfect gender performance and violent sexuality. Both characters are extremely poor, but do not really focus on their poverty. Even though their biological sex is ostensibly ignored, they identify themselves not as women, but as men who play cheap performance of hyper-femininity. Patricia and Lucretia love places which are dirty, risky, and most of the time disgusting, but at the same time express desire to be splendid and beautiful. Maciej Pawlikowski observes that Witkowski's characters occupy an ambivalent place in the society of the transition era. Their strategy is simultaneously apparent and unequivocal:

Camp appeared when a man played a woman. Every gesture, inflection, mischievous winking, every emotional admiration of the margin was almost dripping with camp. "Faggots", like no other, were suitable for the elite dance of an impoverished aristocracy, played in the middle of a marching, ruins of a burnt public toilet, or a dangerous night park on whose benches they could roll their "faggot's tales", sipping them with warm, cheap vodka. The whole spectacle – that's probably how we should treat it – is a humorous, funny pose with tragic mask. "Forms, forms are the most important," says Michaśka the Penman, looking at a dingy cup put on a tablecloth. (Pawlikowski 2010.)

Another aspect of their problematic position is determined by how sincerely they miss the Polish People's Republic. Back then they were relatively well-off. Yet more importantly, they

displayed a controversial devotion to Soviet soldiers. Soviet soldiers' presence in Poland was universally condemned as a symbol of Poland's unwanted dependence on the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, for Witkowski's characters they were a symbol of sexual excitement, a chance to seduce masculine and violent men. The undertone of this generally funny and ironic novel is deeply troubling and disturbing. The two main characters enjoy violent sexual behavior, but they truly do not see any other way to build a new identity or even become a part of community. They are not only pariahs, but also some kind of hostile social element on the map of Polish struggle to normalize the country and its society. They are opposed to be normalized in any way. The act of resistance is also based on their anticapitalistic perspective and unapologetic opinions about the most recent history:

And as it happens, someone had lined this arsehole with sawdust and rags especially for them. All comfy and cosy.

No one ever went hungry with that tinned soup, with those potatoes, the subsidies of socialism. There was always enough to eat and a roof over your head; a lady doesn't need much to get by. Now they're building a great big shopping mall in that park of theirs; they're burying their entire history. Patricia insists she will protest. But she's only kidding. More bitterly and sadly every time.

'What can a bag lady like me do? Lay into Big Capital with my walking stick? Hit it over the head with my handbag? What should I tell them, that it's an historic site? Oh, go and get the ashtray, Lucretia, the gentleman has nowhere to put his (ha! ha!) *aaaassshh!*'

Patricia realises she's called herself a 'bag lady', and she's delighted at her new joke. Somewhere deep down it contains a trickle of indignity, and Patricia is already

planning to drink it, to lick it up like a drop of eggnog from the bottom of a glass. Tonight. (Witkowski 2011, 6.)

Their paradoxical strategy is to enjoy humiliation and thus oppose the regime of the new taste. The author of the novel uses terms generally considered humiliating and not politically correct in describing non-heteronormative sexuality. The characters of *Lovetown* seem to be rather disgusted by the new nomenclature. ‘Gay’ or ‘homosexual’ sound outlandish to them; these terms do not describe their identity. It is rather clear that they do not want to have any secure identity or become more socially visible. The humiliation as an effect of drastic exclusion is re-branded as an excitement and liberation from boring and strict social norms. Notably, the identity of Witkowski’s characters can be interpreted in the context of ‘gaga feminism’. Although it uses Lady Gaga’s nickname, the concept is more general. ‘Gaga feminism’ explores the idea of identity’s proclaimed artificiality and its surprising opportunities for the self. The process of proposed self-creation includes experiments, masquerades and any form of gender flexibility. J. Jack Halberstam suggests that ‘unbecoming a woman’ could be a social and aesthetical experiment that leads to liberation from binary gender. Witkowski’s characters are placed somewhere near this perspective, but there are at least two important differences. The first one is the fact that they are ‘unbecoming a transgender woman’, not a woman herself. You can see the seams of their queer performance, because they proudly play with feminine stereotypes and not directly base their identity on them. The second is Patricia’s and Lucretia’s doubtful freedom and liberation. One could describe them as being addicted to sex, violence, and social hostility. Their self-humiliating subjectivity would not be a free act of creating



identity. Playing a 'ladylike identity' would be another step towards indulging in a self-deprecating state of mind.

Halberstam's anarchic and subversive conception of the self is accompanied by the directly expressed hope that 'gaga feminism' would 'participate in big and meaningful forms of critique' (Halberstam 2013, xxv). The gist of his argument is as follows:

Gaga feminism, or the feminism (pheminism?) of the phony, the unreal, and the speculative, is simultaneously a monstrous outgrowth of the unstable concept of 'woman' in feminist theory, a celebration of the joining to femininity to artifice, and a refusal of the mushy sentimentalism that has been siphoned into the category of womanhood. (Halberstam 2013, xii.)

Patricia's and Lucretia's chaotic resistance could be seen as gender flexibility or anarchic gestures against the normative social system. Nonetheless, Halberstam's view seems to be rather elitist: he does not take into account extreme poverty, hostile environment, or inadequately educated non-heteronormative subjects. Two characters of the novel use the strategies mentioned by Halberstam, although not as a tool to achieve a higher level of emancipation. For them, female gender is not only worse than the male norm, but also more exposed to sexual violence that they want to experience. Thus, they are doubly humiliated, doubly excluded, and doubly despised.

According to Szcześniak, the problem of social unification also applies to 'gay politics of normalization applied from the early 1990's' (Szcześniak 2016, 260). Czapliński, on the other hand, sees the conflict between the older and younger generations of homosexuals represented in *Lovetown* as a simplification (Czapliński 2009, 360) which overlooks similarities between their social positions. The first part of the novel focused on

Patricia and Lucretia offers, however, a deep insight into life of non-heteronormative individuals in the 80s in Poland. The image is not only vivid and complex, but it also allows us to ask some unobvious questions about Polish community before and after the transition, about forms of exclusion – especially among minorities – and ambivalent forms of resistance. The second part of the novel is artistically and historically weaker. What is even more symptomatic, Błażej Warkocki, among other critics, accuses the author of simplifying struggles with identity and normalization. Warkocki also observes a process of infantilization of homosexuals' identity, culminating in stereotypes and homophobic images, which he ascribes to Witkowski's depiction of the new generation of gay men in Poland (Warkocki 2013, 117–129). It can be also argued that Patricia and Lucretia are depicted as transgressive, subversive selves who oppose any form of normalization, whereas gay men from the second part of *Lovetown* draw political profits from this process. Westernization and normalization of Polish public discourse is, to some extent, double-edged. The author ostensibly backs up the older generation in their acts of resistance, but at the same time explores the idea of insecure identity and its consequences for the self. Neil Bartlett suggests that the narrator of *Lovetown* is somehow entrapped by the couple of characters:

Overpowered (and occasionally diddled with) by these self-obsessed creatures, the journalist himself gradually becomes seduced by their values as well as their triumphantly inventive, gender-harassing language. The young man who is first shocked and then made jealous by these tales of love among the ruins finds that he has, by the time we reach the delirious final pages, been translated into a flaming old queen himself ... (Bartlett 2010.)

Witkowski's characters are created as some kind of historical figures, predecessors to the contemporary LGBTQ movement. Their position as described by the narrator is ambivalent and problematic from the contemporary point of view. Witkowski seems to enjoy their performance of gender and sexual brutality because there are safely distanced, directly parodied, and in some way folklorized. Patricia and Lucretia are described as mythological figures, long-forgotten actors from our common world. Therefore, they are used to burst the picture of normalized society and normalized gay community. Witkowski's provocative pose is, however, questionable due to his ideological blind spots which make him miss some crucial questions. Are their position really voluntarily accepted? Is not their perception of femininity misogynic? Do their sexual habits allow us to think that they are not victims of social norms? Or, is normalization an actual opposition to violence as the author suggests? Selection and depiction of literary characters in novels that reconstruct the era of 1989 transition are crucial for the interpretation of these texts. Witkowski's choice is certainly controversial, but provides a real and deep de-normalized picture of Polish minorities. Patricia and Lucretia are in a way a small minority, excluded even from gay minority. Due to their economic and social status they oppose not only social mainstream norms, but also 'their' minority's norms. Manifestly, portrayals of Polish poverty are getting increasingly important due to unforeseen struggle for adaptation to the new reality of a democratic country suffered by the characters portrayed in the novel.

## Minor perspective and minor's perspective

The condition of poverty and social exclusion that it entails can be reasons why the younger generation of authors see the poor as potentially attention-grabbing characters. Underrepresentation of these groups is not, after all, the only ground to represent their point of view. Similarly, important is their uncorrupted and atypical 'literary voice'. Nevertheless, Dominika Słowik in her novel *Atlas Doppeltgänger* goes in a different direction. First, she focuses on Silesia, the region of Poland commonly associated with heavy industry. Second, she adopts a children's point of view. In Słowik's novel everything that is considered stereotypically socialist (architecture, brutal forms of industrialization, the unification of communal space) transmogrifies into metaphors and dreamy pictures. Justyna Sobolewska, a literary critic, remarks:

The initial part of the book is one of the best depictions of apartment blocks ever written. The labyrinth of flats and halls resounds with a labyrinth of language. Apartment blocks are not only a symbol of social divisions, but an equal character of the book who lives its own life. (Sobolewska 2015.)

Taking apartment blocks for a character of the novel is highly symptomatic. Słowik's prose follows the idea that reality is co-created by people and all kinds of things – architecture, furniture, gadgets, clothes. Słowik writes:

both flats and people were marked by the transition; it was as if somebody watched an intermediate stage of the pupation. in rooms, here and there, there were lego bricks laying around, a visible and undoubtable sign of wealth. ... and this transformation, political, physical

and spiritual, was not a visual effect, a randomly caught moment. this change, this transformation was synonymous with energy, some kind of unjustified, pointless happiness, when people were still young, the country was young and nobody was fucking about drinking half a shot. (Słowik 2015, 118–119.)

By following Anna's grandfather imagination and stories, two girls are exploring his collection of maps and enjoying a magical version of their reality. What is worth noting, the girls use every element of their environment to escape dark and hopeless reality. Nonetheless, the novel offers some general observations about children's perspective on growing up in the early 90s. The most important aspect is their perception – the way they see, hear, or feel things around them. They seem to be able to find a way of creating their own selves when confronted with the transition. This period, even if 'lacking of myth-creating gesture' as Szcześniak (2016, 15) states, abounds in meaning. Everything is not only different, but primarily new. What is additionally interesting, adults – except for the grandfather – are rather irrelevant in this story. The world of children is wild and unrestricted, ruled only by the children themselves. Słowik writes:

when anna and i were little, in the apartment blocks there was a shitload of kids. they were running around, screaming mercilessly, they used to beat with the stick the very few cars on the estate, which immediately provoked protests from the neighbors sitting at the windows.

– will you get the fuck out?! – they were screaming and threatening from the balconies. it didn't impress the kids, they shrugged and walked away with dignity,

adjusting their shoelaces with keys dangling on their necks.

in the 1990's we, children, were like a separate tribe, a half-wild herd ruling the blocks. arrogant and self-confident packs were sneaking around during games through the streets as if they were being led to attack – screaming and howling; children were losing so much of their humanity that adults were looking at them with strange fear and were unsuccessfully trying to remind themselves some old, long-forgotten things, which were echoing in their heads. (Słowik 2015, 104.)

The children take advantage of the chaos caused by the transition. Still, their state of mind and adults' situation are comparable, if not analogous. The chaos of this period influences their attitude and expression. Even if challenges of the time are different for these two groups, children do not oppose the future and the progress. In fact, they enjoy the effects of the peaceful revolution. Its spontaneity, carousal atmosphere and unpredictability are somewhat exhausting for the parents' generation but are welcomed by the children with curiosity. For the main characters (who can also be considered as the narrator's alter egos or doppelgängers), the political change is evidently blurred, but in fact appears as a cosmic revolution. Due to the feeling of detachment the two girls gradually distance themselves from material reality and its solid norms. With their grandfather's help, they undermine social conventions as well as conventional realism and the typical understanding of time.

The imaginary world of memories, made-up stories and alternative realities supports their different view on the reality of Silesian apartment blocks. They are fearless and wild, but also curious about the possibility of creating an unconventional vision of reality. Their resistance to the dominant narrative is

not based on their memories of the Polish People's Republic or miscalculation of the transition. The author mentions adults' discussions and never-ending complaints that children are exposed to, but neatly separates lives of these two tribes. The adults' customs and norms are blurred and stereotypical, observed by children from the distance. The main character's world is co-created by the youngest and the oldest generation. By omitting most political and historical dilemmas Słowik exposes the fact that there are other imaginations and other stories, even behind the facade of apartment blocks.

Dorota Masłowska, Michał Witkowski, and Dominika Słowik use different aesthetics and diversified types of protagonists in their novels. Their literary strategies, however, express a deep desire to avoid the process of normalization and resist unification. The desire of secure identity seems an implemented idea rather than an individually developed need. The three texts analyzed above offer alternative versions of history and alternative visions of security or happiness. What is worth mentioning is that all of them try to bring social and aesthetic justice by creating alternative points of view. In this context the mainstream nationalist discourse seems to be undermined at the same time by the widespread desire of Polish society to reach normalization. The hero of the Polish transition, to use Szcześniak's observation, is a 'normal man'. Nonetheless, participants of the Polish transition are more varied; their voices include transgressive or minor ones which offer a more complex insight into contemporary Polish identity, contradictory, inconsistent, and internally conflicted as it is. The only thing that seems to be equally important as this complexity of identity is the tireless desire to be recognized as such.

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# Fear of the Other

## Representations of Otherness in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions

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Fear of the Other is one of the most deep-rooted types of fear in any society. It often adds to political and ideological conflicts that can lead to dramatic developments with immediate and far-reaching consequences. Ireland and Ukraine have suffered the catastrophic consequences of Otherness, resulting from colonial oppression. Ireland's *An Gorta Mór* (1845–52)<sup>1</sup> and Ukraine's *Holodomor* (1932–33)<sup>2</sup> can be thought of as historic periods characterized by the emergence and greater dissemination of stereotypical perceptions of national Others, which awaken in times of unrest and conflict. Phenomena that shape people's

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<sup>1</sup> *An Gorta Mór* means 'the Great Famine' in Gaeilge.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, *holodomor* means 'death by starvation'. It is a compound of two words: 'holod', which means hunger and 'mor' meaning death.

perceptions of ethnic and national characters are transformed into images, transmitted by texts, in particular, by literary artefacts. Therefore, imagology – ‘the critical analysis of national stereotypes in literature’ (Beller & Leerssen 2007, xiii), is befitting for an understanding of Ireland’s and Ukraine’s famine discourses. The examination of images that can be defined as ‘the mental or discursive representation or reputation of a person, group, ethnicity or “nation”’ (Beller & Leerssen 2007, 342) in these discourses is especially interesting, for in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions, images transmit the ‘historical memories and aesthetic emotions’ (Weretiuk 2017, 52) related to these two nations’ most tragic experiences. The fact that the famines resulted from detrimental policies of the governments of their states, implemented ‘without any consideration whatever of the consequences in human suffering’ (Carynnyk 1983) at critical periods, underscores their tragic outcomes. Moreover, it allows us to investigate the reasoning behind the enhancement of negative perceptions of the Other.

The appositeness of comparative method to research across national boundaries is pointed out by Elise Nykänen and Hanna Samola: ‘Comparative literary studies serve as one of the most relevant theoretical frameworks in those essays that map the transnational, “international literary space” (Casanova 2004, xii), which transcends the national borders of European literatures’ (Elise Nykänen & Hanna Samola, ‘Introduction: Affective Spaces in European Literature and Other Narrative Media’).

An examination of the deepening of a boundary between the Self (or auto-image) – the image that refers ‘to a characterological reputation current within and shared by a group’, and the Other (the hetero-image) – the image representing ‘the opinion that others have about group’s purported character’ (Leerssen in Beller & Leerssen 2007, 342–343) in literary representations

reveals that the ‘othering’ process is closely linked to the emotion of fear. Bearing in mind that the construction of Otherness resulting from fear can be viewed as a bilateral process, which involves both sides in the oppressor-oppressed divide, it should be indicated that this paper discusses the emergence of fear from the perspective of the oppressed.

Walter Macken’s *The Silent People* and Ulas Samchuk’s *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life*<sup>3</sup> are among the best-known works of fiction on Ireland’s and Ukraine’s Great Famines respectively. In both novels, the Self/Other divide reflects a power imbalance between the ruling and the ruled classes, which manifests itself in the characters’ social status: those who belong to the former, exercise power, and are in a privileged position; and those who represent the latter, are subjugated, and reduced to dire straits. A line of distinction within this power-laden relationship is reinforced by the representations of a complex discord arising from religious domain. In *The Silent People*, the Catholics are largely associated with the Irish, belonging to the self-image, while the Protestants mainly refer to the English comprising the group of the Other. To define the Self against the Other in *Maria*, the Ukrainian peasants’ piety and faith are contrasted with the Bolsheviks’ blasphemy, expressed by their vehement destruction of all religious symbols. The deployment of the rhetoric of national character strengthens a profound divide between the two images: the virtues of the national character of the Self are directly opposed to the vices of the Other, thus giving substance to the observation that ‘constructions of foreign national characters provide an essential quality of difference against which cherished self-images materialize with greater clarity’ (Neumann 2009, 275).

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<sup>3</sup> Henceforth, this novel is referred to as *Maria*.

## Fear of the Other in *The Silent People*

*The Silent People* is part of a trilogy, written over a century after *An Gorta Mór*, that chronicles the lives of several generations of one Irish family. The adventures of its protagonist, a young Connacht man, Dualta Duane, narrated in a sequential timeline, offer the possibility of an investigation of the processes of image construction and development of relations between the English and the Irish at the outset of the famine. The novel shows that even though Irish negative perceptions of the English existed before *An Gorta Mór* due to centuries of British oppression, they increased in the period between 1845 and 1852. Revealing the damaging impact of British colonial rule in Ireland, *The Silent People* presents two opposing images using well-established clichés for their construction. The hard-working, quick-witted, good-humoured, freedom-loving and devoted to their land and religious beliefs Irish represent the Self. They are contrasted with the avaricious and uncaring landlords – the novel's Other. The distinction between the two images is sharpened by the use of language: the characters belonging to the Self speak Irish, and those who constitute the Other are portrayed as English-speaking. Yet, in a remarkable way, readers are made aware that cultural dissemblance, drafted to heighten the contrast between the Self and the Other, is not an actual divider of people. Macken demonstrates that cultural characteristics can be interpreted in different ways, and acquire both positive and negative meanings, which, in turn, can be used to either embellish or denigrate the image of a group of people. Such ambivalence of cultural elements is clear from two scenes that take place at the fair. In the first, Dualta Duane and his friend Sorcha are watching an English pedlar selling a coat. The two youths note that most people are entertained by his comic antics, when displaying the coat:

'I have here a small coat of a noble lord,' a loud voice suddenly shouted in English. It brought a hush over the fair. They turned their heads. It came from a beefy man standing on a box at an old-clothes stall. He was holding up a coat of red cloth with brass buttons on it. 'You can dress and go and dine with the Lord Lieutenant in it. You can drive the cows in it. You can go to Mass in it. You can get married in it. You can be buried decently in it. You can hand it on as an heirloom to your great grandchildren. What am I offered for it? Who'll propose a sixpence for a start?'

Sorcha and Dualta laughed. Most people didn't understand the English, but the pedlar mimicked all the virtues of the coat. (*The Silent People*, 9.)<sup>4</sup>

This episode portrays the pedlar as the Other among the Irish who do not understand the English language, reminding us of the tendency of humans to attribute specific characteristics to different societies or races: 'anything that deviated from accustomed domestic patterns is "Othered" as an oddity, an anomaly, a singularity' (Leerssen 2007, 17). Yet the pedlar's Otherness causes amusement and laughter, and not hostility. It is interesting to juxtapose this event with another Anglo-Irish encounter, which follows shortly thereafter. It presents the confrontation between Dualta and the Half-Sir, son of the local landlord, who violently strikes Dualta with a whip for no reason. The Half-Sir's unreasonable behaviour is revealed to readers in a passage describing his feelings: 'Suddenly a wave of distaste and frustration came over him. He raised the whip, and, harder perhaps than he had intended, he brought it down across the face of the youth' (SP, 10). This act fuels Dualta's resentment

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<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, all page numbers in parentheses, placed after quotations and preceded by SP, refer to this text.

and generates fear in people who are helplessly witnessing the incident. They are unable to help their fellow countryman because they are terrified of the landlord's son and his entourage.

Similar patterns that show the emergence of negative perceptions of the Other evolving from fear are provided by multiple episodes throughout the novel. The most dramatic example of cruelty of the Other is the execution of two young Irish men, who supposedly shot a bailiff. One of those men who were to be hanged is Dualta's friend Paidi, and his death is particularly emotional, because it is undeserved. It is revealed that the young man 'happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time' (SP, 64), and that there is proof of his innocence: Paidi was caught when 'coming home from courting a girl' (SP, 65). Yet, to Dualta's astonishment, those who knew that Paidi was not guilty of the bailiff's death, did not 'come forward and say so' (SP, 67). Another character, Cuan, voices what every Irish person in the large crowd that gathered to see the execution realizes: they were afraid to bear witness to their fellow countrymen's innocence, for they knew in advance that if they spoke up, they would have hanged, too. Revealing the methods used by the ruling class to instil fear in people in order to achieve their obedience, the scene of the public execution highlights the inferior position and vulnerability of the Irish:

Paidi is gone out like a light, just like a light you quench, and not in fair time. So now you know what murder really is, whether it is by the hand of a civilian or by the hand of rulers with all the outward show of justice and impartiality. This was no law. It was law without reason or hope for the people who came under its shadow. (SP, 67.)

Dualta's feelings about his friend's hanging connect his personal grief with a larger picture, showing the system's unfair treatment of the Irish people. The quotation implies that the authorities, indicated by the word 'rulers' in the text, are deemed culpable for numerous cases of blatant injustice towards them. The representatives and administrators of the cruel system – the wealthy landlords, landowners, bailiffs and policemen, fulfil the role of the Other. Because the authorities are largely associated with the English, fear evokes negative assumptions about this national group in particular, and hence, strengthens its negative perception by the Irish. One may wonder about the reasons underlying the British Empire's cruel treatment of one of its colonies. The examples of cruelty in *The Silent People* may provide us with an indication, possibly one of many. It appears that the socio-political context, in which the characters are immersed, sustains a set of relations that makes it possible for the ruling class to treat an inferior group with disdain and violence. In other words, cruel treatment of the oppressed group is authorized by those in power. Impunity stimulates the oppressor's moral corruption; this point is discernible in the episode with the Half-Sir. Dualta's encounter with the Half-Sir convinces us that cruelty and injustice generate fear and resentment, which inevitably stir a desire for vengeance. This idea is encapsulated in Cuan's ruminations on his attack on the landlord: 'Out of persecution would come bitterness, a lust for revenge' (SP, 108). The text of *The Silent People* includes numerous examples that demonstrate ways in which the Irish negative perception of the English develops from fear and, evolving into anger and animosity, leads to the nation-wide resistance. In these, cultural aspects are marked components of the 'othering' process. At the same time, the text provides a clear signal that, as in the episode with the English pedlar, in a non-threatening environment, free from injustice



and violence, Otherness does not trigger fear, and can be genially dismissed. Leerssen fittingly remarks that “the encounter with other cultures, languages and customs” can inspire curiosity, stimulate the imagination, and evoke ‘fascinating images in people’s minds’ (Leerssen in Beller & Leerssen 2007, 6).

An understanding that fear results from oppression increases throughout the novel due to copious portrayals of the plight of the Irish people. First, it is provided by the depictions of the impact of colonialism on Irish cultural context: the lack of education opportunities, the poor state of Irish schools and the denigrated position of the Irish language. Second, it is revealed in the scenes of physical violence carried out by British authorities against the Irish. Finally, it is shown in multiple passages describing poverty and physical privation of the Irish versus the affluence of the English, *inter alia*, contrasting descriptions of food and dwellings. Interestingly, while demonstrating that cultural distinctions, such as language, are used as the most convenient instruments in defining Otherness, the imagological analysis of images of Self and Other in *The Silent People* leads to the assumption that the factors shaping the characters’ fear of the Other are power-related.

## Fear of the Other in *Maria: A Chronicle of A Life*

The Ukrainian novel *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life*, written shortly after the 1932–33 Famine in Ukraine, is arguably the first work of fiction about the Holodomor. Since 2011, its translation by Roma Franko, a Canadian translator of Ukrainian origin, has been available to English readers. The novel narrates the life story of a Ukrainian peasant girl Maria from the village of Hnyloryby,

which is presented sequentially during the disquieting times of the Russo-Japanese war, years of World War I, the 1917 Socialist revolution in Russia and finally, the 1932–33 Famine. This sequential structure of the novel allows us to see the transformations in the Ukrainian perception of the Russian national character between the 1860s and the 1930s. Despite differences in time and socio-historical processes between *An Gorta Mór* and the Holodomor, the analysis of the Ukrainian novel reveals similar patterns of image construction. As in the case with Anglo-Irish relations, Ukrainian stereotypical perceptions of their powerful neighbour have evolved over a long period of time due to its colonial past. In a way similar to *The Silent People*, commonly held beliefs are utilized in Samchuk's novel to construct the image of the Other. A line of distinction between the Ukrainians and the Russians is drawn by means of three features: a bad language habit, indolence and cruelty. These negative traits are ascribed to the Russians, the Bolsheviks, and the Komsomols – these names are synonymous, and applied to identify the Other. It should be observed that prior to the forcible seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, the Ukrainian perception of the Russians in *Maria* is depicted as rather neutral. This is conveyed in the portrayal of Ukrainian villager Korniy Pereputka, one of the novel's main characters. Korniy is drawn to the Russian navy, where he serves as a sailor for seven years. During his time in the army, he acquires some 'Russian' features: idleness and a swearing habit, and therefore, in his native village, Korniy is positioned as the Other. His Otherness, however, does not trigger fear but rather light teasing. At times, his outlandish manners are even regarded as cultivated, for example, his use of a handkerchief, which seems to elevate him above his countrymen. Yet, in juxtaposition with the images of the emaciated villagers, Korniy's healthy appearance increases the reader's understanding of his Otherness:

After completing his military service, the sailor Korniy Pereputka came home hale and hearty. Robust, with a ruddy complexion, speaking Russian, and blowing his nose in a handkerchief. All the neighbours rushed to see him, and he just stood there – a strong oak among the skeletons crushed by typhus – and spouted off a lot of nonsense. [...] He had a moustache curled up at the tips, a shaved nape, a watch on his pale, hairy arm. (*Maria: A Chronicle of a Life*, 95.)<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen, language is one of the elements deployed for the construction of Otherness. Its importance in the image formation is reaffirmed by the fact that when Korniy undergoes transformation and regains the qualities characteristic of the Self, he parts with ‘the Muscovite language’ and speaks ‘in the way that normal people speak’ (*Maria*, 104). The emphasis on the ‘normality’ of the language of the Self brings out the deficiency of the language of the Other. In this way, the depravity of the Other is suggested, which is further strengthened in the novel’s copious accounts of violence and cruelty.

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe the emergence of fear of the Other in *Maria*. A change in the Ukrainian perception of the Russians becomes noticeable in the passages describing Russia’s involvement in military conflicts, such as the Russo-Japanese war, and the First World War, in which Ukraine has perforce to participate as part of the empire. This is demonstrated in the emotionally expressive scenes of the protagonist’s grief over ‘multitudes of sons, husbands, and sweethearts’ sent to war:

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<sup>5</sup> Henceforth, all page numbers in parentheses, placed after quotations and preceded by *Maria*, refer to this text.

Mothers! Why are you weeping, mothers? Are you feeling sorry for your sons? Don't cry. There are millions of sons in Russia!

Wives! Are you saying you can't get along without your husbands? That they'll perish? Don't worry ... Russia will give you other husbands! (*Maria*, 147.)

Maria's bitter irony, used to express her feelings of injustice about the Ukrainians' involvement in fighting for Russia's faraway territories, draws attention to Russia's responsibility for Ukraine's tribulation. The negative perception of Russia and the Russians escalates then in the episodes showing the forceful imposition of Bolshevik rule after the 1917 Russian revolution that brings chaos and grief to Ukraine. With the Bolsheviks' arrival in the village of Hnyloryby, it becomes prevalent in the accounts describing the demeanour of the aggressive invaders. In parallel with the imagological constructs of the Other in *The Silent People*, here, too, a cultural detail contributes towards the image formation. The Bolsheviks' brutality is shown in association with the Russian language. One of the scenes depicts them appropriating the villagers' clover, cows and horses, while 'swearing lively' (*Maria*, 170), shouting and yelling in Russian (*Maria*, 171, 173); another passage discloses how 'expeditiously' they deal with those who tried to protest – 'line them up against the wall and shoot them' (*Maria*, 173).

The scene showing Maria's objection to the Bolsheviks' confiscation of clover marks the transition to a more belligerent mood in the novel. It attests to the interdependence and interpenetration of politics, power, and the process of image formation. When the Bolsheviks cry out, 'Shut up, granny!' They shouted in Russian. 'Lenin will pay you for everything!' (*Maria*, 171), a connection between an ideological element suggested by the word 'Lenin', and a cultural peculiarity indicated by the mention

of the language, is achieved. In this way, an understanding that the Bolsheviks' unlawful deeds are justified by their leaders is provided. In addition, numerous references to the Russian language accentuate the point that detrimental Bolshevik ideology is imported from Russia.

Nonetheless, there is an important detail that somewhat alters the image of the Other. Even though it is provided in a relatively brief paragraph, it should not escape readers' attention. One of the Bolsheviks – 'a bearded Tambovets',<sup>6</sup> is shown to take a great care of a Kirghizian trotter. Clearly fond of the horse, the Tambovets is described as someone who 'looked after him, fed him oats, gave him hay that he stole from peaceable women' and who 'gently called him Vaska and curried him with a currycomb and a brush' (*Maria*, 157). Sadly, the horse dies, as the Tambovets abandons him and 'everything' else, 'for he heard the call of the revolution' (*Maria*, 157). This passage encourages readers to think that people's behaviour is shaped by the environment, in which they operate. Under other circumstances, in non-violent conditions, the Tambovets' life would probably not have differed greatly from the peaceful existence of the Ukrainian peasants before Bolshevik rule, as portrayed in *Maria*. It can be suggested, then, that changes in discourse entail changes in the construction and interpretation of images. Leerssen's indication of the variability of images, which he discusses in terms of Anglo-Irish discourse, prompts to consider that within the Russian-Ukrainian context, the Self/Other duality could produce a less threatening Other, provided that the discourse is devoid of cruelty:

The relationship between auto- and hetero-image is not one of static polarity. [...] the images themselves are subject to extreme vicissitudes (taking place, all the

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<sup>6</sup> 'a man from the Tambov district in Russia' (*Maria*, 246).

same, within the basic parameters of the underlying native-foreign polarity) and the relation between them is, if any, a dialectical one, where auto- and hetero-images sometimes polarize in mutual antagonism, sometimes impart certain characteristics to, and mutually influence, each other. (Leerssen 1996, 11–12.)

The point that the ruling class delineates and controls the discourse, shaping people's convictions and behavioural patterns, can be strengthened by Brian H. Bornstein and Richard L. Wiener's reference to Roger Barker's theory that links environment and behaviour: 'The current environment influences the behavior of the inhabitants of those environments as much, if not more, than do the characteristics of the inhabitants' (Bornstein & Wiener 2014, 74). From this, it appears that aiming 'to understand a discourse rather than a society' (Beller & Leerssen 2007, xiii), imagology inevitably facilitates our understanding of a given society.

In *Maria*, it is shown that having destroyed Ukraine's peaceful rural life, the Bolsheviks instead create a hostile environment. In the eyes of the local peasants, their malevolence is highlighted by their unsightly appearance: 'The men were unshaven, their unbuttoned shorts were grimy like the earth, their ashen chests were thrust forwards, the sound of accordion was fading away in the fresh morning air ...' (*Maria*, 170). The protagonist's exclamatory remark 'But after all, you're not Tartars!' (*Maria*, 171) suggests a comparison between Bolshevism and a different historical period in Ukraine's history, also steeped in violence. The mention of Tartars manifestly alludes to the Tatar invasions of Ukraine in the past, implying their barbarous behavior. This detail strongly corroborates the point that the emergence of negative perceptions between nations or groups of people is

power-related, and arises from fear.<sup>7</sup> Equally important, it shows that stereotypes outlast political systems and ideologies. Leaders and social orders change, yet old-established images remain embedded in national memories and can be retrieved and restored in times of crisis. Stenzel notes that ‘political conflicts and even wars sink into oblivion more easily than the images of others’ (Stenzel mentioned by Leerssen 2007, 11). In the 1930s, fear of the Other is induced by threats that spring from Bolshevik rule. In other words, fear of the Other is fear of the Bolsheviks. Resulting from the emotion of fear, negative images of the Bolsheviks and Russians develop and intensify throughout the Soviet period. While there seems to be an obvious connection between images and power, it is pertinent to consider stereotypes as tools of power. In famine fiction, they are used to accentuate the depravity of the Other by highlighting the righteousness of the Self. In doing so, they denounce injustice and oppression.

Stereotypical clichés in *Maria* aid the author in his depiction of the Bolsheviks’ culpability for Ukraine’s tragedy, reinforcing readers’ awareness that their presence is dangerous and harmful for Ukraine. The Bolsheviks’ cruelty permeates the text: ‘Field jackets, boots, and riding breeches. With a clattering sound the terrible Russian peasant is shaking up the planet like the Krakatoa volcano. The Ukrainian land resounds with the stumping of the revolutionary hordes’ (*Maria*, 158). Military clothing, warlike sounds – all these elements, attributed to characterize the invader, and strengthened by the word ‘hordes’, draw attention to the aggressiveness of Ukraine’s oppressor. In response, the

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on Tatar invasions of Ukraine see, for instance, Serhii Plokhy (2015) *The Gates of Europe. A History of Ukraine*. UK/USA/Canada: Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, and Alexander Basilevsky (2016) *Early Ukraine: A Military and Social History to the Mid-18th Century*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers.

derogatory name for the Russian – *moskal*,<sup>8</sup> emerges. It is used by Maria's eldest son, Lavrin, in his remark about the ruination of Ukraine's statehood: "The moskal was never our brother", Lavrin argued. "They destroyed our kozak state ..." (*Maria*, 161). The allusion to the abolition of the Cossack Hetmanate by Russian Queen Catherine II in the eighteenth century prompts the existence of contentious issues in Russian-Ukrainian relations in the past. Another pejorative term characterizing the Russians, *katsapy*,<sup>9</sup> appears in the episodes dealing with the 1920–21 smaller-scale famine: 'You fiendish katsa-a-apy! You've befouled all of Russia, and now you're pushing your way into Ukraine!' (*Maria*, 175). In both cases, this discharge of deprecatory names labelling the Bolsheviks affirms that the characters' hostility is directed towards those, who bring violence and destruction. It can thus be assumed that while generating anger and resentment, fear of the Other is ignited by the issues related to power and are not brought about by cultural differences.

This point is corroborated by the passages describing an increase of fear. In the early 1930s, fear of the Other magnifies during collectivization: a forcible grain-collection campaign, which the Ukrainian peasantry resists *en masse*. The Bolsheviks pillage the villagers' houses and yards in search of grain, and indeed all kinds of edible products. The villagers hide their food supplies in order to survive; then, the Bolsheviks resort to violence to extract information about the whereabouts of the hidden grain, including torture:

For ten days they burned the subkurkul Petro Kukurika on an iron plate heated with gas, and kept asking him: "Where did you hide the grain?" He wouldn't tell them.

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<sup>8</sup> 'soldier; Muscovite; Russian' (*Maria*, 245).

<sup>9</sup> the plural form for 'a billy goat' (Hiroaki Kuromiya 1998, 43).



He was toppling over like a mown stalk but he remained as silent as a stone being split by a hammer. [...] He remained silent like one who is cursed, and he didn't even peep when they mercilessly broke his bones. And so he was sentenced to ten years for his stubbornness. (*Maria*, 196.)

The descriptions of the Bolsheviks' torture methods highlight the detrimental outcomes of Bolshevik rule, and signal that the Ukrainians' fear of their Other is justified. The novel provides a clear message that no other system was as bad as Soviet rule: 'I, my good people, have even read some history. Things happened. Many things happened. But our country has never known such barbaric behaviour, and perhaps it will never experience it again' (*Maria*, 199). Considering the Bolsheviks' extreme violence, it can be suggested that in *Maria*, Bolshevism is depicted as an ideology that appeals to people bereft of empathy and morality. Interestingly, this point is expressed in an unambiguous way in the Bolshevik leader's concept of a revolutionary: Vladimir Lenin insisted that 'The best revolutionary is a youth devoid of morals' (Shaw Crouse 2012, 145). Bolshevik ideologists, clearly, have succeeded in creating the right conditions for groups of people with certain behavioural traits. The Soviet leadership deftly used those, who had a propensity for violence, which, naturally, cannot be attributed to one nation. Anne Applebaum fittingly describes them as 'a fanatical and devoted minority, one that would kill for the cause', and refers to the 'founders' of the 1917 Revolution as 'the men and women who had been motivated by such passion for destruction' (Applebaum 2017). In many cases, people who strongly adhere to an ideology, its frontline workers, or 'a mob of supporters' (*ibid.*), do not realize that they are being 'deliberately' used by their leaders in order to secure support and hold onto power. In *Maria*, this view is prompted

by the sentence about Bezpalky, one of the novel's villains, and his henchmen, who actively participate in the collectivization process and behave violently towards their fellow countrymen: 'The sly-eyed ones simply do not know what those at the top are planning' (*Maria*, 198).

Following the scenes of torture, the monstrosity of Soviet rule in Ukraine during the Holodomor is bolstered in the parts of the novel that present the apocalyptic images of famished, dying people. Particularly poignant is the portrayal of 'emaciated pathetic-looking little children', picking grain in the field in order to survive: 'Their small bodies creep through the weeds, their scrawny hands reach for ears of grain. Back home, their father has collapsed and is lying motionless, their mother is not getting out of bed. At home there is death, and they, these little ones, are running forth to look for life' (*Maria*, 210). In this final section of Samchuk's novel, the reader is shown the most disturbing act of cruelty – the callous killing of children. Once again, Ukraine's aggressive neighbour is identified as her Other, in the description of the soldiers arriving from the north to secure grain fields from the starving peasants: 'They are the soldiers of "the great and brilliant future" who have come here from the distant north. They aim at every little head that raises itself towards an ear of grain. Shots, shouts, blood, little bodies topple over, small holes are dug, the ground is levelled' (*Maria*, 210–211). Bitter irony brings into sharp focus the false slogans proclaimed by the Bolsheviks, which, in juxtaposition with their actual deeds, amplify readers' realization of the deceitful nature of their rule. A sense of Otherness along with the propagation of fear that emanates from their belonging to a military group, the remoteness of their land, and especially from their harrowing brutality – all these are used by the writer to accentuate Russia's role in Ukraine's tragedy. Revealing Moscow's oppressive rule

in Ukraine, the novel's representation of the events between the 1860s and 1930s in Ukraine demonstrates how the Ukrainian perception of the Russians transforms, and, developing into fear, further leads to resentment. Leerssen's observation that the direction of image formation processes 'is determined at least in part by power relations' (Leerssen 2007, 343) allows us to assume that in the context of the Holodomor, there is a good reason to suggest that this process is governed by power relations solely.

This paper addressed the theme of fear through an examination of literary representations of images of Self and Other in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions. The imagological analysis of the novels *The Silent People* by Walter Macken and *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life* by Ulas Samchuk allowed for the discernment of similar patterns in their image construction, revealing that in the Self/Other dichotomy, fear is an element of Otherness. The selected episodes, in which the 'othering' process was discussed, demonstrated that under conditions free from oppression, Otherness appears innocuous and non-threatening, and can be a source of amusement. Within the context of oppression, by contrast, violence and cruelty, which result from the abuse of power and are often authorized by the ruling class, generate fear and resentment of the oppressed. Hence, brought out and deepened by cultural elements, fear of the Other is a power-related phenomenon, whether under colonial rule or in the context of a totalitarian regime. While Irish and Ukrainian works of famine fiction constitute remarkably valuable sources for the study of the development and dissemination of perceptions and stereotypes between nations and groups of people by providing 'insight into the way specific historical events shape a society, and the attitudes, morals and behaviour of its members' (Weretiuk, June 2017, 53), they undoubtedly provide rich ground

for an examination of the representation of fear of the Other within the local and transnational contexts.

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# The fear of cultural belonging

## Sharon Dodua Otoo's transnational writing

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### Introduction: Afropolitan literature as an example of transcultural writing

In contemporary Europe, cultural conflicts, persisting racism and the lack of a broader acceptance of plural identities are all social problems, with which literary discourse too comes to terms. Aside from being dealt with from the standpoint of the majority culture, over the last decades these phenomena have also been thematised and creatively elaborated by several so-called 'Afropolitan writers'. Being an effect of globalisation

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and late modernity, or, according to Achille Mbembe (2007), a ‘worlds-in-movement phenomenon’, those authors live and write out of a dual attachment to the Western world and to the African continent. They are therefore characterized through a very fertile and demystifying ‘double glance’ on societies and cultures which for long have been very distant, contributing to give contemporary literature an ethical turn. In fact, as has been pointed out by Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek in their recent publication entitled *In Search of the Afropolitan*, this new category of contemporary writers is supposed to assume “a mobile and decentralised position that disavows earlier deeply hegemonic phases of modernity, as it calls for a reorientation of ideas about Africa and African culture and identity” (Rask Knudsen & Rahbek 2016, 1). At the same time, Afropolitan writers are aware (and in some sense the ‘stakeholders’) of cultural complexity, often refusing to oversimplify or essentialise the notions of blackness and whiteness.

So, without generalising too much, Afropolitan literature could be defined as a supranational concept addressing questions such as multi-local and diasporic identity, as well as new European citizenship, being deeply linked with the concept of cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism. Ethics in a world of Strangers* (2006). In his essay, Appiah uses the formula ‘universality plus difference’, coming to terms with a concept originally and conventionally related to white European culture, which has now been critically and creatively reinvented and reversed. Evidently, the concept of Afropolitanism stands opposed to the tendency (which is especially to be found in media discourse) of considering African and afro-descending writers not primarily as intellectuals, but as native informants; but it also goes beyond the sometimes fairly rigid categorisation as ‘postcolonial writers’, which is

more common in academic discourse. According to the ethical commitment of these writings, Rask Knudsen and Rahbek commentate:

... Afropolitans, due to their (globally) itinerant lives, are in a particularly advantage position to realize the ethical responsibilities inherent in Appiah's proposition, yet in a specific counter-discursive way, because the knowledge they have also relates directly to what European or Western culture has made of African difference over centuries of imperial or colonial impact. Afropolitans employ that knowledge actively as power to effect a radical change in perception. (Rask Knudsen & Rahbek 2016, 15.)

Furthermore, Afropolitan literature may include authors of different generations, like Ben Okri (Nigeria, 1955), Chiamamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigeria, 1977), Taiye Selasi (London, 1979), as well as Igiaba Scego (Rome, 1974), being the English-speaking and -publishing proponents much better known as those using Italian, German or 'minor' languages for their literary work. At last, Afropolitan writing is frequently associated with new concepts of 'World literature' or 'Global literature', too.

In my contribution, while dealing with the fear of cultural belonging, I will focus on the narrative work of the Black British-Ghanaian writer and activist Sharon Dodua Otoo, reflecting on how blackness and ethnicity, together with a migration background, constitute main factors in the negotiation of identity, in Western society. In fact, emotions like fear, disease and cultural-based misunderstandings are shaped by literary representations that, as in the case of this 'Afropolitan' writer, may open new identity discourses and counter-narratives. Without a doubt, these specific discourses could also be analysed from the point of view of the transcultural theory, as developed



by the German philosopher and sociologist Wolfgang Welsch (1994, 1999 etc.). Indeed, they are the expression of cultural exchanges, which prevent us from thinking about cultures as closed systems, or as ‘monades’. According to Welsch, in fact, the new cultural formations transcend traditional concepts, being characterized by the creation of network-like relationships. The increasing level of internationalisation, migration and cross-media networking is radically changing social interaction and self-representation, as Welsch points out in a series of significant and duly quoted contributions. It is therefore no longer possible to think about Western societies as homogeneous constructs, for they are the product of hybridisation and networking. Yet, to come to the point, most academics will agree with Welsch and with this constructive analysis, diametrically opposite to the Clash-of-Civilisations theories and related political views, but unfortunately many common European citizens and journalists are not on the same page. Cultural conflict, fear and misunderstanding in contemporary societies and the aesthetics of fear, disease and violence are therefore to be analysed using a set of methods that are not provided by Welsch’s model. As Dagmar Reichardt recently pointed out:

Welsch brings greater precision and evidence solely to the morphology of the cultural relativity and to the taxonomy of the research object (leading essentially to its enlargement), and yet he eschews such precision when it comes to give parameters for how to act methodically. Testing the methods of analyses remains therefore a challenge for the future, and its importance and applicability can be proven only through scientific practice. (Reichardt 2017, 45.)

In the case of comparative literature studies, I personally would suggest using the analytic tools the texts themselves call for, whether they are focused on gender-specific themes or on postcolonial ones; whether the theme and the aesthetics of migration are in the foreground, or whether, as in the case in point, we are dealing with an imagological reflection on Black- and Whiteness and on related themes concerning identity construction and identity performance in contemporary metropolitan society.

As for the writer I have included in my contribution, here are some biographical details: Sharon Dodua Otoo was born in London in 1972, from emigrated Ghanaian parents and she was raised in England. She moved to Berlin in 2006 and since 2010 she has been involved with the Initiative Black People in Germany (Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland), and she is the editor of *Witnessed*, an English-language book series of the German publishing house Assemblage (located in Münster). In this series, in 2012 she came out with her first fictional text, in English language: the novella *The things I am thinking while smiling politely* (2012) (German language version republished in 2013), followed in 2014 by another one, entitled *Synchronicity*. Both texts were translated by Mirjam Nuenning in German language and released by the same publisher. The writer and activist, who in the same years published several short stories and on-line essays in English and German, became renowned by a larger public in 2016, when she was awarded with the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis, one of the most prestigious awards for literature in German language. Otoo's winning entry was the short story *Herr Gröttrup setzt sich hin*, which is still unpublished but available in (the original) German language at the web site of the Austrian television channel ORF. So, as we see, we are dealing with a translingual writer, whose main

publications are the expression of transnational editing policies, and whose main literary acknowledgement is symptomatic for the transformation not only of the German-speaking societies, but also of the German (*deutschsprachigen*) Literature.

## The disease of naming

My analysis of Dodua Otoo's narratives, in terms of representation of individual disease and cultural anxiety, begins with a (quite long) quotation from her novella *The things I am thinking while smiling politely*. At a first glance, it is the story of a heartbreak occurring to the protagonist and narrator, a Black-British woman living in Berlin, mother of siblings, and PhD-scholar in German literature; but at the same time, this interpersonal crisis is the protagonist's occasion for analysing herself and her childhood in England, where she grew up in an African family with migration background. This way, the author gives an insight not only into the current German society, but also into the British society of the 80s and 90s (and as we see, most of the identikit of Otoo's main character descends from the author's own biography).

Names are important, but I no longer know mine.

I have never cared much for my so-called maiden name. Some officially suited white lady once glared at me in barely-hidden disgust when, in response to her customer-service-trained polite enquiry, I told her that it really didn't matter how she pronounced it.

'Yes it does!' She clenched her teeth slightly but definitely as she spoke. 'It is your surname!'

My eyes spotted something quite amazing on a wall somewhere to the right of her head. Perhaps she had identity issues of her own. In any case, I really didn't

care. I didn't even quite know how to bend and squash my Ghanaian name to suit English tongues – and leaving it to freely expand across my lips in its full tonal glory would simply underline even more how much I really did not belong. I wish Auntie had thought of that and had given me appropriate Afro-centric guidance before abandoning me to the indoctrination generally referred to as the British education system. I may have better learnt how to handle my identity in public.

And yeah, the other reason that I mistreated my name was I did not want to be associated with my father any second longer than strictly necessary – [...] Several month after we were married, I discovered the Peters was also the surname of a German colonial aggressor and, although I didn't begin to hate it then, I stopped adorning myself with it, like it was some magnificent fur coat, but begun instead to treat it like an ugly scarf: functional and necessary in cold weather, but not my item of choice and it wouldn't matter much if I misplaced it one day, of perhaps lent it to someone in need, and it was never returned. [...]. (2012, 9–10.)

As we can easily recognize, in these lines the character's name is a kaleidoscopic mirror of her identity, which is represented as a crossroads of tensions: the difficulty of being accepted without any friction by the British society, beyond the officially exhibited political correctness; the assimilation process by which every foreign name is anglicised, losing its 'authenticity'; the refusal of the father's name, as a symbol of a disease-causing familiar past and masculine authority; the expectation of changing life by adopting the deeply rooted and "sexy" name of her "sexy" husband (2012, 10), as the mirage of a renewal of her own. In fact, the narrator, once fallen in love and married with a German, very enthusiastically accepts her husband's surname as hers, provided

she does not discover its colonial background. The narrator's idealising image of German culture is therefore dismantled and debunked: as if to say, a colonial past could unexpectedly appear behind every European, and not only British surname, as the return of a repressed collective memory. However, this kind of return of the repressed seems to be perturbing, *unheimlich*, primarily to those border-crossing subjects who are going to carry these names for the first time, since they are linked to this memory as victims, and not to the virtual heirs of the former "colonial aggressors". In a nutshell, the protagonist's difficulty in dealing with her own name, albeit recounted with humour and with light and delicious self-irony, is the clear expression of the difficult negotiation of her identity within the European, British and German contexts. While she tries to re-construct her identity, no longer in a public-oriented way, but re-enacting it in the direction of the private sphere, i.e. her new German-British-Ghanaian family, she undergoes a sense of un-belonging that recalls more remote episodes of her life, as if she were in a spiral of memory from which she cannot evade.

In fact, in both the narration of the present in Berlin, and the flashbacks on the narrator's childhood in London – and using an oscillating chronology slowly leading to the explanation of the relationship rupture – figures of blackness and whiteness are constantly performed and discussed. Yet, these figures are not interpreted in a merely unilateral or conflictual way, being often linked to gender and generational aspects. For example, when it comes to how ethnic difference is perceived and performed in today's Berlin, there is a remarkable attitude difference between the protagonist and her children: although the latter are exposed to racist comments even at school, they apparently do not suffer them, reacting with cleverness and feeling superior not only to their only-white schoolmates, but also to those teachers

who do not seem to have any ‘intercultural competence’ at all. Furthermore, as to the question of naming and self-naming, the siblings bear their hybrid Ghanaian and German names with no discomfort whatsoever, relating to them with the spontaneity that may be common to the new generation of teenagers growing up in a multicultural metropolis:

I invited Beth to join me in the kitchen, where I made her a hot chocolate with squirty cream and marshmallows, just like she always loved it. I told her all about how Till and I chose the name “Bethany”, that both her and Ash’s names came from the Bible. I heard for the first time how pleased she was that she had also been named after Auntie, and how she hated it whenever people shortened her second name to “Pat”. We laughed until the tears rolled down our cheeks when Beth told me how horrified she was, the first time she heard Ash’s second name. I tried to absolve myself of all responsibility. Till had wanted to honour his grandpa Heinrich, a German communist who had been arrested and killed during Nazi Germany. “Yeah whatever,” Beth had responded. “But you could have anglicised it. Or ... taken his second name ... or something!”. She shook her head in disgust. “Heinrich! I mean ... what were you thinking?”

[...] I thought back to similar homework assignments I had had. Sitting in the classroom, the eyes of those behind me burning my neck, the eyes of those in front of me, scanning my expression for authenticity. “What is her African name? And does it translate to ‘most prized cattle grazing on the savannah’ in English?” I thought back to how much I hated my teachers in those moments. (2012, 76–77.)

To get to the point, in a moment of the protagonist's life when she is upset because of her husband's betrayal, all kinds of identity-making and future-prospecting issues (such as the self-naming and the naming act related to her and to their children), are deeply questioned. This leads the narrator to reflect on the relevance of blackness and racialisation during her own childhood and to compare her own identity-formation to that of her children, implicitly comparing British society of the 80s to 21<sup>st</sup> century life in Berlin. Despite all societal and generational differences, there is one perturbing constant feature, i.e. the feeling that black people are the object of the gaze of the white majority, which forces her to reflect on how they are viewed. To better argue that, let's look at Dodua Otoo's text:

Berlin is a place where anything goes, and you can wear whatever you like, but if you are a Black woman in the underground, be prepared to be looked up and down very very slowly. I cannot tell you how many times I have glanced down at myself in horror during such moments to check if my jeans were unzipped or if my dress was caught up in my underwear. White people look at me sometimes like I am their own private Völkerschau. Staring back doesn't help. It counts as part of the entertainment. Where else can a tourist make you feel like you – the resident – are actually the one who does not belong? Welcome to the Kreuzberg district of Berlin. (2012, 85.)

This quotation allows us to approach Dodua Otoo's narratives from the point of view of gender discourse, which is very important in both English novellas and in the German-language short story. Linking gender issues with ethnicity, especially in *The things I am thinking while smiling politely*, this novella on the one hand explores the private and interpersonal

dimension of a mixed marriage, and on the other it examines the public dimension of metropolitan multi-ethnic coexistence. Thematising both dimensions, Otoo successfully avoids certain stereotypes. For example, the protagonist's husband, Till, could have chosen an 'authentic white German maiden' (to make a quite ironic conjecture) to betray his Black-British wife, but he does not: he falls in love with a young 'illegal' immigrant from Maghreb, who risks being deported after the protagonist reveals, as retaliation, their relationship to Till's boss (who actually is the most negative white German character of the novella).

Regarding the latter dimension of the public sphere, Dodua Otoo not only points out how the *black* female body is constantly sexualized by the *white* male gaze; she also hints at the objectivation practices of the non-white Other in Western society from a historical point of view, mentioning the institution of Human Zoos (Germ. *Völkerschau*), a phenomenon of the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century where 'exotic' human beings from the colonies were publicly exhibited in cities of the industrialised world. In fact, disseminating similar references to the history of racism and racial discrimination throughout her narratives, Sharon Dodua Otoo draws upon her researches and socio-cultural activities, documented by the earlier mentioned book series *Witnessed* and by several on-line essays. In particular, in her essay "Vom Schauen und Sehen. Schwarze Literatur und Theorieproduktion als Chance für die weiße Mehrheitsgesellschaft" (2014) she argues that 'Black' literature and art, together with cultural theory, should be seen by the European collectivity as an opportunity to radically change its gaze on the 'racialized object'. Referring to Afro-American authors like bell hooks (and her essay "Representing Whiteness in Black Imagination", from 1992) and Toni Morrison (with *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* 1992) she points out that it is necessary not



only to recount the possible reactions of the so-called ‘imagined black object’ to discrimination and verbal (but not only verbal) violence, but also and especially to reverse the gaze on the white majoritarian subject itself, in order to critically analyse the historical and cultural implications of it. So, going back to our novella, while the narrator is limiting herself to “smile politely” as a reaction to a large number of events where racism is the issue, the reader is invited to meditate on both, the gazes and acts of the white characters, as well as the reactions of the black ones. At the end of the narration, the reader should therefore be ready to critically analyse the various implications of the self-justification provided by the narrator’s husband for his choice to leave her:

“Es macht keinen Spaß mehr”, he says. I think about what he is saying – what he is about to say – and consider whether it would be kinder, gentler in English: *It’s no fun any more ...* “Fun?” I snort. It kind of erupts out of me. I pause and look at the balcony opposite ours, the one with the beautiful flowers. Obviously they do not have children. [...] Till looks me in the eyes, longer than he has in the last six months in total – which really isn’t saying much. “Es macht *mir* keinen Spaß mehr”. The additional emphasis “It’s no fun anymore *for me*” makes all the difference. Till has finally drawn a line in the sand. We continue to stand side by side, looking down on the street scene below us. Nothing has changed. And yet the world has just turned upside down. It takes me some time to realise that these two facts are not contradictory. Actually, in a few weeks, I will still be chewing on it. (2012, 97.)

Anticipating the reader’s reaction to these lines, the banality of the conclusion of the character’s relationship is not far from other, more explicit events affected by prejudice and racism.

When the main character learns that she no longer is the ‘object’ of her husband’s desire, she also painfully learns that even a relationship that was thought to be authentic is not immune from the distorted vision of the ‘other’ and, in this case, from the sexualising gaze of the white ‘male’ on the black female ‘object’.

## The fear of belonging

As we have seen, through the case of our ‘Afropolitan’ writer, identity formation and identity performance are intimately linked to the gaze of the majoritarian other, which in fact is an implicit confirmation not only of the theoretical literature she refers to in her essays, but also of the principles of Imagological research. Nothing new under the sun, we could comment at this point, but coming to the core of my argumentation, I will try to point out where the specificities of Dodua Otoo’s narrative work lie, and, especially, why we can see a ‘fear of cultural belonging’ in it.

First of all, Dodua Otoo deals with the migrant’s fear of belonging, i.e. the fear of the ‘first generation’ of people moving from traditional societies, bound to be forced to stay in the society of arrival for good, as it is often impossible for them to move back to their home countries. The following paragraph of Otoo’s first novella expresses this concept very clearly in narrative terms:

Even after all those years, Auntie had still not properly arrived in London. And we seemed to always have the backdoor open – metaphorically speaking at least. I grew up thinking it was completely normal for adults’ bedrooms to have several large suitcases and a chest standing in them, filled with items ranging from large saver packs of toothbrushes, through several

collections of buy-two-get-one-free packages of cereal, to a multitude of jelly shoes (various colours) with matching plastic basket bags (they had obviously looked great in the shop window). We were always preparing to go home. Indeed, Auntie still is. (2012, 95.)

The latter lines are actually dealing with the meaning of ‘home’, with its absence that is metonymically expressed by the objects described, all talking about the impossibility of arriving definitively. It is a theme which is central for Migration Literature and migrant collective consciousness, too, as it has been carefully analysed by scholars like Sara Ahmed (1999) and Jennifer Burns (2013) in several publications. In addition to that, from the point of view of the second generation, cross-border subjects, the parents’ trauma of having lost their ‘home’ frequently creates a disease-causing responsibility to mediate between the culture the elder generation left behind and the culture where this generation is growing up. In this case, the fear of cultural belonging could be linked to the apprehension of being associated with the parents’ culture of origin. At the same time, this younger generation – represented in our case by Dodua Otoo and in general by Afropolitan writers – whilst dealing with discrimination and racism, is usually fairly aware of its in-between position, of its ‘double gaze’ on two or more societies and cultures, from the inside and from the outside: a position that implies a mental complexity and analytical tools used by such writers and artists in an original way. In this latter case, the fear of cultural belonging could therefore also be interpreted as the desire not to belong, in order to preserve this kind of double perspective, and to develop a more and more conscious transcultural identity.

Yet, from the point of view of the aesthetics of identity-questioning and cross-cultural writing, Sharon Dodua Otoo’s

second novella and her German prize-winning short story are even more interesting. *Synchronicity*, first published in 2014 (the German translation), then (2015) in the original version, recounts a rather surreal story, in a realistic setting of present-day Berlin. It is the story of a young woman born in London but descending from a Ghanaian tribe (whose name of fantasy is “Etis”), now living in the German capital where she works as a graphic designer. In a first-person narration, this woman describes the loss of her capacity to see colours, which occurs day by day and colour by colour, causing her not only to face serious problems with an important project she accepted from her German customer, but also to question all certainties related to her life. As we, the readers, learn only gradually, and as the protagonist’s mother explains in a letter whose fragments are woven into the narration, the inability to see colours is only one of the consequences of the special abilities of the members of this Ghanaian tribe, who are all women capable of parthenogenesis, i.e. the faculty to generate children alone. Whilst the colours gradually ‘come back’ to the narrator – who passes from a ‘mono-colour’ to a ‘polychromatic’ perception, which involves not only the sight, but all the five senses – she also grows aware of the particular pain of her existence. In fact, all members of her tribe must leave their mothers for good when they grow up and must not depend on other people, neither the mother nor anyone else. At the end, and roughly summarizing, the protagonist faces the dilemma of choosing the way imposed by tradition, or breaking off from it in order to reconcile with her daughter, whom she had forced to leave home one year before, and who is now expecting a baby.

Concerning the narrative style of this novella, we can firstly notice the particular synaesthetic descriptions of the moments when the narrator is going to once again perceive ‘her’ colours.

The following lines describe, for example, the return of the narrator's red colour:

I shouldn't have been surprised. In the letter my mum had written to me, she had stated quite clearly that this was the re-colouring that had scared her the most. I had stabbing pains and the sensation of bleeding all over my body but thankfully I could see neither wounds nor blood.

As usual, the symptoms had begun in the early hours and were fairly mild. On waking, it felt like a tiny scratch had caused a droplet of blood to appear just above my right eyebrow. I wiped it with the tip of my little finger and was astounded when I looked at my glove that there was not even the slightest mark on it. Whereas yesterday the morning had been unpleasant, but bearable due to the scent of peppermint and fog in my nostrils, today only smelt of danger. My mum had known that I would also feel slightly nauseous and very dizzy. I also carried travel sickness tablets. (2015, 35.)

As we can see from this example of the synaesthetic descriptions, which are repeated at the beginning of every chapter, from 10 to 21, in this novella *Dodua Otoo* works with an interesting estrangement effect, an effect through which the usual perception of reality is deactivated. A similar strategy is employed by the author in her Bachmann-Prize-winning short story, where the daily routine of a typical German breakfast celebrated by an old German couple is upset by an egg, that unexpectedly is not hard-boiled enough. This event causes a sort of familiar earthquake, which restores in the couples' memory the erased Nazi-past and the end of the war, when the husband – who now treats his wife in an authoritarian way – was saved by her from the retaliation of Russian soldiers. This estrangement effect is even intensified

by the narrative instance, changing from a neutral, extradiegetic habit to a personal, homodiegetic one, where the point of view is the one of the soft-boiled egg. The magical element related to a (widely speaking) 'African' collective imagination, we just observed summarizing the plot of the novella *Synchronicity*, is a further element related to this narrative strategy: in fact, the soft-boiled egg that also functions as a second narrator, seems to be an unborn soul, who migrates throughout the centuries and continents in search of his/her special occasion for coming to life.

Going back to Dodua Otoo's second novella, which deals with the issues of identity and belonging more than her German short story, we can say that she uses this particular anti-realistic effect of estrangement not only to address the theme of self-alienation and the anxiety of tradition. The painful conquest of a multicoloured identity performed by the protagonist and narrator could also be interpreted as an allegory of the individual and cultural process of the acceptance of differences, with all its difficulties. In this case, the transition from a mono-colour to a multicolour dimension could be interpreted as the change from a monocultural dimension into a transcultural one. Yet, the protagonist's decision to change radically her own nature and to find a new way of life, breaking with tradition, is associated not only with the fear of cultural belonging, but also with the fear of personal, sentimental, surely intimate belonging: a fear she slowly overcomes by falling in love with a policeman of Arab ancestry and discovering herself as a 'normal' human being who needs to exist in the mind of someone, taken care of by and taking care of someone. However, this personal and sentimental dimension of *Bildung* in *Synchronicity* is associated with the widening of the protagonist's horizon in the direction of ethical and societal issues, and therefore with *Bildung* in its original

and more complex meaning, deeply rooted in German literature. In fact, once finished her graphic project amid a number of difficulties, the protagonist of *Synchronicity* finds out that her German customer has planned to use her work as the decoration of a luxury brothel, and that this brothel will be placed in a building whose inhabitants are forced to leave their homes. Similarly, the protagonist and narrator herself had received an eviction letter and she has to leave her Kreuzberg-apartment, the district of Berlin heavily affected by gentrification. The sequence of personal and psychological dilemmas is therefore associated with a series of societal conflicts, and the protagonist of Dodua Otoo's novella is forced to make her choice on this latter level too.

## Conclusion: self-alienation, societal alienation and ethical implications

This final consideration brings us to our provisional conclusion about Sharon Dodua Otoo's main concerns as a writer, editor and activist. In fact, in the literary examples I have analysed, the main characters seem to be involved both in the difficult negotiation of blackness in the private and the public spheres, where whiteness represents the majority, but also in other societal problems, like migration, discrimination of minorities, gender inequality, gentrification, and so on. The fear of cultural belonging that characterizes the plots of the two novellas is in fact deeply linked to the ability of identifying and thematising those problems, and this is why we could also speak about the desire not to belong, in this case as in many other contemporary writers characterized by a transcultural biography. Quoting the writer, it is "Negotiating the Dilemma Between Societal Alienation and Self-Alienation" where Dodua Otoo focuses on, and where she

also refers to writers like Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (2012, 85), whose intertextual presence is quite evident, especially in her first novella.

Yet, recalling the ‘classification’ of Dodua Otoo as an Afropolitan writer, such as some of the characteristics of this literary movement I discussed at the beginning of my article, I now suggest we can more explicitly affirm that we are not simply dealing with postmodern elite writers with a solely European educational background, involved with themes concerning ‘second generation’ people living in big metropolitan areas. Afropolitan writers like Sharon Dodua Otoo are ‘making’ a literature characterized by ethical and political commitment, dealing with the local issues (for example, special districts of the metropolis they live in), as well as global issues (the African diaspora, the mental de-framing of what it means to be African in a global context, postcolonial issues etc.) often in a very remarkable way.

Indeed, this “radical change in perception” (Raks Knudsen & Rahbek 2016, 15) is not only about the “African difference”; it rather concerns a wide range of ‘differences’, and a wide range of estranging dynamics, the Western society is made up of.



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# Fear and safety in contemporary Russian cinema

## A transcultural perspective

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Andrei Zvyagintsev, one of the most recognized contemporary Russian film directors, said in an interview held in February 2020 that fear is ‘the language of the devil’ which can be very easily spread to the younger generations, turning them into slaves. To prevent the epidemic of the virus – another name for fear in Zvyagintsev’s interview – Russians as a nation should acknowledge their history, recognize their traumas and blame, and start a new chapter of their lives as the one united nation breathing freely in fresh air. Zvyagintsev’s opinion could be associated with the statement posted by Paula Risikko, the Interior Minister of Finland, after the 2017 asylum seeker’s

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attack in Turku. It was at this time that she emphasised – as the Introduction to this volume reminds us – of the need for the collective tolerance and trust of the Finnish society in order to stay strong and not to be defeated by fear or hatred. These both appeals show that the safety and stability of today’s world is linked to a mutual understanding of historical relationships, mental openness and the readiness to accept cultural differences as well as the permanent redefinition of one’s own collective and individual identity. The problems of today connected with the continuously increasing mobility and globalization imposing social and political changes similar to the ones described, were predicted many years ago in Samuel Huntington’s theory of the ‘clash of civilizations’:

The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ... Civilizational identity will be increasingly important in the future ... The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating [these] civilizations from one another ... In class and ideological conflicts, the key question was “Which side are you on?” and people could and did choose sides and changed sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is “What are you?” That is a given that cannot be changed. (Huntington 2003.)

Being aware of the aforementioned situation and in a way developing Huntington’s observations, Mikhail Epstein, the Russian and Anglo-American literary theorist and critical thinker, has come up with the theory of transculture, which could be helpful in the understanding and prevention of the potential conflicts between parties representing oppositional cultural and religious identities. Having himself the experience of being an immigrant, a Russian-Jewish one, in the United States, in

his concept he focuses, first of all, on going beyond one's own culture towards the logic of transculture, which – according to Epstein – is an open Continuum aimed at the transcendence into 'no-culture' (2009). It could be said that the crucial steps on this path are two factors: difference and distance, or in K.A. Appiah's words 'universality plus difference' (2006).

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of recent tendencies noticeable in contemporary Russian films by the widely acclaimed and still very active directors, Vera Storozheva (born 1958), Pavel Lungin (born 1949) and Andrei Zvyagintsev (born 1964), in which the problem of fear and safety is emphasised in many different ways, from the perspective of the individual character reflecting upon his or her own life, as well as from the angle of the representation of the collective memory of the Russian nation. The selected films are interpreted from the point of view of Epstein's concept of transculture, so, consequently, I am interested in examining universal aspects of the films – by going beyond the Russian culture, exposing the artistic strategies used by the directors to touch upon the problem of fear. Generally, it could be noted in this context that Zvyagintsev's leitmotiv is that of an apocalyptic vision of our world devoid of moral values, which can be linked to the breakdown of the family and the disintegration of cultural tradition (Waligórska-Olejniczak 2015). Storozheva is known for her visualizations of women fighting for their independence and inner freedom, which stand in opposition to the overwhelming and limiting power of the patriarchal system, whereas Lungin turns attention to the elements of tradition, history and cultural memory in relation to the fate of the individual. In the majority of contemporary Russian films, the condition of the human body, which is very often degraded or mutilated, serves as a kind of litmus paper, a text in which various aspects of Russian reality are written,

exposed and discussed. Treating Epstein's theory of transculture as a reference point in this article, I will first analyse Storozheva's *Travelling with Pets*, then I will move on to Lungin's *Taxi Blues* and finally I will focus on Zvyagintsev's *Elena* before presenting these works in a more general perspective in the concluding part.

## Transculture as a way of liberation

It is important to realize that Epstein's theory is based on the rejection of both 'leveling globalism' and 'isolating pluralism' (2009). The first phenomenon is understood by Epstein as the canonization of one globally homogenous culture over many, which in practice means Pan-Americanism. The latter, in turn, is viewed as the process of the cocoonization of each culture within itself, which become self-sufficient and often incomprehensible for others. This may lead to living in cultural ghettos full of self-pride minorities or such phenomena as reverse racism, among other things. The third alternative – according to Epstein – is transculture, which is viewed as the way of liberation from 'the prison of language', a hope for lasting peace, achieved by the individual's gradual learning about the inborn culture in order to gain an appropriate distance to penetrate it and truly understand, and finally abandon it. '*Transculture* is a new sphere of cultural development that transcends the borders of traditional cultures (ethnic, national, racial, religious, gender, sexual, and professional) ... a description of Soviet culture involves the act of self-withdrawal from it, which presumes an exit into "trans-Soviet" cultural space' (Epstein 2009). In this context it is worth noting that further methodological studies should be conducted to research the relationship between the concept of transculture and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of exotopy (*vnenachodimost*) as

well as Jurij Lotman's concept of *semiosphere* because there are clearly areas where these theories overlap, cross or create parallel variants of the existing cultural phenomena. As Bakhtin pointed out 'In the realm of culture, outsidership is a most important factor in understanding' (1986). This assumption could be the starting point for the discussion about those three concepts, i.e. Epstein's transculture, Bakhtin's exotopy and Lotman's semiosphere.

In Epstein's vision, *transculture*, lying both inside and outside of all existing cultures, can free people from any genetic definitions, and liberate them from their/any social and cultural identity or any determinations of nature to allow real understanding and sharing of the experience of the Other. 'A transcultural personality fully recognizes hu's roots', though he does not 'want to cling to them' (Epstein 2009). Epstein says: 'I am willing to accept my identity at the beginning of my journey, but I do not agree to remain with it until the end of my life, to be an animal representing the tag on its cage', 'culture is metempsychosis – reincarnation during one's lifetime' (2009). It could be concluded at this point that reaching the stage of transculture involves the continuous diffusion of cultures, which can take place only if a human being is ready for their constant cultural transformation, being on the way mentally and intellectually changed, a neo-nomadism which – in a sense – seems to be deeply enrooted in both Russian and American history (e.g. in the belief in the American Dream or in the idea of the Russian permanent striving for the unity of the individual and the collective).

Vera Storozheva is the only female director selected to discuss the problem of transculture from the angle of the representation of contemporary women's fears. Her film *Travelling with Pets* (*Путешествие с домашними животными* 2007) from the point of view of its plot is a very simple story about a young

woman, Natalia, living near a railway line with her mature husband, who suddenly dies of a heart attack. On the way to the nearby city to dispose of his dead body, she meets a divorced guy, Sergiei, who, after a couple of dates, comes up with the idea of starting a new life with Natalia. Surprisingly and irrationally, as it may seem, she turns down his offer and after some time travels to the orphanage where she spent her childhood, adopts a boy, and comes back home happy to start a new life with her son and a faithful dog. Most of the reviewers look at the movie as a story about personal freedom, traditional role models in Russia and the life choices of women (Monastireva-Ansdell 2008). This sociologically profiled approach remains in agreement with other interpretations whose authors consider the film a manifesto of feminism, in which we can see an active and determined woman, devoid of sentimentalism, who is not upset over her husband's death and not afraid of the hardships of being a single mother. It could be said that in some respects Natalia is perceived as the anti-Russian heroine because she rejects the patriarchal system of values and the expectations of the outside world in order to implement her own business plan, which is aimed mainly at self-fulfillment through the adoption of the child. The director shows the process of Natalia's gradual abandoning of her old habits and culture. The death of her mature husband marks the turning point in her life; it can be treated as the symbol of the liberation from the toxic family relationships and the passage to the new beginning of her life in which she is free. The silent and slow contemplation of nature as well as the discovery of her own female sexuality gives her the strength to take socially unpopular decisions and change her life completely.

In the visual images of the final part of the film, we can see Natalia's representation as Mother Earth, a woman who leaves her own house and overcomes her individual needs and instincts

to share her love with the world, namely with the boy who had been abandoned in the orphanage. Storozheva creates this new image of Natalia referring to the symbolic nature of the journey, which is seen as the opportunity for her personal development and the participation in the ritual of creation. Natalia has the nature of a nomad – the condition of her house and the decision to reject the prospect of a comfortable and financially safe life with Sergei prove not only that she does not care about material values but also that she has abandoned the culture of gender and cultural requirements. She has found a way and the ability to transform the world, which in her case means the transgression of herself, the adopted boy and even the stray dog, as she gives them a new status, the status of a family member who belongs to a group. What she fears most is the stability of being the slave in her own house, isolation, and assigning to her only the role of a servant – whom she in fact was all the time she was functioning as the wife of her dead husband.

Travelling to the orphanage takes up a lot of time in the film. Long shots of Natalia, dressed in blue and visually resembling the Mother of God, allow us also to treat the journey as the way of overcoming her childhood trauma. Coming to terms with her early suffering, she mentally reconstructs the place and changes it into the home which she has never had. Love for the adopted son transforms the orphanage into a utopian space existing only in her memory. This mental activity of the familiarization and domestication of space, which could be treated as a kind of universal gesture, enables her to create her own pre-history and simultaneously see her life from the necessary distance. The behaviour of her new son, who immediately knows how to build the relationship with Natalia's dog on their way home, can be perceived as the proof that she has moved from the artificial and isolating reality of her marriage into the space of peaceful



contemplation and mutual understanding (in Epstein's words *no-culture*), the space she has created herself fighting with the stereotype of being a Russian woman, and broadening her spiritual and intellectual opportunities. In her behavioral sphere she finds new means of interacting with the outside world and crosses the established codes of communicating between men and women in order to experience new modes of expression, which is characteristic for the transcultural perspective (Pennycook 2007).

It is interesting to note that this final rebirth of the heroine is preceded by a series of stages of Natalia's theatricalized gestures. Looking for the meaning of her future life, she takes part in a masquerade of female roles, puts on provocative and surprising costumes and make-up as if she was testing herself in a role of a lover, bride or actress. Storozheva as a director seems to imply that womanhood is a kind of performance, which can be noticed and tested in various acts and actions. Besides, this kind of behavior brings to mind the associations with the concept of *ersatz nostalgia*, longing – as Arjun Appadurai points out – for something which did not exist before, a reality which was created as a result of contact with mass culture (1996). In the film *Travelling with Pets* this need can be enrooted in Natalia's contact with the outside world, which brings about the desire to provoke and to leave behind the rural life.

The sequence of shots presenting her getting on and off the train shows that she eventually rejects the mirage of the worldly life and comes back to the everyday activities of her domestic life. Natalia's attempt to join the passengers of the train can be perceived not only as the spectacle of checking out potential female identity opportunities but also as the act of trying to become a part of a group, a participant belonging to the party on the move. Apart from that, the train in this particular sequence

of the film seems to be a symbol of the Soviet Russia, a reality which no longer exists. Its emergence and disappearance may be interpreted as the visualization of the collective nostalgia for the past, which is still present among the average members of the Russian society (Alexievich 2016). The impulsive behaviour of the heroine suddenly getting on the train is the act of momentary desperation performed to retain the past, which can be associated with something known, safe and permanent. On the other hand, the artificiality of Natalia's exaggerated outfit and manners prove that her place is somewhere else, in the reality which may be less stable and predictable but is not forced on her as it is the matter of her own choice. As a result, Natalia's liberation could be perceived as the embodiment of cultural liberation:

For Epstein (2009) "transculture" represents above all a mode of identity building, an existential dimension beyond any given culture, a way of being at the "crossroads of cultures". He has defined it as "a model of cultural development" that liberates the individual from the tyranny of one's own culture, from "the prison house of the language", from unconscious predispositions and prejudices of the "native", naturalized cultures. ... transculture liberates us ... from the conditioning effects of culture, with its set of prefixed, imposed habits, customs, assumptions and dynamics of group identity formation. (Dagnino 2012.)

Natalia represents in the Russian cinema the rare epitomization of a female individual who is able to overcome the fear of living on her own or being ostracized by the society used to traditional cultural and social expectations. It could be said that her existence is stable because she decides to distance herself from culture and tradition, or 'deterritorialize' – if we describe the situation using Epstein's terminology based on Deleuze and Guattari's concept.

Being financially self-sufficient, she reduces her life in a sense to the closed capsule of her relationships within the triad: she – her adopted son – and her adopted dog, which is the family unit she has chosen and created herself. The scene showing the train's arrival brings to mind also the history of the Soviet cinema, in which the railway always used to symbolise the idea of modernisation and industrial progress. The pictures of the train in *Travelling with Pets* allow us to associate the proposed visual message with the movie *Little Vera* (*Маленькая Вера*, 1988) by Vasili Pichul, in which this means of public transport, pulled into a siding, serves as the metaphor of the anticipation of the world's destruction, the signal of inevitable changes which will take place following the collapse of the Soviet Union – the events which are also emphasised in Lungin's film *Taxi Blues*.

The way of the interpretation of the film *Travelling with Pets* presented above could lead to noting some similarities between the discussed movie and Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalgia* (*Ностальгия* 1983). Tarkovsky's text also emphasises the role of the mother as the guarantee of safety, emotional stability and authenticity, which is encoded in the visual symbol of the Russian *dacha*. Slavoj Žižek in his comments on the film even calls Eugenia, the provocative heroine who is deliberately contrasted with the image of the mother, 'the incomplete being', a 'hysterical and artificial' creature (Žižek 2011). Both films, Storozheva's and Tarkovsky's, are dominated by long and static shots, which allow only for very slow movement of the objects. The pictures to a great degree focus on the reunion of the main characters with the world, and their submission to the power of inertia. The activity of travelling in the outside world in both cases means in fact the externalization of the inner journey, resembling the initiatory descent into the mystery of one's own psyche.

## Lungin's promised land

Pavel Lungin seems to build up his movie *Taxi Blues* (*Tакси-блюз* 1990) on two fundamental sets of oppositions: *individual-group* and *past-present*, which may constitute the foundation of the traditional thinking about Russian orthodox culture and religion. The film is often considered as an example of the nostalgic cinema and is perceived as a story about Russian identity which is deeply enrooted in Russian history and ideology (Seckler 2009). Researchers treat the film as the Russian version of a buddy movie, whose main theme is a strange and changing relationship between two heroes: a taxi driver, Shlykov, and a saxophonist, Lyosha (Seckler 2009). *Taxi Blues*, which was made in 1990, shows the picture of Russian life at the end of the Soviet times, when the West was associated with a rather blurred mythical concept, some kind of an alien reality, not available to an average person.

The film's plot is similarly as uncomplicated as Storozheva's movie: Shlykov, who wasn't paid for his New Year's Eve drive, wants to teach a lesson to his debtor, Lyosha. The taxi driver, who is a brutal but hard-working man, truly believing in the mirage of the Russian imperium, surprisingly, after at first making Lyosha his servant and slave, starts to be totally dependent on him emotionally, and he can't live without the musician, who – out of the blue – becomes a very famous artist all over the world. It could be said that Lyosha re-enters the Russian reality as a different man in a different political system, when his face appears on a large outdoor billboard announcing his concerts and marking a new era. His sudden, colourful and even a bit aggressive presence on the screen visibly contrasts with the surrounding mundane post-Soviet reality; his behaviour, however, contradicts these associations because it turns out that it is Shlykov who does

not match, as he cannot understand the changing world and is not able to define his new identity. It is worth mentioning that the role of Lyosha is played by Pyotr Mamonov, the legendary founder of the rock group *Zvuki Mu*. This fact makes the hero more credible and in a natural way brings about the associations with the myth of the famous artist, the icon of the musical world. Consequently, the world of the commercial success represented by the saxophonist in Shlykov's eyes gains the status of a utopia, a mirage of the promised land, which was once approachable and attainable but does not function in this way any longer. Shlykov is not able to recognize and comprehend the change, which corresponds to his position of being mentally lost in the post-Soviet Russia.

In order to point out the potential spaces of transculture in Lungin's film, I would like to turn attention to one of the most emblematic scenes, in which we can see the main character Shlykov in a long shot, standing in front of a skyscraper from the Stalinist era and waiting all night for Lyosha to pay him for a ride. The small figure of the hero, which is contrasted with the monumental building representing the old political system, shows – with the use of irony – that his faith and determination are of no value. The skyscraper brings to mind associations with a Colossus on clay legs, which feels its inevitable fall. Shlykov, a man of athletic build and rigid physical routine, who in the shot is visually compared to this unstable construction, seems to lose his life battle with Lyosha, a thin alcoholic, who sometimes sleeps in the street and does not possess anything apart from his musical talent, his passport to a better future. Lyosha represents both the distinctive features of the eternal Russian fatalism and the American optimism, which finds its manifestation in his inborn longing for freedom and his continuous striving toward self-destruction through alcohol. Lungin, in his creation of

Lyosha, shows almost literally that the virtual reality, the sphere of the imagination, should be treated not only as dominant in life but also as the only opportunity to abandon the limitations of the outside world and build relationships with other human beings. Shlykov's attachment to the physical space and his utopian vision of Russia makes it impossible to understand Lyosha's world. It's worth mentioning that in Storozheva's film the way to reach the level of *no-culture* was to respect one's own body and use it as a means to gain insight into the spiritual, to find one's place in the universe. Lungin, in opposition to Storozheva's approach, seems to keep a distance to the vulnerability of the physical and the material, and he focuses on the imagined world, the virtual space which is generated by emotions such as, among other things, fear and the feeling of being unable to adapt to the outside reality.

The final scene of the long-awaited visit of Lyosha to Shlykov's flat shows that the imagined worlds of both protagonists do not overlap. The promised land of transculture, which would require from him abandoning the old beliefs in the Soviet system of values with its strong hierarchy and social class differences, is not attainable to the taxi driver. The imperial myth is destroyed as well as Shlykov's dreams of a happy return to the known and domestic reality connected with Lyosha's presence and emotional dependence on him. The jazz and blues music, usually associated with free spirit and improvisation, in the film becomes the audial symbol of nostalgic thinking, which mentally may lead the viewers to the associations with Svetlana Boym's remarks expressed in her monograph *Future of nostalgia* (2001). Turning attention to the origin of the phenomenon, Boym points at the power of ritual and memories, which can distract us from the inevitable flow of time, as well as at the potential of popular culture evoking the nostalgic theatricalisation of everyday life (2001). Memory seems to be the essential element of nostalgia

when it is defined as the escape from the present through the return to the idealized past and projecting a better future based on the selected aspects of the past (Pickering 2006; Keightley 2006). Such understanding of nostalgia can be associated with the quest for ontological security which is derived from the past events (Zamarajewa 2014). Lungin by exposing Shlykov's emotional instability seems to reflect upon the phenomenon of longing for one's past and for the culture which does not change. The end of *Taxi blues* featuring the counterproductive car chase shows that there is no opportunity of fulfilling this dream or reconstructing the once destroyed culture and relationships.

## Zvyagintsev's symmetry as a sign of human degradation

Andrei Zvyagintsev, whose film *Elena* (Елена 2011) is often compared to Michael Haneke's *Amour* (2012) or Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), seems to encode the meaning of his works first of all in spatial relationships. Creating a simple everyday life story of an elderly couple, he provocatively shows that good and evil can have the same motivation, which in consequence may lead to the moral justification of wrongdoing. One of the most meaningful sequences of frames in *Elena* is the part which takes place in the orthodox church. The main female character, who clearly did not visit the place for ages, goes there to pray for the health of her husband who had a heart attack. The director takes advantage of the idea of the holy orthodox icon to expose Elena's inadequate behavior and her ambiguous emotions towards her partner. Using close-ups of the icon and Elena, he degrades its status to the function of a mirror, in which the protagonist watches herself. Instead of contemplating the mystery

of God, she focuses on looking at her own facial expression. It could be said that in this act she stays on the surface level of the activity of contemplation, the level of human egoism and pride derived from the self-admiration of one's own behaviour. She is pictured not only as the trader doing business with God but also as a person who is not able to go beyond the service function of her marriage. Consequently, reaching the universal space of transculture in the way Natalia did in *Travelling with Pets* is not possible to her, and Zvyagintsev clearly shows that her marriage is her cocoon in the same way as religion can be the cocoon for the whole nation. This very idea is further developed in his subsequent film *Leviathan* (*Левиафан* 2014), in which it constitutes the main theme. In *Elena* the problem is worked out in the order of the changing frames leading us from the sacral space of the orthodox church to the falsehood of the heroine's expectations and fears for her own family's material stability. Such a turn of the protagonist's emotions can be suggested by Zvyagintsev's replacement of the shots happening in the church with the pictures of Vladimir, Elena's husband, lying in a hospital bed after a heart attack which he suffered in a swimming pool. As a result, the clash of the sacred and the profane allows us to recognize the affective space which is generated by the unleashing of emotions following Vladimir's accident.

The image of the church which is usually associated with life giving water is merged with that of the water of the swimming pool bringing about death, which, in turn, allows us to connect it with the history of Russia. In this context it is worth noting that the Soviet times were shaped by the ideology according to which most of the orthodox churches were routinely turned into warehouses. Consequently, it can be said that the profanation of the place is shown both from the individual and collective points of view, which can be interpreted as a metaphor of the



eradication of the Russian religious culture, emphasised in the film also by Elena's and Vladimir's typical *homo sovieticus* mentality. Zvyagintsev's film seems to show the world of the ethical emptiness of ordinary people. Elena and Vladimir as well as the young generation of their children and grandchildren have no goals or moral rules other than those inspired by financial motivation. Consequently, *Elena* confirms that if there are no values and traditions to abandon, to build on or aspire towards, there is also no path to transculture understood as the next level of cultural awareness and transformation, which in such a case has to stay unrecognized and undiscovered.

This message seems to be encoded also visually by Zvyagintsev's use of symmetry, which is easily noticeable in the film, in particular in carefully planned shots presenting various kinds of mirrors and geometrically matching mirror reflections. These mirror-like objects and shapes are either literally present on the screen or mentally suggested as a metaphor. They help to recognize, for example, the quality of the relationship between Elena, her husband and her stepdaughter, or to project the future of her grandson by the visual emphasis of the fact that he physically takes after his lazy, unemployed father. *Elena* shows the Russian reality as an apocalyptic and degrading isolation resulting first of all from the negligence of the collective and cultural memory, both being the foundation and the starting point – following Epstein's views – of building up the ethical and historical continuum.

The visual compatibility of the pictures of the orthodox church and the swimming pool allows us also to point out that Zvyagintsev's protagonists, Elena and Vladimir, are an elderly couple, undoubtedly brought up by the traditional Soviet ideology, who pass down their atheist philosophy onto their children. The chlorinated liquid in the swimming pool, which can be read as

both the opposite and the replacement of the life giving water of the religious faith, in the long run brings about the death of Vladimir and, as a consequence, triggers the spiritual decline of Elena, who turns out to be a canny murderer. In this way the simple everyday life story serves in the film as the impulse to show the universal process of suppressing the fears of losing power in the family and the society, and creating a fake existence which lacks stable values guaranteeing the future development of the individual and the collective.

## Conclusion

Summing up, it could be said that the selected films by the acclaimed directors Vera Storozheva, Pavel Lungin and Andrei Zvyagintsev show that one of the most important problems in contemporary Russian cinema is the search for stability, understood as a kind of historical and moral continuum, which can build up the foundation of everyday existence, the basis which stays put independently of geopolitical changes. The characters of the movies chosen for interpretation are often forced to live in a hybrid reality, at the crossroads of the old and the new systems of values. Disintegration of the outside world accompanies the nostalgic need to retrieve what is gone (Lungin) or to build up a new identity, which can be created after abandoning the world of gender, religious or social constraints (Storozheva). Zvyagintsev, on the contrary, shows that both the state-regulated reality of the Soviet past and the new Russia are the worlds of moral barbarism marking the behaviour of subsequent generations. In all film narratives discussed in this article fear remains the core emotion which accompanies the protagonists, and therefore – as it was mentioned in Elise Nykänen and Hanna Samola's Introduction

– it can be considered as universal and ‘distinguished on the basis of facial expressions and other physiological, bodily responses’. Lungin’s creation of Shlykov’s character proves that fear and the striving for psychological stability can remain pre-intentional and non-conscious although they strongly influence the protagonists’ actions and decisions, which could be linked to Sedwick and Frank’s and Ratcliffe’s findings (1995; 2015) in further discussions. Lungin turns attention to the mechanisms linking fear and other emotions; first of all he is interested in nostalgia, melancholy and anger, trying to make us aware that the liberating power of imagination and music, which is shown as the universal language, and which can be experienced only after understanding the need of cultural and historical transformation. This process will take place over many years and will be connected with the painful marginalization of the people who are not ready for change. The historical and cultural issues constitute also the core problem of Zvyagintsev’s movie although at first sight the theme of the individual dilemmas may seem central in his film. *Elena* demonstrates fear and egoism as the elementary instinct and drive of people’s decisions in the societies which lost their moral directions. Consequently, Zvyagintsev’s narrative requires the ethical engagement of the audience, which stays in contrast to Storozheva’s work showing the protagonist who found the way to suppress and overcome the sources of social or personal limitations. As a result, Natalia’s approach to life could be seen as the manifestation of liberation and the attempt of at least a partial realization of Epstein’s concept of *transculture*. The new model of the relationship with time, history and memory seems to define the dilemmas of today’s world, at the same time motivating humanity to continuous intellectual and emotional development, going beyond the limitations of the individual’s culture and personality.

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# Divakaruni's *Before We Visit the Goddess*

## Overcoming fears and instabilities

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### Divakaruni and her literary activism

Among the NRI (Non-Resident Indian) contemporary writers, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, currently residing in Houston, Texas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Houston, is one of the most visible and prolific authors, having received numerous awards both in the U.S. and in her native India. I argue that her 2016 novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* is far more than just a realistic depiction of challenging and often quite fearful situations, experienced in recent years by a large number of displaced, diasporic or migrant human beings of all

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J., Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 289–314.  
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ages and origins who doubtless seek safety that is often difficult to find. Rather, after the initial outline of the crucial situation that have defined the lives of its protagonists, the novel evolves into a potent literary exploration of new forms of coexistence, mutual understanding and higher awareness. The writer thus inscribes herself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century literary trend (mentioned by Anne Duprat, in one of the opening chapters of this volume), of remedial writing that cares about the future of this world. Divakaruni's declared intent, in a number of interviews mainly in both countries that she claims as her own, India and the United States, is to write about women protagonists who find themselves in challenging circumstances yet are able to create positive solutions to their problems. In other words, her protagonists, often depicted as they face major adversities, dangers and uncertainty, manage to grow inwardly as they emerge from crisis situations, beyond deeply rooted fears and insecurities that inhabit them and motivate their behaviors.

Divakaruni clearly perceives herself as an agent of change through her literary productions, 'I think of my writing as part of my activism. Through what I write I hope to raise some consciousness, start some conversations' (Divakaruni & Joshi 2017). After 1995, her initial involvement with poetry shifted to a series of novels and collections of short stories that have often been published conjunctly in the u.s. and in India. Available first to English-speaking audiences, they reached a much larger readership through translations in other linguistic environments, among which the publications in various Indian languages (in reference to Divakaruni and the place of the diasporic Indian writers in the anglophone context, see Zare & Iyer, ix–xxvii; Iyer, 11–17).

In consideration of the up-to-date social sciences research, a frequent (critical) temptation is to perceive literary productions

predominantly as a reflection or an illustration of social issues, also in the case of Divakaruni (f. ex. Banerjee 2000). Literature certainly bears testimony to deeply-rooted human experiences and brings them to the fore through intricate narratives. But it must exceed compilations of data and statistics: I would plead that the essential quality of a work of art is to trigger compassion, to stimulate empathy, and eventually offer hope. This exactly, in my opinion, has been Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writing agenda and her primary purpose in literature (Zupančič 2013). If the general social discourse deals with external data and statistics in order to draw conclusions about various critical matters of the world, in our particular case of diasporic communities, a writer has the opportunity to highlight the inner life of her characters and present the dimensions that usually remain unseen. Yet both approaches, be it creative writing or social sciences research, agree that fears borne out of instabilities and related to the lack of safety are exacerbated in an immigrant environment, in close communities that watch the 'outside' world with apprehension and circumspection (see for example Moghaddam, Ditto & Taylor 1990; Hedge 1998). Yet, a novel, to deserve its name, albeit decidedly realistic, must always rise above the mere representation of social data and can never be considered only as a reflection of a (somewhat trendy) social phenomenon. In this sense, I suggest that Divakaruni's emphasis on women characters in her literary creations stems in her case both from her personal experiences as a woman between two major cultures and from her deepest commitment to lend her own literary voice to those that often remain the most vulnerable in a number of societies.



## Deep causes for fears and instabilities

In the majority of Divakaruni's works, as is the case in *Before We Visit the Goddess*, we find (immigrant) women facing fears, instability and lack of safety. These themes have inhabited her novelistic writing from the very beginning, as in her 1995 début short-stories collection *Arranged Marriage*. Similar topics emerge in the novels *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *One Amazing Thing* (2009), and in *Oleander Girl* (2012). Most frequently, Divakaruni's protagonists are exposed to 'in-between conditions' away from the country of their origins, in a new environment where they cannot ever be fully integrated or adapted. Nevertheless, in this particular Divakaruni's novel as well as in a number of others, issues of displacement represent a major cause for fears about one's own safety. The writer suggests that precarity may be experienced in a number of settings, even within one's own 'home', because of social disparities, economic direness, psychological pressures or ideological intolerance that all affect her protagonists. Most frequently, though, her characters experience hardships linked to fears and instability *internally*, as I have suggested above, without expressing them overtly and without sharing them even with their closest kin. Thanks to Divakaruni's delicate perception and perspicacity, together with her benevolent eye, her audiences are nevertheless acutely aware of the challenges in which her novelistic characters find themselves, as the writer emphasizes such inner turmoil through the frequent inner monologues of her protagonists. Divakaruni's novels thus inform us about larger social issues mainly through intimate psychological reactions of her protagonists. When the writer suggests possible options and positive outcomes for her protagonists, she acts from her keen observation of human minds and hearts, and most probably not with an intent to console her

readers with a happy ending. In this regard, my close reading of the novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* is meant to highlight Divakaruni's general writing positions. To echo my statements expressed above, the strength of her prose is indeed strongly emphasized through the solutions she foresees for the conditions in which many immigrants, especially women, find themselves.

What do Divakaruni's protagonists fear, especially in *Before We Visit the Goddess*? There is apprehension and uncertainty regarding their immediate environment. Yet, it would certainly be problematic to limit their anxieties to the almost stereotypical relationship between women and the danger of crime, namely, the fear that comes with the exposure to possible male psychological or physical assaults (Gill 2004). General research about immigrant women exposed to violence has been vastly discussed and documented in scholarly literature (Raj & Silverman 2002; Menjívar & Salcido 2002). Divakaruni has observed it in depth in her social engagement and has explored it in her prose writing. She has been a guiding force in associations, first in the San Francisco Bay area, whose aim was to help immigrant women especially in situations of domestic abuse. She transformed the experiences gained through such activities in her novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), taking it to a different, rather metaphorical or even allegorical level. Tilo, the protagonist of the novel, 'the mistress of spices', is somewhat magically transported from a secret Indian location to a shop in Oakland, California, in order to serve mainly the Indian diasporic community. She is not allowed to leave her safe yet reclusive abode because of her vows to the community from which she stems. As she braves the interdictions, breaks the imposed taboos and rises above her own possible apprehensions, Tilo nevertheless puts her own life at risk to help relocate to safety some of the immigrant South-Asian

women who dared ask for help, out of the trust she instilled in them.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, the writer thus combines the questions of fear and safety with her protagonists' struggle to maintain their original identity, torn between the 'old' setting and the 'new' context (Hedge 1998). Divakaruni links these topics with issues of inculturation, as in *Before We Visit the Goddess*, where she sets the stage for the conflicts between generations, in part between the 'old' values and the u.s.-born children of immigrants. Theoretically, such conflicts have been highlighted for example in a vastly quoted 2001 volume *Ethnicities. Children of Immigrants in America*, edited by Rubén C. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes. Similarly to what Divakaruni highlights in her novels, the 'new' generations continue to be exposed to discrimination (which causes their stress and possible apprehensions in this regard), while from the perspective of their families, they also risk their 'complete' acculturation in the new environment (Zhou 212).

But what are the characteristics that allow Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni to rise above these isolated or rather specific issues or concerns and compose a novel with a life of its own, with its own rhythm and succession of events that create novelistic tensions, even suspense, to finally present the readers with some healing compromises? *Before We Visit the Goddess*, a bestseller in India after its initial success in the u.s., approaches the notions of fear, (un)safety and instability from a rather global perspective, with the three protagonists who are either Indian or of Indian heritage. Divakaruni constructs her novel from various narrative angles, organizing it around the often-failed connections between three generations of women. One of them remains anchored in India, the other one is torn between her home country and the u.s., and the third one is born in the 'new world', yet having difficulties

connecting to any roots whatsoever. Sabitri, the oldest, has never left India, while the second, her daughter Bela, eloped to the United States, to an uncertain existence and a shaky marriage. The third one, her only child Tara, although born to the 'first-generation immigrants' (as they are being called), has never visited India. The fears and the dilemmas the three of them experience inwardly, at a very deep level that progressively becomes more apparent in the novel, may be perceived as the driving force for the narrative, while their experience of some type of safety remains ephemeral. In many ways, the novel may be perceived as a life lesson first for the Indian diasporic community and then for the general readership, not predominantly because of the trials linked to immigration. In a larger sense, the novel is a depiction of today's world in which the old paradigms have been drastically shattered. In such a world, it takes wisdom, perseverance, and especially trust in one's own abilities, to start and develop new forms of coexistence.

## Divakaruni and her contemporaries

In continuing with the orientation demonstrated in her previous collections of stories and novels, such as *The Unknown Errors of Our Lives* (2001), *Queen of Dreams* (2004) and *Oleander Girl* (2013), *Before We Visit the Goddess* features strong yet often distressed women protagonists who have experienced major life challenges all linked to their difficulties in adapting to new situations, without the prospect of feeling secure in any of them.

Divakaruni's novels may thus be set alongside other contemporary Indian women writers who choose to express themselves in English (for comparisons between Divakaruni and other NRI writers, see f. ex. Iyer & Zane 2001). In particular,

parallels may be drawn with Kiran Desai's Booker-Prize novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), as it also deals with issues of deep fear and insecurity, both in the Indian Himalayas and in the New York illegal immigrant environment, with shattered ideals, crushed hopes and complete despondency of practically all the protagonists in this book. Yet, while there is not much hope at the end of Desai's masterpiece that earned her the Booker Prize, Divakaruni, as mentioned above, maintains her hopes for humankind, with the possibility that her characters will find solace in their new-found awareness about themselves and about the world. Such may also be the position of Arundhati Roy, in her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), published twenty years after her acclaimed début work, *The God of Small Things* (1997), also a Booker Prize recipient. Roy's second novel definitely builds upon the issues of fear and safety, all within India itself, where internal immigration or adaptation to life-threatening situations shapes the existence of her characters. Against all odds, at the end of her novel, Roy deploys her wit when offering a possibility for a harmonic coexistence of various types of marginal and even outcast protagonists. The graveyard community where she assembles her protagonists is both utopian and dystopian, with the desire for safety as the connective element that binds them all together.

Divakaruni's characters in *Before We Visit the Goddess* progress toward a certain level of acceptance of life's demands and also of their shortcomings. Coming to terms with their failures only happens at the end of the novel, the impact of which may be compared to both Desai's and Roy's novelistic approaches. Actually, within the three narratives, by Divakaruni, Desai and Roy, all the protagonists come to see and to experience the darkest, the most shadowy sides of their psyche. They have tried to manipulate others, they have been dishonest, mainly to

themselves, and they have injured, in the first place, none other than themselves.

For her part, Divakaruni does not try to embellish or to justify her characters' actions. Rather, throughout the novel, *Before We Visit the Goddess*, she lets them evolve toward a clearer perception of themselves. From the characters' own 'testimonies' or 'confidences', as they are directed at the readers, we understand that many of their actions originated from their insecurities and their social instability, causing the rifts that cannot be mended easily. Regardless of a general positive attitude displayed by Divakaruni, a direct reconciliation and a final appeasement of fears is actually not possible for any of her three women characters. Sabitri dies in India, without having been able to see her daughter again and without ever meeting her granddaughter. While we as readers are given the information and understand the situation, Bela, the daughter, can never confide enough in Sabitri to explain why her husband would not let her invite her mother to visit them in the United States, or help with the newborn baby. Toward the end of the novel, we nevertheless witness the possibility that Bela and her daughter Tara may construct a relationship that is not based on fears of betrayal and on continuous distrust. Also, the writer allows for an uncanny connection between Sabitri and her granddaughter Tara, which is prepared throughout the novel, but the nature of which only becomes clear toward its last pages. In addition, although Tara incidentally visits a Hindu temple in the United States, in Texas, which is actually a crucial element in the narrative, this event does not offer a promise that she could overcome her sense of social instability and that she could reconnect with her heritage. However, it bears a symbolic value: the goddess in the temple may eventually allow Tara to find the 'goddess within', her intrinsic value. As an inherently strong woman, she may finally

accept her family and the female genealogy to which she belongs, beyond national and geographical boundaries. She may also be able to find some peace in the new hybrid global environment where stability, as we know, is nonetheless becoming a very rare commodity. In this sense, Divakaruni's novel echoes many similar attempts in contemporary prose, as it demonstrates in its own way how some balance may eventually be gained, in this scary and uncertain world of today.

One interesting point when dealing with Divakaruni's writing is the author's involvement with her readers. During her book tours, she has often been a guest at Google Headquarters, and she was again invited to speak in front of their employees after the publication of *Before We Visit the Goddess*, on April 28, 2016, where she explained the reasons and choices behind the combination of the three strong women's stories in this particular novel (available at 'Talks at Google'). Divakaruni's ethical concerns came through very decidedly during this encounter, just as in her previous public appearances. This highlights her beliefs and her attitude towards writing such as they permeate all of her books (see Zupančič 2013). She definitely believes in the power of literature to affect human consciousness (which resonates with the positions expressed in this volume by Anne Duprat). Writing about challenges, and especially about ways to overcome them and deal with them in the best possible way is at the core of her concerns. As she states, we may have consciously or unconsciously done wrong, but once we are aware of our actions, we may be able to accept that we acted as best we could. This may allow us to forgive ourselves, which is the condition for our well-being in the world. Still, Divakaruni never undermines the weight of fears and insecurities in the lives of her characters. She also describes them from a specific perspective that allows her audiences to find strength in reading about the lives of the

protagonists and to connect in particular with their resilience in dire situations, such as in her novels *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *One Amazing Thing* (2009).

## Overcoming fears and insecurities

An interesting point about the way Divakaruni engages with her readers is her generosity in helping them benefit as much as possible from her writing. On her web page, she includes a link to a reading guide (aimed especially at book clubs and their discussions), with pertinent questions that indicate what elements of the narrative she privileges, without ever prejudging her readers' interests. The description that most probably comes from Divakaruni herself, as it is to be found on her web page, serves as an introduction to the Reading Guide prepared for *Before We Visit the Goddess*. It obviously contains some major key words that sum up the narrative and are similar to what I have presented so far, adding some details that will serve as a transition for the analysis that follows below:

*Before We Visit the Goddess* tells the story of three generations of mothers and daughters whose experiences in Kolkata and the United States reflect and diverge widely through the years: Sabitri, born poor in a rural village, who eventually runs a successful dessert store in Kolkata; Bela, her daughter, who flees India for America in order to marry her political refugee boyfriend; and Tara, Bela's daughter, who, in the fallout of her parents' divorce, descends into dark places. Through different perspectives – both male and female – and shifts in time, author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offers a multifaceted look at transcontinental and



multigenerational bonds and at love in its many guises.  
(*Before We Visit the Goddess*. Reading Group Guide.)

From the paragraph cited above, we gather that the novel truly focusses on a set of strong female characters, each of them having to face challenges in their own way. Looking at its structure, the novel starts with Sabitri, now aged sixty-seven, retired in a small village far from Kolkata, worn out by years of hard work, also emotionally drained, partly because of the distance between herself, her daughter and her granddaughter, and the impossibility of ever being united with them. She is disturbed by her daughter Bela's plea, over the phone, which is their chosen medium of communicating, to intercede with Tara who decided to drop out of college. As Sabitri hesitates between various drafts of a letter she is supposed to send to Tara, the narrative of her own life starts to unfold. But the letter of advice, to underscore to her granddaughter the need for a woman's education as a guarantee of her independence, only falls into Tara's hands many years later. Namely, Sabitri suffered a fatal heart attack the night she wrote the letter. In the last pages of the novel, Tara is helping her mother move to a retirement home. She discovers an unopened envelope in a box she is about to throw away (*BWVG*, 200), received from India years back, after Sabitri's property manager assembled the sparse leaflets and sent them to the United States. As Tara reads through the pile of unorganized sheets of paper, she understands that her grandmother was trying to influence her and offer advice by writing about her own life. She also finally understands how extremely important this knowledge about her grandmother's existence would have been during all the years of her deep yearning for something she was not able to identify, the connection that would eventually have given her some sense of security while she continued on the spiraling slope of difficulties.

The narrative meanders in a sophisticated arrangement of fragments from various time periods that come together like pieces of a puzzle, between these two key situations, the action of (Sabitri's) writing and finally the action of (Tara's) reading, which stand like mirrors on both ends of the novel. The first action, in the beginning, the drafting of the letter that contains parts of Sabitri's life story, stands in opposition to Tara's final consideration of its importance, while it also complements it, when she absorbs all she should have known for so many years. The first chapter, set in 1995, is followed by the one introducing Bela, Sabitri's estranged daughter, and her story about an 'incident' that happened to her in 1963, in Assam, where she lived with her family. At age eleven, she encountered a magician whom nobody else seemed to notice, which opened up 'locked doors inside her mind' (*BWVG*, 46). Without a possible explanation, she is found unconscious and is taken to a hospital. Her awakening after this uncanny yet life-altering event brings about an acute sense of insecurity and danger (*BWVG*, 48) that maintains the suspense, without an immediate resolution in the narrative. Namely, in the third chapter, 'American Life: 1998' (*BWVG*, 49), the narrative switches to the third protagonist, and also from the third to the first person, to Tara's voice, which continues to be the case whenever her own story appears in the novel.

The chapters are possibly presented to the reader in a non-linear fashion so as to create a strong feeling of narrative tension, with the formal principles that eventually contribute to some anxious anticipation of problematic situations. Starting with Sabitri in 1995 and continuing with Bela in 1963, the 1998 Tara's chapter is followed by Sabitri's career as a dessert-maker, from 1965 to 1995. In the fifth chapter, we then return to Bela and her pregnancy in 1973. Tara's voice takes over again in the sixth chapter, in 2002. Next, we move back to 2000 with Bela's exploration of

new, positive venues in her life. Here, we encounter yet another narrative voice, Kenneth's, her neighbor's. The following, next to the last chapter, is set in 2015, and is reserved for a man's voice, this time Bela's estranged husband Sanjay. Curiously, the last of the nine chapters in this 2016 book, with Tara talking about her mother's move to a senior facility in Austin (*BWVG*, 183), is set in the future, in 2020.

When we encounter Tara in the 1998 chapter, she has been a college drop-out for about three years. She is already working odd jobs and does not communicate with her mother other than in her own mind (*BWVG*, 51). The reason for such estrangement is that her father, as she tells herself, 'decided to leave' (51). We only learn two chapters later how insecure and frightened Bela felt in her marriage and how she wanted to leave her husband and sneak out of her home in the middle of the night, had it not been for her pregnancy (*BWVG*, 118). In the 2015 chapter, told by Sanjay, we learn his side of the story, with his own insecurities, his fears and his unforgiving resentment. In his mind, Bela manipulated him and made him jealous, pretending to be attached to his best friend Bishu (*BWVG*, 180). Such convictions – which he was unable to discuss with Bela – lead to his decision to wait until Tara would be older, and then leave his wife. Doubtless there is no security in such a marriage, but rather a sickening attitude of someone who never knew how to truly care for his wife whom he uprooted from her home country, certainly against the best advice of her mother.

Although the whole novel may be seen as dealing with fears and insecurity, the protagonists' emotional responses to life actually do not come from any specific large-scale violent situations, as is the case in Divakaruni's 2009 novel *One Amazing Thing*, in which a heterogeneous group of people are trapped in a dangerous post-earthquake situation. Rather, in *Before We Visit the Goddess*,

the emotions are deeply engrained in protagonists' minds, at a very intimate level only accessible to the readers through the descriptions provided by the writer. The protagonists' general emotions and in particular their fears concern an overarching ontological sense of instability, of life's precarious nature, as women (and men) in this novel cannot count on any continuous blessings. In other words, the characters do not want to foster any feelings of false security, nor any hopes that would be too extravagant, because experiences have shown them how quickly fate may overturn a happy moment into one of complete sadness and despair. Especially women in the novel may nurture such feelings and thoughts because they have been taught, both in India and in the U.S., to keep their heads low, as Divakaruni also shows in her other novels, for example in *Sister of My Heart*, (1999). Because they are women, they belong to social structures that don't encourage any expression of arrogance or false pride. Neither are they willing nor meant to control other people's lives. But as Divakaruni underscores it in this novel and in the interviews (for example in Divakaruni & Khare-Ghose 2013), these women are the strongest of all, because they learned how to endure the hardships and sustain their livelihood even when all doors seemed to have closed, a characteristic that is particularly evident in Divakaruni's *Oleander Girl* (2012). They also believe in improving themselves. At least the eldest of them, Sabitri, firmly believes that women must find a way to become self-sufficient, happy with what they have created. This was indeed her attitude when as a young widow, she used the cooking skills learned from her own mother, Durga, to perfect herself. Even when she conveys to her granddaughter that the way out of women's predicament is education, she actually speaks of her own elation when she was capable to achieve something, 'by myself, without having to depend on anybody' (BWVG, 32). Here, again, we hear

a persuasive writer's voice, her own stark belief that finding their own vocation, their passion – often through education – will help women stand up for themselves, overcome their fears, and finally find stability within themselves.

## Understanding adversities in *Before We Visit the Goddess*

In many situations, the origins of protagonists' preoccupations with safety, coupled with inherent fears, are to be traced back to their social status, in other words, with the place they occupy in a particular society. At the onset of the novel, Sabitri remembers her own challenges from the past, so that we may learn very early on about a major crisis situation and her feeling of complete dependency and helplessness (*BWVG*, 19). This climactic event takes place within a period of time when she lives in a rich Kolkata household, on a whim of the lady of the house who offered to pay for her education. Perceived as an undeserving profiteer, Sabitri experiences constant apprehension of ill-treatment, especially by the servants in the house, and potentially by her benefactress. She namely holds a secret, that of having met by chance the heir of the house, in a hidden place that serves as their refuge. After having allowed herself false hopes of eventually being accepted by Mrs. Mittir, Rajiv's mother, her whole universe crushes when their young romance is discovered. She is thrown out of the house, penniless, humiliated and vilified, fearing the worst. Inside the men's college where she has been taking some of her classes, which is the only place where she manages to hide, she is rescued by her 'Maths professor' (*BWVG*, 21). A promise of a solution? Rather, this is when her long existence of false security begins, based on lies and concealment. Bijan, who later becomes

her husband and the father of Bela, finally understands her past connection to Rajiv, her forbidden sweetheart. From this moment on, new fears of losing the man she learned to love will accompany her, through a period of Bijan's alcoholism and his eventual demise, after their little son has also died.

As suggested above, the arrangement of the narrative, which only progressively allows us to create a more complete mental picture of the network astutely created by the author, definitely affects the mental processes of Divakaruni's readers. When analyzing the novel, the question is how to establish linearity from a text that is deliberately unsettling, a text that creates the sensation of insecurity and uneasiness, in the first place by means of its structure. As separate narratives are set against each other, the characteristics of the three women are progressively shaped out, in juxtaposition with the portraits of the men who inadvertently or deliberately play(ed) a major role in their lives. In Divakaruni's other novels, we also find situations where the protagonists are unable to communicate directly with one another, but where the readers may better understand their challenges as the writer introduces their innermost thoughts and feelings. In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, such a technique allows us to observe Tara, even as she only shares small details about her life in the first-person narratives reserved for her. She has been emotionally maimed by the departure of her father and believes that she 'hadn't been worth a man's faithful loving' (*BWVG*, 68), after she finds out her live-in boyfriend is cheating on her. Ironically, her father seems to be completely unaware of the amplitude of what she perceives and considers as his ultimate betrayal. While he waits for his daughter to become a student so that he could leave the household, Sanjay believes that he is only 'punishing' Bela and 'preserving' Tara. He is thus unconscious of the fact that his decision will cause Tara to actually drop out

of college. This crisis is exacerbated when Tara also starts on her kleptomaniac compulsion (*BWVG*, 51), to fill the deep void in her heart, as she will only understand it much later.

## Toward reconciliation and (im)possible healing

Tara's Indian heritage certainly marks her as 'different' in the U.S., but ironically also allows for two situations where she is being offered a job because of who she is. Both encounters eventually turn out to be mental anchors for Tara, first with an old lady of Indian extraction she befriends against her initial reluctance, when she serves as her 'caretaker'. Later, in a chapter set in 2002, she is hired to be a driver for an Indian professor, Dr. Venkatachalapathi, who during his business stay in Texas wishes to visit the goddess temple. Yet, the trip to Meenakshi shrine turns out to be the condensation of all the fears and trepidations expressed in this novel.

As the two travelers are getting lost in the Texan countryside, Tara, the driver, is having a panic attack, 'I can feel my heart doing its crazy-prisoner thing, throwing itself against my breastbone like it wants out right now' (*BWVG*, 122). Three of her most painful memories assail her, her father's announcement about her parents' divorce, during her first semester of studies; her boyfriend's infidelity; and then the hardest and the most fearful of them, her abortion two years earlier (*BWVG*, 123). In contrast to Tara's obvious signs of distress, her passenger, Dr. Venkatachalapathi (*BWVG*, 123), faces his own fears that they might have an accident and he would die. This brings back the memories of his daughter Meena's death, which is in fact the

reason why he was asked by his wife to visit the Meenakshi temple during his travels in Texas.

At this point in the narrative, Tara's own voice continues to relate her anxieties and her tremendous fear the night before the abortion (*BWVG*, 126), when in a missed opportunity for both, she unsuccessfully tried to call her mother. But then, in the present moment of the narrative, the young woman becomes intrigued by the ritual at the temple and accepts an 'archana' (*BWVG*, 127), although she would hardly fit in within all the requirements for a blessing by the priest. However, she experiences a shift that might turn out to be beneficial for her, as 'Something had happened in the temple' (*BWVG*, 128).

Tara may have been right in stating that 'nothing good lasts long enough' (*BWVG*, 129), because on the way back, a huge truck hits her car (*BWVG*, 130–131). Tara's reaction after the accident, her shivering, feels to her just like after the abortion, life shattering. Dr. V. (as Tara abbreviates his name in her narrative) fears the pain, but actually not death, when he sees the truck heading towards the car (*BWVG*, 131). Tara's pent-up emotions explode in a crisis while they are waiting to be rescued and she openly admits for the first time to having had an abortion. The blurted-out confession allows for a certain communion between the two wounded human beings. Dr. Venkatachalapathi reveals details about his family's tragedy (*BWVG*, 132–134), their daughter's suicide because he and his wife could not accept that she loved another woman. Deep-rooted cultural prejudices combine here with fears and insecurities about socially accepted behaviors, although their unexpected closeness might have brought about some healing for both characters.

The following chapter, titled 'Bela's Kitchen: 2000' (*BWVG*, 137), the seventh out of nine, returns to Tara's mother, Bela. Throughout the book, a series of very strong and conflicting



emotions are attached to her. Her reactions range from feeling unsafe to fearing for her survival in a country to which she has difficulties adapting and which she struggles to understand better. In a certain way, her emotions, rather typical for a foreign-born immigrant, echo the attitudes described in studies dealing in particular with immigrant women (see for example Hegde 1998). Were it not for joining Sanjay in the U.S. where he thought he could hide from his political troubles in West Bengal, Bela would never have left her mother and her home. The deeply engrained fear of shaming herself – if she admitted to her troubles – remains the principle cause of her withdrawal. She believes that her new life is based on a sham, the cause of a constant struggle with herself. The relationship with the man she thought she could trust becomes an issue, and the short-circuits in communication finally lead to their separation. Bela's accrued difficulties in finding her place in the new country are similar to 'psychological symptomatology in Indian immigrant women' such as analyzed by Moghaddam, Ditto and Taylor (1990). The same pattern continues later in her life, although Bela succeeds in finding her own inner strength. She develops her own line of eclectic survival strategies: fusion cooking, similar to her mother's love for desserts. Inadvertently, as we now understand it from her own perspective, Bela misses the opportunity to communicate with her daughter and support her, when Tara is at her lowest, for example just before the abortion.

It is obvious that Divakaruni deliberately chooses to combine these opposing narrative movements: while one of the characters is on the upward movement, the other one sinks under the weight of her troubles. The writer brings the mother and the daughter together, face to face, only in the last chapter, set ahead of time in 2020. Tara has 'appropriated' or rather borrowed a portrait from the family album, the only photo she has ever

seen of her grandmother, and plans to give it back to her mother. Symbolically, it is Sabitri – or rather what is left of her – who manages to reconcile the two women, her daughter and her granddaughter, with the letters that Tara finally manages to read, and with her portrait – which seems to act from beyond the grave. If there is to be a conclusion to a novel that leaves the final solutions open, I should state with Divakaruni that, indeed, life will create hardship for us and that we will need all our willpower not to succumb. Nonetheless, we do possess the energy, the know-how – the skills to look at ourselves in the mirror and decide how we want to live our lives.

## Conclusion

In the present essay, my analysis of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's 2016 novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* focuses primarily on the topics of fear, safety and instability. Perceived as the markings of our inherent human condition, these emotions clearly define our very nature, regardless of our place of birth or the location in which we live. My intent was to observe which categories of human beings predominantly attracted the writer, in order for her to explore the impact of these deep-rooted feelings on human behavior. I was also interested to see which modalities or strategies Divakaruni imagined for her protagonists, in order for them to overcome their insecurities, build their inner strength and eventually face the adversities with conviction, courage and confidence. For a non-resident Indian writer – and a woman – who is strongly attracted to issues of social justice, the choice of immigrant women at the center of her narratives appears rather symptomatic and a natural first choice. The other category that interests her are women who may have remained in India, where

they have been exposed to hardship, especially when crossing the lines between geographical regions or social strata. *Before We Visit the Goddess* engages in interactions between such women, adding to them the third category, the still ostracized ‘second’ generation, born in a new country with hardly any links to the land of their ancestors, yet often considered as foreigners in their native environment. Although Divakaruni, with the subtleness of an experienced novelist, allows for many different representatives of humankind to be included in her prose, she quite obviously privileges women and their plights. We have seen that in this particular novel, Tara’s father Sanjay often makes his hasty decisions based on his own fears and insecurities, maybe without a deeper introspection into the reasons for his own behavior and for the long-lasting consequences of his acts. Women in the novel seem to undergo a more thorough self-examination, which results in their capacity to accept their vulnerability and even draw strength from it.

In many ways, these women, although fully fleshed out in the narratives and presented realistically, are in themselves carriers of archetypal values, which is far from surprising for a writer who has studied her cultural heritage and used it in her rewriting of the two major epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Each of the novels, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) mentioned above, and *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019) that only came out recently (Divakaruni announced it on a social media post, July 12, 2018), centers its narrative around a heroin from the Indian lore. In her public appearances and her interviews, the writer often expressed her own apprehensions about immersing herself in the old myths, with the intent of rewriting them from her own perspective and with full emphasis on their female protagonists (Zupančič 2012; Divakaruni & Khare-Ghose 2013; Divakaruni & Joshi 2017). Her Draupadi, the wife of the iconic Pandava brothers in *The Palace*

of *Illusions*, is thus allowed to tell her story, which is not the case in the traditional *Mahabharata*. In *The Forest of Enchantment*, Sita, from *Ramayana*, is no longer the prototype of a submissive Indian wife such as transmitted from generation to generation.

Although Divakaruni's more realistic prose writing underscores the writer's concern with today's issues, especially the challenges facing women between cultures and between various social strata, the images of the two semi-goddesses, Draupadi and Sita, remain present as their *substratum*. Both Divakaruni's Draupadi and Sita are examples of women born out of the higher realms, who still cannot avoid being cast in the most excruciating human situations. Exposed to utterly unsafe conditions, fearing for their lives, they may quiver but ultimately never lose faith. Divakaruni's Draupadi, considered as one of the most appealing renditions of this mythical realm, a character that combines enormous courage and strength with delicacy, fragility, constant insecurity and profound survival fears, is a continuous reminder of how to find inner peace in the midst of dangers and adversities. In *The Forest of Enchantment*, Sita is torn away from home when she marries Ram. The promised love eternal is shattered because of envy and pettiness, and finally crumbles because of Ram's incapacity to recognize the truth and to choose his consort over his own beliefs and his perception of his royal duties. For her part, although she must brace herself against all kinds of fears, Sita emerges unscathed and stronger from the highly dangerous situations. Yet, after her captivity in Sri Lanka, she is forced to undergo a test by the fire, *agni pariksha*, to prove her innocence. Because of power struggles among the men in Ram's kingdom, she is exiled into the forest, where she anonymously raises her twin sons in a hermitage, both as a mother and a father. Her husband finally finds her, only to request that she be submitted to yet another *agni pariksha*. In

short, this is when she cannot bear humiliations any longer and decides to regain the cosmic plane from which she originated. As a model and an obvious analogy for contemporary women, Divakaruni's Sita and her journey through repeated hardship raises a number of issues about the fate of the female principle even in today's world, closely related to the fears about our safety on the planet. If Sita, by the common traditional belief in India, is also an incarnation of prakrti, of Mother Earth, something of which Divakaruni is fully aware, we can only imagine the whole extent of the predicament that pushes Sita to her final rebellion against the impositions of this world.

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**IV**  
**Coping with fear**





# Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as posthumanity in graphic narratives

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In *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005), E. Ann Kaplan describes how the US experience of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 shifted studies of trauma, displacing its primary considerations from individual experiences, like shell shock or domestic violence, to collective events like the Holocaust. This social and intellectual possibility arose through a reframing of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from character defect to disease as well as considered work by key scholars such as Cathy Carruth (1994), Shoshana Felman (1991), or Dominick La Capra (2001) which drew on earlier events such as the Gulf War. Early clinical descriptions of PTSD appeared in Judith Herman's seminal work *Trauma and*

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J., Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 317–340.  
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-014-4>

*Recovery* (1992), combining physical, social, and psychological elements of a long-term disabling condition caused by a specific trauma: stress, flashbacks, phobias, nightmares, insomnia, panic attacks, and depression, among others. Work like Herman's raised social consciousness and reframed its understanding of individual sufferers, calling for respect, understanding and compassion for those traumatized even in unpopular circumstances. By 2001, PTSD had become a medical – and social – condition worthy of treatment. A new vision of trauma had become possible, a collective, shared experience, that minimized stigma for the individual. And this shift in trauma studies is highlighted in *The Secret Origins of Comics Studies*, when Jose Alaniz (2017) suggests that trauma studies remains enmeshed in the traumatic event while disability studies concentrates on the ways that people move on and function in society, thus taking on fundamentally different narrative functions.

An important clinical feature of trauma is the inability of the traumatized person to frame damaging experiences in comprehensible language. This inability to remember all or part of the traumatic event is an integral characteristic of many definitions of PTSD. One way of understanding this circumstance is that trauma ejects its victims from Lacan's Symbolic order into a pre-linguistic Real, necessitating a reintegration of the traumatic experience into language. Herman (1992) identifies the best cure for trauma as enabling the patient with PTSD to create and retell a narrative about the traumatic experience. This sort of cure renders the trauma knowable not only in Lacanian terms through a re-entry into the Symbolic Order, but also suggests the operation of the Foucauldian, transforming experience into knowledge by means of language. Thus, reframing allows for an escape from abjection not only into semiotic but also intellectual exchange. However, not all trauma can be cured by expression

in language. Further complications arise because of popular and political constraints placed on personal narratives for elements like clear-cut resolutions and happy endings. Popular cultural forms tend to reinforce, rather than contest this paradigm, particularly in the US, where, as Linda Williams (1998) observed in 'Melodrama Revised,' Manichaeic and melodramatic models underpin the most dominant cultural forms, thereby setting up the essential framework of the popular imagination.

This overriding melodramatic and Manichaeic mode of popular culture derives from European forms. Peter Brooks (1976) described a 'mode of excess,' in nineteenth century French and British stage melodramas that presented a series of stock characters in standard conflicts with clearly defined outcomes. For Brooks, even belletristic productions like Balzac's novels exhibited similar thematic and excessive tendencies to stage melodramas because they openly depict emotion, stating aloud the impulses and feelings that polite society tends to keep unspoken. Williams draws on Brooks's work, noting that the struggle between good and evil in these narratives is punctuated by energy, anxiety, fear, and in-the-nick-of-time interventions. This overarching theme, of heightened emotion and a clear struggle between good and evil dictates that stories end with a conquering hero reunited with loved ones, moving from spaces of fear and into presumed lasting safety. PTSD subverts this narrative by preventing the hero from experiencing the emotional fulfilment to which s/he is clearly entitled. In fact, popular opinion in the US, as reflected by the Department of Veteran's Affairs, indicates that a lack of affective happiness and love is the most serious impact of PTSD because it interferes with the lives of soldiers and their families. In other words, PTSD deprives its sufferers of the happy ending they so richly deserve.

Mike Peter's 'Veteran's Day 2009' political cartoon depicts just such a scenario: a soldier carries a huge rucksack labelled stress, flashbacks, phobias, nightmares, insomnia, panic attacks, depression and shell shock. The soldier stands, wide-eyed and sweating, holding an M-16 assault rifle, likely part of an occupying, international, expatriate force. This image of PTSD is now so normalized that all experiences of trauma might be measured against it – consider for example, BBC's internationally acclaimed series *Sherlock*, in which Dr. John Watson cannot overcome his responses to wartime trauma to re-enter the normal life of a London physician. And despite the current global and collective understanding of trauma signaled in Kaplan's vision of trauma studies, this sort of individual experience drives a dominant popular narrative of PTSD, an impaired ability to love.

A parallel may be seen in Slavoj Žižek's (2002) post 9/11 welcoming of the world to the desert of the real, a propagandistic realm where material reality and ideology come into an essential conflict. Žižek's desert of the real creates social pressures that might undermine the ability of the PTSD sufferer to move beyond trauma, especially because American cultural values, suffused by the hyper-reality Baudrillard (1988) saw in Disneyland – artifice that seems more real than that which it imitates – not only normalize, but amplify the requirement for melodramatic happy endings, a situation of absolute safety at odds with traumatic experience. The maneuverings Žižek (2002) describes as inherent to post 9/11 discourses include a masking of political activities intended to sway opinion and undermine true democracy behind a veneer of respectable truth. This supposed truth, like Hollywood film, also seemingly demands a happy ending, further reinforcing unrealistic cultural expectations, an eerie echo of Williams that intersects with theoretical constructions of posthumanity, creating a site where hyperreality can supplant

lived experience. Trauma studies may be seen as a similar site of essential conflict, a space where safety and danger, fear and the familiar, inevitably collide.

Graphic narrative offers a purchase point for presenting bodily and psychological experience not easily expressed in language or narratives that cannot conform to the necessity for a happy ending. Hilary Chute (2016) observed in *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*, that graphic narrative gained international importance in large part due to its witnessing function of trauma, danger, and fear, as seen in books such as *Maus* (1986) or the works of Joe Sacco. Unlike Chute, who concentrated on the graphic narrative as a mode of historical, artistic witness or documentary, I consider how depictions of trauma suffuse multiple graphic narrative canons, not simply the serious and academically respected. My reading also mobilizes semiotic work on graphic narratives – traditionally a European mode of inquiry – and brings it to bear on these forms. I consider theoretical models for the flattened affect Herman associates with trauma and PTSD and then examine representations of these conditions in graphic narratives in the light of posthumanity and propaganda, especially insofar as they function through Baudrillard's hyperreal, a site where fabrication and fantasy supplant reality.

A totalizing dystopian discourse of technological posthumanity, which is itself subject to inclusion in both the hyperreal and the desert of the real, also mirrors the flattened affect and emotional impediments of PTSD sufferers. In *Technophobia!: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, Daniel Dinello (2005) describes shifting social concerns following the end of the Cold War, marking a transition from nuclear anxiety to viral terrors in the light of the global spread of AIDS. Dinello's posthuman entities, much like the composite technological-

human creatures Donna Haraway (1991) discusses in 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,' exist outside of the usual human categories. Posthumans, like cyborgs, trouble accepted binaries and undercut the traditional melodramatic narratives that provide a cultural expectation of uninterrupted safety. Popular narratives about the dangers of viruses, robots, and computers that infiltrate humans, like trauma, supplant affective emotions, empathy and love. These concerns occur in narratives that occupy a position Baudrillard might have called third order simulacra, in which the real, material world, becomes absorbed into, and therefore superseded by, the fabricated hyperreal.

Posthumanity and PTSD undercut lived emotional and social frameworks that lend meaning to the experience, allowing melodramatic fictions to absorb reality. Furthermore by PTSD and posthumanity pose serious problems for representation because they bump up against the types of experiences that Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) describes as abject and unlivable, experiences like trauma, that cannot be rendered into language and therefore remain unknowable. Returning for a moment to Žižek (2002), such experiences exist just outside understanding and representation, creating a site for the manipulation and unspoken control that allows for the intervention of a totalizing melodramatic hyperreal. Graphic narrative may provide a remedy for this ideological morass by allowing comprehensible representations of abjection, trauma, and posthumanity. With the new explosion of graphic narratives about the trauma of COVID-19 appearing almost daily, these questions are of ever-increasing importance for people struggling with issues of fear and safety across the world.

## Depicting trauma in graphic narrative canons

I suggested above that the graphic narrative might present an enhanced framework for representing trauma, as compared with purely textual narrative forms. One reason for this is what Thierry Groensteen (2011) termed the simultaneous mobilization of elements of comic art. Groensteen (1999), recognized as a primary theorist of the semiotics of the comic art, sought to account for all of the elements present on the page and how they could work together to construct and convey meaning to the reader. Groensteen provided an overview of this system in *Comics and Narration* (2013; *Bande dessinée et narration: Système de la bande dessinée 2*), when he described how words, pictures, gutters, borders, and other specific and nonspecific elements combined to create a ‘simultaneous mobilization’ (89) of elements for the reader. In contrast with narrative forms like film, that constrain the viewer into a single linear and time-bounded experience, comic art allows for a different mode of cooperation between words, symbols, images, and spaces in creating meaning. When considering the problems of depicting trauma, whether an inability to recall the trauma specifically or frame language to describe it, then, the comic art provides multiple potential levels of and options for representation. This is not to say that the comic art transcends or prevents the workings of melodrama or the hyperreal, but rather that it may provide a different sort of platform for re-entry of unspeakable events into a symbolic order, and may therefore serve as an extension of the means of bearing witness that Chute (2016) describes. The depiction of trauma in graphic narratives long predates the twenty-first century; in fact, trauma can be identified in even the most innocent settings, and therefore only a brief overview to



complement the much longer history of artistic representation of trauma in Chute (2016) is presented here.

An extremely interesting representation of collective trauma as suppressed memory occurs in Peyo's *Le Smurfs Noir* (1963), a text that is far removed from many academic discourses of comics. In this first Smurf-only full-length narrative, an epidemic occurs when a black fly bites an index Smurf on the tail, rendering his skin black and causing him to hop about, crying 'Gnap!' and biting his fellow Smurfs, infecting them in turn.<sup>1</sup> The site of danger to the normally safe Smurf community shifts as the Smurfs themselves have become the vector of infection. The significant features of trauma in this narrative include the inability of the infected Smurfs to describe what has happened because the disease displaces their normal linguistic functions with the cry of 'Gnap!' As the Smurf village is overtaken, Papa Smurf recalls that something similar may have occurred in the long-gone days of his youth, an indicator of his own prior traumatic memory loss. In fact, as Papa Smurf investigates the causes of the epidemic in the spotted red mushroom that serves as the Smurf public health service, a cataclysmic explosion eradicates Black Smurf disease, restoring general Smurfiness, but leaving the entire village, including Papa Smurf, dazed and confused, with no memory of the disease or its cure. The disease is gone, as well as the Smurfs's clearly suppressed memories. The extreme innocence of the Smurf community, and a complete absence of social propaganda, contribute to a complete return to normal Smurfiness and safety, leaving only the reader with any feelings of fear or unease. The innocence of the Smurfs combined with the happy ending supports a melodramatic ending at odds

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<sup>1</sup> See "Smurf Wars: The Black Smurfs", <http://bd-wars.blogspot.com/2016/12/smurf-wars-black-smurfs.html>

with posthumanity, even if the Smurfs themselves are powerful figures of a cultural hyperreal.

The superhero narrative, similarly, contributes to cultural manifestations of hyperreality and begins with sites of trauma and danger. The initial volume of *Action Comics* (1938), for example, depicts Superman intervening in a case of domestic violence, a situation of fear in what should be a safe space. In the superhero universe, or more properly, multiverses, trauma came to function as a primary element in both superhero and supervillain origin stories by the Bronze Age. For example, Batman is traumatized in early childhood, first by bats, and later by witnessing the murder of his parents after a night out in Gotham City, a site of incredible danger in many depictions. Superman is the only survivor of his home planet of Krypton, torn from all he knows, and the subject of bullying in the supposedly safe rural community where he grows up. Crossing into the Marvel Universe, Bruce Banner is bombarded by gamma radiation to become the Incredible Hulk, Tony Stark is mutilated (at least in some story lines) before becoming Iron Man, and Wolverine is the victim of government-sponsored human experimentation, torture, and traumatic conditioning. Supervillains are born by falling from buildings, slipping into vats of industrial chemicals, or as a result of the untoward consequences of their ill-advised scientific endeavors. These superhero narratives may repress trauma – in the early Golden Age *Action Heroes*, the reader has little to no idea of Superman or Batman's traumatic backstory – or they may explicitly consider trauma as subject matter. For example, the Weapon X storyline in Marvel comics details medical interventions, sensory deprivation, and aversive conditioning designed to traumatize Wolverine and to suppress his memories, which return intrusively years after his experiences in a clear depiction of PTSD. A more canonical text, *Arkham*

*Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989) illustrates both the consequences of super villainy and the ongoing psychological effects of Batman's prior trauma and ongoing violent activities. And the asylum, a place of terror and fear, exists primarily to promote the safety of the outside world. These books combine visual storytelling, images, and omissions to propel their narratives, which are melodramatic, episodic, and therefore tend to remain unresolved, leaving fear and safety, comfort and danger in essential tension, and subverting melodramatic expectations.

The academic graphic novel canon, in contrast with the superhero multiverses, seeks to account for the effects of trauma rather than simply treating it as a fact of existence, thus engaging more explicitly with the work Chute (2016) associates with witness. One example, which Chute (*Why Comics* 2017) cites as the origin of graphic narrative popularity worldwide, or what she describes as a transition 'from underground to everywhere' is Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986)<sup>2</sup>. *Maus* is widely understood to have changed the graphic novel genre in the US, paving the way for later, serious artists like graphic journalist Joe Sacco. *Maus* is a memoir of Art coping with the sometimes not-so-amusing antics of his father, Vladek, a survivor of Auschwitz. Vladek exhibits numerous qualities that suggest PTSD: sleeplessness, jumpiness, general anxiety, controlling tendencies, social isolation, suppressed memories, and sudden, irrational outbursts. Yet Spiegelman, both as an author and as Art, continually undercuts the suggestion that Vladek's troubles result from experiences of the Holocaust as opposed to flaws in his underlying personality. For example, Art and his wife discuss why Vladek is so much more annoying and anxious than his friends the Karpis, a married couple, who also survived Auschwitz. They are unable to come to a resolution.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maus>

*Maus*, which predates twenty-first century understanding of PTSD and the shift in trauma studies Kaplan describes, or even Sacco's verisimilitudinous approach to graphic journalism of terrible events, considers trauma recursively. Through a series of interactions, we learn that Art is seeing a therapist to cope with his own feelings of isolation and loss after the death of his mother, Anja (also an Auschwitz survivor). The therapist, yet another Auschwitz survivor, finally reveals that, like Vladek, Art is still trapped in Auschwitz – nearly everyone he knows is a survivor – and therefore, like them, subject to its dehumanizing effects and therefore unable to function even in the relatively safe space of the Catskills. Ultimately, the narrative suggests that one reason Art lacks compassion for Vladek is because of his own affective flattening, resulting in an inability to negotiate sites of safety and comfort that parallel's Vladek's level of disfunction. Being raised by a Holocaust survivor creates its own trauma, disabling Art from a full range of human emotions. This suggests the operation of trauma Herman might diagnose as requiring a narrative cure, symptoms dovetailing with the flattened affect of posthumanity that Dinello (2005) described.

The theme of narrative cure for personal trauma is also evident in the burgeoning of graphic medical memoir (or fictionalized memoirs) such as *Cancer Vixen* (2006) or *Stitches* (2010) that characterize the new move toward endeavors like graphic medicine. Another academically canonical text, Craig Thomson's graphic memoir *Blankets* (2003)<sup>3</sup>, employs creative illustrative approaches to illustrate his account of childhood trauma. Whereas *Maus's* Art comes to terms with his own personal trauma in a series of frames that provide a linear conversation with his therapist, Thompson's Craig employs

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<sup>3</sup> See a discussion by Arjun Singh at <http://jaiarjun.blogspot.com/2007/06/notes-on-craig-thompsons-blankets.html>

more discontinuous, fragmentary visual narrative practices that present a raw view of traumatic experience. For example, he embeds images of verisimilitudinous memories within frames of nightmare images. In another series of images of himself, seemingly following a linear trajectory, each shows his head and face deformed and distorted by the effects of traumatic memory, centered text beneath grouping the images into a single visual graphical unit, describing his desire to burn his memories. Both images and words are necessary to convey Thompson's message – that even his own mind has become a site of fear – and the memories themselves are depicted as flame-like shapes bursting from Craig's mouth. A later graphic novel, *Habibi* (2011), takes a more aesthetic approach to traumatic experiences, using myriad images of the heroine, Dodola, scattered about the page in various artistically formal, nude poses, with text emphasizing her feelings of distance from her own body after experiences of sexual trauma (see Damluji 2017)<sup>4</sup>. Unlike the critically-acclaimed *Blankets*, *Habibi* was criticized for its treatment of sexuality as well as racism against Arab characters – Thompson's practices of objectification were less successful in this belletristic work than in memoir, highlighting the power of graphic memoir in this setting. Nevertheless, Thompson provides an interesting visual vocabulary for depicting the aftereffects of trauma that remain outside the diegetic boundaries of a graphic novel.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://medium.com/@ndamluji/the-spectre-of-orientalism-in-craig-thompsons-habibi-dde9d499f403>

## PTSD and posthumanity in graphic narratives for adults

As noted above, trauma can be seen to exist in European comic art, including that intended for young audiences (or the work shown in the Centre belge de la Bande dessinée in Brussels and discussed by Groensteen [2011, 2013]), superhero comics (especially DC and Marvel), and academically recognized medical memoir and belletristic fiction. However, another broad category of graphic narrative also deserves some attention, particularly given the themes of hyperreality and posthumanity with which I began this essay. These novels, intended for adult readers, treat serious themes, but adopt the sorts of action-oriented or science fiction themes that Dinello (2005) might associate with posthumanity, often in a setting of hyperreality consistent with what Baudrillard called third-order simulation. A compelling example that bridges the adult and prior superhero genres is the revival of *Unknown Soldier* (2008) by Joshua Dysart under DC's Vertigo imprint. Dysart reframes the former unknown soldier, who featured in various DC series from the 1960's to the 1980's. While the initial *Unknown Soldier* was an American soldier who became disfigured during World War II, the new *Unknown Soldier*, Moses Lwanga, is a native Ugandan who only recovers his repressed boyhood and adult memories as the result of a new disfiguring trauma. Moses begins the book believing himself to be an unremarkable refugee and a physician, only to discover that his former identity as child soldier and troubled youth had been suppressed through psychological experimentation in a secret government program. The complications of suppressed memory, disfiguring injury, and subsequent PTSD symptoms parallels that of superhero narratives, like Wolverine's, and propels the remainder of the novel. Visual elements show parallels between

the relative safety of Lwanga's remembered childhood Little League experiences contrasted with the suppressed reality of being a child soldier.

The theme of posthumanity features more prominently in Jonathan Hickman's graphic novel *The Nightly News* (2010), which participates explicitly in the posthuman discourses that Dinello describes and also evokes the hyperreal, in the guise of propaganda that might echo Žižek more strongly if the book did not repeatedly quote Noam Chomsky (2002). Hickman depicts violent newsworthy events as orchestrated by a character known only as The Voice, who funds a secret society that uses traumatic conditioning to manufacture terrorists, who in turn kill politicians and newscasters on screen during the nightly news. This process enables The Voice to control the news cycle, and hence public opinion, making television reporting a site not merely of propaganda but also corporeal danger. Hickman constructs a tightly woven narrative within a larger matrix of facts and figures about media and society and then further frames this content with Chomsky's work (2002) on propaganda. These authorial choices inform narrative explanations of the impact of 'viral ideas' such as patriotism, global warming, democracy and the benefits of higher education, an eerie echo of the viral preoccupations of Dinello's posthumanity or Žižek's desert of the real. The Voice's terrorists undergo severe sensory and nutritional deprivation, which extends into suppressed memory, as altered mental functioning prevents them from remembering what they have done or fearing the consequences of their actions. The narrative slowly reveals an unsettling diegetic relationship with hyperreality: every powerful person and social element that contributes to dominant cultural narrative formation in the book is in some way associated with The Voice, undercutting even the possibility of safety in this novel.

The *Nightly News* further destabilizes this narrative because its layout makes it unclear how various words, images and frames operate within the diegetic space, thus troubling the simultaneous mobilization of elements on the page (see Keogh 2017).<sup>5</sup> Many seemingly extraneous pieces of visual information litter the pages, providing context to the reader, while raising questions about whether any of the characters can access these data. For example, infographics provide calculations regarding the value of education, facts and figures about globalization or how to measure the general trustworthiness of polls. While the information clearly supports the positions espoused by *The Voice*, it is never evident whether any other character is receiving this content. Quotations from Chomsky's propaganda theory also participate in this ambiguous visual and contextual discourse. The reader is left wondering who knows about these observations and how they potentially influence the actions of the book.

The choice of Chomsky in *The Nightly News* is telling because he theorizes propaganda as a social construct that reinforces a type of oligarchic ideology by mobilizing (and exploiting) seemingly democratic impulses (see Chomsky 2002). In other words, Chomsky describes propaganda as a means of lying to the public and tricking them into consenting to unfair and harmful political and economic realities. This is unlike Žižek's desert of the real insofar as Chomsky concentrates on intentional practice while Žižek sees these tendencies as suffusing all cultural production, regardless of intent.<sup>6</sup> A further claim might be made by Chomsky that his theories, unlike Žižek's ontological musings, are verifiable. Yet, the fact that Hickman elected to Chomsky's

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<sup>5</sup> See "The Nightly News", <https://theslingsandarrows.com/the-nightly-news/>

<sup>6</sup> The ongoing battle between Žižek and Chomsky is probably less important here than the fact that Hickman is a Cambridge MA artist and Chomsky works at MIT, making them both local figures.



work as opposed to rather broader conceptual work on the role of representation and reality in media and communications theory – like that of Stuart Hall or Marshall McLuhan – may indicate that Hickman does not care about the relationships between encoding and decoding or the medium and the message. Instead, Hickman creates a space in which there is no actual truth narrative because various forces manipulate news narratives on both a semantic and a literal level, paralleling the phenomena Chomsky discusses. Thus, narrative and lived experience in *The Nightly News* are both propaganda, a chilling manifestation of posthuman hyperreality. *The Nightly News* presents a reasonably verisimilitudinous model for posthumanity, at least in terms of the flattening of affect and elision of emotion that characterizes the traumatized, the android, and the virus. This narrative could also be read through the trauma studies work I cited above because Hickman presents a universe in which everyone is traumatized and therefore all reality is suspect because no one has access to their emotions, disabling them from processing everyday concepts like fear, safety, danger, or love. Hickman has created a world populated by a multiplicity of Peters' veterans, controlled by a Machiavellian propaganda machine like that Chomsky and Žižek both describe.

*The Nightly News* can be read as echoing and expanding on views of propaganda and trauma in earlier serious graphic novels aimed at adult audiences. For example, in Warren Ellis' ten-book cyberpunk series, *Transmetropolitan* (1997–2001), the protagonist, Spider Jerusalem, exhibits signs of mental unbalance resulting from personal trauma and drug use, which gives him an ironic entrée into journalistic truth narratives. Jerusalem is singularly able to navigate the discordant rhetoric of a posthuman landscape characterized by generalized public anxiety about infectious disease, terrorism, and corporate corruption to report

the ‘truth,’ which is only possible because he refuses to adopt an objective voice. A few features of Dinello’s construction of posthumanity are critical in this subjective vision: interface with the internet, simultaneous mobilization of Jerusalem’s writing with current events, and his physical separation from the lived experiences of others. In this reality, the gonzo journalism that Jerusalem publishes live on the internet – which was much more of a big deal back in pre-blog 1997 than it would be today – becomes the sole mechanism for public access to the truth about society, public affairs and politics. This interface between technology and human experience thus embodies the posthuman, casting Jerusalem into an order of simulation somewhere between the real and the hyperreal, which allows him a unique vantage point for constructing his own narratives. Sadly, Jerusalem appears unable to interact in society in an emotionally authentic way.

Ellis constructs a hero with clear signs of PTSD, adequately distanced from his own emotions to seek the truth in the disorienting, technologically dense world of the city, without regard to feelings of fear. *Transmetropolitan* opens with a nude Jerusalem, sitting tattooed in a woodland cottage far away from modern technology. His money, drugs, and weapons are depleted, but a landline breaks into this wooded setting, informing Jerusalem that he has a book deal and he is obligated to fulfil the contract. This event marks a call to adventure that leads Jerusalem into a posthuman realm of hyperreality that only he can decipher. Throughout the novel, Jerusalem exhibits fairly marked symptoms of hyperarousal and irritability. His affect appears wild and disoriented while he speaks on the phone. He uses his last weapon to blow up his favorite drinking establishment with a hand-held missile launcher before returning to the city, and afterward he engages in unpredictable, brutal violence following seemingly innocent events. His behavior

is also obviously avoidant, leading him away from the media-saturated city streets with their blinking, blaring advertisements. But this very PTSD allows Jerusalem's subjective vision to operate as the only available truth narrative within the diegesis of these books.

Whereas Hickman (2010) literally deconstructs the verisimilitudinous, producing a highly fractured narrative that undercuts itself and reemphasizes its own propagandistic functioning, *Transmetropolitan* shows that the truth is out there, if someone, like Jerusalem, is brave and damaged enough, to look for it. The narrative, like Hickman's, also considers the viral, but here such viral preoccupations are literally infectious, specifically cholera, which has infiltrated The City, creating a miasma of invisible dangers. Serious infectious disease and bizarre manipulations of the body operate as a chilling backdrop to the primary narrative. In Jerusalem's experience, the body is nearly fluidly malleable, posthuman through its relationship with disease and even technologies that separate body and soul, leaving no safe space for normal human functioning. Ultimately, *Transmetropolitan* suggests that trauma might be a remedy for the totalizing influences of hyperreality, but at the cost of PTSD that mimics the effects of the very posthumanity it evades.

That depictions of trauma in *The Nightly News* and *Transmetropolitan* dovetail neatly with Dinello's vision of science fiction posthumanity is hardly surprising since these narratives bracket the formation of the particular desert of the real that Žižek (2002) described in the wake of the September 11 attacks. In fact, Chomsky's model of propagandistic manipulation is generally consistent with Žižek's theorization of the workings of power just beyond the limits of direct representation (even if neither of these figures might agree that it is). In other words, much like the 'watershed' in trauma studies, theories like Žižek's

desert of the real are, in fact, grounded in a continuum of thought and representation that laid the groundwork for new awareness that Chomsky sees as intentionally manipulated to undercut democracy, creating a site of unspeakable danger in the very spaces that are supposed to be safe.

Additional representations of trauma embed their depictions within other powerful cultural forms that correspond to a type of hyperreal. Bill Willingham's *Fables*, which ran from 2002 to 2016 under DC's Vertigo imprint, tells the story of a group of highly traumatized survivors from fairy tales and fables driven from their war-torn Homelands and into the relatively safe haven of New York. Spin-offs include *Cinderella*, *Jack of Fables*, *The Literals*, and *Fairest* as well as the stand-alone productions *1001 Nights of Snowfall*, *The Last Castle*, *Werewolves of the Heartland*, *Peter and Max*, and *The Wolf Among Us*. All of the characters have suffered trauma at the hands of a Manichaean Adversary who waged war on all fables, whether good or evil – trauma that is superadded to any misadventures inherent to their origin stories.

*Fables* presents interesting fodder for readings of trauma studies because it includes generalized, shared traumatic experiences as well as individual traumatizing events. For example, the final group to leave the Homelands commemorates their experiences each year, grounding their personal trauma in shared understanding and memory. Yet shared experiences in these books also result in highly idiosyncratic manifestations of PTSD. For example, both Rose Red and Snow White have visions of the disembodied head of Colin, one of the Three Little Pigs, but these visions only occur as the result of specific triggering events that also cause fear and unease in the rest of the Fable world. Another, compelling example, is the individual response of Gepetto's wooden soldiers, who were 'born' from the same

living magical forest and can communicate with each other telepathically. When forcibly separated from each other, the resulting trauma results in psychotic behaviors that vary from soldier to soldier. However, and unlike the narratives in the hyperreality of *The Nightly News* or *Transmetropolitan*, the overall arc of many subthemes in *Fables* is a collective urge to repair trauma, creating safe spaces free from the fears that caused their exile.

One reason for the need to correct and counteract trauma is that immortality is conferred to some fables by the power and belief of the mundane world. Hence, characters such as Snow White, Rose Red, Cinderella, or The Big Bad Wolf cannot die, while more minor characters, like Little Boy Blue or the Three Little Pigs, can. The former characters, therefore, undergo repeated, and in many cases horrific traumatic experiences in the various plots and subplots of the multiple narratives. Snow White, for instance, is tortured and raped by the seven dwarves before leaving the Homelands, an experience she can never forget. Rose Red loses her true love, Boy Blue, and descends into a desperate depression. Bigby, the Big Bad Wolf, is frozen, broken into pieces, burned, driven mad and rendered into an animalistic monster. Yet, despite these experiences, none of the characters can die, necessitating a means of curing the psychological effects of PTSD, creating safe spaces in their minds so that they can continue to function. Ultimately, these characters each transform from more ordinary fables into more exalted, or 'super' versions of themselves, effectively following a path similar to that of the Marvel and DC superheroes described earlier in this paper and ultimately completing a hero's journey to take up the leadership of their old realms. Unlike mere mortals, these fairy tale heroes require trauma in order to fulfil their destinies and take up their powers to create spaces of safety for those they care for.

## Conclusion: Trauma and...

In the pages above, I outlined some thoughts about the operation of trauma and posthumanity in various types of graphic novels from different types of canons published over the last several decades. Drawing on Chute, I suggested that graphic narrative offers a unique opportunity to develop a representation of trauma that would allow for the type of healing that Herman (1992) suggests as clinical practice. These narrative forms are of interest because they offer different perspectives on PTSD and its operation in popular culture as a site of both acute and chronic discomfort that undercuts the notion of safety in everyday life. As I suggested, graphic narrative may offer a multimodal purchase point for traumatic experiences not easily expressed in language. Both academic canonical and other books use the visual opportunities in graphic narratives in conjunction with more explicit plot devices to represent the somatic and physical effects of trauma. These graphic narratives afford multiple sites for representing trauma and ultimately suggest that PTSD is a form of posthuman experience, a manifestation of the desert of the real to which Žižek welcomed the world in 2002 and the opening of this essay. Given that posthuman experience is characterized by a flattened affect, all feelings, whether of fear, safety, love, or comfort will be attenuated, a circumstance that parallels the symptoms of PTSD. Further work in this area should include a consideration of more explicitly didactic texts that detail specific medical trauma, such as Helene Chochois' (2017) *La Fabrique des Corps: Des premières prothèses à l'humain augmenté*, scientific material like the biographical works of Jim Ottaviani, or national comics that detail specific historical events.

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# Of murdered babies and silenced histories

## Gendering memory in two francophone trauma narratives

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### Gendering traumatized memory

Trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra, in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, includes the testimony of a Holocaust survivor named Bessie K. whose baby, concealed under her coat, was killed in Auschwitz after its cough gave it away to the ss. After returning from the camps, Bessie came to deny that her baby ever existed and found herself unable to tell her husband what happened. She then became plagued by feelings of guilt, as her denial seemed to her to equate to metaphorically killing her baby a second

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time (LaCapra 2014, xxxiv–xxxv<sup>1</sup>). Issues of motherhood and infanticide are also at the heart of the trauma narratives included in this study, in that they are the lens through which Malika Mokeddem and Scholastique Mukasonga choose to approach their accounts of the catastrophic events they are dealing with, in a preoccupation with highlighting the gendered experience of trauma.

My study explores this articulation of gender with various traumas caused by recent historical catastrophes through a dialogical reading of two autobiographical narratives written in French and published in 2008: Algerian Malika Mokeddem's *Je dois tout à ton oubli* [I Owe Everything to your Oblivion] and Rwandan Scholastique Mukasonga's *La Femme aux pieds nus* [The Bare-foot Woman].<sup>2</sup> Despite dealing with different historical events (the Algerian War of Independence, the oppression of women, terrorism in Algeria during the “Black Decade” in the 1990s, and the 1994 Rwandan genocide), these two texts converge in revolving around tropes of infanticide, tormented genealogies and motherhood, and idealized and/or toxic mother/daughter relationships through issues of memory. Above all, these texts share a similar concern with finding a new aesthetics to render the specific, gendered experience of the historical catastrophes they are writing about and for which traditional narratives prove inadequate.

Using as a critical framework Michael Rothberg's notion of “multidirectional memory,” this paper sets out to examine the ways in which a woman writer feels compelled to resort to new aesthetic forms and themes to render the break from traditional narratives required for expressing her gendered experience of

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<sup>1</sup> Bessie K.'s complete testimony can be found at the Yale Fortunoff Archive Tape A67.

<sup>2</sup> English translations by the author of the article.

trauma and memorializing her own history when it happens to be part of a larger history often dominated by male narratives. This study thus aims to create bridges between texts by women writing with the voiced intention of re-inscribing their stories within the dominant canons of French history and literature. I argue that this gendered expression of trauma occurs through the use of specific tropes: infanticide, “bad” mothers, or disturbed mother-daughter relationships, which are a way for the women writers included here to reclaim agency over their traumatic (his) stories and to subvert traditional male narratives which often uphold motherhood as the last vestige of humanity in situations of extreme trauma, while also moving beyond victimology<sup>3</sup> and typical catastrophist discourses. Thus, my argument is that the shared, recurring tropes used by these women writers to express traumatic (his)story – be it experienced or fictional – allow them to find their own voices and challenge their positions as reified subjects of male historical and psychoanalytical narratives, thereby enabling them to re-appropriate their stories and move beyond passivity. The intertextuality with myths also plays a central role in these texts, in order for these authors to (re)write themselves into history, and debunk certain myths held by male narratives about “femininity.” My position is not that there is such a thing as an innate *écriture féminine* (women’s writing<sup>4</sup>) of

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<sup>3</sup> “Victimology” is a term that was coined in 1947 by Benjamin Mendelsohn and has now become an academic discipline which studies data relating to victimization. According to the Oxford dictionary, victimology is also “a mental attitude which tends to indulge and perpetuate the feeling of being a victim”.

<sup>4</sup> “Écriture féminine” is a term coined by French feminist Hélène Cixous in her seminal article “The Laugh of the Medusa” meaning literally “feminine writing.” The idea of “écriture féminine” comes from Freud’s idea notion that women are incomprehensible and less “rational” than men; building on his idea of women as “the dark continent,” Cixous uses that as a metaphor to celebrate the lack of control possible over the position of woman in the phallogocentric Symbolic Order. Feminine writing is associated with the Lacanian Real, with

trauma, but that the writers included in this study intentionally develop specific tropes, for the purposes of reclaiming their stories, in a conscious attempt at differentiating themselves from their male counterparts. Thus, I will not be using “gendering” in a genetic sense, but as a political stance.

*Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* (Hirsch & Miller 2011), builds on the notion of postmemory, while sharing some of the same preoccupations as multidirectional memory, but in a gendered perspective that is rather absent from Rothberg’s essay, as the following statement shows:

In its concern with justice, ethics, and repair, and the ways in which those domains are shaped by structures of family, generational identity, and home, *Rites of Return* marks a new moment in the field of gender and cultural studies (Hirsch & Miller 2011, 18).

Thus, Miller and Hirsch emphasize their gendered approach to the theorization of memory, in a transnational perspective, since their book contains essays from various perspectives (Korea, Palestine...). Furthermore, Miller and Hirsch place an emphasis on connections rather than comparisons<sup>5</sup> in their transnational exploration of diaspora narratives. *Rites of Return* is presented as staging

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the maternal body, which is barred from the Symbolic Order; she associates representational writing with the Symbolic, and non-representational writing with the female and maternal bodies. However, feminine writing does not belong exclusively to females; namely, Cixous argues that anyone can occupy the marginalized position of “woman” within the Symbolic order and write from that position.

<sup>5</sup> Hirsch and Miller write: “In placing their stories alongside each other, we are putting forward a *connective* rather than *comparative* approach that places the claims, responses, and strategies of redress emerging from different contexts in conversation with each other. The performance of return crosses cultural divides and reveals both commonalities and differences among diverse groups with divergent histories” (Hirsch & Miller 2011, 8).

a dialogue between feminist and diaspora studies, offering a multifaceted paradigm of community *that acknowledges longings to belong and to return while remaining critical of a politics of identity and nation.*<sup>6</sup> [...] An attention to roots and identity-based origins does not necessarily mean an appeal to a biological essentialism, shored up and masked by innovative technology. [...] *as feminists, we are committed to challenging idealizations of home.*<sup>7</sup> Throughout this past decade, we have been actively engaged in the emerging fields of memory and trauma studies and particularly have come to appreciate the confluences and the commitments these theoretical projects share with feminism. Indeed, the notion of *postmemory* elaborated by Marianne Hirsch emerges from feminist insights into the mediated structuring of identity and the intersection of private and public forces in its formation (Hirsch & Miller 2011, 4).

These voiced attempts at thinking cultural memory and feminism through new paradigms clearly show the urgency of not only granting attention to what could be termed “minority” historical narratives, but, also, to reclaim a central position for women writers in cultural memory studies, by studying them in a connective, productive perspective. This is the statement that the present paper springs from.

Echoing Marianne Hirsch’s seminal work, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989), where she argues that mothers and daughters are figures that have been neglected by classic psychoanalysis and confined to traditional, shallow narratives, and challenges Freud’s family romance and

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<sup>6</sup> My italics.

<sup>7</sup> My italics.

notion of the Oedipus complex, these women writers offer various rewritings of the “great silenced story” (i.e., the mother/daughter story – *Mother/Daughter Plot* 37). By performing a close study of the shared tropes they use in reclaiming their stories, this paper will, first, give a brief overview of the multidirectional feminist trauma theory in Francophone literature that I am aiming to sketch, by demonstrating how the circulation of recurring themes (infanticide, troubled mother/daughter relationships and a deconstruction of the notion of “motherhood”) allows these writers to reclaim agency over their experiences. After exposing the theoretical background framing this study, I will move on to a detailed discussion of each one of the two texts included here, focusing more precisely on the figures of infanticide, childlessness, and motherhood and their various treatments and purposes in each text, while also highlighting the ways in which the Holocaust serves as a paradigm through metaphors providing a productive echo chamber in these narratives dealing with various traumas.

## Towards a multidirectional feminist trauma theory

### A critical overview

First, let me give a brief overview of the critical background in which this study is inscribed. By trying to sketch a multidirectional feminist trauma theory, I mean to study common tropes used by women writing in French in order to express a traumatic past or the inherited memory of that past historical catastrophe, which would constitute a sketch of transnational, shared women’s voice

of trauma, spanning across various contexts and time periods. More specifically, this study centers on the figures of tormented motherhood and the infanticidal mother, as counterpoints to dominant male discourses of trauma, in which the mother-child relationship is often idealized as a last vestige of humanity in situations of extreme trauma.

In this perspective, I am broadening Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory by examining how it can be extended to gender studies, since even mainstream memory theories seem to fall short of being able to render accurately the gendered experience of catastrophe. Following Rothberg's (2009) notion of "multidirectional memory," which demonstrates how marginalized collective memories interact productively instead of competing with one another, this paper reads dialogically an autofictional novel by a French Algerian writer, Mokeddem, titled *Je dois tout à ton oubli*, dealing with immigration, the Algerian War of Independence and the oppression of women in rural areas of Algeria, focusing on a violent mother/daughter relationship and a case of infanticide; and a memoir, *La Femme aux pieds nus*, by Mukasonga, a Rwandan author who now lives in France and survived the 1994 genocide, in which she lost her entire family.

According to Hirsch, the female body is the privileged site for the transmission of trauma – especially the physical closeness existing between the mother and her daughter, which she examines in "Mothers and Daughters," where she summarizes and challenges what Adrienne Rich called "the great unwritten story" ("Mothers and Daughters", 200), i.e., the mother-daughter plot. And yet, it seems that the mother-daughter relationship, while being central to both texts examined here, is, more often than not, used in a distorted way, so as to debunk any idealization of the mother-daughter relationship, which has too often been



used as a topos of “innocence” and “purity” in men’s narratives of traumatic history<sup>8</sup>.

These two texts – *Je Dois Tout à ton Oubli* and *La Femme aux pieds nus* – herald child figures as embodiments of trauma, while, at the same time, questioning the very narratives of “innocent childhood” – except for Mukasonga’s text, which provides an interesting instance of the fundamental differences in the ways in which memory and motherhood are intertwined, whether the writer is writing from outside or from within, or is a first-generation survivor, first-hand witness, or a second-generation survivor, or witness by proxy.

While trying to express what occurred beyond words, along with the sexed subjectivity of their experiences, these authors invent new narrative forms, i.e., what can be termed an aesthetics of catastrophe – a poetic memoir that serves as the symbolic shroud for her mother killed during the Rwandan genocide in Mukasonga’s case and an autofictional-cum-detective narrative in Mokeddem’s case. Thus, expanding on Hirsch’s theories of the mother-daughter transmission of memory, as well as on her recent work with Miller on trauma, migration, and gender, I will show the various ways in which these texts give rise to a counter-discourse of memory through the gendering of what tends to be suppressed by master discourses on trauma and catastrophe, and, thus, create a transnational literary voice of the gendering of trauma in literature written in French. This analysis provides an overview of the cathartic function of literature in the gendering of memory.

Let us now move on to a close reading of these two narratives and of the ways in which they exemplify the transnational

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<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man* (translated by Stuart Woolf, NY, Orion Press, 1959) or Robert Antelme’s *L’Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

feminist voice of trauma that this study is trying to sketch in Francophone studies. We will therefore see how these two texts converge in two main ways: on the one hand, the use of a toxic mother/daughter relationship (mostly in Mokeddem's case) as displaced trauma, or screen memory,<sup>9</sup> insofar as the narrator focuses on the dysfunctional family situation, which conceals the deeper trauma from which the text originates; on the other hand, the use of metaphorical or actual infanticide and extensive discussions of whether to remain childless or not at the core of the resilience process at work through writing.

### “Ce Serpent familial” [that family snake]: Malika Mokeddem, Algeria, and the infanticidal mother

This multidirectional concern, intertwined with the desire to remain childless, is a central aspect of Malika Mokeddem's *Je Dois tout à ton oubli*, an autofictional narrative built around a case of infanticide and dealing with the 1954–62 Algerian War of Independence, immigration, the wave of terrorism in Algeria in the 1990s, and the tensions between what is presented as “modernity” and “traditions.” The narrator, Selma, is a female cardiologist in her fifties, living in France, having emigrated from Algeria in her twenties. As she is being haunted by a recurring nightmare, in which she is three years old and terrified as her mother is stifling her with a pillow, she suddenly remembers something that she had relegated to the confines of her mind: that, at the age of 3, she witnessed, through a keyhole, her mother

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<sup>9</sup> “Screen memory” is a term coined by Sigmund Freud in 1899 in the context of infantile trauma and amnesia. He hypothesized that screen memories, often trivial in appearance, served to conceal traumatic memories, as if to omit and record them at once (Freud, S. 1899. *Screen Memories*. Standard Edition 3. London: The Hogarth Press).

kill her aunt's baby daughter. She decides to go back to the remote village in the Algerian Sahara where her family lives, and where she hasn't been for 20 years, in an attempt at finally establishing a dialogue with her overbearing, abusive mother, and finding out what really happened on the day of the infanticide.

As the narrator travels back to her origins, the memories of her childhood and youth resurface and the War of Independence is paralleled with the narrator's struggle to set herself free from the weight of ancestral traditions in which girls have no other perspective than the prison of the domestic sphere. As she reconnects with her former university friends, who suffer from various symptoms of post-traumatic disorder induced by the war and the subsequent terror attacks of the 90s, Selma comes to see the war of independence as a reflection of her private struggle for liberation. Under circumstances too long to summarize here, it is the war that allowed her to flee to France, thus escaping what she calls "l'univers carcéral du désert, [le] cachot de ses traditions" (Mokeddem 2008, 27) [the concentrationary world of the desert, the prison of traditions].

She eventually comes to see the "sacrificed baby" as the victim of those stifling traditions. Images of the baby being stifled with a pillow actually mirror the stifling sensation oppressing the narrator whenever she is around her family:

Peu à peu, Selma prend conscience aussi de ce qu'elle doit à cet oubli. Il est à l'origine de tous les refus qui la constituent et de sa relation, si particulière, avec sa mère, et qui n'a jamais relevé de l'habituel conflit entre mère et fille. Depuis ce meurtre, Selma était devenue insomniaque et s'était mise à fuguer. Elle filait en douce échappant ainsi à l'épouvantable sensation d'étouffement (Mokeddem 2008, 38).

[Gradually, Selma also develops a new awareness of what she owes to that oblivion. It is the origin of all the refusals that constitute her and of her relationship with her mother, which is so particular, and has never fallen under the category of the typical mother/daughter conflict. Since that murder, Selma had started suffering from severe insomnia and had started to run away on a regular basis. She would quietly leave the house, unnoticed, so as to escape that horrendous stifling feeling].

Mokeddem's narrator then replaces the sacrificed baby girl in a larger context of gendercide, wondering how many millions of female newborns are sacrificed every year in places like China or India, and using Holocaust metaphors, likening Algeria to Medea, the epitome of the infanticidal mother: "En vérité, c'est au pays tout entier, à l'Algérie, que sied le rôle de Médée. C'est elle [...] qui a assassiné les uns, exilé les autres, *fait incinérer des bébés dans des fours* (my emphasis) [...]" (Mokeddem 2008, 73) [The truth is, it is the country as a whole, Algeria, that should play the part of Medea. It is her who assassinated some, exiled others, *incinerated babies in ovens*].

Selma then exposes why she has decided to remain childless, so as to break the cycle of violence and entrapment, by making sure she never destroys her daughter's life in the same manner as hers was destroyed. Her rejection of motherhood is also likened to a rejection of her origins, of memory, and of passing on anything: "[La mère] a forgé son refus de l'enfantement. Elle n'a jamais eu de mère et elle ne sera jamais mère" (Mokeddem 2008, 138) [The mother forged her rejection of motherhood. She has never had a mother and she will never be a mother], thereby what is passed on is non-motherhood. The narrator's un-mothering, abusive mother has passed on to her the inability to be a mother.

Selma refers to her family as “ce serpent familial” [that family snake] (Mokeddem 2008, 33). Throughout the narrative, a parallel is implicitly drawn between the baby that Selma will never have and the murdered baby girl who has come to stand for the Algerian roots and war traumas that she wishes to forget: “Et lequel des deux hommes de la maison est-il le géniteur du *bébé sacrifié* (my emphasis)?” [And which one of the two men in the house is the *sacrificed baby’s* genitor?] (Mokeddem 2008, 33), whereby the baby becomes cast as the sacrificial victim of an entire generation.

Thus, infanticide is used in the novel as a sort of screen memory, a displaced trauma, which has come to embody all that the narrator wants to run away from upon moving to France and starting a new life. Infanticide is also at the core of Scholastique Mukasonga’s *La Femme aux pieds nus*, albeit for rather different purposes than in *Je Dois tout à ton oubli*.

## Scholastique Mukasonga: Mothering memory after the Rwanda genocide

Scholastique Mukasonga, a survivor of the 1994 Rwanda genocide now living in France, writes *La Femme aux pieds nus* so as to pay tribute to her mother Stefania, who was killed during the genocide, along with all of Mukasonga’s relatives. The text becomes the symbolical shroud with which she covers her mother’s dead body. However, her autobiographical novel is symbolical on more than one level, insofar as, as a woman from Sub-Saharan Africa, and as a Tutsi – i.e., the ethnical minority in Rwanda that the Hutus aimed at exterminating during the genocide – she is writing from the perspective of a triple alienation: as a woman, as an African writer, and as an ethnical minority. Her goal is, therefore, not only to give a voice to her

dead mother, but, also, to the countless other voiceless Rwandan women who have been silenced by history.

The novel opens with the mother Stefania's voice, presented as direct speech, therefore metaphorically restoring the murdered mother to life:

Quand je mourrai, quand vous me verrez morte, il faudra recouvrir mon corps. Personne ne doit voir mon corps, il ne faut pas laisser voir le corps d'une mère. C'est vous mes filles qui devez le recouvrir, c'est à vous seules que cela revient. Personne ne doit voir le cadavre d'une mère, sinon cela vous poursuivra ... vous hantera jusqu'à votre propre mort, où il faudra aussi quelqu'un pour recouvrir votre corps (Mukasonga 2008, 12).

[When I die, when you see me dead, you will have to cover my body. My body can't be seen by anyone, a mother's body should never be seen. It is you, my daughters, who have to cover it, you are the only ones able to perform that duty. No one must see a dead mother's body, or else, it'll be with you forever ... it'll haunt you until you die, when it will also be time for someone to cover your bodies].

The threat that if the daughter lets anyone see her mother's corpse she will then be haunted by its memory for the rest of her life can be read as an embodiment of the mother/daughter transmission of "postmemory," all the more so as the entire narrative revolves around the physical and emotional closeness that used to bind the narrator to her mother. According to Hirsch, postmemory generally occurs through the mother-daughter relationship (characterized by greater affective proximity than that between

a mother and a son)<sup>10</sup>. Now that her mother is no longer alive, Mukasonga regrets this unique mother/daughter relationship and laments: “Hélas ! je n’ai pas retenu tous les secrets que me confiait Stefania, les secrets qu’une mère ne confie qu’à sa fille” [Alas, I do not remember all the secrets that Stefania used to tell me, the secrets that a mother only tells her daughter] (Mukasonga 2008, 54).

Throughout her narrative, Mukasonga highlights the gendered experience of the genocide, emphasizing that the Tutsi women were targeted, much like Jewish women, for their reproductive capacities, as shown in the following excerpt:

Merciana, c’était la vraie chef de famille, une “évoluée” comme on disait alors. Je ne sais où elle était allée à l’école mais elle savait lire et écrire. Savoir écrire, c’était dangereux quand on a un père qui s’est exilé au Burundi. [...] Ils ont pris Merciana. Ils l’ont traînée jusqu’au milieu de la cour, là où tout le monde pouvait la voir. Ils l’ont déshabillée. Ils l’ont mise toute nue. Les femmes ont enfoui leurs enfants sous leur pagne. Les deux militaires ont épaulé lentement leur fusil. “Ce n’est pas le cœur qu’ils visaient, répétait maman, ce sont les seins, seulement les seins. Ils voulaient nous dire à nous les femmes tutsi : ‘Ne donnez plus la vie car c’est la mort que vous donnez en mettant au monde. Vous n’êtes plus des porteuses de vie, mais des porteuses de mort’” (Mukasonga 2008, 28–29).

[Merciana was the real head of the family, an “evolved woman” as we used to say. I do not know where she had attended school but she could read and write. Being able to write was dangerous when your father had left

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<sup>10</sup> Postmemory, as already mentioned, is a term coined by Marianne Hirsch so as to describe the experience of children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, who inherit a trauma they have not directly experienced.

to Burundi in exile. They took Merciana. They dragged her to the center of the courtyard, where everyone could see her. They undressed her. They exposed her naked. The women hid their children under their pagnes. The two military men slowly raised their guns to their shoulders. “They were not aiming at her heart, Mama would keep repeating, they were aiming at her breasts, only her breasts. They wanted to send us, Tutsi women, the following message: “Stop giving birth because it is death that you give when you birth. You are no longer carrying life, but you are carrying death”].

Throughout the text, women’s traditional, biological role as mothers is over-emphasized, marking a radical difference with Mokeddem’s narrative. This echoes narratives by Holocaust survivors, such as Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz and After* trilogy, in which the return to “normalcy” after coming back from the camps can only be achieved through motherhood, and in which sterility is seen as almost as traumatizing as the Holocaust itself, as a second wound. Namely, most of the female survivors interviewed by Delbo in *Mesure de nos jours* focus their narratives around motherhood, either on their disappointment at the fact that, once they became mothers in turn, their grief and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms were not alleviated, or on their inability to bear children after surviving Auschwitz, due to being too old or infertile, which they experienced as a second blow from fate, preventing them from overcoming trauma through giving birth (Delbo 1971). It is noteworthy that, for first-generation genocide survivors, in which women are especially targeted by the perpetrators for their reproductive capacities, as was the case for the Holocaust and for the Rwandan genocide, there is still hope for oblivion, i.e., hope that, by bearing children,



female survivors will overcome trauma and resume a “normal” life. The child figure is still invested with the hope for renewal.

Thus, Mukasonga highlights the centrality of motherhood in the Rwandan culture, by referring to “le prestige et les pouvoirs que la tradition rwandaise attribue à la mère de famille. [...] la haute chevelure des femmes, symbole de leur fécondité” (Mukasonga 2008, 46) [the prestige and powers that the Rwandan tradition attributes to the mother; women’s high hair-do’s, a symbol for their fertility] and, also, that “l’urugori était le signe de la souveraineté maternelle” [urugori<sup>11</sup> was the sign of the sovereignty of mothers] (Mukasonga 2008, 46), which sets the stage for the sudden disruption of the narrative by the intrusion of the unthinkable violence :

Stefania, Marie-Thérèse, Gaudenciana, Theodosia, Anasthasia, Speciosa, Leoncia, Pétronille, Priscilla et bien d’autres, c’étaient elles, les Mères bienfaitantes, les Mères bienveillantes, celles qui nourrissaient, qui protégeaient, qui conseillaient, qui consolait, les gardiennes de la vie, celles que les tueurs ont assassinées comme pour éradiquer les sources mêmes de la vie (Mukasonga 2008, 148).

[Stefania, Marie-Thérèse, Gaudenciana, Theodosia, Anasthasia, Speciosa, Leoncia, Pétronille, Priscilla and so many others, it was them, the Benefactress Mothers, the Benevolent Mothers, the ones who used to nourish, to protect, to advise, to comfort, the guardians of life, those that the murderers have killed as if they wanted to eradicate the very sources of life].

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<sup>11</sup> In the Kinyarwanda language, urugori refers to hair decorations and, by extension, to a woman’s hair.

As the entire genocide experience is narrated through the lens of motherhood, Mukasonga also resorts to a form of magical realism, echoing a narrative technique shared by several other Francophone writers, such as Caribbean Maryse Condé in *Moi, Tituba, sorcière ... noire de Salem* (Paris: Mercure de France 1986) and Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma in *Les Soleils des indépendances* (Paris: Seuil 1995), thus replacing her story within a historical and literary lineage. As the soldiers enter the village, we are told that “les vieilles femmes aux seins desséchés avaient des montées de lait, les bébés refusaient d’abandonner le ventre maternel” (Mukasonga 2008, 31–32) [old women with dried-up breasts were suddenly producing milk, babies were refusing to leave their mothers’ wombs]. The irruption of the catastrophe – etymologically, an over-turn of the normal course of events – literally reverses the normal course of life, affecting the very pillar of traditional Rwandan society – motherhood.

In light of the unfolding of the genocide narrative through the lens of motherhood, it is then no wonder that Mukasonga eventually emphasizes an optimistic vision through a narrative of resilience, presenting her current life as a mother as a way to overcome trauma and continue the cycle of life, moving beyond anger and resentment. However, ultimately, she laments over the fact that her becoming a mother does not alleviate the pain of not being there to cover her mother’s dead body:

Je n’ai pas recouvert de son pagne le corps de ma mère. Personne n’était là pour le recouvrir. Les assassins ont pu s’attarder devant le cadavre que leurs machettes avaient démembré. [...] Maman, je n’étais pas là pour recouvrir ton corps et je n’ai plus que des mots – des mots d’une langue que tu ne comprenais pas – pour accomplir ce que tu avais demandé. Et je suis seule avec mes pauvres mots et mes phrases, sur la page du

cahier, tissent et retissent le linceul de ton corps absent  
(Mukasonga 2008, 13).

[I did not cover my mother's body with her clothes. No one was there to cover it. The murderers were able to take their time looking at the corpse that their machetes had dismembered. Mama, I was not there to cover your body and all I have left are words – words in a language which you did not understand – so as to accomplish what you had asked for. And I am alone with my poor words, and my sentences, on the notebook page, weave over and over again the shroud of your absent body].

While Mokeddem's narrative deals with physically returning to the site of family trauma, Mukasonga's return occurs through words and memory. While the first narrative upholds childlessness as a way to work through trauma, Mukasonga's text, which addresses a historical trauma that happened barely twenty years earlier, upholds motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment, perpetuating the special position of mothers in the society that has been destroyed by the genocide: "Avoir un enfant, c'était accéder enfin à la plénitude de considération, de respect, de puissance à laquelle toute femme aspirait" (Mukasonga 2008, 160) [Having a child meant finally accessing the full consideration, respect, and power to which all women aspired]. Becoming a mother is a way to counter the de-gendering effects of the genocide.

## Conclusion

These two texts converge in staging memory through tropes of infanticide – whether metaphorical or literal – and placing motherhood issues at the core of the narrative. Broadening

Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory" to include gender studies, this essay has sketched a multidirectional feminist trauma theory by highlighting the various echoes, recurring metaphors, and intertextualities spanning across two autobiographical novels written in French and dealing with different historical and personal traumas, different geographical locations, and different time periods. By reading these texts in conversation, I have argued that these women gender their memory with the voiced intention of re-inscribing their stories within the dominant canons of French history and literature, since women writers and Francophone writers still tend to be considered as the "periphery" of French literary production, with the publishing market and literary prizes being entirely centralized in Paris, and with male narratives still holding the monopoly over historical narratives.

For the first-generation genocide survivor (Mukasonga), emphasis is placed on motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment and as a way of reclaiming agency over her life, whereby becoming in turn a mother is depicted as the *sine qua non* condition of returning to "normalcy" and perpetuating the life cycle, in the same vein as many Holocaust survivors' narratives. The preoccupation with continuing the cycle and passing on the survivor's memory is, indeed, central throughout *La Femme aux pieds nus*. On the other hand, in *Mokeddem*, agency is presented as being reclaimed through a conscious decision *not* to procreate, to break the cycle of (post)memory and avoid taking the risk of traumatizing one's children. The potential child comes to be solely perceived as a living memorial. In *Mokeddem*, rejection of motherhood underscores a rejection of her own parental figures, which, as the texts unfold, amounts to a crisis of memory, of origins, and rejection of the original trauma. Thus, rejection of motherhood becomes a refusal of transmission.

The treatment of the figure of infanticide, central to both narratives, is also crucial in that it reveals the differing ways of coming to terms with the catastrophe itself and its memorialization: in *Je Dois tout à ton oubli*, the plot is centered on an actual infanticide; the narrator also eventually experiences her childlessness and the memory of the sacrificed baby as liberating – from the burden of her ascendance, from her Algerian roots, from her oppressed childhood and her condition as a woman. On the other hand, in *La Femme aux pieds nus*, the many instances of infanticide depicted in the novel are those caused by the Hutus, the perpetrators of the genocide, and childlessness is solely experienced as a consequence and stigma of the de-gendering violence caused by the genocide. In this perspective, motherhood is depicted as liberating and cathartic, and as a means to re-gender memory and counter the de-gendering effects of a genocide that targeted women specifically for their reproductive capabilities.

Furthermore, these two writers use recurring allusions to other historical traumas, thereby broadening the scope of their narratives and creating productive, healing lines of communication in a multidirectional perspective and a cathartic turn to the future. I have argued that the set of common tropes to which these female writers resort constitutes a common voice to women's writings dealing with the sexed subjectivity of trauma. These two texts not only converge in using tropes of motherhood and infanticide as the core of their narrative of traumatized memory – and let us not forget Adrienne Rich's statement that the mother and the childless woman are a false polarity, since both serve the institution of motherhood – but they also echo each other by the use of Holocaust metaphors and allusions to other traumas, thereby replacing the narrator's own trauma in a larger, multidirectional, transnational context.

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# Peur et humour

## Le cas de l'humour noir

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Que peur et sourire se rejoignent dans l'humour noir, chacun est prêt à l'admettre intuitivement, mais selon quelles modalités thématiques, stylistiques et formelles ? C'est ce dont je voudrais traiter ici ; moins pour proposer une approche de poétique générale que pour tenter d'éclairer la notion d'humour et les difficultés conceptuelles qu'elle pose avant de situer sa variante « noire » et sa relation à un sentiment comme la peur dans ce champ. J'espère montrer ainsi que l'étude de l'humour est pleinement comparatiste et qu'elle mériterait d'être davantage prise en compte par les chercheurs en littérature comparée.

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## Situation de l'humour

L'humour, en tant que phénomène clairement identifié et généralement accepté, n'existe pas : un simple survol des recherches montre une diversité proprement étourdissante, où chaque auteur emprunte à ses prédécesseurs ce qui lui semble utile à sa démonstration. Il semble impossible de réduire théoriquement ce qui incarne un 'je ne sais quoi' de l'esprit sans le détruire du même geste. Les considérations étymologiques concluent au caractère trompeur d'un mot que l'anglais a emprunté au français pour le lui rendre complètement faussé. Selon leurs présupposés, les auteurs s'attacheront à une signification plutôt qu'à une autre, rapprochant l'humour du comique, d'une humeur éphémère ou d'une disposition psychophysiologique. Comme l'ingéniosité en la matière semble inépuisable, les présentations étymologiques se concluent souvent par des considérations sur le caractère indéfinissable de l'humour.

La difficulté provient du fait que l'humour est traditionnellement conçu comme une espèce déterminée de disposition et d'attitude intellectuelle propre à un type d'homme particulier. En ce sens, il se rapporte davantage à la psychologie et à la philosophie qu'à la littérature<sup>1</sup>, et de fait, du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle (où l'explication la plus connue, dérivée de la doctrine médiévale des humeurs, est celle de Ben Jonson, qui cherchait par-là à promouvoir sa conception de la comédie) au xix<sup>e</sup> siècle, où l'excentricité et l'extravagance caractéristiques de l'humour sont reliées à l'imagination moderne, aux débats sur

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<sup>1</sup> Benedetto Croce mettait les critiques en garde dès 1903 : parce qu'il est un phénomène psychique, l'humour est une matière de l'art mais son étude relève de la psychologie descriptive. Il recommandait donc aux littéraires de s'en tenir à l'humour de chaque écrivain pour décrire la manière singulière dont il se présente dans son œuvre (Croce 1954, 281–291).

l'ironie romantique (Behler), l'histoire de la notion d'humour mêle des considérations philosophiques, psychologiques, anthropologiques, sociologiques, esthétiques.

Le xx<sup>e</sup> siècle restera comme celui qui a rendu l'humour à la diversité des processus humains qu'il concerne : philosophie – de Bergson (qui traite d'un sujet plus large, le comique) à Vladimir Jankélévitch ou Gilles Deleuze – linguistique<sup>2</sup>, psychologie, anthropologie<sup>3</sup>.

Pour aller vite, se dessinent deux grandes tendances : 1/ l'humour est envisagé comme une vision du monde dont l'historicité est partiellement examinée ; 2/ l'humour fait l'objet d'une théorie (méta-) psychologique, dont le type le plus connu est l'interprétation freudienne.

Nous disposons de nombreux et excellents travaux sur les spécificités nationales de l'humour : qu'ils soient anciens : Louis Cazamian pour l'Angleterre, Luigi Pirandello pour l'Italie, José García Mercadal pour l'Espagne, ou plus récents : Hans-Dieter Gelfert pour l'Allemagne, Daniel Royot pour les Etats-Unis ou Michel Autrand, Daniel Grojnowski, Dominique Bertrand, Daniel Ménager pour la France<sup>4</sup>. Aujourd'hui, nous bénéficions des acquis d'études comparatistes récentes comme celles de Judith Stora-Sandor pointant vers l'humour des 'minorités' (Stora-Sandor 1992)<sup>5</sup>, ou de Jonathan Pollock qui insiste sur les liens humour-mélancolie en revenant sur la composante humorale du phénomène, manifestée par l'étymologie. Au

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<sup>2</sup> Les traducteurs, qui rencontrent nombre de problèmes pour la transposition des jeux de mots, y ont insisté. Voir Guiraud, Henry, 'Traduire l'humour'. Sur une problématique linguistique générale, voir Olbrechts-Tyteca.

<sup>3</sup> Les éthologues se sont aussi intéressés au rire, voir Smadja.

<sup>4</sup> En France, il faut signaler l'association CORHUM (Association française pour le développement des recherches sur le COMique, le Rire et l'HUMour).

<sup>5</sup> Elle a aussi étudié le phénomène de l'humour juif dans une thèse de doctorat d'Etat en littérature comparée, publiée en 1984.

plan international, un programme de recherches nettement interdisciplinaire se dessine. Il est développé par l'*International Society for Humor Studies* en Allemagne et aux Etats-Unis<sup>6</sup>, par la *CORHUM* en France.

Si l'on considère les formes, il n'y a pas de 'structure du langage humoristique'<sup>7</sup>, la construction d'une typologie de l'humour apparaît comme une sorte d'oxymore épistémologique. Les opérations de l'approche poéticienne qui consistent à définir un objet sémiotique (genre ou type de discours) achoppent sur ce qui représente un irréductible 'je ne sais quoi'. Toutefois, certains travaux, tantôt monographiques tantôt comparatistes, envisagent une étude des formes. Plusieurs types d'approches peuvent être identifiés :

- La mise en évidence de postures historiquement et stylistiquement caractérisées :

a/ensembles nationaux : l'humour anglais (Cazamian 1952), l'humour américain (Royot), traversées diachroniques du phénomène humoristique.

b/ensembles chronologiques : le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle anglo-allemand avec la relation très forte entre l'œuvre de Sterne et celle de Jean Paul (Montandon), le tournant du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et les débats sur l'ironie romantique (Behler).

c/ensembles internes à une œuvre : la partie humoristique de l'œuvre de Jean Paul qu'il opposait lui-même à sa partie satirique (*Procès groenlandais ; Choix des papiers du Diable*) ; le *Dictionnaire des idées reçues et Bouvard et Pécuchet* de Flaubert dont la problématique cardinale de la bêtise a été dégagée par Anne Herschberg-Pierrot.

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<sup>6</sup> Sa Constitution figure dans *Humor*, vol. 9-3/4, Hawthorne, N.Y., Berlin, W. de Gruyter Ind., 1996. La revue elle-même étant résolument interdisciplinaire.

<sup>7</sup> Titre de l'article de Dominique Noguez.

- La définition de formes ou discours littéraires plus particulièrement liés à l'humour : l'étude du 'nonsense' par Wim Tigges, celle des textes 'fumistes' de la fin de XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle française (Grojnowski) ou des formes brèves humoristiques (du type mots d'esprit, aphorismes, définitions de dictionnaires).

Dans ces études, il n'est pas souvent question de la peur. Pour cela, il faut en venir à l'humour noir.

## L'humour noir

L'*Anthologie de l'humour noir* d'André Breton a une histoire éditoriale compliquée. Achèvement d'imprimer le 10 juin 1940, le livre ne sera diffusé qu'à partir du milieu de 1945. Devenu introuvable, il sera réédité en 1950 puis en 1966, chez Jean-Jacques Pauvert, paraîtra l'édition considérée par l'auteur comme définitive<sup>8</sup>. Pourtant, dans l'introduction qu'il donne alors au livre, Breton indique qu'il a été 'publié pour la première fois en 1939' (Breton 1990, 865).

Breton le rappelle dans son introduction : les mots 'humour noir' 'ne faisaient pas sens' avant l'*Anthologie*. Toutefois, même aujourd'hui, ses significations varient au gré d'interprétations multiples et divergentes. Si l'on excepte le sens commun, pour qui l'humour noir est une simple plaisanterie sur la mort ou la souffrance, on peut d'abord considérer celui-ci comme une catégorie du concept plus général d'humour. Ce pourrait être

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<sup>8</sup> Avec des corrections mineures par rapport à 1950, sauf pour ce qui concerne Raymond Roussel. Dans les éditions précédentes, une interdiction émanant des éditions Lemerre avait contraint Breton à publier uniquement des analyses de *Locus Solus* et de *L'Etoile au front*. L'*Anthologie* de 1966 donne une plus juste place à l'écrivain. Sur ces difficultés éditoriales, voir Moura 2001.

une tentation du chercheur en Littérature comparée. Breton semble en effet procéder selon une démarche comparatiste en rassemblant des œuvres venues de différentes littératures au nom d'un principe censé les relier de manière souterraine. Les extraits choisis par l'auteur viennent alors justifier l'existence de la notion d'humour noir et illustrer les efforts successifs de définitions que le livre entend imposer. Breton délimiterait un nouveau terrain de 'recherches'.

Evidemment, ce point de vue académique n'intéressait nullement Breton, qui se flattait 'd'avoir apporté dans ce choix [de textes] une grande partialité, tant il est vrai qu'une telle disposition nous paraît seule de mise à ce sujet' (Breton 1990, 876).

On pourrait considérer aussi que l'humour noir n'est pas une catégorie préexistante à l'*Anthologie*. Celle-ci, suggère Mireille Rosello, est à considérer comme un genre littéraire à part. La 'voix' qui traverse le texte n'est pas celle de l'auteur André Breton, mais celle d'un 'narrateur' si l'on veut. L'humour noir, en ce sens, n'est pas un phénomène antérieur au texte, il est un effet de ce texte, 'une catégorie produite après-coup par une réalité textuelle à laquelle un lecteur donne vie' (Rosello 1989, 13).

La diversité des lectures provient de la richesse suggestive de l'*Anthologie*, de l'extension de la notion d'humour noir, mais aussi de la duplicité d'André Breton, introducteur et compilateur de ce type d'humour. Il joue en effet 'sur les deux tableaux' dans sa présentation du phénomène et des humoristes car il affirme qu'on ne peut définir l'humour et qu'il faut laisser la question en suspens tout en ayant résolu le problème puisqu'il nous donne des textes illustrant celui-ci. La logique de l'*Anthologie* est, comme l'a remarqué Rosello, celle d'un refus de la définition et d'une affirmation *de facto* de la notion par les exemples. On y reconnaîtra la duplicité profonde d'un geste de reconnaissance ('ceci est de l'humour noir') qui se nie en théorie.

C'est qu'il convient, comme toujours avec l'œuvre de Breton, de ne pas rechercher les éléments d'une esthétique, mais une attitude de l'esprit, une manière de vivre (éventuellement de mourir) qui déborde toute préoccupation textuelle. La question de l'humour a hanté Breton toute sa vie. Il éprouve de l'intérêt pour celui-ci dès sa rencontre avec Jacques Vaché (en 1916) et peut-être même avant. Comme l'édition 'définitive' de l'*Anthologie* date de 1966, il aura apporté des modifications à cette œuvre jusqu'à ses derniers jours (il meurt le 28 septembre 1966). Goût pour l'humour (Swift, Jarry, Vaché ...) et réflexion sur l'humour (Hegel, Freud ...) ne sont pas séparés. Selon lui, l'humour est l'une des notions-phares du surréalisme et de l'esprit moderne, l'une des voies libératrices dans lesquelles a pu s'engager l'esprit humain. L'humour appartient à la nébuleuse élective dans laquelle se situe le mouvement :

Il s'agit ici d'une valeur non seulement ascendante entre toutes, mais encore capable de se soumettre toutes les autres jusqu'à faire que bon nombre d'entre elles cessent d'être universellement cotées (Breton 1990, 868).

Son caractère éblouissant empêche de le définir : 'il ne peut être question d'explicitier l'humour et de le faire servir à des fins didactiques. Autant vouloir dégager du suicide une morale de la vie' (Breton 1990, 869). Placé sous le signe de Baudelaire et du dernier Rimbaud, il est donné pour un phénomène nécessaire à la sensibilité contemporaine.

Au plan conceptuel, 'Humour (noir)' est une notion que les surréalistes approfondissent grâce à deux références, Hegel et Freud<sup>9</sup>. La notion d'*humour objectif*, empruntée à Hegel (dans la traduction de l'*Esthétique* due à Charles Bénard), apparaît

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<sup>9</sup> Tinel a proposé une rapide archéologie de la notion. Sur les sources hégéliennes de la pensée surréaliste, voir Robert.

en 1932 dans *Misère de la poésie*<sup>10</sup>. A la même époque, Marco Ristitch se tourne, lui, vers Freud pour évoquer ainsi l'humour :

Par un mélange de réel et de fantastique, hors de toutes les limites du réalisme quotidien et de la logique rationnelle, l'humour et l'humour seul donne à ce qui l'entoure une nouveauté grotesque, un caractère hallucinatoire d'inexistence, ou du moins, une objectivité douteuse et méprisable et une importance dérisoire, à côté d'un sur-sens exceptionnel et éphémère, mais total. En contact avec la poésie, l'humour est l'expression extrême d'une inaccommodation convulsive, d'une révolte à laquelle sa retenue, sa compassion ne font que donner plus de force (Ristitch 1932, 36).

Quant à 'Misère de la poésie', le texte présente l'humour comme seul lieu de résolution possible de deux tendances (ou deux écueils ou deux pôles) de l'art romantique : 'l'imitation servile de la nature dans ses formes accidentelles' et 'L'humour comme conséquence de la personnalité d'atteindre son plus haut degré d'indépendance' (Breton 1990, 18–19). L'humour objectif est la fusion de l'une et de l'autre, leur 'pénétration intime' (Breton 1990, 472–496).

Par ailleurs, Breton marque son adhésion aux analyses de Freud, qui insistent sur le plaisir lié à l'humour<sup>11</sup>. 'Paratonnerre'

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<sup>10</sup> 1932 est l'année où le mot « humour », attesté en français dès 1725, entre dans le *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

<sup>11</sup> Breton rejoint Jean Frois-Wittmann qui, rendant compte du livre de Freud, *Le Mot d'esprit et ses rapports avec l'inconscient*, traduit par Marie Bonaparte et M. Nathan (Paris : Gallimard, 1930), relève « un commentaire particulièrement compréhensif de Freud : alors que l'esprit ne sert que le plaisir, ou le met au service de l'agression, l'humour doit à son caractère de défense contre la contrainte de la souffrance, donc à sa parenté avec les autres méthodes édifiées dans le même but par le psychisme humain (folie, névrose, extase, ivresse, etc.) 'une dignité qui manque totalement à l'esprit' » (Frois-Wittmann 1930, 27).

citera ainsi le père de la psychanalyse : 'Le moi se refuse à se laisser entamer, à se laisser imposer la souffrance par les réalités extérieures, il se refuse à admettre que les traumatismes du monde extérieur puissent le toucher ; bien plus, il fait voir qu'ils peuvent même lui devenir occasions de plaisir' (Breton 1990, 872).

La préface de l'*Anthologie* développe une chronologie selon laquelle Hegel 'a fait faire à l'humour un pas décisif dans le domaine de la connaissance lorsqu'il s'est élevé à la conception d'un humour objectif' (Breton 1990, 872), avant que Freud ne parvienne à des conclusions remarquables sur l'humour. Le but de l'*Anthologie* est donc de confronter la thèse de Freud avec des 'attitudes particulières qui relèvent de l'humour' et des 'textes où cet humour s'est trouvé porté littérairement à son plus haut degré d'expression.' (Breton 1990, 872). 'Humour noir' va donc concentrer l'attention sur un déchirement tragiquement vécu fondateur d'une vision du monde reliant Swift à Sade, La Fontaine à Lichtenberg, Vaché ou Grabbe.

La nouveauté de la notion en 1939 réside, comme le remarque Annie Le Brun, dans '*la prise exacte du principe contradictoire* auquel se heurte toujours toute conscience de la vie.' (Le Brun 1968, 102), conscience qui se double incessamment d'une ombre nouvelle surgissant dans chaque objet qu'elle appréhende. L'humour noir est un défi d'une intensité extraordinaire parce qu'il est un refus de fuite devant cette contradiction, 'parce qu'il réalise dans le sens de la vie la synthèse contradictoire de tout ce qui s'oppose' (Le Brun 103). Ainsi le Swift de la 'Modeste Proposition.' tire-t-il de l'affreuse misère irlandaise une terrible invitation à l'appétit de vie.

La révolte de l'humour noir consiste en un refus de laisser se développer la moindre sensibilité à l'égard du Moi, refus donc de céder à la peur voire à l'effroi devant les circonstances les



plus menaçantes de la vie. En témoigne l'exemple de Nietzsche : sentant les premières atteintes de la folie, il peut écrire à un psychiatre : 'Certes, j'aimerais bien mieux être professeur à Bâle que d'être Dieu ; mais je n'ai pas osé pousser mon égoïsme privé au point d'abandonner la création du monde' (Breton 1990, 984). Le Moi affronte tout ce qui l'amoindrit avec force, opposant à l'ensemble des répressions de la vie (de la plus évidente, la mort, à toutes celles qui corrodent la liberté de jouir, des iniquités sociales aux réductions de la pensée discursive) 'un climat de subversion affective et intellectuelle qui risque fort de miner la santé de qui se croit sur pied' (Le Brun 1968, 104).

Dès lors, non seulement cette révolte de l'humour noir projette sa violente lumière sur les murs de la prison de l'existence, mais elle bloque, de manière éphémère, tous ses mécanismes répressifs grâce à '*une intense innervation du monde par le plaisir*' (Le Brun 1968, 106). L'existence peut bien consumer son apparence, l'être de l'humoriste n'est pas (immédiatement) atteint par l'adversité, encore moins par la crainte. L'humour noir est alors ce 'dynamisme qui illumine tous les points de la contradiction de vivre et n'en brille pas moins de tous les feux de la vie.' (Le Brun 1968, 108), soleil éclatant des gouffres.

L'humour noir synthétise ainsi toutes les exigences que Breton assigne au mouvement surréaliste : abandon des voies de la logique ordinaire, dislocation des lois organisatrices du langage, poétique de l'image reliée à celle de la poésie. Il apparaît comme un concept central et permanent. Le qualificatif 'noir' vient désigner sa qualité la plus éminente attachée, arrachée au caractère effrayant et désespérant de l'existence<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Et qui fait du Mexique, aux 'splendides jouets funèbres', 'la terre d'élection de l'humour noir' (Breton 1990, 871), sur cette localisation du phénomène, voir Tinel.

Une telle exigence n'a pas été immédiatement reconnue. La réception de l'œuvre en France au lendemain de la guerre est décevante pour Breton<sup>13</sup>. Dans l'un des rares articles de l'époque sur le livre, Raymond Queneau, qui ne figure pas dans l'*Anthologie*, réduit la violence de l'humour noir à un jeu intellectuel et à un conflit sans conséquence avec la bourgeoisie<sup>14</sup>. Pourtant, en 1966, l'année même de la parution de l'édition définitive, Annie Le Brun souligne son importance : 'Dans l'humour noir, l'homme affronte la vie sous les feux croisés de la mort et du plaisir, seuls capables de fouiller l'espace humain dans ce qu'il a encore d'inexploré' (Le Brun 1968, 113). L'*Anthologie* aura ainsi contribué à l'éclaircissement d'une valeur éminente du surréalisme, la révolte supérieure de l'esprit contre toutes les puissances d'asservissement, dont la peur.

## Et les formes ?

On conçoit que les prolongements ultimes de l'attitude humoristique résident dans une philosophie de l'existence qui déborde la littérature. Mais on peut aussi partir de ces éléments pour décrire un certain nombre de procédures textuelles manifestant cette attitude et qui méritent d'être éclairées dans une perspective littéraire.

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<sup>13</sup> Alors que les rééditions seront saluées (Sheringham).

<sup>14</sup> Queneau écrit : 'L'humour noir se révolte, dit Breton. Entre autres, contre le monde bourgeois. Il en donne une peinture outrée qui a une valeur dissociative puissante. Mais cette peinture outrée n'est réalisée que par le nazisme, qui fait passer dans le réel les mauvaises plaisanteries d'un Sade ou d'un Kafka ou du rajah d'Alphonse Allais. Or, la lutte contre le nazisme, elle, ne s'est pas faite sur le plan de cet humour noir. Elle s'est faite à coups de mitraillettes et de bombes de dix tonnes. Voilà où nous en sommes. Et après ? Je disais bien que les commentaires de Breton dataient un peu'.

Le texte d'humour présente une posture d'énonciation caractéristique instituant un risible – l'élément dont on rit – en même temps qu'un certain rapport à celui-ci, posture supposant partenaire, médiation, intentionnalité. A partir de là, on peut envisager une poétique des effets de positions de certaines instances textuelles. Un texte comique suppose en effet l'interaction de trois instances, selon une structure triangulaire : le rieur – 'l'ethos' –, le lecteur ou public qu'il vise (lecteur, public impliqué<sup>15</sup>) et le risible, l'élément provoquant le rire.

Les relations entre ces instances varient, modalisées *ad libitum* selon les structures narratologiques et sémiotiques, mais dans un domaine où un certain degré de simplification est souhaitable, trois dispositifs s'observent, idéaux-types où se manifestent différents types de tension entre les instances du texte : deux dispositifs où l'ethos se sépare du risible pour s'en amuser ou le juger, un dispositif où l'ethos se place dans une position ambivalente de distance et de proximité du risible.

Dans le comique, l'ethos et le destinataire marquent leur distance par rapport au risible pour s'en amuser, selon une démarche ludique orientée vers la moquerie. Le risible consiste en toute déviation par rapport à une norme (implicite ou non) : texte pour *rire de*, où l'objet du rire est une victime tenue à distance. Dans la satire, l'ethos et le destinataire se séparent du risible tout en le condamnant et en proposant un ordre, selon une démarche correctrice orientée vers le triomphe : texte pour *rire contre*, où l'objet du rire est une cible contre laquelle sont affirmées des valeurs.

En revanche, avec l'humour, l'ethos et le destinataire ne se séparent pas du risible, ils s'y incluent dans une sorte de coexistence amusée qui répond à un mouvement de généralisation : sont

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<sup>15</sup> On distingue ici l'auditoire universel (défini comme tout être de raison) de l'auditoire particulier, dans les termes de Chaïm Perelman (Perelman).

risibles tant la norme que la déviation par rapport à la norme ou l'absence de toute norme. Il s'agit d'un texte pour *rire avec*, où objet et sujet du rire sont inséparables. Alors que comique et satire se fondent sur la dualité rieur/risible et que leur rire procède par détachement (moquerie, mépris, triomphe)<sup>16</sup> d'un devenir érigé en spectacle, l'humour marque la coexistence du rieur et du risible : 'L'esprit rit des choses ; l'humour rit avec elles' (Carlyle).

Cette ambivalence humoristique va se vérifier dans les formes textuelles, à tous les niveaux d'une œuvre : générique, rhétorique, thématique ainsi qu'au plan des personnages (Moura 2010). L'hypothèse mérite d'être considérée, elle reste à étudier d'une manière systématique.

La littérature générale et comparée trouve là un programme de recherches longtemps négligé, surtout en France. Sans doute parce que nous continuons à considérer que l'humoriste est le plus petit des hommes de génie, et que notre littérature s'est accoutumée, depuis la constitution de sa doctrine classique, à laisser nos humoristes en dehors de ce qui fait sa signification et sa grandeur. On peut le regretter et tenter, dans le cadre de la Société Européenne de Littérature Comparée, d'y remédier.

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<sup>16</sup> Selon le principe bien observé par Jean Emelina : 'LA CONDITION NECESSAIRE ET SUFFISANTE DU COMIQUE EST UNE POSITION DE DISTANCE PAR RAPPORT A TOUT PHENOMENE CONSIDERE COMME ANORMAL ET PAR RAPPORT A SES CONSEQUENCES EVENTUELLES' (Emelina 1991, 81).

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# L'Autre dans la fiction post-apocalyptique du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle

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## Introduction

En lien avec la grande tendance de fictions post-apocalyptiques, les études scientifiques sur le sujet de la fin du monde s'amplifient également : on analyse ces textes afin de mieux comprendre si on vit aujourd'hui dans un *zeitgeist* post-apocalyptique, ou si la dominance du sujet et l'utilisation excessive du terme dans le langage quotidien révèle une certaine indifférence envers la catastrophe. De plus, on explorera les fonctions qui relèvent de cette angoisse, car il est clair que les fictions contemporaines se réfèrent souvent aux sujets socio-politiques et aux crises écologiques actuelles qui menacent l'existence de l'homme

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moderne. Les romans comme *Die Einöder* de Manfred Böckl (2007), *Terminus radieux* d'Antoine Volodine (2014), *Station Eleven* d'Emily St. John Mandel (2015) et la série de romans *Rain* de Shaun Harbinger (2015) traitent des multiples destructions que l'homme cause sur la planète, de leurs effets sur l'individu ainsi que sur la société (des survivants), et ils reflètent les discours réels actuels. Cependant, la fiction contemporaine se concentre plutôt sur l'époque qui suivrait le(s) grand(s) désastre(s), on pourrait donc supposer qu'on ne craigne plus l'apocalypse, mais plutôt le temps qui viendra(it).

Dans l'article présent, on étudiera pourquoi et comment la fin du monde devient une catégorie existentielle en appliquant la philosophie de Jean-Paul Sartre à la littérature contemporaine. Ainsi, on expliquera à l'aide de romans exemplaires le potentiel de la catastrophe apocalyptique à constituer le néant de l'humanité et on évoquera comment on peut en déduire des conceptions de l'identité future.

## L'évolution du terme post-apocalypse

Le terme *apocalypse*, dérivé de la première ligne du *Livre de la Révélation* (Schreiber 2013, 566), sert dans la théologie moderne à désigner un certain genre de textes bibliques qui sont caractérisés par une vision du monde : le monde arrivera à un changement radical, un combat final entre le Bien et le Mal lancé par Dieu, qui entraînerait la destruction des infidèles, puis la victoire définitive de Dieu qui instaurerait la paix dans son royaume divin sur terre (566). C'est en effet le moment de la révélation envers un prophète qui s'exprime dans le mot grec ancien *apokaluptô* du chapitre Ap. 1:1 signifiant 'je dévoile' (Derrida 1983, 11–12).

L'auteur du *Livre de la Révélation* transcrit ces visions à une époque où les premiers chrétiens en Asie Mineure se voyaient menacés par la culture romaine dominante (Schreiber 2013, 567). Dans la perspective de Jean de Patmos, ils avaient besoin de la destruction du monde existant afin de protéger leur identité culturelle et religieuse (581–583) ; ce sentiment d'angoisse et d'impuissance est la source des descriptions drastiques et catastrophiques de ce changement du monde (567). De plus, ces textes représentent la base pour une perception linéaire de l'histoire, structurée par un enchaînement de *passé*, *présent* et *futur* (Drewermann 1985) : la conviction générale était encore dans l'Israël ancien, que le temps se déroule de façon circulaire, suivant l'ordre répétitif des fêtes religieuses (437). Les auteurs des textes apocalyptiques, en revanche, sont certains que le désastre est inévitable et imminent, leur seul intérêt est de savoir avec quelle ampleur il frappera (468). À l'inverse se développe avec l'ère séculière le *Fortschrittsglaube*, la conviction que l'histoire avancerait parallèlement avec la perfection progressive de l'homme (Kuhnle 2005). À cela s'ajoute la nécessité psychologique de l'être humain de posséder une biographie complète, pour soi et pour son espèce entière, ce qui est une fonction du mythe ainsi que de l'apocalypse, clarifie Frank Kermode (1966, 8). Selon lui, les fictions servent à la compréhension et elles s'adaptent au processus qui veut donner du sens au passé ; l'homme a donc besoin de la fiction, alors que le mythe cherche à établir de la stabilité (39).

L'ère séculière introduit en outre à l'essor des sciences naturelles la conception d'une apocalypse comme *fin finale* : les inventions humaines aident à promouvoir la civilisation, font s'accroître le nombre d'habitants sur la planète, mais en même temps, on développe des technologies de plus en plus dangereuses. Ensemble, avec l'élargissement des connaissances scientifiques,

se répand le scepticisme envers la religion et finalement, l'homme prend la place de Dieu comme Créateur et Destructeur. Ce sont surtout les bombes nucléaires et les crises globales qui incitent les philosophes comme Günther Anders (2003) à discuter dès les années 1970 le pouvoir (auto-) destructif de l'humanité. Il est d'avis que notre époque actuelle sera la dernière (61). Jean-Paul Engélibert (2013) analyse également cette évolution et conclut que l'homme est responsable pour la persistance – ou non – de la Terre. Ainsi, le terme *apocalypse* est devenu un terme séculier qui signifie *la fin du monde causée par l'homme et sans histoire sainte*, ce qui mène à ce *zeitgeist* actuel que 'la catastrophe définit notre modernité' (15). Engélibert explique que déjà le fait qu'on se pose la question sur la fin du monde montre que la civilisation se trouve dans sa dernière époque (181). Il voit ainsi le potentiel créatif de la négation que le scénario apocalyptique (dans le sens de *fin du monde*) propose.

Parallèlement, avec le début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les fictions recommencent à raconter un Après: les ressources sont diminuées, souvent polluées, la population humaine est dispersée, l'intérêt principal des survivants est alors de reconstruire leur civilisation. Dans un tel cadre fictionnel, les auteurs mettent en question comment s'organiseront les hommes, comment ils définiront leur identité. C'est en effet le royaume de l'homme qui viendra après le bouleversement, car c'est lui qui met fin au monde précédent tout en reconstituant lui-même l'environnement de l'avenir. De cette manière, le terme *apocalypse* regagne sa signification originale d'un *changement*, mais dans un contexte séculier, car il ne dénomme plus la fin, mais une transition. Les fictions contemporaines sont en fait plutôt *post-apocalyptiques* et il semble que l'angoisse apocalyptique est en train de perdre son impact et que les inquiétudes se concentrent plutôt sur les conséquences de la catastrophe. On revient à l'idée que la catastrophe ne

soit qu'un moment dans l'histoire, que l'apocalypse soit donc *transitoire*. Les narrations se passent à l'époque après le désastre, ce qui permet un point de vue extérieur comme l'explique Hans Krah (2004) : ces scénarios répondent aux besoins du public de savoir ce qui viendrait après, mais ils impliquent aussi que les événements dévastateurs n'affectent qu'une partie de la planète et de l'humanité (82–84). Hans Krah souligne qu'une telle narration marginalise le désastre (84) et on peut se demander si cela tire ses origines dans le sentiment d'impuissance envers les crises actuelles qui s'additionnent à une véritable *méta-crise* proche du *tipping point* selon Claus Leggewie et Harald Welzer (2013). Les chercheurs allemands développent la théorie que l'humanité est en train de risquer un scénario de désastres multiples qui ont leur origine dans le changement climatique anthropique qui force l'humanité à reconsidérer ses coutumes et actions (22).

Eva Horn (2017) applique ce terme de *méta-crise* à la fiction et montre comment les crises réelles influencent la littérature et le film du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le problème avec cette *méta-crise* se tient au fait qu'elle ne se produit pas d'un seul coup, mais qu'elle se développe lentement : c'est une *catastrophe sans événement* (27), qui survient sans qu'il soit possible d'identifier les acteurs, les coupables et les mesures à prendre (Horn 2014, 20). L'apocalypse lente et la *méta-crise* mettent l'homme dans un état d'inactivité, paralysé par les dévastations qu'il a causées : une fonction fondamentale de la fiction post-apocalyptique est donc de transformer la *méta-crise* diffuse en histoires saisissables et en figures concrètes (Horn 2017, 27).

## L'identité existentialiste de la post-apocalypse

Le scénario post-apocalyptique exprime dans la fiction les sentiments de menace de notre identité, car ce n'est pas seulement le monde qui se tourne contre le Moi, mais c'est également l'autre homme qui incarne un risque. L'apocalypse dans la signification d'aujourd'hui constitue une catégorie existentielle, parce qu'elle remet l'être humain contemporain en question. Pour arriver à cette conclusion, il faut d'abord expliquer brièvement la notion *existentialiste* empruntée à Jean-Paul Sartre pour l'appliquer aux fictions post-apocalyptiques. Sartre essaie de délimiter l'existence humaine par une approche ontologique et phénoménologique. Selon lui, l'aspect principal de l'existence humaine est le *néant* qui est indispensable pour le processus de la prise de conscience. Suivant son argumentation, tout d'abord, l'homme est une chose parmi toutes les choses, il est un *être en soi*, c'est le simple fait d'exister. Cependant, comparé aux autres créatures vivantes et les objets morts, l'homme se rend compte de son existence et de sa liberté. Pour accéder à cette conscience, il faut prendre une perspective extérieure, ainsi, il met le néant entre soi et son existence et devient un *être pour soi* (Sartre 1994, 665). Sartre explique que l'homme est la seule chose qui est capable de se nier ainsi, d'où sa liberté absolue (Streller 1952, 5). Naturellement, cette liberté absolue comprend la pleine responsabilité, car il n'y a pas de plan ou d'être divin (23), il n'y a ni une raison pour l'existence de l'homme, ni une vision à accomplir. En outre ce *néant* est une source d'angoisse ; accepter son obligation de gérer les conséquences de ses actes induit d'autant plus d'anxiété. Finalement, l'homme craint de perdre son identité comme *être pour soi* face à la rencontre de l'Autre (Bedorf 2012, 165).

La confrontation avec l'Autre provoque des interactions et interdépendances, car l'Autre, lui aussi, est un *être pour soi* avec une conscience, comme le Moi (Streller 1952, 10). Il a le même mode d'existence et ainsi les mêmes droits (11), clarifie Streller et c'est l'étude du regard de l'Autre qui explique le mieux les propos de Sartre sur la liberté et la responsabilité. C'est en effet la présence de l'Autre qui remet le Moi à son état d'*être en soi*, parce que le Moi est un des nombreux objets dans le monde de l'Autre. Il devient la mort des possibilités du Moi (Bedorf 2012, 166) ! Par son regard, le Moi perd son statut indépendant et il est maintenant un *être pour autrui* – une relation qui se produit également à l'inverse. L'analyse des romans révélera que le regard de l'Autre est un sujet récurrent dans la littérature contemporaine post-apocalyptique. Rencontrer un autre être humain, être vu ou éviter d'être vu, ce sont les moments de tension dans les narrations. La conception existentialiste de l'identité selon Sartre est applicable à la littérature post-apocalyptique, parce qu'elle remet l'existence humaine en question.

Suivant l'argumentation de Leggewie et Welzer (2013), l'identité de l'homme moderne des pays industriels se fonde sur les biens matériels qu'il possède (234). Leggewie et Welzer précisent que si le succès, le statut social, les biens sont les seuls moyens de définir le Soi, celui-ci est en péril dès que ces facteurs essentiels manquent. Afin de prévenir la *méta-crise*, ils proposent de se rendre de nouveau compte que l'homme devrait se définir par ses actes et non pas par ses biens (235). Il faut en conséquence revenir à ce qui selon Sartre constitue l'être humain : sa réalité est liée à ses actions qui sont en même temps l'expression de sa liberté (Streller 1952, 12).

Appliqué dans la littérature, on comprend que cela est la raison pour laquelle les scénarios apocalyptiques sont si angoissants, car ils mettent en danger l'identité de l'homme moderne en

détruisant ce qu'il possède. L'étude des romans montre que la véritable catastrophe dans un monde post-apocalyptique est en effet la perte des conditions de vie auxquels on s'est habitué. Les survivants doivent non seulement réorganiser leur civilisation, mais aussi reconstituer leur identité. Dans la logique de Sartre, on peut alors considérer la catastrophe apocalyptique comme la *néantisation* de l'humanité entière, parce qu'elle a la force de prendre du recul afin d'atteindre la conscience.

## 'Fear is a choice you embrace', ou bien la transformation productive de l'angoisse apocalyptique ?

La chanson *Weak Fantasy* du groupe Nightwish traite de ce renoncement à l'autonomie de l'homme que Sartre critique également dans sa philosophie : l'homme a la tendance de succomber à l'angoisse comme conséquence de sa conception de vérité, de l'influence des cultes, ce que le groupe compare à un ensorcellement qui, en répondant aux envies pour le fantastique et une nécrocratie masculine, comble le vide en avec une histoire folle – les enfants méritaient mieux<sup>1</sup>. L'homme cherche une explication, une justification et une direction pour son existence au lieu d'agir de façon indépendante et il a tendance à se soumettre à la peur.

En revanche, la littérature post-apocalyptique peut proposer des stratégies pour transformer productivement les angoisses de notre société ; il serait donc présomptueux de la

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<sup>1</sup> Texte original : 'Fear is a choice you embrace – your only truth, tribal poetry, witchcraft filling your void, lust for fantasy, male necrocracy, every child worthy of a better tale' (Holopainen & Hietala 2015).

juger comme simple distraction. Bien au contraire, Eva Horn (2017, 30) démontre qu'il y a trois lectures principales de cette fiction : a) la consommation des scénarios de catastrophe sur un mode d'interpassivité, tout en se référant à Slavoj Žižek, b) l'appel à l'action et d'avertir l'humanité des crises à venir et c) la transmission de savoir sur les catastrophes, une lecture analytique et éclairée dans le but de faire face à l'angoisse et de la transformer en actions pour éviter les désastres ultérieurs.

Les écritures post-apocalyptiques peuvent inciter leurs lecteurs à agir, surtout pour les textes qu'on définit comme *écofiction* : un aspect crucial surtout de l'écothriller est d'avertir le large public des conséquences catastrophiques des activités de l'homme (Dürbeck 2017, 318–321). Non seulement la crainte de détruire la planète et les créatures innocentes caractérise ce genre, mais c'est également la lutte pour les ressources qui est exprimée (voir de nouveau *Die Einöder*). Dans son roman, Böckl montre où se terminerait notre civilisation consommatrice si on ne changeait pas nos habitudes : dans des escalades de la violence, l'exploitation des hommes et de l'environnement jusqu'à la *méta-crise*. Ceux qui vivent dans l'époque suivante sont menacés par les contaminations toxiques et nucléaires du sol et de l'atmosphère et par la diminution des ressources. Ce n'est pas seulement la nature qui souffre, mais aussi les êtres humains : Böckl peint l'image d'une société où les maîtres de la ville, les ingénieurs, médecins, biologistes, abusent de leur pouvoir sur la production de la nourriture et de l'oxygène pur afin d'asservir la population illettrée.

Ces textes utilisent donc le scénario apocalyptique comme une critique du capitalisme, de la consommation, de la destruction de l'environnement et finalement des évolutions politiques, de la déchéance de l'éthique et des mœurs. Une telle littérature vise à avertir de l'aggravation des problèmes après les catastrophes



apocalyptiques. Les textes ne se consomment pas passivement, mais ils invitent les lecteurs à remettre leur mode de vie en question.

La troisième façon de lire ces fictions serait selon Horn (2017, 30) de les considérer comme un moyen de transmettre du savoir nécessaire pour gérer les crises de l'avenir. Les scénarios sont décrits avec une forte référence à la réalité dans le but de rendre le public capable d'agir pour prévenir la catastrophe. Horn fait le lien avec la théorie de Jean-Pierre Dupuy qui revendique déjà en 2002 une interprétation du *zeitgeist* (post-) apocalyptique de manière productive et plaide 'pour un catastrophisme éclairé'. Ainsi, il recourt à la conception originale de l'apocalyptique qui cherchait à cette époque à estimer l'ampleur du désastre ; le *catastrophisme éclairé* vise cependant à l'éviter avant toute chose. Pour ainsi faire, il est nécessaire de bien distinguer la précaution de la prévention (Dupuy 2002, 161) et de se rendre compte du fait qu'en réalité, on ne peut pas réagir en avance à la catastrophe (162). Eva Horn (2017, 31) explique que cela est possible dans la fiction qui montre souvent que et comment le désastre est évitable. Hans Kraah (2004, 83) est du même avis en constatant que la narration (post-) apocalyptique possède le potentiel de contribuer à la résolution des problèmes qu'elle décrit. Par rapport aux *ecothrillers* (Dürbeck 2017), ces solutions sont normalement d'un caractère technique. Néanmoins, on verra plus bas que les romans choisis pour cette analyse présentent une autre idée : l'homme en soi doit changer afin de prévenir la catastrophe, tout en racontant l'histoire à partir de l'époque post-apocalyptique. On démontrera comment de tels textes posent des questions sur notre identité moderne qui est marquée par la *méta-crise* et comment les auteurs imaginent l'existence humaine dans un futur antérieur (Horn 2017, 24).

## Analyse de romans exemplaires

Dans la grande diversité de romans post-apocalyptiques (aussi de sous-genres et de sujets) du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, on a choisi des romans exemplaires afin d'illustrer les propos qui précèdent : ce seront *Die Einöder* de Manfred Böckl (2007), *Station Eleven* d'Emily St. John Mandel (2015) et *Terminus radieux* d'Antoine Volodine (2014). Ils représentent la sphère culturelle des pays industriels de l'Ouest où la thématique de la post-apocalypse est actuellement très importante en fiction. Cela se justifie par les références aux textes bibliques qui sont fondateurs pour les conceptions apocalyptiques. Les romans remettent l'identité de l'homme moderne en question en imaginant la destruction de ses biens matériels sur lesquels il base sa conception du Soi. Ainsi, ces romans utilisent l'événement catastrophique comme le *néant* nécessaire afin que l'homme prenne conscience du Soi – l'apocalypse devient donc une catégorie existentielle selon Sartre et on prouvera que surtout sa phénoménologie du regard est un sujet récurrent dans les romans. De plus, les auteurs transforment productivement l'angoisse apocalyptique en proposant des alternatives aux habitudes dévastatrices des sociétés modernes, ou en proposant des autres concepts d'identités humaines.

### La perte de l'identité dans *Die Einöder* de Manfred Böckl (2007)

Le texte de l'auteur allemand est typique pour le genre écocritique (Goodbody 2017), car il combine les faits scientifiques sur le changement climatique et la *méta-crise* imminente avec une narration captivante sur la survie dans un monde dévasté.

Dans une vieille ferme isolée dans la Forêt de Bavière, un vieux couple de paysans résiste aux contaminations, aux caprices météorologiques mortelles, à la famine ; comme Adam et Ève expulsés du paradis, ils gagnent leur vie à la sueur de leur front. Comme le couple biblique, ces paysans subissent les souffrances extrêmes après avoir été expulsés du paradis ; cette vue de la douleur de l'humanité entière, symbolisée par eux, évoque la pitié de l'étranger<sup>2</sup>.

Un jour, un homme arrivant à leur ferme se déclare prêtre-itinérant, offre la bénédiction de Dieu sous forme d'une dose gratuite d'oxygène pur, qui est rare à cette époque et qui soulage pour un moment les souffrances des ermites. Il les compare à Adam et Ève – eux, ils ont arrêté de prier et de croire, de parler, de ressentir, lors de la lutte quotidienne pour l'existence. On ne connaît pas les causes exactes de la catastrophe, mais l'auteur fait un bref résumé des violences commises envers l'environnement et l'homme. L'oxygène pur stimule les émotions et les souvenirs des paysans et le vieil homme décide de marcher jusqu'à la grande ville dont le prêtre a parlé afin de récupérer une bouteille du gaz précieux pour sa femme. Le trajet est dangereux, car le désastre a dispersé les populations et on se rencontre rarement et avec précaution : au lieu de le saluer, les habitants des villages regardent le vieux fixement et hostilement<sup>3</sup>. Le regard de l'Autre devient un moment risqué, une menace existentielle, qui réduit le Moi à un objet de l'Autre, mais dans une situation décisive pour la survie. Ainsi, les personnes perdent leurs prénoms et sont

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<sup>2</sup> Texte original : 'und sah euch im Schweiß eures Angesichts darben und keuchen, und in meinem Herzen erkannte ich das ganze Leid der Menschheit in euch. So erweckte eure Verzweiflung die Erinnerung an Adam und Eva in mir, die genau wie ihr äußerste Mühsal erdulden mußten, nachdem der Ewige sie aus dem Garten Eden verjagt hatte' (Böckl 2007, 49).

<sup>3</sup> Text original : 'niemand grüßte ihn, und manche Leute starrten ihn sogar mit unverhohlener Feindseligkeit an' (p. 91).

désormais appelées par leurs traits visibles d'un seul coup d'œil : 'den Alten' ('le vieux', 45), 'der Glotzüugige' ('l'exophtalme', 97), 'der Fette' ('le gros', 94–95). Ceci a un impact considérable sur les normes pour l'interaction interhumaine : les maîtres de la grande ville sont les scientifiques qui savent créer des variétés de plantes résistantes à la contamination et produire de l'oxygène (103–104). Ils exploitent les illettrés comme travailleurs dans leur agriculture et comme esclaves sexuels pendant leurs fêtes orgiaques dans la mairie<sup>4</sup>.

En revanche, les souverains ne leurs accordent que des aliments de qualité inférieure et les traitent comme des bêtes. Le vieil ermite, de même que son prédécesseur, le randonneur, se retrouve rapidement sur les tables, enivré par l'alcool, l'oxygène et les délices de la fête. En échange, il est forcé de se déguiser, de s'humilier, pour divertir les régents (105). Il leurs échappe pendant une véritable chasse à l'homme et quand il arrive à sa ferme avec une bouteille d'oxygène, il trouve le corps mort de sa femme. Lui aussi meurt après avoir été attaqué par un lynx.

Avec sa narration, Böckl avertit ses lecteurs que seuls les hommes les plus violents et sans scrupules survivraient à la catastrophe apocalyptique : le royaume humain serait l'enfer sur terre et il faudrait le désastre pour qu'on le comprenne. Le meilleur pour la nature serait la disparition de l'homme. Basée sur une éthique de consommation, la civilisation moderne est décadente, elle ne laisse que des dégâts après avoir exploité la planète. Cela explique pourquoi Böckl ne laisse pas survivre ses protagonistes, parce que la nature souffre de la présence humaine.

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<sup>4</sup> Text original : 'Die Angehörigen des Herrscherbundes wiederum sahen in den einfachen Leuten nichts weiter als wertlosen Pöbel, den man freilich für bestimmte primitive Arbeiten benötigte ... gefielen sich die Herrscher bisweilen darin, junge Männer und Frauen aus der niedrigen Bevölkerungsschicht zu den Orgien zu befehlen, wo die Betroffenen dann zu perversen Sexspielen gezwungen wurden' (104–105).

De plus, il montre que le Dieu chrétien ne sauve pas ses fidèles et qu'il n'y a pas un plan divin. C'est donc un regard critique sur sa propre espèce qu'il espère rendre plus raisonnable à travers de la lecture de son roman.

## La perte et la réorganisation de la civilisation dans *Station Eleven* d'Emily St. John Mandel

L'auteure canadienne Emily St. John Mandel raconte dans son quatrième roman, *Station Eleven* (2015), le déclenchement d'une épidémie qui tue une grande partie de la population humaine. Dans une narration qui saute entre le présent, les flashbacks et les visions, St. John Mandel décrit les voyages d'une compagnie de théâtre et de musique qui rend visite aux colonies de survivants dans le paysage dévasté. Ils apportent du divertissement en présentant des spectacles et des concerts, parce qu'ils savent que la survie ne suffit pas pour l'être humain : le slogan 'Survival is insuffisant' (St. John Mandel 2015, 119) est tatoué sur le bras de la jeune protagoniste Kirsten Raymonde. Pour le groupe, la beauté artistique est également le traitement de leurs traumatismes et névroses (47). L'auteure souligne ainsi que l'être humain a des besoins plus complexes que la simple préservation de la vie ce qui risque facilement d'être oublié dans une civilisation actuelle qui se perd dans la distraction. Les survivants se rendent compte de ce fait quand ils sont privés des accomplissements de la civilisation moderne (31–32). La cohésion sociale est également affaiblie, ce qui se fait remarquer parfois quand le *Travelling Symphony* est contesté violemment (119). La rencontre avec les étrangers est un péril comme dans *Die Einöder* et définie par une

inquiétude permanente. Kirsten évite d'en parler, mais elle a dû tuer deux personnes en situation d'autodéfense (119 et 295). De plus, elle préfère oublier tout ce qui constituait son identité dans le passé. Elle est convaincue que ceux qui se souviennent sont condamnés à mourir ; ceux qui s'accrochent au bon vieux temps, le monde avant la grippe, ont du mal à s'adapter<sup>5</sup>. Le monde post-apocalyptique force l'homme à se redéfinir et comme ses souvenirs font partie du passé, il fait mieux de les abandonner, pense Kirsten.

Un autre personnage s'occupant des souvenirs est Clark Thompson, qui échoue à l'aéroport de Severn City avec d'autres passagers. Ils sont épargnés par la grippe, mais n'osent pas entrer en contact avec le monde extérieur. Ainsi, ils reconstruisent une société dans le terminal, réorganisent les structures de la cohabitation et apprennent à accepter des conditions de vie plus simples. Cette population symbolise donc ce qui reste de l'identité de l'homme moderne privé de ses biens matériels. Néanmoins, Clark voit dans les objets devenus obsolètes sans électricité, comme son iPhone, des ordinateurs portables, des jouets, une paire de hauts talons, un permis de conduire, des témoignages de l'artisanat et de l'ingéniosité de l'homme<sup>6</sup>. Ce roman révèle ainsi que les objets représentent eux-aussi les êtres humains avec lesquels ils étaient en contact. Il y a donc une interaction entre l'humain et la marchandise ; avec son musée improvisé, Clark

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<sup>5</sup> Texte original : 'But my point is, doesn't it seem to you that the people who have the hardest time in this – current era, whatever you want to call it, the world after the Georgia Flu – doesn't it seem like the people who struggle the most with it are the people who remember the old world clearly ?' (St. John Mandel 2015, 195).

<sup>6</sup> Texte original : 'Clark placed his useless iPhone on the top shelf. ... Beside it, Lily Patterson's driver's licence. ... They looked insubstantial there, so he added his laptop, and this was the beginning of the Museum of Civilization. ... He stood by the case and found himself moved by every object he saw there, by the human enterprise each object had required' (254–255).

veut commémorer les personnes et les civilisations exterminés par la catastrophe apocalyptique.

Ce que les survivants ont perdu leur ne devient pas conscient sans ces références matérielles et sans les souvenirs répétés dans leur mémoire. Kirsten était trop jeune au moment où l'épidémie commença et ne se rappelle plus les ordinateurs ou les téléviseurs, à la différence de son ami August qui essaye de retourner mentalement à son enfance (38–39). La protagoniste pourtant, en toute contradiction de son mantra de ne pas se laisser affaiblir par son passé, garde en soi le souvenir de lampes électriques, un éclairage de nuit en rose qu'elle avait sur sa table de nuit<sup>7</sup>. Les autres membres du *Travelling Symphony* font l'expérience que les spectateurs eux-aussi préfèrent revenir dans un passé plus lointain, dans un meilleur monde, que l'époque qu'ils connaissaient. Les pièces de théâtre modernes sont moins appréciées comparé aux classiques de Shakespeare<sup>8</sup>.

Il vaut mieux ne pas penser à la période à laquelle on se sent encore trop attaché, quand les catastrophes se déclenchèrent. Les différents personnages essayent donc de dépasser les traumatismes avec des méthodes très diverses et la capacité de s'exprimer et de réviser les expériences personnelles en sont une grande partie, voir la thérapie *cathartique* selon Josef Breuer et Sigmund Freud (1995). Puis, comme pour les personnages de Böckl, les prénoms sont importants pour la définition des individus même si la fonction des noms confine à l'absurde (Fricke 1981, 33). Les membres de la compagnie sont souvent

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<sup>7</sup> Texte original : 'She harboured visions of a lamp with a pink shade on a side table, a nightlight shaped like a puffy half-moon, a chandelier in a dining room, a brilliant stage' (39).

<sup>8</sup> Text original : 'They'd performed more modern plays sometimes in the first few years, but what was startling, what no one would have anticipated, was that audiences seemed to prefer Shakespeare to their other theatrical offering. « People want what was best about the world, » Dieter said' (38).

appelés selon leur fonction ou par ce qui est visible : il y a par exemple 'the second horn' (le deuxième cor), 'the seventh guitar' (la septième guitare), 'the third cello' (le troisième violoncelle, St. John Mandel 2015, 46–49), ou leur antagoniste 'the prophet' (59) etc. Ce prophète auto-déclaré, encore un parallèle avec *Die Einöder*, n'était qu'un jeune garçon à l'apparition de la grippe. À l'aéroport, il cherche le sens plus profond dans la catastrophe en fantasmant sur le *Livre de la Révélation* et la bande dessinée de science-fiction *Station Eleven* que l'ex-femme de son père avait créée. Le jeune Tyler devient progressivement plus fanatique et quelques années plus tard, il fonde une secte radicale qui terrorise la région et menace le *Travelling Symphony*. C'est donc le désastre global qui déclenche le fort besoin psychologique chez l'homme de comprendre les événements, de connaître ce qui constitue son existence.

Tyler est tué lors de la confrontation finale entre les fidèles du prophète et les artistes ; Kirsten trouve dans sa poche des pages abîmées de la B.D. et de la Bible. Ainsi, elle comprend le lien personnel entre eux : elle connaissait le père de Tyler et le prophète n'était, comme elle, qu'un être humain perdu dans le monde post-apocalyptique (304). De cette manière, c'est à l'aide d'un objet matériel du vieux monde que ce jeune homme est identifié. St. John Mandel remet de nouveau en question l'identité de l'homme moderne à travers les biens qui l'entourent.

La troisième similarité avec *Die Einöder* est le retrait dans des petites communautés et le rejet des autres. Même au sein du *Travelling Symphony*, les artistes se regroupent selon leurs instruments, tout en faisant allusion à la citation fameuse de Sartre: quelqu'un a écrit 'L'enfer, c'est les autres' sur le camping-car et une autre personne a remplacé 'autres' avec 'flutes'<sup>9</sup>. On

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<sup>9</sup> Texte original : 'had written « Sartre : Hell is other people » in pen inside one of the caravans, and someone else had scratched out « other people » and substituted « flutes »' (48).



défend l'intégrité du groupe contre les influences étrangères, surtout la colonie du prophète : comme les premiers chrétiens en Asie Mineure, mais plus violemment, les croyants craignent la perte de leur identité culturelle et religieuse, cela explique pourquoi ils expulsent les sceptiques (53–55) et soumettent les incrédules à la force des armes. Dans le roman de Böckl, par contre, il ne s'agit pas d'un culte, mais d'une société de privilégiés qui ne veulent pas perdre leur statut. La différence principale est finalement que Böckl répond au problème de la destruction environnementale par l'homme en proposant la disparition de notre espèce – Emily St. John Mandel suggère à l'inverse une restructuration des sociétés et une redéfinition de l'être humain.

La mutation de l'être humain dans  
*Terminus radioux* d'Antoine Volodine  
(2014) et *Rain. Rise of the Living  
Dead* de Shaun Harbinger (2015)

D'autres textes proposent la mutation pour achever la pérennité de l'être humain, ce qui souvent ne se produit pas volontairement ou indépendamment de la situation : dans *The Year of the Flood* de Margaret Atwood (2010), les humanoïdes créés par Crake ne ressentent plus d'émotions afin d'éviter la violence dans la société de l'avenir, et les néo-humains de Michel Houellebecq dans *La possibilité d'une île* (2005) sont ainsi génétiquement modifiés qu'ils ne se nourrissent que de sels minéraux et d'eau, ils consomment donc moins les ressources naturelles. Cependant, ces créatures ne ressemblent qu'à première vue à des êtres humains, ils n'ont en fait que peu en commun avec leurs ancêtres. L'homme ne peut

donc être autre que l'homme qu'il est, malgré ou justement à cause de ses faiblesses.

Le sous-genre de la post-apocalypse *zombie* imagine une autre évolution artificielle : une épidémie ou un accident bio-chimique (ou nucléaire) extermine la plupart des humains, et les survivants se voient confrontés aux zombies. Ces corps ambulants, ni morts, ni vivants, sont parfois décrits comme étant en train de se décomposer.

N'ayant rien que des instincts de base comme le besoin de se nourrir, le zombie n'a plus ni psyché ni âme ou personnalité humaine ; il n'a qu'une physis encore plus éphémère que l'homme vivant. Selon Petra Schrackmann (2015), le zombie est en conséquence une allégorie pour l'infraction envers les tabous et les normes sociales, il est, pour ainsi dire, le Mal dans l'homme (216). Néanmoins, c'est ainsi que se manifeste la difficulté de considérer le zombie comme une chose. Le tuer devient une question éthique, si on juge l'acte comme une rédemption exercée par pitié pour la personne que la créature eut été jadis. Par contre, même si le mort-vivant est assez défiguré, il garde quelques aspects physiques de son Soi précédent ce qui rend moralement et émotionnellement lourd son exécution (217), voir par exemple dans le premier roman de la série *Rain* de Harbringer (2015) : le protagoniste ressent la douleur de son ami qui souffre du fait que sa petite copine s'est transformée en zombie et savoir qu'il faut la tuer<sup>10</sup>. Ce roman raconte l'histoire de quatre amis qui sont surpris par l'irruption d'une *apocalypse zombie* tout en étant en train de passer un weekend de randonnée dans la montagne. Une des amies, Elena ne peut pas s'enfuir alors ils fouillent un phare pour des survivants. Elle se transforme en mort-vivant

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<sup>10</sup> Texte original : 'I couldn't see my best friend experience the pain of seeing her again. I would do anything to spare Mike that torture. He was staring up the steps, swallowing hard, He knew she was up there' (Harbringer 2015, 202).

après avoir été attaquée et le protagoniste Alex craint que son ami Mike puisse s'effondrer psychiquement à la vue de ce qui reste de la jeune femme. Le zombie Elena, par contre, ne semble plus reconnaître ses anciens amis humains avec lesquelles elle a survécu le déclenchement de la crise ; ses copains, dans l'œil d'Elena, ne sont que de la proie<sup>11</sup>.

Dans *Terminus radieux* d'Antoine Volodine (2014), le vieux couple de dirigeants du kolkhoze isolé en Sibérie a survécu à la radiation nucléaire. La Mémé Oudgoul et son partenaire Solovieï ont échappé au gouvernement communiste totalitaire en se retirant dans la zone désertée pour y gérer la petite colonie de Terminus radieux. Ses habitants sont également à la limite entre la vie et la mort, ce qui tient aussi au fait que Solovieï et la Mémé Oudgoul se servent de leurs forces magiques pour ranimer les défunts : 'Il [l'ingénieur Bargouzine] était décédé une fois de plus pendant la nuit. Il fallut que la Mémé Oudgoul lui administre son traitement de choc à l'eau très-lourde, à l'eau très-morte et à l'eau très-vive.' (Volodine, 125). Pour continuer d'exister dans ce monde contaminé, l'être humain mute en mort-vivant, sinon, il disparaît définitivement : 'Il [Solovieï] avait construit sa propre existence sur d'autres valeurs que l'héroïsme et, ... dans le monde des rêves et dans des univers parallèles peuplés de morts-vivants' (65).

Volodine remet constamment l'être humain en question dans les sphères fantastiques de rêves, de souvenirs, de sortilèges, dans lesquelles naviguent ses protagonistes. Autrement que les textes précédents, *Terminus radieux* ne peut qu'avertir les lecteurs ce qui les attend au cas où on continue sans hésitation à se servir de

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<sup>11</sup> Texte original : 'Her eyes glared at us with no recognition, only hunger. To her, we were no longer friends she had survived with. We [were] simply prey' (205).

technologies dangereuses comme le nucléaire dans un monde à la limite de l'escalade soudaine des conflits existants.

Ces romans exemplaires illustrent de façon paradigmatique comment la catastrophe globale force l'homme à reconsidérer son existence. Ils révèlent l'idée commune que l'espèce humaine ne peut pas continuer ainsi qu'elle le fait actuellement, mais que l'homme doit forcément changer son mode de vie. Avant tout les sociétés des pays industriels ne peuvent pas continuer à se définir par leurs biens matériels au détriment de l'environnement. Comme le revendiquent Sartre et plus tard Anders, puis Leggewie et Welzer, l'homme moderne devrait plutôt s'identifier à travers de ses actes. On voit ainsi que la catastrophe apocalyptique sert dans de telles fictions comme néant pour l'humanité entière.

## Conclusion

On constate donc que dans la fiction du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, on revient à la conception d'une *fin transitoire* en racontant le scénario post-apocalyptique qui remet le Moi de l'homme moderne en danger. C'est un sujet si récurrent dans la littérature contemporaine et le cinéma actuel, surtout des pays industriels, qu'on peut constater un véritable *zeitgeist post-apocalyptique* ce qui va de pair avec le sentiment de *méta-crise*. Les menaces écologiques, économiques, politiques, sociales et sanitaires sont multiples, ce qui provoque une pluralité d'inquiétudes. Cette situation actuelle conteste l'homme dans tous les aspects de son existence et le rend conscient du fait que son identité en soi est définie par l'angoisse. Néanmoins, on ne craint plus la *fin finale* du monde, on imagine en fait que le désastre serait géographiquement limité et que son ampleur ne frapperait pas l'humanité entière. La source des angoisses post-apocalyptiques concerne plutôt les conditions de

vie après ce bouleversement, parce qu'il est clair que la civilisation moderne serait ramenée plusieurs décennies en arrière et toutes acquisitions et commodités seraient effacées. Encore d'avantage, on se définit par les marchandises dont on s'entoure (Trentmann 2017), car c'est ce que l'Autre perçoit instantanément du Moi. Dans notre société visuelle et consommatrice, le regard de l'Autre juge plus qu'avant ce qu'il voit, ainsi l'identité doit forcément s'adapter à sa dictée ; on comprend qu'on est l'objet de la considération de l'Autre au sens Sartrien.

C'est en effet une renaissance de l'existentialisme selon Jean-Paul Sartre dont la philosophie démontre comment et pourquoi l'existence humaine se caractérise par l'angoisse : déjà la prise de conscience est un acte qui provoque des craintes, car on doit se mettre à distance de soi-même (la *néantisation*) afin d'obtenir une perspective externe.

L'analyse des romans montre que les scénarios post-apocalyptiques symbolisent une prise de conscience de l'humanité dans le sens Sartrien, car ils représentent un *néant* de notre espèce entière. Dans *Die Einöder*, Manfred Böckl (2007) arrive à la conclusion que l'ère de l'homme arrivera à sa fin, une pensée qui se rapproche des conceptions de l'anthropocène dans le contexte littéraire que Dürbeck et al. développent dans leurs recherches. La deuxième idée fondamentale du roman est que seulement les pires individus survivraient à la catastrophe. Emily St. John Mandel se montre plus optimiste en proposant dans son roman *Station Eleven* (2015) un changement profond des sociétés afin d'améliorer la coexistence des hommes et de l'environnement. Les textes traitant du sujet du zombie, par contre, montrent que l'être humain risque de muter dans un monde contaminé, tel que la Mémé Oudgoul et Solovieï dans *Terminus radieux* d'Antoine Volodine (2014) qui sont devenus immortels par la radiation. Les zombies dans la série de romans *Rain* de Shaun

Harbinger (2015) et d'autres fictions similaires sont également à la limite entre la vie et la mort et représentent le côté animalier et subconscient de la psyché remettant ainsi en question l'identité humaine. Comme eux, les néo-humains de *La possibilité d'une île* de Michel Houellebecq (2005) ont très peu en commun avec leurs personnes de référence : ils sont moins nuisibles pour la planète, mais ils sont privés des émotions et des motivations qui définissent un individu. De cette manière, Houellebecq reprend aussi l'idée qu'il vaudrait mieux se caractériser par ses actes.

On peut donc conclure que tous ces exemples montrent que le scénario post-apocalyptique aide à poser les questions par rapport à ce qui constitue l'homme : il ne peut qu'être ce qu'il est et comment il est, mais il peut changer sa façon d'agir.

Une telle littérature exprime également les craintes liées à l'existence humaine qui peuvent permettre, ce qu'on montre avec quelques exemples, un traitement productif de ces angoisses existentielles. Soit cette littérature sert à réveiller l'homme et à l'avertir des dangers imminents, soit elle soulage le lecteur de ses soucis avec un effet cathartique, soit elle propose un *savoir de crise*. Plus important pour la constitution du Moi post-apocalyptique est la fonction de la littérature qui consiste à poser les questions existentielles grâce auxquelles ce genre peut développer et discuter des concepts pour l'identité, l'altérité et l'interaction interhumaine.

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**V**

**The end of the world? From cultural  
ecologies to ecological disasters**



# Michel Deguy's *l'être-comme* and the poetics of ecological comparativism

*Sam La Védrine*

Michel Deguy has been a mainstay of the French literary landscape for more than fifty years. In the sixties, a translator of Friedrich Hölderlin, Paul Celan, and Martin Heidegger, but principally a poet and essayist, his texts and theories draw on a wide range of philosophical thought and poetic tradition to establish creative models of strictly poetic thinking. Addressing the possible collective inhabitation of Earth, and specifically that of poetry's analogical potential to offer a radical alterity for expressing community with others, Deguy's most recent, extensive work on poetic ecology has been at the forefront of challenging cultural capitalism and what Frédéric Neyrat describes as eco-technology

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J., Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 407–437.  
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[*éco-technique*]. For Neyrat, principally embodied in subsequent work in his critique of terrestrial control as a kind of mass geo-engineering, this is where modernity's capitalist-inflected image and its alluring but unattainable promise reduce both politics and the subject's experience of it to a game of consumption, where pre-formed identities are produced and then amplified by eco-technological apparatus (2003, 19–21). Deguy's understanding of identity formation then offers a philosophical poetics also responding to what Jean-Luc Nancy posited as a technology of *world* assuming art's creation, an endless spacing of difference and self-presented meaning which must be understood 'like the infinity of art which replaces a nature that never had and never will take place', and where 'an ecology understood as such can only be a technology'<sup>1</sup> (1993, 66). Poetry's complex relationship with philosophy as a kind of technology in the original Greek sense of *tekhné* [τέχνη] as craft certainly conjoins in activity sited outside Deguy's texts,<sup>2</sup> but within them, such interests coalesce to ask important questions of poetry's provision of epistemological and ontological ground for the mutable identities of individual's and others' modern ecological existence on a troubled Earth.

## Poetry's measures

In the recent poetry collection, *N'était le cœur* (2011), Deguy's short verse 'Nihil' concisely announced that in a world existing no longer with nature, nor with God, where 'there is no longer

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<sup>1</sup> 'comme l'infini de l'art qui supplée une nature qui n'eût et qui n'aura jamais lieu [...] [u]ne écologie bien entendue ne peut être qu'une technologie' [All translations my own].

<sup>2</sup> In 1977 he created and for many years subsequently ran the review *Po&sie*, and from 1989 to 1992 was president of *le Collège international de philosophie*.

even the inherited enemy,<sup>3</sup> we might appear alone. These absences raise (and the present tense is deliberate) three adjunct questions:

From where, then, comes the terror?  
There would only be the between-us  
That it would be a question of managing  
– and first by inventing the us?

The third, the other other than otherness, the other,  
Could it be space, the astrophysical elsewhere  
Where deterrestration [*déterrestration*] stirs? (2011, 37).<sup>4</sup>

The clever neologism of the latter stanza, *déterrestration*, clearly indicates two processes, humanity desiring to extract itself from a finite planet – Earth; and simultaneously, its digging in the other direction to inadvertently prepare its own mass tomb. For Deguy, of the first, two distinct modes of terrestrial extraction implicate eco-technology:

[...] deterrestration – which I readily take from Jean-François Lyotard – is the ultimate project of Technology, leaving the heavy earth in the direction of space [and] extraterrestration is this distancing, leaving the terrestrial without a spaceship, this loss, the

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<sup>3</sup> '[i] n'y a plus même l'ennemi héréditaire'.

<sup>4</sup> 'D'où vient donc la terreur ? | N'y aurait plus que l'entre-nous | Qu'il s'agirait de ménager | – et d'abord en inventant le nous ? || Le tiers, l'autre autre qu'autrui, l'autre, | Serait-ce l'espace, l'ailleurs astrophysique | Pour où s'agite la déterrestration ?'. In an original version, eight of the poem's alterity-evoking transcendental nouns appear in majuscules (Gods, the Dead, Manes, Beasts, Nature, the Enemy, Others, and Space [Dieux, Morts, Mânes, Bêtes, Nature, Ennemi, Autre, and Espace]). Cf. Deguy (2006) p. 209.

state of detachment or abandon where Research places us [...] <sup>5</sup> (2013, 179–82).

Whilst this commentary on technological research also reflects what the late Michel Serres terms a placeless disorientation of terrestrial existence driven by science in the quest of humanity becoming astronauts [*devenus astronautes*] (2014, 238–239), Deguy's other question from 'Nihil' on the very invention of an antipodal-challenging 'nous' ('Le tiers, l'autre autre qu'autrui'), recognised the impossible, interwoven prospect of complete ontological community based upon a chimerical *commun*.

Neyrat has drawn attention to Nancy's work on an ontological conception of singular-plural being to indicate how such a paradoxical, forever incomplete 'nous' is oddly better represented by its cross-over from French into the English of 'no us' (2013, 64–65). After Heidegger's work on Being-with (*Mitsein*), Nancy himself delineated the alterity paradox of being's with [*avec*] as how

[...] the simultaneity of separation and contact, that's to say the most fitting constitution of the *cum*-, is exposed like indeterminacy, and like a problem. In this logic, there's no proper measure of *with*: the *other* withdraws from it, in the alternative or in the dialectic of the incommensurable and common intimacy [...] <sup>6</sup> (1996a, 105).

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<sup>5</sup> 'La déterrestation – dont je cite volontiers l'occurrence chez Jean-François Lyotard – est le projet ultime de la Technique : celui de quitter la terre pesante en direction de l'espace [et] L'extraterrestation, elle, est cet éloignement, ce quitter le terrestre sans vaisseau spatial, cette perte : l'état de détachement ou d'abandon où nous met la Recherche'.

<sup>6</sup> 'la simultanéité de l'écart et du contact, c'est-à-dire la constitution la plus propre du *cum*-, s'expose comme indétermination, et comme problème. Il n'y a pas, dans cette logique, de mesure propre de l'*avec* : l'autre la lui retire,

Following Nancy's prescription of a major problem of phenomenological corporeal unity, across recent years a whole host of critics from several fields have been alert to how a combination of ecological crises, globalisation and late capitalist expansion, and their combination in ecotechnology have collapsed old paradigms of collective spatial orientation – and accordingly its measure – into dizzying channels of quite stochastic incommensurability. Ursula Heise, for instance, describes new scales of excess as the product of a 'globalist consciousness' (2008, 4); Fredric Jameson took 'cognitive mapping' as a critical method which can amplify a subject's 'sense of its place in the global system', simultaneously inventing a radical politics 'on a social as well as spatial scale' (1991, 53–54); and Timothy Clark diagnoses a very recent 'Anthropocene disorder' as a problematic conception based upon a catachrestic care rhetoric in which old categories of politics and nature are exhausted and replaced by irreducible, relational measures always in danger of capitulating to negation, reification or, as Nancy acknowledges, withdrawal, where, indeed, one can only be reminded so many times that 'ecology is all about interdependence' (2015, 140–41, 147).

With the maxim of interdependence generating so much prevalent ecological or ecocritical discourse in response to fears of the future and communal disharmony, by instead exploring independences and opposites in a radical ethics of poetic meaning, Deguy's work then helps emphasise new spaces of identity in an innovative middle-way located between and crucially separate from the dualisms of proper and improper, self and other, sameness and difference. This search for a creative orientation of common measure which acts to maintain irreducibility has seen his work concentrate and evolve through two prominent areas.

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dans l'alternative ou dans la dialectique de l'incommensurable et de l'intimité commune'.



First, by inverting Heidegger's notion of 'work-being', which 'opens up a world' and '*lets the earth be an earth*' (2001, 42–43), there is a poetic reason of ontological comparativism taken after Heidegger in Deguy's advance of the bivalent analogical signification of *l'être-comme* [being-like (it)] where the subject's work is simply the spacing of being 'like' the human; and second, this ontology's connection to a mode of ecological thought which distinguishes between an individual world and a collective Earth in the latter's prospect as the ecumene [*l'écoumène*].<sup>7</sup> As with the neglected *tiers* in 'Nihil', the indistinct gap between the human and its surrounding space is then inhabited by a uniquely poetic epistemology where Deguy urgently rethinks the very act of comparing. Henceforth, I interpret this as a poetics of ecological comparativism, and the qualification in this genitive is key: it recommends that we read comparison in a different way to that which it may have been predominantly performed, instead, one in which creative interpretation of ecology follows the movements of poetry's own comparative apparatus – its metaphors, analogies, figures, and imagery.

Accordingly, ecological comparativism helps form a poetic identity and delineates a middle-way for ecological co-existence following two principle presuppositions: analogy is fundamental to human expression; and conceptually applied to the whole Earth (its social and natural spaces), its 'cultural' comparison follows but also modifies a 'natural' ecology's rule of interconnection. Specifically, this poetic identity might

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<sup>7</sup> This term is taken from Augustin Berque who defines its field of existential relations as 'the whole sum and the condition of human environments, in that they are properly human, but no less of ecology and physics. This is the ecumene, which is fully the abode (*oikos*) of the being of the human' [*l'ensemble et la condition des milieux humains, en ce qu'ils ont proprement d'humain, mais non moins d'écologie et de physique. C'est cela, l'écoumène, qui est pleinement la demeure (oikos) de l'être de l'humain*']. Cf. Berque (2015) p. 17.

challenge the speculative tradition of Kant's noumenal world and its transcendental dialectic (2007, 258–64; 316–19), as well as Hegel's own immanent dialectic of sublation [*Aufhebung*] and its reliance upon opposites preserved in a determinate negation producing universal, synthetic unity annulling contradiction and driving towards historical completion (1977, 67–70; 50–53). Accordingly, poetry's comparisons see poetic identity hold or maintain contradictory differences whilst producing a semblance of interconnection only by affirming two separate alterities: the ontological, material, and pre-verbal encounter with otherness – both human and non-human; and the otherness of different epistemologies expressing specifically singular places and spaces through different languages and ideas. Rather than sublating these alterities and reinforcing sameness through a totalizing dialectical synthesis – Hegel's *Aufhebung* – poetry's comparison then becomes an affirmative motor on which differences are configured together *separately* as measures of incommensurable, non-dialectical relation.

Before looking more closely at Deguy's work, it is important to stress how as an expression of judgement on the world, but also as a potentially inherent ontological condition, the analogy of poetry's comparison provides this measure for reorienting the existence of ecological being on Earth. As a critical heuristic, ecological comparativism then resonates with Jacques Derrida's invocation of removing poetry from the literary rubric of comparative literature, opening space for a specifically comparative poetics placed alongside 'discursive arts of which is not certain from the outset that they belong to literature' (2008, 34). This is where an autonomous poetic subjectivity creatively acts at and radiates from ecology's very epicentre, unbinding an ontological-epistemological dialectic encompassing human-nonhuman, subject-place dualities but possibly also that of any

conceivable self-other alterity. This motion beyond categorization shares César Domínguez, Haun Saussy, and Darío Villanueva's epistemological imperative of comparativism as a principally cognitive operation connecting two or more elements, where '[b]y comparing we build sense' (2015, xi). For them, the comparison of similitude and difference establishes 'a minimal correlation of analogy' which affirms that 'comparison is a logical-formal act, a dialectical relationship between a differentiating way of thinking (induction) and a totalizing attitude that looks for what is constant (deduction)' (idem., xvi). Alternatively, however, both as creative and critical heuristic, ecological comparativism is opposed to totality presupposition and a dialectic of deduction as operating through negation. Instead, it perceives poetics as formally configuring difference *non-dialectically* through comparison's speculative affirmations, instead producing a non-totalizing *fragmentation* in which the only constant invariant is the dialogic spacing of referential separation existing in the expression of poetry's very contingent analogies.

The evolution of Deguy's work has then notably outlined this potential, analogical union of ecology and comparativism.<sup>8</sup> Recognising how any relationship to the Earth is threatened by cultural capitalism, and in turn its ontology of equivalence, Deguy has asked 'how resist this Threat, if not by renewing our attachment'<sup>9</sup> (2002, 60). Merely imagining the Earth's space as a unified topology, its alterity scales can affirm subjectivity's attachment-through-detachment by non-dialectical relation. For Neyrat, the act of separating the parts of any posited whole to understand their relations has emerged as the instrumental

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<sup>8</sup> It's interesting to note that already in 1997, Verena Andermatt Conley recognised that ecology was an epistemic praxis of relations in which '*it will be impossible not to think in an ecological way*'. Cf. Conley (1997) p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> 'Comment résister à cette Menace, sinon en renouvelant notre attachement'.

paradox of what he terms an ecology of separation. To the cleavage of Humanity (subject) and Earth (object), he urges that it must be shown at what point nothing exists in isolation but is merely separate (2016, 33–34). This strives to reconnect by relation exactly what has been cleaved [*clivé*] or welded [*soudé*] – two contronyms representing abusive separation and excessive connection (idem., 34). This means, for him, that an ecological ontology endorses neither ‘radical distancing’ [*éloignement radical*] nor ‘absolute interconnection’ [*interconnexion absolue*] (idem., 34–35). Neyrat affirms cleavage as a radical rupture between two realities which can produce active rather than passive denial (‘dénégation’) (idem., 267–268). Separation, on the other hand, affirms otherness but also a dependence which logically destroys relations by gathering them into an absolute totality (idem., 269–70). Challenging an epistemology of ecology to deconstruct a sense of cleavage but maintain relational difference then centrally addresses two broad yet unequivocally interconnected fears endemic in the modern world – planetary destruction and the presence of the other. The second concern lead Deguy to tentatively propose that “Poetry” serves to measure the gap, the naked proximity of strangers: the other, at a null and infinite distance<sup>10</sup> (2006, 31). In his ecological vision, however, the other fear, planetary destruction, makes for what he terms *géocide*, ‘the global phenomenon that ecology takes in view, in vision’, whereby of its prospect, ‘there will be only one – and it’s in progress’<sup>11</sup> (2012b, 65). Offset by globalisation, this prospect presages the terrifying singularity of the end *in* the world. From a European perspective, the genesis of this fear resides in

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<sup>10</sup> ‘« Poésie » sert à mesurer l’écart, la nue proximité des étrangers : l’autre, à une distance nulle et infinie’.

<sup>11</sup> ‘le phénomène globale que l’écologie prend en vue, en vision [...] il n’y en aura qu’un – et il est en cours’.

successive World Wars and the atrocities of the Holocaust. But as technological expansion radiates cultural sameness to all corners of the globe, this fear now also represents designation of the Anthropocene era – the epoch in which human activity has visibly been the dominant, disproportionate planetary influence.<sup>12</sup>

The *end of the world*, then, despite the coupling of Godlessness and absent nature in ‘Nihil’, might be less an eschatological anxiety and more a portent supplanted by the very real prospect, from a human perspective, at least, of the *end of the Earth*. Addressing misperception of the boundaries between the finite and the infinite, Deguy’s early work recommended ‘we have to talk about the earth in the imperfect’, and asked of language approximations of this space, ‘does this distance measure the difference between “earth” and “world”?’<sup>13</sup> (1969, 157). If poetry’s textual space is where conceptions of world and Earth, but also self and other collide, then to see these relations anew it’s important to find comparison’s invariant reason. In *La Raison poétique* (2000), a text which undertook this search, Deguy’s summary of his ongoing critique of the effacement of cultural difference affirmed poetry as still inscribed against difference flattening doxas, such that ‘the spirit of poetry [...] knows how to treat, by bringing to a paroxysm, the paradoxicality of the “oxymoron”, the unsurpassable condition that makes of thinking the there is [il-y-a] of phenomenality’<sup>14</sup> (2000, 205). Paradoxical vision had initially emerged in his form of poetic phenomenology – of the sixties and seventies – where Deguy prefigured the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) pp. 17–18.

<sup>13</sup> ‘nous devons parler de la terre à l’imparfait [...] cette distance mesure-t-elle la différence entre « terre » et « monde »?’.

<sup>14</sup> ‘[L]’esprit de poésie [...] sait traiter, en portant au paroxysme la paradoxalité de l’« oxymore », la condition indépassable que fait à la pensée le il-y-a de la phénoménalité’.

late, only posthumously published work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty – in particular, his figure of the chiasmus [*chiasme*]. In the incomplete *Le Visible et l'invisible* (1988), Deguy's forebear proposed the interweaving of subject and object where mind and body are processes of exchange rather than coincidence. Whilst this recognises the difficulties in assigning meaning or definitions to terms such as see [*voir*] and world [*monde*], for Merleau-Ponty it is philosophy which is tasked with voicing their correspondences, delineating the conceptual paradoxes of their facticity and adjusting us to 'these figured enigmas' [*ces énigmes figurées*] (2010, 1639–1640). This sought a sensation of being-in-the-world located in the gap [*l'écart*] between world and body, where the seeing, feeling subject is implicated in 'the intertwining of my life with other lives, of my body with visible things'<sup>15</sup> (idem., 1681). Merleau-Ponty indicated a so-called hyperdialectic as capable of expressing this interweaving's truth, 'because it unrestrictedly envisages the plurality of relations and what has been called ambiguity'<sup>16</sup> (idem., 1723). However, this hyperdialectic perhaps neglects that an economy of images might be visible through poetry's speculative, figurative perception, a point on which he took a different direction to Deguy's pending decision and sought a concrete phenomenology for being's dialectical definition of two movements colliding in the *there is* [*il y a*] of *something* [*quelque chose*] (ibid.).

*L'écart*, however, became Deguy's focal point of separate spacing for poetry's non-dialectical formation as a kind of relational, autotelic topography. In a speculative holding of difference, confirming the world through figurative separation

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<sup>15</sup> 'l'entrelacement de ma vie avec les autres vies, de mon corps avec les choses visibles'.

<sup>16</sup> 'parce qu'elle envisage sans restriction la pluralité des rapports et ce qu'on a appelé l'ambiguïté'.

from, rather than negation of it, Deguy maintains if not Merleau-Ponty's dialectical modification, then certainly its gap. For Merleau-Ponty, this was the diplopia [*diplopie*] of double-vision conjoining being and signification within the reciprocity of the chiasmus, 'the identity of coming in and out of self, of experience and distance'<sup>17</sup> (idem., 1750). Christopher Watkin reads Merleau-Ponty's *diplopie* as the product of an 'indirect ontology' acting as a pre-dialectical parallax which is comparable to 'the relation of figure and ground', an ontology that 'cannot be reified, completed or contemplated; it is dispersed, always incomplete in itself and yet calling for its completion, while at the same time denying that possibility' (2009, 31). However, whilst maintaining similar principles by bringing this ontology to expression (post-contemplation), separation from the object – and accordingly identity divorced from its speaking subject – sees the truly radical relation of poetic contingency emerge. Its mutability makes creative becoming a split mode of being held in a comparative ontology's non-dialectical, relational structure.

Deguy early on emphasised this ontological feature of poetry's figuration because its transcendental potential to sublimate singular identity through negation is held in reserve, carrying difference(s) without effacement. In *Figurations* (1969), responding to the inevitable Cratylism for the writer, Deguy deemed that the relationship of words to things was an 'intrinsic metaphoricity' [*métaphoricité intrinsèque*], a word's flesh potentially the metaphor of its meaning [*sens*] which makes the poem sonically articulate a same [*même*] which exists within it. Referring to Merleau-Ponty, he described how as inherent sign-users, those of the west are haunted by this inevitable union as the product of a prevalent Western metaphysics, 'incurable, of two in

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<sup>17</sup> 'l'identité du rentrer en soi et du sortir du soi, de vécu et de la distance'.

one [...] the dialectic which restricts play itself'<sup>18</sup> (1969, 143–145). Accordingly, he reasoned that 'if we talk about trans-figuration, this can only be understood as passage to figuration, as if the trans(port) gave figure' – a relocation of meaning deemed the very 'status of metaphoricity'<sup>19</sup> (idem., 146–147).

## A poetics of figurative comparison

As the poetic figure's non-dialectical relational structure posits a form of common engagement for the subject seeking reality's purported visibility, Deguy added a condition to Hölderlin's maxim of how poetically man dwells on Earth [*dichterisch, wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde*],<sup>20</sup> because in his modification, it is also poetically that we see. Refusing closure to the infinite metaphoricity of analogy's possibility to refer to finite things, Deguy has then affirmed poetry as endlessly ongoing, suggesting that 'let's not say that there are images in the poem, but that the poem is in the imaginarium. The poem is imaging rather than imaged'<sup>21</sup> (2000, 45). Against the logic of the universal *imaginarium* of images in which all of reality is translated into an economy of cultural terms, divided and effaced as such, Deguy indicates how poetry's imaging is the very tenor of diversity, the poem holding difference within its own aesthetic, but also potentially ethical, timeless economy. His

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<sup>18</sup> 'inguérissable, de deux en un [...] la dialectique qui restreint le jeu même'.

<sup>19</sup> 'si l'on parle de trans-figuration, cela ne peut s'entendre que comme passage à la figuration, comme si le trans(port) donnait figure [...] statut de métaphoricité'.

<sup>20</sup> To which Heidegger declared that 'poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other'. Heidegger (2001) p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ne disons pas qu'il y a des images dans le poème, mais que le poème est dans l'imaginarium. Le poème est imageant plutôt qu'imagé'.



early poems examined the semiotic value of comparison given how poetry's speaker can always declare 'My life | The mystery of like' [*Ma vie | Le mystère du comme*] (1973, 49). Deguy's understanding of the poetic image as an unfixed thing-in-reality has for its foundation a reservoir of possible meanings merely configured into the poem to create its singular contingency. The implied risk of identity effacement, however, seriously affects the poetic's endlessly possible immeasurable scales and their potential for being otherwise. Poetry's analogy is in this sense threatened by an infinite supplement, that indicated when Deguy's *Où dire* (1966) portended the 'Apposition that monitors the like | While waiting for its inevitable turn | The analogy that expels us from this world' [*Apposition que surveille le comme | Tandis qu'attend son tour inévitable | L'analogie qui nous expulse de ce monde*] – note here, however, expulsion from this *world* (idem. 72). This expulsion, one might say onto the Earth, might appear an abstract assertion. But the movement of poetic ideation is a turn back to perception in which thinking operates in language subject to contingency. Accordingly, if ecology is a vision, then it must be exposed to its most terrifying perception: if humanity until now has only sought survival or expansion, or it could be argued, survival *through* expansion, then its common being must be looked at again as a comparative ontology. Nancy's reading of the impossible possibility of the in of being-in-common [*l'être-en-commun*] incentivised this prospect, emphasising that ontological singularity relies on a conception of shared finitude in which 'finitude co-appears [*com-parait*] and can only co-appear [*com-paraitre*]', always present in 'being-in-common and like this being itself'.<sup>22</sup> This exposure to an immeasurable exteriority, however, relies on an equally singular relationality, where

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<sup>22</sup> 'la finitude *com-parait* et ne peut que *com-paraitre* [...] l'être-en-commun et comme cet être lui-même'.

[...] this outside itself is in turn nothing other than the exposure of another areality, of another singularity – the same, other. This exposition or sharing gives rise, from the outset, to a mutual interpellation of singularities [...]<sup>23</sup> (1986, 73).

For Nancy, this later allowed identification of Deguy's conception of *comme* as offering a barely recognised ontology, one 'slipped into the intimate interstice of the hiatus of sameness, triggering all the waves of resemblance, all the collisions of proximity';<sup>24</sup> for Nancy, *comme* as an ontological category can then express immeasurability, such that

[...] anything can be the measure of anything. Anything can be the common measure of the immeasurable commensurability of all, and of the difference-indifference of the whole, of its proportionate disproportion. *Comme* makes the measure: the common measure of being is what makes the presence of being like another presence, and being as such [*comme tel*] nothing other than its own analogy [...]<sup>25</sup> (1996b, 175–176).

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<sup>23</sup> 'ce dehors lui-même n'est à son tour rien d'autre que l'exposition d'une autre aréalité, d'une autre singularité – la même, autre. Cette exposition, ou ce partage donne lieu, d'entrée de jeu, à une interpellation mutuelle des singularités'.

<sup>24</sup> 'glissé dans l'interstice intime du hiatus de la mêmeté, déclenche toutes les déferlantes de la ressemblance, toutes les collisions de la proximité'.

<sup>25</sup> 'Toute chose peut être la mesure de toute chose. Toute chose peut être la commune mesure de l'incommensurable commensurabilité de tout, et de l'indifférence différence du tout, de sa disproportion proportionnée. *Comme* fait la mesure : la commune mesure de l'être, c'est ce qui fait la présence être comme une autre présence, et l'être *comme tel* n'être rien d'autre que sa propre analogie'.

To hold the transcendent in reserve without affirming it, because such affirmation would separate the subject's world from the Earth, Deguy urges the creation of comparings [*comparants*]. Emphasising ontological difference in poetic thought's immeasurable encounter with a specific place, this modified Heidegger's ontology of beingness to create a bivalence of poetry's *comme* producing *comparants*. Opposed to identity's exclusion inherent in a negative dialectic – the *neither-neither* of Hegelian sublation, which Heidegger himself attempted to deconstruct<sup>26</sup> – Deguy's *and-and* uses *comme* to assert poetic language's holding of same and other. This extensively uses analogy's grammar as poetic apparatus expressing comparative ontology's relational structure. In the collection *Jumelages* (1978), one of Deguy's increasingly predominant prose-poems, 'Anniversaire de l'éclipse', exemplified poetry's world-making:

From the sun removed, the moon remains the neither-day-nor-night. The one the other are eclipsing says the one, which does not exist. The one the other eclipsing, something appears that is neither one nor the other, neither object nor third party. Two disjointed join together to make a world<sup>27</sup> (1986a, 64–65).

Towards affirming separate, dialogic attachment to the appearing Earth, Deguy's commentaries on a range of preceding French poets in *Choses de la poésie et affaire culturelle* (1986) then contracted this analogical principle of difference's spacing of conjoining into the comparative ontology of *l'être-comme*. A discussion of *phusis* and *tekhné* sustained distinctions on the

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Heidegger (1969) pp. 49–51.

<sup>27</sup> 'Du soleil ôtez la lune reste le ni-jour-ni-nuit. L'un l'autre s'éclipsant disent l'un, qui n'existe pas. L'un l'autre s'éclipsant, quelque chose apparaît qui n'est ni l'un ni l'autre, ni objet ni tiers. Deux disjointes de se conjoindre font un monde'.

shared comparative operations of poetry's images and figures, its physics and its craft. As a modality that reunites these differences, Deguy reasoned

[...] if I pronounce *image*, I speak on the side of things; if I say 'comparison', I mean logical, discursive activity. And perhaps every effort of the poetic (reflection of poetry) is to rise up again (ana-logically) on this side of sharing, of partition, towards a simulation of indivision, of a 'genesis', of a parturition of this indivision retained by words of our language, say precisely those of 'phenomenology', which fit together, hold together (in the promise of a synthesis they don't attribute to themselves) the *phainomenon* and the *logicon*; or this word of *figure* which says the conformation of the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*, both the aspect of what appears and the finery of saying in its capacity of reception, or its capacity for a 'content'.

Appearing, in as much as co-appearing, would be at the measure, at the mercy, of the euphemistic 'comparative' [...] <sup>28</sup> (1986b, 34–35).

An essay on Mallarmé's trope of the dancer then stressed the dialogic separation of referents sharing a comparative differential and an impossibly complete measure. Outlining

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<sup>28</sup> 'si je prononce *image*, je parle du côté des choses ; si je dis « comparaison », je parle du côté de l'activité logique, discursive. Et peut-être tout l'effort de la poétique (réflexion de la poésie) est pour remonter (ana-logiquement) en deçà du partage, de la partition, jusqu'à une simulation de l'indivision, à une « genèse », à une parturition de cette indivision que retiennent des mots de notre langue, tel précisément celui de « phénoménologie », qui emboîtent, font tenir ensemble (promesse d'une synthèse qu'ils ne s'attribuent pas) la *phainoménon* et le *logicon* ; ou ce mot de *figure* qui dit la conformation de la *res extensa* et celle de la *res cogitans*, l'aspect de ce qui paraît et l'atour du dire en sa capacité d'accueil, ou *contenance* pour un « contenu ».

Le paraître en tant que comparaître serait à la mesure, à la merci, du « comparatif » bien disant, euphémistique'.

that ‘the principle of comparison (A is like B) is not the principle of identity’, he urged that poetic thinking, ‘by approach and approximation, in reconciliation, deals with the comparable-incomparable’.<sup>29</sup> To distinguish poetic statements on identity from rhetorical judgements, Deguy argued that

[...] poetry’s principle is wary of identification; respectful of the fold of difference displayed by *l’être-comme*, it deals less with the common-as-unity [*comme-un*], more the experience of common [*comme-une*] diversity [...]

With this latter ambivalence as its value, poetry takes the element of a thing, whether an immaterial idea or physical matter, so that poetic nomination, and accordingly its expression, becomes symbolic but not in itself a substantial symbol, ‘the whole in a particular sense of being that develops the expression being-like’.<sup>30</sup> Although Western thought has only recently awoken to the simultaneous ecological value of the non-human *and* the immeasurable plurality of other cultures, Deguy early on maintained their relation in an important polysemy qualifying beingness. He noted that ‘a thing is in being-like, like another in the measure where it refrains from self-identifying with its other, by comparing itself to understand itself’, whilst admitting, however, this was more easily accomplished when ‘the thing is an activity’.<sup>31</sup> Playing on words he explained that

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Le principe de comparaison (A est-comme B) n’est pas le principe d’identité [...] par approche et approximation, dans le rapprochement, traite du comparable-incomparable’.

<sup>30</sup> ‘le tout en un sens particulier d’être que développe l’expression être-comme’.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Une chose est en étant-comme, comme une autre dans la mesure où elle se retient de s’identifier à son autre, en se comparant pour se comprendre [...] la chose est une activité’.

[...] comparison interrogates the incomparable; the distinction of things between it.

Poetry prohibits violent identification by the *comme*: refusing simplification while wresting from diversity a common [*comme-un*] being or configuration [...]<sup>32</sup>

With *thing* here extendable to any object, including the thing in question of self-identity, poetic thinking refuses absolute identity thanks to the inverted negation of two negations (thesis and antithesis). Against an act that metaphysically expels from the world, poetry instead affirms analogy's opening in the incomplete agreement of *comme*, 'the paradoxicalisation of is-and-is-not', holding *and-and* to conserve and transform – 'which lifts into the world its figurings [*figurants*], making differences abound in "correspondences"<sup>33</sup> (1986b, 64). Comparison's separation and what is then only figurative rather than actual reconciliation in *comparants* or *figurants* requires no transcendental ground. Instead, every identity is an incomplete analogical process.

Transcendence of self or other carries the possibility of elevating compared differences into synthesis, and so Deguy has iterated how *l'être-comme* is immanent spacing and represents a faithful figuration of thought. Poetry must recognise this, for him, because

[...] it's with the things from here, provided that they are treated in "figurings" and arranged in comparisons [...] that we can say everything that is here; the there

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<sup>32</sup> 'La comparaison entre-tient l'incomparable ; la distinction des choses entre elles.

La poésie inter-dit l'identification violente, par le comme : refusant la simplification tout en arrachant à la diversité un être comme-un ou configuration'.

<sup>33</sup> 'la paradoxicalisation, au est-et-n'est-pas [...] qui fait lever dans le monde ses figurants, fait foisonner les différences en « correspondances »'.

is [*il y a*] of here. And not turned “to for transcendent use” [...]”<sup>34</sup> (2000, 207).

## The ontology of *l’être-comme*

The conjunction of *and-and* then inspires Deguy’s modulation of the paradox of *comme* inside his comparative ontology, *l’être-comme*. One thing juxtaposed with another is both ontologically equivalent – *being-like-it* – because, in its spacing, it is analogically or comparatively equivalent – *being-like-it*. This bivalent configuration arose in Deguy’s reading of Heideggerean Being. Sceptically rejecting becoming as coming-into-essence, Deguy saw *comme* as pointing thought towards poetry’s speculation where it might raise ‘the other movement, that of *l’être-comme*, or “assimilation”, on the condition of hearing in this word a becoming similar and in no way a (re)turning-to-the-same: outside the superstition of the essence-substance’.<sup>35</sup> Working into French the German of Heidegger’s *als* (as much as) and *wie* (the same as), the French *comme*, as with the English *like*, holds comparison’s bivalence at the surface, ‘an indivision of *als* and *wie*’ where

[...] since A will not become B... in the “literal” sense of the identity “being”, and especially not by becoming more and more A (A *als* A) or B (B *als* B), the future (its

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<sup>34</sup> ‘C’est avec les choses d’ici, pourvu que traitées en « figurants » et agencées en comparaisons [...] qu’on peut dire *tout* ce qui est ici ; qu’il y a de l’ici. Et non pas tournées « à usage transcendant »’.

<sup>35</sup> ‘L’autre mouvement, celui de l’être-comme, ou « assimilation » à condition d’entendre dans ce mot un devenir semblable et nullement un (re)venir-au-même : hors superstition de l’essence-substance’.

possibility) is hidden in becoming-like: A *wie* B, B *wie*  
A [...]<sup>36</sup>

Foreclosure of the future exchanged for the comparative becoming of the poem and its produced subject means being is not re-evaluated as Heidegger's Beingness of being, but instead as the being of being-like (both modes together). To this, Deguy concludes 'we must invent what re-sembles; invent the case of semblance'<sup>37</sup> (idem., 51–52). Comparative ontology as analogical resemblance then ultimately posits a logical chain, one in which Deguy refers to the behavioural model of Wittgenstein's language games:

[...] a proper, a self, which is then only presentable in the mode of *comme*, is glimpsed through a series of "a like b like c like x", lodged (logically) in the "family" (Wittgenstein) of its airs. Being, is having the air of; having the air of, is being like [...]<sup>38</sup> (idem., 66–67).

This possible series suggests a potential comparativism established as a planetary network. An ecological poetics, however, will have to firmly establish *l'être-comme* as strictly contingent in order to reflect the complex, stochastic formation of identity within modern planetary space. Accordingly, Deguy's reprised commentary on the *chiasme* warns that if the value, rather than the circumstance of comparison is contingent, then

<sup>36</sup> 'une indivision du *als* et du *wie* [...] [p]uisque A ne deviendra pas B... au sens « littéral » de l'identité « être » ; et surtout pas en devenant de plus en plus A (A *als* A) ou B (B *als* B), l'avenir (la possibilité) se recèle dans le devenir-comme : A *wie* B, B *wie* A'.

<sup>37</sup> 'Il faut inventer ce qui ras-semble ; inventer le cas de semblance'.

<sup>38</sup> 'Un propre, un soi-même, qui n'est donc présentable que sur le mode du *comme*, à entrevoir à travers une série en « a comme b comme c comme x », logé (logique) dans la « famille » (Wittgenstein) de ses airs. Être, c'est avoir l'air ; avoir l'air, c'est être comme'.



its configuration might only be arbitrary. On the condition that if ‘for the “inside” and the “outside”, *l’être-comme* (each its *being-like* the other) did not determine its being in an *a priori* “chiasmus”’,<sup>39</sup> comparison will itself be catachrestic (1986b, 31). Whilst the poetic provision of paradoxes might initially appear unclear, this indetermination is a privilege of poetic expression. As a new and old configuration and an *a priori* property of thinking – rather than identity – poetry’s paradox then indicates rhetoric’s failure.

Accordingly, Deguy suggests that in any dialogue, ‘thinking is judging, judging is comparing’ [*penser, c’est juger, juger c’est comparer*], where *l’être-comme* permits thinking resemblance. In its process of selection, whilst judgement is arbitrary, its transportation is not, and ‘comparison is the pivot and the operation of discernment of the same or not’ [*la comparaison est le pivot et l’opération de discernement du même, ou non*]. Consequently, Deguy gestures to radical implications this could have for modern thought, poetic operations whereby

[...] as long as the rationality of an *economic* mathematical calculation does not definitively prevail as “the last word imposed” on all human choices, thought, i.e. judgment, the freedom of thought with its comparative estimations, *decides* what *it is* and from the other [...] <sup>40</sup> (2009, 229).

Poetry’s decision arises in Deguy’s own *comparants*. The poem ‘Les plaisirs du seuil’ implies that poetry requires a leap of faith

<sup>39</sup> ‘pour le « dedans » et le « dehors », *l’être-comme* (chacun son être-comme l’autre) ne déterminait pas son être dans un « chiasme » *a priori*’.

<sup>40</sup> ‘tant que la rationalité d’un calcul mathématique *économique* ne l’emporte pas définitivement comme « le dernier mot qui s’impose », sur tous les choix humains, la pensée, i.e. le jugement, la liberté de pensée avec ses estimations comparatives *décide* de ce qu’*il en est* et d’l’autre [sic].’

(‘La poésie limitrophe exige un saut’) to attain ‘the gift of like’ [*le don du comme*], a world view in which ‘wandering sees itself | And things share in a comparative of world’ [*l’errance se voit | Et les choses se partager en un comparatif de monde*] (2012a, 83). Because the indistinctness of configured comparison is poetry’s expression, both modes of *l'être-comme* require textual space to think out resemblance. Deguy lays out the dialectic that threatens the ontology of *comme*, specifically the placement of the figure as subject apart from the world. He takes up the principles of a favoured paradoxical formula, being-here as not-being-here, and extends them to suggest that ‘the poem says poetry, or often passes back over by poetry’ [*Le poème dit la poésie, ou repasse souvent par la poésie*] (idem., 330–31). If Deguy had initially presented his own life as the mystery of *comme*, its later appearances bring subjectivity into innovative fields of poetic comparison acting as a latent ecological ethics.

It’s in this sense that Deguy offers a textual space for hospitality of the other in renewing speculative attachment to the Earth, that where ‘the unattached being that we are | Descends now paths without turning back’ [*L’être sans attachement que nous sommes | Descend maintenant les marches sans se retourner*] (1986a, 85). Whilst for Deguy this has as much to do with estrangement from the sacred, hospitality is resolutely taken up on ecological principles. This is a key component to the assembly of *le tiers inclus*. He asks, ‘What is the third party, the host of the host and its host, the other? It takes everything to make a world, and more than two [*plus de deux*] for hospitality<sup>41</sup> (2006, 305). Poetry’s pluralism contributes to the making of that singular world, where meaning is both the hospitality of the other, and the hospitality of that which is meaning for the other. However,

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Quel est le tiers, l’hôte de l’hôte et de son hôte, l’autre ? Il faut du tout pour faire un monde, et plus de deux pour l’hospitalité’.

Deguy is sceptical but also extremely cogent in posing questions as to how such hospitality might retain common aesthetic meaning given that globalisation purports to create conditions that are hospitable for equality but more often manipulate modern media to collapse a sense of the local and amplify dislocation. Deguy urges that thinking must then turn away from technology to a modification of the sacred. Interpreting Heidegger's dictum *only a God might save us*, salvation is posited as lying beyond our domination. This might seem reactionary at first, but Deguy's incision is lucid for thinking ecologically, 'regarding and having regard to what is not masterable-possessable' [*en-regard-de et eu égard-à ce qui n'est pas maîtrisable-possédable*]. Warning against a cinematic reification of the Earth's image – that which inspired what Heidegger terms a globalist consciousness – Deguy suggests that

[...] Echo-graphy for the ecumene cannot avoid using technological echo-graphy, for example high definition photography of the Earth seen from the sky, but it serves to return our view from this view to a single end for a moment of "disinterested" [*désintéressée*] enjoyment [...].<sup>42</sup> (2002, 56–57).

As a collision of disinterest and uprooting – or even unearthing – being *désintéressée* is then a modern state of contingency to which poetry can bring much needed critical currency.

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<sup>42</sup> 'L'écho-graphie pour l'écoumène ne peut pas ne pas recourir à l'écho-graphie technologique, par exemple à la photographie à haute définition de la terre vue du ciel, mais c'est pour retourner notre vue de cette vue à seule fin pour un instant d'une jouissance « désintéressée »'.

## The poetic ecology of ecological comparativism

Beyond its representation as *tekhné*, it is then poetry as *poiesis* – as making and remaking – which recrafts attachment to the visible but no longer merely natural Earth which attaches us to this vision:

[...] in its restraint, detachment [*détachement*], by this withdrawal marked by the movement of its dice [*dé*] (its dice throw [*coup de dé*], if I dare say), gains the point where it merges with sublime height to glimpse the place of this world [...] <sup>43</sup> (2012a, 374).

In order to speculatively rebuild attachment and see the *oikos* of the Earth as a planetary household, Deguy strives to annul a corrosive thinking of difference. Towards the end of the uncollected poem, 'L'iconoclaste', this stresses that poetry's principle is its hospitality hosting circumstance, because when two hosts encounter,

Relation teaches them how to be  
Imagination is the host of the unknowable  
Having plunged into the depths of the unknown  
It returns in poems with humans  
Tells them with images  
It's unimaginable but it's like that<sup>44</sup> (idem., 424–425).

<sup>43</sup> 'Dans sa retenue, le détachement, par ce retrait que marque le mouvement de son *dé* (son coup de dé, si j'ose) gagne le point où il se confond avec la hauteur sublime pour entrevoir le lieu de ce monde'.

<sup>44</sup> 'La relation leur apprend la manière d'être | L'imagination est l'hôte de l'inconnaissable | Ayant plongé au fond de l'inconnu| Elle en revient en poèmes chez les humains | Leur dit avec les images | C'est unimaginable mais c'est comme ça'.

Because of this unimaginable pluralism, and in order that the gap of comparativism's differences aren't themselves flattened by ecology's doxa of all-encompassing interconnection and interdependence – what Neyrat terms saturated immanence (2014, 7–8) – Deguy posits poetic ecology as the logic best placed to modify cultural hegemony. He conjectured that

[...] if “ecology” is the logy concerned about the “survival” of humanity, then, as much as an *ethology*, it will have to take charge of ethics, and enact a radical criticism of the “cultural” [...]<sup>45</sup> (2002, 136–137).

By this ethical critique, Deguy distinguishes an epistemological ecology from political environmentalism, theological Manicheanism, or the symbolism of a primitive regression. As he notes, paraphrasing Mallarmé:<sup>46</sup>

[...] well understood ecology, that is to say non-utopian, is the opposite of returning to nature. “Nature” has taken place, we will not return to it. Ecology is anti-Rousseauist. What it's talking about is neither good nor bad. It talks about the exhausted earth, seeking a relationship with this earth [...]<sup>47</sup> (idem., 144).

With its speculative conception of phenomena, if relation with a capitalist-exhausted Earth is to survive into the future,

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Si l'« écologie » est la *logie* qui s'inquiète de la « survie » de l'humanité, alors, en tant qu'*éthologie*, elle devra prendre en charge l'éthique, et procéder à une critique radicale du « culturel ».

<sup>46</sup> ‘La Nature a lieu, on n'y ajoutera pas’. Cf. ‘La Musique et les Lettres’, Mallarmé (2003) p. 67.

<sup>47</sup> ‘L'écologie bien comprise, c'est-à-dire non-utopique, c'est le contraire du retour à la nature. La « Nature » a eu lieu, on n'y retournera pas. L'écologie est anti-rousseauiste. Ce dont elle parle n'est ni bon ni mauvais. Elle parle de la terre épuisée, cherchant une relation avec cette terre’.

accordingly it requires, or at the very least could learn from, poetry's comparisons. Although then only recently adding to Hölderlin's maxim, Deguy's concept of *géocide* at the same time represents the ideologically accidental destruction of the Earth and all its contents. In *Écologiques* (2012), he declared that even political intervention on the environment is insufficient because 'ecology is radical – or insignificant' [*L'écologie est radicale – ou insignifiante*]. Given how the circulation of poetic thinking and the exercises of its non-dialectical paradoxes are the measure of poetic production, radicalism requires paradoxical reconception of the *logie* of *logos*. Deguy asked 'how could ecology transform the world if the rationality of the *possibility* of this change escapes the order of *logos*'?<sup>48</sup> (2012b, 82). This changed measure must be philosophically vigorous yet poetically grounded, otherwise it falls into hyperbolic environmentalism, what Deguy terms ecology's mask (idem. 90). Its possibility is predicated not on 'the poetics of *there is*' [*les poétiques du il y a*], but as an imaginative power of seeing, 'that is to say, of *comme*' [*c'est-à-dire du comme*], where 'utopia is ecology' and 'ecology is a poetic' [*l'utopie, c'est l'écologie [...] l'écologie est une poétique*] (idem., 110). The merging of ontological comparativism and poetic ecology saw Deguy's most recent *écologique*, *L'envergure des comparses : Ecologie et poétique* (2017), cover questions of cultural patrimony, advertising, screen existence, artificial intelligence, pollution, and post-truth communication whilst reminding that selection and choice are constant invariants of being human, whereby 'comparison alone grasps the difference; far from "assimilating", it arranges the incomparable'<sup>49</sup> (2017,

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<sup>48</sup> 'how could ecology transform the world if the rationality of the *possibility* of this change escapes the order of *logos*'.

<sup>49</sup> 'La comparaison seule saisit la différence ; loin d'« assimiler », elle ménage l'incomparable'.

84). Because changing the epistemological paradigm changes the *comparant*, poetic ecology addresses ‘the world of the Earth’ [*le monde de la terre*] Deguy insisting that

[...] one thing is what it can be in being-like, like with others whereby identity recoils. Its preferability among the possible alloys (hypallages) is *estimated* by poetic reason. For the poem, thinking is comparing [...] <sup>50</sup> (idem., 49, 70, 54).

As poetry’s comparativism potentially informs all ecological thought, a subject’s figurative separation from the Earth creates a vast liminal space where poetic creation opens gaps in the writing act’s preclusion of sameness substituted for metaphors of shared non-dialectical difference. The latent ecology in poetry’s dialogic spatial separation becomes the antecedent for comparison, an affirmation of diversity, and in a vast ecological, comparative ontology, it points to a time and space in which subjectivity’s singularity requires difference to attain identity. In Deguy’s work on the poetics of phenomenology, comparativism, and ecology, the move into difference between meaning and non-meaning is such that ‘Not being one to another in being the one for the other | Incomplete relation prevents separation’ [*N’être pas l’un à l’autre en étant l’un pour l’autre | La relation inachevée empêche la séparation*] (1986a, 27). To combat the divisive culture that has generated humanity’s fear of *géocide*, Deguy persuades that ‘ecology is a vision’ [*l’écologie est une vision*], and that all is ‘like that [*comme ça*], where *ça* is becoming *comparant* and reality enters into its ever mutable figure (2012b, 9). Whilst it remains to be seen what will come of them, as its critical and creative

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<sup>50</sup> ‘une chose est ce qu’elle peut être en étant-comme, comme avec les autres où son identité recule. Sa préféralité parmi les possibles alliages (hypallages) est *estimée* par la raison poétique. Pour le poème, penser c’est comparer’.

configurations conjoin comparativism and ecology, Deguy's work stresses the important argument that these two critical loci perhaps exist as two sides of the very same *comparant*.



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# *Sans dessus dessous* (1889) de Jules Verne

## Dernier avertissement avant l'Apocalypse

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Je voudrais m'intéresser aujourd'hui au monde tel que le dessine Jules Verne au tournant des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, monde qui est encore largement le nôtre et, plus particulièrement, au 40<sup>e</sup> opus des *Voyages extraordinaires, Sans dessus dessous*, roman d'anticipation que Jules Verne fait paraître en 1889 dont le titre désigne clairement une impasse, sous les dehors topiques du monde à l'envers. Titre profondément médité, comme il ressort de l'explication de texte que Verne conduit pour ses lecteurs dans *L'Écho de la Somme* du 14 novembre 1889 :

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J., Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 439–460.  
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-014-4>

... avec Vaugelas et Mme de Sévigné, j'ai écrit *Sans dessus dessous*. Grammaticalement je le sais ... il faudrait *sens dessus ni dessous*. Mais *sens dessus dessous* – orthographe qui a prévalu –, c'est le renversement : ce qui était dessus est dessous. *Sans dessus dessous* c'est le bouleversement, il n'y a plus de sens (Verne 1979, 181).

Cette glose de l'auteur est précieuse parce qu'elle permet de battre en brèche l'idée bien ancrée d'un Jules Verne pleinement en phase avec son temps et qui ne marchanderait pas son adhésion à une civilisation qui, en cette fin de XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, se pense en expansion continue<sup>1</sup>, grisée par la foi en ce qu'on appelle le progrès. C'est là la vulgate, qui choisit de voir en Verne l'apôtre d'une modernité techniciste, le chantre du progrès scientifique, incarnés dans la figure de l'ingénieur conquérant, dont la maîtrise technique soumet le monde, un monde résolument ouvert et dont les ressources seraient aussi inépuisables que celles des ingénieurs pour les bonifier. Mais c'est oublier un peu vite que la science ne débouche pas que sur des conquêtes qui servent le développement mais bien aussi sur une féroce volonté de puissance, quand les merveilleuses machines tournent aux engins de mort et l'expansion indéfinie à l'expansionnisme et à la rapacité.

Cet article entend rouvrir ce dossier et redonner voix à un Verne méconnu longtemps étouffé par la tradition accréditée en donnant audience à l'expression lancinante d'un malaise dans la civilisation qui partout perce chez un Jules Verne lanceur d'alerte, inquiet de la course à l'abîme et du naufrage éthique où s'enfonce

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<sup>1</sup> Pour relever d'une lecture partielle, sinon même partielle, de l'œuvre vernienne, il faut toutefois reconnaître que ce biais importe dans la mesure où il a bien partie liée avec la réception de l'œuvre de celui qui demeure l'un des auteurs français les plus lus et les plus traduits, comme le souligne Pierre Macherey (1966, 183), qui rappelle que le public l'a liée 'à la conquête de l'empire colonial français et à l'exploration du cosmos, à la construction du canal de Suez comme à l'exploration des terres vierges'.

un monde toujours plus polarisé, qui n'a pour gouvernail que l'impérialisme et le capitalisme sauvages.

Devant ces apories qui sont inhérentes à l'œuvre vernienne et qu'il ne paraît plus guère possible de nier, la critique a longtemps trouvé la parade et c'est l'occasion de liquider une seconde idée reçue : il y aurait dans l'écriture des *Voyages extraordinaires* une date pivot, 1886, qui partagerait la production en deux volets bien différenciés : un premier massif, marqué par le scientisme, à quoi succéderait un second versant travaillé par l'inquiétude et la remise en cause de la foi dans le progrès continu comme dans l'idéologie dont elle procède. Or, si 1886 fait bien pour Verne office de charnière, ne serait-ce que parce que c'est l'année où meurt son éditeur, Hetzel, auquel il était uni par des liens aussi étroits qu'ambivalents, les choses sont loin d'être aussi tranchées.

## Les dessous du 'progrès' : miracle ou mirage ?

Il n'est que de reprendre le premier roman de Verne, ce *Paris au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle* demeuré inédit jusqu'en 1994 où il sera miraculeusement retrouvé, texte d'anticipation extrêmement noir, qui présente, à cent ans de distance, en 1960, un Paris paranoïde, totalement déshumanisé et qui ne connaît plus de valeurs que bancaires, une 'capitale du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle', pour reprendre la terminologie de Benjamin (1997)<sup>2</sup>, où la technique a quitté le service de l'humain pour dégénérer en instrument de contrôle social, quand la fée

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin a commencé de réunir des documents pour son livre capital dès 1927. Exilé, il en reprend les matériaux en 1934. Cette somme, *Paris, capitale du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle : le livre des passages*, est essentielle pour comprendre de quels caractères équivoques est constituée cette modernité du xix<sup>e</sup> siècle dont Paris est le microcosme.

électricité cesse d'illuminer les grands boulevards pour s'en aller exciter la chaise électrique qui attend les réfractaires au nouvel ordre<sup>3</sup>, première version de cette société carcérale dont, à titre posthume il est vrai, et largement retravaillée par Michel Verne, à l'autre bout de la production vernienne, *L'étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac* (1919) allait donner une version définitive en campant la terrifiante Blackland, cité schizoïde et raciste née d'un fantasme autarcique, avec ses planeurs capables de parcourir à vive allure 5,000 km sans ravitailler et de frapper n'importe quelle cible tandis que, pour prévenir toute révolte intestine, les habitants sont constamment maintenus sous le feu de canons judicieusement placés.

Un canon qui, de *De la Terre à la lune* (1865) en passant par *Les cinq cents millions de la Bégum* (1879) et jusqu'à *Sans dessus dessous*, on va le voir, hante l'œuvre vernienne sur laquelle il projette l'ombre de menaces continues, symbole de la peur bien plus que de la sécurité. Les armes de destruction massive, au reste, obsèdent les *Voyages extraordinaires*, entre l'inquiétant docteur Schultze, figure du militarisme prussien qui construit à Stahlstadt<sup>4</sup> une préfiguration de la Grosse Bertha sur laquelle

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<sup>3</sup> Or, si ce premier texte, dont Jules Verne a proposé le manuscrit à Hetzel en 1860, n'a pas vu le jour, c'est précisément qu'il ne cadrerait pas avec la ligne positiviste qu'Hetzel entendait imposer à ses auteurs, Jules Verne étant prié de s'en tenir à la veine plus porteuse de *Cinq semaines en ballon* qui devait inaugurer, en 1863, le programme des *Voyages extraordinaires* qui devaient se spécialiser dans la geste héroïque des défricheurs d'œkoumène. Un roman qui, pourtant, n'ignorait pas les menaces des progrès incontrôlés d'une civilisation que Verne, comme le Lucien Leuwen de Stendhal, n'est pas loin de regarder comme *fausse* quand on y lit : 'cela sera peut-être une fort ennuyeuse époque que celle où l'industrie absorbera tout à son profit ! À force d'inventer des machines, les hommes se feront dévorer par elles ! Je me suis toujours figuré que le dernier jour du monde sera celui où quelque immense chaudière chauffée à trois milliards d'atmosphères fera sauter notre globe' (Verne 1871, 188).

<sup>4</sup> Stahlstadt est une ville bâtie sur le progrès, mais en rien une réalisation progressiste. Appuyée sur l'industrie lourde des marchands de canons, elle

les usines Krupp ne commenceront à travailler qu'en 1908 ; l'ingénieur Roch, qui entend monnayer sa découverte d'un explosif 'dont la force brisante dépasse tout ce qu'on a inventé jusqu'à ce jour' (Verne 1896, 8), quitte à mettre les chancelleries européennes, lancées dans la course aux armements, à feu et à sang ; et la sinistre Blackland, déjà évoquée, qui connaît les balles dum-dum, où l'on torture à l'électricité (Verne 1919, 668–670), surveille par caméras et radars interposés et dispose de ces planeurs à pilotage automatique qui n'ont pas grand-chose à envier à nos drones.

Alors, fût-il écrit durant cette 'Belle époque', synonyme, pour beaucoup, d'une douceur de vivre prêtée à des sociétés européennes lancées sur la voie du progrès qu'exaltent, à intervalles réguliers, les démonstrations fracassantes des Expositions Universelles, l'ouvrage n'a rien de lénifiant et ne vaut pas quitus donné à un ordre du monde qui ne peut manifestement subsister qu'en instaurant, à l'intérieur, une surveillance fachoïde qui mette les dominants à l'abri des appétits des exclus<sup>5</sup> et, à l'extérieur, en pratiquant un équilibre de la terreur dont on peut au mieux espérer qu'il débouche sur la dissuasion.

En somme, *si vis pacem, para bellum*. Si ce n'est que *Paris au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle* nous avait déjà prévenus : en ces temps où le *laissez faire, laissez passer* des libéraux a été élevé à la hauteur d'un crédo, consacrant la marchandisation de toutes choses, le narrateur ne peut que constater : 'le jour où une guerre rapportera quelque chose, comme une affaire industrielle, la guerre se fera' (Verne 1994, 82).

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suppose l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, la mortalité ouvrière, le césarisme et, *in fine*, le totalitarisme. Dépassant le seul revanchisme anti-allemand, Stahlstadt préfigure la rationalité nazie d'une société militarisée, strictement hiérarchisée et totalitaire. Déshumanisée.

<sup>5</sup> C'est patent dans *Paris au xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, Les cinq cents millions de la Bégum, Les Indes noires, L'étonnante aventure de la mission Barsac...*



Et il est bien certain qu'on ne cesse de la rencontrer au fil des *Voyages extraordinaires*. Omniprésent dans l'œuvre de Jules Verne, le conflit y fait fonction de révélateur des impasses où s'enfonce une civilisation toute matérielle. *Il n'y a plus de sens*. Non seulement, la guerre occupe thématiquement une place de choix, mais un examen des conflits évoqués montre que Jules Verne a quasiment passé en revue tous ceux qui ont émaillé l'actualité du temps.

Tout ce qui suivra dans la littérature de science fiction, moins mineure qu'on ne le dit souvent – et, notamment, la question taraudante de la mort de la civilisation qui laisse une Terre retournée à une sauvagerie primitive – est déjà là. Jusqu'à l'extinction d'une civilisation qui se targue pourtant de réaliser l'extension du domaine de la démocratie et de l'intégration que met en scène *L'éternel Adam* (1910), sorte de testament de Jules Verne, désigne la ligne de fuite du militarisme : l'Apocalypse, qui intervient, dans ce nouveau roman d'anticipation, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au terme de luttes de civilisations, le récit retraçant l'histoire de l'humanité dans laquelle il n'est plus possible au héros, archéologue du futur progressivement désabusé sur le Progrès, de voir autre chose qu'une marche vers la barbarie, une course rétrograde qui laisse l'histoire dans l'ornière : 'la matière des récits ne changeait guère : c'étaient toujours des massacres et des tueries'. Pourtant, il relève que 'L'humanité avait vécu par le cerveau ... ; elle avait réfléchi au lieu de s'épuiser en guerres insensées – et c'est pourquoi au cours des deux derniers siècles, elle avait avancé d'un pas toujours plus rapide vers la connaissance et vers la domestication de la matière' (Verne 2000, 335).

Mais c'est manifestement là une voie étroite, tant la liste des conflits est impressionnante (Chesneaux 2001, 291–295 ; Minerva 2001), qui témoigne, là aussi, de l'extension de la mondialisation

qui rend la Terre de moins en moins sûre puisque les 5 continents sont concernés.

Et même un peu plus puisque le front s'étend jusque sur la lune en une véritable guerre des étoiles. De fait, si Méliès a, dans son court-métrage de 1902, retenu une image poétique qui a fait le tour du monde du roman de Verne dont il est adapté<sup>6</sup>, *De la Terre à la lune*, premier volet d'une trilogie qui comprend aussi le peu marquant *Autour de la lune* (1870) et qui s'achève avec *Sans dessus dessous* (1889), il sut exploiter le caractère drolatique d'une équipée aux accents clairement satiriques et grinçants.

De fait, décrocher la lune est loin d'être une affaire purement scientifique quand l'aventure est laissée aux mains d'un quarteron d'artilleurs en retraite que la fin de la guerre de Sécession a désarmés et laissés désoccupés, mais habités d'un besoin vital (!) de trouver une cible à canarder. Regroupés dans une corporation au nom évocateur, le *Gun-Club*, où l'on n'est admis qu'à la condition expresse d'avoir 'imaginé un canon' (Verne 2004, 5), ces experts en balistique ne songent qu'à optimiser les engins de mort au point que : 'il est évident que l'unique préoccupation de cette société savante fut la destruction de l'humanité, et le perfectionnement des armes de guerre, considérées comme instruments de civilisation' (7).

Une 'paix désastreuse' les renvoie à 'l'artillerie platonique' (9) aussi ces 'Anges Exterminateurs' (7) imaginent-ils d'abord trouver un dérivatif à leur oisiveté forcée en suscitant quelque guerre en Europe avant que leur président, Barbicane, furieux de cette 'paix inféconde' qui les 'arrêt[e] net sur la route du progrès' (17) et affichant sans fausse pudeur que 'toute guerre qui nous

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<sup>6</sup> Le professeur Barbenfouillis que Méliès met en scène est directement inspiré du Barbicane de Verne, mais Méliès a également mis à contribution H. G. Wells dont *Les premiers hommes dans la lune* ont paru l'année précédente (1901) pour parfaire son imaginaire sélénite.

remettrait les armes à la main serait bien venue' (17), ne voie plus loin en proposant la conquête de la lune dont l'annexion ferait d'elle le 37<sup>e</sup> État de l'Union (19).

Pour des raisons techniques, la base de lancement nécessaire à un canon de 900 pieds et de 68.040 tonnes (69) doit avoisiner le 28<sup>e</sup> parallèle alors que le nationalisme conquérant exige que l'opération se déroule sur le territoire états-unien et Maston d'envisager derechef l'annexion du Mexique : 'Eh bien ! puisque nos frontières ne sont pas assez étendues ... , c'est là un *casus belli* légitime et je demande que l'on déclare la guerre au Mexique ... . Tôt ou tard cette guerre se fera, et je demande qu'elle éclate aujourd'hui même' (89–90). En réalité, le conflit avec le Mexique a déjà eu lieu (1846–48), les États-Unis y ont gagné le Texas (1845), que de meilleurs géographes désignent à Maston, avec la Floride, comme deux États de l'Union satisfaisant aux conditions de latitude, rendant conséquemment 'inutile', mais pour cette raison uniquement, de déclarer la guerre aux pays voisins<sup>7</sup>.

Et il faut qu'un Français, Michel Ardan, se mêle de l'entreprise pour qu'elle prenne un autre tour, que la stérile agression se retourne en mission scientifique d'observation quand le projectile est transformé en vol habité. Tranchant sur ceux qu'il traite de 'meurtriers aimables et savants' (187), il détourne le canon de son office de mort pour n'en plus faire qu'une simple rampe de lancement et le jeu de mot attendu où il plaisante sur l'âme de l'engin – 'Au moins, dit-il, ce canon-là ne fera de mal à personne, ce qui est déjà assez étonnant de la part d'un canon. Mais quant à vos engins qui détruisent, qui incendient, qui brisent, qui tuent, ne m'en parlez pas, et surtout ne venez jamais me dire qu'ils ont

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<sup>7</sup> En revanche, l'industrie d'armement trouve néanmoins à s'employer dans la construction de la base, qui offre de riches perspectives de reconversion à une usine qui 'pendant la guerre, avait fourni à Parrott ses meilleurs canons de fonte' (Verne 2004, 103).

« une âme » je ne vous croirais pas !' (187) –, plus qu'une simple plaisanterie, prend une valeur métaphysique qui fait le départ entre deux sensibilités, et entre deux morales.

En déniait une âme à l'instrument dont se servent ceux qui n'ont d'autre politique que celle de la canonnière, c'est à eux-mêmes qu'il la refuse, en les laissant face à leur brutalité quand la démonstration de force sert à s'accaparer le bien d'autrui. Car si l'on échappe pour cette fois à la guerre des étoiles, le récit rappelle l'annexion douteuse du Texas et l'expropriation sans appel des Séminoles, dont les terres ancestrales ont le malheur de se trouver sur le terrain retenu pour construire la base.

## Bien public vs. intérêts privés : quand la civilisation perd le Nord

Or, c'est très exactement ce qui va arriver à d'autres populations natives dans *Sans dessus dessous*, qui prend la suite des aventures de Barbicane, Nicholl et Maston, lesquels retombent vite sur terre puisque, sitôt revenus, ils s'empressent de fonder une société de commandite pour tirer profit de leur équipée et ne s'offusquent pas de devenir l'attraction reine d'un Barnum géant (Verne 1893, 176 ; Verne 2007, 68).

Du premier volume au dernier opus de la trilogie, de l'aveu même de Jules Verne, on l'a vu, 'c'est le bouleversement, il n'y a plus de sens' (Verne 1979, 181). Plus de frein non plus quand nos vétérans reprennent du service dans les années 1890 au moment où le gouvernement des États-Unis propose la mise en adjudication de la calotte glaciaire arctique, zone encore vierge dont une société américaine sollicite la concession (Verne 2007, 13) dans un document soigneusement sibyllin puisque une clause

stipule la non caducité de la propriété si quelque modification venait à affecter ces lots (19).

En droit, ces contrées devraient évidemment revenir aux indigènes qui les peuplent mais il en va tout autrement en fait, et le narrateur ne peut que reconnaître l'imposture du droit à l'autodétermination, conquête du droit international :

comment ces pauvres gens auraient-ils payé ? En coquillages, en dents de morses ou en huile de phoque ? Pourtant, il leur appartenait un peu, par droit de premier occupant, ce domaine qui allait être mis en adjudication ! Mais des Esquimaux, des Tchouktchis, des Samoyèdes ! ... On ne les consulta même pas. Ainsi va le monde ! (17).

Ce sont quelque 407,000 mille carrés qui forment le lot consistant en 'continents, mers, détroits, îles, îlots, banquise' mis aux enchères (55), dont se porte acquéreur la *North Polar Practical Association*, mystérieuse société qui, derrière des hommes de paille, cache Barbicane et consorts, la bande du Gun-Club, significativement, amputée de Michel Ardan qui s'en est retourné vers son Europe natale, dédouané de toute compromission dans les louches tripotages à venir, dont les intrigues se jouent désormais des gouvernements dont ils savent pouvoir disposer au point que 'peu s'en fallut qu'ils n'obligeassent le gouvernement fédéral à déclarer la guerre à l'ancien Monde' (194).

Derrière la géographie politique, la géopolitique même, la géographie, physique et humaine, à laquelle Verne s'est toute sa vie dévoué, revêt ici une valeur indicielle : transcendant les frontières et leurs incarnations institutionnelles, les États, elle est science d'une planète une qui réclamerait une action commune, concertée et responsable alors que tout montre qu'elle est abandonnée aux appétits court-termistes des puissants du

jour, insoucieux du legs qu'ils laissent aux générations à venir. Loin que l'exaltation que Verne conduit de la toute-puissance humaine mène, en rapprochant les peuples, à habiter une planète une, celle-ci est, bien plutôt, mise à feu et à sang (Lévêque 2018, 61–92).

Les âmes sensibles peuvent bien pleurer sur le sort des ours ou des Esquimaux, leurs intérêts passent à la trappe quand les puissances européennes, pourtant inquiètes des recompositions qu'elles entrevoient, se montrent tragiquement incapables de sortir de l'isolationnisme, de s'entendre comme de résister aux visées expansionnistes des États-Unis, qui font le lit de conflits qui menacent la sécurité collective (Lévêque 2017, 13–36).

La soumission est donc enlevée pour une bouchée de pain par un trust dont les ambitions sont purement commerciales : 'si la Société avait acquis cette portion des régions circumpolaires, c'était dans le but d'exploiter ... les houillères du Pôle boréal'. Dans une société d'avant la transition énergétique, la course à la croissance offre de fabuleuses perspectives à qui saurait sécuriser les ressources stratégiques, soumises à la pression anthropique, éveillant les convoitises : 'il y aurait des fortunes à gagner en exploitant les régions polaires' (79). Et pour peu que l'on parvienne à neutraliser la glace qui gèle aussi exploitation et profits, c'est le jackpot. Aussi entre-t-il dans les vues de ce cartel de viabiliser le grand Nord, supprimant la morte saison, pour en organiser le pillage. Quels bénéfices, alors, pour peu que cette exploitation puisse être rationalisée, optimisant la productivité jusqu'à abolir la morte saison ! Car, rendre 'la Terre plus hygiéniquement habitable, et aussi plus productive, puisqu'on pourra semer dès qu'on aura récolté, et que, le grain germant sans retard, il n'y a[ura] plus de temps perdu en hiver !' (130).

À un demi-siècle de distance, Verne reprend, pour son *Barbican*, les vues développées par Fourier, sensible, en bon

saint-simonien, à tirer du globe des ressources propres à servir la croissance, base de la société organique et mondialisée qu'il appelle de ses vœux :

Lorsque les deux milliards d'habitants auront exploité le globe jusqu'au soixante-cinquième degré, on verra naître la couronne boréale ... qui donnera la chaleur et la lumière aux régions glaciales arctiques. Ces nouvelles terres offertes à l'industrie permettront de porter le genre humain au grand complet de trois milliards. Alors les deux continents seront mis en culture, et il n'y aura plus d'obstacle aux créations harmoniques. ... Depuis le soixantième degré jusqu'au pôle, la chaleur ira en augmentant, de sorte que le point polaire jouira à peu près de la température d'Andalousie et de Sicile. À cette époque le globe entier sera mis en culture, ce qui causera un adoucissement de cinq à six degrés, et même douze, dans les latitudes encore incultes, comme la Sibérie et le Haut-Canada. Les climats voisins du soixantième degré s'adouciront par double cause : par l'effet des cultures générales, et par l'influence de la couronne, au moyen de laquelle il ne viendra du pôle que des vents tempérés, comme ceux qui arrivent de la Barbarie sur Gênes et Marseille. Ces causes réunies établiront au soixantième degré la température dont jouissent aujourd'hui les régions du quarante-cinquième, en pleine culture, comme Bordeaux, Lyon, Turin, Venise. Ainsi les villes de Stockholm, Pétersbourg, Tobolsk et Jakutsk, qui seront sur la ligne la plus froide de la terre, jouiront d'une chaleur égale à celle de Gascogne ou de Lombardie, sauf les modifications causées par le voisinage des montagnes et des mers. Les côtes maritimes de la Sibérie, impraticables aujourd'hui, jouiront de la douce température de Provence et de Naples. ... Les climats qui seront les plus glacials du

globe, tels que la ligne de Pétersbourg à Ochotsk, jouiront à cette époque d'une température plus agréable qu'on ne peut la trouver maintenant dans les séjours les plus vantés, tels que Florence, Nice, Montpellier, Lisbonne, qui sont favorisés du ciel le plus serein et le plus doux. J'estime que ces contrées n'ont pas plus de quatre mois de belle saison tempérée ; mais après la naissance de la couronne boréale, le soixantième degré, c'est-à-dire la ligne de Pétersbourg à Ochotsk, aura pour le moins huit mois de belle saison et double récolte assurée (Fourier 1846, 41-43)<sup>8</sup>.

Mais, loin de suivre ce messianisme auquel, dans sa sensibilité aux idéaux quarante-huitard et aux utopies sociales, il s'était d'abord montré réceptif, le scénario catastrophiste que Verne développe dans son roman le voit prendre ses distances avec la politique de la croissance à tout crin et invite à réfléchir à d'autres

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<sup>8</sup> Si, chez Fourier, les conséquences d'une telle agression contre (la) nature sont moins drastiques pour l'humanité, elles n'en témoignent pas moins des mêmes tendances à la rationalisation dont le règne animal fait ici les frais dans cette nouvelle genèse qui se veut régénération : 'le genre humain ... fera sur les hôtes des mers l'opération que fit Noé sur les hôtes des terres, dont il recueillit dans l'arche plusieurs couples de ceux qu'il voulait conserver. On transportera donc dans les bassins salés intérieurs, comme la Caspienne et autres, une quantité suffisante des poissons, coquillages, plantes et autres productions marines que l'on voudra perpétuer et réinstaller dans l'Océan après sa régénération. On attendra que l'Océan soit purgé et passé aux grands remèdes par l'effort des lames du fluide boréal, qui, s'élançant du pôle avec violence, précipiteront les bitumes si activement que tous les poissons seront surpris, suffoqués par cette transition subite. Il n'en restera que les races utiles, comme merlan, hareng, maquereau, sole, thon, tortue, enfin toutes celles qui n'attaquent pas le plongeur, et qu'on aura tenues à l'écart pour les replacer dans les ondes après leur purification, et les garantir contre la violente surprise du fluide boréal auquel ils se seront lentement et progressivement habitués dans les bassins intérieurs. Ces espèces, qui ne sont point malfaisantes, pourront sympathiser avec les poissons de nouvelle création, dont les sept huitièmes seront serviteurs de l'homme' (note 1, p. 46).



options, respectueuses d'une écologie bien entendue, qui est aussi un humanisme.

Car si le printemps est appelé à être perpétuel, c'est tout sauf un printemps des peuples et ceux que le public a d'abord regardés comme des 'bienfaiteurs de l'humanité' sont vite démasqués dès lors que l'opinion publique comprend comment ils entendent mettre en œuvre leur programme : à coup de canon.

Ainsi, après le canon employé pour lancer un projectile de la Terre à la Lune, le canon employé pour modifier l'axe terrestre ! Le canon ! Toujours le canon ! Mais ils n'ont donc pas autre chose en tête, ces artilleurs du Gun-Club ! Ils sont pris de la folie du "cannonisme intensif" ! Ils font donc du canon l'*ultima ratio* en ce monde ? Ce brutal engin est-il donc le souverain de l'univers ? De même que le droit canon règle la théologie, le roi canon est-il le suprême régulateur des lois industrielles et cosmologiques (Verne 2007, 164).

C'est donc un dévoiement de la nature qui doit en résulter puisque cette viabilisation de la Terre suppose de dévier son axe de rotation, ressort de l'intrigue qui ne doit rien aux supposées vues anticipatrices de Verne, qui l'a trouvé tout prêt chez Fourier, dont les thèses sur la 'couronne boréale' s'en prenaient vivement à 'la position défectueuse', 'vicieuse' (Fourier 1846, 48), même, 'de l'axe du globe' (47-48), coupable d'entraver la productivité et qui, pour cela, devrait :

être renversé d'un vingt-quatrième, ou sept degrés et demi, sur le méridien de Sandwich et Constantinople, de manière que cette capitale se trouvât au trente-troisième degré boréal ; il en résulterait que, sur la longitude 225 de l'île de Fer, le détroit du Nord et les deux pointes nord d'Asie et d'Amérique s'enfonceraient d'autant dans les glaces du pôle boréal ; ce serait

sacrifier le point le plus inutile du globe pour faire valoir tous les autres points. Quant aux régions polaires, observons que, le détroit du Nord étant complètement inutile, à cause de la saillie du cap Szalaginskoi, peu importerait que ce détroit s'engageât plus avant dans les glaces, puisqu'il est déjà nul pour la navigation. Mais son rapprochement du pôle rabaisserait d'autant la région la plus intéressante de la zone glaciale ; c'est le golfe d'Archangel, ou mer Blanche, qui deviendrait très praticable, puisque le cap Nord de Laponie ne se trouverait plus qu'à soixante-quatre degrés, au niveau de Jacobstadt, dernière ville de Finlande. Les relations maritimes s'étendraient facilement aux bouches de l'Obi et du Jénisea, qui s'échaufferaient de six degrés par ce redressement de l'axe, et de six autres degrés par l'effet des cultures dont la Sibérie orientale deviendrait susceptible. Alors s'établirait une communication par eau entre les extrémités du grand continent ; les productions chinoises, transportées du coude du Hoang jusqu'au lac Baïkal, s'y embarqueraient à peu de frais pour l'Europe en descendant l'Angara et le Jénisea.

Dans notre zone tempérée, des débouchés importants, tels que le Sund et la Manche, s'amélioreraient de même en se rapprochant de l'équateur de cinq à six degrés. Les golfes de Saint-Laurent et de Corée ne subiraient aucun déplacement sensible ; la Baltique entière gagnerait pleinement sept degrés, et Pétersbourg se trouverait à la hauteur actuelle de Berlin.

... Qu'on essaie de tracer sur un planisphère des latitudes coordonnées à cette hypothèse du déplacement de l'axe, et l'on verra qu'il serait à l'avantage de la terre entière, sauf quelques cantons déjà indignes d'attention, tels que le Kamtschatka (47–48).

On est donc bien loin de la poésie de Milton dont le *Paradis perdu* faisait de cette inclinaison une marque du péché originel, sauf, si l'on veut vraiment faire de Verne un visionnaire, à convoquer un autre Milton, Friedman, qui solidarise, lui, *Capitalisme et liberté*. Une *Liberté du choix* des plus douteuses néanmoins, comme le mettent en évidence les projections qu'établit le bureau des Longitudes pour mesurer les incidences ravageuses de cette diplomatie de la canonnière qui, déchaînant l'apocalypse, met le monde à feu et à sang, limitant la *liberté du choix* à celle de finir asphyxié ou inondé. Ainsi New York, Philadelphie, Lisbonne, Madrid, Paris ou Londres comptent-elles parmi les cités condamnées à périr étouffées, un déluge devant balayer Russie asiatique, Inde, Chine, Japon et Alaska, si 'le président Barbicane n'est pas arrêté à temps dans sa criminelle tentative' (Verne 2007, 201).

## La sécurité collective à l'encan

Voilà nos *bienfaiteurs* devenus des 'êtres dangereux pour la sécurité des deux Mondes', mués en 'audacieux malfaiteurs', au point que le gouvernement fédéral, saisi, doit s'entremettre pour déclarer *wanted* Barbicane et Nicholl, partis préparer leur coup en secret dans les entrailles du Kilimandjaro où, à grand renfort d'or, les roitelets locaux ont affecté leurs sujets au service des grands travaux. Ne demeure que l'inflexible Maston, qui use du 5<sup>e</sup> amendement pour taire la retraite de ses complices et les dérober à la vindicte populaire. Et tant pis si on lui oppose un devoir moral envers l'humanité. La question du progrès fait retour, cette fois sur le terrain des institutions, quand la sécurité collective est mise en péril par l'affirmation de droits individuels qui dévoient le fonctionnement démocratique. Alors se pose

aussi la question de la légitimité d'actions illégales face au danger terroriste, dans une dialectique entre droit et non-droit qui fragilise l'idéal de perfectibilité reçu des Lumières. Faut-il ou non soumettre Maston à la torture pour obtenir des informations sur le lieu où se sont réfugiés ses complices ? La discussion enflamme le narrateur :

Mais il faut bien le reconnaître, ces moyens que justifiaient les mœurs d'autrefois ne pouvaient plus être employés à la fin d'un siècle de douceur et de tolérance – d'un siècle aussi empreint d'humanité que ce XIX<sup>e</sup>, caractérisé par l'invention du fusil à répétition, des balles de sept millimètres et des trajectoires d'une tension invraisemblable –, d'un siècle qui admet dans les relations internationales l'emploi des obus à la mélinite, à la roborite, à la bellite, à la panclastite, à la méganite (174).

Si, cette fois, la morale est sauve, les artificiers n'y sont pour rien et cela tient à un artifice romanesque qui rend au facteur humain toute sa place : l'inflexible Maston est poursuivi par une admiratrice si pressante qu'il perd le fil de ses calculs si bien que quand, le jour J, le coup de canon dévastateur est tiré, on ne sent que le vent du boulet, à la grande exaspération du président Barbicane, qui craint un autre krach : 'À quel taux vont tomber les actions de la *North Polar Practical Association* ?'. C'est finalement une erreur de calcul qui sauve ce monde à l'envers que met en scène *Sans dessus dessous*, laquelle ne tient pas seulement à un mécompte arithmétique de Maston qui dévie la trajectoire du boulet : le véritable faux-calcul procède d'une faute dans la visée chez ces promoteurs trop gourmands en proie au *greed* où Max Weber reconnaît un symptôme et de l'éthique protestante et de l'esprit du capitalisme :

Ah ! s'il n'y avait eu à disparaître sous les nouvelles mers que des Samoyèdes ou des Lapons de Sibérie, des Fuégiens, des Patagons, des Tartares même, des Chinois, des Japonais ou quelques Argentins, peut-être les États civilisés auraient-ils accepté ce sacrifice ? Mais trop de Puissances avaient leur part de catastrophe pour ne pas protester (203).

*La femme est l'avenir de l'homme*, même si Aragon ne le dira que plus tard. Reste que la question est bien posée de l'avenir de l'humanité.

## 'Malaise dans la civilisation' : *Apocalypse now* ?

Dans les années 1880–1890, l'œuvre vernienne ne connaît donc pas le revirement que l'on allègue généralement, mais elle admet néanmoins une nette inflexion, liée à la violence de la conjoncture internationale, dont les antagonismes s'exportent sur le front colonial, impliquant la planète entière dans le jeu des impérialismes d'État dont la conférence de Berlin, en 1885, que Jules Verne dénonce dès l'orée du roman<sup>9</sup>, donne la mesure pour d'autres aires géographiques. Sans que l'on puisse parler de reconversion, perce un autre Jules Verne sensible au malaise dans la civilisation, un Jules Verne lanceur d'alerte, attaché à découvrir partout les dangers d'un militarisme qui compromet la sécurité collective, met en péril le vivre-ensemble, et ce

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<sup>9</sup> 'Depuis quelques années ... la Conférence de Berlin avait formulé un code spécial, à l'usage des Grandes Puissances qui désiraient s'appropriier le bien d'autrui sous prétexte de colonisation ou de débouchés commerciaux' (Verne 2007, 9).

d'autant plus sévèrement qu'il s'insinue jusque dans l'utopie. Ainsi d'Antékirtta, l'île de *Mathias Sandorf*. Dans un contexte où la coexistence pacifique est de plus en plus menacée, la responsabilité sociale des fauteurs de progrès est questionnée. *Les cinq cent millions de la Bégum* (1879) forment le premier jalon de ce massif pessimiste qu'achèvera *L'Île à hélice*, en 1895, et qui interroge sans relâche la citoyenneté du monde face à des intérêts d'autant plus dangereux qu'ils sont portés par des trusts dont le mépris du bien commun est manifeste.

Dans les décennies 1880–90, le modèle de domination de la nature par des hommes qui repoussent toujours plus loin les limites à force de travail est désormais clairement affronté à la violence des impérialismes d'État et au jeu du capital, alors que le contexte européen est dominé par un essor sans précédent des intérêts financiers, quand s'opère la fusion entre capital industriel et capital bancaire. Un capital qui trouve à s'investir dans l'industrie d'armement, laquelle alimente la compétition acharnée que se livrent les puissances sur le terrain colonial, terrible cercle vicieux que l'on retrouve dans la *Journée d'un journaliste américain en 2889*, anticipation contemporaine de *Sans dessus dessous*<sup>10</sup> où la prolifération de gaz asphyxiants et autres projectiles chargés du bacille de la peste ou du choléra, a certes rendu la guerre impossible, sauf à prendre la responsabilité de faire sauter la planète, mais ouvert les voies à la confiscation de la démocratie, désormais aux mains d'un inquiétant *soft power* que dirigent, via la presse, des trusts qui n'ont de pensée que de profit.

Dans *Sans dessus dessous*, si l'on n'en est pas encore là, les risques politiques sont déjà là, eux, que font courir au monde entier, dans une société que la spéculation a mondialisée, la

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<sup>10</sup> Mais sans doute due à la plume de Michel Verne, bien qu'endossée par son père Jules.

perversion de la science quand elle prête la main aux intérêts financiers. *Sans dessus dessous* est la traduction fictionnelle de ces intérêts. La North Polar Practical Association atteste des liaisons dangereuses entre la science et le capital, une collusion que l'on retrouvera jusque dans le dernier roman de Jules Verne, *L'Invasion de la mer* (1905).

Si Verne ne renonce pas à l'anticipation, dans le second volet de son œuvre, celle-ci revêt une valeur heuristique, qu'il s'agisse de *Face au drapeau* (1896) ou de *Maître du monde* (1904), suite dysphorique donnée à *Robur le conquérant* (1886), et il délaisse désormais les ressorts de la technologie pour s'intéresser au problème social, dans toute son extension. Et si la technologie participe de ce questionnement, ce n'est plus son versant libérateur, optimiste, qui est exalté, mais bien la part d'aliénation qu'elle revêt pour l'homme social quand se fait jour l'idée que le progrès fait reculer les sociétés, quand il n'est pas humain et moral.

C'est peut-être dans ce dévoiement des idéaux progressistes que réside, pour Verne, la plus grande peur et c'est là qu'il identifie la plus grande menace pour la sûreté des citoyens et pour la sécurité des nations.

De là sa prédilection pour des terres vierges qui échappent aux revendications étatiques et où, partant, tout est encore possible, pourvu qu'y prennent pied des hommes d'une autre trempe que Barbicane et consorts, souvent tentés par l'anarchisme, mais moins parce qu'ils rêvent de destruction que parce qu'ils sont déçus par la faillite du contrat social et aspirent à une contre-société vivable, hors d'un ordre social corrompu. C'est cette 'terre libre', indépendante, que va chercher un Kaw-djer en rupture de ban aux confins de la Terre de feu dans *En Magellanie*, 'Magellanie, le seul point, sur toute la surface de la terre, où régnât encore la liberté intégrale' (Verne 2010, 21), celles que,

*anywhere out of the world*, pour le dire avec Baudelaire, Robur et Nemo sont contraints d'aller chercher hors la Terre, qui dans les airs qui dans les mers. Nemo qui, avant d'être le commandant du Nautilus, héros de la résistance indienne face à l'oppression britannique et héraut de la résistance au colonialisme, cette prédation, dans *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870) avait par anticipation fait pièce aux menées de la *North Polar Association* en plantant au pôle Sud, soit une terre qui échappe au partage étatique, son étendard, qui se trouve être un drapeau noir (Verne 2008, 478, 563).

Est-il trop tard pour renouer avec la sécurité en revenant sur terre, dans les zones arctiques et ailleurs ? C'est ce sur quoi nous ne saurions être trop optimistes à lire les prospectives de Verne, sauf, peut-être, à faire jouer l'esprit critique qu'il nous a laissé en partage.



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# Le Japon de Fukushima comme lieu de discours pour des auteurs francophones

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À 14h46, le 11 mars 2011, le nord-est du Japon est secoué par un tremblement de terre de magnitude 8,9. L'épicentre est situé à 120 km sous la mer, au large de la ville de Sendai, à une profondeur de 24 km. Les secousses durent deux minutes trente. Puis, dix minutes plus tard, surgit un gigantesque tsunami, dont les vagues atteignent par endroit 15 mètres de hauteur, avec des pics à 39 mètres, pénétrant jusqu'à 10 kilomètres à l'intérieur des terres, à une vitesse de 160km/h et ravageant les ports et les villages de la côte nord-est de l'île principale de Honshû.

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J.,  
Riippa, A. & Samola, H. (Eds) (2020). *Narratives of fear and safety*.  
Tampere: Tampere University Press, 461–488.  
<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-359-014-4>

Le lendemain, une explosion retentit dans la centrale de Fukushima, le toit du bâtiment qui abrite le réacteur n°1 s'effondre, provoquant des rejets de radioactivité.

Les jours suivants, alors qu'on déplore trois cent mille personnes sans abri, trente mille morts ou disparus et des milliers de blessés, deux autres explosions se produisent au niveau du réacteur n°3 et on réévalue d'un point la puissance du séisme. Un nouvel incendie se déclare ensuite au réacteur n°4. (Fiat 2011, 12.)

Le tsunami a, en effet, gravement détérioré la centrale nucléaire de Fukushima Daiichi. Sur les six réacteurs en activité de la centrale, quatre subissent des dommages irréparables. C'est un accident nucléaire de niveau 7, le niveau le plus élevé. 215,000 personnes sont évacuées dans un périmètre de 30 kilomètres autour de la centrale. Le dégagement de césium 137 est beaucoup plus élevé que la bombe d'Hiroshima.

Les ouvriers de Tepco, la compagnie japonaise opératrice de la centrale de Fukushima, vont tenter de refroidir le cœur des réacteurs. Mais les explosions des réacteurs vont entraîner des rejets de déchets radioactifs dans l'air. Les ouvriers vont continuer d'essayer de refroidir les réacteurs à raison de 400,000 litres d'eau par jour déversés sur la centrale. Cette eau lourdement contaminée fuit vers la mer, contaminant à son tour les poissons et les crustacés. Une zone d'exclusion est décrétée autour de la centrale.

Le monde se trouve ainsi devant une catastrophe naturelle (le séisme, le tsunami) écologique (les effets de la destruction de la centrale nucléaire de Fukushima), humanitaire (les morts, les blessés), sanitaire (les déplacés, les sans-abris, les contaminés) sans précédent. Le tremblement de terre est d'une intensité inattendue, le tsunami d'une puissance non prévue, l'accident de

la centrale nucléaire pose des problèmes de contamination et de décontamination et soulève des questions concernant la sécurité nucléaire. La prise en charge des populations est complexe.

Un des pays démocratiques les plus développés se voit devant une situation inédite. Une société hautement technicisée et bien organisée est tout à coup démunie devant une catastrophe d'une telle ampleur. Un pays riche et remarquablement bien organisé dans des circonstances normales, a vu ses citoyens livrés à eux-mêmes par milliers.

Cependant, si Fukushima est considéré comme un tournant dans l'histoire du monde, c'est surtout à cause des relations que cette catastrophe implique entre la technologie, l'écologie, la politique, l'industrie et la société. Fukushima montre qu'un tel accident est possible dans un contexte démocratique, riche et libéral et il pose la question de savoir ce qui s'est réellement passé et celle de savoir ce que nous pouvons apprendre de cette catastrophe. Cet accident est une catastrophe humaine, sociale, technologique, industrielle et politique de grande ampleur qui remet en cause des modes de vie et de pensée. L'accident de Fukushima semble avoir eu lieu à cause d'une carence de la pensée concernant la sécurité de la centrale, d'où la naissance d'une réflexion sérieuse face au nucléaire et à son expansion ou au contraire, sa restriction. La radioactivité est toujours présente et l'impossibilité de circonscrire les conséquences de Fukushima remet en cause le mythe du nucléaire, sa propreté, son éventuelle innocuité et la pensée d'une humanité qui suit une évolution vers un progrès linéaire et sans à-coups. Apparaît alors l'idée que le progrès associé au développement technologique et médical, à l'accélération du rythme de vie, à l'augmentation de la production et de la consommation pourrait non pas conduire l'humanité vers un mieux mais vers sa destruction. La notion d'un temps défini est aussi impossible dans cette situation puisqu'il ne sera

pas possible de parler 'd'après Fukushima'. La pollution nucléaire reste, elle n'est pas envisageable à l'échelle d'une ou plusieurs vies humaines mais à l'échelle de milliers d'années et elle pose la question du vivre 'avec' les conséquences de Fukushima puisqu'aucun retour à la normale ne sera jamais possible, comme l'avait déjà montré Tchernobyl. Ainsi, on a le moment circonscrit de l'explosion et ensuite un temps post accidentel qui a une durée infinie et des conséquences réelles anxiogènes :

La contamination dessine une nouvelle géographie réelle et imaginaire, traçant au gré des vents et des pluies le dessin complexe des « zones » radioactives impropres à une vie authentiquement humaine : la nouvelle technonature contaminée, en apparence identique à celle qui lui préexistait, est dotée de nouvelles règles dont le non-respect entraîne fatalement, comme dans le film prémonitoire *Stalker* d'A. Tarkovski, la maladie puis la mort à plus ou moins brève échéance. (Lemarchand 2016/1, 130.)

La catastrophe japonaise remet donc en question des dimensions temporelles ainsi que le mythe du progrès sur lequel se fonde notre civilisation. La catastrophe renvoie aussi au passé, aux bombardements de Nagasaki et d'Hiroshima ou encore aux tremblements de terre de Kobe en 1995 ou du Kantô en 1923. Elle fait surgir des peurs tout à fait inédites dans l'histoire de l'humanité, où se croisent la terreur devant l'ampleur de la catastrophe de Fukushima, l'effroi existentiel devant les caractéristiques temporelles de cet événement, la peur devant la remise en question de toute une philosophie du progrès, jamais mise en cause jusqu'à présent.

Dans ce contexte et devant ces faits, il semblait nécessaire pour les intellectuels et les artistes de se pencher sur les événements de Fukushima afin de les commenter, de les décrire, de peindre leur

ressenti par rapport à ce qui s'est passé. Comme l'explique Yuji Nishijama :

Pour traiter une catastrophe au plan social et culturel, il est indispensable de lui conférer une intelligibilité. On a besoin des paroles et des images pour décrire un désastre, mettre de l'ordre dans ce que l'on y perçoit, et l'objectiver par une mise à distance. (Nishiyama 2016/1, 1.)

C'est, bien sûr, ce qu'ont fait les écrivains et les artistes japonais et, à chaque anniversaire de la catastrophe, de nouvelles œuvres sont produites.

Les écrits de langue française, pour leur part, sont aussi présents et plus nombreux que ceux dans les autres langues. Cela s'explique peut-être par le lien entre le Japon et la France depuis la fin du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle mais cela tient certainement aussi à la place du nucléaire en France où on compte cinquante-huit réacteurs sur dix-neuf sites alors que le Japon en comptait cinquante-quatre en fonction avant le 11 mars 2011.

Les catastrophes du type de Fukushima, par leur ampleur, mettent les hommes et les femmes face à leurs limites et en même temps les forcent à reconsidérer la notion de réalité. Se pose aussi la question de savoir si on a le droit ou non de commenter et de juger ou encore d'imaginer un événement d'une telle ampleur. En effet, une fois entendu le fait que les artistes ne peuvent pas rester indifférents à la catastrophe de Fukushima et qu'il est de leur devoir de participer à la réflexion sur cet événement de dimension planétaire, la question qui se pose aux écrivains est de savoir comment parler des faits. Convient-il de parler des faits ou d'écouter 'les paroles du désastre' que mentionne Yuji Nishiyama (Nishiyama 2016/1) ? Par écouter, le philosophe veut dire se pencher sur ce qui a été écrit ou peint, dans d'autres temps et

dans d'autres lieux, dans d'autres contextes où des catastrophes ont été imaginées ou vécues. D'après lui, les sciences humaines ont pour vocation 'd'ajouter l'épaisseur des contextes et des temporalités ... et nous montrent comment nous pouvons faire face à cette réalité' (Nishiyama 2016/1). Cet auteur mentionne aussi la question posée par ses concitoyens artistes de savoir ce qui n'est pas permis de faire en tant qu'artiste, face à une telle catastrophe.

Le questionnement sur le rôle des humanités et des arts est d'autant plus crucial que la science ne peut pas réparer les dégâts causés par la technique, elle est impuissante à changer le réel et ne peut donc plus que se contenter de décrire ou d'enregistrer ce qui peut l'être. En résulte d'autant plus le devoir d'un questionnement philosophique sur le bien-fondé du projet technologique sur lequel sont construites nos sociétés développées et l'amplification du rôle des sciences humaines qui ont un rôle important à jouer dans le décryptage d'une catastrophe comme celle de Fukushima. La littérature qui prend en main la catastrophe de Fukushima se situe alors à la frontière entre l'art et l'engagement dans l'espace social. La littérature :

S'empare de ce qui dans le réel angoisse, et organise une réaction à ce qu'elle-même constitue comme danger. Cette réaction peut s'arrêter au constat de sidération – qui est déjà une sortie du sidérant –, ou s'exprimer dans la déploration, l'alarme, la provocation, ou dans les divers modes de réassurance, depuis la compréhension jusqu'à la compensation, la remédiation ou le divertissement. (Duprat, p. 40 dans cette œuvre.)

Les textes littéraires sur Fukushima sont des exemples de représentations de ce qui est à peine imaginable. Par leur existence, ils confrontent leurs lecteurs avec leurs peurs les plus

profondes et leur proposent, directement ou indirectement, une réflexion sur les enjeux de l'événement.

Les auteurs francophones que nous avons lus partagent, avec nous, leur regard sur la catastrophe écologique de Fukushima. Les questions récurrentes concernant les textes que ces hommes et ces femmes ont produits sont les suivantes : quel type de discours peut-on produire en tant qu'écrivain (français) sur la catastrophe de Fukushima ? Quels peuvent être la forme du texte et son contenu ? Comment les textes répondent-ils aux questionnements existentiels face à la catastrophe de Fukushima ? Quelles sont les limites de la littérature concernant la représentation de l'inimaginable et de la peur ?

## Présentation du corpus des auteurs francophones

La forme du discours dépend en partie de la situation des écrivains par rapport aux événements. Certains vivaient au Japon au moment des faits, d'autres sont venus peu de temps après, certains ont séjourné plus tard à la villa Kujoyama à Kyoto qui est une résidence d'artistes appartenant à la France.

La relation entre les écrivains francophones et le Japon n'est pas forcément la même non plus et cela peut interférer sur la forme du texte. Tout le monde connaît le rapport particulier d'Amélie Nothomb avec le Japon. On peut gager que celui de Christophe Fiat avec le pays n'est pas de même nature. Si le moment où les écrivains se rendent au Japon influe également le contenu de leur texte, c'est aussi le cas du lieu où ils se rendent. Amélie Nothomb, par exemple, choisit de passer rapidement près de Fukushima tandis que Michaël Ferrier passera beaucoup de temps près du lieu de la centrale.



Le 28 mars 2012, après seize ans d'absence, Amélie Nothomb reposait le pied au Japon, le pays de sa petite enfance, pour les besoins d'un documentaire de France 5. Suit le récit de ce pèlerinage aux sources. Deux personnages importants de l'univers d'Amélie Nothomb sont mis au premier plan dans ce texte : Rinri, le fiancé éconduit de *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam* et la nounou adorée, Nishio-san de *Métaphysique des tubes*. L'écrivaine atterrit à Osaka, va dans le village de son enfance transformé en banlieue chic, elle rencontre aussi sa nounou dont la maison a été détruite par le séisme de 1995 et qui, malade, n'a pas réalisé ce qui s'est passé à Fukushima. Puis Amélie Nothomb se rend à Kyoto, fait un détour par Fukushima et retrouve, à Tokyo, son amoureux des années 90. Malgré les événements dramatiques qui ont eu lieu au Japon, elle évoquera, dans son texte, l'idée de nostalgie heureuse pour décrire ses retrouvailles personnelles avec le pays. À noter que son texte est sous-titré 'roman'. Ce texte s'inscrit dans la longue lignée des textes d'Amélie Nothomb. Il est un des textes qui fait référence au Japon mais le lien avec Fukushima est très distendu. On peut tout de même gager qu'Amélie Nothomb s'est sentie très concernée par la catastrophe et ait voulu publier un texte où elle mentionne la catastrophe et témoigner de l'ambiance au Japon après les événements de Fukushima.

Christophe Fiat, quant à lui, dont le texte est sous-titré récit, part au Japon après la catastrophe, au mois d'avril 2011, accompagné d'un interprète et d'acteurs. Il décide d'écrire une pièce de théâtre sur un personnage de science-fiction nippon : Godzilla. Iwaki, nom propre que l'on trouve dans le titre de son récit, est une ville de la préfecture de Fukushima.

Thomas B. Reverdy, de son côté, fait un long séjour en 2012 au Japon, dans la résidence de Kujoyama à Kyoto et cela va lui permettre d'écrire un texte romanesque sur la société japonaise, à laquelle il associe la catastrophe de Fukushima. Il décrit dans

son roman l'existence au Japon d'un phénomène particulier qui permet à des hommes ou à des femmes de disparaître par dizaines de milliers chaque année. On les appelle les *johatsu*. La plupart de ces personnes qui s'évaporent sont des individus surendettés qui fuient sans laisser de traces. Ils deviennent des ombres que personne ne recherche, des parias de la société. Ni la police, ni la famille déshonorée n'entreprennent quoi que ce soit à leur sujet. Kaze est l'un d'entre eux, banquier depuis trente ans dans la même entreprise, il est congédié du jour au lendemain sans comprendre pourquoi, à moins qu'il n'ait mis le doigt sur des malversations financières opérées le lendemain du tsunami par les yakuzas.

Alertée par sa mère, Yukito, exilée aux États-Unis, décide de réagir et de chercher son père. Elle enrôle son ex-petit ami, Richard B (inspiré par Richard Brautigan), mi-déetective privé, mi-poète et elle rentre à Kyoto. Pendant ce temps, le père, Kaze, a monté une entreprise de débarrassage dans un quartier de laissés-pour-compte de Tokyo, où il travaille, aidé d'un jeune garçon de 14 ans, Akainu. Ces deux personnages vont finir par rejoindre les camps de réfugiés de Sendai, près de la zone interdite de Fukushima. Ils vont être plongés dans le monde des victimes du désastre, ceux qui ont tout perdu mais qui doivent encore payer les traites de leurs maisons sinistrées.

Michaël Ferrier, quant à lui, vit au Japon au moment de la catastrophe de Fukushima. Il va raconter très en détail, comme témoin de premier plan, les événements de ce mois de mars 2011. Une première partie de son récit est consacrée au tremblement de terre, puis à son séjour temporaire à Kyoto. Enfin, il relate comment il va se rendre à Fukushima pour apporter de l'aide et des vivres. À la fin de son livre seulement arrive le commentaire critique des événements.

Philippe Forest se rend à la maison franco-japonaise de Tokyo où il a été invité, en septembre 2013, pour un colloque sur la réception de la culture japonaise en France, auquel participe d'ailleurs Michaël Ferrier. Il y parlera de Sôseki, l'inventeur du roman japonais. Nous nous référerons au premier chapitre de son livre qui s'intitule 'retour à Tokyo', comme le livre entier, et qui est un chapitre où il témoigne de son premier séjour au Japon après Fukushima. Il écrit : 'si je devais écrire le journal de ce que j'ai vu ici, je l'intitulerais « Retour à Tokyo »'. (Forest 2014, 21)

D'autres textes francophones relatent aussi les événements. Ainsi, dans *Malgré Fukushima*, l'écrivain Éric Faye nous livre le journal qu'il a tenu alors qu'il était en résidence à la villa Kujoyama (été et automne 2012), après la catastrophe, où il donne au lecteur ses réflexions sur la vie au Japon à ce moment-là et Richard Collasse qui habite au Japon, raconte d'une manière saisissante, dans un roman, *L'Océan dans la rizière* une fiction où le tsunami tient la place centrale. Certains textes sont aussi plus centrés sur la catastrophe nucléaire, donc sur les dangers de l'atome, comme *Le Démantèlement du cœur* de Daniel de Roulet. Cet auteur a écrit toute une série de textes sur le nucléaire, montrant le triomphe de la science et sa remise en cause. Dans son texte sur Fukushima, il décrit une famille où la mère japonaise, handicapée des suites de la bombe de Hiroshima, s'occupe, en tant que scientifique, du démantèlement de surgénérateurs nucléaires en France. Elle doit se rendre d'urgence au Japon après les événements de Fukushima, où, par ailleurs, son fils travaille comme intérimaire dans la centrale du Kansai au moment du drame.

Dans un tout autre registre, Laurent Mauvignier raconte dans *Autour du monde* un roman choral de toutes les histoires qui se sont déroulées le 11 mars 2011, avec, entre autres, l'étreinte d'une Japonaise et d'un Mexicain au moment du séisme et du tsunami et la mort du jeune homme alors que la jeune femme survit

dans la maison grâce à sa doudoune qui lui sert de bouée. Pour Mauvignier, le séisme et le tsunami sont la toile de fond de son livre qui répond au principe de l'effet papillon avec l'observation imaginaire de la place et des effets de cet événement autour du monde, dans la vie de différentes personnes. Parfois, les effets sont très profonds, comme dans l'exemple de cette famille japonaise qui est en vacances à Paris et qui prolonge son séjour, tout en tentant de protéger leur plus jeune fille de l'annonce de la mort de ses grands-parents. Mais, la plupart du temps, l'information de la catastrophe circule dans le monde entier mais n'a que peu d'effet dans la vie des personnes qui reçoivent la nouvelle par le biais de la télévision ou de leur ordinateur. On est en quelque sorte à l'opposé de ce qui se passe dans le texte de Daniel de Roulet où l'événement a un impact direct sur la vie des protagonistes qui sont très concernés par ce qui s'est passé à Fukushima.

On peut se risquer à dire que, sur le plan typologique, ces textes, à l'exception de ceux de Reverdy, de Collasse, de de Roulet ou de Mauvignier qui sont des romans, s'apparentent à la narration exotique qui 'vise [...] à représenter exactement ce qui a été visité' (Moura 1998, 51) dans un ailleurs extrême-oriental, ici de catastrophe naturelle. La tendance dominante des textes est la tendance descriptive qui vise à restituer ce qui a été vu, à en témoigner le plus justement possible. La forme dont se rapprochent le plus ces textes (à l'exception des romans) est le journal de voyage. Même Forest qui ne va pas sur les lieux de la catastrophe et qui reste à Tokyo, se fait l'écho de ce qu'il entend et de ce qu'il voit, il témoigne de la catastrophe à travers le discours de ses amis japonais. La fonction de témoin semble primordiale pour la plupart des écrivains, même si elle appelle parfois le surnaturel, comme la vision-poursuite de Godzilla chez Fiat. La description de ce qui est vu et entendu se fait dans une foison

de détails, plus insoutenables les uns que les autres. Puis suit le commentaire.

Dans ce type d'expérience, décrite par les auteurs, qui semble proche de la description du voyage moderne tel que le conçoit Jean-Marc Moura, le voyageur fait aussi la découverte de lui-même et trouve 'des résonnances inédites et profondes' (Moura 1998, 57), il fait une plongée dans 'le lointain intérieur' dont Henri Michaux a parlé. Dans un voyage ordinaire, l'homogénéisation de l'espace et l'occidentalisation du monde oblige le voyageur, selon Moura (Moura 1998, 58), à se poser la question du lien qu'il entretient avec le lieu qu'il visite puisque désormais la nouveauté des lieux et des personnes devient, dans une certaine mesure, relative. Les témoins de la catastrophe de Fukushima se trouvent, quant à eux, dans une situation rare pour des hommes du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle car le spectacle qui va s'offrir à eux est absolument inédit et donne l'impression d'assister à une scène biblique d'Apocalypse. Cela fera surgir chez Michaël Ferrier l'image qu'il marche dans un désastre :

En attendant, je marche, je marche ... j'écris. Je longe  
l'effacement des choses (Ferrier 2012, 177).

À ces scènes de fin du monde dont nous allons maintenant donner quelques exemples précis, s'associe un sentiment de peur et de sidération.

## L'enchaînement des événements durant la catastrophe de Fukushima

Au sein du corpus francophone, le récit du séisme peut être lu sous la plume de Michaël Ferrier qui a produit un texte important sur la catastrophe (*Fukushima, récit d'un désastre*) et qui, de surcroît, a été à l'origine d'une réflexion collective sur le séisme et d'échanges entre intellectuels français et japonais à ce sujet (voir *Penser avec Fukushima*).

Dans le cas du séisme, Ferrier qui a vécu le tremblement de terre depuis Tokyo, fait appel, pour décrire le phénomène, à la personnification des forces naturelles, comme si les mouvements de la terre étaient le fait d'un être vivant :

Les vibrations saturent chaque point de l'espace et le rendent incompréhensible. Oscillation, éparpillement. Tout se ramifie et se désagrège. On dirait une bête qui rampe, un serpent de sons, la queue vivante d'un dragon. Je comprends tout à coup pourquoi les Japonais représentent le tremblement de terre sous la forme d'un poisson-chat, mi-félin, mi-mollusque. Quelque chose comme un corps agile, somptueux, caverneux, qui se défait et se reforme quasi instantanément (Ferrier 2012, 29).

Pour représenter le séisme, Ferrier utilise une légende populaire japonaise qui raconte que le pays repose sur le dos d'un poisson-chat dont les mouvements causent parfois un séisme. En même temps, en introduisant ainsi une imagerie traditionnelle japonaise dans son texte, Ferrier suit la lignée des récits de voyage de ses prédécesseurs.

Pourtant, le sentiment qui va dominer pour le lecteur, même si les textes donnent à lire principalement, par la suite,

des descriptions des effets du passage du tsunami, est celui de la terreur muette des écrivains devant les dégâts humains et matériels occasionnés.

Il était impossible pour les auteurs de parler de la catastrophe de Fukushima sans évoquer le tsunami qui est à la base de cette catastrophe. Et ce d'autant que Ferrier qui vit au Japon, Fiat qui arrive peu de temps après et Nothomb qui va sur les lieux un an plus tard, vont voir la région dévastée par le tsunami, mais aucun d'entre eux ne pourra approcher la ville de Fukushima puisque c'est une zone interdite. La plupart des descriptions doivent donc se concentrer sur les dégâts que l'on peut observer sur le passage du tsunami. Aucun des auteurs ne pouvant se rendre près de la centrale, l'accident de la centrale ne pourra être décrit que d'après des sources secondaires, à travers ce qu'en disent les médias, les scientifiques. Visuellement, il est impossible de témoigner de ce à quoi la centrale ressemble et la radioactivité est parfaitement invisible aussi. Le lecteur est devant le paradoxe de n'avoir de descriptions que du passage du tsunami et ces descriptions s'avèrent extrêmement détaillées.

Le narrateur-témoin (cas de Ferrier et de Fiat) qui arrive sur place peu de temps après la catastrophe nucléaire et le tsunami prépare le lecteur à la description brute :

J'avais vu des milliers d'images de la catastrophe avant de monter dans le Tohoku (nord-est en japonais) ; rien ne m'avait préparé à une telle dévastation. (Ferrier 2012, 116.)

Puis, le lecteur est immergé dans un non-monde :

Quand dans notre camionnette de location, chargée de vivres, de médicaments, et de vêtements, nous entrons progressivement dans la région par la grande autoroute qui mène vers Sendaï, puis par le réseau inextricable de

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petites routes qui ruissellent vers la mer, c'est d'abord une impression trompeuse de normalité. Les rizières bien ordonnées, les charmants villages blottis dans les anneaux rocheux de la côte, les grandes forêts solitaires remplies du chant des oiseaux, tout évoque le calme et la sérénité. [...]

Et soudain, passé la courbe d'un virage, au détour de la route, le désastre nous prend. Tout à coup, il n'y a plus rien. Ni arbres, ni maisons, ni jardins. Ni routes, ni immeubles, ni collines. Une masse de débris innombrables ondule à perte de vue. [...] (Ferrier 2012, 118-119.)

Les dégâts du tsunami sont décrits par le biais d'une description minutieuse :

Tout autour de moi, il y a des monticules de meubles cassés (chaises, tables, armoires), des appareils ménagers et des matelas crevés, des magazines et des livres mouillés. Je vois aussi des télévisions, des téléphones, des habits d'hommes, de femmes, et d'enfants et des instruments de musique, un piano et trois guitares. Il y a aussi des jouets, poupées, train, livres illustrés, tricycle ? C'est triste. (Fiat 2011, 22.)

Les phrases sont courtes, elles constatent les dégâts. Les auteurs utilisent des tournures présentatives simples, des adjectifs évaluatifs sobres. L'affectivité est sous contrôle.

La description fait aussi voir un monde aplati, pulvérisé :

C'est un tapis de débris. Des kilomètres et des kilomètres de gravats. Tout est aplati, aplani, rasé, arasé. De cette plaine de déchets, plus rien ne semble pouvoir s'élever : le mouvement vertical a été éliminé de la terre, réduite à sa plus simple surface, sa plus plate expression. Plus



rien ne porte, ne rayonne, aucune arête d'immeuble, aucune flèche de branche : le bois, l'acier, tout a été aplati, laminé, lapidé, dilapidé. (Ferrier 2012, 120.)

Des données chiffrées sont données (voir Ferrier 2012, 124–125, 126). Il s'agit pour les auteurs de décrire des faits insoutenables et ils ne peuvent le faire que dans la posture du témoin et en empruntant des modèles discursifs qui se rapportent au récit de guerre. Les écrivains deviennent des chroniqueurs de guerre qui s'interdisent les belles phrases littéraires et restent au plus près de leur sujet. Ils se concentrent sur l'établissement de listes qui tentent d'épuiser la totalité de ce qu'ils ont vu et de donner la représentation la plus fidèle possible du désastre. C'est la manière que les écrivains en état de stupeur ont trouvé de décrire l'atteinte, la destruction de l'espace quotidien par le tsunami.

## Le témoignage des rescapés

Les rescapés sont rencontrés par les narrateurs-témoins et ils racontent ce qu'ils ont vécu : 'Ils me racontent, ils me racontent encore avec des larmes au bord des yeux, avec des tremblements dans les mains' (Ferrier 2012, 138), 'ils me disent les corps pressés, écrasés ...' (Ferrier 2012, 140) :

- Les rescapés ont vécu le tsunami par le son :  
Ça fait du bruit, une maison, quand c'est arraché du sol. Le mugissement de l'eau est formidable. Mais le son du bois qui grince puis se fracasse est quelque chose d'inimaginable, me disent plusieurs rescapés, les yeux encore effrayés par le spectacle qu'ils me décrivent. ...

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Il y a aussi tous les bruits de la parole, les cris rageurs des hommes, les hurlements des femmes, les cris perçants des enfants – dans un mélange de peur et d'excitation – quand ils voient enfin la vague. (Ferrier 2012, 131.)

- Ils ont été terrifiés par la coulée noire :  
Le tsunami est une lente pellicule noire, un rideau mat et lisse comme le velours, mortel comme la peste. Il se glisse partout avec un visqueux de vase. Tout est pris, repris, charrié, démembré dans cette masse de nuit où il n'y a plus ni néons ni lumières, juste des odeurs et des mouvements. C'est une immense dissolution. (Ferrier 2012, 141.)

Ferrier rapporte les descriptions qui lui sont faites, les corps noyés, bouffis, gonflés, boursoufflés (Ferrier 2012, 137), les morts qui font la queue (Ferrier 2012, 157), qui sont des déchets radioactifs.

- Enfin, les survivants sont ensevelis sous les odeurs :  
Le pire, c'est l'odeur : l'odeur stupéfiante de la boue et du poisson mort.  
On l'appelle *hedoro* : la boue. La boue spéciale du tsunami.  
Elle garde en elle tous les effluves des éléments qu'elle a charriés, voitures, bidons, avions, bateaux, maisons, chair humaine, poissons. Elle s'est installée partout dans les maisons, le mobilier, les penderies... (Ferrier 2012, 159.)

Le lecteur est plongé par les auteurs dans la description du lieu lointain et touché par la catastrophe, une description objective lui est faite des lieux, des données chiffrées sont données, le témoignage des rescapés est restitué, les impressions du narrateur-témoin sont mentionnées. Ferrier nous explique

(Ferrier 2012, 128) qu'il s'est mis à l'écoute des rescapés et qu'il a essayé de comprendre et de restituer ce qui s'est passé. Le lecteur est devant un compte-rendu de ce que le narrateur-témoin a vu, devant, aussi, une tentative de restitution des événements. La narration se fonde sur une enquête du narrateur auprès de la population. L'impression pour le lecteur est de lire un journal de bord ou un début d'enquête sociologique. Les détails donnés sont choquants. Ils correspondent à ce que le lecteur attend ; ce dernier veut essayer de se représenter ce qui s'est passé et recherche, auprès de l'écrivain, non pas le journaliste-commentateur de la télévision ou des médias, mais le témoin qui enregistre et restitue ce qu'il a vu et entendu. Le lecteur veut être au plus près des victimes et entendre leur voix par l'intermédiaire du médium écrivain. La peur, les émotions perceptibles sont du côté des rescapés interrogés, l'écrivain, de son côté, restant aussi neutre que possible. Mais s'il l'est dans sa retranscription minutieuse des paroles des victimes et dans sa description des lieux, les détails qui sont donnés aux lecteurs trahissent aussi la peur et la sidération de l'écrivain-témoin.

## Le vide de la représentation de la catastrophe nucléaire

Autant le tsunami et ses conséquences sont décrits dans les détails, autant la catastrophe nucléaire est passée sous silence. Elle n'est présente que par la rumeur et le parallèle avec Hiroshima et Nagasaki. Les lieux ne peuvent être approchés, ils sont interdits. En effet, les visiteurs se retrouvent devant la barrière du cercle rouge vif, celui du périmètre de 20km, le cercle rouge pâle des 30 km et le cercle orange des 40km.

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Toute l'information sur ce qui se passe à Fukushima est vague, comme si tout l'événement était marqué par la censure, le discours qui peut être suivi sur les médias n'a pas de source énonciative claire :

Ils disent que la situation autour des centrales devient chaque jour à la fois plus claire – une catastrophe interminable – et plus opaque (black-out de plus en plus serré dans les médias). (Ferrier 2012, 185.)

De manière naturelle, la comparaison est faite avec les bombardements nucléaires de la seconde guerre mondiale :

On dit que le dégagement de césium 137 aurait été cent soixante-huit fois plus élevé que lors de l'explosion de la bombe atomique larguée sur Hiroshima en 1945. (Ferrier 2012, 75.)

Au fond de la salle, sur un tableau, il y a un plan de la ville avec des cercles qui partent de l'épicentre et indiquent les quartiers rasés et la propagation de la radioactivité. Ce sont les mêmes cercles qui sont utilisés aujourd'hui pour décrire la zone de contamination autour de la centrale de Fukushima, avec le gros point noir pour Iwaki. (Fiat 2011, 40.)

L'image de la pendule arrêtée d'Hiroshima et celle de Fukushima sont mentionnées, comme des symboles récurrents de catastrophe nucléaire.

La zone interdite ne peut être décrite car elle ne peut être approchée. D'où la description des cercles qui l'entourent avec les différents degrés de dangerosité. On remarque que la description est plus facile pour le romancier que pour le voyageur qui doit se limiter à écrire ce dont il a été témoin :

La zone interdite : c'est comme s'approcher d'un incendie. Un cercle de vingt kilomètres de circonférence (évacuation forcée), puis un autre de dix kilomètres (évacuation recommandée, confinement obligatoire). Sur toute cette route entre les vingt et les trente kilomètres, il n'y a pratiquement plus personne. (Ferrier 2012, 202.)

On accédait à la zone interdite par le checkpoint de Minimi-Soma. Elle n'était pas plus dévastée que le reste du littoral, mais elle était radioactive en plus d'être dévastée. D'un côté du checkpoint on était dans le périmètre des vingt kilomètres qui avaient été évacués sur décision du gouvernement. De l'autre côté, on était dans l'anneau de vingt à quarante kilomètres où les gouverneurs et les maires avaient conseillé à leurs concitoyens d'évacuer tout de même, mais en laissant à chacun le choix et la responsabilité qui allait avec, c'est-à-dire sans aucune garantie que les assurances et l'administration suivent. (Reverdy 2013, 204.)

Pourtant, si le romancier a la possibilité de décrire la centrale de Fukushima car il fait œuvre de fiction, de nombreuses questions éthiques se posent à lui. Les écrivains-témoins de la catastrophe de Fukushima sont, dans leur attitude, très prudents, n'osant entrer dans la fiction. En effet, se pose déjà à eux la question de la légitimité de leur récit puisqu'ils ne sont pas des victimes de Fukushima. Ils sont des témoins *a posteriori*. La question de la légitimité de la fiction pour évoquer le désastre est encore plus sensible, le lecteur pouvant trouver indécent et choquant, par rapport aux victimes, l'utilisation de la fiction pour un événement aussi récent. 'L'invention et l'imagination peuvent, en effet, sembler inappropriées, voire moralement condamnables, quand la réalité est marquée par l'horreur de la catastrophe.'

(Fabien Arribert-Narce 2016, 71). Cependant, plus le temps passe, comme le souligne Arribert-Narce, moins la nécessité de témoigner reste poignante et plus la place pour la fiction grandit. Le décryptage des images des médias par les mots des écrivains devient moins pressant.

Les écrivains-témoins ne peuvent pourtant pas rester cantonnés dans leur rôle de ‘caméra objective’ face aux événements et se permettent aussi de les commenter ouvertement. Nous laisserons de côté la dénonciation de la catastrophe écologique que représente Fukushima tant sa réalité est évidente pour nous pencher sur les autres aspects critiqués. C’est à ce moment précis de leur parcours que les écrivains montrent leurs émotions, leur empathie et leur révolte par rapport à ce qu’ils ont vu et senti.

## Le commentaire des événements

À côté de la classique critique de la prolifération du nucléaire et de ses dangers, du rappel de l’engagement contre le nucléaire de Kenzaburô Ôé, prix Nobel de littérature en 1994, on trouve une sérieuse critique de la gestion de la crise par les institutions politiques et économiques :

Ou alors la vérité, c’est qu’ils ne savent rien. C’est possible, et même dans certains cas, probable. Refroidir les réacteurs ? Ils ne savent pas faire. Se débarrasser de l’eau radioactive ? Ils ne savent pas faire. Réparer ? N’en parlons pas. Le danger des radiations ? On n’en sait rien. Contamination alimentaire ? On verra bien. Conséquences, répercussions, séquelles ? Allons, passons à autre chose ... Des mois et des mois après le désastre, pas fichus de donner des informations sûres, fiables ou ne serait-ce que compréhensibles de la

situation, notamment en ce qui concerne les retombées radioactives. (Ferrier 2012, 238–239.)

On présente une situation complètement anormale comme normale. On s'habitue doucement à des évènements inhabituels. On légalise et on normalise la mise en danger de la vie, on s'accommode de l'inadmissible. Des employés des centrales et notamment les sous-traitants contaminés sans mot dire, des populations entières réduites au silence et à la résignation, des rejets chroniques et continuels tolérés et même homologués, des déchets intraitables qu'on transmet, toute honte bue à ceux qui viendront après. (Ferrier 2012, 292.)

Reverdy, dans son roman, va même jusqu'à mentionner (Reverdy 2013, 169–170) la possibilité d'un vaste scandale qui impliquerait des hommes politiques au plus haut niveau et des hommes d'affaires. Ils auraient racheté les sociétés supposées gérer les dégâts occasionnés par la centrale nucléaire en utilisant les informations précises qu'ils avaient sur la situation réelle. Ils auraient aussi racheté les terrains autour de Fukushima dans l'espoir de pouvoir y construire des terrains de golf plus tard. Le récit oscille ici vers l'idée d'un vaste complot.

Les rescapés doivent quitter leur résidence mais ils sont aussi obligés de continuer à payer les dettes de la maison désormais inhabitable. De plus, la population supposée avoir été en contact avec la radioactivité est stigmatisée :

Les *ibekashuba* d'Hiroshima

Les *ibekashuba* sont de quatre sortes, m'explique Kiyoko. Il y a ceux qui étaient là pendant l'explosion (dans les 10km<sup>2</sup> de l'épicentre), ceux qui sont arrivés deux semaines plus tard. Il y a les foetus des gens

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contaminés et il y a ceux qui ont soigné les irradiés (secouristes, médecins, infirmiers). (Fiat 2011, 76.)

*Les nouveaux ibekashuba*

La mort sociale est en marche. Les emplois, les mariages (avec la peur des enfants mutants), tout est suspendu au spectre de la radiation. Des camions avec une plaque de Fukushima sont refoulés dans certaines stations-service. Des graffitis apparaissent sur les voitures immatriculées dans la région des centrales. Des passants hèlent le conducteur d'une voiture de la préfecture de Fukushima pour lui dire de s'en aller. (Ferrier 2012, 240–241.)

La population qui vient de Fukushima est ainsi rejetée par les Japonais des autres régions.

Les morts radioactifs sont sans sépulture :

Les funérailles sont interdites car les morts de Fukushima ne sont plus des morts : ce sont des déchets nucléaires. C'est le pire peut-être : ils périssent mais ils ne meurent pas, ils n'ont pas le droit de mourir comme tout le monde. Ainsi se met en place toute une politique et une économie de la déjection ... qui confine à l'abjection. (Ferrier 2012, 274.)

Il s'agit ici pour les écrivains de Fukushima de mettre des mots sur des situations et des images insoutenables. L'auteur disparaît derrière les faits qu'il observe et qu'il rapporte dans un premier temps, puis, dans un second temps il commente certains faits, les dénonce, laisse éclater sa colère devant les conséquences de ce qu'il a vu ou imaginé.



## Conclusion

Est-il possible de raconter le désastre du tsunami et de la centrale ?

Que peut-on écrire devant une beauté – ou une catastrophe – hors norme ? La question n'a cessé de me tarauder durant tout ce voyage. Le désir de dire, le souci impérieux de porter témoignage, se trouve immédiatement confronté à toute une série de réticences et de résistances, née de la disproportion entre ce que ces gens ont vécu et le récit qu'il leur est possible – ou impossible – d'en faire. À peine commence-t-on à raconter qu'on suffoque : nous avons affaire à l'une de ces réalités qui font dire qu'elles dépassent l'entendement ou l'imagination. (Ferrier 2012, 166–167.)

Ferrier se pose la question de savoir s'il existe la possibilité d'un discours sur Fukushima. Il se pose la question en tant qu'écrivain, mais il la pose aussi en ce qui concerne les rescapés et en ce qui concerne les interlocuteurs des survivants. Leur parole peut-elle être entendue ?

Philippe Forest, quant à lui, questionne l'émergence du discours sur Fukushima de la part des écrivains et des artistes :

On ne compte plus désormais les romans qui, à chaque rentrée, prennent le Japon pour décor. Il est rare qu'ils consistent en autre chose qu'en l'expression d'un fantasme folklorique dont Fukushima vient désormais parfaire le pittoresque : le pèlerinage poétique attendu du côté des immeubles modernes de Tokyo et des temples traditionnels de Kyoto conduit immanquablement vers la zone irradiée du désastre. Ce tourisme esthétique de la désolation a pris de telles proportions, me dit-on, que les survivants du tsunami, s'ils sont reconnaissants des

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secours que leur apportent les bénévoles, commencent à être excédés par le défilé continu des artistes et des écrivains, japonais et étrangers, qui font la queue sur place pour prendre les victimes à témoin de leur propre souffrance face à la catastrophe qui les a épargnés. (Forest 2014, 14.)

Il raille l'exotisme puéril de la littérature française à l'égard du Japon et se moque du glissement des stéréotypes d'autrefois à ceux concernant aujourd'hui l'extrême modernité du pays, maintenant agrémenté de Fukushima qui 'vient désormais parfaire le pittoresque.' (Forest 2014, 14). Il pense aussi 'n'avoir aucune autorité pour (s')exprimer sur l'épreuve que le Japon a vécue et qu'il traverse' (Forest 2014, 12) et s'il croit que sa vision sur ce qui s'est passé importe peu, en revanche il écoute attentivement ses amis écrivains japonais, entre autres Ikezawa qui pense que 's'il lui semble légitime ... d'écrire des romans dans lesquels s'exprime la compassion pour les victimes du tsunami, l'heure n'est pas encore venue de faire de même avec Fukushima. Car le temps est toujours à la colère et au combat, rien n'étant réglé du marasme atomique qui menace le pays.' (Forest 2014, 20)

Nothomb, quant à elle, fait dire à Rinri :

– Depuis le 11 mars 2011, reprend Rinri, la vie a changé. Beaucoup de gens ont quitté le Japon et même si je ne le ferai jamais, je peux les comprendre. Nous sommes hantés. Nous avons perdu l'insouciance. Nos existences nous pèsent. La profondeur de notre silence atteste de notre degré de compréhension. (Nothomb 2013, 120.)

Le témoignage de Forest qui rencontre ses amis japonais va dans le même sens :

L'expérience de la catastrophe a profondément et durablement affecté le pays au flanc duquel se trouve toujours la plaie ouverte de sa côte sinistrée vers laquelle toute pensée, toute création, toute culture se trouvent désormais tournée. (Forest 2014, 12.)

Pourtant, le dialogue est difficile car, durant son séjour à Tokyo, lorsque Forest interroge Anna Ogino (mère japonaise, père américain, écrivain du corail selon la dénomination de Ferrier) sur son livre *Le grand séisme : entre désir et morale* où elle raconte, à la manière de Reverdy, l'envers du décor et mentionne l'apparition de potentats locaux qui ont tiré profit de la situation à Fukushima, des réactions très vives ont eu lieu parmi le public présent. Cet incident montre la nature conflictuelle et complexe du sujet, il souligne toute la difficulté d'un discours sur Fukushima, que ce soit le fait d'écrivains francophones ou japonais. Ainsi, s'il est possible de faire voir la peur et les émotions des rescapés dans la littérature sur Fukushima, il semble difficile d'exprimer sa propre peur et sa colère en tant qu'écrivain-témoin, en questionnant le contexte politique et social et son éventuelle responsabilité dans la catastrophe.

Cependant, il est à noter que la littérature, en servant de porte-voix aux rescapés, en retranscrivant minutieusement leur témoignage, donne la parole à des gens ordinaires et se fait la plume de leur voix intime. Cette fonction de la littérature, qui donne la parole aux victimes, est peut-être la manière la plus efficace de transmettre la peur des victimes de Fukushima, en gardant l'espoir que ce témoignage transmis aux générations contemporaines et futures, puisse permettre de faire évoluer les esprits sur la question de la généralisation du nucléaire dans le monde et de ses dangers. La littérature assume aussi une certaine fonction sociale, dans ce contexte, en donnant une voix à ceux qui ne n'expriment jamais, à ces gens ordinaires qui représentent

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la majorité des populations des nations du monde et que l'on entend rarement dans les arts. Leurs peurs et leurs préoccupations largement diffusées par des textes comme ceux sur Fukushima, peuvent aider à influencer une réflexion plus large sur l'évolution des idées en matière de politique ou d'économie ; en tout cas, c'est un espoir.

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# L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle

## Une invention renouvelée à la croisée de la littérature, de l'histoire des sociétés et de l'histoire environnementale

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La catastrophe est devenue depuis deux décennies un objet d'études dans plusieurs champs de recherche, notamment historique et esthétique. Cet intérêt scientifique pour la catastrophe s'est plus particulièrement centré sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (quoique pas exclusivement loin de là). Mais de fait c'est au XVIII<sup>e</sup> que se crée en Europe une véritable pensée de la catastrophe à la faveur des réflexions philosophiques et des transformations sociétales qui caractérisent les Lumières. De telle sorte que la catastrophe peut être appréhendée comme un marqueur,

Kaukiainen, K., Kurikka, K., Mäkelä, H., Nykänen, E., Nyqvist, S., Raipola, J.,  
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un événement emblématique dans la compréhension de la transition vers l'époque moderne. Cette pensée de la catastrophe qui émerge au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle se nourrit du spectacle de désastres naturels majeurs, parmi lesquels les tremblements de terre demeurent parmi les plus impressionnants. Nous évoquerons ici le tremblement de terre de Lima en 1746 ; celui de Lisbonne en 1755 et ceux de Messine et de Calabre qui eurent lieu en 1783 à quelques mois d'intervalle.

Rappelons quelques faits pour prendre la mesure matérielle de ces différents cataclysmes et comprendre qu'ils aient pu retenir l'attention de leurs contemporains.

Le séisme de Lima, extrêmement puissant, détruit en octobre 1746 une grande partie de la cité coloniale connue comme la Cité des Rois, le cœur de la ville et les plus beaux édifices baroques. Mais surtout un violent tsunami consécutif au séisme ravage totalement le quartier portuaire du Callao. On estime que 6000 personnes sont mortes ou portées disparues, soit un dixième des habitants de Lima (De Ribas 2011).

Le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne détruit la ville le 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 1755 : s'ensuivent la submersion de la partie basse de la cité par une gigantesque vague, et de terribles incendies dans les parties non inondées ; on estime à 60,000 le nombre de victimes.

En 1783, plusieurs secousses telluriques touchent toute l'Italie méridionale, particulièrement Messine, en Sicile, et de l'autre côté du détroit la région de la Calabre, entre les mois de février et d'avril (entre le 1<sup>er</sup> février et le 28 mars); d'une puissance moindre que les séismes de Lima et Lisbonne, mais répétés, ces tremblements de terre suivis de tsunamis de part et d'autre du détroit de Messine, détruisent beaucoup de villes et villages et provoquent environ trois fois plus de morts qu'à Lisbonne (Mercier-Faivre & Messina 2008). Nous reviendrons plus avant

sur les traitements narratifs et informatifs distincts dont ces catastrophes ont fait l'objet en leur temps.

Avant cela, interrogeons-nous sur ce qui permet d'affirmer que la catastrophe a été *inventée* au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Son invention a trait à la fois à l'événement catastrophique – auquel il faut donner sens – et à la signification du mot lui-même. Autrement dit, elle concerne d'une part l'histoire du mot, qui subit au XVIII<sup>e</sup> une évolution sémantique radicale (en français, en anglais, en espagnol) et d'autre part les interprétations d'ordres théologique, philosophique, scientifique qui sont faites de l'événement, avec leurs implications éthiques et esthétiques, dans le déroulement de ce siècle charnière.

## Aux sources étymologique et divine

L'origine grecque de l'étymologie de la catastrophe est bien connue : *katastrophê* est un mot composé qui signifie en grec 'bouleversement, renversement', décomposable en *strophê*, 'action de tourner, évolution' et *kata*, 'vers le bas'. La catastrophe est donc à la fois clôture et changement. Ce qui est moins connu en revanche, ce sont les motivations et circonstances précises des changements sémantiques qui affectent le mot dès le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (O'Dea 2008). Comment expliquer que le mot, d'une spécialisation théâtrale, désignant la résolution d'une situation individuelle de tension, en vienne à devenir synonyme de désastre collectif ; que de l'idée de dénouement heureux ou malheureux, le même mot en vienne à se charger de connotations exclusivement négatives. Le changement abrupt, l'énormité des effets produits ne suffisent pas à expliquer le changement de spécialisation du terme en justifiant de quelques sèmes généraux permanents. Lorsque Michel Ribon (1999) invoque la permanence du spectaculaire dans l'évolution



du sens du mot *catastrophe*, il pense en sémioticien : selon lui, en passant de la scène de théâtre à la scène du monde, la catastrophe, d'admirable devient accablante, et interroge la dimension éthique de sa représentation (Ribon 1999, 14).

Par ailleurs, certaines théories d'inspiration religieuse à portée exemplaire et moralisatrice ont pu au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle donner une finalité didactique à la catastrophe, par la 'terreur sacrée' (Ribon 1999, 15) que celle-ci suscite alors. La catharsis devient expiation. Cependant, dans les usages particuliers qui sont faits du mot (en français) rien ne relève de l'évidence, et ces usages démontrent la coexistence de nombreuses acceptions, parfois chez un même auteur, et parfois même au sein d'une seule occurrence au sens indécidable (O'Dea 2008). Ce qui est certain, et remarquable, c'est que l'évolution sémantique du mot *catastrophe* vers son sens moderne a lieu dans un siècle particulièrement sensible aux cataclysmes. Cet intérêt prend forme dans les nouvelles modalités d'interprétation de l'événement, interprétation qui se laïcise. Encore faut-il nuancer la portée de cette *laïcisation* et l'entendre avec les guillemets de rigueur. Le tremblement de terre est un événement qui sème la terreur parmi les survivants et suscite une crainte permanente chez les générations suivantes. Les prédicateurs, qui donnent une interprétation fondamentalement punitive de la catastrophe, ont fait de la peur un ressort essentiel de leur argumentation : Dieu, par la catastrophe, use de la peur pour 'rappeler les humains à la relativité de la vie terrestre' et 'il faut être prêt à tout instant, à affronter le jugement de l'éternité' (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008, 11).

Menée de façon radicale, et suivant en cela ses modèles bibliques de destruction de cités telles Sodome et Gomorrhe et d'inondation par le Déluge, l'interprétation punitive verra dans la catastrophe un châtement divin et cherchera dès lors des boucs émissaires. Après le tremblement de terre de Lima, des

processions et pénitence publiques sont organisées dans la ville en ruines pour apaiser la colère divine et demander miséricorde. L'accès à ces cérémonies expiatoires est interdit aux femmes. Citant un travail de Scarlett O'Phelan, Nicolas de Ribas (2011) rappelle que, dès avant le tremblement de terre ont émergé parmi les religieux des critiques, réitérées, contre la sensualité des liméniens et particulièrement l'indécence des femmes qui suivaient alors la mode française en arborant des décolletés plongeants et des vêtements qui s'arrêtaient au coudes.

Croyances populaires et fausses prophéties font bon ménage pour entretenir la peur d'une imminente destruction apocalyptique. A l'encontre de cette conception, la philosophie des Lumières instillera un autre ordre des choses en postulant que c'est la peur qui engendre les superstitions religieuses (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008, 11).

## Les positionnements théologiques et philosophiques

Le discours d'inspiration religieuse n'est pas toujours exempt d'une visée explicative, loin s'en faut. Car la catastrophe ramène la question du Mal au centre de la réflexion théologique, par son impossibilité à justifier la mort d'innocents. Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ce discours religieux s'infléchit, s'adoucit quant à la portée de la catastrophe-châtiment (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008). Idées anciennes et idées nouvelles s'opposent souvent, se mélangent parfois en tentant de concilier une vision théocentrique du monde et une approche rationnelle nourrie d'observations naturalistes. Les théories catastrophistes de Thomas Burnet sont de ce point de vue très éclairantes (O'Dea 2008, 45) : impressionné par les reliefs alpins, le théologien anglais publie en 1681 *Telluris theoria sacra*,

ouvrage dans lequel il explique que la terre, lisse à son origine, s'est façonnée à coups de 'ruptures brutales' entre les deux bornes de son histoire que sont le Déluge et l'Apocalypse. Où l'on voit que la lecture même attentive du paysage est subordonnée à l'ordre biblique, et le restera au siècle suivant.

Du côté des philosophes, c'est la question de la Nature que la catastrophe introduit comme un enjeu épistémologique. Michel Ribon (1999, 28–29) rappelle qu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle s'opposent deux théories dans la philosophie de la Nature : 'la théorie concentrique d'une nature idéale organisée selon un principe de perfection' et 'une théorie excentrique qui met l'accent sur [...] la catastrophe où s'exalte la sauvagerie d'un sublime'. Ici se situeraient selon lui Voltaire, Buffon, Diderot, qui furent tous frappés par le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne. A la représentation d'une Nature idéale, née d'une vision très anthropocentrée, où la catastrophe naturelle s'apparente à la destruction d'un ordre qui la précédait, se substitue la vision plus naturaliste d'une Nature qui met l'homme au spectacle de sa puissance terrifiante. Michel Ribon (1999, 16) réintroduit ainsi la catégorie esthétique du sublime par la fascination qu'exerce la catastrophe sur les esprits, fascination qui pose dès lors un questionnement d'ordre éthique lorsque le sublime se confronte 'aux existences humaines concrètes'.

## Une littérature, pour donner du sens

Nous pouvons introduire à présent, après les positionnements théologiques et philosophiques, la dimension littéraire dans l'invention de la catastrophe. La narration est essentielle, de diverses façons, à la pensée catastrophique. Les tremblements de terre évoqués de Lima, de Lisbonne et de Calabre ont tous

susité des textes, qu'il s'agisse de témoignages de survivants, de voyageurs de passage après l'événement ou de compte-rendus journalistiques des semaines après. Mais s'il y a visiblement dans ces récits une certaine rhétorique de l'effroi (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008, 27 ; De Ribas 2011) qui se dégage par l'utilisation de l'hyperbole et de l'emphase, de la prétéition, d'images bibliques ou organiques pour tenter de rendre compte de l'immensité du désastre, ils ne sont pas pour autant réductibles à un discours catastrophé. Les circonstances de chaque événement et les conditions de production particulières des lettres, chroniques, poèmes, mémoires et autres relations nourrissent l'imaginaire collectif de la catastrophe en ménageant les spécificités des séismes et des désastres subséquents.

Il y a quelques raisons à ce que le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne ait marqué les esprits au point de devenir la catastrophe naturelle de référence du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : par le nombre de morts qu'elle a provoqué (environ 60,000 personnes périrent, sur une population de 275,000 habitants), elle dépasse le désastre de Lima (où disparut 'seulement' un dixième de la population de la ville de 60,000 habitants) ; les ravages des séismes italiens, au final plus meurtriers, sont géographiquement plus dispersés ; Lisbonne conjugait un nombre très élevé de victimes et la destruction massive d'une magnifique capitale et cour européennes. A ces aspects très concrets de l'impact meurtrier du cataclysme s'ajoute un impact symbolique, celui du désordre induit dans l'organisation sociale et étatique. Après le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne, les nouvelles qui circulent se veulent rassurantes quant au sort de la famille royale : le palais royal, qui se trouvait au bord du Tage, a été détruit mais Joseph 1<sup>er</sup> et sa famille sont sains et saufs, bien qu'ils doivent s'accommoder de conditions de vie précaires sous des tentes. L'image d'une royauté malmenée, d'un ordre hiérarchique mis en danger, a de quoi effrayer.

Les tremblements de terre d'Italie de 1786, qui ont causé moins de ravages en termes de destructions urbaines, portuaires, et de déstructuration sociale, renvoient parallèlement l'image d'un désordre symboliquement moins dangereux. Quant au tremblement de terre de Lima, nous l'avons dit, les destructions matérielles sont immenses et le nombre de morts relativement peu élevés au vu de la force du séisme. C'est bien le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne qui restera dans la mémoire littéraire comme 'l'événement monstre' du XVIII<sup>e</sup> (Quenet 2005, 350–351).

A Lima comme à Lisbonne des personnalités ressortent au moment de faire face au chaos provoqué par les incendies, les risques d'épidémies, les pillages, l'absence d'approvisionnement des denrées élémentaires et l'exode des rescapés ; ce sont le Vice-Roi Manso de Velasco à Lima ; le premier ministre, futur marquis de Pombal, à Lisbonne. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de faire l'éloge appuyé de la Vice-Royauté ou de l'État mais de montrer que les institutions ainsi incarnées remplissent pleinement leur fonction ordonnatrice.

La diffusion de l'information diffère selon les circonstances. Il faut distinguer les premières nouvelles visant à informer les autorités ou gouvernements étrangers via les ambassades, des informations destinées à donner des détails aux populations ; écrire pour collecter des informations et aviser les autorités, mais aussi écrire pour un lectorat désireux de connaître la vérité de la catastrophe. Les gazettes, apparues en Europe au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, se multiplient et se diversifient au XVIII<sup>e</sup>, et participent au développement d'une presse périodique d'actualité, adepte d'un certain sensationnalisme dans le traitement de l'information. Anne-Marie Mercier-Faivre (2008, 231–249) a montré comment, en l'absence de nouvelles en provenance de Calabre et de Sicile, les gazettes ont suppléé ce silence par une mise en scène de leur propre attente afin d'entretenir l'intérêt de leurs lecteurs.

Cette visée informative-là invente une écriture sur la catastrophe qui intéresse les conditions de production et surtout de réception des informations. A la source disons historique, les témoignages directs rendent compte des détails vécus et d'une nécessité de transmettre leur ressenti dans une écriture pleine de pathos (De Ribas 2011). Confrontées à un chaos a priori indescriptible et indéchiffrable, ces premières relations tentent de remettre de l'ordre dans les sentiments et les esprits de leurs auteurs : c'est ici sans doute que se noue la différence entre une écriture sur la catastrophe et une écriture *de* la catastrophe, dans cette convergence du compte-rendu factuel, du ressenti personnel et de la quête de sens.

La réappropriation de l'événement catastrophique par les écrivains s'inscrit dans la continuité d'une écriture de la catastrophe, avec les spécificités propres du projet littéraire (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008, 25) : 'peu [d'écrivains] se sont risqués au XVIII<sup>e</sup> à écrire sur la catastrophe en inventant une forme et un style qui lui conviennent'. Le fait exceptionnel serait en effet un frein à l'écriture totalement inventive. S'il y a bien une stylistique du récit catastrophique, il n'y a pas de forme narrative propre à la catastrophe. Dans son projet de dessiner une esthétique de la catastrophe, Michel Ribon revient sans cesse à la dramatisation de la représentation catastrophique, inhérente à la notion même :

'L'art projette [sur la catastrophe] sa lumière propre en nommant et en qualifiant de telles forces, comme s'il se proposait de les enfermer dans la scansion, le vocabulaire et la grammaire de son discours et de ses images, ou dans l'organisation de leurs mises en scène. (1999, 15).

L'appropriation artistique de l'événement catastrophique vise le sens ; ainsi, la littérature interroge celui-ci dans une émission cathartique de parole inquiète propre à tous les récits, relations, témoignages, et tente de conjurer dans le même temps le bouleversement du monde et le 'désastre mental' (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008, 24) en réinjectant du sens à sa mesure. A propos du *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* que Voltaire écrit en 1756, un an après le séisme, voici ce que dit Michel Ribon (1999, 175) :

Voltaire repousse, sur fond d'humanité gémissante et de mort, l'illusion optimiste tout en faisant quelque place à l'espérance, comme si l'ample respiration propre à tout poème et son rythme berceur autorisaient cette frêle consolation.

Le discours a posteriori de la littérature, comme tous les discours tenus sur la catastrophe, selon Grégory Quenet (2000), permet de 'reconstruire un ordre d'après-catastrophe, à la fois dans sa dimension matérielle et dans sa dimension symbolique'.

## L'apport de l'histoire environnementale

La catastrophe comme discours constitue une entrée d'analyse où se retrouvent littéraires et historiens. L'étude de la construction du discours, de ses enjeux et de sa circulation rend compte des représentations sociales, culturelles, de la catastrophe (Fressoz, Graber, Loche & Quenet 2014, 6). L'histoire environnementale (ou naturaliste) s'est quant à elle construite dans les années 70 depuis les États-Unis, dans 'une dialectique entre les sciences naturelles et les sciences humaines et sociales' (Fressoz, Graber, Loche & Quenet 2014, 9), en privilégiant toujours la forme narrative comme outil. Parallèlement en France, sur la base d'une

divergence quant à la définition du terme, l'environnement est assimilé de façon restrictive à la nature. Après quelques évolutions, actuellement, l'histoire environnementale en France s'attache à étudier 'les relations entre les hommes et leur écosystème', se démarquant en cela d'une histoire environnementale anglo-saxonne désireuse d'apporter 'un éclairage nouveau sur les objets historiques classiques'. A ce titre, nous pouvons avancer que la catastrophe comme invention est un concept renouvelé par la recherche et que ce renouvellement prend sans doute corps dans l'évolution de la conception du temps pour qui cherche à théoriser la catastrophe naturelle en l'inscrivant dans une chronologie.

Les tremblements de terre et leurs effets que l'on se met à observer au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, en même temps que le relief que l'on se met à déchiffrer, obligent les esprits avisés à dissocier les temps bibliques de l'histoire de l'humanité et de la création de la terre ; le temps géologique ne pouvait raisonnablement pas être réduit à la durée de l'humanité. Trois siècles plus tard, l'histoire environnementale impose de prendre en compte dans le champ des sciences humaines un compas qui n'est plus celui des sociétés et des cultures mais celui de la nature (pour le dire vite). C'est en outre l'histoire environnementale qui, en théorisant la catastrophe, y adjoint de manière indissociable la notion de risque : 'la catastrophe désigne la rencontre entre un aléa et une vulnérabilité' (Fressoz, Graber, Loche & Quenet 2014, 44). Nous sommes avec cette définition à la fois loin et proche du sens théâtral classique. Sans doute parce qu'à force de vouloir se défaire des études empiriques, l'histoire environnementale se construit sur un discours aux tonalités plus abstraites qu'empathiques.

Loin de vouloir construire des schémas ou des modèles (il n'y aurait pas de figure globale de la catastrophe), elle questionne un héritage, et particulièrement des oppositions historiques ancrées dans un temps inadéquat : ainsi, dans la réflexion qu'elle



développe sur le risque, l'histoire environnementale invite à revoir l'opposition entre des sociétés traditionnelles destinées à subir les événements catastrophiques et des sociétés modernes capables par leur maîtrise technologique de dompter sinon ces événements du moins leurs effets. En Occident, ce dernier type de sociétés naît au XVIII<sup>e</sup> avec le développement des sciences naturelles et l'essor industriel. Mais si l'on s'attache à cette dialectique entre catastrophe et risque en l'arrachant à cette conception canonique de l'histoire, on observe que le progrès technologique, de solution, est devenu depuis longtemps source de risque ; que les cataclysmes majeurs que sont séismes et tsunamis gardent tout leur potentiel terrifiant et que le désarroi des populations qui en sont victimes est toujours incommensurable ; enfin, qu'à l'ignorance et à l'impossibilité d'agir en prévention des catastrophes s'opposent légèreté et inconscience. Lors de la reconstruction de Lima, qui a débuté très vite après le séisme, il n'a été tenu aucun compte des préconisations de Louis Godin, membre de l'Académie des Sciences de Paris et cosmographe de sa Majesté espagnole, chargé par le Vice-Roi de réfléchir à la future organisation de la ville, sur la taille des édifices et les matériaux à privilégier (De Ribas 2011). Mais que penser d'un pays moderne qui construit aujourd'hui des centrales nucléaires sur des failles sismiques actives ? La classification entre catastrophes naturelles et non-naturelles, ou pseudo-naturelles, semble dépassée. La catastrophe dite 'naturelle' – le cataclysme – est profondément humaine.

Le sens classique du mot nous l'avait dit, le sens moderne, confirmé. Un séisme qui aura lieu hors de toute présence humaine, ou même au sein d'un groupe humain mais sans aller jusqu'à ce point de rupture où il sera débordé par l'événement, ce séisme-là ne sera jamais une catastrophe. De plus, l'impact de l'homme sur l'environnement ne se réduisant jamais à rien,

de par sa seule présence et ses choix de vie, il ne saurait y avoir stricto sensu de catastrophe *naturelle*. La Nature était au centre des réflexions philosophiques du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ; le discours de l'histoire environnementale tend à faire aujourd'hui de l'expression 'catastrophe naturelle' définitivement un oxymore en s'inscrivant en faux contre l'idée qu'une catastrophe puisse être naturelle.

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# Abstracts



*L'œuvre, la peur et le temps : pour une  
saisie du risque par la littérature*

Anne Duprat

The relationship between art and fear has its own history, which is directly related to the history of comparative literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially insofar as it is linked to the emigration of philologists from Germany and Central Europe to Western Europe, then to the United States from the mid-1930s onwards. This history has undergone new developments since the beginning of the millennium, when reflections on the role played by literary forms in the collective understanding of the threats facing societies joined broader debates on the ability of aesthetic representations to account for the world after 9/11, and in an era of proven ecological risk.

Considering the problematic association of fear and security allows us to approach from another angle the specific role that literature could (once again) play within all cultural productions in managing an era of fear that is now globalized. Indeed, literature does consider these as two alternative states inseparable from our relationship to reality; between these two poles, forms and genres are ordered according to their greater or lesser involvement in a description of reality, and the particular engagement in the world that their writing program calls for. However, each literary formulation of a threat always involves a warning about what becomes of reality, in its unpredictable novelty, as well as the expression of new human attitudes towards this reality. Above all, it proposes elements for an ethical and aesthetic qualification of the state of apprehension that it engages, invents or describes.

*Knocking on Europe's door: How narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia shape collective perceptions of immigration*

Anna Notaro

This chapter starts by reviewing historical and cultural imagery of the 'ideal' Europe before discussing literary examples – *The Camp of the Saints* (Raspail 1973), *Submission* (Houellebecq 2015), in the belief that literature provides us with the most useful insights into the cultural underpinnings of the complex political phenomena of our time. It then highlights how the narratives of fear, insecurity and nostalgia typical of the dystopian prefigurations mentioned above have found new vigour online and, in particular, in the visual propaganda of the Brexit Leave campaign. Particular attention is paid to the rhetorics of the narratives of fear in their articulation across various media before concluding by examining alternative narratives to the dominant ones, as exposed in art works produced in response to the migration tragedy.

*Pro loco et tempore : la littérature portugaise  
à l'épicentre de la crise économique*

Serafina Martins

The recent economic crisis (2008–) in Portugal and its impact on daily life opened up new possibilities for artistic expression in the country, particularly as far as literature is concerned. This body of literary work has not yet been the subject of a systematic literary critical study. The purpose of the present essay is to analyse four literary works in order to draw overall conclusions from the texts. Indeed, these texts all share common themes such as openly denouncing malpractices, personifying and humanising the consequences of the crisis. Moreover, all texts use linguistic parody for purposes of commentary and criticism. Eventually, they come up with solutions in order to re-establish balance in life, restoring democratic principles and nourishing a complete subjective experience.

La crise économique portugaise récente (2008–) et ses effets dans la vie quotidienne ont ouvert un filon dans l'art du pays, en particulier dans la littérature, dont l'ensemble n'a pas encore été pris par la critique d'une façon systématique, peut-être parce que les manifestations sont encore très récentes. Elles font partie d'un mouvement inorganique dû, au départ, à la chute de Lehman Brothers, qui a contaminé l'équilibre économique de la banque autour du monde. En Europe, les situations les plus médiatiques ont été celles de l'Espagne, Italie, Grèce et Irlande. Toutefois, au Portugal les effets du *crash* n'ont pas été moins graves, même si la dimension de son économie et la localisation du pays expliquent, partiellement, la méconnaissance de ce qui s'y est passé.

La réaction dans les arts (par exemple, le théâtre et la littérature) compile des problèmes comme le chômage ou la soumission du pays aux règles d'institutions financières internationales.



La crise a encouragé une attention au réel un peu inusitée vis-à-vis les ambitions du paradigme globaliste et de nombreux objets artistiques portugais de cette période constituent des manifestes politiques adressés au pays.

Cet essai a pour point de départ une intention exploratrice visant nous mener à des conclusions générales à partir de l'étude de quatre oeuvres littéraires : *Combien d'années se sont déjà passées, a-t-il demandé* (*Já passaram quantos anos, perguntouele*, 2013) ; *Dépays : Comment suicider un pays* (*Despaís : Como suicidar um país*, 2013) ; *La miséricorde des marchés* (*A misericórdia dos mercados*, 2014) ; *Dette souveraine* (*Dívida soberana*, 2012). Ces oeuvres partagent la dénonciation des faits provoqués par la crise, la personnification et l'humanisation des conséquences ; elles critiquent la situation et ses agents à l'aide de la parodie linguistique ; surtout, elles proposent des solutions envisageant le retour à la normalité, y compris le retour à la démocratie et à la plénitude de l'existence subjective.

*“We have to fix this world now”: Hope, utopianism,  
and new modes of political agency in two  
contemporary Finnish young adult dystopias*  
Maria Laakso

In everyday use, the concepts of utopia and dystopia are often understood as binary oppositions of each other. However, a dystopia is not the simple reverse of a utopia. As literary traditions both utopia and dystopia belong to the same tradition of utopian literature, imagining alternative societies to the existing ones. Even though dystopian fiction imagines negative impacts of ongoing political or societal processes, it also mirrors the temporal society the author and the readers inhabit. The utopian fiction works the same way.

Dystopian and utopian fiction also share some thematic features. Even though the fictional worlds of dystopias are often dark and horrifying, modern dystopias also share an idea of resistance and change for the better. Especially dystopias addressing young readers always offer a certain amount of hope no matter how evil the depicted situation in the fictive world is.

In this article I concentrate on the positive undertones in young adult (YA) dystopias and show that works of the genre often question the strict dichotomy between utopia and dystopia. I claim that hope is always an important part of YA dystopias, and they offer young people a path to active political agency in a way that is not otherwise open to them in contemporary Western societies.

YA authors (as well as their audiences) often follow the international literary trends and the late increase in popularity of YA dystopian fiction has made YA dystopias appealing in many cultures. This article focuses especially on Finnish dystopian literature aimed for young adults. Over the past decade there has been a commensurate boom in young adult (YA) dystopias in Finland. In this article I analyze two Finnish YA dystopias, Siiri Enoranta's

*Nokkosvallankumous* (2013) and K. K. Alongi's *Kevätuhrit* (2015). In both novels, the young characters have both the opportunity and the obligation to change the ruined world around them. In my reading of these two novels I discuss the YA dystopia as a genre that offers young protagonists a chance to fulfill their potential and change the world.

*La sécurité ou l'exacerbation des peurs au profit d'une liberté provisoire*

Orlane Glises de la Rivière

The dystopian novels are built on recurring patterns which reveal the fears of our own society. They all describe a fully staged world that allows total control over each individual. This essay focuses on the works *1984* by George Orwell, *2084* by Boualem Sansal and *La Zone du Dehors* by Alain Damasio. All of them depict a society with a theatrical dimension that offers a new perspective on the use of power. Power is exercised through an entirely artificial world in which the characters only perceive the surface of things, the state carefully maintaining them in ignorance of how it works. This gives each dystopia a no-escape dimension, in which the characters are unable to break out. The theatrical dimension is thus all the stronger: locked up on stage, visible to all, the inhabitants of this society are unaware of the backstage area and the possibilities of escape, condemned to spy on each other in a Sartre-like closed-door environment. Thus, power no longer extends vertically but horizontally, forming rhizomes that allow total and absolute surveillance over each individual.

Herein lies the paradox: while in every dystopian society there is an ironclad security in which everything is perfectly orchestrated, fear is nevertheless omnipresent. If the ideal of happiness seemed to rhyme with an ideal of security, the dystopian novels show that this is not the case. On the contrary, the state has annihilated citizens' freedoms in favour of control, even auto-control. Indeed, if the symbol of the police state was embodied until then in the Orwellian Big Brother, surveillance itself has evolved over time. It no longer originates only from a state machinery but also from individuals themselves who are in demand for control over each other. This translates into total transparency, sometimes literally as in Eugène Zamiatine's novel *Nous Autres*. The barriers between public and

private have been replaced by the concept of the social: everyone is free to observe everyone. This climate, which for some characters in the novels seems reassuring, in reality only increases mistrust and fear of each other. It is all the more reinforced by the ever-present technology. It is used for surveillance and is reminiscent of our own dependence on existing technological tools.

Thus, another issue is emerging: beyond surveillance, it is freewill that is constantly being questioned. The reader is witnessing a voluntary servitude, in the words of Etienne de la Boétie, who locks up the characters more than any other repressive system. If such a system is possible, it is perhaps precisely because there is also general consent. In dystopian works, we can thus observe a conditioning on the part of each citizen. They float in a technological cocoon that offers them an oriented freedom: every desire is the fruit of a predefined conditioning and the slightest decision is foreseen by an ever more efficient technique. Big Brother has not disappeared, it has adapted to create a new form of servitude.

*Mind the gap: Fear on the London Underground*  
Cristiana Pugliese

The London Underground provides transport for millions of commuters every day. It is a highly regulated modern transport system which is seemingly controlled and safe, but – by its very nature – it is also associated with the archaic and the mythical underworld. The confined spaces below the surface of the city make us feel more vulnerable and trigger anxieties and fears that are both rational and irrational. The same fears for our personal safety that we feel in the urban environment, in the city above ground – fear of violence, crime, terrorism – also affect us in underground London. But moving from light into darkness, from an open space into a confined space, also carries fears of the unknown. We may find ourselves on the wrong train or stranded at an unfamiliar station and the fear of failing to reach our destination is always at the back of our minds. It is not by chance that the Tube has inspired many thrillers and supernatural stories in which passengers lose their way or are thrown under a train, or are ambushed and hunted down by murderous psychopaths or creatures who are not wholly human. This article examines the main fears and anxieties about travelling underground as expressed in what might be called Tube literature.

*Peur du chaos et retour à l'humain : le mythe du yéti selon Hergé et Castelli-Manara [Fear of chaos and reversion to humanity: the myth of the yeti according to Hergé and Castelli-Manara]*

Brigitte Le Juez

The Yeti, or “abominable snowman”, is an anthropomorphic and monstrous folkloric creature from the Himalayan region. Ever since successive expeditions tried to reach the highest peaks of the Himalayas, it has been a subject of fascination in Europe. B.H. Hodgson was the first to refer to him in 1832 in an article entitled “Meeting with the Yeti”. In his 1915 *On the Traces of the Yeti and Other Clandestine Creatures*, R.O. Gent, forest officer stationed in the area of Darjeeling mentioned that he had observed footprints of a human type but of an exceptionally large size. From this report, and until recently, many other similar reports have followed. In 2008, for example, European journalists relayed reports that Japanese tourists looking for the yeti had photographed such footprints in the Himalayas.

The existing testimonies of such happenings often concord; however, they vary as to the physical appearance of the monster. Some indeed mark a notable new aspect: the yeti may not be an isolated being. In 1920, climbers on an expedition, at an altitude of 5000 m, not far from the north face of Everest, reported seeing through binoculars several dark shapes moving over a high snow field. They said their footprints were three times the size of a human being's.

There are, nevertheless, widely differing beliefs about the exact nature of the yeti, and many fictional writings do not fail to exploit its possibilities. Regardless of the credibility of these tales, the myth of a formidable monster has been built over time, and questions continue to be asked about it. Among many interrogations, some arise more forcefully today: why does this being, who escapes humans but resembles them, come back in so many legends? To

what fear(s) does it correspond in our psyche? What means are used to tackle these in the effort to regain a sense of safety?

In an attempt to answer them, this article examines the adaptation of the character of the yeti in two comics, namely *Tintin au Tibet* by the famous Belgian author Hergé (1960) and *L'uomo delle nevi* by Italian authors Alfredo Castelli and Milo Manara (1979), and the development of the ensuing literary myth. The human and hidden face of “the abominable snowman” is thus revealed thanks to the protagonists’ surpassing themselves, struggling with an existential experience that leads them to the top of the Himalayas. Using archives on the topic, the authors offer surprising, positive and humanistic responses to the anxieties that still surround the idea of the yeti today. The authors’ sensitive inventiveness makes it possible to address the received ideas concerning the yeti, offering a reflection on ancestral fears through a critical and intermedial dialogue between stories of all times.



*Fear of unjust memory or desire for secure identity? Remembering the era of 1989 transition in contemporary Polish novel*

Olga Szmidt

The article focuses on Polish contemporary novels that explore memory about the era of the 1989 transition in Poland. Among other texts and pieces of art, contemporary Polish novels written by young authors seem to be the most innovative and original in representing this very moment of history, with its fears and desire for a new identity. The article tackles two main problems related to the interpretation of literary works of Dorota Masłowska, Michał Witkowski, and Dominika Słowik. The first is a spectrum of new Polish identity of the era of the 1989 transition. The second is a literary expression of individual resistance of normalization. These authors use different aesthetics, different points of view, and diversified types of protagonists in their novels. Nonetheless, all their works can be interpreted as searching for two main ideas – the Polish identity of the new era after the 1989 transformation and memory of that period. Equally important here is questioning the normative categories used to describe the new social and family roles as well as the oppressive bond between the individual and the community. These novels show different visions of the new Poland, ruled not only by the desire to recreate a safe and uniting identity but also by the fear that the transformation went wrong and was indeed unjust. The sociohistorical tension between the bygone life in the Eastern Bloc and the desired admittance to the Western world creates very heterogeneous individual and collective representations. The categories of familiarity and, on the other hand, alienation seem particularly significant in this context. The article presents a broad view of the context of the 1989 transition in Poland, analyzes the cultural consequences of the broad usage of the norm discourse during this period, as well as provides a critical reflection on the transgressive nature of the literary texts in question. In addition to

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an in-depth interpretation of literary works, the article is enriched with a reflection on the reception of these works. This allows the title issue to be included in the analysis of the broader context of socio-political changes for which categories of fear and security seem essential.

*Fear of the Other: Representations of Otherness  
in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions*

Tatiana Krol

Fear, one of the basic human emotions, occupies various domains of human activity, bears influence on people's behaviour and has many ways of expression. Studying the emotion of fear, as well as the contexts in which it emerges, can be approached from various angles. Fear is a significant element in famine narrative. Weaving the real into the fictional, the genre of famine fiction provides strong material for a comparative examination of fear. An understanding of the appositeness of a comparative methodology perspective is strengthened by Joep Leerssen's insight that events and facts acquire meaning in the process of their interpretation, when 'humans try to make sense of them', and his point that 'all events and facts reach us in mediatized form' (Leerssen 1996, 4). In mediatized forms, feelings and emotions are deployed in image formation, which, in turn, is often based on stereotypes. The emotion of fear participates in the construction of the image of the Other, giving significance to the imagological method within the field of comparative literature.

This paper addresses the theme of fear in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions. It discusses fear of the Other through an inquiry into representations of Self and Other in the novels *The Silent People* (1962) by Irish author Walter Macken and *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life* (1934) by Ukrainian writer Ulas Samchuk. The paper adopts imagology as its theoretical framework to analyse the mechanisms in the development of stereotypes pertaining to the process of 'othering' within the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy in the context of famine. The imagological analysis of the novels shows the development of Irish and Ukrainian perceptions of their respective Other in the light of oppressive socio-political relations. The juxtaposition of the novels' episodes, revealing antagonisms between the dominant group – the colonizing nation, and the

subordinate colonized people, highlight similarities and differences in the construction of the images of Self and Other in Irish and Ukrainian famine fictions. In its discussion of the role of fear in the 'othering' process, the paper specifically focuses on four episodes from *The Silent People* and *Maria: A Chronicle of a Life* in order to show how cultural elements, such as language, become recognisable markers of Otherness.

The paper demonstrates that the Self/Other divide is determined by a power imbalance between the ruling and the ruled classes and argues that the emergence and increase of fear of the Other are power-related processes by and large. In famine fiction, stereotypical constructs and negative perceptions of the Other stem from fear and reflect an unjust and oppressive system.

*The fear of cultural belonging: Sharon Dodua Otoo's transnational writing*  
Nora Moll

Cultural conflicts, perduring racism and the lack of a broader acceptance of plural identities, in Europe have been thematised in recent years by several “Afropolitan writers”. In their case, collective emotions like fear, disease and cultural-based misunderstandings are shaped by literary presentations which may open new identity discourses, and which very often are focussed on gender-specific narrations of the body and of the individual affectivities. This paper aims to discuss the (often unsolved) dialectic between the fear of and the effort for cultural belonging, by analysing the narrative texts of the Black British-Ghanaian writer and activist Sharon Dodua Otoo, author of two novellas written in English and both translated and published in Germany (*The things I am thinking while smiling politely*, 2012; *Synchronicity*, 2014), where she has been living and working since 2006. In 2016 Dodua Otoo was awarded with the prestigious Bachmann-Preis, for her yet-to-be published short story *Herr Gröttrup setzt sich hin*, dealing with reincarnation and with the German Nazi-past. By passing from a realistic style in *The things I am ...*, a novella in which the story of a heartbreak seems to be the pretext for a delicate but candid discourse about racism and xenophobia in present-day Germany, to a sort of magical realism in the fragmented *Synchronicity*, Sharon Dodua Otoo shows the importance of the point of view of blackness in order to deal with imagery of fear and disease in European society. The ways to overcome this cultural anxiety the writer experiences are very personal, and full of literary reshaped “poly-colours”.

*Fear and safety in contemporary Russian cinema: A transcultural perspective*

Beata Waligórska-Olejniczak

The aim of the article is to give an overview of recent tendencies in contemporary Russian films by three widely recognized directors (Andrei Zvyagintsev, Vera Storozheva, Pavel Lungin) in the context of the representation of the problem of fear and safety. The films under discussion in this article are Storozheva's *Travelling with Pets* (2007), Lungin's *Taxi Blues* (1990) and Zvyagintsev's *Elena* (2011). The main theme is discussed from the perspective of the individual character reflecting upon his or her own life as well as from the angle of the representation of the collective memory of the Russian nation. The main methodological tool is Mikhail Epstein's concept of transculture. Epstein's theory is associated with the logic of an open and universal continuum, the process of transcendence into "no-culture", i.e. the development of the cultural unit that overcomes the borders of traditional cultures (ethnic, national, racial, religious, gender, sexual and professional etc.). It can be achieved by finding the way of liberation from 'the prison of language' and gradual learning about the inborn culture in order to reach an appropriate distance to penetrate it, truly understand and finally abandon. Epstein's theory is based on the rejection of both 'leveling globalism' and 'isolating pluralism'. Taking into account Epstein's findings this article suggests that Zvyagintsev's leitmotiv is an apocalyptic vision of the world devoid of moral values, which can be linked to the breakdown of the family unit and the loss of both cultural and historical continuum. Lungin turns attention to the areas of tradition and orthodox religion, whereas Storozheva is known for her visualizations of women fighting for their independence, which constitutes the foundation of their inner freedom and safety. In all the films fear remains the core emotion which accompanies the protagonists. Lungin's creation of Shlykov's

character proves that fear and striving for psychological stability can remain pre-intentional and non-conscious although they strongly influence the protagonists' actions and decisions. Lungin is interested in the mechanisms linking fear and other emotions such as melancholy and anger, trying to make the recipients aware that the liberating power of imagination and music, which is shown as the universal language, can be experienced only after understanding the need of cultural and historical transformation. Similar issues constitute also the core problem of Zvyagintsev's film; *Elena* demonstrates fear and egoism as the elementary instinct and drive of people's decisions in the societies, which have lost their moral directions. Consequently, Zvyagintsev's narrative requires the ethical engagement of the audience, which stays in contrast to Storozheva's work showing the protagonist who found the way to suppress and overcome the sources of social or personal limitations. As a result, Natalia's approach to life could be seen as the manifestation of liberation and the attempt of at least partial realization of Epstein's concept of *transculture*.

*Divakaruni's Before We Visit the Goddess:  
Overcoming fears and instabilities*  
Metka Zupančič

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2016) is used as an example of a contemporary work by a non-resident Indian woman writer, currently living in Houston, Texas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Houston. It features strong yet often distressed women protagonists who have experienced major apprehensions when facing life challenges all linked to their difficulties in adapting to new situations, without a possibility of feeling safe and secure in any of them. Divakaruni's novels may thus be set alongside other diasporic contemporary Indian women writers who choose to express themselves in English and who from their own perspectives approach similar topics. In Divakaruni's opus, *Before We Visit the Goddess* is yet another response to life's struggles generally linked to immigration, among her many inspiring novels that mostly deal with women, older and young, and who often fear for their safety. Within the realm of contemporary literature considered as a tool for healing, it may be read as a life lesson of how to overcome the emotional limitations and gain the strength to face a world in which the old paradigms have been drastically shattered and where safety has become a rare commodity. Such have already been the situations depicted in Divakaruni's debut collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* (1995). Similar topics have emerged in the novels *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), *One Amazing Thing* (2009), and in *Oleander Girl* (2012), in which the protagonists demonstrate and fully embody wisdom, perseverance, and especially trust in their own abilities, to start and develop new forms of coexistence in a world that seems to be on the brink of falling apart. In this sense, Divakaruni's declared intent is to write about women protagonists who are able to create positive solutions to their problems. In other



words, her protagonists, often depicted as they face major adversities, dangers and uncertainty, manage to grow inwardly. They also succeed in finding an inner locus of safety, be it imagined or real, as they emerge from crisis situations, beyond deeply rooted fears and insecurities that inhabit them and motivate their behaviour. Most importantly, Divakaruni clearly perceives herself as an agent of change through her literary productions, written first in English and then translated not only into various languages of her native India but also all over the world.

*Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as  
posthumanity in graphic narratives*

Lisa DeTora

Trauma resists language, rendering its sufferers unable to speak about their experiences. Graphic narrative bridges visual and textual conceptual frames, offering a purchase point for presenting bodily and psychological experience not easily expressed in language. Graphic narrative also offers different perspectives on trauma in popular culture, such as the inevitable connection between posthuman experience and the psychological effects of trauma. The essay outlines some thoughts about the operation of trauma and posthumanity in various types of graphic novels from different types of canons published over the last several decades, with a focus on books and series for adult readers that do not fall within a specific *bande dessinée*, superhero, or academic canon and also contribute to an overarching, global vision of posthumanity that dovetails with Donna Haraway's original comments on cyborg identities. Given that posthuman experience is characterized by a flattened affect, all feelings, whether of fear, safety, love, or comfort will be attenuated, a circumstance that parallels the symptoms of PTSD.

Drawing on the work of Hilary Chute, the author suggests that graphic narrative offers a unique opportunity to develop a representation of trauma – figured through trauma studies as described by E. Ann Caplan – that would allow for the type of healing that clinician Judith Herman suggests as appropriate medical practice for PTSD sufferers. Herman's specific recommendation is that the traumatized person develop a personal narrative. As suggested by Chute and others, graphic narrative may offer a multimodal purchase point for traumatic experiences not easily expressed in language. In fact, the graphic narrative offers different perspectives on PTSD and its operation in popular culture as a site

of both acute and chronic discomfort that undercuts the notion of safety in everyday life. This essay considers various types of graphic narratives to build the case that PTSD and posthumanity remain linked across traditions, genres, and canons.

The essay briefly reviews graphic narratives in various canons and traditions, including superhero books in the DC and Marvel universes; academically canonical works like *Maus*, *Habibi*, *Stitches* or *Cancer Vixen*. These works form a basis for a more expanded discussion of a significant example in bande dessinée, the Smurfs, as well as noncanonical works for adult audiences such as *The Nightly News*, *Transmetropolitan*, and *Fables*. These graphic narratives afford multiple sites for representing trauma and ultimately suggest that PTSD is a form of posthuman experience, a manifestation of the desert of the real to which Žižek welcomed the world after the attacks on the US in September 2001. With the explosion of new graphic narratives about traumatic experiences connected with the COVID-19 public health emergency, questions about graphic representations of trauma will likely remain important to an overall model of fear and safety in popular culture and literary forms.

*Of murdered babies and silenced histories: Gendering memory in two francophone trauma narratives*

Nathalie Ségeral

This paper explores the gendering of traumatized memory in two Francophone narratives: Algerian Malika Mokeddem's *Je dois tout à ton oubli* [I owe everything to your oblivion] (2008) and Rwandan Scholastique Mukasonga's *La Femme aux pieds nus* [The Bare-Foot Woman] (2008). A dialogical reading of these texts reveals a multi-layered convergence: they both revolve around tropes of motherhood, infanticide, and mother/daughter relationships as crystallizations of memory and they share a similar concern with finding a new aesthetics to render the specific, gendered experience of the historical catastrophes for which traditional narratives prove inadequate. While trying to express what occurred beyond words, along with the sexed subjectivity of their experiences, these two authors invent new narrative forms, i.e., what can be termed an aesthetics of catastrophe – in Mukasonga's case, a poetic memoir that serves as the symbolic shroud for her mother killed during the 1994 Rwandan genocide of the Tutsis, and an autofictional-cum-detective narrative in Mokeddem's novel, dealing with the Algerian war of Independence, the "Black Decade," immigration and the oppression of women in rural Algeria.

Building on Michael Rothberg's notion of "multidirectional memory" and on Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory," I contend that the shared tropes used by these women writers to express traumatic (his)story allow them to find their own voices and challenge their positions as reified subjects of male historical and psychoanalytical narratives, thereby enabling them to re-appropriate their stories and move beyond passivity. This study creates bridges among texts by women writing with the voiced intention of re-inscribing their stories within the dominant canons of French history and literature. Through a close study of the shared tropes used in reclaiming their

stories, I highlight the ways in which Holocaust metaphors provide a productive paradigm in narratives dealing with other traumas (the Rwandan genocide, colonial and postcolonial Algeria, and women's oppression), allowing these writers to achieve catharsis and reclaim agency over their stories.

Cette étude propose une exploration de l'écriture du traumatisme au prisme du genre à travers une lecture dialogique de deux récits (auto)fictionnels parus la même année: *Je dois tout à ton oubli* de l'Algérienne Malika Mokeddem (2008) et *La Femme aux pieds nus* de la Rwandaise Scholastique Mukasonga (2008). Le récit de Mokeddem a trait à l'immigration, à la Guerre d'indépendance algérienne et à la décennie noire, ainsi qu'à la condition des femmes dans les zones rurales d'Algérie. Son intrigue s'articule autour d'une relation mère-fille destructrice et d'un cas d'infanticide. Le texte de Mukasonga constitue un témoignage-hommage de l'auteure-narratrice à sa mère ayant péri dans le génocide de 1994. Nous verrons que ces deux textes, malgré leurs différences génériques et thématiques, se font écho par leurs thématiques similaires: l'infanticide, une relation mère-fille sur laquelle se cristallise le travail mémoriel et le paradigme de la Shoah.

S'appuyant en partie sur les théories de Marianne Hirsch concernant la transmission mère-fille du traumatisme dans le cadre de la post-mémoire, cette étude s'attache tout particulièrement à démontrer la manière dont ces deux auteures essaient de trouver de nouvelles formes narratives afin de dire l'inexprimable – le traumatisme s'étant produit au-delà des mots – tout en cherchant à se réapproprier leur histoire. La figure controversée de la maternité infanticide, qui leur rest commune, permet d'exprimer métaphoriquement la mémoire traumatisée de la narratrice et le refus de transmission dans un contexte paradoxal de désincarnation, conduisant ainsi ces deux auteures à (ré)incarner le traumatisme à travers le corps féminin. Cette écriture du corps donne lieu

à une (ré)incarnation métaphorique cathartique permettant une réappropriation de leur histoire tout en dépassant le statut victimaire. D'une part, les narratrices de Mokeddem et Mukasonga contribuent à la redéfinition de la maternité en remettant en question les fondements de la maternité comme institution sociale; ce faisant, la littérature conduit à un (ré)enfantement de la mémoire par la revendication d'une certaine (non-)maternité. D'autre part, ces innovations stylistiques permettent la ré-inscription de leur histoire au sein des canons historiques et littéraires dominants, dont les auteurs issus de la francophonie, et plus encore les femmes, sont bien souvent exclus. Ainsi, cette étude vise à redéfinir la théorie du traumatisme dans la littérature francophone au miroir du féminisme.

## *Peur et humour : le cas de l'humour noir*

Jean-Marc Moura

Fear and laughter seem to converge in the literary phenomenon called 'humour noir' (or 'dark humour'). The article tries to investigate the notion of humour and its conceptual ambiguities. Then it focusses on the surrealist concept of 'humour noir' and its links to fear. The expression « humour noir », coined by André Breton in the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, was presented as a main value of surrealism, a superior revolt of the spirit against all the forces that enslave him, including fear. Then, the article briefly examines the literary forms of humour, in particular the specificities of the enunciation of a humorous text. Ultimately, it points out the fact that the study of humour is definitely international and that it constitutes an exciting program of research for comparative literature.

Peur et sourire paraissent se rejoindre dans l'inspiration littéraire baptisée « humour noir », mais selon quelles modalités thématiques, stylistiques et formelles ? L'article tente d'éclairer la notion d'humour littéraire et les difficultés conceptuelles qu'elle pose, avant de situer sa variante 'noire' et sa relation à un sentiment comme la peur. La notion d'humour noir, avancée par André Breton dans son *Anthologie de l'humour noir* et présentée comme l'une des valeurs-phares du surréalisme, apparaît comme une synthèse des valeurs surréalistes, une révolte supérieure de l'esprit contre tout ce qui l'asservit, y compris la peur. La question des formes de cet humour se pose alors. On fait l'hypothèse que l'on peut analyser un texte humoristique à partir de sa posture d'énonciation, impliquant trois instances, le risible, le rieur et le public visé. On voudrait ainsi montrer que l'étude de l'humour est pleinement comparatiste et qu'elle mérite d'être davantage prise en compte par les chercheurs en littérature comparée.

*L'Autre dans la fiction post-apocalyptique du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*  
Jasmin Hammon

The scenarios of the end are as varied as the subgenres treating the time after the apocalyptic event(s). Nevertheless, the majority of contemporary post-apocalyptic fictions describe disasters caused by mankind which destroy only parts of the planet. They imagine the end of modern civilisation and the reorganisation of society where the survivors need to redefine concepts of identity, alterity and consequently their interaction with the Other. Leggewie and Welzer point out how the identity of today's mankind, based on products, becomes fragile when these objects are wasted or not available in the context of a global disaster. Goodbody (2017) or Dürbeck (2017) present how contemporary fiction discusses the exploitative use of the environment and the other human beings. Eva Horn (2014) and Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2002) analyse the social, psychological and political functions of these scenarios and their potential to transform the anxieties of the contemporary human being to lose the consumer items on which its identity is based.

In the following article, the main hypothesis is that the apocalyptic catastrophe is a moment of *nothingness* (*néant*) in Sartre's existentialist understanding of how the human existence as a Being-for-itself conceives consciousness. It will explain why apocalypse becomes an existential category in contemporary literature as it represents a *néant* for the whole of humanity. In *Die Einöder* (2007), Böckl describes the human being as driven by the lust for power and possession which are the motivation to exploit both other people and the environment. Like in Sartre's philosophy, the human existence is thrown into the world without any kind of divine plan or cause for its life, that is why not even the devout believers are saved. In *Station Eleven* (2015), St. John Mandel pictures how society falls apart after the Georgia Flu killed the majority of the human population on Earth. *The Travelling Symphony* provides



entertainment to the remaining, because they know that human beings need beauty and art as much as they need to ensure the mere survival. Also, the novel discusses consumerism as the author lets one main character, Clark, initiate a museum where he collects objects from the past, now useless in a world without electricity. The last part analyses scenarios where the human being as such has to evolve, mutate or has to be cloned to survive the coming catastrophe(s), such as in *Terminus radieux* (Antoine Volodine, 2014) or in the *Rain* series by Shaun Harbinger (2015).

These novels have in common that the subject of the look is of importance. The perception of the Self in these contemporary post-apocalyptic texts seem to depend highly of what is visible *at one glance*, for example by his or her appearance or by the objects the person possesses. That is why the disasters endanger the individual Self by destroying its consumer goods. It is the phenomenology of the look with which Sartre explains his existentialist philosophy as it sets the process of conceiving conscience in motion. Therefore, the apocalyptic event(s) can be considered as the *néant* of mankind.

Michel Deguy's *l'être-comme* and the  
poetics of ecological comparativism

Sam La Védrine

Including a selective reading of contemporary, existential derived philosophy (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Frédéric Neyrat, Jean-Luc Nancy), this article close-reads Michel Deguy's poetic theories of *l'être-comme* and cultural ecology. In this, distinguishing between the individual conception of the world, and the collective inhabitation of the planet, I argue that the analogical potential of poetry comes to offer a vast but intimately radical alterity for community with others by speculatively creating a non-dialectical and therefore necessarily paradoxical expression of the ecological comparativism of planetary space.

By this, I read poetry's fundamental mode of comparison as contributing to a form of specific poetic identity which helps maintain contradictory differences whilst producing a semblance of interconnection undergirded by separation. I posit that it does this in opposition to identity formation by negation, instead *affirming* two separate alterities: the ontological, material, and pre-verbal encounter with otherness – both human and non-human; and the otherness of different epistemologies expressing specifically singular places and spaces through different languages and ideas. Rather than sublating these alterities and reinforcing sameness through a totalizing dialectical synthesis – Hegel's *Aufhebung* – poetry's comparison becomes an affirmative motor on which differences are configured together separately as measures of incommensurable, non-dialectical relation.

By analysis of Deguy's formulation of *l'être-comme* as a comparative ontology after Martin Heidegger's conception of Being, and with reference to similar responses in the work of Neyrat and Nancy, Deguy's poetic ontology then displays how identity, faced with incommensurable measure, finds the only constant invariant

of the being of its subject(s) as the spacing of referential separation existing in the expression of poetry's very contingent analogies. This way, a conception of being arises in *being like*, where one thing juxtaposed with another is both ontologically equivalent – *being-like-it* – because, in its spacing, it is analogically or comparatively equivalent – *being-like-it*. Serving to challenge a common epistemology of ecology and its presuppositions of interconnection and interdependence, I place Deguy's work on cultural ecology as a continuation of this binding alongside questions of scale in ecocritical discourse. This serves to show how Deguy's ecology aspires to maintain relational difference whilst posing responses to two broad yet unequivocally interconnected fears endemic in the modern world – planetary destruction, what Deguy terms *géocide*, and the presence of the other.

Following this argument through readings of poetic measure and its operation of figurative comparison, and with constant reference to Deguy's corpus, both early and recent, I conclude with an exposition of the poetic ecology of ecological comparativism with emphasis on the poem's role as offering a textual space for the hospitality of difference. This is where, in Deguy's words, 'it takes everything to make a world, and more than two for hospitality', and where the latent ecology in poetry's spatial separation becomes the antecedent for comparison, an affirmation of diversity the necessary difference required to attain any identity.

Sans dessus dessous (1889) de Jules Verne :  
*dernier avertissement avant l'Apocalypse*

Laure Lévêque

The glorification of man's unstoppable all-might is generally thought to be the main feature in Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), but the will to power concealed behind mastery has fallen into relative oblivion. What the conquest, as scientific as it may be, owes to force and violence – embodied by the *Gun Club* society, whose members initially launch the project – has suffered a similar fate and the theme of conquest is to be found again in *Topsy-Turvy*, one of the later works in Verne's *Extraordinary Voyages* sequence, published twenty-five years later. Once again, a cannon is used as the means to fulfil the *Gun Club's* goals, but they are now commercial. Its members want to take possession of the ice cap to exploit its natural resources, once the Earth's rotation axis has been deliberately displaced – in disregard of the fate of the planet's inhabitants, condemned to mass extinction. Even if the enterprise eventually fails, one can stare the cannon blast of the impending catastrophe in the face, evidence that something is rotten in Western civilisation: a mean and venal one, it is now threatened by progress, which is put on trial as a form of final warning.

*Le Japon de Fukushima comme lieu de discours pour  
des auteurs francophones [The Japan of Fukushima  
as described by French speaking writers]*

Sabine Kraenker

This article examines how French speaking authors engage with a far-away ecological catastrophe. Key questions are what kind of discourse the foreign authors use in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe (2011) and how their approaches can be legitimised, given the inevitable cultural and geographical distance. More specifically, this article examines the capability of literature to describe a nuclear disaster. Can it represent something so indescribable, something that modifies the human experience of death and fear? Can literature represent the world after Fukushima, a world of risk and anxiety?

The Fukushima disaster questions the myth of progress our civilization is based on and questions temporal dimensions. The event raises uncontrollable fears. In this context, it seems necessary for artists and intellectuals to comment on those events, to describe them and to tell what they feel about them.

Disasters such as Fukushima make men and women encounter their limits and force them to reconsider the notion of reality. This raises the question of the legitimacy of commenting on catastrophes. Authors who wish to engage with such events inevitably encounter the problems of communicating and representing such extreme events.

In addition to these ethical questions, the role of human sciences is crucial too. Human sciences cannot change reality and cannot repair it, but human sciences can question the technological progress our societies are built on and they can represent what is difficult to imagine. By their existence, narratives of catastrophes expose their readers to their deepest fears and propose to them,

directly or indirectly, a reflection on the high stakes involved in the event.

That's exactly what French writers studied in this article have tried to do. Their most interesting contribution has been giving the victims and the witnesses of the Fukushima disaster the possibility to express what they have lived through. The speech of ordinary people is audible in their texts. The expression of those people's fears and views may help the reflection on the topic for the rest of us.

*L'invention de la catastrophe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : une invention renouvelée à la croisée de la littérature, de l'histoire des sociétés et de l'histoire environnementale*  
Sandra Contamina

The notion of *catastrophe* has been studied for about twenty years as an object in many works, in several fields of research. This study does not claim to be a summary of all these literary, historical, philosophical and linguistic works; drawing on their contributions, it is rather an attempt to put the notion at the current crossroad between literature, the history of societies and environmental history.

For this purpose, we need to remind first what the word means, as [a] part of the Greek tragedy when the action comes to an end which is not necessarily disastrous. Later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the word changes its meaning to “collective disaster”, including quite different connotations especially religious and moral ones.

In the Modern Age, the notion of *catastrophe* sustains two discourses, one theological, and the other philosophical, combined with two notions: Evil and Nature. Far from being systematically opposed to each another, the observation of nature and religious thought are mobilized in an attempt to read the world. To achieve this objective, literature is fundamental to express and give meaning to the notion of *catastrophe*, particularly earthquakes.

Finally, writing about *catastrophe* is a way of reclaiming the incomprehensible event. Beyond the traditional tension between ethics and aesthetics, literary disaster discourses develop their own rhetoric, according to the individual project and style. But, strictly speaking, there is not a specific narrative form for writing about *catastrophe*. As for discourse analysis, historical studies and more recently environmental history bring new insights to understand how natural disasters can be expressed and used as an intellectual notion.

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# *How do*

cultural narratives circulating in literature and other media influence the collective emotions that frame our everyday experience?

The essays in this bilingual volume look at how various issues of fear and safety are represented, worked on, and re-assessed in literature and other narrative media – and what kinds of affective spaces are created in the process. Essays in English and French range from stories of crises and immigration to dystopian and utopian literature.

The work is aimed especially at literary scholars and students, but due to its wide scope, it is also of interest to experts in the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, media studies, film studies, anthropology, and sociology.

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