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**World Literature and the Circulation of Art**  
*Literatura-Mundo e a Circulação da Arte*

Amândio Reis  
Stefano Evangelista  
(Eds.)



# Front Matter | Ficha Técnica

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*Journal of Comparative Studies*  
*Revista de Estudos Comparatistas*

World Literature and the Circulation  
of Art | Literatura-Mundo e  
a Circulação da Arte

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Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Procession  
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## Foreword

### Literature and the Arts: Comparative Circulation(s)

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With the rise of interarts studies in the 1990s, not so much as a new discipline, but as “an interdisciplinary field that can only be properly established when many disciplines join forces within an institutional framework” (Fischer-Lichte, 2016: 25), Comparative Literature departments and courses of literary studies at universities around the world have paid increasing attention to the other arts and their diverse interactions with literature, challenging traditional boundaries as well as long-held hierarchic views in academic approaches to different typologies of “texts”. Notions of intertextuality have thus greatly expanded, inviting scholars, students, and the general public, to think less in terms of pure territories and dividing lines, and question instead the intervals and overlaps, and instances of friction, between different artistic practices, forms and media.

The inaugural issue of *Compendium* set out to combine this growing awareness of a transmedia environment in recent decades with the scales of comparison of world literature and their contribution to present developments in the study of production, circulation, and translation (in a broad sense). It also responds to the persistent hesitation of world literature — despite its intrinsically comparative methodology — to think of literature beyond its own confines. As Michael Wood and Delia Ungureanu have noted in their recent attempt to connect the adjacent fields of world literature and world cinema, “many world literature scholars are trained in comparative literature, but their comparisons are rarely made across media” (2021: 290). In promoting precisely such comparisons, this first issue of *Compendium* has brought together a selection of essays which propose to investigate artistic processes within world literature, connecting the literary with many other spheres of art and culture, as well as exploring the fluctuating limits of “text” and, consequently, the limits of reading and changing contexts of reception.

However, the main goal of this issue is more than simply to restate the 20th-century legacy and the contemporary expressions of a “high degree of interactivity among the arts” (Clüver, 2009: 524) which seems increasingly hard to overlook, yet not easy to discern and describe from within traditional disciplines. Rather, it is to understand literature itself as a virtual space for the international circulation of works of art.

The six articles in this issue disclose different possibilities of understanding literature, and therefore narrative, not only as a locus for the description and discussion of non-verbal art forms, but also for their dissemination, translation, transformation and even creation. They span three languages (English, French and Spanish) and several geographic and cultural contexts, from past and present transnational poetic renderings of an engraving by Albrecht Dürer’s from the 16th century to contemporary Anglo-American novels in the genre of art-fiction, dwelling on the art world and featuring painters, performance artists and writers as fictional or semifictional characters and protagonists. Read collectively, they argue for the advantages of exploring the comparative circulation(s) of art and literature today.

The following articles illuminate ways in which real, i.e., existing, works of art and images participate as powerful mediators in literary creation. By so doing, art works assert their presence as companion pieces to texts and books, in the form

of explicit references and illustrations, or as hidden influences and source texts in intermedial reworkings. The contributions of Aratrika Choudhury, Ana Fernandes, and Jorge García Fernández Arroita fall into this category. Choudhury examines the interconnected circulation of texts and images in illustrated collections of stories from the east, a book form especially crafted for the western market between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, in the context of the British Empire. By looking specifically into three story books illustrated by Warwick Goble — *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1912), *Indian Myth and Legend* (1913), and *Indian Tales of the Great Ones Among Men, Women, and Bird-people* (1916) — Choudhury provides an eloquent example of “how illustration can and often does modify text” (see p.42). Comparing the collected stories with their accompanying images, Choudhury identifies the colonial prejudices imbued in the practice of “Asian” story book illustration, while analysing at the same time the specific features of the work of one illustrator (Goble). This work is then located at an interval between knowledge and misconception, reality, and imagination.

Turning to Balzac’s *Le Chef d’oeuvre inconnu* (1831), a fictional text which is also a reflection on art and creativity, Fernandes suggests that in fact Balzac employed “the style of Rembrandt” (see p.46) in his story, appropriating the pictorial techniques of a real artist by translating them into words. Comparative readings of passages from the text alongside Rembrandt’s oil paintings *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (1653) and *Philosopher in Meditation* (1632) seem to attest to Balzac’s pictorial style of writing, founded on sophisticated methods of description. While identifying a paradigm of the ekphrastic mode in *Le Chef d’oeuvre inconnu*, Fernandes also interrogates the limits of representation, be it through words or images, as well as the limits of translation *between* words and images, and the underlying tensions of mimesis and invention. She finally locates the object of her study, like Choudhury, in the hybrid space of an untranslatable palimpsest.

Ekphrasis — one of the most recurring conceptual tools in this Issue — emerges again as a creative force in García Fernández’s study of a cluster of literary works with a common pictorial antecedent: Dürer’s *Melancholia I*. García Fernández’s essay shifts the discussion from narrative to the lyric, encompassing the multiple literary afterlives of a single work of art in a plurality of languages and epochs, from Nerval to Eliot, to Gil de Biedma, Enrique Lihn, and Rafael Ávila Domínguez. By so doing, he invites us to conceive of ekphrasis not so much as a descriptive tool for replacing images with words, but more as a transformational and interpretive process affecting the ekphrastic text as much as its source work, of which the former is in fact a reading. As shown in this article, Dürer’s work has not only been transferred from images into language as a pictorial emblem, but it has also circulated within a literary continuum, melded into poetic “melancholia” as an intertextual motif.

The remaining articles focus on how the contemporary novel tackles the other arts and the art world in general as a theme and fictional construct. Julia Clayton’s and Kathrin Neis’s meditations on the genres of “art-fiction” and the “artist novel”, as well as Belén Quinteiro Pulleiro’s account of the “quality bestseller” in Spain in the 1980s, all examine the ways in which literature has located itself and circulated at different levels of high and popular art and culture. Clayton explores

the *topos* of “misattribution” in three works by contemporary women writers to analyse how these texts reflect, and reflect on, the interrelatedness of gender politics and the politics of reception, distribution, and commerce. She suggests that by responding creatively to the question of “Why there have been no great women artists?”, art-fiction and the misattribution novels studied here re-historicise, but also revitalise, traditional accounts of art history, inasmuch as “fictional art can also be a way of recovering the initial *frisson* of art movements that have become so familiar that we’ve forgotten how radical or shocking they once were” (see p.23).

By contrast, Quinteiro offers a distant look on the specific phenomenon in recent history of the “quality bestseller” in Spain, and the ways in which it altered the literary landscape of the 1980s with lasting consequences. Considering the role that publishing houses, literary awards, editorial collections, agents, copyright laws, and even film adaptations, have played in that phenomenon (along with five case studies associated with the Spanish publishers Tusquets, Anagrama, Lumen, Edhasa/Minotauro, and Alfaguara), Quinteiro reminds us that literary circulation is also subject to extra-literary material factors and incidents, perhaps even more so when it shifts from the “highbrow” and politically-driven into the more commercial end of the spectrum, based on sales numbers and tending to a model of “internationalisation”.

Closing the Articles section of this Issue, Neis returns to the concept of ekphrasis — which is also addressed by Clayton — in her analysis of Louise Erdrich’s artist novel *Shadow Tag* (2010), seen in the light of Laura Eidt’s 2008 book-long essay on how cinema and literature have approached and *depicted* painting. Erdrich’s novel not only combines real and fictional works of art but it also deploys the mechanism of ekphrasis as more than a decorative element, or an inspiration in the search for literary equivalents to vividness and visuality. Neis suggests that ekphrasis operates in fact within the text, at the level of characterisation, pointing to the characters’ personal history, their ethnic and cultural background, as much as, perhaps counterintuitively, invisible dimensions, such as character psychology and emotional life. Ultimately, Neis reframes ekphrasis as a narrative catalyst in *Shadow Tag*, and not necessarily as a descriptive tool, thus challenging one of the most enduring notions concerning the interactions between art and literature.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s meditation on “Flaubert’s Landscapes”, published in 2004 and included in the section From the Archive, contributes to historicise the discussion carried out in this Issue. Although not tackling any artist or non-literary work of art *per se*, Gumbrecht retrieves the pictorial notions of “landscape” and, on one occasion, of “portrait” (see p.113), in his reading of specific passages from Flaubert’s four novels, *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô*, *L’Éducation sentimentale* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, as well as his *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. After a nuanced account of the nineteenth-century tension between Romantic vision and the precepts of Realism, Gumbrecht offers a thought-provoking “tentative thesis about how Flaubert’s ‘realistic’ views of landscape and of the human body can also be seen as a ‘romantic’ attitude” (see p.107). The article concludes with a stimulating hypothesis on the simultaneous irony and enthusiasm in Flaubert’s descriptions: regardless of whether we view them as romantic or non-romantic, such passages

help us better understand romantic landscape descriptions and the relationship between body and landscape. But apart and aside from that, Gumbrecht's reflection is itself a demonstration that other arts and fields of knowledge — such as romantic painting and its epistemological frame — can have a vital influence even on literature that is not openly “interartistic”, from character-making to narrative and focal innovation, and across genres of fiction and non-fiction.

The Reviews section of this Issue further testifies to the importance of including the circulation of art in current discussions of comparative and world literature, encompassing a field rich with areas of contact and crossover. Raquel Morais identifies the continuities and discontinuities — surprising in their relational nature, even if individually perhaps not new for the familiar viewer — between the works of three contemporary Portuguese artists in a collective exhibition commissioned this year in Paris by the Centre Georges Pompidou: the film-maker Pedro Costa, the sculptor Rui Chafes and the photographer Paulo Nozolino.

In his review of Satoshi Machiguchi's editorial project *Ango*, José Bértolo continues the discussion on the modes of coexistence between words and images. *Ango* not only brings Sakiko Nomura's photographs together with Ango Sakaguchi's literary text, but it also builds (in)visible historical bridges between Nomura's contemporary images and Sakaguchi's post-World War II short story, creating a hybrid object that we could perhaps call a photo-fiction-book.

It seems especially adequate to conclude this Issue with Hugo Pinto Santos's review of *Literatura-Mundo Comparada, Parte III: Perspectivas em Português* [Comparative World Literature, Part III: Perspectives in Portuguese], the third and final part of a ground-breaking six-tome anthology of world literature in Portuguese. After the two first volumes devoted to charting the literatures of the Portuguese-speaking world and of Europe, respectively, the final instalment of Helena Carvalhão Buescu's monumental endeavour looks further out into the wide world. Ancient and contemporary texts are brought together in dialogue, under thematic chapters which are in themselves an invitation to active and comparative modes of reading; authoritative, historical, and not rarely entirely new translations are provided by a large set of scholars, historians, professional and non-professional translators. *Literatura-Mundo Comparada* is evidence that comparative and world literature are by nature based on conversation and the making and remaking of communities — they teach us that literature is essentially about not being alone.

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## **A Question of Misattribution**

### **Women's Art & Feminist Art History in Contemporary Fiction**

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper explores three works of fiction — Elizabeth Kostova's *The Swan Thieves* (2010), Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World* (2014) and Jessie Burton's *The Muse* (2016) — all of which attempt to answer the question “why have there been no great women artists?” by exploring the possibility that artworks by women may have been misattributed to their male contemporaries. It is suggested that authors of art-fiction often draw on the work of feminist art historians not only to show how such misattribution might occur, but also how it might be consolidated and perpetuated via the international mechanisms which govern the circulation of art, thus relegating female artists from the status of practitioner to muse. In exploring how the reception of an artwork can be influenced by viewers' perceptions about the artist's gender, fiction about women's art also contributes to the debate over whether it is possible to identify a distinctive feminine aesthetic.

Whilst suggesting that art-history novels often defer to a traditional hierarchy of art forms, in which oil paintings of mythological subjects carry the greatest prestige, this paper argues that art-fiction can also create an alternative narrative of art history which can be used to challenge or at least supplement the mainstream narrative in which great artworks are almost exclusively produced by men.

## **RESUMO:**

Este artigo explora três obras de ficção — *The Swan Thieves* (2010), de Elizabeth Kostova, *The Blazing World* (2014), de Siri Hustvedt, e *The Muse* (2016), de Jessie Burton —, todas elas tentando responder à pergunta “porque é que não houve grandes artistas mulheres?” ao explorar a possibilidade de que obras de arte de mulheres possam ter sido mal atribuídas aos seus contemporâneos masculinos. Sugere-se que os autores de ficção sobre arte [*art-fiction*] recorrem frequentemente à obra das historiadoras de arte feministas não só para mostrar como essa atribuição incorrecta pode ocorrer, mas também como pode ser consolidada e perpetuada por meio dos mecanismos internacionais que regem a circulação da arte, relegando assim as artistas femininas, do estatuto de praticantes de arte, para o estatuto de musas. Ao explorar o modo como a recepção de uma obra de arte pode ser influenciada pelas percepções dos espectadores sobre o género do artista, a ficção sobre a arte feminina também contribui para o debate sobre se é possível identificar uma estética feminina distinta.

Embora sugerindo que os romances de história de arte muitas vezes se desviam para uma hierarquia tradicional de formas de arte, na qual as pinturas a óleo de temas mitológicos têm o maior prestígio, este artigo argumenta que a arte sobre ficção pode também criar uma narrativa alternativa da história da arte, que pode ser utilizada para desafiar ou, pelo menos, complementar a narrativa principal na qual as grandes obras de arte são quase exclusivamente produzidas por homens.

## **KEYWORDS:**

aesthetics; art-fiction; Elizabeth Kostova; Jessie Burton; muse; Siri Hustvedt

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

Elizabeth Kostova; estética; ficção sobre arte; Jessie Burton; musa; Siri Hustvedt

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## Introduction

Feminist approaches to art history, particularly attempts to rediscover and rehabilitate the work of forgotten women artists, have provided the inspiration for several fictional treatments over the last two decades. This article examines three contemporary novels set in various countries (France, Spain and the USA) and different periods, but all based on the possibility that artworks by women may have been misattributed to their male contemporaries. In Elizabeth Kostova's *The Swan Thieves* (2010) the Impressionist painter Béatrice de Clerval is blackmailed into allowing her work to be exhibited as the work of a male rival; in *The Muse* (Jessie Burton, 2016) Olive Schloss allows her art-dealer father to believe that her paintings are the work of a Spanish artist, Isaac Robles; whilst in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blazing World* (2014), Harriet Burden attempts to expose the art world's bias against women by perpetrating a sophisticated hoax, only for it to backfire when the critics refuse to accept her claim to be the true author of three critically-acclaimed shows.

In providing fictional explanations for the under-representation of women in art history, writers of art-fiction often draw on academic works on feminist art history which may be cited in interviews, acknowledgements or lists of suggested reading at the back of the novel. In the first edition of *The Muse*, for example, Jessie Burton provided a substantial list of recommended reading, including key works on feminist art history and autobiographies by women artists. Elizabeth Kostova has described how, in writing *The Swan Thieves*, she became “committed to the idea of honouring women painters, who’ve been so much neglected in the canon” — particularly after discovering that even recent lists of the painters who participated in the first Impressionist exhibitions exclude the name of Berthe Morisot, “on whose life I very loosely based some of my character Béatrice.”<sup>1</sup>

These three “misattribution novels”, in particular, draw on some of the responses to the question posed fifty years ago by Linda Nochlin in her essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971). Whilst the point of the article was largely to warn that in trying to answer the question we risk endorsing its negative implications (that there have been no great women artists “because women are incapable of greatness” [Nochlin, 1999: 154]), that has not prevented numerous attempts to answer it.

Nochlin's question has attracted two major lines of response. The first approach is to *acknowledge* the lack of “great” women artists and instead focus on identifying the barriers faced by women artists in the past — hence the title of Germaine Greer's *The Obstacle Race* (1979). These obstacles include institutional sexism<sup>2</sup>; domestic responsibilities; a tendency for women artists to be channelled towards the decorative or applied arts, traditionally held in lower esteem than easel

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<sup>1</sup> Email interview with Elizabeth Kostova conducted by Julia Clayton on 17 January 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Lack of access to life-drawing classes, in particular, meant that women artists often lacked the appropriate training to create high-status oil-paintings of historical or mythological scenes; they therefore tended to be pushed into less prestigious media, such as watercolour, and less prestigious genres such as still-life, portrait or landscape (Pollock, 1988: 44; Chadwick, 1991: 33).

painting or sculpture<sup>3</sup>; and the possibility that feminine aesthetics might not meet male critics' criteria for "greatness" (Nochlin, 1999: 155; Pollock, 1988: 26-27).

An alternative approach is to argue that there *have* in fact been plenty of great women artists, meaning that the art historian's task becomes an "archaeological" one of researching and promoting the work of neglected women artists in order to supplement the existing canon. Whilst this approach perhaps risks exaggerating the talent of a handful of 'anointed' female artists, whilst underplaying the obstacles faced by women artists as a group, the idea of rehabilitating forgotten women painters has remained a popular line of investigation, partly because it lends itself to monographs and small exhibitions. The attempt to dig up "examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history" (Nochlin, 1999: 154), with its attendant risk of exaggerating the talent of minor artists, is neatly parodied by A. S. Byatt in *Possession* (1990), where it is suggested that the reason why none of Blanche Glover's Arthurian paintings have survived is that, frankly, they were not very good. The loss of the paintings, however, enables characters in the novel to talk them up into something special: "they'd be fascinating [...] I imagine them as being voluptuous but pale, lovely willowy creatures with heaving breasts and great masses of pre-Raphaelite hair" (376).

A variant on this approach involves re-appraising the work of women artists who have been overshadowed by their male lovers, tutors or relatives in the ways described by Harriet Burden in *The Blazing World*: "Camille Claudel's reputation swallowed whole by Rodin. Dora Maar's big mistake: she screwed Picasso, a fact that had obliterated her brilliant Surrealist photographs" (Hustvedt, 2014: 140). The absorption of women's art into the oeuvre of their male mentors or lovers, however, also raises the further possibility that women artists of the past *have* produced great work, but that their best paintings have been attributed to their male contemporaries and thus "recorded as the achievement of others" (Greer, 1979: 10). Historically, there are several reasons why such misattributions might have taken place. In some periods it was considered immodest for a woman to sign her own work (14), whilst some women painters, realising that works by men commanded higher prices, used to sign their work under male versions of their own names, such as Rosarius (Rosa) Brett and Antonio (Antonia) Brandeis (75, 320). Margaret Keane, explaining why she continued to allow her husband Walter to take the credit for her "Big Eyes" paintings even after she had divorced him, said: "You've got to remember that back in the Fifties there was a lot of prejudice against women artists. There weren't that many of them, and on the whole their work didn't sell" (Keane, 2022).

In particular, it has increasingly been recognised that the view of the artist as a solitary genius hides the workings of a complex studio system involving a team of students and assistants, which may often have included the artist's female relatives (Chadwick, 1991: 15). Although Tintoretto's daughter, Marietta Robusti, worked in her father's studio for fifteen years, all her work was attributed to him, with his apparently prodigious output only serving to cement his "genius" status (Greer,

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<sup>3</sup> Even in the decorative arts, male designers or workshop facilitators have tended to receive credit for work done by women makers; the anonymity of the Omega Workshops, whose products were just "signed" with an omega (Ω) tended to encourage an attribution to Roger Fry or Duncan Grant even when the item had been made by a woman (York Art Gallery, 2022).

1979: 15; Chadwick, 1991: 18). One of the most celebrated cases of misattribution is that of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Judith Leyster, as by 1890 her work had been almost entirely re-attributed either to her husband Jan Molenaer or her (presumed) teacher Frans Hals (22). Misattribution also works both ways: just as high-quality work by women may sometimes be attributed to men, inferior work by *male* artists may sometimes be attributed to women, thus damaging the reputation of the female artist.

The authors of the three novels under discussion have all implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the influence of real-life cases of misattribution on their creative work. In an interview on *The Muse*, Jessie Burton cited the Judith Leyster / Frans Hals case as a source of inspiration: “no one thought a woman could paint the paintings she did”, as well as Walter Keane’s appropriation of his wife’s “Big Eyes” paintings.<sup>4</sup> She went on to comment that

Women historically have not been considered capable of “great” works of art, of universal messages to give to the world. Men have. So it stands to reason that unconscious bias and misattribution of authority take place in the cultural field as much as it does in the economic and political ones. (Burton, 2017, *WH Smith* interview)

Elizabeth Kostova has said that although she was aware of historical cases of misattribution, the idea of misattribution appealed “first and foremost as a plot point”, as she “needed something difficult and unjust to occur in the life of Beatrice de Clerval that would effectively end her career as an artist but also deeply wrong her as a woman artist.”<sup>5</sup> In *The Blazing World*, Harriet Burden’s anger with the art world is filtered through her knowledge of historical injustices perpetuated against female artists: “Artemisia Gentileschi, treated with contempt by posterity, her best work attributed to her father. Judith Leyster, admired in her day then erased. Her work handed over to Frans Hals” (140). Burden’s awareness of this history renders it all the more poignant that her attempt to expose misogyny within the art world results in the misattribution of her own work to her male “frontman”, Rune: as one character says, if she knew that “art history had steadily sunk the reputations of women artists by assigning their work to the dad, the husband or the mentor, then she should have known that borrowing a big name like Rune might sting her in the end” (141).

## 1. How does misattribution take place, and how is it perpetuated?

Each novel suggests a possible scenario through which women’s art might have been misattributed to male artists, whilst also exploring, through the reception of

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<sup>4</sup> When Margaret Keane sued her former husband regarding his claim to be the author of the ‘Big Eyes’ paintings, the judge ordered that each of them should create a painting in court. Whereas Margaret completed her painting in under an hour, Walter ‘refused even to try, complaining that he had hurt his shoulder’ (Keane, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Email interview with Elizabeth Kostova conducted by Julia Clayton on 17 January 2022.

these invented artworks, how such misattributions might have been perpetuated beyond the artists' lifetimes.

In *The Swan Thieves* Béatrice de Clerval, as a respectable married woman, submits one of her paintings to the Paris Salon under the pseudonym of Marie Rivière. The artist's true identity is guessed by a pair of unscrupulous art dealers, Gilbert and Armand Thomas; they acquire a hold over her when they observe her on holiday with her husband's uncle (Olivier Vignot) and steal a letter providing evidence of the couple's adulterous affair. Gilbert Thomas comes to Béatrice's studio while she is working on *Leda and the Swan*, asking "what price I might put on my reputation or that of my child" (Kostova, 2010: 595) before proceeding to blackmail her by saying that he had seen her on holiday with Vignot: "it was wonderful how women were beginning to enter the profession ... but a woman may change her mind about painting, after she becomes a mother, and certainly about any public scandal" (596). Thomas exacts a heavy price for his silence:

Money was not sufficient reward for this superb painting, but if I would finish it to the best of my ability, he would honour it by putting his own name in the corner of it [...] and he would be happy to do the same for any future paintings, with the understanding that I would be spared any unpleasantness (596).

Thomas therefore takes credit for Béatrice's masterpiece and *Leda and the Swan* is accepted for exhibition at the Paris Salon in 1880 under his name. One of the novel's messages is that such misattributions tend to stick: more than a century later, the caption in the National Gallery in Washington still gives a spurious authority to Thomas's claims:

*Léda vainçue par le Cygne*, 1879; purchased 1967. Gilbert Thomas, 1840-90 (41).

Béatrice decides that the only way to free herself from Thomas's control is to stop painting completely: "I will never paint for this monster after I finish, or if I do it will only be once, to record his infamy" (597). However, her retirement from the art world at the age of twenty-nine goes largely unremarked because it coincides with her becoming a mother, a pattern so common in this period that nobody thinks to investigate whether she might have abandoned her career for other reasons.<sup>6</sup> Her threat to expose Thomas's appropriation of *Leda* is however fulfilled in her final work, *The Swan Thieves*, in which the two hunters stalking the swan are so obviously the Thomas brothers that they can never risk exhibiting the painting (566).

A second scenario whereby a woman's artworks might be misattributed to a man is explored in Jessie Burton's *The Muse*, which inverts the stereotype of the passive female muse inspiring the dynamic male artist. Instead, it is Isaac Robles who becomes Olive Schloss's "muse", and it is her works which pulsate with colour and energy, not his. Isaac's work is technically competent, but bland, shown by Olive's reaction to his joint portrait of her and her mother: "it wasn't terrible. It was two women on the front of a Christmas card" (2016b: 202). Isaac understands that

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<sup>6</sup> As a 1988 Guerrilla Girls poster put it, one of the "advantages of being a woman artist" is "having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood" (Mullins, 2019: 12).

originality is the hallmark of a good artist (105-106), yet he cannot incorporate this knowledge into his own practice: ‘there was no humour, no spirit or power, no exciting use of colour of line’ (201).

The identification of the ‘muse’ of the title is however perhaps less clear-cut than initially meets the eye, reflected in Burton’s comment that ‘Olive thinks Isaac is her muse, but she’s just displacing responsibility and all the creativity comes from her’ (Burton, 2017). Some readers have suggested that it is actually Teresa, Isaac’s sister, who is Olive’s muse (Cordner, 2016), and it is certainly Teresa who inspires Olive’s two greatest paintings, by telling her the story of SS. Justa and Rufina. Olive nevertheless *acts* as if Isaac is her main source of inspiration; when she loses the desire to paint after creating *Rufina and the Lion*, she attributes this to his absence as he becomes more involved in the Republican cause.

Perhaps a bigger question relates to Olive’s complicity in allowing her father — and the outside world — to believe that her four great masterpieces were painted by Isaac Robles. Although it is Teresa who decides to substitute Olive’s *Santa Justa in the Well* for her brother’s mediocre portrait (Burton, 2016b: 196), Olive jumps at the chance to convince her father, by proxy, of her artistic talent. Harold Schloss is a successful Paris art dealer, but none of the twenty-six artists he represents are women, reflecting his belief that women are incapable of producing great art: “they haven’t got the vision” (249). Failing to understand *Santa Justa*, or even to realise that the same woman is depicted in both halves of the painting (he believes it to be Robles’s imaginative interpretation of the commission for the joint portrait), he gives it the title *Women in the Wheatfield* (197). Once the painting has been re-titled and misattributed, Olive herself begins to perceive it as a different painting to *Santa Justa in the Well*, even though they are one and the same canvas (237). When Teresa urges Olive to admit her authorship of the painting, Olive asks, “but would it be the *same* painting?” (203, *my italics*).

Like Harriet Burden in *The Blazing World*, Olive’s eventual intention is to reveal her authorship of her art *after* it has received critical acclaim: she wants her paintings to achieve such a level of success and visibility that nobody can take them off the wall, or off the market, just because they are by a woman (Burton, 2016b: 250). From this perspective, perhaps one of the most perplexing aspects of the novel is the way in which Olive allows the misattribution of her works to continue, even after they have been purchased by no less a figure than Peggy Guggenheim. The key to this problem perhaps lies in Olive’s statement that allowing her work to be attributed to Isaac gives her “all the freedom of creation, with none of the fuss” (Burton, 2016b: 205). Jessie Burton has described writing *The Muse* in the aftermath of the attention she received following the publication of *The Miniaturist* (Burton, 2016a, *Foyles* interview) and it is tempting to suggest that she was perhaps transferring some of her own desire for privacy and anonymity to Olive.

The misattribution of Schloss’s paintings to Robles is never corrected (not even by Teresa Robles, who reinvents herself as the art historian Marjorie Quick), partly because both painters are killed soon after the paintings are completed, and partly because they are so bound up with a particular place and time: Andalusia, 1936. Once the viewer is told that Robles disappeared whilst fighting for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, this sustains a false narrative in which art historians



speculate that Robles painted *Rufina and the Lion* “as he reached the cusp of his powers before war came” (Burton, 2016b: 135), or solemnly debate “the particular Hispanic pathology around the myth of Justa and Rufina” (312). The novel therefore offers a salutary warning against applying national stereotypes to works of art, as the reader knows that the “Robles” paintings are the work of an Anglo-Austrian teenager who has only spent a few months in Spain. One of the most powerful instances of invented reception in the novel is the inclusion of an essay from a broadsheet newspaper in which Robles is elevated into the pantheon of twentieth-century Spanish greats: “*Guernica*, the works of Dali and Miró — and now *Rufina and the Lion*, an allegory of Spain, a testament to a beautiful country at war with itself, carrying its own head in its arms, doomed forever to be hunted by lions” (339) — a complete mis-reading of the painting which is heavily coloured by hindsight.

In *The Blazing World*, Harriet Burden’s hoax is intended to achieve recognition for her own work whilst also raising the wider issue of the under-representation of women in the art world: “I knew that despite the Guerrilla Girls, it was still better to have a penis” (Hustvedt, 2014: 33).<sup>7</sup> In an attempt to prove that art is taken more seriously, and valued more highly if there is “a cock and a pair of balls” behind it (269), she mounts a series of three shows, each fronted by a male artist: *The History of Western Art* (Anton Tish, 1998), *The Suffocation Rooms* (Phineas Q Eldridge, 2001) and *Beneath* (Rune, 2003).<sup>8</sup>

Burden’s objective is to prove that our perceptions of a work of art are conditioned by our expectations, within the context of what the artist Grayson Perry has described as the “Default Male World” (Mullins, 2019: 7). The critics are prepared to accept that Anton Tish, an inarticulate monolingual twenty-four-year-old who believes that Andy Warhol is the greatest artist who ever lived (Hustvedt, 2014: 40) is responsible for an erudite and witty show containing allusions to obscure art-history texts, including an essay which is only available in French (20). Gushing reviewers fail to pick up that Tish is an anagram of “shit” (Burden removed the “c” from Tisch, his real surname [59]), whilst convincing themselves that his gaucheness is a finely judged act: “he played the naïf perfectly, the Forrest Gump of visual art” (45). Critics also fail to spot the clues hiding in plain sight in the second show, *The Suffocation Rooms*, including the handwritten “wallpaper” containing the repeated statement “Phineas Q Eldridge is really Harriet Burden” (137). Hustvedt has spoken about how the “masculine enhancement effect” and its corollary, the “feminine pollution effect”, are so entrenched in our socialisation that they even cause women to under-rate women’s art (White, 2014): when the gallerist Cynthia Clark is asked in the novel whether she would have shown *The History of Western Art* if she was aware of its true authorship, her awkward response suggests that she felt an association with Burden would have tainted her brand (Hustvedt, 2014: 21).

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<sup>7</sup> The Guerrilla Girls, a US-based collective of women artist-activists, have been campaigning on this issue since 1985. Their summer 2021 UK campaign, *The Male Graze* (<https://www.themalegraze.com>), featured reproductions of famous nudes from British collections accompanied by the slogan “Are there more naked women than women artists in UK museums?” (Figes, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> These three shows are collectively known as the *Maskings* project, leading Valeria Cammarata to suggest that Burden’s work can be seen as a modern version of the seventeenth-century masquerade, including its frequent subversion of gender roles (Cammarata, 2019).

The reception of Burden's second show, *The Suffocation Rooms*, provides a particularly good demonstration of how we see what we expect to see. The installation consists of a series of seven rooms, each containing two chairs, a table and two metamorphs (humanoid figures); each room gets progressively scruffier, hotter and darker, until the seventh room feels "like a Finnish sauna" (131). Each room also contains a wooden trunk, from which a hermaphroditic "alien", made of wax, gradually emerges (133). Burden suspects that if she had exhibited the show under her own name, as a woman in her sixties, it might "look old-womanish all of a sudden" (158). As it is, because the show is fronted by Phineas Q Eldridge, a mixed-race gay drag artist, the critics choose to interpret the show either from an LGBT angle, suggesting that the box from which "the eerie intersex person" rises is "also the closet" (210) or as a piece of commentary on racism in America, suggesting that the two metamorphs represent the right-wing family values of white America (210). Although the show was conceived and created before 9/11, the timing of its opening in the immediate aftermath of those events also leads visitors to place an unintended interpretation on the ominous heat of the seventh and final room (137), with its claustrophobic atmosphere and air of decay (210-211).

The reason why Burden's plan ultimately fails, cementing rather than exposing the misattribution of some of her work, is due to the very institutionalised sexism she had sought to expose. When Rune, her third "mask", refuses to acknowledge her as the creator of *Beneath* (308), nobody else is prepared to believe her either, leading one reviewer to suggest that the true subject of the novel is "the indefatigability of denial" (Cusk, 2014). Rune undermines Burden by claiming that she is too mentally unstable to produce such a complex work: "Harriet was an important collector, but she was unbalanced, a bit of a fruitcake, megalomaniacal [...] delusional" (Hustvedt, 2014: 276). In another interview he says "she had a hard time after her husband died, and she's been in psychiatric treatment for years" (308). Most depressingly, from Harriet's point of view, Rune does not even acknowledge that women are under-represented in the art world: "There are lots of women in art now. Where is the battle?" (234).<sup>9</sup>

Another reason why the misattribution sticks is that Burden covers her tracks too well. She allows Anton Tish to sign the works from her first show, and to keep the proceeds: "pieces from that show signed by Anton Tish command high prices" (21). She goes back through the records of her collaboration with Rune, only to realise that their email correspondence had been deliberately cryptic; that her studio assistants had failed to realise what was really going on<sup>10</sup>; and that the cheques she wrote to fund the show's production only served to confirm Rune's version of her "generous support" for the project (309). Unlike her first two frontmen, Rune did not need the cash, the exposure or the critical acclaim, as he already had "a palace-size apartment on Greenwich Street [and] a house in the Hamptons" (139). Given that

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more surprisingly, the feminist critic Terry Castle also suggested, in her review of the novel, that Hustvedt was attacking a paper tiger, listing forty-two female artists and photographers who "somehow managed to flourish at a very high level despite patriarchal obstacles" (Castle, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> *The Blazing World* could be seen as a satire on the modern studio system operated by artists such as Jeff Koons, who rely on large teams of artists and craftsmen to realise their designs (Kon-Yu and Van Loon, 2018: 54).

Rune's most famous work was a film about plastic surgery called *The New Me*, including scenes featuring surgical knives, blood-soaked gauze and the slicing of facial skin (141), it is hardly surprising that the critics picked up on similar imagery in *Beneath*, including masks which were "sliced through the cheek" (262) — suggesting that either Burden made the mistake of trying to allude to Rune's work, or that Rune had a greater input than Burden was prepared to admit.

Most importantly, as Hustvedt herself has said, "there is a difference between using a made-up name and using real people as pseudonyms. People are not costumes you can wear. They are flesh and blood" (White, 2014). Burden was dealing with real people — artists whose behaviour sometimes proved unpredictable and who inevitably influenced the nature of her own work. One character compares her manipulative relationship to Anton Tish to "the Pygmalion myth with the sexes reversed" — but whilst Pygmalion's ivory statue only comes to life at the end of the story, Burden's creation "had the misfortune to be made of bone and muscle and tissue from the start" (Hustvedt, 2014: 112).

The effect of misattribution is often to relegate the female artist from the status of practitioner to that of muse, a process explored by all three novels. In *The Swan Thieves*, Robert Oliver's obsessive painting of the same woman (eventually revealed to be de Clerval) acts as a metaphor for this process, suggesting that Gilbert Thomas's actions in appropriating Béatrice's work not only ended her career as an artist, but also transformed her from a *producer* of art into a mere object for representation in men's paintings. Harriet Burden also finds herself reduced to the status of muse and satellite: when she stakes her claim to be the true author of *Beneath*, Rune's press statement thanks "Harriet Lord" (deliberately using her married name, which she never used as a professional artist) for being "a true supporter" and a "*muse* for the project" (Hustvedt, 2014: 308, my italics). In *The Muse*, a photograph of Robles in his studio, with Schloss and her painting *Rufina and the Lion* in the background, becomes a star exhibit in a Robles retrospective mounted in 1967. As the only known photograph of Robles, it is "blown up to cover four enormous boards", accompanied by a caption stating that it shows Robles with "an unknown woman" (Burton, 2016b: 340). The curator comments that she was "probably a model he used" (134).

One of the observations which can be drawn from all three novels is that the misattribution of women's art to men enables awareness of the work to circulate in a way which would probably not have happened if it had been correctly attributed. Historically, women's art has tended to be excluded from the channels through which art circulates, "absent from art magazines and newspapers, rarely featured in glossy monographs and survey show catalogues" (Mullins, 2019: 9). *The Muse*, in particular, explores the ways in which art circulates via an international network of dealers and collectors: sold in Paris to an American collector, awareness of the "Isaac Robles" paintings spreads through exhibitions, art magazines, newspaper features and art-history institutes such as the fictional Skelton.

## 2. Is there such a thing as a distinctive feminine aesthetic?

In exploring how the artworks are received, each novel also invites the reader to decide whether it is possible to guess the gender of an artist simply by looking at their work, thus contributing to the long-running art-historical debate over whether gender is ‘linked to the production of certain kinds of imagery’ (Chadwick, 1991: 8). The notion of a feminine aesthetic is linked to the argument that women are under-represented in traditional art historical discourse because they are less likely than men to belong to a ‘school’ of painters, or paint in a defined style, thus defying the traditional categories on which art history relies as a discipline. In *The Blazing World* the critics were baffled by Burden’s early work because it was “too busy, too off the beaten track. It didn’t fit into any schema”, yet “she wasn’t Judy Chicago either, making a feminist statement” (Hustvedt, 2014: 19) — suggesting that, perhaps counter-intuitively, critics might be more comfortable with overtly feminist artworks that can at least be categorised (or pigeonholed) as such.<sup>11</sup>

Attempts to define a distinctive feminine aesthetic have ranged from the potentially patronising adjectives used by nineteenth-century male critics (*gentle, decorative, precious, delightful, sentimental, winning, appealing, exquisite, charming, fresh, sweet, graceful, delicate* — and of course, *amateur* [Greer, 1979: 75, 314; Chadwick, 1991: 9]) to claims that women’s art employs a central core of imagery “derived from the form of female genitals and from female bodily experience” (Pollock, 1988: 27), involving circular forms, “sensuously tactile” textures and looser handling of paint than men (Chadwick, 1991: 323). It is also often suggested that women are more likely than men to paint domestic scenes, although such scenes by men (Johannes Vermeer) carry a far higher value than similar scenes by women (Berthe Morisot).

Studies attempting to demonstrate the existence of a distinctive female aesthetic, whether in terms of style, colour, subject-matter or technique, have proved inconclusive: Renée Adams’s recent study on gender in the art market, for example, showed that whilst ‘roses’ might be labelled as a particularly feminine subject, 85% of paintings of roses sold at auction are actually by male artists (Adams, 2019, “Gender Diversity”). Participants in this study, when shown a series of paintings by male and female artists, only managed to correctly guess the gender of the artist 50.5% of the time (Adams et al., 2017: 5), leading the researchers to conclude that most “participants are unable to guess the gender of an artist simply by looking at a painting” (1). The most significant finding from the study, however, was that affluent male art buyers were likely to give a lower “appreciation rating” to a painting if they were told that it was by a female artist (7): *perception* of an artist’s gender is all-important.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Lurie’s novel *The Truth About Lorin Jones* (1988) also makes the same point, as Jones’s biographer comments that “her most characteristic work hovered in a no-man’s-land — *a woman’s land, perhaps* — between representation, abstraction and surrealism” (Lurie 1989: 45, my italics).

<sup>12</sup> The difficulty in proving the existence of a distinctive feminine aesthetic leads to the suspicion, as a Guerrilla Girls poster put it, that whatever kind of art women make, “it will be labelled feminine” (quoted in Mullins, 2019: 12).

The three “misattribution” novels under discussion all appear to start from the assumption that there *is* such a thing as a distinctive feminist aesthetic, although the suggestion is — particularly in *The Swan Thieves* and *The Muse* — that the difference between the work of male and female artists lies in their *treatment* of a particular subject, rather than the choice of the subject itself.

In *The Swan Thieves*, the subject-matter of much of Béatrice de Clerval's work is typical of that of real Impressionists such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot: domestic settings and places of family recreation, including gardens, seaside resorts, parks and boating-lakes. Béatrice paints her maid sewing (Kostova, 2010: 552), her husband reading a book in the garden (529), and the swans in the Bois de Boulogne (530). Griselda Pollock has convincingly demonstrated that female Impressionist painters were limited to such settings because “respectable” women could not access the type of venues which featured in the work of the male Impressionists: brothels, bars, cabarets and backstage areas (1988: 53, 56), and it is often suggested that female painters may have been drawn to Impressionism largely *because* it legitimised the subject matter of domestic life, hitherto relegated to the category of “genre painting” (Pollock, 1988: 56; Chadwick, 1991: 214), whilst simultaneously rejecting the historical and mythical subjects for which women painters often lacked the appropriate training (Chadwick, 1991: 215).

The cosy domestic world of most of de Clerval's paintings therefore makes it all the more striking that the painting which drives the plot, *Leda and the Swan* (even if it utilises her studies of swans in the park) is very *atypical* of Impressionist art in its subject-matter, as Greek myth was the province of the “Academic” painters against whom the Impressionists were reacting (Kostova, 2010: 41). *Leda* is also a large canvas (“about five by eight feet”, 40), suggesting that Béatrice was deliberately subverting the expectation that women should produce small, delicate paintings. Perhaps most significantly, however, Kostova also suggests that a woman artist might be able to take a well-worn story, portrayed by dozens of male painters before her, and put her own spin on it, as Artemisia Gentileschi had done with her version of the story of *Susanna and the Elders* (1610).<sup>13</sup> In presenting a version of the story which was less salacious and voyeuristic than its predecessors, Gentileschi drew on her own experience of being raped by her father's studio assistant; she removed any suggestion of Susanna's complicity in her rape by avoiding the usual setting of a garden (a metaphor for female fecundity); by presenting Susanna as completely nude, rather than seductively draped; and by making one of the elders gaze towards the viewer, finger to his lip in order to silence us (Chadwick, 1991: 98). In the same way, Kostova has said that she wanted to take “a myth that represents the helplessness of the female subject”, and *subvert* it, by showing it through a woman's eyes: “I thought it would be a fascinating task to try to ‘design’ a painting of Leda's experience from a female painter's point of view, even a fictional one”.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kostova has also spoken of her own pleasure, in seeking subjects for her novels, of “taking a worn-out cultural topic” — for example *Dracula* (*The Historian*, 2005) — “and trying to breathe new vitality into it, to make it real and specific through the lives and experiences of characters” (email interview with Elizabeth Kostova conducted by Julia Clayton on 17 January 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Email interview with Elizabeth Kostova conducted by Julia Clayton on 17 January 2022. The theme of *Leda and the Swan* continues to be explored by women artists, for example Helen Chadwick's *The Oval*

In some respects the *ekphrasis* of the painting, with its focus on the scantily-clad woman, appears to place it firmly among the seductively reclining Ledas of the classical tradition: “a wisp of drapery caught over her middle and slipping off one leg, her shallow breasts bare, arms outspread” (Kostova, 2010: 40). Yet when the psychiatrist Andrew Marlow sees *Leda* for the first time in the National Gallery in Washington, he feels there is something which sets it apart from the neighbouring paintings which also show women being raped or tortured in mythical or religious contexts: the ‘voluptuous victimhood of the classical paintings [...] the soft porn Sabine women and Saint Catherines’ (41). He is impressed by the painting’s graphic depiction of Leda’s *fear* (“the terror in her very hands as they dug into the earth” [41]), and also by the way in which the artist has managed to convey Zeus’s aggressive masculinity, even in swan form: ‘the swan needed no genitalia to make it masculine — that shadowed area under the tail was more than enough, as were the powerful head and beak’ (41). Such is the authority of the gallery’s attribution of the painting to Gilbert Thomas, though, that does not even entertain the possibility that the true author might have been a woman, instead concluding that Thomas ‘must have been a highly perceptive man’ to create such a work (41).

When Béatrice’s lover Vignot initially suggests that the story of Leda would be “just the sort of thing a Salon jury would welcome” (508), her first reaction is to question whether a story so loaded with male desire and female submission might be too “strong” a subject for a woman (509). But then, in one of the most significant passages in the novel, Vignot shows her how to turn the bourgeois domestic subject-matter she *is* permitted to paint into a scene of Classical rape and bestiality: she can use her own garden as a setting, use a swan from the Bois de Boulogne as a model for Zeus, and use her maid as the model for Leda (509), thus circumventing her exclusion from life-drawing classes.

Olive Schloss in *The Muse* also takes a mythological subject popular with male artists — the tale of SS. Justa and Rufina — and puts her own spin on it, creating the paintings *Santa Justa in the Well* and *Rufina and the Lion*. Jessie Burton has described how she chose this subject for her invented artworks *before* realising “that Goya, Velazquez, Murillo and Zurbarán had all painted [it]. That little moment of serendipity thrilled me so much” (Burton, 2016a). The story is about female artistic integrity (Kyte, 2016): the two sisters, Christians who worked as potters, were asked to make pots for a pagan party, but refused (Burton, 2016b: 122). The Roman authorities threw Justina into a well and Rufina into the arena with a lion; when the lion would not touch her, the Romans cut off her head and threw it down the well (123).

Olive’s first treatment of this story, *Santa Justa in the Well*, shows Justa before and after her arrest. On the left-hand side, Justa stands in a field of ripe wheat (highlighted with gold leaf),<sup>15</sup> carrying a heavy pot painted with deer and rabbits (175). On the right-hand side, however, the crop has become “deadened and limp”; Justa is curled up inside the circle of the well whilst live deer and rabbits look down

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*Court* (first exhibited 1986), which featured photocopied collages of the artist’s naked body with a swan and armfuls of flowers (Mullins, 2019: 72-73).

<sup>15</sup> One of the mysteries of *The Muse* is where Olive obtains the gold leaf she uses in *Santa Justa and Rufina and the Lion*, especially as she succeeds in keeping her painting activity secret from her art-dealer father.

on her from its edge, “as if set free from the broken crockery” (176). It is tempting here to see the influence of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, as Justa’s arrest causes the crops to fail and the natural order to be disturbed. When the painting is exhibited as the work of Isaac Robles the presence of the animals receives little critical comment — other than to suggest that the circle represents “the rotundity of planet earth” (311), but we cannot help wondering whether these same animals would have been seen as cute, charming or sentimental if the critics were aware that the painting was by a woman.

*The Muse* comprehensively rejects any suggestion that women artists might favour pinks, pastels and “cloud-colours” (Lucy Lippard, qtd. in Chadwick, 1991: 323), as nothing could be further from the bold indigos, purples, golds and bright greens favoured by Olive Schloss. However, rather than being inspired to use such strong colours by the bright Spanish sunlight, we learn that she bought them — perhaps a bit too conveniently — in London before travelling to Spain, selecting them as if impelled by some external force: “I just picked them up and put them on the counter [...] a vivid grasshopper-green — and a shade of scarlet, and oil called Night Indigo, a plum, and a silvery grey — all colours I’d never used before” (Burton, 2016b: 106).

A large part of the joke in *The Blazing World* is the way in which Siri Hustvedt, in creating Harriet Burden’s installations, not only drew on stereotypes about “feminine” art but also on genuine works by women artists — yet in the novel the critics and the public unquestioningly accept these shows as men’s work and stubbornly resist any suggestion that a woman might be behind them. We have already explored the suggestion that a female aesthetic might derive from an exploration of the female body, and in that sense Harriet’s work is very “feminine”, especially her “metamorphs”: huge, padded, doll-like images which appear (through the use of packs from electric mattresses) to generate their own body heat (Hustvedt, 2014: 30). It has been suggested that the metamorphs may have been based on the huge fabric sculptures created by Louise Bourgeois — who, like Burden, was overlooked for many decades before finally gaining recognition in her sixties (Castle, 2014)<sup>16</sup>, whilst the “gigantic sculpture of a woman” in *The History of Western Art*, covered in tiny reproductions of artworks (44) may be influenced by the work of Nikki de Saint Phalle: visitors to *Hon (She, 1966)* entered a huge female figure through her vagina (into an amusement park), and there was a milk-bar inside one of her breasts (Chadwick, 1991: 312). Burden’s installations continue to use the same domestic settings (“quirky dollhouse stuff” [Hustvedt, 2014: 46])<sup>17</sup> and giant “dolls” which were dismissed as “fussy and pretentious” (46) when she exhibited them under her own name, or as “an odd blend of pretentiousness and naïveté” (32-33) — yet when these installations are presented as the work of male artists, these features cease to be regarded as “feminine” and are instead interpreted as pieces of serious social commentary.

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<sup>16</sup> An advantage of being a woman artist, according to the Guerrilla Girls, is “Knowing your career might pick up after you’re eighty” (1988 poster quoted in Mullins, 2019: 12).

<sup>17</sup> The reception of Burden’s ‘quirky dollhouse stuff’ may be based on responses to Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brooks’s *Dollhouse* (1972), in which each room related to a different female role: mother, lover, nanny, cleaner and artist (Mullins, 2019: 30).

*The Blazing World* therefore proposes that even a “feminine” subject can remain unrecognised as such if the viewer believes they’re looking at a work by a male artist, and that this same work can even have “masculine” qualities attributed to it. Burden’s third show, for example, is described as “a rigorous, complicated installation” (10), and as ‘hard, geometrical, a real engineering feat” (277).<sup>18</sup> Reading the review in *The Gothamite*, Burden feels a sense of triumph that the critic “doesn’t know that the adjectives muscular, rigorous, cerebral can be claimed by me, not Rune. He doesn’t know he is a tool of my vengeance” (292).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, novels about women artists, with their fictional biographies and lengthy passages of ekphrasis, can be viewed as an attempt to answer the question “why have there been no great women artists?” by “writing women back” into art history (Pollock, 1988: 55) — a point made by a reviewer who described *The Swan Thieves* as “a fictional addendum” to Germaine Greer’s *The Obstacle Race* (Taylor).

In “adding” artists to the canon — in this case, a French Impressionist, a 1930s Symbolist and a late twentieth-century conceptual artist — misattribution-novels and art-fiction more generally can be viewed as an attempt to create an alternative narrative of art history (“a parallel extra-academy, extra-museum art history”, Chapman, 2009: 785) which can be used to challenge — or at least supplement — the mainstream narrative as outlined in works such as Ernst Gombrich’s classic textbook *The Story of Art*,<sup>19</sup> in which great artworks are made by a succession of male individuals who possess the “golden nugget of Genius” (Nochlin, 1999: 157). In addition to promoting the work of female painters, fictional art can also be a way of recovering the initial *frisson* of art movements that have become so familiar that we’ve forgotten how radical or shocking they once were. Kostova has spoken of the need to remember that Impressionism was not always “a synonym for safe art”, featured on “umbrellas and tote bags, mugs and notecards — an industry that trivialises and commodifies it, and at the same time makes it relentlessly familiar”.<sup>20</sup>

These alternative narratives, however, still come with some qualifications. We have seen how all three “misattribution novels” suggest that there is such a thing as a distinctive feminine aesthetic, in treatment of subject-matter if not in style, colour or technique, yet they simultaneously *undermine* this concept, as the works by these three fictional women artists are all so readily accepted by dealers, critics, collectors and gallery visitors as being the work of male artists.

Even fiction which overtly seeks to challenge the mainstream narrative of art history often defers to a traditional hierarchy of art forms in which oil painting sits at the top of the pyramid, particularly oil-paintings of mythological or historical

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<sup>18</sup> The contrast between the language used to describe men’s and women’s work in *The Blazing World’s* fictional reviews is also discussed by Kon-Yu and Van Loon (2018: 55).

<sup>19</sup> Although Gombrich’s textbook (first published in 1950 but regularly updated) has become the go-to single-volume of art history, out of the 228 plates depicting works attributable to a single artist in the 1995 edition only one depicted an artwork by a woman: Käthe Kollwitz’s *Need* (Plate 368).

<sup>20</sup> Email interview with Elizabeth Kostova conducted by Julia Clayton on 17 January 2022.



subjects such as de Clerval's *Leda and the Swan* or Schloss's *Rufina and the Lion*; *The Blazing World* is a rare example (along with Pearl S Buck's *This Proud Heart*, 1938) of a novel involving a female artist who is *not* a painter. Jessie Burton's *The Muse*, in particular, also buys heavily into the idea of original genius which characterised Irving Stone's novels on Michelangelo and Van Gogh (Chapman, 2009: 787): although Olive Schloss is a self-taught nineteen-year-old with no formal artistic training, she can still paint museum-quality masterpieces such as *The Orchard* in a single overnight session (Burton, 2016b: 87), a point raised by a reviewer who looked at the novel from an artist's perspective: an untrained but inspired young woman creates a breathtaking piece of art without any training, instruction or advice" (American Girls Art Club).

*The Muse*, however, also provides an excellent example of the playfulness which so often characterises novels about invented artworks, sending readers scurrying to Google whether a particular painter or painting is real. Jessie Burton has been so successful in creating a fictional artist (Isaac Robles) firmly linked to a particular time and place (Spain at the start of the Civil War) that many readers have understandably assumed that Isaac Robles was a real Spanish Symbolist painter, even if the works attributed to him in the novel are fictional. One book group review commented that "several members thought that the mystery painting was based on a real work of art [...] the comment was made that the author had *tricked the readers into believing in its existence*" (Cordner, 2016, my italics). Typing "Isaac Robles" into a search engine brings up a whole gallery of "his" paintings; it is only by digging down further that we realise that these paintings are from Jessie Burton's Pinterest board on "Isaac Robles" and that they are mostly by Joan Miró, interspersed with photographs of Miró in his studio and paintings of Justa and Rufina by other Spanish artists. Isaac Robles' internet presence surely provides the ultimate endorsement of the problem of misattribution, as — in an act of supreme irony — the fictional male artist still manages to steal the thunder from his fictional female contemporary.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In a real-life example of such upstaging, in October 2018 Jenny Saville's self-portrait *Propped* broke the record at auction for a price paid for a work by a living female artist — only to be ignored in press reports in favour of Banksy's self-shredding painting, *Girl with Balloon*, which featured in the same sale (Mullins, 2019: 21).

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## The Aesthetics of Authenticity in the Illustrated World of Warwick Goble, c. 1912-1916

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### ABSTRACT:

The imperial practice of collecting stories from the east and transforming them into illustrated books, primarily for circulation in western book markets, can be traced back to orientalist endeavours of the long nineteenth century. While M. Frere's *Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Legends current in Southern India* (1870), contained only two, small, black and white illustrations by an anonymous artist, eventually books started including several full-page colour illustrations. This publishing pattern favouring the inclusion and involvement of illustrations in the circulation of collected stories often brought contesting notions of authenticity in dialogue. The transformative individualism of *the artist as the illustrator*, at the turn of the twentieth century, expanded and problematized the premises of circulated narratives in intriguingly complex ways. My article critically examines the nature and consequences of such aesthetic reworking by attempting to unpack the semiotics of Warwick Goble's illustrations for collected Indian narratives.

### RESUMO:

A prática imperial de recolher histórias do Oriente e transformá-las em livros ilustrados, principalmente para circulação nos mercados de livros ocidentais, remonta aos esforços orientalistas do "longo século XIX". Enquanto *Old Deccan Days or Hindoo Fairy Legends current in Southern India* (1870), de M. Frere, continha apenas duas ilustrações pequenas, a preto e branco, de um artista anónimo, a determinada altura os livros começaram a incluir várias ilustrações a cores de página

inteira. Este padrão editorial, favorecendo a inclusão e o envolvimento de ilustrações na circulação de histórias recolhidas, pôs frequentemente em diálogo noções de autenticidade contrastantes. O individualismo transformador do *artista enquanto ilustrador*, na viragem do século XX, expandiu e problematizou de formas intrigantemente complexas as premissas das narrativas em circulação. O meu artigo descreve criticamente a natureza e as consequências de tal reformulação estética, tentando compreender a semiótica das ilustrações de Warwick Goble para recolhas de narrativas indianas.

**KEYWORDS:**

collection; colour; imperialism; orientalism; visual semiotics

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

colecção; cor; imperialismo; orientalismo; semiótica visual

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When Walter Benjamin mourns the loss of artwork's aura following repeated reproduction in printed forms in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", he views art as an independent, unified whole. However, printed forms like special editions of books were artefacts which not only enabled the circulation of art, but also brought them in contact with texts and contexts. The coexistence of image and text can be fraught with complexities which affect the meaning-making process of the book as a visual material object. Several changes pertaining to the way books, particularly gift books and special editions were illustrated and generally perceived can be located at the turn of the twentieth century. However, as John Lewis points out, "it is fair comment to suggest that the twentieth century began in 1901, but the forces governing the design of the twentieth century book do not fit the calendar so conveniently" (1984, Preface). In the early twentieth century there was a perceptible desire for illustrations to be more than mere illustrations and for illustrators to be artists. Lewis draws our attention to the reintroduction of painters as illustrators in England. It is interesting to note the emergence of a group of trained artists with exclusive art school links around this time. In Britain, Warwick Goble, Heath Robinson, John Dickson Batten, John Lockwood Kipling all belong to this group. The idea of guilds of block makers without art school training was replaced by the individuality of the cosmopolitan illustrator who was identified primarily as an artist.

As illustrated books evolved and became more popular, so did the identity of the illustrator. For instance, this flyer accompanying the 1915 edition of *Stories from the Arabian Nights* published by Hodder and Stoughton (Fig. 1), advertises an exhibition of Edmund Dulac's "original water-colour drawings".<sup>1</sup>

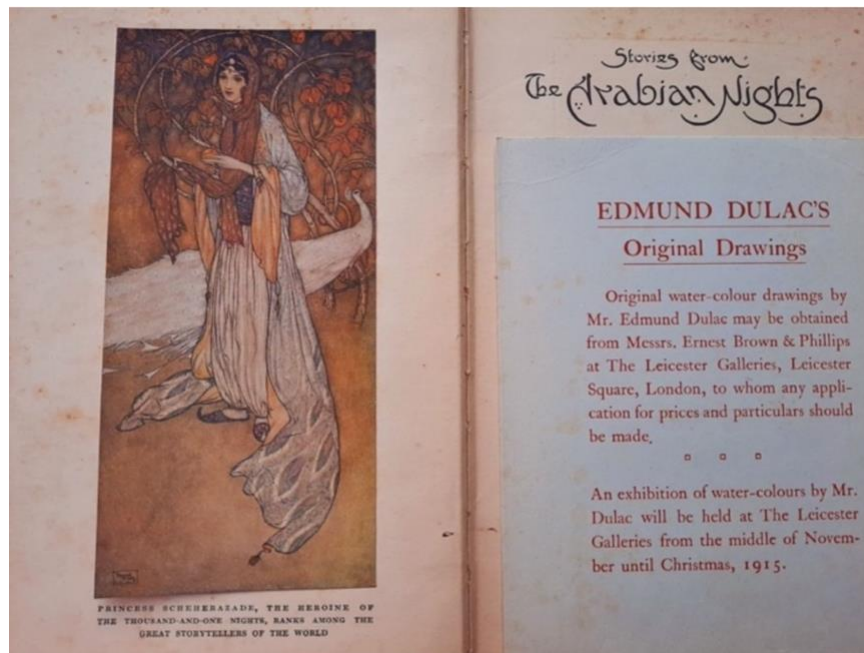


Fig. 1.

<sup>1</sup> From personal collection.

An exhibition of illustrations frees the image from text in a very direct way as the two are no longer bound, sown and stitched together. It reinstates the kind of autonomy sought by artist-illustrators even while struggling to provide an authoritative visualisation of the text. I contend that this newfound artistic individualism transformed the narratives that were in circulation, by expanding and problematising their content in multiple ways, within the confines of the book.

In the backdrop of imperial story collection and illustration, Warwick Goble emerges as an understudied but important name. Born on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1862, in London, Warwick Goble was an illustrator and a contemporary of the more famous children's book illustrators Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. In fact, Goble went to The City of London School, five years ahead of Rackham. In the early 1890s, he started his career by preparing half-tone illustrations for local monthlies and later, he was Macmillan's resident gift book illustrator. One source further points out that "Goble had become the designated artist for Asian story books" ("Warwick Goble"). Indeed, between 1912 and 1916, Warwick Goble produced illustrations for at least three collections of Indian stories: Macmillan's 1912 edition of Lal Behari Day's *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, Donald A. Mackenzie's *Indian Myth and Legend* (1913), published by the Gresham Publishing Company and Cornelia Sorabji's *Indian Tales of the Great Ones Among Men, Women, and Bird-people* (1916) published by Blackie and Son. My article will primarily engage with the visual semiotics of these three books, in an attempt to expose the complicated dialogue between image and text in illustrated collections of oriental tales. I will explore how these images-text interactions brought contesting ideas of authenticities or multiple authenticities together and the consequences of their encounter.

The word 'authenticity' despite being in popular usage, is deeply ambiguous and it is not my aim to exhaustively define it. Through my case study in this article, I intend to explore its application and functionality within the confines of selected texts. In existing scholarship, authenticity almost always denotes a larger field of associations — a schema, a language. In the work of Theodor Adorno (1973), it is referred to as "jargon", while more recently, Charles Taylor (2003) respectfully calls it a "culture". Adorno states the "fact that the words of the jargon [of authenticity] sound as if they said something higher than what they mean suggests the term 'aura'. It is hardly an accident that Benjamin introduced the term at the same moment when, according to his own theory, what he understood by "aura" became impossible to experience" (1973: 9).

By drawing this comparison with Benjamin's "aura" Adorno foreshadows how authenticity always points at something that cannot be adequately defined but has nonetheless come to signify a certain metaphorical value. Most scholars agree that authenticity is linked to the notion of identity or more correctly the system of recovery of an identity. In his incisive exploration of authenticity and culture, Charles Guignon points out that the notion of selfhood became deeply connected with authenticity in the nineteenth century (see Guignon, 2004: 65). The quest for recovering a unique individualism and being recognized for that transcended all social involvements. This system of identity recovery of the self as well as the other is deeply ingrained in orientalist endeavors popular at the time as well. Guignon further adds that "the modern idea of art and the concern with becoming authentic

grew up around the same time and are very intimately connected” (71). In illustrated books of oriental tales, two identities come in contact — the authentic representation of the artistic self and the authentic representation of the content.

The act of story collection, publication and consequent circulation was an essential consequence of colonial contact and imperial rule. Particularly, folklore collection is identified by Charles Morison as one of the three systems of imperial ethnography (quoted in Naithani, 2001: 184). James Clifford highlights that, “[i]n the West, however, collecting has long been a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity. [...] the self that must possess but cannot have it all learns to select, order, classify in hierarchies — to make ‘good’ collections” (1999: 60). Interestingly, Clifford links the idea of authenticity and possession which hints at the role of consumerism and market forces in the process of identity recovery. We may argue that producing illustrated editions of oriental stories became synonymous to producing ‘good collections’ and beyond simple collecting, the process of publishing came to represent a conscious act of curation and a subconscious act of creation. Creation, because often these collections with their illustrations visually signified a specific world which was separate from the world from which the stories were collected and the world to which it was delivered.

Susan Stewart writes:

[...] the collection represents the total aestheticization of use value. The collection is a form of art as play, a form involving the reframing of objects within a world of attention and manipulation of context. Like other forms of art, its function is not the restoration of context of origin but rather the creation of a new context, a context standing in a metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life [...] While the earth and its redundancies are destroyed, the collection maintains its integrity and boundary. (1993: 152)

“Manipulation of context” and “aestheticization of use value” denotes what Foucault might have called subjugation of knowledge resulting from formal systemization which may implicitly or explicitly be viewed as demonstration of power (see Foucault, 1980: 81). To put it simply, person(s) responsible for curating and creating the identities signified in the illustrated book of collected tales wielded a certain kind of power. Against the background of colonization, story collection undeniably had overt and covert political intentions which contributed to the growing market for folktales from around the world in Europe in the nineteenth century. Beyond the stories themselves, it is the art accompanying them which can be in equal parts intriguing and problematic. Goble’s illustrations by themselves are visually captivating, it is their incongruity with the text and ultimately the embedded element of world-building, which I find profoundly interesting. The creation of a new aesthetic context sustains the collection, but also comes into direct conflict with the narratives as they were expected to have existed within and beyond their place of origin. Although adaptation studies and dialogical approaches do not put much impetus on the idea of fidelity, it is somewhat unavoidable in the context of a postcolonial discourse. However, it is not my aim to emphasise a need for fidelity. I intend to study the images in their immediate textual context in the book, in an attempt to understand and decode the landscape of incongruity which highlights



contesting authenticities. Meyer Schapiro writes, “[i]f some illustrations of a text are extreme reductions of a complex narrative — a mere emblem of the story — others enlarge the text, adding details, figures, and a setting not given in the written source” (1983: 11). Goble’s illustrations indeed “enlarge the text”, but they also do so in a way which problematizes claims of authenticity that collected stories make.

Folktales are expected to be authoritative snippets of information which reflect cultural essence. According to Adorno, essence is a set of attributes necessary for the identification of an object and is deeply related to the idea of authenticity. Much like “aura” and “authenticity”, “essence” is easier to identify than describe. For instance, Raghunath Goswami, while talking about Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar’s classic 1907 Bengali book *Thakumar Jhuli*,<sup>2</sup> highlights the exceptional Bengaliness of its illustrations without explaining the parameters of said Bengaliness (see Goswami, 1989: 336). Authentic representation is linked to authoritative retelling by Stith Thompson. He writes,

In contrast to the modern story writer’s striving after originality of plot and treatment, the teller of a folktale is proud of his ability to hand on that which he had received. He usually desires to impress his readers or hearers with the fact that he is bringing to them something that has the stamp of good authority, that the tale was heard from some great storyteller or from some aged person who remembered it from old days. (Thompson, 1977: 4)

This kind of retelling echoes the idea of recovery of the old rather than creation of the new. The preface to *Folk-Tales of Bengal* emphasizes this. The collector claims, “I have reason to believe that the stories given in this book are a genuine sample of the old old stories told by old Bengali women from age to age through a hundred generations.” The stories in *Folk-Tales of Bengal* were collected by Lal Behari Day, a Bengali journalist and Christian missionary, in compliance with his patron Richard Carnac Temple, British chief commissioner and author, to whom the book is also dedicated. It was first published in 1883. Day had toiled hard to collect the stories from different sources in an attempt to be authoritative. In the preface, he writes that as a child he used to listen to the stories told by a woman, whom he identifies as “Sambhu’s mother”, but having forgotten or mixed up most of the stories the project of producing a collection of stories meant finding a new source for such stories, as Sambhu’s mother had passed away. This led him to look for new storytellers and his efforts eventually proved fruitful. The collection includes several variations of stories (for example “Shonar Kathi Ropor Kathi”<sup>3</sup> is alternately named “The Story of Rakshasas”<sup>4</sup> in Day’s book) which would later be featured in Mitra Majumdar’s book (mentioned earlier). It is important to note that the illustrated edition of *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, with art by Warwick Goble appeared much later, in 1912, almost twenty years after Day’s demise.

The 1912 gift book edition of *Folk-Tales of Bengal* published by Macmillan had a gorgeous cover with gold embossed decorations, title and credits. It read: “Folk-Tales of Bengal illustrated by Warwick Goble”. The omission of the name of the

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<sup>2</sup> Translates to *Granny’s Sack of Stories*.

<sup>3</sup> Translates to “Golden Stick and Silver Stick”.

<sup>4</sup> Plural of “Rakshas”, a particular type of demon in Indian folklore.

collector on the cover exposes Macmillan’s strategy of promoting the work of their resident gift book illustrator and alerts us further to the changing status of the illustrator in early twentieth century. A characteristic of the books produced during this time was the nature of their covers. Unlike contemporary publications, books from early twentieth century had no illustrated book covers. Structures like gilded lettering or ornamental designs or hard binding were unique signifiers of value. So if a book was a special edition or represented high value it was expected to have these markers. If the first edition of Lal Behari Day’s book was born out of academic interest or ethnographic curiosity, the 1912 rendition most certainly foreshadowed a more complex purpose. It was no longer recovering a cultural identity, it was circulating a revisualized identity through print. Warwick Goble produced thirty-two colour plates for the book. The frontispiece (Fig. 2) is an illustration for the story “Phakir Chand”<sup>5</sup> which is the second story in the collection. The semi-nude, white-skinned figure in the foreground is *almost Indian but not quite*.<sup>6</sup> The armlet, the bejewelled waistband, the saree-like drape contributes to the Indianness of the figure while the colour does not.



Fig. 2.

The semi-nudity noted in the frontispiece eventually transforms to a state of complete undress in an illustration for the final story “The Bald Wife”, making it somewhat unsuitable for its original audience (children), as mentioned in the preface. The other illustrations are similarly made using vibrant hues and great skill but the figures are not quite Indian. Similar white-skinned subjects decked in Indian clothing continue to appear throughout the course of the book. In an illustration for

<sup>5</sup> A proper name.

<sup>6</sup> This is inspired by an expression that famously appears in an essay by Homi Bhabha. The original expression is “almost the same, but not quite”. Here it has been somewhat modified to suit the need of my critique. For reference see Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 86).

the story “The Origin of Rubies” again, the setting is bursting with eastern tropes like an embroidered carpet, heavily embroidered drapes, ornate bowls and a tall hookah and has a similar white-skinned figure covered in jewels from head to toe. The long-tailed parrot perched on the left corner however is not enough to convince one of the Indianness of the scene because the central subject herself breaks the illusion by betraying her foreignness (Fig. 3). What Goble creates is essentially a new world inhabited by *Indianised* individuals. The bodies of Goble’s subjects draw our attention through colour, attire (and the lack thereof), accessories, and betray the first hint of another world, a world different from the one that Day had promised to depict in the preface and we witness the collector’s authority coming in contact with the illustrator’s autonomous individualism. However, it would be wrong to assume that such individualism existed in isolation and was free from contemporary artistic and cultural influences. Strange mutations are stirred up with colour and ink. One can easily end the discussion by shoving this under the metaphorical oriental carpet and concluding that Goble let his imagination run wild and ended up creating a new race, mixing and splicing tropes from different cultures which resulted in these strange mutations on paper. Orientalist art has often been criticised for stereotypical depictions of the East, which are also reflected in Goble’s illustrations, yet their complex and often incongruous relationship to the text opens up a world of enquiries. Not only is Goble creating a new race of individuals but he is creating them for a very specific visual world, or to put it simply, beyond manipulating the figures on the foreground, the illustrator crafts an unique world in the background. To understand this part of the equation we have to look closely at Goble’s style.



Fig. 3.

Apart from a boom in the production of illustrated books in the late nineteenth century, the other event of considerable importance which affected Goble’s career, along with that of several other British illustrators, was the growing popularity in Europe of Japanese woodcuts. For instance, Walter Crane’s 1914 book on the study of art, *Line and Form*, takes up the topic of Japanese brushwork in the very first

chapter. Japanese art and artistic methods became fashionable in France and England in the 1870s and 1890s after drawing considerable attention at the International Exhibition of 1867 in Paris. Many of the Impressionists were strongly influenced by some aspects of Japanese art. The fact that Goble had embraced Japonisme becomes immediately clear through his artwork. The tradition of the ‘floating world’ (which refers to the composition of pictures where the subjects seem to be floating due to the lack of solid background), is strong in Goble’s colour illustrations. Partial or complete omission of background was also a particular characteristic of scientific illustrations from around this time and embodied the central principle of objective exhibition in the scientific aesthetic of classification and the Linnean system. In the illustrations of *Folk-Tales of Bengal*, the backgrounds of all the images have been left in a diffusion of colour with only a few elements painted with great detail. This selective attention to detail in the background is also present in his illustrations for folktales from other parts of the world. A look at three other books of fairy/folk tales from different parts of the world strengthens my contention that Goble was indeed creating a new world. *Green Willow and Other Japanese Stories* (1910), *Stories from the Pentamerone* (1911), and *The Fairy Book* (1913) — all books illustrated by Goble in and around the time when he was illustrating stories from India exhibit similar treatment of background. The same diffused colour with no solid ground or walls (or selectively solid) giving the impression that the subjects are somewhat floating or suspended. Indeed, this subtly plays into the metaphor of “suspension of disbelief” which becomes somewhat necessary to completely appreciate Goble’s in-between, liminal world, which is never fully situated in the east or the west.

Goble’s illustrations build temporal and geographical connections in interesting ways. Different stories from different parts of the world exhibit shared strains of continuity. Firstly, all the illustrations seem to reflect the same time of the day, a twilight hour that does not cast a shadow. It was especially useful in removing unnecessary distractions caused by shadows in the foreground where the inhabitants of Goble’s liminal world reign supreme. Secondly, elements of fashion, furniture and other material in the background seem to reflect a strange unity of time and space. The king and queen from *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1912) and the princess from *The Fairy Book* (1913) sleep in similar canopied beds (a clear European influence), while the princes in both the scenarios are regally turbaned and wear similar attires (an Eastern influence [Fig. 4]).



Fig. 4.

In a startling moment, one stops to wonder — could it perhaps be the same prince, hopping from one adventure to another, from one illustration to another, across books, across boundaries? Further, the same kind of trees and plants appears in all the stories irrespective of geographical location. The same, bright, decorative low-growing flowers which bloom in the woods through which Little Red Riding Hood passes also bloom in the forests of distant Bengal (Fig. 5).<sup>7</sup> It is a landscape that continues uninterrupted from one book to the next, and onto the next, thus ironically bestowing visual continuity to the literature of different parts of the world. An intertextual reading of all these illustrated books makes it clear that Goble intended to create a unique world through the act of symbolic mutation.



Fig. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Frontispiece from *The Fairy Book* and illustration for the story “The Boy with the Moon on his Forehead” from *Folk-Tales of Bengal*.

Thus the Bengal which Day chose to represent transforms radically when twenty years after his death an ambitious illustrator and artist takes up the paintbrush to build the vision of a different kind of world where eastern and western influences communicate with each other.

*Indian Myth and Legend* written by Donald A. Mackenzie was published in 1913 and comes second in the line of Goble's works on India. It is of course an ambitious project in itself because here the author claims to retell stories about the gods and goddesses of the Hindus from the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. It starts with the story of Indra and ends with the mission of Rama. This book however does not exclusively include the artwork of Warwick Goble but involves other artists. The illustrations in *Indian Myth and Legend* can be broadly divided in four groups viz., photographic images, art by Nanda Lal Bose, art by Surendra Nath Ganguly and art by Warwick Goble. The inclusion of two other Indian artists gives rise to the scope for comparison with the work of Warwick Goble and also results in a fractured fantasy conjured by multiple illustrations in multiple different styles. Goble's illustrations appear halfway through the book, in the story "Prelude to the Great War". The painting illustrating Shantanu's meeting with Ganga is the first of the many paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses which follow. Mackenzie sees the meeting of king Shantanu and goddess Ganga as the starting point of Mahabharata and in many senses it is. Ganga bears Shantanu a child who comes to be known as Bhishma and plays a crucial role in the final battle of Kurukshetra. The androgynous depiction of King Shantanu cannot escape one's attention. We only need to observe Raja Ravi Varma's famous painting of Shantanu and Ganga beside the one by Goble to notice how curiously unfamiliar Goble's Shantanu looks. Androgynous Hindu deities keep appearing through the rest of the book.

In "The Triumph of the Panadavas", the Arjuna that meets the river nymph is white-skinned, beardless and distinctively androgynous. He stands precariously balancing his weight on one hip as the nymph emerges out of water. A similar depiction of Rama appears later in the book where after several years of exile, he still manages to look like a young blue boy. Among all the representations, the one that intrigues me the most is that of Draupadi. In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, the daughter of King Drupad is depicted as essentially dark-skinned. One of her many names is 'Krishnaa' which refers to one who is dark skinned. In the illustration for "The ordeal of Queen Draupadi" (Fig. 6), we encounter a Draupadi that is not dark but white-skinned. At this point, one inevitably pauses to wonder if disbelief can be suspended when the facts of an established canon are challenged? In the preface, Donald E. Mackenzie states that the book is expected to provide "comparative evidence" of certain Aryan influences and the development of Hinduism. The comparative evidence is presented not only through text but expected to be supported by photographs and original art thereby highlighting the illustrative purpose of art over its creative aspect. However, the artist's individual style of representation yet again manipulates authenticity as it is promised by the text. Beyond identifying the illustrated book as a locus of interaction between multiple contesting authenticities,

I am deeply interested in unpacking what art really does, when it does not express a true depiction of text.

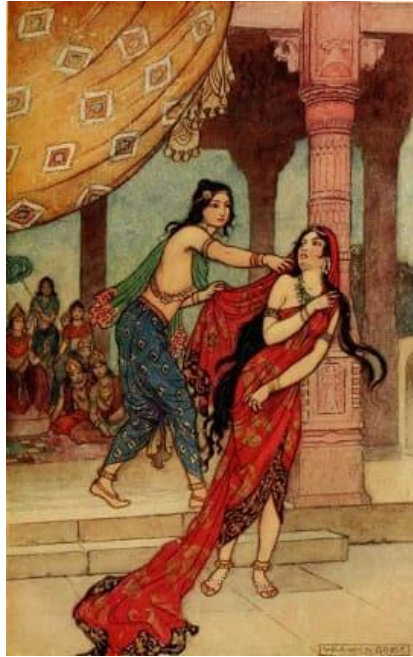


Fig. 6.

Moving on, finally we arrive at the tragic tale of Damayanti. Her story appears in the *Mahabharata*. She was the princess of the Vidarbha kingdom who married Prince Nala. She fell in love with Nala after hearing about his virtues from a swan. A different but equally interesting swan appears in Greek mythology. Zeus disguised as a swan seduces Leda who was the wife of Tyndareus, the King of Sparta. At first glance the two stories sound strikingly different. Yet, Warwick Goble's paintbrush manages to create an unheard of and unimaginable kinship between the two (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7.

Starting from the tone of the skin to the design and structure of the jewellery to the attire itself and even the surrounding vegetation, the paintings literally mirror each other. However, while one swan comes as a saviour, the other comes portending doom. The curious kinship between Leda and Damayanti further highlights Goble's aim to create a unique visual world with its own sense of aesthetics which does not always necessarily describe the text but expands and problematizes it.<sup>8</sup>

*Indian Tales of the Great Ones among Men, Women and Bird-People* is a compilation of stories by Cornelia Sorabji which was published in 1916 by Blackie and Son Ltd. The stories do not only concentrate on mythological themes or folktales, but also include stories of Indian heroes from real life like Razia Sultan and Babar. This book does not directly proclaim to be authentic (unlike the others which specifically mention it in the paratext). Further, it is dissimilar to the others in the sense that the artistic techniques used to render the illustrations here vary from those used in the previous books. In this volume of stories, colour makes a grand exit. Most of the illustrations are rendered in black and white. The only illustration that does appear in colour is the frontispiece depicting Naila, "the most beautiful of Rana Mal's daughters". The omission of colour in this book modifies the vision of another world created and sustained by Goble in other texts.

Interestingly, *Indian Tales of the Great Ones among Men, Women, and Bird-People* includes a story of Draupadi too, like *Indian Myth and Legend*. Here, the story is called "Draupadi and the Great Game" and it is supplemented by an illustration by Goble which is strikingly different from the one which we encountered before. There are two main differences from the previous representation. Primarily that without colour the depiction of Draupadi becomes more neutral and less west-influenced. This Draupadi, like the surrounding in which she stands, is not imbued with colour and therefore less affected by its problematic connotations (Fig. 8).

herself; so, "Ask again" he said.



"Ask", he said, "a boon, and it shall be granted"

"And for the freedom of his brothers  
with their weapons and chariots of  
war."

Fig. 8.

<sup>8</sup> I have come across Goble's illustration of Leda in several websites but am yet to determine its bibliographical origin. This image has been accessed via the source under "Leda and the Swan" in Works Cited.



Further, her revised attire exempts her from the visual continuity expressed in the previous illustrations. The second figure (possibly that of Duryodhan) present in the illustration adheres to a more popular, and overused trope of masculinity with his broad shoulders and facial hair. I have previously examined how Goble's stylistic choices creates a new visual world in the background against which he places his characters, a backdrop constructed with diffused colour and selective details. The illusion of an aesthetic continuity is broken in this book and one is tempted to ask what is responsible for this visual fracture — inconsistency of style or the exemption of colour's expressive agency? Or perhaps, we can say that the exclusion of colour is a stylistic choice expressive of the artist's changeable self-expression. The inclusion and exclusion of colour truly changes the game. White Indians lose their pallor and get back their feet on a solid ground made less ambiguous by exclusion of diffused colouring. All the strange mutations created on paper are cancelled out. Therefore, colour plays a crucial role in changing our perception of Goble's art.

The importance of colour can hardly be understated even outside the confines of the book and in the discourse of colonial politics itself. For instance, the colour of skin or hair, colours in a national flag all immediately signify personal and political identities. In the context of these collected oriental narratives, it is important to acknowledge how colour functions as an active agent that ruptures text and enables the creation of a new visual premise. In several ways it becomes intimately associated with the illustrator's identity. The involvement of colour in these books signals a certain hierarchy which is much more complex than what is immediately apparent. For instance, every single colour plate by Warwick Goble in all the three books, bears the full signature of the illustrator whilst none of the black and white illustrations does (Fig. 9). They only record the initials.

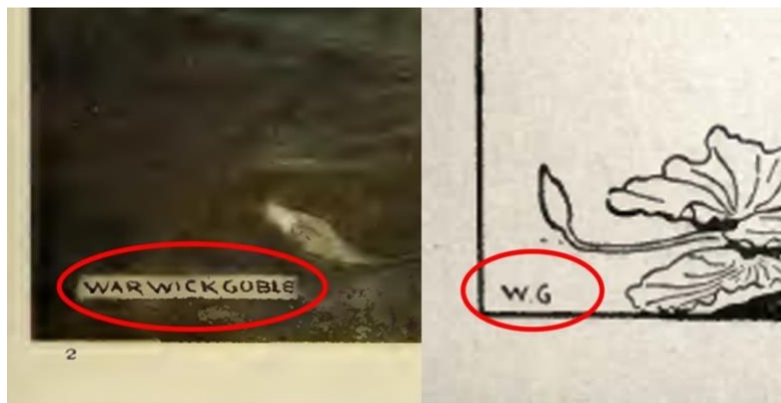


Fig. 9.

Additionally, colour plates are often recorded as “paintings” even when they are reproduced in black and white. In *Indian Myth and Legend* “Plates in colour” are listed before “Plates in monochrome”. Interestingly, the latter include both photographs in grayscale as well as black and white reproductions of original colour paintings. Nandalal Bose's painting used as an illustration with permission from the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, is one such example. On the other hand,

none of the photographs from real life mention the names of the photographers. For instance, one photograph is described as “From the Indra Temple, Ellora”, rather than “From the photograph of [so and so] of the Indra Temple, Ellora”. It would seem that all members of the network through which the book passed, including author, illustrator, publisher, reader et al had a shared knowledge about the greater hierarchical value of colour illustration. Colour demanded special treatment. In these books, for instance, the colour plates printed on special art paper and covered by protective sheaths, clearly demarcate themselves from the text in a very symbolic way. These physical boundaries both highlight and separate art from the text and often foreshadow an inevitable disruption in the meaning making process of the book as a visual whole.

In her book *Colour, Art and Empire: Visual Culture and the Nomadism of Representation*, Natasha Eaton, whilst talking about the “nomadism” of colour, describes it as something that is constantly in “flux”, especially in the context of imperialistic representation, thereby assigning to it the status of an active agent (see Eaton, 2013: Introduction). Any artist or art historian will vouch for the moody disposition of colour or paint in general. The way colour appears, always has and will continue to look different depending on its environment of creation and display. Colour illustrations were possibly some of the most high-maintenance forms of illustrations in these books, and this explains why publishers almost always took the additional pain to print them on special art paper. In *Indian Myth and Legend*, the colour plates appear in the second half of the book, almost as some sort of symbolic reward for patiently glossing through the first half punctuated with colourless illustrations.<sup>9</sup>

Expectedly, the list of colour plates precedes the list of monochromatic plates at the start of the book. To extend my analysis of colour illustrations, I will examine a quote by John Berger. He writes, “oil paintings often depict things. Things which in reality are buyable. To have a thing painted and put on a canvas is not unlike buying it and putting it in your house. If you buy a painting, you buy also the look of the thing it represents” (Berger, 1972). Although Berger specifically speaks about oil colour, the metaphor may be extended to other media. If we say that when we buy a painting, we also buy the look of the thing that it represents, then what do these colour plates by Goble represent? What is being circulated here? If it is not the reality, what is it – this other world? The opacity of oil colour hints at something which can be touched, something which symbolises a sense of solidity. Alternately, transparency is an inherent quality of water colour which creates an illusion of fantastic liminality in Goble’s work. The gap between the molecules of the watercolour pigment easily allows light to pass. It is interesting to note that the word illustration is derived from the Latin root “illustrare” which means “light up”. How can we make sense of this world Goble is metaphorically illuminating?

Goble’s individual style and treatment of subject revises and revisualizes circulating texts in complex ways. Speaking about artistic style, Susan Sontag writes that “artists with a style that is intricate, hermetic, demanding – not to speak of ‘beautiful’ – get their ration of unstinting praise. Still, it is clear that such style is

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<sup>9</sup> Hinted at by my supervisor, Professor Kiera Vaclavik, during one of our many riveting discussions.

often felt to be a form of insincerity: evidence of the artist's intrusion upon his materials, which should be allowed to deliver themselves in a pure state" (2009: 16). The description of style as artistic intrusion reinstates how illustration can and often does modify text. Further, the framework of an illustrated book allows the illustrator to not only visualise a world of his own, but to build continuity and sustain that vision through a series of sequential images which are then repeatedly printed and circulated in conjunction with the text. Despite not being reliable visual aids to circulated narratives (as illustrations are sometimes expected to be), Gobles's creative output reflects his personal responses to a previously inaccessible eastern literature. Harnessing the elusive quality of water colour and joining it to his individual interpretation of different worlds and different people, he creates a liminal space that is neither fully occidental, nor fully oriental — a nation imagined by an illustrator who was also an artist.

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## Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu

*Ekphrasis* et palimpseste

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### RÉSUMÉ :

Cet article explore la façon dont les descriptions littéraires d'œuvres d'art visuel affectent le tissu narratif et descriptif d'un texte. La nouvelle que nous examinerons fonctionne sur trois niveaux textuels : les luttes créatives du peintre, ses relations amoureuses avec son modèle et/ou les femmes peintes de sa toile, et ses prétentions esthétiques à révolutionner la peinture. Notre projet soutient que l'*ekphrasis* est un mode de traduction qui prend deux formes : la description traditionnelle, "contenue", d'une œuvre d'art visuel ; et un mode d'écriture qui imprègne tout le texte et imite les caractéristiques de la peinture. *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* de Balzac adopte avec succès le mode d'écriture ekphrastique, transformant le récit en une toile où les frontières entre les médias sont floues. Au cœur de ce texte réaliste, l'adhésion fondamentale au principe mimétique de l'art est confrontée aux expériences non figuratives de ses peintres fictifs. Le corps féminin, comme incarnation de l'Art et la manifestation du désir de l'artiste, devient le symptôme de l'incursion de ce dernier dans la peinture abstraite et de sa volonté de s'appropriier l'art et le lieu de la résistance à l'*ekphrasis*. Nous nous centrerons sur la façon dont Balzac combine les techniques de Rembrandt — en particulier son utilisation de la lumière — dans la composition de ses propres descriptions. Nous suivrons ensuite l'*ekphrasis* du maître fictif Frenhofer sur sa toile et les leçons d'interprétation qu'il donne tout au long du texte afin d'analyser son dernier tableau. En mettant l'accent sur ce qui se trouve sous la surface d'une toile plutôt que sur ce qui est visible, Frenhofer illustre sa vision de la peinture comme palimpseste.

## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper explores how literary descriptions of visual artworks affect the narrative and descriptive fabric of a text. The novel we will examine operates on three textual levels: the painter's creative struggles, his romantic relationships with his model and/or the painted women of his canvas, and his aesthetic claims to revolutionize painting. Our project argues that *ekphrasis* is a mode of translation that takes two forms: the traditional, "contained" description of a visual work of art; and a mode of writing that permeates the entire text and emulates the characteristics of the work. Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece* successfully adopts the ekphrastic mode of writing, transforming the narrative into a canvas where the boundaries between media are blurred. At the heart of this realist text, the fundamental adherence to the mimetic principle of art is confronted with the non-figurative experiences of their fictional painters. The female body, as the embodiment of art and the manifestation of the artist's desire, becomes the symptom of the artist's incursion into abstract painting and his will to appropriate art and the site of resistance to *ekphrasis*. We will focus on the way Balzac combines Rembrandt's techniques — particularly his use of light — in the composition of his own descriptions. We will then follow the *ekphrasis* of the fictional master Frenhofer on his canvas and the interpretive lessons he gives throughout the text in order to analyse his final painting. By focusing on what lies beneath the surface of a canvas rather than what is visible, Frenhofer illustrates his vision of painting as palimpsest.

## **MOTS-CLÉS :**

*ekphrasis*; modèle; femme; écriture; palimpseste

## **KEYWORDS:**

ekphrasis; model; woman; writing; palimpsest

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## 1. *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* : création et transformation

Le tableau de René Magritte *Tentative de l'impossible* (1928) offre une belle illustration de la prémisse du conte de Balzac *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1837)<sup>1</sup> — à savoir, l'impossible tentative de créer la vie à travers la peinture. Ce tableau présente un couloir nu qui ne donne aucune indication d'être un atelier de peintre — il n'y a pas de peintures sur le mur, pas d'esquisses d'autres œuvres, pas de chevalet — l'artiste, son pinceau dans une main et sa palette de couleurs dans l'autre, travaille à sa création. Une femme nue dont le corps entier a été créé, à l'exception d'un bras, est debout, une jambe légèrement pliée comme si elle était prête à commencer à marcher dès qu'elle sera terminée. Son ombre sur le sol ne laisse aucun doute sur le fait qu'il s'agit d'une créature tridimensionnelle. Il est cependant difficile d'évaluer si elle est vivante : son teint blanc rappelle l'ivoire d'une statue — ce qui n'est pas sans rappeler la Galatée de Pygmalion<sup>2</sup>, le vide de son regard et son manque d'expression semblent indiquer qu'elle n'a pas encore pris vie, et qu'elle ne le fera peut-être jamais. En face d'elle se trouve (l'image de) l'artiste qui ressemble étrangement à sa création : le teint blanc, les sourcils épais, des lèvres fines et rougeâtres, un long nez droit, un regard vide et un même visage sans expression reflètent les traits du visage de la femme. Cet écho visuel nous rappelle que tous les deux sont des créations sur la toile.

Tel que sur le tableau de Magritte, la lumière chez Balzac acquiert beaucoup d'importance. Celle-ci est un élément central dans la description de l'atelier de Porbus car elle guide l'œil du lecteur à travers la pièce. Caractérisé comme une “vaste pièce” (Balzac, 1995: 37), cet atelier possède des pièces hautes (“haute verrière” [37]) et densément agencées. En effet, l'objet du regard “ne laisse qu'un chemin étroit”, et les murs sont couverts d’innombrables esquisses” (37), donnant l'impression d'une pièce compacte dans laquelle la lumière et le regard poursuivent leur propre chemin. Pour dresser le portrait de Frenhofer, Balzac utilise une pratique spécifique : le style de Rembrandt. Dans un jeu de lumières éclatantes et de noirs profonds, “une dentelle étincelante de blancheur” (36) entourait le cou de Frenhofer. Ainsi que sur le tableau *Aristote regardant le buste d'Homère* (Fig. 1), une lourde chaîne d'or reposait “sur le

<sup>1</sup> Il est difficile de donner une date précise pour *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* dans la mesure où Balzac l'a révisée plusieurs fois au fil des années. La première version parut dans *L'artiste* en 1831, en pastiche de “*La cours de guitare*” (1831). Le texte mettait surtout l'accent sur l'histoire d'amour entre Poussin et Gillette et la lutte entre l'art et l'amour. Il est ensuite réédité la même année dans *Romans et Contes philosophiques* avec quelques modifications, en particulier la brusque révélation de Poussin à Frenhofer de son échec dans *La Belle Noiseuse*. L'échec de son personnage laisse supposer une conception globalement pessimiste de l'œuvre d'art : jamais elle ne pourra parvenir à la perfection. En 1837, il apparaît dans le cadre des *Études philosophiques* et l'accent devient clairement le destin de Frenhofer; la scène dans laquelle celui-ci révisé la peinture de Porbus *Marie Égyptienne* est ajoutée, et les réflexions sur l'art et l'esthétique s'étoffent. Nous retiendrons donc l'année 1837 car nous la croyons qu'elle contient les principaux aspects de l'histoire. Deux versions ultérieures ont été publiées en 1845 dans l'édition Furne de *La Comédie humaine* et dans *Le Provincial* à Paris, en 1847, le premier ajoutant la dédicace “A un lord” au début ainsi que la date 1832, cette dernière changeant le titre en “Gillette” (un changement majeur qu'aucun éditeur a suivi), révisant la phrase “Cet adieu glaça les deux peintres” en “Cet adieu les glaça” (qui grammaticalement peut inclure Gillette), et éliminant la référence à *Catherine Lescaut* comme courtisane. (Pour plus de détails et d'analyses sur les changements textuels, voir Paulson “Pour une analyse dynamique de la variation textuelle : *Le Chef-d'œuvre trop connu*” (1991).

<sup>2</sup> Nous traiterons du mythe de Pygmalion un peu plus tard.



pourpoint noir du vieillard” (36). Il représentait bien “une toile de Rembrandt marchant silencieusement et sans cadre dans la noire atmosphère que s’est appropriée ce grand peintre” (36). Balzac utilise des notes de couleur éparses pour animer son portrait : une touche de “vert de mer”, quelques touches de blanc (“blanc nacré” et “étincelante de blancheur”), ainsi que du noir (“le pourpoint noir”) (34-36) égayé par une chaîne en or et la lumière diffuse du jour.



Fig. 1. Rembrandt, *Aristote regardant le buste d'Homère* (1653).  
Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Cet assortiment de couleurs contribue à l’atmosphère sombre du tableau et rappelle encore une fois les œuvres de Rembrandt. Par son utilisation de la lumière et de la couleur, Balzac peut mettre en valeur certains aspects du maître et diriger l’œil du lecteur comme le fait un tableau.

Dans son étude de “l’écriture picturale” dans le conte, Yvette Went-Daoust commente : “le narrateur s’empare du métalangage de la peinture pour décrire un personnage et procède comme s’il œuvrait sur une toile. Il en modèle les contours, joue avec la couleur, un peu comme Frenhofer lui-même détaille et corrige le tableau de Porbus” (Went-Daoust, 1987: 53). Comme Went-Daoust l’affirme “Rembrandt sert de caution picturale à la description” (55), l’unifiant et en l’estampillant, pour ainsi dire, d’un style reconnaissable. Comme nous pouvons le constater Rembrandt sert aussi de toile de fond à la description de l’atelier de Porbus qui suit immédiatement celle du portrait de Frenhofer.

Un tableau de Rembrandt en particulier nous vient à l’esprit, non pas pour son contenu — qui s’appliquerait plutôt au portrait de Frenhofer —, mais pour sa

technique. C'est *Le Philosophe en méditation* (1632) (Fig. 2). Le visage du philosophe correspond à la description de Frenhofer : un “front chauve, bombé, proéminent” (Balzac, 1995 : 34) et une barbe pointue blanche renforce la sagesse qui émane de son image. Balzac ajoute une évaluation du visage de Frenhofer comme “flétri par les fatigues de l'âge et plus encore par ces pensées qui creusent également l'âme et le corps” (36) pourraient très bien s'appliquer au *Philosophe* de Rembrandt. La similitude s'arrête ici, cependant, car le vieil homme de Rembrandt n'a pas la qualité diabolique de l'artiste balzacien.



Fig. 2. Rembrandt, *Le Philosophe en méditation* (1632). Musée du Louvre.

Le bureau du philosophe est situé sur le côté gauche du tableau, sous une fenêtre en arc de cercle d'où jaillit la première et principale source de lumière de la toile. La lumière n'atteint pas la profondeur de l'escalier ni le devant de la pièce à gauche et le spectateur est confronté à des masses de peinture noire qui obscurcissent l'atmosphère de la toile.

*Le Philosophe en méditation* met en lumière la qualité ekphrastique de la description de l'atelier de Porbus par Balzac. Après avoir été accueilli par Porbus qui “s'inclina respectueusement” pour laisser entrer le vieux maître et Poussin, la description se lit comme un tableau :

Un vitrage ouvert dans la voûte éclairait l'atelier de maître Porbus. Concentré sur une toile accrochée au chevalet, et qui n'était encore touchée que de trois ou quatre traits blancs, le jour n'atteignait pas jusqu'aux noires profondeurs des angles de cette vaste pièce; mais quelques reflets égarés allumaient dans cette ombre rousse une paillette argentée au ventre d'une cuirasse de reître suspendue à la muraille, rayaient d'un brusque sillon de lumière la corniche sculptée et cirée d'un antique dresseur chargé de vaisselles curieuses, où piquaient de points éclatants la trame grenue de quelques vieux rideaux de brocart d'or, aux grands plis cassés, jetés là comme modèle. (36-37)

Guidés par la lumière provenant de la fenêtre de toit, les “quelques reflets égarés” projettent des rayons lumineux sur des objets choisis : le corselet du Reiter, le buffet antique chargé d’assiettes rares, les rideaux de brocart d’or, autant d’objets qui témoignent de la richesse de la maison de Porbus. Comme dans le tableau de Rembrandt, ce que la lumière n’atteint pas est maintenu dans l’obscurité. L’utilisation par Balzac de verbes évocateurs — “allumaient”, “rayonnaient”, “piquaient de points éclatants” — ainsi que la profusion de couleurs imitent la façon dont la peinture opère de la peinture par le positionnement minutieux de la lumière et des éléments colorés ; il transmet aussi les caractéristiques géométriques d’un tableau puisqu’il mentionne les “angles” de la pièce, les reflets de la lumière qui “rayonnaient d’un brusque sillon de lumière”, la corniche du buffet et qui, en tant que tels agissent comme des lignes de convergence pour l’œil du spectateur. Contrairement à l’argument de Murray Krieger, selon lequel l’ekphrasis interrompt le flux de la narration, elle n’est pas une pratique purement descriptive mais, plutôt, elle brouille les frontières entre la description et la narration.

Selon Bernard Vouilloux (2004), la description du lieu de création de l’artiste exclut tout arbitraire ou gratuité : chaque objet qui compose l’atelier est chargé de symbolisme, tant les meubles qui le décorent que les objets qui y sont disposés, chacun ayant une fonction symbolique spécifique.

Cet atelier est avant tout un lieu de travail, un lieu de création, pas un salon social ou un lieu de rêverie. Cependant, ce ne sont ni des descriptions d’outils ni des descriptions d’éclairage relativement classiques qui nous renseignent sur la posture esthétique de Porbus. Ces croquis et études nous donneront quelques indices de départ : “d’innombrables ébauches, des études aux trois crayons, à la sanguine ou à la plume, couvraient les murs jusqu’au plafond” (Balzac, 1995 : 37). Les techniques utilisées par Porbus pour faire ses études remontent à la période de la Renaissance<sup>3</sup>.

Intimement lié à la figure de l’artiste et inspirant de nombreux artistes et poètes, le mythe de Pygmalion, reconstitué un siècle après le conte de Balzac, souligne la résilience de cette aspiration artistique. Malgré les styles radicalement différents de Magritte et Balzac et les moyens tout aussi différents de leurs peintres fictifs respectifs pour réaliser leur ambition, l’artiste de Magritte et le Frenhofer de Balzac poursuivent une entreprise similaire. Ils cherchent tous les deux à créer la vie sous la forme d’une femme. Ils utilisent tous les deux l’appareil de la peinture (le pinceau et la peinture et en ce qui concerne Frenhofer, le chevalet et la toile aussi) mais produisent de la vie, ou des ressemblances, plutôt que de l’art. Il semble que l’ambition primordiale est de faire disparaître l’art pour le rendre si réel (et ici l’artiste de Magritte et Frenhofer diffèrent quant à leur conception du réel) qu’il ne peut plus être qualifié d’art.

Un autre peintre de ce trio d’artistes représentant les différentes étapes de la vie et de la carrière d’un artiste est le jeune Nicolas Poussin (inspiré du personnage historique), “néophyte, [...] barbouilleur d’instinct” (Balzac, 1995: 7 et 20) qui vient d’arriver à Paris ; l’artiste à succès Porbus (inspiré du véritable peintre du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, Pourbus) et le vieux maître Frenhofer, un personnage fictif. La nouvelle

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<sup>3</sup> Emilia Sitzia (2004 : 70-71) développe l’idée que Porbus est un artiste qui peint d’après les techniques de la peinture du Nord et de la peinture classique italienne.

s'inspire de l'éveil artistique du jeune Poussin, dont la rencontre avec Frenhofer et Porbus lui ouvre l'espoir de devenir un grand peintre et le rend capable de prouver son talent (on lui demande de copier une œuvre de Porbus) et de commencer à apprendre, en découvrant les théories de Porbus et de Frenhofer sur l'art. Poussin détient l'une des clés de l'histoire : son dévouement à sa maîtresse et modèle occasionnel, Gillette. Celle-ci est une jeune femme d'une beauté parfaite qui s'échange contre l'occasion de voir le mystérieux chef-d'œuvre de Frenhofer, *la Belle-Noiseuse*<sup>4</sup>.

Frenhofer, un peintre excentrique qui a eu le privilège d'être le seul élève du peintre flamand Mabuse<sup>5</sup>, travaille depuis dix ans sur son tableau, *La Belle-Noiseuse*. Il prétend avoir créé la vie sur la toile sous la forme d'une femme qu'il appelle *Catherine Lescault*, qu'il adore et traite comme si elle était sa femme, un peu comme Pygmalion avec Galatée. Frenhofer l'appelle "ma créature, mon épouse" (44) et se présente comme son "père, amant et Dieu" (45) et l'appelle "mon idole" (46). Il refuse de laisser quiconque la voir de peur qu'elle ne soit profanée par "[les] regards froids et [les] stupides critiques des imbéciles" (46). Il agit lui-même sur elle, et son combat réside dans sa tentative d'insuffler une étincelle de vie sur *Catherine*, de renoncer à l'artifice de l'art (comme dans la peinture de Magritte), et donner vie à sa création. Il n'y a rien devant la toile, et seul ce néant est évoqué. "Mais, tôt ou tard, il se rendra compte qu'il n'y a rien sur la toile, s'écria Poussin. "Rien sur ma toile", s'exclame le vieil homme offensé (76). Frenhofer, qui aime et est prisonnier d'une vision illusoire et hallucinatoire, d'un stéréotype imaginaire qui ne trouve une forme d'expression sublimée que par le langage, ne parvient à dépeindre que le chaos. En effet, l'illusion et la jouissance qu'elle entretient ne peuvent être dépeintes, et la connaissance ne peut que les encadrer. La toile est le résultat objectif d'une projection subjective angoissée, autrement dit, elle est la matérialisation de "ce qui torture le sujet de l'intérieur" (Castagnet, 2013: 399), elle devient un miroir reflétant le sujet lui-même. Contrairement aux lectures traditionnelles du roman *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* de Balzac qui considèrent le peintre vieillissant Frenhofer et son "chef-d'œuvre" comme des échecs, Bongiorno (2000) estime que divers éléments du texte suggèrent que l'échec se situe plutôt du côté des deux peintres de second plan : Poussin et Porbus, et leur incapacité à comprendre la tentative de Frenhofer de transformer la peinture en poésie<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Ce titre, *La Belle-Noiseuse*, disparaît du texte dans l'édition de 1847. "Noiseuse" est un mot intéressant qui ne figure dans aucun dictionnaire mais qui provient probablement du substantif "noise", c'est-à-dire, "querelle". Belting propose comme traduction possible de *Belle-Noiseuse* "argumentative beauty" (Belting, 2001: 125).

<sup>5</sup> Mabuse, ou Jan Gossaert, était un peintre de la cour flamande du XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle, à qui l'on attribue généralement le mérite d'avoir introduit le style de la Renaissance italienne dans le Nord.

<sup>6</sup> "Frenhofer's success springs from his conception of the painter and painting as, respectively, poet and poetic text. Frenhofer thus perceives painting as, ultimately, literature. It is this radical conception of painting as literature that gives rise to "reverse ekphrasis". Further, it is Frenhofer's artistry, specifically his doomed masterpiece, that will invert the terms of expression "ut pictura poesis", instead positing "ut poesis pictura": as with poetry, so too painting. Ultimately, however, it is the power of Balzac's poetry that he can create for the reader a painting in which, as Frenhofer's detractors readily point out, literally "nothing" appears; a painting in fact that never existed; one that exists only in as Balzac's *Chef d'oeuvre inconnu*. Both Frenhofer and Balzac, in fact, succeed in producing a fiction, one in painting, the other in writing" (Bongiorno, 2000: 88).

D'ailleurs, la relation inter-artistique entre peinture et littérature dans cette œuvre de Balzac est assez évidente. Frenhofer utilise même des discours figuratifs et une imagerie verbale poétique, comme dans "le soleil, ce divin peintre de l'univers" (Balzac, 1995: 56). En d'autres termes, il s'agit d'une comparaison des arts : la peinture et la poésie sont toutes deux des expériences esthétiques visant à imiter la nature. À l'époque où se déroule l'action de l'histoire de Balzac, la peinture était considérée comme supérieure à la poésie. En effet, cette dernière s'appuie exclusivement sur des symboles verbaux comme moyen d'expression et de représentation, alors que la première utilise des représentations figuratives<sup>7</sup>.

Frenhofer rejoint Actéon dans une position spéculaire. En effet, dès que l'œuvre est exposée, le langage perd sa cohérence, le sens bascule (pas dans le sens de disparaître), et la toile représente "spectaculairement" ce quelque chose qui cherche à s'exprimer, qui cherche désespérément à se matérialiser.

Dieu a créé la femme par l'intermédiaire de l'homme ; Pygmalion a eu besoin de l'aide de Vénus pour que Galatée prenne vie. Frenhofer, en revanche, veut contourner ces intermédiaires et devenir le premier à créer une femme sans intermédiaire, c'est-à-dire sans intervention divine.

Le récit de Balzac oppose l'amour à l'art et affirme leur incompatibilité pour les couples Poussin-Gillette et Frenhofer-Catherine : l'artiste doit choisir entre eux<sup>8</sup>. Pour expliquer son refus de montrer sa création, Frenhofer déclare : "Je suis plus amant encore que je ne suis peintre" (45) tandis que Poussin se fait l'écho du vieux maître lorsqu'il déclare à sa maîtresse : "Je ne suis pas peintre, je suis amoureux." (39). Finalement, pour les deux peintres, l'art l'emporte sur l'amour. Malgré les protestations de Gillette et ses propres hésitations, Poussin, ému à l'idée de connaître l'intrigant maître, se rend compte qu'il n'a pas le choix et sacrifie son amante à son art. Dans le même ordre d'idées, Frenhofer, qui cherche une femme terrestre qu'il pourrait comparer à sa Catherine Lescault, accepte de la montrer à Poussin en échange de Gillette<sup>9</sup>. Dans cet échange de "femme pour femme" (44) comme l'appelle Porbus — en fait une femme vivante pour une femme peinte — Catherine l'emporte aux yeux de Frenhofer, qui la déclare parfaite par rapport à la maîtresse de Poussin. Quand Catherine est enfin dévoilée à Porbus et Poussin, les deux artistes sont déconcertés par ce qu'ils voient : "des couleurs confusément amassées et contenues par une multitude de lignes bizarres qui forment une muraille de peinture" (55). Ils vont finalement discerner "le bout d'un pied nu [...] un pied délicieux, un pied vivant !" (55). La figure féminine attendue n'est en fait que

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<sup>7</sup> Depuis son institutionnalisation académique à la fin du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la littérature comparée s'est développée, en tant que discipline, par une interaction progressive avec d'autres domaines de connaissance plus récemment établis (tels que les études de genre, les études de traduction, les études post-coloniales, les études inter-arts ou interculturelles et les études Est-Ouest). L'émergence du concept de *Weltliteratur* a non seulement précédé celle de la littérature comparée, mais a également contribué à la formation de la discipline avec laquelle, aujourd'hui, il entretient des relations si fructueuses. Les deux sous-tend, après tout, "a [...] vision of the world's literary production transcending borders and languages but not in any way effacing their individuality and historical concreteness" (Said *apud* Auerbach, 2003: XVI).

<sup>8</sup> Au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, il était communément admis que l'amour pouvait interférer avec le potentiel créatif d'un artiste.

<sup>9</sup> L'idée de l'échange des femmes et de la circulation des femmes dans le texte a fait couler beaucoup d'encre ; voir notamment Claude Bernard, "La problématique de l'échange" dans 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu' de Balzac" (1984).

l'image d'un pied dans un chaos de couleurs et de lignes. Porté érotiquement par l'imaginaire amoureux, le pied de *la Belle Noiseuse* comme élément trahit l'objet transformé en un personnage qui devrait être vivant. Balzac évoque ainsi les conditions de l'art, non comme scénographie et enchaînement de formes, mais chaos et "bruit de fond" où prendront forme tous les possibles. Saisissant le moment de crise, *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* illustre la théorie balzacienne de la nécessité d'exprimer une réalité qui transcende les simples représentations photographiques de la réalité.

## 2. Les préceptes de Frenhofer

Le premier tableau mentionné et qui donne lieu au premier élan théorique de Frenhofer ainsi qu'à sa première leçon de peinture est la *Marie Égyptienne* de Porbus se disposant à "payer le passage du bateau", qualifiée de "belle page" et de "chef-d'œuvre" (11). La *Marie* de Frenhofer ne représente plus la *Marie* de Porbus, mais la remplace et en quelque sorte la voile. La *Marie* de Porbus est cachée par la *Marie* de Frenhofer et ne peut être lue que comme un palimpseste sur la toile. Comme pour le peintre, tout est une question de couches, un palimpseste dissimulant le travail de création.

Malgré les nombreuses pages consacrées à ce tableau dans la nouvelle, nous nous trouvons dans l'incapacité à décrire le chef-d'œuvre puisqu'il n'y a pas de moment ekphrastique pour lui donner vie. Le discours de l'art, c'est-à-dire les théories de Frenhofer ainsi que ses pratiques de l'art — ont remplacé l'art lui-même. En d'autres termes, la nouvelle ne se concentre pas sur des images mais plutôt sur des mots. La peinture a été instituée comme mode d'écriture, "métalangage" pour reprendre le terme de Went-Daoust (1987: 53), mais la traduction intersémiotique entre image et texte, c'est-à-dire sous la forme de l'*ekphrasis* de *Marie Égyptienne* de Porbus ou *La Belle-Noiseuse* de Frenhofer n'apparaît pas dans le texte. Comme le prétend Frenhofer, la *Marie Égyptienne* "ne vit pas" (Balzac, 1995: 38), ni sur toile ni dans le texte lui-même. Nous avons les contours mais pas les couleurs, cet élément nécessaire pour donner vie à l'art, selon Frenhofer.

Si nous nous approchons de la perspective de Murray Krieger,<sup>10</sup> celui-ci cherche à élargir le champ de l'*ekphrasis* à ce qu'il appelle la "peinture de mots" (Krieger, 1992: 9), c'est-à-dire des descriptions consacrées au visuel plus généralement qu'au domaine limité des œuvres d'art.

Les études d'*ekphrasis*, telles que celles de Krieger sont prises dans l'hypothèse souvent incontestée que les mots offrent une médiation alors qu'une image est "a visual substitute for its referent" (1992: 2). Pour Krieger, les images fixes des

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<sup>10</sup> L'étude phare de Murray Krieger en 1992, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign*, qui est devenu une référence pour toute enquête sur l'*ekphrasis*, examine la façon dont la critique littéraire a abordé la poésie ekphrastique. L'ouvrage de Krieger est l'une des premières études en forme de livre sur le phénomène ekphrastique, correspondant à la récession de la suprématie du visuel en faveur de celle du langage. Il retrace cette évolution à travers l'analyse des épigrammes, c'est-à-dire de simples accompagnements de l'œuvre d'art, jusqu'à la poésie emblématique de la Renaissance, qui s'impose comme le compagnon visuel d'un poème et qui marque un changement par rapport à l'"image-signe naturelle" (de l'anglais "natural sign picture") à l'"image-code" (Krieger, 1992: 22).

entités spatiales qui offrent un accès sans intermédiaire à leur référent. Selon lui, les images appartiennent au monde sensible et sont soumises à un désir du “natural sign”, c'est-à-dire d'une esthétique qui pose le visuel, l'œil, comme principale source de perception et qui considère le signe (visuel) comme un “visual substitute for its referent” (Krieger, 1998: 5). Et ici nous remarquons que c'est la vision de Porbus et de Poussin qui est sous-entendue.

Implicite dans l'argument de Murray Krieger est l'idée que l'ekphrasis est un élément supplémentaire qui n'appartient jamais pleinement au verbal même si le verbal l'a invité (ou utilisé). La théorie de Krieger fonctionne dans une lecture de l'ekphrasis comme pratique paragonale, n'oubliant pas que le paragone est le nom donné au concours entre différents médiums d'art, notamment la peinture et la poésie<sup>11</sup>. Parce que l'ekphrasis établit un pont et force un lien entre la peinture et la littérature, il a été soit considéré comme promouvant la notion des “sister arts”, soit comme étant un agent de discorde, ce dernier plus souvent que le premier.

Ce qui est vivant, ce sont les théories de l'art de Frenhofer lorsqu'il critique la *Marie* de Porbus. Comme l'explique le vieux maître, pour le profane, l'œuvre de Porbus est un chef-d'œuvre, mais aux yeux des initiés, elle manque d'étincelle de vie, ou plutôt, elle oscille trop entre la vie et la mort. Frenhofer joue ici non seulement le rôle de critique d'art mais il agit aussi comme un professeur d'art. Il critique l'œuvre à plusieurs niveaux : la méthode, l'exécution et le principe de base. En ce qui concerne la méthode, Frenhofer indique que Porbus a hésité entre deux écoles opposées : d'une part, l'école vénitienne de Titien et de Véronèse, qui met l'accent sur la couleur, et d'autre part, l'école allemande de Dürer et d'Holbein, qui met l'accent sur la ligne<sup>12</sup>. Les théories développées dans le texte de Balzac s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'une querelle qui, en 1830, dressait l'école académique, fidèle à David et prônant le dessin, contre l'école romantique qui, dans la mouvance de Diderot, privilégiait le mouvement. Frenhofer reprend l'opposition en la ramenant au conflit entre les écoles allemande et italienne.

Tu as flotté indécis entre les deux systèmes, entre le dessin et la couleur, entre le flegme minutieux, la raideur précise des vieux maîtres allemands et l'ardeur éblouissante, l'heureuse abondance des peintres italiens. Tu as voulu imiter à la fois Hans Holbein et Titien, Albrecht Dürer et Paul Véronèse. (Balzac, 1995: 13-14)

Cette hésitation laisse une marque sur l'exécution du tableau, et comme le note Frenhofer :

Ta figure n'est ni parfaitement dessinée, ni parfaitement peinte, et porte partout les traces de cette malheureuse indécision. Si tu ne te sentais pas assez fort pour fondre ensemble au feu de ton génie les deux manières rivales, il fallait opter franchement entre l'une ou l'autre, afin d'obtenir l'unité qui simule une des conditions de la vie. (14)

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<sup>11</sup> L'un des apologistes du parangone était Léonard de Vinci, qui insistait sur la supériorité de la peinture sur la poésie, élevant le sens de la vue comme le pouvoir le plus noble et le plus proche de celui de Dieu (Hagstrum, 1958: 66-70).

<sup>12</sup> Au XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, l'opposition se fait entre les disciples de Rubens (couleur, lumière, sensualité) et les disciples de Poussin (ligne et raison).

En d'autres termes, le regard d'indécision sur le visage du matelot que Poussin admire tant, est aussi un reflet de l'indécision de la méthode qui imprègne le tableau dans son ensemble. Il poursuit sa démonstration en indiquant quelles parties particulières du tableau portent le pouls de la vie et celles qui portent le calme de la mort : "ici c'est une femme, là une statue, plus loin un cadavre" (13).

Ce que Porbus a omis de fournir à sa création, selon le vieux maître, c'est une âme : "Tu n'as pu insuffler qu'une partie de ton âme à ton œuvre chérie. Le flambeau de Prométhée s'est éteint plus d'une fois entre tes mains, et bien des endroits de ta peinture n'ont pas été touchés par la flamme céleste" (13). Lorsque Frenhofer retouche la toile de Porbus, il célèbre le mouvement avant toute chose. Il cherche à capter la vie. Pour lui, Porbus n'est pas prométhéen.

Le feu céleste est le pouvoir de l'esprit, et ce n'est qu'en saisissant le principe de formation de la forme que la vie peut naître. Un élément fondamental de l'esthétique de Balzac émerge : l'œuvre exprime l'énergie vitale de l'artiste.

L'artiste ne doit pas seulement jouer à Dieu mais aussi transmettre une partie de son âme à sa création pour réussir. Frenhofer propose une réflexion approfondie sur le principe mimétique de l'art selon lequel le mode de la peinture de Porbus fonctionne. Quand Frenhofer dit : "Il ne suffit pas pour être un grand poète de connaître à fond la syntaxe et de ne pas faire de fautes de langue !" (12) et "La mission de l'art n'est pas de copier la nature mais de l'exprimer ! Tu n'es pas un vil copiste, mais un poète !" (15), il veut dire que la représentation devrait vraiment signifier la recreation par opposition à la reproduction. Frenhofer reprend donc le credo balzacien. Pour lui, il ne suffit pas de dessiner, d'après un modèle vivant (féminin) la figure anatomiquement correcte d'une femme, de l'embellir selon les canons de la beauté, et de donner l'illusion de la perspective et de la profondeur par l'utilisation pertinente de la lumière et de l'obscurité. L'alphabet de l'art doit être complété par quelque chose de moins superficiel, c'est-à-dire par une ambition qui regarde dans les profondeurs de la nature. L'art, pour lui, comme pour Balzac, symbolise autre chose que ne le laissent supposer les formes visibles. La plate imitation de la nature est insuffisante. Il faut remonter au principe générateur des formes, à la Forme au "sens métaphysique" du terme, selon les termes de Pierre Laubriet (1961: 115). La difficulté réside en ceci que ce principe trouve de multiples incarnations. Sous la forme se trouve encore une autre forme. On voit donc l'impasse :

La Forme est un Protée bien plus insaisissable et plus fertile en replis que le Protée de la fable, ce n'est qu'après de longs combats qu'on peut la contraindre à se montrer sous son véritable aspect ; vous autres, vous vous contentez de la première apparence qu'elle vous livre, ou tout au plus de la seconde, ou de la troisième, ce n'est pas ainsi qu'agissent les victorieux lutteurs ! (Balzac, 1995: 44)

Cette conception défie la longue tradition de l'art académique dont Porbus est un représentant et qui, selon Frenhofer, accorde trop d'importance à la copie (des maîtres) au détriment de la recreation (de la nature). Frenhofer soutient qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de copier pour représenter : on peut "figur[er] le mouvement et la vie" sans "copier exactement" (44). Frenhofer définit la tâche de l'artiste de cette façon :



Nous avons à saisir l'esprit, l'âme, la physionomie des choses et des êtres. Les effets! Les effets! mais ils sont les accidents de la vie, et non la vie. Une main, puisque j'ai pris cet exemple, une main ne tient pas seulement au corps, elle exprime et continue une pensée qu'il faut saisir et rendre. Ni le peintre, ni le poète, ni le sculpteur ne doivent séparer l'effet de la cause qui sont invinciblement l'un dans l'autre! (15-16)

L'approche holistique de Frenhofer s'efforce donc d'exposer ce qui relève de l'âme et de l'esprit des personnes et des choses. Remontant la chaîne des causalités, le véritable artiste associe un sens à une figure, ce qui souligne le lien entre les expressions les plus diverses et leur concept unique. Comme le remarque Marc Eigeldinger dans son ouvrage *La Philosophie de l'art chez Balzac* (1998), pour Balzac, la pensée, substance éthérée et la matière procèdent d'une seule substance. Très intéressé par les relations entre l'esprit et la matière, Balzac croit à la force magnétique de Frédéric-Antoine Mesmer (1733-1815). Selon cette théorie, Dieu a créé le monde à l'aide de principes de non-crétion ou lumière australe. Cette substance éthérée est différente grâce au mouvement que lui imprime le fluide magnétique. La vision archéologique de l'art de Frenhofer transparaît encore dans le vocabulaire qu'il utilise :

Vous ne descendez pas assez dans l'intimité de la forme, vous ne la poursuivez pas avec assez d'amour et de persévérance dans ses détours et dans ses fuites. [...] Toute figure est un monde, un portrait dont le modèle est apparu dans une vision sublime, teint de lumière, désigné par une voix intérieure, dépouillé par un doigt céleste qui a montré, dans le passé de toute une vie, les sources de l'expression. (Balzac, 1995: 16)

Frenhofer souligne ici le travail de détective que l'artiste doit effectuer, tel un archéologue sur un site de fouilles, afin de saisir le côté insaisissable de la nature, c'est-à-dire la forme. Selon lui, la forme nous ramène au "passé de toute une vie" (17). Frenhofer est donc un philosophe de l'art qui a étudié les grands maîtres pour comprendre sa propre ambition. Ses études ne l'ont pas amené à copier les maîtres du passé, comme on le demandait aux élèves de l'École des Beaux-Arts ; au contraire, explique-t-il : "j'ai étudié à fond les grands maîtres du coloris, j'ai analysé et soulevé couche par couche les tableaux de Titien" (28). Encore une fois, le parallèle archéologique est révélateur de la façon dont l'esprit de Frenhofer opère par décortilage et stratification.

Il est intéressant de noter que lorsqu'il s'agit de la pratique de l'art, Frenhofer met en œuvre une méthode inverse : celle de la stratification par opposition au décortilage des couches. Mais enfin, il nous a fourni un outil théorique précieux pour étudier et analyser l'art, et son art en particulier. Sa critique de la *Marie Égyptienne* de Porbus est une leçon de lecture et d'interprétation que nous devons à notre tour appliquer lorsque nous considérons ses propres œuvres d'art. En d'autres termes, Frenhofer considère les œuvres d'art comme des palimpsestes, des surfaces composées de couches de peinture superposées, c'est-à-dire comme exactement ce qu'elles sont. Il avertit Poussin en retouchant la *Marie* de Porbus : "Personne ne nous sait gré de ce qui est dessous" (24) car pour lui, c'est ce qui est dessous qui constitue l'essence de l'œuvre. Il est à noter qu'aucun critique, à l'exception de Damisch (1984: 13), n'a jamais commenté cette phrase de Frenhofer alors qu'elle est, nous le croyons, essentielle pour appréhender le type d'art que Frenhofer

conceptualise et pratique. De la même manière que de nos jours, les conservateurs radiographient les peintures de Da Vinci afin de comprendre sa technique, les critiques littéraires doivent également examiner le “dessous de la peinture” de Frenhofer.

Un dernier aspect des théories de l’art de Frenhofer qui mérite d’être souligné est sa conception de la “forme” qui est au cœur de sa réflexion et qui permet de comprendre sa rupture avec l’art mimétique. Tout en expliquant que l’artiste doit exprimer la nature et pas simplement la copier, Frenhofer élucide les moyens d’y parvenir:

Vous ne descendez pas assez dans l’intimité de la forme, vous ne la poursuivez pas avec assez d’amour et de persévérance dans ses détours et dans ses fuites. La beauté est une chose sévère et difficile qui ne se laisse point atteindre ainsi ; il faut attendre ses heures, l’épier, la presser et l’enlacer étroitement pour la forcer à se rendre. La forme est un Protée bien plus insaisissable et plus fertile en replis que le Protée de la fable ; ce n’est qu’après de longs combats qu’on peut la contraindre à se montrer sous son véritable aspect ; vous autres, vous vous contentez de la première apparence qu’elle vous livre, ou tout au plus, de la seconde, ou de la troisième. [...] [La] grande supériorité [de Raphaël] vient du sens intime qui, chez lui, semble vouloir briser la forme. La forme est, dans ses figures, ce qu’elle est chez nous, un truchement pour se communiquer des idées, des sensations, une vaste poésie. Toute figure est un monde, un portrait dont le modèle est apparu dans une vision sublime, teint de lumière, désigné par une voix intérieure, dépouillé par un doigt céleste qui a montré, dans le passé de toute une vie, les sources de l’expression. (Balzac, 1995: 43-44)

Ce passage illustre la lutte concrète, violente et physique que le maître expérimente dans le processus de création. Il faut “épier, presser, enlacer pour la [la forme] forcer à se rendre” (6) afin d’approfondir les secrets de la vie. La forme est décrite comme un monde dont la construction est de qualité divine, “un doigt céleste” (17), dépendant d’une expérience intérieure (“désigné par une voix intérieure” et “apparu dans une vision sublime” [17]). La forme est aussi censée découvrir les “sources de l’expression”, c’est-à-dire revenir à une forme d’expression primitive, essentielle et peut-être performative, celle de la Genèse où Dieu dit et il devient.

### 3. La Technique de Frenhofer

*Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu* nous présente les deux facettes de la peinture : la théorie et la pratique. Après avoir critiqué verbalement le chef-d’œuvre de Porbus, Frenhofer poursuit, en le retouchant réellement. La brève performance de Frenhofer consiste en de petites touches, ici et là, de glacis (“un petit glacis bleuâtre”), de lustre (“le luisant satiné” [22]) et de taches de couleur (“quelques plaques de couleur” [23]) afin d’unifier le ton général, de donner de l’ardeur à la figure de Marie et de créer un sentiment de mouvement et de pulsation dans le tableau. “Regarde comme cette draperie voltige à présent” (22). La peinture est dépeinte comme une activité particulièrement intense, tant verbalement que physiquement. Les sons onomatopéiques “Paf, paf, paf !” et “Pon ! Pon ! Pon !” (23) accompagnent les “convulsions” et les “petits mouvements si impatientes, si saccadés” qui caractérisent

les coups de pinceau de Frenhofer<sup>13</sup>. Le produit final est “une peinture trempée de lumière” qui laisse Poussin et Porbus “muets d’admiration” (24), car le maître a réussi à insuffler de la profondeur et de la vie à la peinture, créant l’illusion que chaque élément respire et bouge dans le tableau.

Après cette démonstration réussie, Frenhofer dit à ses deux compagnons : “Cela ne vaut pas encore ma Catherine Lescault, cependant on pourrait mettre son nom au bas d’une pareille œuvre. Oui, je la signerais, ajouta-t-il en se levant pour prendre un miroir dans lequel il la regarda” (24). Ce geste a également été négligé par les critiques. L’utilisation d’un miroir était une technique employée par Da Vinci lorsqu’il peignait et elle était également recommandée par Alberti comme moyen d’évaluer sa création. Bien que le miroir offre un reflet exact, c’est aussi une image déformée dans le sens où il inverse l’ordre des choses. Il donne l’illusion de l’exactitude sans être exact. En outre, le miroir réalise une fixation quasi photographique de l’image dans le sens où il saisit l’image dans sa totalité et la reflète dans son intégralité avec la même intensité, en mettant également l’accent sur tous ses détails. Elle est donc différente d’une peinture qui se concentre nécessairement sur des éléments spécifiques et les met en valeur.

De plus, un miroir aplatit l’image, lissant toute rugosité ou irrégularité dans la texture et la surface de la toile, offrant ainsi une nouvelle perspective et une autre façon d’aborder l’œuvre d’art. Frenhofer met donc en scène non seulement la production de l’œuvre d’art — sa performance sur la toile à travers son travail au pinceau — mais aussi l’acte de regarder et de percevoir. Par la médiation du miroir, Frenhofer pose la question de savoir comment on voit l’œuvre d’art plutôt que ce que l’on voit dans l’œuvre d’art. Il met l’accent sur la perception plutôt que sur le contenu. Par son dernier tableau, il propose une œuvre d’art qui choque, perturbe, bouleverse la cognition et la reconnaissance et fait de la perception le centre de la représentation. Ce que Frenhofer a accompli ici avec sa leçon de peinture est de s’approprier l’œuvre de Porbus et l’enterrer sous des couches de peinture. La *Marie Égyptienne* de Porbus est devenue maintenant un palimpseste dont les traces sont encore visibles sous les taches de peinture ajoutées par Frenhofer. La version originale de l’œuvre de Porbus survit à travers l’esquisse que Poussin en dessine et qui suscite la “séance de formation” de Frenhofer. Ce dessin devient la carte d’identité du néophyte puisque, dans le même geste d’appropriation que celui de Frenhofer, Poussin le signe, imprimant ainsi son nom à la fois sur l’œuvre d’art et dans le texte lui-même - c’est ainsi que nous apprenons son nom. Mais Frenhofer achète immédiatement le dessin, se réappropriant la *Marie Égyptienne* pour lui-même.

La réaction immédiate de Porbus à l’égard de Frenhofer est une réaction de soumission et d’émerveillement mais dès qu’il le peut, il révèle à Poussin ses véritables pensées concernant le génie de Frenhofer :

[Frenhofer] est un homme passionné pour notre art, qui voit plus haut et plus loin que les autres peintres. Il a profondément médité sur les couleurs, sur la vérité absolue de la ligne, mais, à force de recherches, il est arrivé à douter de l’objet même de ses recherches. Dans ses moments de désespoir, il prétend que le dessin n’existe pas et

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<sup>13</sup> Les saccades et les convulsions du pinceau rappellent les “jouissances” que Porbus note sur la *Belle-Noiseuse* de Frenhofer.

qu'on ne peut rendre avec des traits que des figures géométriques ; ce qui est trop absolu, puisque avec le trait et le noir, qui n'est pas une couleur, on peut faire une figure ; ce qui prouve que notre art est, comme la nature, composé d'une infinité d'éléments ; le dessin donne le squelette, la couleur est la vie, mais la vie sans le squelette est une chose plus incomplète que le squelette sans la vie. (Balzac, 1995: 34)

Encore incomplète, la toile de Porbus ne signifie rien d'autre qu'elle-même. Elle se réduit à une figure fragmentée et ne s'inscrit pas dans un ordre plus général et donc signifiant. Entre le réel et sa représentation doit se produire le travail mental qui substitue à la chose son essence.

En opposition à la quête de Frenhofer pour créer la vie, l'art de Porbus est marqué par la mort. Porbus lui-même utilise le terme "squelette" pour parler du dessin et de la ligne, tout en reconnaissant que la couleur est la vie. Alors que Frenhofer semble se concentrer sur le tableau dans son ensemble, et accorder une attention particulière au mouvement général de l'image créée, Porbus est plus attaché aux détails et il pense que pour rendre la nature le plus fidèlement possible, il est préférable de lui donner d'abord sa matérialité concrète — le squelette — plutôt que de se concentrer sur son "âme", c'est-à-dire la couleur.

## Conclusion

Frenhofer a trouvé la solution à cet état d'être impossible : la couverture et la superposition enveloppent Catherine tout en laissant une tache qui signale sa présence (l'image du pied parfait) et préserve son intimité. Frenhofer, en créant la vie sur la toile, a réussi à produire une traduction littérale du réel ; une traduction qui pousse la mimésis à son extrême, en remplaçant la réalité par sa propre réalité "fictive" au lieu de représenter ce qui est. Le maître balzacien a juxtaposé une réalité extérieure recréée par un nouveau système de signes qui suggère et exprime la réalité d'une manière abstraite mais qui reste incompréhensible pour le commun des mortels et même pour un artiste aussi chevronné que Porbus. Le corps féminin est la substance essentielle de l'œuvre d'art, ce qui résiste à la traduction tant sur la toile — la chair ne doit pas être exposée — que dans le texte. Le langage visuel, le mode ekphrastique qui donne vie à l'atelier de Porbus et au personnage de Frenhofer ne parviennent pas à donner une forme concrète au corps féminin. Catherine est "l'insaisissable, le mystérieux, le 'poétique'" (Baudelaire, 1923).

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## Écfrasis líricas y relaciones intertextuales alrededor de la *Melancolía I* de Alberto Durero

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### RESUMEN:

La *Melancolía I* (1514), grabado del pintor alemán Alberto Durero, es sin duda una de las obras con más repercusión y más sometida a análisis de la historia del arte hasta nuestros días. No obstante, el campo pictórico no es el único en el cual han dejado poso sus fértiles semillas, generando también importantes repercusiones en el ámbito literario, especialmente dentro del género poético. Entre las diferentes écfrasis líricas que refieren a este prolífico grabado renacentista, encontramos una estela de relaciones intertextuales que parten del soneto “El Desdichado” de Gérard de Nerval, seguido de “La Tierra Baldía” de T.S. Eliot, a partir de la cual escribe Jaime Gil de Biedma su poema “Príncipe de Aquitania, en su torre abolida”; aparte de otras referencias líricas que llevan a este mismo grabado, como “Ciudades” de Enrique Lihn, o más recientemente el poema “Tres”, publicado por Rafael Ávila Domínguez en el número dieciséis de la revista *Apostasía*, que dialoga indirectamente con los dos primeros poemas antes señalados. Desde todas estas referencias interconectadas en torno al susodicho grabado, la materialidad de la *Melancolía I* consigue expandirse desde la imagen hasta la palabra, enhebrando las perlas de un linaje intertextual que amplía las significaciones del concepto de melancolía en relación con la creación artística, transmotivando sus connotaciones líricas desde el imaginario renacentista al romántico y al modernista, y desde ellos hasta nuestra idea de melancolía hoy en día.

### **ABSTRACT:**

*Melencolia I* (1514), an engraving made by the German painter Albrecht Dürer, is certainly one of the most widespread and analyzed engravings in the history of art until today. However, the pictorial field is not the only one in which this work has left its fertile seeds, also producing significant repercussions in the literary field, especially in poetry. In between the several lyrical ekphrasis that refer to this prolific renaissance engraving, we can find a trail of intertextual connections which begins with the sonnet “El desdichado” from Gérard de Nerval, followed by “The Waste Land” from T.S. Eliot, and then Jaime Gil de Biedma writes his poem “Príncipe de Aquitania, en su torre abolida”, influenced by the former; apart from other poetic references which also lead to this engraving, such as “Ciudades” by Enrique Lihn, and more recently the poem “Tres”, published by Rafael Ávila Domínguez in the sixteenth issue of the journal *Apostasía*, in indirect dialogue with the first two poems mentioned above. From these references, all interconnected around this picture, the materiality of *Melencolia I* has accomplished to expand from image to language, strung on the pearls of an intertextual lineage that broadens the significance of the concept of melancholia around artistic creation, transmutating the lyrical connotations from renaissance to the romantic and the modernist imagination, and from them to our present idea of melancholia.

### **PALABRAS CLAVE:**

Gérard de Nerval; Gil de Biedma; intertextualidad; melancolía; T.S. Eliot

### **KEYWORDS:**

Gérard de Nerval; Gil de Biedma; intertextuality; melancholia; T.S. Eliot

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## 1. Hermenéutica y simbolismo en la *Melancolía I*: el concepto de melancolía en la creación artística y sus formas de representación

La *Melancolía I* de Alberto Durero es un grabado de raíces profundamente simbolistas, entendiendo este término no desde un sentido histórico, relacionado con las corrientes artísticas que reciben este nombre durante la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, sino como una matriz artística o forma técnica de producción que trabaja los significantes empleados como catalizadores de ideas, conceptos o sensaciones no directamente relacionados con ellos, de modo que esos significantes actúen en representación superficial de los trasfondos que ocultan tras ellos, al mismo tiempo que los reflejan indirectamente como mediadores entre la imagen o representación y la recepción, necesitando de esta última para poder ser decodificados e interpretados. Por ello, una técnica simbolista siempre necesita de una interpretación hermenéutica que juzgue los significantes simbólicos para extraer desde ellos determinadas significaciones<sup>1</sup>, rehilando tales significantes con las ideas, conceptos o sensaciones a las que refieren, o al menos a las que el exégeta deduce que se deben referir, de una forma coherentemente argumentada. Desde esta lógica, podría decirse que la *Melancolía I* (Fig. 1) es un sistema interrelacional de símbolos dialogando entre ellos, aunque no hacia una interpretación unitaria o perfectamente definida. Más bien, este grabado busca dispersar la mirada del intérprete a través de su imaginería, llenándola de símbolos dispares que, a causa de su abstracción, complejidad y sobrecarga iconológica, dificultan sobremanera su interpretación, tanto en sentido particular como en sentido genérico. En lo particular, debido a que la diferencialidad entre los símbolos pictóricos dentro del grabado impide una interpretación clara y distinta de cada uno de ellos, al estar dialogando con otra gran cantidad de posibilidades que se afectan recíprocamente, provocando que la mirada hermenéutica tenga que volver sobre cada símbolo siempre que observe una afectación de otro en él, y así con el resto y reiteradamente, complicando sobremanera cada interpretación particular; y en lo general, debido a que esa heterogeneidad significativa de símbolos pictóricos, que refieren a ideas no definidas per se, resulta en una extrema dificultad para establecer una coherencia unitaria en la interpretación, permitiendo tan solo una coherencia dialéctica, como mucho, que sería además dependiente de cada interpretación particular cuya línea simbólica lleve, de forma recíproca con el resto de símbolos, a su interpretación general.

Aun estando cargado de símbolos, este grabado responde más bien a un principio alegórico, dado que la interrelación dinámica entre sus simbologías construye una red de carácter complejo, y en cuanto a ello, podría argumentarse que lo que separa el símbolo de la alegoría son dos factores esenciales: la referencia directa que interconecta un concepto y un significante en el símbolo, frente a la compositividad o heterogeneidad interna de una significación simbólica compuesta o compleja como la de alegoría; o, en su defecto, la estaticidad significativa del símbolo frente a la

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<sup>1</sup> Utilizando la terminología de E.D. Hirsch en "Meaning and significance reinterpreted" (1984), donde a partir del estructuralismo saussuriano establece una diferenciación binómica entre significado, entendido como aquello a lo que refiere un significante de forma más directa o puramente semántica; y significación, que referiría a las interpretaciones hermenéuticas que un receptor puede extraer de unos determinados significantes.





estudiados, puede ser también rastreada una interesante estela intertextual que arrastra ciertas simbologías iconológicas por la historia de la literatura a partir de este grabado, tratando el propio concepto de melancolía desde diferentes ópticas epocales y formas de representarla, especialmente en relación con la pérdida, la memoria, la degeneración y el paso del tiempo, o la creación artística y el ánimo del poeta. Pues no es lo mismo la idea de melancolía ni las formas de hablar de ella o representarla que tenían los clásicos grecorromanos, ni los tratadistas medievales, los pintores renacentistas, los poetas románticos o modernistas, o los artistas que hayan producido su obra desde la segunda mitad del siglo XX hasta el día de hoy. Ni lo son, por supuesto, las respectivas formas de simbolizarla, proyectarla o representarla.

En cualquier caso, ya desde la antigüedad se tenía la idea de melancolía como un estado de ánimo relacionado con la tristeza y provocado por un exceso de uno de los cuatro humores internos del cuerpo humano, la llamada bilis negra (*melaina chole* en griego, lo cual le da nombre a este estado de ánimo), que ya para filósofos como Platón o Aristóteles era habitual en artistas, poetas y pensadores, personas singulares que para ellos eran capaces de catalizar esa bilis negra en la sensación melancólica, que podía ser productiva, en lugar de “producir apoplejía, desesperación o angustia” (Elgue-Martini, 2008: 12), como era normal para ellos en otros sujetos. Este estado anímico estuvo históricamente relacionado, además de con la inspiración poética y la creación artística, con el amor, el cual podía desequilibrar los humores internos del ser humano mediante un exceso de bilis negra, convirtiendo el amor en enfermedad y en obsesión, tal y como señalaba Bernard de Gordon en su *Lilio de medicina* (1480), indicando que el exceso de esta sustancia, definida como seca y fría, provocaba desde insomnio, pérdida de sueño o apetito, a necesidad incontrolada del llanto o incluso accesos de locura e irracionalidad. Este fue un tema muy comentado en la tratadística de medicina medieval, según su teoría de los cuatro humores, desarrollada por Hipócrates y luego retomada por Galeno, quienes relacionaban esta sensación a un problema físico proveniente de una afectación del alma, al menos hasta que se avanzara en el descubrimiento de los funcionamientos orgánicos y sanguíneos del cuerpo con la medicina moderna, ya en los siglos XVII y XVIII. Dejando fuera estas concepciones y las diferentes divergencias científicas que se han podido dar al respecto de la melancolía, esta siempre estuvo relacionada a una tristeza de espíritu o de ánimo que deviene en desidia o ataraxia, pero también a la inspiración artística, la imaginación y la creatividad, dualidad con la que precisamente juega Durero en su grabado, proyectando a su ángel saturniano (divinidad relacionada con esta cualidad) como creador suspendido entre el ánimo productivo y la afasia inventiva que impide al anterior dar sus frutos, como puede interpretarse desde simbologías intermedias como el compás, la balanza o los utensilios artesanales de carpintería y

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que escapan al campo meramente literario (a pesar de que Marc Angenot ya se estuviera preguntando en la misma época por este concepto y cómo tratar las relaciones interdiscursivas exoliterarias), y otros tantos autores que lo retoman, como Norman Fairclough, Terry Threadgold, Luzón Marco o Ryszard Nycz, que diferencia entre campo interdiscursivo e interartístico, o Francisco Quintana Docio, quien establece la oposición en tanto que relaciones interdiscursivas endoliterarias y exoliterarias, lo que Marco o Fairclough denominan a su vez como intertextualidad manifiesta e interdiscursividad o intertextualidad constitutiva, añadiendo el aspecto explícito a la primera, y el aspecto de cambio de formato, género, registro o estilo a la segunda. Otros autores le dan diferentes nombres, como Heinrich Plett, que la llama directamente intermedialidad.

arquitectura. Por otro lado, tenemos la nostalgia, cualidad paralela a la melancolía pero dada a una connotación más positiva, relacionada con el recuerdo del hogar (de hecho, proviene de la raíz *nostos*, que significa hogar), aunque también con el dolor (correspondiente a su segunda raíz griega, *algos*) de no encontrarse allí, es decir, de la pérdida de lo amado o lo conocido, algo que será fundamental también para entender la melancolía en estos textos narrativos que se ven influenciados por el grabado de Durero. Sin más dilación en cuanto a estos aspectos periféricos, que pueden ser interesantes pero no apuntan al fondo de la cuestión que busca este artículo, pasemos al estudio de las referencias textuales.

## 2. Herencias y relaciones interdiscursivas desde la *Melancolía I*: del negro sol de la melancolía al príncipe de Aquitania en su torre abolida y el poliedro de Durero

La primera de las influencias de la *Melancolía I* en la literatura, al menos dentro de esta herencia filogenética por desarrollar, se encuentra en el poema “El desdichado” de Gérard de Nerval, originalmente perteneciente a la sección “Les Chimères” de su libro *Les Filles du Feu* (1854). Nerval, poeta romántico y simbolista de un gran hermetismo y habituado a las referencias clásicas, cita en el primer cuarteto de este soneto una de las piezas clave de la iconología del grabado de Durero: lo que él llama “le soleil noir de la Mélancolie”, que refiere al lejano sol de rayos claroscuros que se encuentra al fondo de la composición. Traducido por Alejandro Bekes, este primer cuarteto dicta así:

Yo soy el Tenebroso, el Viudo inconsolado,  
De la Torre aquitana señor sin dinastía.  
Mi única estrella ha muerto; mi laúd constelado  
Lleva en sí el negro sol de la melancolía. (Nerval, 2005: 200)

Aunque esta traducción es, en mi opinión, la más estética y peculiar de las encontradas, especialmente por las variaciones originales en el segundo verso<sup>3</sup>, referiré también a la de Xavier Villaurrutia, debido a que conecta directamente con otro de los poemas que continúan esta herencia intertextual, “Príncipe de Aquitania, en su torre abolida”, de Jaime Gil de Biedma en sus *Poemas póstumos* (1968).

Yo soy el tenebroso –el viudo–, inconsolado,  
Príncipe de Aquitania de la torre abolida;

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<sup>3</sup> Donde Bekes traduce “Le prince d’Aquitaine à la tour abolie” por “De la Torre aquitana señor sin dinastía”, en lugar de la traducción habitual (por ejemplo, la de Octavio Paz o Villaurrutia), “El príncipe de Aquitania en su torre abolida”, que da nombre al poema de Gil de Biedma que más adelante será tratado. Esta original traducción de Bekes es especialmente interesante por señalar la carencia de dinastía, un tema que será clave tanto en el poema de Nerval como en el de Biedma, en relación con la pérdida y el paso del tiempo. Aparte, otra traducción interesante es la de Juan José Arreola, que en lugar de traducirla por “abolida” lo hace por “baldía”, término que tiene más significado en castellano y que además conecta con el famoso poema que cita este verso, “La tierra baldía” de T.S. Eliot, por el cual suele darse a conocer el poema de Nerval.

mi sola estrella ha muerto –mi laúd constelado  
sostiene el negro sol de la Melancolía. (Nerval, 2005: 200)

En cualquier caso, la referencia base a la *Melancolía I* es prácticamente la misma en ambas versiones, siendo el segundo eje intertextual el único que varía sustancialmente. En este soneto de Nerval, el negro sol de la melancolía sirve para representar una noción melancólica de carácter romántico proyectada mediante tal éfrasis simbólica, rematando el cuarteto con una potente imagen que se interrelaciona con la anterior muerte de la estrella como una suerte de agujero negro, representante metafórico del vacío interno en el sujeto poético, del pozo de soledad y orfandad que parece guardar en el pecho como consecuencia de su pérdida ontológica, de su falta de sentido vital dentro del mundo una vez se pierde lo que le da a uno mismo significado y motivación, aspecto que conectará con el segundo eje intertextual antes comentado. Esta primera conexión interdiscursiva con el sol negro de la *Melancolía I* se reitera, desde un sentido más conceptual y referencial que plenamente simbólico, en el poema “Tres” de Rafael Ávila Domínguez, publicado en el reciente número dieciséis de la revista *Apostasía*, donde se cita lo siguiente (haciendo mención al número que da título al poema y que vertebró su idea de fondo), de una manera tan críptica como el resto del texto:

[...] el otorgado el tercer mes del año  
a tres pueblos, a través de tres hijos,  
el número de la casa del tenebroso  
que escribió el sol negro de Durero.  
He sido y soy el número tres.  
El morir es un sacrificio peculiar.  
Yo me dejo ser en tres partes,  
y cada parte de mí no acaba  
en ninguno de los tres caminos. (Ávila Domínguez, 2022: 28)

Esta referencia lleva directamente hasta la figura de Nerval, aunque cambiando los significantes de “el sol negro de la Melancolía” por “el sol negro de Durero”. Como puede observarse, este verso es más referencial que simbólico, aunque guarda un paralelo conceptual con el resto de las líneas del poema, proyectando este sol negro como un ente críptico, velando el sentido por medio de la penumbra de sus oscuros rayos, y que recuerda además a la numerología del cuadrado mágico en la torre del grabado principal, desde ciertos sentidos cabalísticos que asocian la trinidad y el cuatro como número terrestre con el siete como número de Dios. En el caso del poema de Ávila Domínguez, esta referencia al sol negro de Durero sirve para oscurecer la interpretación hermenéutica de la trinidad, que él focaliza en el cuadro *Tumba de tres partes* (1923) de Paul Klee, sobre el cual va acumulando referencias intertextuales y juegos simbólicos para hablarle al lector, sutilmente, del problema de la identidad, la trinidad, las elecciones vitales o la tensión de la dualidad. En todo caso, como tropo intertextual e interartístico transformado de imagen a verbo por medio de una éfrasis poética, este sol negro viene generalmente a simbolizar conceptos de fondo relacionados con la melancolía, el hermetismo, la pérdida y la decadencia o la degeneración.

Dentro de toda esta codificación semiótica, llena de isotopías bastante lúgubres o crípticas, se encuentra el segundo eje intertextual que amplía este linaje filogenético. Aunque este no emerja directamente de la *Melancolía I*, sí que entronca con ella por medio de su relación con el sol negro que le sigue a un verso de diferencia y con la misma idea de melancolía que proyecta su trasfondo. Lógicamente, este eje es el que refiere al príncipe de Aquitania en su torre abolida, que es si cabe más críptico que lo anterior. El motivo histórico al que parece apuntar no es del todo claro, debido a diferentes motivos que irán siendo señalados, y a que no hay ningún estudio ni ninguna referencia clara que distinga a quién puede referirse. El único personaje histórico que portó como tal este título fue Eduardo de Woodstock, también llamado el Príncipe Negro, que por estos dos factores parecería encajar perfectamente en el susodicho epíteto. Sin embargo, el trasfondo al que refiere este supuesto príncipe de Aquitania es el de alguien que ha perdido aquello que le importaba y ha quedado varado en el recuerdo de algo mejor, de algo arrebatado, encajando mejor con una figura caída en desgracia, desterrada o encerrada en una torre que con el mentado Príncipe Negro, cuyo desarrollo vital fue más bien glorioso en cuanto a sus campañas militares, y valorado en positivo hasta su muerte y tras ella. Por ello, considero que es más coherente asociar este sujeto lírico a otros personajes que, aunque no fueron nombrados príncipes de Aquitania como tal, en cierto momento fueron príncipes y también regentes del Ducado de Aquitania, y que además tienen relación con la mítica Torre de Londres, que albergó gran cantidad de prisioneros políticos o fue la guararnición de ciertos reyes y señores cuando ocurrieron rebeliones en sus dominios.

Estos tres personajes son los reyes de Inglaterra Eduardo II, Ricardo II y Enrique VI, los cuales cumplen las tres características antes mencionadas. El primero de ellos, Eduardo II, se fortificó de sus enemigos en la Torre de Londres, al menos hasta que la ciudad se alzó en revuelta contra él, tras lo que huyó de ella. Por lo que, aunque estuviera relacionado con una torre, su implicación es más bien parcial, siendo el candidato menos posible. En cuanto a Ricardo II, hijo del mismo Príncipe Negro, este se refugió en la misma torre durante la Revuelta de los Campesinos que siguió a la epidemia de peste negra en Inglaterra, y más tarde volvió a ser encerrado en esta misma torre ante su mal gobierno y las inclinaciones de su primo hermano, Enrique IV, a tomar el trono. No obstante, aunque la torre estuviera relacionada con su decadencia, no murió allí, sino que fue trasladado desde ella al Castillo de Pontefract, y se desconocen sus últimos hechos de vida hasta su muerte. Por su parte, Enrique VI fue destronado durante la conocida Guerra de las Dos Rosas y encerrado en la misma Torre de Londres, donde luego fue brutalmente asesinado. Quizá Enrique VI ser el que más encaja en el papel, debido a su trágico destino y su relación más explícita con la torre, además de haber sido relatado por un literato de tal fama como William Shakespeare, en su saga homónima de tres partes.

Aun así, puede existir otra posible referencia, según C. J. Ackerley en *T.S. Eliot: 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and The Waste Land*, donde señala lo siguiente, adelantando la siguiente pieza en esta cadena intertextual:

The poet laments his lost love and sees himself as the disinherited to the once glorious tradition of troubadour poetry, destroyed by Albigensian Crusades and symbolised by the ruined tower in Aquitaine. The Waste Land poet here identifies himself with the

Prince of Aquitane as one whose life is in ruins, and whose inheritance is destroyed” (Ackerley, 2007: 93).

Aunque Ackerley describe perfectamente el sentimiento que quiere imprimir en su lírica T.S. Eliot cuando cita el verso de Nerval, no hay referencias explícitas a ningún príncipe o duque de Aquitania afectado por las Cruzadas cátaras o albigeneses, a no ser que se refiera al mítico Juan sin Tierra, duque de Aquitania justo al comienzo de estas cruzadas, pero que no parece tener ninguna implicación aparente en ellas. La única figura que parecería encajar en este marco sería el occitano Raymond de Termes, que fue sitiado en el Castillo de Termes durante estas cruzadas, acusado de herejía por las fuerzas papales y capetas, y finalmente encerrado en Carcasona. El único problema es que esta figura no tiene ninguna relación directa con Aquitania. En definitiva, puede que Nerval extrapolara su personaje poético desde cualquiera de los personajes históricos antes mencionados, mas no queda claro a cuál podría referirse de ellos: si pudiera ser una composición entre varios, o directamente una invención lírica más basada en alguna influencia parcial de alguno de ellos, o incluso de algún otro personaje histórico que no haya sido aquí valorado. En definitiva, lo que termina importando es el sentido que Nerval y luego Eliot quieren depositar en esta figura a través de sus versos.

Avanzando hacia la obra de este segundo autor, Eliot cita a Nerval en el quinto verso que precede al final de “The Waste Land”, el cual discurre así:

[...] se cae el puente de Londres, se cae, se cae  
*poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina*  
*quando fiam uti chelidon* –Oh golondrina golondrina  
*Le Prince d'Aquitane à la tour abolie*  
 estos fragmentos he orillado contra mi ruina.  
 Pues entonces os obligaré. Jerónimo vuelve a estar loco.  
 Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih (Eliot, 2001: 17)

Aquí Eliot utiliza el verso de Nerval para, como decía Ackerman, representar el sentido de pérdida que separa al poeta visionario de “La tierra baldía” entre su decadencia presente frente al paraíso perdido, asociado a una suerte de mito de la edad de oro que es propio de la poesía elegíaca<sup>4</sup>, y el futuro apocalíptico que permea el poema, pero que también esconde un aire esperanzador en la voluntad de poder que insinúan ciertos recovecos subtextuales entre sus versos, como es el caso de las últimas líneas en sánscrito, cuyo término “shantih” refiere a la paz que trasciende o supera el entendimiento racional. El largo poema de Eliot es de esencia compleja, y daría para abrir otra gran cantidad de caminos y conexiones intertextuales con las que dialoga, pero centrémonos en la parte que nos ocupa, que sería la relación entre el sol negro de la melancolía, los poemas de Nerval y Eliot, y cómo desde ellos se

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<sup>4</sup> Como la definiría Friedrich Schiller según sus categorías en *Sobre poesía ingenua y poesía sentimental* (1796), como un ideal estético que representa un conflicto entre el idilio (generalmente en tiempo pasado) y la realidad (generalmente en tiempo presente), favoreciendo al primero sobre el segundo, y generando así una condición de carácter nostálgico o melancólico; frente a la poesía idílica, que expone una condición utópica de felicidad mediante una vida ficticia dentro de ese idilio, en tiempo presente.

genera una nueva relación intertextual con el de Gil de Biedma. Al igual que el sol negro representa ese pozo de melancolía insondable, el príncipe de Aquitania encerrado en su torre representa la pérdida material o sentimental, los estragos causados por el paso del tiempo o el aislamiento de la realidad, que pudiera entroncar con la visión del poeta modernista en su torre de marfil, incapaz de comprender la sociedad cambiante que le rodea, algo que Eliot representa perfectamente en su poesía, siempre suspendida en una brecha indeterminable entre un pasado mítico, un presente banal y un futuro incierto. Mientras que la torre representa en Nerval el aislamiento, la pérdida y la desdicha, en T.S. Eliot representa más bien un punto de incertidumbre, un espacio aislado pero dual, suspendido entre dos mundos que le son imposibles de comprender y que tampoco le comprenden a él, sentimiento que transfigura en el mentado príncipe de Aquitania y su particular melancolía, señor sin dinastía (tal que rezaba la traducción de Bekes) que recuerda todo lo perdido desde el aislamiento en su torre. La sensación es melancólica, pero más dual e indeterminada que la que le precede, y aun así más afligida o apesadumbrada que la que le sigue, refiriéndonos a Biedma. Es interesante observar, desde estas variaciones entre el príncipe de Nerval y el de Eliot, el proceso inverso a la écfrasis que comienza todo este movimiento interdiscursivo, pues la pintora inglesa Elisabeth Collins devuelve este personaje al formato pictórico en su cuadro homónimo (*Prince of Aquitaine*, c. 1950, [Tate](#)), sin saber a cuál de ellos referencia, o si lo hace a ambos.

En “Príncipe de Aquitania, en su torre abolida”, Gil de Biedma renueva los sentidos líricos de Nerval y Eliot para ofrecerle una nueva óptica a esta alegoría poética. Para ello, reenfoca el reiterado verso para construir un poema más acorde a los reclamos de la Generación del 50, aunque ya asentada en la tercera etapa del franquismo, con tono más íntimo y positivo que pone el acorde en temas como la memoria y la historia. Así discurre el poema de Biedma:

Una clara conciencia de lo que ha perdido,  
es lo que le consuela. Se levanta  
cada mañana a fallecer, discurre por estancias  
en donde sordamente duele el tiempo  
que se detuvo, la herida mal cerrada.  
Dura en ningún lugar este otro mundo,  
y vuelve por la noche en las paradas  
del sueño fatigoso... Reino suyo  
dorado, cuántas veces  
por él pregunta en la mitad del día,  
con el temor de olvidar algo!  
Las horas, largo viaje desabrido.  
La historia es un instante preferido,  
un tesoro en imágenes, que él guarda  
para su necesaria consulta con la muerte.  
Y el final de la historia es esta pausa. (Gil de Biedma, 1970: 232)

De esta forma, Gil de Biedma renueva la lógica preexistente en el verso primario de Nerval y la transposición de Eliot, proyectando un consuelo en esa pérdida que hace que la memoria sea un refugio, más que una desesperada condena romántica o una brecha de aislamiento entre un pasado mítico y un futuro incierto. Un refugio ante el dolor de la pérdida y el paso del tiempo que lastraban a sus

predecesores, y que se corresponde con el lugar del sueño o el recuerdo nostálgico, desde una óptica positiva, en este caso. La memoria es un consuelo ante la pérdida, en lugar de una privación. La historia, por su parte, guarda un halo de esperanza bajo la potencialidad de revertir el daño sucedido, por medio de recuperar lo que una vez fue conocido en ese reino dorado que evoca el recuerdo. Mediante esta transmotivación del verso recogido, Biedma consigue hacer de aquel príncipe de Aquitania en su torre casi un sujeto del compromiso, que sueña con recuperar lo perdido; o si no, al menos con existir en el asilamiento de su memoria para tener algo por lo que vivir, en lo que se da aquella pausa del final de su historia con la que termina el poema, casi con un deje metaliterario.

Por otro lado, despegándonos de las referencias interdiscursivas al sol negro y la torre de Aquitania, Enrique Lihn extrae otro motivo más desde la *Melancolía I* de Durero en su poema “Ciudades”, perteneciente a *Poesía de paso* (1966), donde empieza a tornar desde una lírica más conceptual, compleja o hermética, a una poesía más cotidiana y bajada a lo terreno, más acorde a la estética pop que empezaba a aflorar en dicha época, preconizando una de las vertientes de lo que posteriormente pasaría a llamarse posmodernidad, desde finales de los años setenta. En este poema, Lihn alude lo que llama “el cubo de Durero” (Lihn, 2014: 59), que Óscar Hahn, editor de la antología individual *Poesía, situación irregular* (2014), acota en una nota a pie de página como “El poliedro de Durero” (59), matizando el verso de Lihn para facilitar al lector su entendimiento. El poema comienza así:

Ciudades son imágenes.  
 Basta con un cuaderno escolar para hacer  
 la absurda vida de la poesía  
 en su primera infancia:  
 extrañeza elevada al cubo de Durero.  
 y un dolor que no alcanza a ser él mismo,  
 melancólicamente. (Lihn, 2014: 59)

En este fragmento, Lihn refiere a la famosa piedra irregular del grabado, en ocasiones interpretada como la parte terrenal y mundana, dada su forma de poliedro trapezoidal e irregular, que hace de contraparte a la esfera pulida caída en el suelo como representante de lo divino, mediante lo cual Durero establece una tensión entre los dos aspectos de la melancolía, el genio creador frente a la afasia que anula el ánimo y la voluntad, llevados en este caso desde la creación artística a la creación divina, a través de la figura del ángel. Por su parte, Lihn emplea esta referencia pictórica para, desde esa imperfección del ser humano, hacer una crítica al exceso de complejidad de la poesía, del cual ya reniega. De ahí que la extrañeza de ese absurdo se eleve a tal poliedro, paradójicamente, y que el dolor no sea capaz de alcanzarse a sí mismo, al ser representación artificial o falseada, es decir, poética, de otro dolor más puro y consistente, que es el dolor real. En esta oposición, podemos incluir de nuevo el dilema de la melancolía, el dolor y el aislamiento de la torre de Aquitania, tornando en falsedad la exacerbación del desesperado dolor romántico, el trascendentalismo efímero e insustancial de la nostalgia modernista, o incluso el banal optimismo vital de la memoria experiencial frente a la realidad en el poema de Biedma. Es interesante y consustancial a la historia literaria, que cada corriente epocal o



generacional parezca desdeír a la anterior, o que al menos avance en las cadenas de sentido, modificando o matizando las imaginerías precedentes mediante una adaptación contextual a su *zeitgeist* particular. Dentro de esta herencia filogenética de carácter intertextual, lo mismo ocurre con el concepto de melancolía, que va variando de representación en representación, de écfrasis en écfrasis, a partir de la referencia originaria del grabado de Durero que es tomada como base interdiscursiva.

### **3. Variaciones y transmotivaciones en el concepto de melancolía: el príncipe en la torre de Aquitania desde Gérard de Nerval a T.S. Eliot y Jaime Gil de Biedma**

Según tales variaciones, se podría considerar un motivo derivativo o evolutivo de la idea de la melancolía, el cual puede guardar parecidos relativos con lo que Gerard Genette denomina “transmotivación hipertextual” (Genette, 1989: 402), aunque matizando algunos aspectos. Genette denomina este proceso como una “transformación puramente semántica” (402), de la cual ofrece tres casos posibles: una transformación positiva, que introduce un motivo donde antes no lo había; una transformación negativa, que elimina un motivo antes existente; y un tercer caso que es una mezcla de los dos anteriores, que “procede por sustitución completa, es decir por un doble movimiento de desmotivación y de (re)motivación (por una motivación nueva): desmotivación + remotivación = transmoción” (410). En este caso, aunque es el concepto de melancolía el que es modificado, dicho concepto está implícito en la significación de los versos recogidos, de modo que, aunque no haya una modificación de los significantes extraídos en la estela más puramente intertextual (cuando hablamos del verso “Príncipe de Aquitania en su torre abolida”), sí que hay una modificación de sus sentidos o significaciones, que transforma la motivación de los versos. Podría argumentarse que esta es una situación parcial del mecanismo relatado por Genette, mas este modo de proceder sí encaja con el hecho de ser una transformación puramente semántica. En todo caso, la poca definición en los condicionantes del proceso y la cantidad de ejemplos posibles que se pueden establecer bajo tales definiciones hacen que se pueda relativizar mucho el campo de aplicación de este concepto, pues este ejemplo diferiría bastante del que ofrece Genette en el *Salomé* (1891) de Oscar Wilde, aludiendo al cambio de un motivo político por uno pasional desde el relato bíblico hasta el suyo. A pesar de ello, sí que habría al menos algún grado de transmoción en la transformación de la idea de melancolía romántica a la modernista, y de esta a la de la Biedma, pues cada una de ellas trata este motivo desde patrones diferentes, sometiéndolo a ciertas modificaciones de sentido acordes a su época. Tales modificaciones transforman completamente la interpretación de versos como “Le Prince d’Aquitane à la tour abolie”, que se ve atravesado por una necesidad creadora relativa a otro periodo histórico y a otros estilos o corrientes poéticas, que a su vez genera una nueva percepción colectiva y epocal de su significación.

En el caso de este verso en concreto, que actúa como eje entre la referencia intermedial de Nerval con la *Melancolía I* y el resto de referencias intertextuales de esta cadena, el proceso de transmoción es ejecutado mediante una

transformación implícita en los significados y sentidos<sup>5</sup> connotativos del verso, mientras que sus significantes permanecen inalterados en su aspecto nuclear, siempre que dejemos de lado la traducción al considerarla como una transformación mínima o superficial, en lugar de nuclear o profunda. Para sortear o ajustar el problema de definición en la amplitud del término de genettiano, en mi teoría en construcción sobre la intertextualidad, sus procesos y transformaciones<sup>6</sup>, denomino este caso como un proceso de “transposición intertextual”. Este proceso consiste en que, a partir de un mismo elemento, tropo o motivo sin una modificación literal o explícita de sus significantes, su posicionamiento cerca de un nuevo cotexto significativo cambia (en función de dicho cotexto) las significaciones que este verso es capaz de generar en el receptor mediante la lectura; la cual luego también adquiriría una diferencialidad individuativa propia de una “recodificación paratextual”, en tanto que un lector exégeta extraiga posteriormente sus significaciones fuera del texto y las adapte o recodifique de acuerdo a su propio imaginario e idiolecto. Según estos factores, la idea de melancolía (en este caso tratándola según su reflejo en el príncipe de Aquitania en su torre abolida) va mutando y evolucionando de época en época, escritor en escritor y lectura en lectura, conteniendo un germen o un núcleo común, pero que luego diverge en diferentes derivaciones dependientes de su contexto espaciotemporal, cuyas versiones más exitosas evolutivamente se arraigan en formas eficientes y estratificadas que establecen una interrelación dialéctica (y, en muchos casos, antitética) con aquellas que las preceden; como ocurre, por ejemplo, con la expresión artística de la melancolía (o nostalgia, como variación de la misma) en sus versiones romántica, modernista o de la Generación del 50, a pesar de que todas compartan invariantes comunes, como pueden ser la pérdida, el paso del tiempo, la soledad, la memoria o la degeneración.

Por ejemplo, en el caso de Nerval, el negro sol y la torre del príncipe de Aquitania sirven para simbolizar una noción melancólica de corte romántico, producto de la queja sentimental ante una vista desolada del mundo que rodea al sujeto poético, el cual asume su condición y, en lugar de escaparse hacia otras realidades, la enarbola como su propia bandera para sumirse en su perdición, al mismo tiempo que la explota como matriz generadora de su inspiración poética. De nuevo, puede observarse una relación entre la condición melancólica y la creación artística, ya presente en el propio grabado de Dürero y mucho antes de él. Solo que esta condición melancólica es plenamente negativa, a pesar de que sea afirmada y abrazada por el sujeto poético que la experimenta: es una melancolía triste, llevada por la vía negativa como negación de la experiencia o el mundo externo. A diferencia de Nerval, la melancolía que proyecta T.S. Eliot en su *Tierra baldía*, a la cual se adapta plenamente el mentado verso de Nerval, es una forma de suspensión entre dos mundos, entre aquel pasado mítico y aquel futuro incierto que generan, axiomáticamente, un presente falto de sentido o desmotivado, carente de una esencia concreta, pendiente de un hilo que se mece entre esos dos mundos. Esta es una imaginería sumamente modernista, que recuerda a la idea de la torre de marfil (más aún a la hora de ser puesta en

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<sup>5</sup> “Significados”, entendidos como el contenido semántico que quiere expresar el autor, y “sentidos” en tanto que contenidos semánticos extraíbles o interpretables desde ellos, en línea con lo que E.D. Hirsch llamaba “significación”.

<sup>6</sup> La cual constituye el trabajo de mi tesis doctoral, que se encuentra actualmente en proceso de escritura.

contacto con la de Aquitania) y que también puede observarse en otros autores que se mueven en esta poesía de estética elegíaca, como pueden ser el Verlaine de los *Poemas saturnianos*<sup>7</sup>, el Rubén Darío de *Azul...*, el Juan Ramón Jiménez de *Piedra y Cielo* o algunas partes del Antonio Machado de las *Soledades*... En el otro extremo de la cuerda tendríamos a Gil de Biedma que, desde el mismo verso que en esta ocasión escoge como título de poema, en lugar de la vía negativa o la vía dual o indeterminada, toma la vía positiva para imprimir en su poema una interpretación de la melancolía en tanto que salvación a través de la memoria como refugio (y su reflejo metafórico en la torre aquitana), como posibilidad reconfortante capaz de devolver al sujeto a su antiguo reino dorado, o la historia a su cauce anteriormente desviado, frente al sentimiento de pérdida como desolación o pérdida como banalidad presente y nostalgia del pasado que atravesaban a Nerval y a Eliot, respectivamente.

## Conclusiones

A través de estas variaciones o transmotivaciones del concepto de melancolía, partiendo desde la écfrasis del sol negro de Durero y llegando luego a las intertextualidades sucedidas a partir de la imagen del príncipe en la baldía torre de Aquitania, puede observarse como las progresivas relaciones intermediales e intertextuales van transformando evolutivamente esta herencia filogenética, transfigurando desde ella sus iconos en lenguaje, y luego haciendo cambiar sus sentidos progresivamente, de referencia en referencia.

De igual forma, las écfrasis líricas provenientes del susodicho grabado llegan a reverberar en prolíficos sentidos, desde aquella primera alusión de Nerval hasta escrituras tan contemporáneas como la de Enrique Lihn o la de Rafael Ávila Domínguez, las cuales van transformando los sentidos originarios hasta tal punto que ese sol negro o ese poliedro irregular sirven para hablar del problema de la trinidad, la identidad, la hermenéutica o la misma banalidad de la poesía. Ello se debe a que el amplio campo simbólico-conceptual y el fuerte hermetismo de la *Melancolía I* permiten su perfecta adaptación transmedial a las necesidades del lenguaje poético, abriendo esta serie de cadenas interdiscursivas que logran modificar y sofisticar los conceptos subyacentes a tales imágenes.

Lo mismo ocurre con las citas verbales que desde ellas han sido generadas en paralelo a las écfrasis poéticas, las cuales han sido capaces de generar una interesantísima herencia intertextual que parte desde el grabado renacentista de Durero y pasa desde el romanticismo a la modernidad y hasta nuestros días, dejando su marca en diferentes épocas a las cuales se adaptan cada una de las interpretaciones o transmotivaciones de los versos, tropos, alusiones o imágenes proyectadas, haciendo del concepto de melancolía una idea de carácter evolutivo, cambiante y

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<sup>7</sup> Los cuales, de hecho, hablan de la melancolía en diversas ocasiones. En una de ellas, Verlaine nombra al “bardo de su melancolía / como un dios que a la tierra se ha dignado a bajar” (Verlaine 23), versos que aunque puedan llegar a recordar a la *Melancolía I*, por su contraste mundano-divino y la figura del artista, no tienen una conexión explícita ni demostrable o argumentable con el grabado de Durero, motivo por el cual serán dejados de lado.

poligénético: adaptable y siempre sometida a los vaivenes del tiempo, en lugar de a una esencia cerrada que pueda llegar a agotarse en sí misma.

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## La cosecha de los 80

El fenómeno *bestseller* de calidad

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### RESUMEN:

Este artículo se propone plantear cinco estudios de caso que ubiquen el momento de aparición del fenómeno conocido como *bestseller* de calidad en el campo editorial español de los años 80. Para ello se tendrán en cuenta a los protagonistas materiales, colecciones y mediadores que toman parte, al igual que a la serie de apuestas que se llevan a cabo para introducir a las distintas publicaciones en un nuevo sistema literario.

### ABSTRACT:

This article looks into five case studies that locate the moment of appearance of the phenomenon known as quality bestseller in the Spanish publishing field of the 80s. For this purpose, the material protagonists, collections and mediators that take part will be taken into account, as well as the series of bets that are carried out to introduce the different publications in a new literary system.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:**

*bestseller*; campo literario; colecciones; editores; traducción

**KEYWORDS:**

*bestseller*; collections; literary field; publishers; translation

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El “no” no era solo el núcleo duro del chascarrillo gracioso del letrado de la estantería de detrás la mesa de Beatriz Moura con el que definía su labor editorial: “de entrada diga no”, o la frase que ya usaba Gaston Gallimard y Peter Mayer repetía con dicha: “No también es una respuesta”. El no, despojado del aire de altivez del editor que prescribía el buen gusto, mantenía y adquiría otras dimensiones a lo largo de los años 70: el no de la censura prohibiendo publicar *Cantos de Maldoror* de Lautréamont y *Conversaciones con Pier Paolo Pasolini* de Jean Dufloy<sup>1</sup> o el no a la continuidad de algunas editoriales, que se vieron abocadas al cierre o a la absorción de otras mayores: en el 1977 Berstelmann compraba el 40% de Plaza & Janés, en el 1980 Random House era comprada por el magnate de S.I. Newhouse y Alfaguara por Santillana. O incluso, en el 1982, Planeta compraba el 70% de Seix Barral y Ariel y Bruguera entraban en suspensión de pagos acercándose a la expedición de su certificado de absorción.

Pero, ante este clima turbulento, algunas editoriales supieron tomar las riendas de la situación y buscar el “sí” apostando por la creación de colecciones que las introdujesen en nuevos procesos de transformación cultural, o incluso les permitiesen tomar puntos de ventaja, como fue el caso del fenómeno de la importación del *bestseller* de calidad.

### 1.1. La entrada al mercado del *bestseller* de calidad

En los años 80, la tirada media normal de una novela en España giraba en torno a los 3.000 ejemplares, elevándose en torno a los 6.000 en el caso de las más grandes. Con esta vara de medir, si un ejemplar llegaba a los 100.000 ejemplares era evidente que podíamos estar hablando de un auténtico *bestseller*. Y si aún, a mayores, el libro en cuestión concitaba prestigio, no podía estar sino siendo el estrellato de una nueva generación de editores que supieron cómo introducir un nuevo fenómeno: libros con ambición, con reconocimiento, de calidad y que además conformaban las listas de los más vendidos y arrasaban en las librerías.

La posición del *bestseller* en la estructura del campo literario empezó a manifestarse hacia 1895, cuando Harry Thurston Peck, editor de la revista *The Bookman*, empezó a publicar el ranking de los más vendidos en varias ciudades de Norteamérica. Luego, siguiendo la estela de *The Bookman*, en 1912 nació la lista del *Publishers Weekly* y en el 1942, la lista del *New York Times*. En Francia, siguiendo la máxima de “l’annonce du succès développe le succès”, la revista *L’Express* se apresuró a crear su propia lista de los más vendidos en el 1955 y, en España, no es hasta mediados de los años setenta del siglo XX cuando el Instituto Nacional del Libro empieza a elaborar las listas de ventas que se publicarán mensualmente en la revista *El libro español* (Vila-Sanjuán, 2003: 35).

Este fenómeno, analizado a partir de casos de estudio concretos, respaldaría las afirmaciones de Even-Zohar que tumban los calificativos de buena y mala literatura para ofrecernos un prisma con el que analizar a un sistema literario de acuerdo

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<sup>1</sup> Puede consultarse *Diez años de represión cultural. La censura de libros durante la Ley de Prensa (1966-1976)*, de Georgina Cisquella, José Luis Erviti y José A. Sorolla, publicado en 1977.

con los criterios de jerarquización que impone cada periodo de la historia. Así, la canonización no es una categoría inherente a los textos, sino que depende por completo de la escala de valores vigente en cada momento histórico (Iglesias Santos, 1999: 332). Básicamente, el *bestseller* dio paso no solo al derroque del binomio buena-mala literatura, sino también a los géneros tal y como eran conocidos, pivotando a partir de entonces en torno a distintos planos de la estética posmoderna tan en alza en el momento. Una estética que reivindicaba la ironía, el juego, la relativización y permitía, a partir de algunos trucos de la literatura de género, reformular el núcleo duro de la novela histórica, de suspense, de humor... Fenómenos extraños del campo literario español que lo inscribían dentro de la infraestructura cultural del mercado global: a partir del reclamo de premios internacionales con tiradas apabullantes — como el Goncourt, el Pulitzer o el Booker —, la invasión de las funciones que desempeñaban las revistas literarias por parte de suplementos culturales (Ródenas, 2003: 208) o a través de la creación de nuevas colecciones que al importar un producto extranjero simbolizasen tanto su modo de producción como de distribución.

Bien es cierto que España, durante el decenio de los años 70, ya contaba con grandes editoriales de *bestsellers* internacionales como Plaza & Janés y Grijalbo. Grijalbo publicó, no nos olvidemos, *El padrino* (1969), de Mario Puzo, uno de los mayores *bestsellers* de la industria editorial española. La editorial vendió más de medio millón de ejemplares entre España y América, y fue también el libro más vendido de Círculo de Lectores hasta mediados de los años 90. Grijalbo empezó siguiendo las listas de *bestseller* de ficción del *Publisher's Weekly* e intentaba comprar todos los libros posibles, llegando a tener siete de cada diez que la revista recomendaba. En su catálogo las traducciones habían llegado a representar el 60% del total de libros publicados<sup>2</sup>, siendo pionero en la traducción de *bestsellers* americanos<sup>3</sup>.

En el caso de Plaza & Janés, fue Mario Lacruz quién apostó por fichajes que sobrepasaron los índices de ventas: como Frederick Forsyth (con *Chacal* en el 1971<sup>4</sup>), o Dominique Lapierre y Larry Collins (con *El quinto jinete* en el 1980). Además, Plaza & Janés puso en marcha importantes campañas promocionales que incluían *spots* publicitarios en televisión, programaron giras y apostaron por publicaciones que se habían versionado en series televisivas que favorecieron a algún éxito imprevisto — como la miniserie de mayor audiencia de la historia de la televisión: *Hombre rico, hombre pobre* (1976).

Pero el *bestseller* de calidad fue un epifenómeno que se gestó con su propio pulso y bajo condiciones un tanto distintas, que se pueden caracterizar a partir de estudios

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<sup>2</sup> Dato extraído a partir de la Base de Datos del Ministerio y WorldCat, minados *a posteriori* por el SPSS Statistics (lo que vendría a sustituir la labor del cabal Index Translationum que, aunque muy valioso para estudios literarios y sociológicos de otros periodos y zonas geográficas [véase Sapiro, 2008] para este no es funcional: la falta de adaptación a los requisitos internacionales y las lacras de un mercado editorial aún no reglado hacen que, sobre todo en los años 60 y 70, los datos no hayan sido registrados sistemática y apropiadamente).

<sup>3</sup> Aunque también tuvo fuerte presencia en no ficción. Claro ejemplo de ello fue el éxito de *Tus zonas erróneas* (1978) de Wayne W. Dyer.

<sup>4</sup> El notable éxito de la novela hizo que pronto se realizase una versión cinematográfica, dirigida por Fred Zinnermann en 1973. Además, de que esta misma inspiró otra producción estadounidense, del 1997, llamada *The Jackal*, y realizada por Michael Caton-Jones, con Bruce Willis como asesino y Richard Gere como uno de los prisioneros.



de caso concretos, como son los de Beatriz Moura, la editorial Tusquets y la colección “Andanzas”; Jorge Herralde, la editorial Anagrama y la colección “Panorama de narrativas”; Esther Tusquets, la editorial Lumen y la colección “Palabra en el Tiempo”; Paco Porrúa, Edhasa/Minotauro y la colección “Narrativas Edhasa” y Michi Strausfeld, Alfaguara y la colección “Literatura Alfaguara”<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.2. Tusquets, Beatriz Moura y la colección “Andanzas”

Beatriz de Moura (Rio de Janeiro, 1939-), hija de padre diplomático y traductora, ya había trabajado para el mundo editorial en Gustavo Gili en Ginebra desde el 1961 al 1962, y en Salvat en Barcelona en el 1963; además de en Lumen, dirigida por Esther Tusquets y donde adquirió conocimientos de dirección editorial, coordinación de colecciones y la creación de un catálogo. Es al dejar Lumen, en el 1969, cuando decide fundar su propia editorial junto con su primer marido, Óscar Tusquets: la editorial Tusquets. Esta fue bautizada con dos colecciones: “Cuadernos Ínfimos” (1969-1993), dirigida por Sergio Pitol y de cubiertas plateadas y “Cuadernos Marginales” (1969-2001) de cubiertas doradas — diseñadas ambas por Oscar Tusquets y Lluís Clotet. Publicando en esta última, en el 1970, *Relato de un naufrago*, uno de los libros mejor vendidos de Tusquets con más de cien ediciones (Álvarez Maylín, 2021: 2). “Cuadernos Marginales” tenía como fin publicar buenos textos, breves, de grandes autores o pensadores: píldoras como *Residua* (1981) — que le había ofrecido Jérôme Lindon, su editor francés — que llegó a ser el aliciente para que luego se publicase toda la obra de Samuel Beckett.

Así, la editorial se mantendría en la cresta de la ola de la revolución cultural y seguiría nutriendo a librerías y lectores con otras colecciones como la de “Acracia”, que nace en el 1974, cuando Ricardo de la Cierva era Director General de Cultura Popular y Presidente del Instituto Nacional del Libro Español, y se mantuvo con un buen ritmo de ventas hasta el 1982. También nace en esos años “La sonrisa Vertical”, dirigida por Luis García Berlanga<sup>6</sup> y se inaugura con la publicación de *El cipote de Archidona*, de Camilo José Cela.

Pero sería la colección “Andanzas” la que en mayor sintonía estaría con la realidad internacional del momento. Esta se inauguró por septiembre de 1981 sacando al mercado una novela traducida del polaco: *El Valle del Issa*, de Czesław Miłosz, que había recibido el Premio Nobel el año anterior; lo tradujo directamente del polaco Anna Rodón Klemensiewicz y el diseño de la colección y la portada fueron de Jordi Sánchez. La colección “Andanzas” se llamó así por el gusto de Moura de moverse por mera curiosidad (Cruz Ruiz, 2014: 54), como deja claro con sus cuatro primeros títulos: el ya nombrado *El Valle del Issa*; *Sangre inocente*, una novela policiaca de P.D.

<sup>5</sup> Al contrario del supuesto que afirmaba que un libro que vende mucho no puede tener calidad literaria y que ya desmonta Raphaële Vidaling en su libro *L’Histoire des plus grands succès littéraires du XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Nace en el 1979 del resultado de la evolución de los intereses de un sector del público en el que empezaba a decaer este fervor ideológico tan incisivo de principios de los 70, y se especializa en literatura erótica, publicando a autores como Sade, John Cleland, Apollinaire, Bataille, Frank Harris, Klossowski o Pierre Louÿs.

James — la gran escritora inglesa del género —, con traducción de Aníbal Leal y cubierta de Farré; *Una princesa en Berlín* — un auténtico *bestseller* mundial de Arthur R.G. Solmssen —, traducido por Raúl Acuña y con diseño de la cubierta de Guillemot-Navares, y *Jardín de cemento*, de Ian McEwan, con traducción de Antonio Prometeo Moya y diseño de la cubierta de Guillemot-Navares.

Otro de los éxitos de la colección fue Milan Kundera, que sometió — en un pequeño apartamento en el número 10 de la parisina Rue Litté — a sus editores españoles, Beatriz Moura y López Lamadrid, a todo tipo de pruebas para ganarse su publicación. Bien es cierto que Kundera ya tenía editorial en España, Seix Barral, pero se cuenta que en esta no vendía y que se acabó quedando sin editor. Ante ello, Tusquets llamó a Héctor Bianciotti, su editor en Gallimard, para que los pusiese en contacto. Kundera aceptó gracias al catálogo que Tusquets ya se había forjado, en parte por la publicación de Beckett y Gombrowicz, y les cedió sus derechos de *La insoportable levedad del ser*, que, en cuanto llegó a las manos de los editores españoles, empezó a dispararse en las librerías francesas. La misma suerte corrió su traducción al español, aunque un poco más tardía, dado la demora que implicó la versión directa del checo de la mano de Fernando de Valenzuela.

### 1.3. Anagrama, Jorge Herralde y “Panorama de narrativas”

El equivalente, en cuanto a temática, difusión y tipología, de la colección “Andanzas” de Tusquets sería la colección “Panorama de Narrativas” que conecta al mercado editorial español con la realidad internacional cuando la literatura política, que tanto había congregado a la década anterior, ya estaba agotada. Y la situación se resume muy bien en una frase que Herralde atribuye a la directora de la librería roja por excelencia de Barcelona, que es El cinc d’Oros: “tengo exactamente los mismos clientes, pero antes leían *Materialismo y empiriocriticismo* de Lenin y ahora leen a Patricia Highsmith” (citado en González Gómez, 2019: 188)<sup>7</sup>. Ante este panorama Herralde tomaba ventaja gracias a haberse forjado un buen puñado de contactos internacionales y era hora de hacer una colección que lo reflejase. Aparte de las importantes incursiones a la Feria de Frankfurt desde 1969, los viajes a Londres, con las consiguientes paradas por las librerías de Charing Cross y alrededores, o a la Compendium, en Camden Town, la suscripción a revistas literarias fue una gran apuesta a la hora de dosificar y seleccionar el material extranjero: la consulta del *Times Literary Supplement*, la *London Review of Books* y la *Literary Review*, el seguimiento de los suplementos dominicales del *Times* y del *Independent* o las publicaciones más sectoriales *The Bookseller* y *Publishing News*. Además de la colaboración con dos agentes literarias: Ann Warnford-Davis (agente de McEwan, Ishiguro, Kureishi, Mehta, entre otros) y Nicki Kennedy (Barnes, Amis, Fenton, O’Hanlon, Byatt), quienes le permitieron estar en sintonía.

“Panorama de narrativas”, que había tenido como banderín de enganche a la colección “Contraseñas” — una colección dedicada a un tipo de literatura salvaje,

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<sup>7</sup> Sobre el cambio de gustos en los años 80 puede leerse: “¿Ficción o pensamiento? El estado de la cuestión”, en *Ajoblanco*, abril de 1988.

marginal y forajida que se caracterizó por sus portadas color vainilla, que sirvieron para que a posteriori José Manuel Lara Hernández las bautizase como “la peste amarilla” —, se definía por ser “un espacio para la buena literatura sin adjetivar cuyo único adjetivo sería el de buena literatura, de calidad” (Herralde, 2001: 71). Con ese principio, y salvando un momento en el que las finanzas de Anagrama estaban maltruchas, empezó a publicar a autores absolutamente desconocidos y minoritarios como Jane Bowles, Grace Paley o Thomas Bernhard. Así, como la mayoría de autores eran poco conocidos, para subrayar la credibilidad literaria de la colección amparó a la mayoría de los títulos con un prólogo encargado expresamente a autores, editores o agentes ya consagrados como Carlos Barral, Luis Goytisolo, Juan Goytisolo o Esther Tusquets. O, en otros casos, también buscando textos de autores extranjeros que pudiesen funcionar como prólogo. Por ejemplo, Jane Bowles, que había sido publicada en Inglaterra por el editor independiente, excelente<sup>8</sup> y de finanzas precarias Peter Owen, llevó una introducción de Francine du Plessix Gray, además de un perfil escrito por su honorable fan Truman Capote — reconocido escritor de *Breakfast at Tiffany's* e *In Cold Blood*. Este último resaltaba la personalidad de Jane Bowles y su autoridad lingüística: ya que hablaba con precisión francés, español y árabe... tras haberlos aprendido sola como consecuencia de su carácter nómada. Bowles pasó de Nueva York a vagar por Europa y se alejó de allí y de una guerra ya inminente viajando a Centroamérica y México, para pasar a descansar una temporada en Brooklyn Heights: donde compartió pensión con Richard y Elen Wright, W.H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Oliver Smith, Carson McCullers o Gypsy Rose Lee. La única queja de Truman Capote a la obra de Bowles fue simplemente la cantidad de su obra, aludiendo a que *Dos damas muy serias* constituye toda su estantería, por así decirlo (Bowles, 1981: 10). Lo que no impidió que, con la traducción de Lili Gubern y la portada de Julio Vivas, se le reconociese su mérito en España<sup>9</sup>.

O, en el caso de la publicación en el 1981 de Joseph Roth, Herralde, tras haber leído la edición de Adelphi de Roberto Calasso, publicó *La leyenda del Santo Bebedor* prologada por Carlos Barral, traducida por Michael Faber-Kaiser y con ilustración de Edouard Chimot y portada de Julio Vivas.

Estas publicaciones dieron vida y forma a la colección que catapultaría los dos mayores *bestsellers* de la editorial: Patricia Highsmith, que era una autora editada muy esporádicamente y en colecciones de kiosko de nulo prestigio, y John Kennedy Toole, que con *La conjura de los necios* se convirtió en el mayor *bestseller* y *long-seller* de la editorial.

Patricia Highsmith constituyó sin duda una presencia reveladora. La autora era casi desconocida en España con títulos esporádicos en colecciones de corte policiaco, mientras que desde el principio en *Panorama de narrativas* figuró como una gran escritora literaria, sin etiqueta de género. En el 1980 Mercedes Casanovas, que había montado una pequeña agencia literaria con su amiga Michi Strausfeld, recibió una oferta de la firma alemana Diogenes Verlag para renegociar en España los derechos de Highsmith, cuyas obras habían dado pie a algunas películas y estaba

<sup>8</sup> Peter Owen se caracterizó por sus apuestas editoriales arriesgadas, con las que consiguió publicar en su editorial independiente a siete ganadores del Premio Nobel.

<sup>9</sup> Esta edición además contó con la introducción que ya encabezaba la edición de la colección “Clásicos modernos” de la editorial Virago.

siendo objeto de deseo para un relanzamiento editorial internacional: “el paquete Highsmith”. Tras tanteos con varias editoriales, finalmente Anagrama hizo la mayor apuesta y contrató de golpe bastantes títulos, mientras que Alianza y Alfaguara se quedaron con otros “menores” de la extensa obra de la autora.

*El amigo americano*, tres ediciones, 13.000 ejemplares; *Tras los pasos de Ripley*, dos ediciones, 9000 ejemplares; *A pleno sol*, cinco ediciones, 20.000 ejemplares; *La máscara de Ripley*, tres ediciones, 13.000 ejemplares; *Extraños en un tren*, tres ediciones, 13.000 ejemplares; *Crímenes imaginarios*, tres ediciones, 12.000 ejemplares; *El juego del escondite*, dos ediciones, 8.000 ejemplares; *Un juego para los vivos*, dos ediciones, 9.000 ejemplares; *Ese dulce mal*, una edición, 10.000 ejemplares; *Mar de fondo*, una edición, 14.000 ejemplares; *El cuchillo*, una edición de librería, 6.5000 ejemplares, otras en la colección para quioscos de Bruguera Club Misterio, 100.000 ejemplares; *Pequeñas historias de misoginia*, dos ediciones, 9.000 ejemplares; *A merced del viento*, dos ediciones, 18.000 ejemplares. ¡En un par de años, la olvidada Highsmith había colocado en el mercado español casi un cuarto de millón de ejemplares de sus misterios! (citado en Vila-Sanjuán, 2003: 113)

La aparición de Highsmith se inauguró por todo lo alto con la presentación de los cineastas Fernando Trueba y Óscar Ladoire — que anteriormente la habían entrevistado en su casa de Suiza para *El País* — y el cineasta y escritor Gonzalo Suárez en la librería Visor de Madrid. Los dos primeros títulos publicados por Anagrama, en otoño de 1981, fueron *A pleno sol* y *La máscara de Ripley*, pistoletazos de salida para la aparición de una de las grandes estrellas de la colección, en la primavera de 1982, que fue *El amigo americano*. Se publicarían un total de diecinueve novelas de Patricia Highsmith, que serían decisivas para la implantación de “Panorama de narrativas”.

La otra gran apuesta de la colección fue, en el 1981, las andanzas del sebo y acelerado Ignatius J. Reilly en *La conjura de los necios*, del suicida con gancho John Kennedy Toole. Este llegó a las manos de Herralde a través del catálogo de novedades del Louisiana University Press y, entre los habituales libros sobre jazz o campos de algodón, se anunciaba la única novela publicada por la editorial universitaria: *Confederancy of Dunces* de John Kennedy Toole. En el catálogo se reproducía el texto del prestigioso novelista Walter Percy, que consistiría en el prólogo del libro, y en el que se explicaba cómo, estando en su despacho de la editorial, entró su madre con un cajetín de cuartillas de la novela de su hijo declamando la historia de cómo se suicidó al no conseguir que se la publicasen. Herralde quedó fascinado ante la descripción de Percy del manuscrito y decidió pedir una opción, con la advertencia de que en ese momento otra editorial española también estaba interesada. Herralde estuvo en vilo varias semanas hasta conseguir los derechos de la misma con una modesta primera oferta de 1.000 dólares. La primera edición contó con 4.000 ejemplares y, aunque los primeros meses no fueron tan gloriosos, pronto el libro empezó a agotarse y a generar reediciones, habiendo vendido en un solo año la friolera de 60.000 ejemplares<sup>10</sup>.

El libro, entretanto, en 1981, fue uno de los libros candidatos al Premio PEN Faulkner y figuró en las listas de los más vendidos del *New York Times*, el *Chicago*

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<sup>10</sup> Esta información ha sido proporcionada por Silvia Sesé y Susana Castaño, directora y colaboradora — respectivamente —, de la editorial Anagrama.

*Tribune* y *Los Angeles Times*. Además de haber ganado el prestigioso Pulitzer, convirtiéndose en un *bestseller* en su país y también en Reino Unido. Aunque, en otros países, como en Francia, no tuvo tan buena acogida: allí, pese a ganar el premio al Mejor Libro Extranjero no triunfó: quizás por una traducción demasiado argótica — publicada por Robert Laffont en la colección “Pavillons” —, que *a posteriori* fue solucionada por Christian Bourgeois con la compra de los derechos de bolsillo para su colección “10x18”, con la que logró una gran difusión.

#### 1.4. Esther Tusquets, Lumen y la colección “Palabra en el Tiempo”

Fenómenos equivalentes a los de “Panorama de Narrativas” o “Andanzas” se darían en otras editoriales en forma de ediciones sueltas que formaron parte de colecciones potentes. El caso Lumen, trae a coalición la publicación, en el 1982, de Umberto Eco.

Lumen había sido desde sus inicios la editorial histórica española de Umberto Eco y había publicado casi todos sus libros de ensayo desde los años 60. La fundadora, Esther Tusquets, había oído hablar de Eco a unos jóvenes italianos en la Feria de Frankfurt y, cuando quiso contratarlo, se enteró de que los derechos los tenía Carlos Barral. Este, sin embargo, pasaba por un momento en el que se veía desbordado y decidió cedérselos a Lumen, regalándole así unos buenos *long-sellers*. Esther no confiaba mucho en las ventas — tampoco Carlos Barral debió verlo como el futuro *best seller* que llegaría a ser —, pero *Apocalípticos e integrados* supondría una grata sorpresa (Tusquets, 2005: 113). Las expectativas por parte de los lectores ya eran altas cuando, en el año 1980, se supo que Eco había escrito una novela, *Il nome della rosa*, y que en Italia la editaba a bombo y platillos Bompiani. Hubo ofertas de otros editores españoles aunque el semiólogo, por su parte, insistió a su agente literaria para que el libro lo publicara en España su editor habitual, Esther. Apareció en España en diciembre de 1982, en una edición traducida por Ricardo Pochtar en la colección “Palabra en el Tiempo”, que estaba dirigida por Antonio Vilanova<sup>11</sup>, había sido bautizada con un verso de Antonio Machado, y apostaba por la literatura extranjera, convirtiéndose en una de las más representativas de la editorial. Con ello, *El nombre de la Rosa*, en tan solo una década, llegó a vender el millón de ejemplares.

#### 1.5. Paco Porrúa, Edhasa/Minotauro y la colección “Narrativas Edhasa”

Aunque no todos los *bestsellers* de calidad de esos años fueron novedades. Otros irrumpieron en la escena de forma tardía e inesperada. Es el caso de *Memorias de Adriano* de Marguerite Yourcenar. Esta era considerada la obra cumbre de la autora y un clásico de la literatura contemporánea en lengua francesa: Francia la había publicado ya en el 1951, siendo la Librairie Plon la encargada; en alemán Verlags-

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<sup>11</sup> Filólogo, profesor universitario y crítico literario catalán, cuya labor más reconocida como crítico fueron las reseñas sobre literatura contemporánea en la revista *Destino*, con las que difundió la obra de escritores extranjeros como William Faulkner, Boris Pasternak, Françoise Sagan o Ernst Jünger.

Anstalt en el 1953; la edición inglesa se la había llevado la New English Library en el 1954 y en Italia la publicó, con su encomiable rigor, Einaudi en el 1963. Pero los derechos en español no habían sido contratados hasta el 54 y por Sudamericana, la gran editorial que el catalán Antoni López Llausàs dirigía en Buenos Aires. Aunque este no llega a España hasta que Francisco Porrúa, el editor estrella de Sudamericana, se instaló en Barcelona fundando el sello Minoatur y poniéndose al frente de Edhasa — firma española satélite de Sudamericana — (Castagnet, 2016). Será esta última, con la dirección de Paco, la que desempolvaría la obra magna de Yourcenar, traducida por Julio Cortázar, y conformando la identidad de la colección de “Narrativas Históricas”, que aún hoy sigue siendo uno de los grandes filones de la editorial.

*Memorias de Adriano* se publicó en el año 1982, cuando Yourcenar hacía apenas dos años que acababa de ser investida como primera mujer miembro de la Academia Francesa. Esta era la primera vez que la Académie admitía a una mujer en su seno en sus 345 años de historia, y Yourcenar hizo hincapié en ello al reprochar en su discurso<sup>12</sup> el no haber aceptado antes a mujeres como Madame de Staël, George Sand o Colette. Aún así, la vecindad del suceso no quitó que la autora fuese poco conocida en España, salvo algunas excepciones: como Jorge Herralde, que la leyó “en una edición francesa de bolsillo, en los sesenta, propiedad de Gil de Biedma, y que los amigos nos pasábamos reverencialmente de mano en mano” (Gracia, 2021: 19). También fue el caso de Rafael Conte que, en un artículo de *El País*, ya la saludaba como “uno de los escritores vivos más grandes del mundo de hoy” (Conte, 1982). *Memorias de Adriano*, que era una reflexión sobre el poder narrada en primera persona por el joven Marco Aurelio y, contando con una veta homosexual — al igual que Yourcenar era una reconocida lesbiana, lo que no dejaba de ser un tanto obsceno para la España de los años 80, aún enquistada en costumbres carpetovetónicas y aullando por la liberación de distintas índoles —, fue rescatada por Edhasa a la par

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<sup>12</sup> Este fue publicado en *Le Monde*, gracias a una misiva de Jacques Lesourne. En ella se encontraba el discurso de Marguerite Yourcenar durante su recepción en la Academia Francesa y la respuesta de Jean D’Ormesson (periodista y escritor francés, director de *Le Figaro*). En él, Yourcenar apuntaba: “Señores: En un mundo que cambia tan rápido y tan radicalmente como nunca antes lo había hecho desde sus orígenes lejanos, los trescientos cincuenta años que nos separan de la creación de esta casa por el cardenal Richelieu, constituyen una larga cadena de recuerdos y de costumbres. Errores y omisiones se mezclan aquí con talentos durables y con el genio más resplandeciente; el saber, la imaginación, la vanidad o la gloria, el estilo, el poder, el amor por las ciencias y las letras se visten aquí de fidelidad; el porvenir se nutre de pasado: esto es lo que se llama tradición. Hay sin embargo algo más fuerte que la tradición: la vida y su movimiento. ¿Por qué los héroes de novela pasan su tiempo rebelándose? Por la misma razón que obliga a los grandes hombres a hacer mover la historia. Al esplendor del recuerdo y de la fidelidad responde el ardor del anuncio, de la espera, de la promesa. La historia es una continuidad; es también una impaciencia. Mira tanto hacia el mañana como hacia el ayer. Orientadas tanto hacia el porvenir como hacia el pasado, las tradiciones — así como las mujeres — están hechas a la vez para ser respetadas y sacudidas. Están hechas para que el recuerdo no sea sino el prefacio de la esperanza. Todos conocemos la célebre frase: “La tradición es un progreso que ha tenido éxito”. La tarea más alta de la tradición es la de darle al progreso la gentileza que ella le debe. . . y la de permitir que el progreso surja de la tradición así como la tradición ha surgido del progreso. Imagino que son reflexiones de este orden las que los incitaron a ustedes, señores, a permitirme pronunciar, ante ustedes — sin que el cielo me caiga sobre la cabeza, sin que se caiga esta cúpula, sin que vengan a sacarme de mi asiento las sombras indignadas de aquellos que nos han precedido en este linaje conservador de un patrimonio cultural donde, fieles a la etimología, nuestros padres parece que se entregaron desde siempre y solos a una especie de equivalente masculino paradójico de la partenogénesis — una palabra inaudita y prodigiosamente singular: señora” (D’Ormesson 1981).

que Alfaguara lo hacía con *Opus Nigrum*, otra de las novelas de la sofisticada autora. Esta última, ambientada en la Europa del siglo XVI, en Flandes, narra la historia del médico, filósofo y alquimista Zenón, que convive en un tiempo de transición entre la Edad Media y el Renacimiento.

Aún así, las ventas de la primera fueron, aunque tardías, mucho más sonadas, quizás, por otro famoso lector que acabó catapultándola a la lista de las más vendidas: Felipe González, el joven presidente socialista del gobierno español, confesó en varias ocasiones que *Memorias de Adriano* eran su libro de la mesilla de noche. Así, publicada en el 1982 por Edhasa, *Memorias de Adriano* fue reeditada cuatro veces solo en ese año, vendiéndose la friolera de 30.119 ejemplares<sup>13</sup>.

### 1.6. Michi Strausfeld, Alfaguara y la colección “Literatura Alfaguara”

Uno de los epifenómenos relevantes de los años 80 bien pudo haber sido la aparición en el campo literario del *bestseller* de calidad de literatura infantil. Tras su corta etapa como agente literaria junto a Mercedes Casanovas, la hispanista Michi Strausfeld había acabado en Madrid para hacer realidad su sueño. Esta, cuando había trabajado con Carlos Barral le había propuesto en varias ocasiones lanzar una colección que actualizara el territorio de literatura infantil de calidad, pero al editor le solía desagradar la idea: “Todavía recalaba allí la alemana Michi Strausfeld, también de doble militancia empresarial y empeñada en poner en marcha una imposible división de libros infantiles” (Barral, 2001: 215).

Sin embargo, Jaime Salinas, al que ya había conocido en 1976 por recomendación de Barral y Castellet, pensaba exactamente lo contrario y la invitó a unirse al proyecto Alfaguara y darle alas (Salinas, 2020: 171). Entre ese año y 1989, Michi contrataría a más de 400 títulos para Alfaguara, pasando por Roald Dahl, Sempé o Maurice Sendak. Pero fue una obra de Michael Ende la que salvó la facturación de Alfaguara durante una buena temporada. Strausfeld ya había contratado los derechos de *Momo*, un librito breve y modesto, cuando sus representantes les ofrecieron su siguiente y más ambiciosa obra, que apareció en Alemania en el 1973, siendo publicada por Thienemann-Esslinger Verlag. Alfaguara apostó por ella y se hizo una edición muy cuidada, con traducción de Miguel Sáenz y respetando las letras y dibujos de Roswitha Quadflieg; apareció en mayo de 1982 con un lanzamiento importante, que vendría ratificado un tiempo más tarde por la aparición de la película inspirada en la obra de Ende.

*Momo* y *La historia interminable* lograron romper los prejuicios todavía existentes en cuanto a la literatura “menor”. Fueron libros leídos por cientos de miles de adultos y auténticos *best* y *long-sellers* (aún hoy); además recibieron críticas entusiastas y constituyeron acontecimientos literarios en España, como en el resto del mundo — ha escrito Strausfeld. Hasta el presente, las ventas de *La historia interminable* en España deben haber superado los 60.000 ejemplares”, añade (Strausfeld, 2001: 102).

<sup>13</sup> Información ofrecida por Esther Lopez, encargada de Derechos de autor de Edhasa.

## 1.7. Conclusiones

Con la épica *Conjura* y el inigualable Ripley, Anagrama, la editorial rabiosamente contestataria y antisistema de los años 70, ingresaba en las listas de los libros más vendidos del INLE del año 1983. Las cubiertas negras de la colección “Andanzas”, de Tusquets, inundaban los escaparates de las librerías. Y la novela histórica pasaba de mano en mano mientras la literatura infantil de Alfaguara perdía el sesgo de edad. Los rebeldes del ayer pasaban a formar parte de las reglas de juego del centro del campo literario y lo que los norteamericanos consideraban *mainstream* estaba arrasando la era socialista del mercado literario español a través del fenómeno conocido como *bestseller* de calidad.

Y es que en los años 80 estaba sucediendo algo muy curioso: se puso de moda ser culto y el mercado editorial español supo consolidarlo a través de su capital simbólico. Los lectores sabían que una cubierta amarilla o negra representaba calidad: un patrimonio impagable, que se mantendría en la mentalidad colectiva y que protegía a los escritores desconocidos inspirando su credibilidad. Además de que algunos de los *bestsellers* de calidad traducidos en estos años constituirían un fenómeno específicamente español de la época, como *Memorias de Adriano*, mientras que otros, como *La insoportable levedad del ser*, con su éxito simultáneo en Europa y EEUU se insertarían en la “inegable internacionalización del espacio literario” (Casanova, 2001), aunque esa ya es otra historia.

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## “I’m painting death”

Ekphrasis and Precarious Inspiration in Louise Erdrich’s  
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### ABSTRACT:

Today, world literature can be understood as including the literatures of the world, especially those that have been underrepresented before. It may also be associated with other arts such as painting and examine intertextual and intermedial relations to the construct of “the canon”. Therefore, in this essay, I examine the role of ekphrasis in Louise Erdrich’s artist novel *Shadow Tag* (2010) with the help of Laura Eidt’s typology for the analysis of ekphrases in literature and film. In the novel, fictional paintings are depicted as well as real works discussed, amongst others those of George Catlin in contrast to Native American Art. Ekphrasis in *Shadow Tag* is closely related to the often-difficult intra-familial relations, namely between painter-protagonist Gil and his wife and muse Irene. Gil’s artwork in general, and specifically his “America” series are connected to the topic of colonialism, as his paintings evoke images of the exploited indigenous (Native American) body as well as to the topic of gender relations. Gil’s attitude towards his work and his muse shifts between attraction and repulsion, thereby fuelling his painting, whereas Irene experiences a growing discontent. The ekphrases are strongly influenced by the respective narrative focaliser, often to such an extent that depiction and depicted cannot be distinguished. This immanent topic of perception is multiplied in Irene’s writing and the narrative construction of the text.

## **RESUMO:**

A literatura-mundo pode ser hoje entendida como incluindo as literaturas do mundo, especialmente as literaturas que têm sido sub-representadas. Pode também estar associada a outras artes, como a pintura, e examinar relações intertextuais e intermediais para a construção do “cânone”. Assim, examino neste ensaio o papel da écfrase no romance *Shadow Tag* (2010), da artista Louise Erdrich, com a ajuda da tipologia de Laura Eidt para a análise das écfrases na literatura e no cinema. Neste romance, são retratadas pinturas fictícias, bem como são discutidas obras reais, tais como, entre outras, as de George Catlin, em contraste com a Arte Nativa Americana. Em *Shadow Tag*, a écfrase está intimamente ligada às frequentemente difíceis relações intra-familiares, nomeadamente entre o pintor protagonista, Gil, e a sua esposa e musa, Irene. As obras de arte de Gil, em geral, e especificamente a sua série “América”, estão ligadas ao tema do colonialismo, uma vez que as suas pinturas evocam imagens do corpo indígena (nativo-americano) explorado, bem como ao tema das relações de género. A atitude de Gil para com a sua obra e a sua musa oscila entre a atracção e a repulsa, alimentando assim a sua pintura, enquanto Irene experiencia um descontentamento crescente. As écfrases são fortemente influenciadas pelo respectivo focalizador narrativo, muitas vezes ao ponto de a representação e o retrato não se poderem distinguir. Este tema imanente da percepção é desenvolvido na escrita de Irene e na construção narrativa do texto.

## **KEYWORDS:**

artist novel; Laura Eidt; muse; painting; postcolonial; relationship

## **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

Laura Eidt; musa; pintura; pós-colonial; relação; romance de artista

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## Introduction

Artist novels (*Künstlerromane*) are not only present in literary history but are also experiencing a kind of renaissance in contemporary literature. They deal with the aspects of being an artist; inspiration and the relationship between artist and muse are often of particular interest, thereby shedding light on gender representations. *Shadow Tag* (2010), written by Native American author Louise Erdrich, stands out in terms of its treatment of the complicated collaboration between fictitious painter Gil and his Native American wife Irene which is mainly represented via ekphrasis of his paintings.

The novel is connected to the concept of world literature as inclusive, intertextual, and challenging the canon in several ways: Its writer as well as its protagonists are Native American, thus offering a differentiated perspective on art and colonial history; representing several arts (writing and painting) and referring to the tradition of ekphrasis, *Shadow Tag* is intermedial, while at the same time intertextually discussing works of the canon of Western art and enlarging the (literary) canon itself.

The novel seems particularly suitable for the analysis of ekphrasis, since in addition to the high occurrence of ekphrasis and its close connection to the lives of the protagonists, there is also a contrasting and interaction of the fictional works — so-called *notional* (the term was first mentioned by John Hollander; Cranston, 2011: 212, 217; Heffernan, 2015: 43) or imaginary ekphrasis — with real works of art history. In *Shadow Tag*, Gil's artistic work is predominantly contrasted with the work of colonial artist George Catlin.

Therefore, the focus of this study will be a closer examination of ekphrasis in the novel. In the preceding theoretical section, I will present the analytical approach Laura Eidt developed in her dissertation *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* (Eidt, 2008), which is very suitable for this evaluation, and which concentrates on the description and differentiation of four categories of ekphrasis. The analysis of selected ekphrases in the novel will be embedded in its context and concentrate on artistic inspiration. Besides these close readings, I will also look at possible structural and qualitative similarities and differences between notional and real ekphrases.

### 1. More than *ut pictura poesis*: Eidt's typology

Ekphrasis as a literary form has a long tradition and significant representatives (Wagner, 2013: 163). However, until now, theory has largely refrained from specifying the forms or types of ekphrasis. Eidt's aim is to develop an applicable model for analysis of all kinds of ekphrasis in the media and genres of "poetry, novel, drama, and film" (Eidt, 2008: 44). She argues for the creation of her own typology because "[a] definitive systematic model for distinguishing various kinds of ekphrasis is still lacking in the critical literature, although a few scholars have made some first steps in that direction" (38).

Eidt draws on these existing approaches after analysing and criticising them in detail (38–44). Authors discussed include Gisbert Kranz, Tamar Yacobi, Marianne

Torgovnick, Valerie Robillard, Donna L. Poulton and Heinrich Plett; some of these concepts include intermedial or transmedia aspects. Eidt gives many examples to her explanations, mainly from artist novels and films, but also films by Jean-Luc Godard such as *À bout de souffle*, in which art is not the (main) theme of the work.

Eidt’s model is composed of four types of ekphrasis, which embody “increasing degrees of complexity” (45). More precisely, she writes that: “[...] on the whole, the categories are qualitative more than quantitative, that is, they account more for degrees and kinds of involvement with or of the visual arts in the text or film, rather than for the amount of time a picture is shown or discussed” (45).

She also wants to ensure that the categories are applied to parts of a work and not a single category to a whole text or film, since several types can be found in different places within a single work (45); this idea corresponds well with the approach intended here. Eidt not only thinks it is possible to identify specific functions of a type in a certain context, but also — from a comparatist perspective — to compare these functions in different media or genres (45).

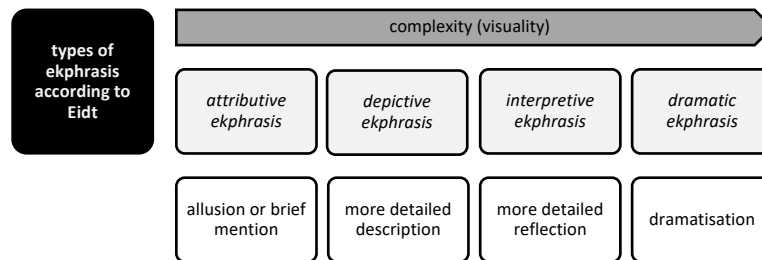
*Attributive ekphrasis* is the simplest level of ekphrasis and refers to a “verbal allusion” or brief mention of one or more works of art in a descriptive or dialogical passage of a text or film without elaborate explanation (46). The works can also serve as “background images or narrative device” (46) and can assume the form of a more general reference to a style or genre (47).

*Depictive ekphrasis* denotes a more detailed discussion, description of or reflection on images than the first type (47), which includes naming and describing “details” or individual “aspects” of the artwork (47), which comes closest to the widespread definition of ekphrasis as ‘verbal representation of visual representation’ (48). Functionally, it takes a “central role for the plot” or the “characterization” of a personage (48). Sometimes, there may be “interference” (a term borrowed from Heinrich Plett), an “intentional conflict between the reception of the original painting [...], and the quotation of the painting and its reception” (50). Often, the depiction is followed by interpretive passages as in the next type (50); i.e., a combination of *depictive* and *interpretive* ekphrasis occurs.

*Interpretive ekphrasis* comprises either the “verbal reflection” on a picture or “a visual-verbal dramatization of it in a *mise-en-scène tableau vivant*” (50). Here, too, the reproduction of details is important, but with a higher “degree of transformation” (50). The reflections often “go beyond its depicted theme” (51); they may be set in connection with the theme of the whole text/film or with its leitmotifs. In a literary text, the description of a scene that corresponds to that of a real painting and thus represents an implicit reference for the reader (“verbal dramatization”) also falls into this category (54). Furthermore, “a higher degree” of “self-reflexivity” in relation to the medium is frequent (56).

*Dramatic ekphrasis* is the “most visual” type, i.e., it “has a high degree of *enargeia*”, that is, it has a higher capability to generate images in the recipients’ minds (56). At the same time, it is a special type: images are staged and brought to life and thus are “even more” prone to “self-reflexivity” than in *interpretive ekphrasis* (56). Entire images or “significant details” are “represented” (56), or else the picture frame is transgressed/broken, analogous to the fourth wall of drama, by pictorial elements or characters, which may also appear in a commentary (57). The type occurs at a

“central” point of the work and over a longer narrative time (57) and exhibits an (even) higher “degree of transformation and additional meaning” (57). In this case, strong “interference” of reception is possible, in that a great discrepancy is created between the “original” reception and “context” of an image and the intended reception within the text (57). This form is only “[r]ecognizable as ekphrasis” to connoisseurs of a work (63), since the original work is not necessarily presented in its original form (e.g., as a painting).



## 2. Ekphrasis and inspiration in *Shadow Tag*

In Louise Erdrich’s novel (Erdrich, 2011),<sup>1</sup> the majority of the ekphrases are *notional* and relate to Gil’s artwork; there are also real ekphrases of paintings by artist George Catlin, who primarily portrayed Native Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, anecdotes from volumes of Catlin’s letters, which are read by the female muse character Irene and her daughter Riel as well as by Gil, are made the topic of discussion. In the following sections, the ekphrases will be examined separately and later brought together for comparison.

It can be said in advance that *Shadow Tag* has a quite complex narrative construction, which seems to be a recurring approach of Erdrich’s (Boesenberg, 2010: 213 about *Bingo Palace*; Morrison, 2018: 52; Noori, 2010: 92): there are first (*homodiegetic*) and third person (*heterodiegetic*) narratives; moreover, different text forms can be identified. These include two narrative threads concerning a secret blue diary and a “Red Diary” kept by Irene, presumably for the purpose of manipulating her husband (also Hudson, 2013: 17; Noori, 2010: 94); both are told in first person. The third-person narrative, with various characters as *focalisers*, includes mainly Gil’s and Irene’s perspectives, as well as their daughter Riel’s. A plot twist at the end of the novel adds to the complication of events: it reveals the entire narrative to be Riel’s master’s thesis as a creative writer, who, referring to the various source material, appeals to the alleged “gift of omniscience” (Erdrich, 2011: 251) she acquired after the death of her parents.

Overall, the novel shows an increase in drama, which is explicitly reflected in the structural design, consisting of five parts that become gradually shorter and more dramatic, plus a kind of epilogue titled “Riel”, which suggests a reference to the structure of a drama and thus has an additional self-conscious effect. Scott

<sup>1</sup> The results presented here partly stem from my original research for an unpublished paper for a seminar about artist-muse-relationships held by Dr. Claudia Schmitt at Saarland University in 2016.

Morrison states that “[T]his meta-narrative style [...] imitates Native American storytelling” (2018: 52).

Therefore, when analysing any text passages, it is important to keep an eye not only on the character who is supposedly narrating/focalising them, but also on this “meta-narratrice” Riel, and even to consider the events recounted from her point of view under the aspect of unreliable narration.

## 2.1 Irene, Gil, and the “America” series

### 2.1.1 The “America” series, (mainly) as viewed by the painter

The first mention of an Irene portrait occurs early in the novel, when Gil is working on it (Erdrich, 2011: 5). A little later, Gil’s work is described as following:

Irene America was over a decade his junior and had been the subject of his paintings in all of her incarnations—thin and virginal, a girl, then womanly, pregnant, naked, demurely posed or frankly pornographic. He’d named each portrait after her. *America 1. America 2. America 3. America 4* had just sold in six figures. If only he’d kept some of the earliest, the best portraits. They were selling for more. The series was becoming famous, or was already famous. Before Irene, he’d painted landscapes, reservation scenes that reminded people of Hopper. He’d been called a Native Edward Hopper—irritating. (8)

In this quotation, we get a first overview not only of the artist’s “*America*” series, but also of his renown and the financial profitability of his works, which seems to be steadily increasing and is important to him.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Irene’s great importance becomes clear, as she apparently triggered the turn to portraiture. The mention of Hopper, in the manner of *attributive ekphrasis*, creates an image of Gil’s earlier style, while the summary of Irene’s various modes of representation, although also evaluative, which is characteristic of *interpretive ekphrasis*, is rather sketchy and therefore cannot have an immediate visual stimulating effect, as would be expected of this type.

Nevertheless, the ekphrasis hints at the question of Irene’s often drastic portrayal. The novel’s defining theme of the complicated relationship and its possible (quite ambivalent) effects on Gil’s art are also illustrated by these thoughts attributed to Gil: “But now he was losing confidence and control. His paintings were hiding from him because Irene was hiding something” 9). Gil “arranges her with no thought of anything other than the portrait, his portrayal of her life. He never asks, ‘How would you like to be painted?’” (Noori, 2010: 93).

Morrison, who reads the novel in the light of Frantz Fanon’s three stages of “the evolution of national cultural identity” (Morrison, 2018: 48) in (post-)colonial contexts, links Gil to “the colonist archetype” (49), deriving his wealth from the portraiture, “the exploitation of his wife” (49).

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<sup>2</sup> Later, there are further references to the financial aspect of Gil’s art (e.g., Erdrich, 2011: 98, when he wants to sell some paintings at the birthday party for his wife).

The following quotation represents a crucial passage within the text, specifically for understanding the relationship and Gil's art — albeit, of course, with the caveat of unreliable narration:

Once upon a time she had been eager to sit for him. There had been a soft electric quality, a constantly changing force field, between them while he painted. Gil had given his entire attention to *her youth* first, but after that he *devotedly* painted *the effect of experience on flesh*. The imprint of his own mouth on Irene's mouth. *Age, time*. Snow slipping off a tree limb until it crashed whitely down. Irene's *weary softness* after giving birth. Her breasts, hot with fever as her milk came in, swollen to a gorgeous size and so sensitive that her milk let down at the lightest touch. She'd nursed in his studio, naked, with pillows to prop the baby, and he'd have two paintings going, one for each side as she changed. That was *happiness*. After the babies became toddlers, then small children, he painted her body as it drew back into itself and toughened. For a time, he'd abandoned her and painted other subjects. But he'd been working on a *mythic level* with the portraits—her portrayals immediately *evoked problems of exploitation, the indigenous body, the devouring momentum of history*. More than that—he'd progressed to a technical level that allowed him an almost *limitless* authority. Abstract expressionism had been the *tyranny* of the day, but he'd stuck defiantly with figurative painting and now his control of old master techniques *looked almost radical*. Irene's distance aroused in Gil a desolate craving. Her secrets drove him to a manic despondency in which he began to do the best work of his life. No matter what *her sin*, he believed he saw her with pure eyes. People called him a *charming hypocrite*, but in his art, he only wanted to *get at the truth*. So how could he blame her body, he thought, painting himself in the picture like Velázquez, like Degas *creeping up on* a prostitute in her bath. If his brush were merely the eyelash of a cat and he had one canvas to work on for the rest of his life, it would be a painting of Irene. (Erdrich, 11–12; my highlighting)

It is already apparent here that the ekphrastic passages in *Shadow Tag* are difficult to separate from statements about Irene and her effect on Gil's art; they alternate and are interwoven. The quotation can be understood as a kind of summary of the artist's work with Irene, in which fragmentarily, individual modes of portraiture are highlighted, although it is hard to identify individual works or even to make a clear distinction between the indication of a *sujet* and Irene's poses or physical states. Common to the representations is not only Irene as subject, but primarily her body, her corporeality, as the centre of all the pictures. Furthermore, there is enigmatic phrasing where it is unclear whether it could be metaphorical, such as the "falling snow" (11).

Using Eidt's system, the more verbal, descriptive, and enumerative passages already mentioned can be identified as *depictive*, while those in italics can be identified as subjective *interpretive ekphrasis*. These primarily address the pictorial statement as well as the general interpretation of Gil's work in postcolonial terms such as exploitation of indigenous people and their bodies. Furthermore, we find some reflections on technical aspects of painting, but they remain abstract; although Gil's mastery of the technique is mentioned, which authority made this evaluation remains obscure: it could be Gil's point of view via (free) indirect discourse, the opinion of the narrative "super-ego" Riel, or also the communication of a widespread public opinion about Gil's art.

On the one hand, the comparisons with famous painters characterise Gil (*depictive ekphrasis*). Similar to Velázquez, who painted himself into the mirror of a



picture in *Las Meninas*, Gil literally seems to be an artist strongly concerned with his self-image. The mention of Degas, who depicted women in apparently unobserved intimate bathing scenes, “creeping up on a prostitute in a bath” (12), at the same time makes Gil seem to equate his model with a prostitute. This enforces Morrison’s notion of the exploiting artist, using the model “as a resource” (2018: 49). On the other hand, the original pictures are evoked without having to give details (*attributive ekphrasis*).<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the last sentence of the quotation — if understood as a genuine statement by Gil — emphasises the closeness between Irene and his art while at the same time pointing out its obsessive character. Interestingly, the conviction conveyed here that the tense relationship with Irene enhances artistic creation is in contradiction to Gil’s previously quoted statement (“Once upon a time” [Erdrich, 2011: 11]); thus, he seems more unpredictable. The language used in this passage shows a predominantly elliptical sentence structure with rather short sentences, which creates the impression of associative thought; the introductory phrase is typical of fairy tales, but also casts doubt on the following idealisation of earlier stages of the artist-muse-relationship and could originate from Riel’s narrative.

### 2.1.2 “America”, as viewed by Irene

In accordance with the complex narrative construction, there are other characters in *Shadow Tag* besides the painter who reflect on the paintings. Of particular interest are statements by Irene. These are often related to reflections on her marriage; for example, in her “Blue Notebook”: “You<sup>4</sup> have painted me for nearly fifteen years. In that time, I have had secrets. I have let them rest like dragonflies on the surface of my body. Once, you even painted an elaborate, transparent, veined wing on my inner thigh and I thought — he sees!” (17).

Following Eidt’s model, such less detailed description can best be called *attributive ekphrasis*; nevertheless, it has great potential to generate imagery, since the combination of a dragonfly wing with a female thigh creates a surreal impression that the reader must inevitably picture. Gil, who symbolically expresses his wife’s inner thoughts in his painting, seems to possess an uncanny intuition. There is a similar strange connection between Gil’s art and her thoughts later on (48–49).

Another example of Irene’s perception of her husband’s works is found in a *heterodiegetic* passage:<sup>5</sup>

a glossy catalogue from Gil’s gallery in Santa Fe: thirty portraits of Irene America, as well as smaller black-and-white images of earlier portraits. There were lists of reproductions of the big pieces. Gil’s beloved doors. She had allowed him to paint her on all

<sup>3</sup> To “see” them, however, the reader must be familiar with the works or be willing to research them.

<sup>4</sup> Irene addresses her husband directly in her secret diary kept in a safe deposit box.

<sup>5</sup> This may be judged as less reliable, whereas Riel at the end describes her mother’s diaries as authentic materials (Erdrich, 2011: 251), which is why they could be accorded a higher degree of credibility. However, it should be noted that due to the uncovering of Riel’s role only at the very end of the novel, to call the narration unreliable is — strictly speaking — only possible in hindsight; there are hardly any explicit textual signals (Tarbet, 2014: 88; except see Erdrich, 2011: 59, 102).

fours, looking beaten once, another time snarling like a dog and bleeding, menstruating. In other paintings she was a goddess, breasts tipped with golden fire. Or a creature from the Eden of this continent, covered with moss and leaves. He'd done a series of landscapes, huge canvases vast with light, swimming Albert Bierstadt or Hudson School replicas, in which she appeared raped, dismembered, dying of smallpox in graphic medical detail. She had appeared under sheaves of radiance, or emerging from the clay of rough ravines. [...] *Some were starkly sexual, stirringly tender. Others were such cruel portrayals that her eyes smarted and her cheeks burned as if she'd been slapped. She had a gloating, cavernous, hungry beauty in some. On others she was a guileful thing, greedy or possessed of a devious sweetness that she found hateful.* Her stomach turned over. (30–31; my highlighting)

Here, as before, we find various ways of depicting Irene that cannot be assigned to individual images and seem to merge into one another; the enumerations and plural form enforce this impression. The passage can be roughly divided into a *depictive* part, which is characterised by the description of the portrayals, and a part with *interpretive ekphrasis*, where Irene's personal evaluations predominate. The allusions to Albert Bierstadt and the Hudson River School can be understood as additional *attributive ekphrases*, providing a "background" for the reader's imagination.

Irene again emerges as the focal point of all the paintings; common themes are her physicality, sometimes drastic, and the problem of the exploitation of the indigenous population. According to Morrison, Irene "allows it [these violent depictions] because of her dependence on Gil for financial, social, and familial stability" (2018: 50). At times, the description is reminiscent of paintings by Frida Kahlo who also showed the maimed female body, but in an act of self-empowerment. Irene's perception is primarily characterised by rejection and disgust, which even expresses itself in a physical reaction that surprises her (Erdrich, 2011: 31). It is also significant that she only allows herself a closer look at the catalogue after her husband's breach of trust ("reading her diary [...], and all the rules were broken" [31]). By writing her diaries, Irene tries to regain power (Morrison, 2018: 52), but, as Hudson argues, "she and Gil are both caught up in the story she has created" (2013: 19). Finally, it will be Riel who, symbolising the "hybridized generation" (Morrison, 2018: 49), truly 'writes back', "takes control of the story and escapes its power" (Hudson, 2013: 37).

The extent to which Irene struggles with her portraits — then "mounts her resistance with her two diaries" (Morrison, 2018: 50) — is illustrated by statements such as:

Her name was now a cipher joined to simulacra. And the portraits were everywhere. By remaining still, in one position or another, for her husband, she had released a double into the world. It was impossible, now, to withdraw that reflection. Gil owned it. He had stepped on her shadow. (Erdrich, 2011: 39)

The indigenous belief in the shadow's significance is addressed several times in the novel (see also Erdrich, 2011: 40 and the chapter about Catlin; Noori, 2010: 91), but furthermore, on a more abstract level, it is transferred to the couple's marriage, and Irene's posing for her husband is questioned.

Together with her half-sister May (a painter), Irene comments ironically on Gil's often sexually exploitative depictions (Erdrich, 2011: 69), but at the same time

hopes that May understands “that Irene was not the image — either heroic or degraded — that her husband painted” (75), she does not want to be the “double” (39). Elsewhere, she describes herself to a gallery visitor as “[f]ast food” for Gil (91), having found her depictions shameful to older Native American viewers (90). Since looking at the catalogue, she is aware that she is seen as “utterly exposed, through Gil’s eyes” (90) by everyone; so, the significance of the male gaze on the female body is another important aspect in the novel.

## 2.2 The “snake” paintings

The ambivalent effect of the relationship on Gil’s art is also evident when an argument with Irene and the words “*snake, poison*” (23) trigger a concrete idea for a painting in him (22–24), the creation of which is discussed several times in the further course of the novel. Gil’s initial thoughts, after he has imagined the picture-to-be “until it became definite and filled his mind” (24), are as follows: “The snake, the poison, the hatred. He was thinking those things. Gil’s hatred was a useful fuel, it cinched his focus and brought clarity. Where was the truth? The panel was an open question” (24). Here, hatred of Irene seems to be the drive of his artwork; a little later, he generalizes the subject to a misogynic stereotype: “the lurching woman, the fallen woman, the woman he was picking up and setting on her feet, the woman falling again. All of this was in the figure of Irene” (25).

Later, the painting process is taken up again and linked to reflections on the relationship:

Gil was working out the paintings, the colours, the emotion, and as he did he was happy. He did not feel alone when he was working. Even when things weren’t going well otherwise, he could paint. It didn’t even matter if Irene was angry. In fact, it was better. When they were happy, when he could count on her quotidian devotion, the paintings seemed to veer into insipidity. He had to wrestle with contentment. As she moved away from him emotionally, the paintings grew fiercer. They came alive with longing. He painted his pain, her elusiveness, his grasping clutch, her rejection, his bitter hope, her sullen rage into the pictures. He’d become aware that the worse things were between them, the better his work came out. It did not yet occur to him to wonder whether his suspicions about Irene were also a method of pushing her away from him, so that he could feel her absence, and in turn feel an aching desire out of which he could make his art. (81)

This quotation seems at first to be a rendering of Gil’s thoughts about his work and its relationship to Irene, whereby once again the notion of inverse proportionality prevails. There are many interpretative phrases containing the emotions and statements the artist wants to convey with his work, although their graphic realisation is left out.

On closer inspection, however, at least the last sentence of the quotation cannot be read as a (free) indirect discourse communicating the character’s thoughts. The preceding text signal “It did not yet occur to him to wonder” rather points to a *zero-focalised*, omniscient narrator — to the “meta-narratrice” Riel — and thus not only lets the preceding sentences appear less credible, but rather offers to read them as

explanations Riel has arranged after the fact for her parents' behaviour (also Hudson, 2013: 36). This is a rare shift of narrative focus *within* a passage. As in the whole novel, readers need to reconstruct the relationship between artist and muse on their own.

The same can be said about the other passages describing the aforementioned “snake” painting. When Gil believes that the serious complications in their relationship, which include Irene’s manipulations concerning the paternity of their three children, have made him progress, Irene seems taken with the work: “he could see in her face she was touched by the intolerable longing in her portrait, and something else. It is masterful, she said at last. One of your best” (Erdrich, 2011: 159). This is followed by what appears to be their relationship in a nutshell: an artistic exploitative act by Gil, who paints Irene in a helpless situation, having fallen asleep drunk (160). At the same time, this appears to be foreshadowing the rape that will presumably take place later (221). Furthermore, this painting anticipates their mutual death, emphasising death: “The picture was disturbing. The energy fueled by his longing seemed to have turned negative. No matter what he tried, how he changed it, Irene looked dead” (98).<sup>6</sup>

As events and their “co-dependence” (Morrison, 2018: 51) escalate, there are fewer and fewer mentions of Gil’s art: a brief viewing of the abovementioned painting by Gil (Erdrich, 2011: 193–194), during which — another foreshadowing — he injures himself, signs it in blood and refers to it as “the last portrait he would paint of her” which would sarcastically “become worth a lot of money, in time” (194); furthermore, the viewing of Gil’s portraits by the eldest son Florian on the internet, followed by an argument with his mother about her lack of resistance against the exploitation (195–197). Then, there is Gil’s lack of understanding for Irene’s concern about the possible effect of the paintings on the children, when he utters the telling words: “No one here gets out alive” (197–198), until Gil finally gives up painting after his breakdown (242).

### 2.3 The “Lucretia”

Prominent within the novel features an ekphrasis that links a real painting — Rembrandt’s *Lucretia* — with a painting of Gil’s and that is at the same time an interpretation of the couple’s life together and foreshadowing of their end, symbolising their “symbiotic” (Morrison, 2018: 51) relationship *in nuce*.

After explaining Gil’s infatuation with the painting as well as the story according to Livy of Lucretia, who stabbed herself out of despair over her forced surrender to a rapist (Erdrich, 2011: 54), it is said:

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<sup>6</sup> Compare when Gil, in a discussion about kitsch, self-referentiality and mirroring, states his main topic as: “I’m painting death” (95). There is another short ekphrasis of the painting, which focuses on the sexual aspect: “In that picture, Irene had turned away; she was hunched over something, hiding it. She was glancing at someone just out of the frame. Her hand was between her legs. She was doglike, he thought, guarding her little bone, her sex. As if he wanted to steal it!” (132). Once again, Gil’s jealousy and the status of the relationship play a decisive role.

Rembrandt painted Lucretia three times. One of the paintings is lost. Another depicts Lucretia just before she plunges the knife into her heart. The Lucretia in Minneapolis has already committed the violence to herself and still clutches the stained knife. Her dressing gown is soaked with blood, the gossamer clings *hauntingly* to her skin, her spirit *dissolves* her features in a muted blaze, *violently alive* even as she drains of life. Gil watched Lucretia's eyes *brimming with transcendent shock*. Her eyes had been filling with tears since 1666. There was *immense tenderness* in her gaze. A sorrow that could shake Gil. Some mornings he sat on the bench and his eyes, too, welled and his vision blurred. He'd often wondered what the Lucretia looked like. Once, he'd painted Irene as Lucretia. In the portrait, Irene also wore a look of *unutterable sadness*. The look of a woman *so deeply shamed, and so in love*, that she *could not bear to live with the stain between herself and her husband*. In the painting, Irene was clothed like the Lucretia, in blood and rust. Her right hand also gripped a cord slender as *the life that was left in her*. But instead of a knife in Irene's other hand, Gil had painted a bottle. (54–55; my highlighting)

This quotation has a very central function in the work: it not only combines a real and a *notional* ekphrasis, which is singular in the novel, but also reveals a parallelism: both ekphrases contain elements of *depictive ekphrasis*, concerning primarily the appearance and position of the women, and of *interpretive ekphrasis* (italicised). The interpretive passages about Rembrandt's painting seem to be attributable to Gil, who is looking at the painting. The transfer of this interpretation to his own depiction of his wife is crucial to the understanding of the relationship. Image and person of Irene overlap, creating ambiguity; Gil seems to have projected his interpretation of the real painting into a wishful imagination about the behaviour of his portrayed wife.

The exchange of the knife for the (wine) bottle in the last sentence, in addition to being a reference to Irene's drinking problem, is a variation of the immediately preceding scene where it was revealed that in all his drawings the youngest son Stoney, who is also artistically gifted, has shown his mother with a wine glass in her hand as if being a part of her body (53).

To sum up, one could say that more than the artist's (or the muse's) perspective can be observed here. Even considering that there is a “meta-narratrice” which causes uncertainty concerning the reliability, in any case, Gil's art is shown from diverse perspectives. His own views about his art and about the influence his relationship has on his artistic inspiration appear contradictory, while Irene's attitude reflects increasing rejection. Their relationship is so closely interwoven with art that it seems impossible to distinguish causes and effects. Thus, ekphrastic passages function to a particular extent as a means of illustrating intra-familial processes and, by alluding to the omnipresent themes of exploitation, corporeality, sexualisation, and death, anticipate the dramatic events when Gil drowns himself and Irene dies following him (247).

#### 2.4 George Catlin and Native Art

The artist whose life and work, along with Gil's, is discussed most extensively in *Shadow Tag* is George Catlin, “the nineteenth-century painter of Native Americana” (7). Irene, history scholar, is writing her dissertation on Catlin. Gil disapproves of Catlin's work, as becomes clear at the beginning:

Perhaps she was suffering from academic frustration? Losing her mind—over George Catlin’s earnest depictions of people who, Catlin absurdly claimed, feared he could take their souls. No. Not with that clumsy brushwork. Gil himself could not bear to look at Catlin’s work. The tragic irony of it offended him. And for Irene, a poor excuse. (7)

Gil, who has difficulties appreciating such art (37–38), here justifies his aversion with the subject and Catlin’s poor painting technique; however, it is also possible that he rejects Catlin’s work because of Irene’s interest in it. Ironically, Gil himself acts similar to Catlin in painting Irene.

The belief of indigenous people alluded to in this quotation that part of their soul is lost through their likeness, is not only arguably held by Irene, but also appears in various anecdotes about Catlin told throughout the novel. The “game” of manipulation between Irene and Gil seems to continue when Irene tells anecdotes she has read in the course of her research in a modified, often more tragic form to Gil, who then rereads them himself to find out that they happened differently; this also is the case with an anecdote about the strange connection between the illness of a young woman called “The Mink” and her portrait painted by Catlin (44–46).<sup>7</sup> Gil then seems to be prompted by his wife’s behaviour to reflect on his art and their relationship (46).

In fact, the majority of mentions of Catlin and his work are not actual ekphrases of his paintings, but rather anecdotes; they illustrate what is happening in Irene and Gil’s family. Riel, who is increasingly enthusiastic about all things American Indian, reads about the painter (60–62). In a conversation, Gil compares himself to Catlin and initially criticises the latter’s paintings as “all alike” (123), only to praise him immediately afterwards in a state of artistic self-doubt (123–124).

One of the only two actual ekphrases of Catlin’s work again takes up the story of “The Mink” and is by far the most extensive. It is told in third person, but without a clearly distinguishable *focaliser* or context:

The story of The Mink, which Irene had falsified, was part of another story, much longer and more complex. In the same year, 1832, Catlin had painted a Dakota chief who possessed considerable force of character. Little Bear was painted in profile, which gave his rival, the dishonorable Sunka, or The Dog, an excuse for hurling at Little Bear a grave insult. The other half of Little Bear, said Sunka, was no good, worthless, shameful. He was but *half a man*. Their fury turned deadly and Little Bear was hit by a gun blast to that very side of his face that Catlin had not depicted. Little Bear died of his dreadful wound, and The Dog was hunted down and slain by warriors faithful to Little Bear. The *strangeness* of the story lies in the *profil perdu*, the lost profile, which both *inspired and predicted the actual loss of the man* and was *for Catlin but an instinctive aesthetic choice based on whim, an artist’s fancy, or boredom perhaps at having made so many similar full-face portraits*. Catlin’s painting aroused suspicion, *caused death*. The tribes Catlin visited were artistic and produced extraordinary objects, including pictorial art. Mahtotohpa, Four Bears, presented George Catlin a buffalo robe upon which the chief had painted the deadly exploits that composed his life story. *The paintings were complex, symbolic, dramatic, exquisite*. They were also one-dimensional and contained no shadows. In addition to so many other European inventions [...] Catlin brought shadows. *Because of the shadows, his paintings had the direct*

<sup>7</sup> In Catlin’s Complete Works, there is one portrait of a Mandan girl with the designation “Mint” (“George Catlin — The Complete Works”).

*force and power of the supernatural, the dream replica, the doppelgänger. It was as if a sudden twin had been created right before the subject. A twin that seemed to live and breathe and follow one with his eyes and yet was motionless.* The paintings were objects of veneration and of fear. Some swore uneasily that those who allowed their portraits to be painted, eyes open, would not lie peacefully after death, as some aspect of their beings would live on, staring out at the world. Others, disturbed that Catlin painted buffalo and took them away with him in his portfolio, tied his actions to the increasing scarcity of the herds upon which their lives depended. *So it was, the images stole their subjects* and, for the rest of the world, became more real, until it *seemed they were the only things left.* (140–141; mainly my highlighting)

The story of Little Bear’s image, together with the mention of other anecdotes, makes up a large part of the quotation, while the actual ekphrastic portions are comparatively small. Judging from the degree of its detail, they would have to be called *attributive ekphrasis*. Alongside the framing story, however, there are larger interpretive passages (italicised) that refer not only to Catlin’s possible motivation for choosing the profile, but — concerning his paintings in a more general way — also relate to the strange connection between tragic events and Catlin’s previous pictorial representation. Moreover, it is no coincidence that these again recall the connection between Irene and Gil’s paintings; together, they form a context of meaning where Catlin’s paintings and the associated events mirror the narrative events.

In addition, there is another ekphrasis: the mention, description and evaluation of a painted buffalo cloak, i.e., Native American art, is contrasted with Catlin’s way of painting. The absence of shadows is emphasised, recalling the belief in their magical function and the doppelgänger motif also important for Irene. Within the quotation, the question of the *focaliser* remains diffuse: while the interpretative phrases at the beginning can be understood as a neutral rendering of various opinions, the last statements create the impression of belonging to a specific and even higher narrative authority. Linguistically, this passage also has an elliptical sentence structure with partly associative thought; in the *interpretive ekphrasis* parts, an accumulation of associative enumerations of adjectives or noun groups can be observed.

In contrast, the second ekphrasis of Catlin artwork is clearly assigned to the character Riel. In the context of her reading activities on Native American culture, it states:

She spoke the names of the people whose portraits appeared in Catlin’s exhibitions: The Constant Walker, Little Stabbing Chief, Whirling Thunder, Swimmer, Soup, Fire, Sturgeon Head, Wild Sage, Rotten Foot, Blue Medicine, No Heart, The Steep Wind, The Mink, Long Finger Nails, Broken Pot, Mint, Double Walker, Black Drink. (156)

This is merely a list of the names of the portrayed persons without more precise information about the appearance of the pictures, i.e., *attributive ekphrasis*. However, since it can be assumed that some of the names are aptronyms (telling names), even the mere mention can create mental images, as is presumably the case with Riel. By speaking their names, she might try reinstating their power.

In summary, Catlin’s work, although the subject of Irene’s dissertation, features significantly less prominent than Gil’s. Its main function is presumably to

provide a contrast to Gil's art and at the same time reflect diegetic events, especially concerning Native American identity by means of the eponymous shadow motif.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the occurrence of real and *notional* ekphrasis in the artist novel *Shadow Tag* with special focus on the process of artistic inspiration. To this end, the theory of ekphrasis in literature and film developed by Laura Eidt in her dissertation was first summarised in such a way that it could be applied to the analysis of the text. Central elements of her theory are the four types of ekphrasis: *attributive*, *depictive*, *interpretive* and *dramatic ekphrasis*, which represent increases in the degree of detail, visuality and the extent of individual interpretation.

In *Shadow Tag*, the complex narrative situation requires to bear Riel in mind, who at the end of the novel is unmasked as the “meta-narratrice”. Nevertheless, several characters can be identified in the novel whose perspective is at least suggested in ekphrases. The focus of the analysis was on the artist protagonist Gil and his wife and muse Irene.

When examining the depiction of Gil's fictional works, it became apparent that most of them are initially described and interpreted only in the plural as part of the “America” series named after Irene, from both Gil's and Irene's point of view. Here, combinations of *depictive* and *interpretive ekphrasis* predominate and often concentrate on showing the way in which Irene is represented. While Gil seems torn between trust and mistrust in his wife and paradoxically experiences positive and negative effects on his art in both, an increasing aversion to her often exploitative images can be observed in the passages dealing with Irene's perception, which is also connected to the shadow/doppelgänger motif also alluded to in the title.

Two of Gil's paintings, which he paints during the recounted time, are presented in greater detail. The ekphrases are almost exclusively from his point of view. They symbolise the escalation of the relationship in that they are increasingly enriched with death metaphors.

The works of George Catlin, on whom the couple's opinions diverge, have a contrasting function: Irene writes her dissertation on him, whereas Gil rejects his work on principle. Most of the passages concerning Catlin, however, turn out to be anecdotes rather than ekphrases. In the passages that are actually ekphrastic, we find a connection between the depicted and subjective interpretations concerning the belief in doubles; thus, they primarily mirror the situation of the marriage and allow deeper reflection. A similar function can be observed in the combination of real and *notional* ekphrasis of Rembrandt's *Lucretia*, which represents the relationship in a nutshell.

The ekphrastic passages are characterised by associative thought and elliptical sentence structure. In accordance with the tense relationship, the interpretations of the pictures show an increase in drama. Irene is so much at the centre of Gil's artwork that in the ekphrases, it is often impossible to distinguish between the real and the depicted Irene, picture and interpretation, epitomising the blurring of original



and “double”. According to Eidt, this could even be termed *dramatic ekphrasis*, especially since the narrative *focaliser* often is hard to determine.

As a result, it can be said that the novel shows an accumulation of ekphrases which are closely connected to the relationship of artist and muse. Eidt’s categories allow an exact description. Since often many paintings are described together, *visuality* is a label worthy of discussion; in any case, it depends on individual mental imagery and knowledge of canon. Basically, the paper shows that ekphrasis is present even in contemporary literature as well as it contributes in many — often subtle — ways to illustrating the novel’s overall themes and motifs, especially when post-colonial and gender issues are thus closely intertwined.

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## Flaubert's Landscapes

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**KEYWORDS:**

body; Gustave Flaubert; landscape; Realism; Romanticism

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

corpo; Gustave Flaubert; paisagem; Realismo; Romantismo

At best, this short essay will be a partial answer to a very specific question. The question is what we want to identify as the typical components of that form of experiencing nature that we call “romantic” — and whether such a “romantic” vision of nature was concomitant with some historically specific implications in the way of viewing the human body. Part of why this question promises to be interesting is because finding an answer would enable us to discuss, among other things, whether our contemporary view of nature still relies on a legacy of romantic presuppositions.

Now, my strategy of coming up with an answer to this specific question will be very partial because I shall concentrate, in the first place, on the texts of just one literary author, i.e. on the work of Gustave Flaubert — Gustave Flaubert who, secondly, has never been subsumed under the historiographical chapter heading of “Romanticism” (but has his undisputed status as one of the great representatives of 19th century “literary Realism”). In addition — as if to make things artificially complicated — I will start my argument by relating early 19th century literary perspectives on landscape and on the human body to some historically specific structures within contemporary epistemology, i.e. to the most typical procedures of 19th century knowledge production and knowledge distribution. For only within this context will it become plausible why I associate Flaubert’s texts with the concept of “Romanticism”.

I will start, then, by describing how 19th century literary Realism — and how, within this context, Gustave Flaubert’s way of writing — were in a historically specific relationship to contemporary epistemology. This will enable us, as a second step, to formulate a tentative thesis about how Flaubert’s “realistic” views of landscape and of the human body can also be seen as a “romantic” attitude. The third and main part of my essay will present a detailed analysis of some landscape descriptions in Flaubert’s four novels and in his *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, leading to a small typology of pertinent textual procedures. This typology will finally be the basis for the development of a second and more complex description of what we may understand as a specifically romantic perspective on literary landscape and on literary evocations of the human body.

## 1.

We should never speak of “literary realism” (nor of any other type of “realism”) outside a historically specific frame of reference. For, quite inevitably, every existing form of human expression has to be “realistic” inasmuch as it cannot escape those particular epistemological structures through which each cultural context shapes its own reality. Seen from this angle, the 12th century Christian epic was as “realistic” as the 19th century novel or as the Renaissance sonnet. If we continue to have the impression, even today, that a certain type of 19th century novel is especially close to our own conception of reality, such an effect is due to a very specific historical configuration, a configuration that still produces an impression of affinity between our present epistemological environment and some genres of 19th century literature, a configuration finally that may well cease to produce the same effect for readers of future ages. More specifically: the type of writing that we call “19th century Realism”

emerged from a range of reactions with which literary authors responded to a profound epistemological crisis that had occurred in the first quarter of their century — and that we have not yet completely left behind ourselves. I am referring here to the very crisis that Michel Foucault so famously described as “*crise de la représentation*” — and that we may also call, with a concept invented by Niklas Luhmann which Luhmann himself never cared to historicize, the “crisis of (the emergence of) the second order observer”. Seen from a historical angle, the emergence of the second order observer during the first decades of the 19th century turned into a problematization of the figure of the first order observer with whose institutionalization Western intellectual Modernity has started four or five centuries earlier. As a first order observer, man had thought of himself, since the age of the Renaissance, as eccentric vis-à-vis the world of objects — whereas, during the Middle Ages, he had conceived of himself as being part of the world as a divine creation. Secondly, the first order observer thought of himself as a purely spiritual (since the 17th century: as a purely “Cartesian”) entity whose task it was to produce knowledge by interpreting the world of objects from a position of distance. Interpretation was thought to be the movement of finding a meaning “beyond” or “beneath” the purely material surface of things. In this configuration of self-reference, then, knowledge production appeared to be an exclusively human achievement — which marked a contrast in comparison to the reliance of medieval culture on divine revelation. Finally, the results of infinite acts of interpretation were supposed to accumulate in (ever more complex) “world pictures” that would become the basis for all future-oriented planning and acting in human societies.

For reasons about which we can only speculate on a level of abstraction that is too high for any historical illustration, this figure of the early modern world observer turned obsessively self-reflexive from the first decades of the 19th century on. The second order observer is thus a first order observer condemned to observe himself in the very act of observation. This self-reflexive turn had two major consequences. A second order observer could not fail to discover, in the first place, that the knowledge (i.e. the elements of world-representation) that he was producing depended, necessarily, on his perspective of observation, that is on his previously accumulated knowledge and on the specific position from which he was observing. This meant that, for each object of reference, there were as many possible representations as there were potential points of view. It was then easy to understand that, ultimately, the number of possible representations for each object of reference had to be infinite — which consequence would undermine, from the side of representation, the assumption of a coherent and stable object of reference. The second consequence coming from the emergence of the second order observer was the insight that there was no truly disembodied observer and that, therefore, the observer’s world appropriation, inevitably, had to be a mixed operation between experience (world appropriation through concepts) and perception (world-appropriation through the senses). What remained unclear, however, was how experience and perception should ever become mutually compatible.

We all know that 19th century philosophy and science found an exuberantly successful solution to the first of these two problems, i.e. the problem of multiple representation. We may characterize this solution as the substitution of a mirror-

like principle of representation through a narration-based principle of representation. If, until the end of the 18th century, phenomena had been described by one-dimensional definitions or images (think of the entries and of the *Planches* in d’Alembert’s and Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*), 19th century Philosophy of History and contemporary Evolutionism switched to narrative discourses as devices of identification. What gave this switch the status of a solution must have been the capacity of those narrative discourses to absorb the existing multiple representations of individual objects of reference, which had been the first problem produced by the second order observer. The second problem stemming from the emergence of the second order observer, however, the problem regarding the compatibility between experience and perception, never found a convincing solution — which of course made it only more visible in its historical context, not the least due to endless attempts at finding a satisfying response.<sup>1</sup>

Far beyond the confines of academic philosophy, the crisis of the second order observer was broadly experienced as a loss of primary trust in “Reality” as a “ground” for cognition and for existence at large, within 19th century western societies. This is why all those forms of literature and of art that reacted to the epistemological challenge became easily associated with a corresponding function of reassurance — and this is also the reason that makes it historically legitimate to use the name of literary “Realism” for all those 19th century narratives that tried to react to the different problems produced by the second order observer<sup>2</sup>. Of course there were many different discursive modalities referring to the epistemological challenge. They ranged — just to focus on the example of French literature — from Balzac’s complex attempts at keeping alive the belief in a kind of cosmological world — and knowledge order (see Gumbrecht and Muller, 1980), via Stendhal’s struggles with the principle of world-representation and his growing frustration about it (see Gumbrecht 2000), to Gustave Flaubert’s apparent refusal to mediate between different, intrinsically incoherent and even contradicting perspectives of world experience. What characterizes Flaubert’s texts within 19th century literary Realism are indeed the radical absence of an auctorial narrator, the blunt juxtaposition of narrative perspectives and of elements of knowledge that do not converge or complement each other and, altogether, the apparent calm — or should one go so far to say: the contemptuousness? — with which he appeared to handle the explosion of multiple representations.

## 2.

Now, is it possible to cast into a single (and certainly complex) concept what we normally appreciate (without the need of reflecting too much about it) as a “romantic” view of landscape, and how could such a concept — if we manage to find one at all — relate to the historical emergence of the second order observer? Perhaps we

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the “second observer crisis”, see chapter (II) of my forthcoming book *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> There is reason to insist that the phrase “19th century Realism” (“Realism” with capital “R” indeed!) has the status of a name because it refers to an individual phenomenon. In contrast, I think literary history and art history should refrain from using the word “realism” as a typological concept.

may simply say that a romantic view of landscape *already* includes all the consequences that we attribute, at least today, to the emergence of the second order observer — but that it does *not yet* presuppose the experience of these consequences as a problem, in any epistemological or even a practical sense. In other words: a romantic view of landscape would certainly have allowed for different observers to have different “pictures” of the same mountains and of the same rivers, and it would also have assumed that these “pictures” were constituted by concepts as much as by the bodily senses — without this pluralization of individual “pictures” or this interference of concepts with sensual perceptions raising any concerns.

On the contrary, Romanticism tended to celebrate as an enrichment what 19th century epistemology would later identify as a challenge — if not as a scandal. The aspect in particular that the human body would become, once again, a dimension of resonance for — and thereby part of — man’s physical environment seems to have fostered, in the beginning, a new feeling of “romantic” familiarity and closeness vis-à-vis the world. There are multiple examples that can illustrate our formula of the romantic view of landscape and of the body as a second order observer view — before an awareness of its intrinsic epistemological problems began to prevail. No other European author of the early 19th century was as fond as Friedrich Schlegel of observing himself in the world-observing act of writing and of pushing such second order observation to ever higher levels of potentially endless self-reflexivity and self-complexification. Although self-observation also was the central precondition and at the same time the most operative motif for the philosophy of German Idealism, we associate the intense enthusiasm with which Schlegel explored this new dimension of thought as the distinctively romantic flavor of his intellectual style. Or think of the landscape paintings by Caspar David Friedrich. Many of them show a human figure in the foreground — and these figures appear, quite unambiguously, as observers of the thematized landscape. But the perspectives that we can reconstruct, on the one hand, as the perspective of the painter and, on the other hand, the perspectives of the represented observers do not enter yet into any tension or conflict. On the contrary, Friedrich seems to simply welcome such increased complexity in the spatial dimension of his paintings, without yet finding any new problems of world construction in them.

The boldest — and certainly also the most frequently noted — move in this early stage of the historical transition towards the second order observer was a new relation to the material world that French poets would refer to with the concept of “*correspondance*”. It pointed to the impression that there was a possibility for the individual to “read” a landscape as if it were the “expression” of the feelings that were prevailing in his or in her soul at a given moment. This new relationship between the landscape and the soul would not only imply the possibility, for the landscape, to be described in concepts similar to those that had traditionally captured the states of the human psyche (only from now on, a landscape could be seen as “melancholic” or as “serene”); it also enabled the landscape to shape specific moments of the individual soul, in the sense that the impression of a landscape could produce, for example, states of “solemnity” or of “jubilation” in the soul. For this new plasticity in the interplay between the human psyche and the spatial environment of the human body, the German language invented the concept of “*Landschafts-Stimmung*”.



It might be best translated as “landscape resonance” (after all, “*Stimmung*” primarily refers to an impression of sound), “landscape resonance” in the double meaning of the landscape resonating with the individual psyche and the individual psyche being adaptable to the impressions of different types of landscape. Finally, romantic aesthetics transformed into the promise of synaesthesia the new awareness of a double-leveledness between concepts and the bodily senses (and of the plurality of the different bodily senses) in the appropriation of the physical environment. Far yet from obsessively insisting on the incompatibility between a world appropriation through concepts and a world appropriation through the senses, romantic poetry was still confident that those different modes in the relation between the psyche and the physical world could be brought together in synaesthesia as an overarching feeling of sensual complementarity and harmony.

### 3.

If we now turn to some of Gustave Flaubert’s landscape descriptions, with the goal of giving more conceptual depth and complexity to our first hypothesis about the literary constitution of romantic landscape, it is necessary to emphasize, once again, that there was probably no other European author in the third quarter of the 19th century who was less “romantic” in his writing than Flaubert. It is no overstatement to say that what gives their specific energy to Flaubert’s great novels was indeed an attitude of irony vis-à-vis some of the central motifs that made up the romantic style of experience. This attitude of irony — in the sense of a distance within repetition — enabled Flaubert to inhabit the romantic style of experience and, by inhabiting it, to reproduce its discourses in the mode of parody. Only an author who was perfectly familiar with the ecstatic expectations towards individual love evoked by so many romantic novels could draw the devastating picture of their potentially life-destroying impact which is in the center of Flaubert’s master novel *Madame Bovary*. Only an intellectual who had lost all illusions about aesthetic education as an existential apprenticeship was able to achieve the ultimate flatness in the description of a “romantic” character which, more than any other feature, characterizes Frédéric Moreau, the hero of *Éducation sentimentale*. In *Salambô*, finally, Flaubert seems to have pushed the discursive modes of irony and parody so far that it became impossible for his readers to distinguish whether his descriptions were the ultimate condemnation of — or the symptom of a secret enthusiasm for — a boundless opulence in the evocation of “purple” (as he himself called them) historical environments. If we trust the “entries” of his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Flaubert’s notebook for the most common commonplaces that were dear to the contemporary French middle class (a manuscript also that had preceded *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as project for a book on the vulgarity of knowing), if we trust the pertinent “entries” of his *Dictionnaire*, then we certainly gain the impression that Flaubert, throughout his career as an author, was as intellectually distant as possible from the conceptual and emotional repertoire of Romanticism.

And yet, even the most devastating critique — especially if it is articulated in the modes of irony and parody — can never completely escape a potential for

ambiguity in view of its object. This is particularly true for the ways in which Flaubert refers to the romantic rediscovery of the human body as a mode of appropriation but also as a part of the physical world. No description of physical detail beats the grotesque horror of the pages dedicated to the clubfoot operation that occupies — with astonishing arithmetic preciseness — the center of *Madame Bovary*. No other scene goes further in the merciless description of the decadence of a formerly glorious body than the sentences that let the reader imagine the heroine's poisoned corpse at the end of the same novel. Likewise, I know of no other more distant and more miserable literary presence of an infant's body than that of Rosanette's and Frédéric's child in *Éducation sentimentale*. For far from all philosophical concepts this child's body illustrates the 19th century vision of a being that is not ready for the struggle of life. In *Salambô*, the corpses of the mercenaries that remain on the battlefield mark the furthest possible distance from the humanitarian ideals and feelings of compassion, whereas some of the scenes in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* belong to the most ridiculous body images that literature has ever produced.

As I mentioned before, there is no detached narrator's "voice" to coordinate all these discourses that Flaubert inhabits and juxtaposes. Wherever he uses some of the stylistic effects that we consider to be "typically romantic," we cannot pinpoint those other devices through which, at the same time, he takes distance from the romantic tone. And yet the impression of such a distance is irrefutably there — thanks probably to the presence, in the same novels, of those descriptions which, instead of being "romantically" sympathetic or expressive, emphasize what is aggressively ugly and grotesque. This may also be the reason why the reader finds the full range of romantic forms in Flaubert's landscape descriptions and enjoys, at the same time, the privilege of a distance that helps him understand how an anti-romantic author can so perfectly write in the different romantic discourses.

The most famous textual instance where the immediacy of a discursive reproduction and the ungraspable effect of distance come together in the picture of a landscape is of course Emma Bovary's daydream of what a honeymoon should be like. It has been endlessly quoted to illustrate the morphology of Flaubert's most famous form-invention, the *discours indirect libre*:

Elle songeait quelquefois que c' étaient là pourtant les plus beaux jours de sa vie, la lune de miel, comme on disait. Pour en goûter la douceur, il eût failu, sans doute, s'en aller vers ces pays à noms sonores où les lendemains de mariage ont de plus suaves paresse! Dans des chaises de poste, sous de stores de soie bleue, on monte au pas des routes escarpées, écoutant la chanson du postillon, qui se répète dans la montagne avec les clochettes des chèvres et le bruit sourd de la cascade. Quand le soleil se couche, on respire au bord des golfes le parfum des citronniers; puis, le soir, sur la terrasse des villas, seuls et les doigts confondus, on regarde les étoiles en faisant des projets. Il lui semblait que certains lieux sur la terre devaient produire du bonheur, comme une plante particulière au sol et qui pousse mal toute autre part. (Flaubert, 1986: 100)

An adequate understanding of this paragraph and we know that such an understanding was not easily available for the first generation of Flaubert's readers — will realize that its words evoke the imagination of a woman addicted to a certain type of romantic novel, but that they do so under the effect of a distancing irony. A similar combination may be at place in the scene of Emma's first excursion on

horseback with Rodolphe, the man who will become her lover after the catastrophic failure of Charles Bovary's clubfoot operation. This passage begins with the portraits of a male and of a female figure that I believe are meant to correspond to Emma's and Rodolphe's idealized (and converging) self-images:

Dès qu'il sentit la terre, le cheval d' Emma prit le galop. Rodolphe galopait à côté d'elle. Par moments ils échangeaient une parole. La figure un peu baissée, la main haute et le bras droit déployé, elle s'abandonnait la cadence du mouvement qui la berçait sur la selle. Au bas de la côte, Rodolphe lâcha les rênes: ils partirent ensemble d'un seul bond; puis, en haut, tout à coup, les chevaux s'arrêtèrent et son grand voile bleu retomba. (Flaubert, 1986: 225)

But the ideal convergence between the self-images of the two future lovers and the rhythm of their joint movement does not extend into the following landscape description. This becomes clear in its very first sentence because it does not establish, as the reader might have expected, a synaesthetic link between the emerging love affair and the *topos* of spring as the season of love — but paints the countryside in the hazy colors of autumn. Instead of turning Emma's physical environment into an expression of her soul, it becomes a complex symbol for the abyss between her dreams and her everyday world. The rhythm of the prose almost abruptly changes from a complex fluidity to *staccato*:

On était aux premiers jours d'octobre. Il y avait du brouillard sur la campagne. Des vapeurs s'allongeaient à l'horizon, contre le contour des collines; et d'autres, se déchirant, montaient, se perdaient. Quelquefois, dans un écartement des nuées, sous un rayon de soleil, on apercevait au loin les toits d'Yonville, avec les jardins au bord de l'eau, les cours, les murs et le clocher de l'église. Emma fermait à demi les paupières pour reconnaître sa maison, et jamais ce pauvre village où elle vivait ne lui avait semblé si petit.

In the central chapter of *Éducation sentimentale*, the chapter about the days that Frédéric Moreau and his lover Rosanette spend at Fontainebleau, while the Revolution of 1848 is about to explode in Paris, Flaubert seems to have pushed to an extreme some of the ironic techniques of writing that he had already played out in *Madame Bovary*. If we feel that Emma Bovary manages to believe in the effects of her self-deception until the final breakdown occurs, the lovers of *Éducation*, in contrast, no longer manage to compensate for the lack of spontaneous feelings in the same fashion, i.e. by projecting into their environment what they believe romantic love should be. Emma's luxurious daydream of the ideal honeymoon landscape has now contracted into a conventional formula that does not even convince the couple who so desires to conjure up a romantic world: "On leur servit un poulet avec les quatre membres étendus, une matelote d'anguilles dans un compotier en terre de pipe, du vin râpeux, du pain trop dur, des couteaux ébréchés. Tout cela augmentait le plaisir, l'illusion. Ils se croyaient presque au milieu d'un voyage, en Italie, dans leur lune de miel" (Flaubert, 2002: 437). As Rosanette has never acquired any historical knowledge, there is nothing she could possibly associate with the castle of Fontainebleau — except for the embarrassing awareness that she should be able to

transform its scenery into historical imagination. All she remembers during a tour of the historical buildings is that she should remember something:

Son mutisme prouvait clairement que [Rosanette] ne savait rien, ne comprenait pas, si bien que par complaisance il lui dit:

“Tu t’ennuies peut-être?”

“Non, non, au contraire!”

Et, le menton levé, tout en promenant à l’entour un regard des plus vagues, Rosanette lâcha ce mot:

“Ça rappelle des souvenirs!” (Flaubert, 2002: 431)

As the protagonists are lacking the images and the knowledge that could transform the empty form of memory into a romantic interplay of *correspondances*, the description of landscape, as an obligatory part in any 19th century love story, is turning into a space that will be filled up with different conventional discourses. In the paragraph that describes the tour of the castle, for example, Flaubert stages a stylistic transition from an impression of scientific objectivity (produced through a vocabulary that is inaccessible to a non-specialist reader) to a tone that transforms trees and plants into the shapes of mythological beings. Above all the reader never gains the impression that these different modes of description could have originated in the minds of Frédéric or Rosanette:

La diversité des arbres faisait un spectacle changeant. Les hêtres, à l’écorce blanche et lisse, entremêlaient leurs couronnes; des frênes courbaient mollement leurs glauques ramures; dans les cépées de charmes, des houx pareils à du bronze se hérissaient; puis venait une file de minces bouleaux, inclinés dans des attitudes élégiaques; et les pins, symétriques comme des tuyaux d’orgue, en se balançant continuellement, semblaient chanter. Il y avait des chênes rugueux, énormes, qui se convulsaient, s’étirant du sol, s’étreignaient les uns les autres, et, fermes sur leurs troncs, pareils à des torsos, se lançaient avec leurs bras nus des appels de désespoir, des menaces furibondes, comme un groupe de Titans immobilisés dans leur colère. (Flaubert, 2002: 435)

It must be the reader’s unfulfilled romantic expectation that makes him so keenly aware, in these scenes, of what a romantic *correspondance* between the landscape and the protagonists’ states of mind should have been. Given, however, the emptiness of the protagonists’ imagination, it rather occurs that the landscape will overwhelm their feelings — while it remains unthinkable that they will ever decipher the same landscape as an expression of their souls. As soon as he feels “the seriousness of the forest”, Frédéric begins to hear Rosanette’s voice as if it were one of the birds’ voices, and he sees her body as a part of the landscape. Quite literally, Rosanette begins to disappear in the textual evocation of multiple objects:

Le sérieux de la forêt les gagnait; et ils avaient des heures de silence où, se laissant aller au bercement des ressorts, ils demeuraient comme engourdis dans une ivresse tranquille. Les bras sous la taille, il l’écoutait parler pendant que les oiseaux gazouillaient, observait presque du même coup d’œil les raisins noirs de sa capote et les baies des genévriers, les draperies de son voile, les volutes des nuages; et quand il se penchait vers elle, la fraîcheur de sa peau se mêlait au grand parfum des bois. (Flaubert, 2002: 436f)

*Salambô*, Flaubert's historical novel, makes me suspect that he was only willing to allow an interplay of *correspondance* between his protagonists' feelings and the landscape around them when romantic poetology would not have suggested the reader to expect such a relationship. As soon as the army of seditious mercenaries finally obeys the order of Carthage to move to a place at a safe distance from the city, the landscape turns into a projection of their state of physical depravation. Bodily needs permeate the perception of the environment. This is why each potential place of arrival disappears as soon as it comes closer, transforming itself into yet another distant horizon:

La route s'allongeait sans jamais en finir. A l'extrémité d'une plaine, toujours on arrivait sur un plateau de forme ronde; puis on redescendait dans une vallée, et les montagnes qui semblaient boucher l'horizon, à mesure que l'on approchait d'elles, se déplaçaient comme en glissant. De temps à autre, une rivière apparaissait dans la verdure des tamarix, pour se perdre au tournant des collines. (Flaubert, 2001: 85)

Several chapters later, while Carthage, under the guidance of Hamilcar, has regained the political initiative and controls once again the military situation, the mercenaries' perception of the landscape is no longer exclusively determined by their physical depravation. What they now see is conditioned by the fear of an enemy who they know will challenge them but whom they are unable to spot. Once again, the landscape turns into a mirror of their feelings:

Les Barbares campés à Utique, et les quinze mille autour du pont, furent surpris de voir au loin la terre onduler. Le vent qui soufflait très fort chassait des tourbillons de sable; ils se levaient comme arrachés du sol, montaient par grands lambeaux de couleur blonde, puis se déchiraient et recommençaient toujours, en cachant aux Mercenaires l'armée punique. A cause des cornes dressées au bord des casques, les uns croyaient apercevoir un troupeau de boeufs; d'autres, trompés par l'agitation des manteaux, prétendaient distinguer des ailes, et ceux qui avaient beaucoup voyagé, haussant les épaules, expliquaient tout par les illusions du mirage. Cependant quelque chose d'énorme continuait à s'avancer. (Flaubert, 2001: 217)

It fits the possible logic according to which only the least educated protagonists will be allowed to engage in a relation of *correspondance* with the landscape around them, if Bouvard and Pécuchet, the most aggressively mediocre and intellectually ambitious among all of Flaubert's characters, are those who have no perception whatsoever of their physical environment. The only world that they inhabit is the stale world of knowledge, accessible alone through books and encyclopedias. Bouvard and Pécuchet never pay any attention to the impressions produced by their senses. The one description of a "landscape" that we find in Flaubert's final (and unfinished) novel happens to be the summary of a series of prehistoric scenarios from Cuvier's *Discours sur les révolutions du globe*, published in 1821. Flaubert's text highlights how ridiculously familiar the protagonists think they are with the most advanced paleontological knowledge of their time. It is this feeling of familiarity which makes Bouvard and Pécuchet remark, in passing, that one of the scientific images painted by Cuvier must be a prehistoric view of Montmartre — which implies that Montmartre, for Flaubert's heroes, is rather an image produced by a book than a potential object of immediate experience:

Après ces lectures [sc.: de Cuvier], ils se figurèrent les choses suivantes.

D'abord une immense nappe d'eau, d'où émergeaient des promontoires, tachetés par des lichens; et pas un être vivant, pas un cri. C'était un monde silencieux, immobile et nu. — Puis de longues plantes se balançaient dans un brouillard qui ressemblaient la vapeur d'une étuve. Un soleil tout rouge surchauffait l'atmosphère humide. Alors des volcans éclatèrent, les roches ignées jaillissaient des montagnes; et la pâte des porphyres et des basaltes qui coulait, se figea. — Troisième tableau: dans des mers peu profondes, des îles de madrépores ont surgit [...]. Enfin, sur les grands continents, des grands mammifères parurent, les membres difformes comme des pièces de bois mal équarries, le cuir plus épais que des plaques de bronze, ou bien velus, lippus avec des crinières, et des défenses contournées. Des troupeaux de mammoths broutaient les plaines où fut depuis l'Atlantique; le paléothérium, moitié cheval moitié tapir, bouleversait de son groin les fourmilières de Montmartre, et le cervus gigantes tremblait sous des châtaigniers, à la voix de l'ours des cavernes qui faisaient japper dans sa tanière, le chien de Beaugency trois fois haut comme un loup.

Toutes ces époques avaient été séparées les unes des autres par des cataclysmes dont le dernier est notre déluge. (Flaubert, 1999: 131f)

The definite articles with which they refer to prehistoric animals (“*le* chien de Beaugency”) and the possessive pronoun that blurs the epistemological difference between Natural History and the Old Testament (“*notre* deluge”) make it clear that this bookish world is indeed the world in which Bouvard et [*sic.*] Pécuchet are living. If their environment, however, sets them apart from the dimension of immediate bodily perceptions, it also makes them helplessly vulnerable — and excitable — for any perception that ever reaches their mind through the senses. This is why the fifty-four-year-old Pécuchet experiences a moment of sexual arousal as “something completely new” when he happens to watch the servant woman Mélie pump water:

Mélie, dans la cour, tirait de l'eau. La pompe en bois avait un long levier. Pour le faire descendre, elle courbait les reins — et on voyait alors ses bas bleus jusqu'à la hauteur de son mollet. Puis, d'un geste rapide, elle levait son bras droit, tandis qu'elle tournait un peu la tête. Et Pécuchet en la regardant, sentait quelque chose de tout nouveau, un charme, un plaisir infini. (Flaubert, 1999: 243)

*La Tentation de Saint Antoine* finally, the one text by Gustave Flaubert which, between the discursive traditions of hagiography, philosophical treatise, and allegorical hallucination, defies all historical or systematic concepts of genre, begins with yet another landscape description that is detached from all physical reality and from all immediate perception. But in this case the distance from actual perception frees the text to become a dense expression of the hermit protagonist's complex character. There is quite literally not a single word in this opening paragraph that the reader could not decipher as referring to some specific feature in the personality of Saint Anthony:

C'est dans la Thébaïde, au haut d'une montagne, sur une plate-forme arrondie à demi-lune, et qu'enferment de grosses pierres.

La cabane de l'Ermitte occupe le fond. [...]

La vue est bornée à droite et à gauche par l'enceinte des roches. Mais du côté du désert, comme des plages qui se succéderaient, d'immenses ondulations parallèles d'un blond cendré s'étirent les unes derrière les autres, en montant toujours; — puis au delà des sables, tout au loin, la chaîne libyque forme un mur couleur de craie, estompé

légèrement par des vapeurs violettes. En face, le soleil s'abaisse. Le ciel, dans le nord, est d'une teinte gris-perle, tandis qu'au zénith des nuages de pourpre, disposés comme les flocons d'une crinière gigantesque, s'allongent sur la voûte bleue. Ces rais de flammes se rembrunissent, les parties d'azur prennent un pâleur nacrée; les buissons, les cailloux, la terre, tout maintenant paraît dur comme du bronze; et dans l'espace flotte une poudre d'or tellement menue qu'elle se confond avec la vibration de la lumière. (Flaubert, 1967: 31f)

#### 4.

Returning to the initial question about the historically specific relationship between the body as a medium of world perception and the literary constitution of landscape in the literature of Romanticism, our analysis of some passages from Flaubert's novels allows us to make a very elementary — and yet astonishing — distinction. There are, on the one hand and astonishingly indeed, landscape descriptions that Flaubert stages as having emerged independently from any actual perception of the physical world. This is true, in the style of the most traditional allegorical discourse, for the opening scene of *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*; for the science-inspired imagination of prehistoric landscapes in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*; for the picture that Emma Bovary wants to cultivate of herself as well as of the ideal landscapes of love. Wherever, on the other hand, perception is meant to play a role in the ways that Flaubert's protagonists see the world, the relationship between the world and the protagonists' psyche is not one of harmony and of *correspondance*. Rather, the protagonists' openness towards their physical environment tends to produce situations of interference between the protagonists' intentions and those waves of unexpected excitement that invade their psyche. Once the quietness of the forest overcomes Frédéric Moreau, his lover begins to vanish for him; inadvertently watching a female body derails Pécuchet so decisively from a lifestyle exclusively dedicated to the cultivation of knowledge that he will need long sessions of "hydrotherapy" (consisting of many buckets of ice-cold water) to regain his composure; letting finally their desires and their fears interfere with the perception of a desertic landscape weakens the determination of the mercenaries in *Salambô*.

But how is it possible that these non-romantic descriptions provide us with such a complex understanding of the romantic relationship between body and landscape? The answer is that none of the non-romantic descriptions could function without the contrasting background of romantic poetics. Emma Bovary's daydreams would not have had their shocking and sobering effect, if no reader had ever believed that a "*correspondance*" between the individual soul and the surrounding landscape was possible; the scene of Pécuchet's first erection would not be so hilarious, if we did not assume that our bodies, normally, constantly and inevitably react to their physical environment. As Flaubert, different from most other authors of 19th century Realism, had no intention to defend the possibility — or at least the idea — of a harmonious relation between the world and the individual psyche, he was free to evoke the romantic motif of *correspondance* in all its precariousness or, seen from a more blatant perspective, in all its philosophical and psychological impossibility.

This is a less optimistic but also a much more complex view than a reader could ever gain from romantic literature itself.

Flaubert helps us understand that romantic landscape descriptions, on the one side, already presuppose — as their tacit epistemological frame condition — the two key consequences coming from the emergence of the second order observer, i.e. the pluralization of representation and the two-leveledness of world appropriation. On the other side, however — and different from all realistic authors, in particular different from Flaubert — romantic literature had not yet identified these two innovations as potential philosophical and even potential practical problems. Most romantic authors rather indulged both in individualizing the “interaction” between their protagonists and the literary landscape and in imagining complex dimensions of harmony between physical perception and conceptual experience. At least from an intellectual point of view, such dreams must have been so remote for Gustave Flaubert that he could describe and analyze them with astonishment and irony, rather than with feelings of approval, protest or regret.

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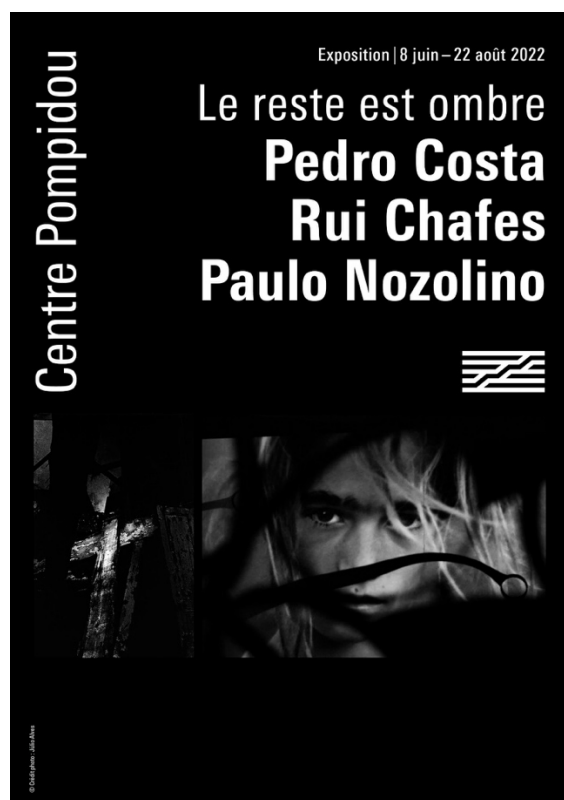
***Le reste est ombre — Pedro Costa, Rui Chafes, Paulo Nozolino.*** Exposição comissariada por Philippe-Alain Michaud e Jonathan Puthier. Paris, Le Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, 8 de Junho a 22 de Agosto de 2022.

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*Le reste est ombre* juntou obras do cineasta Pedro Costa, do escultor Rui Chafes e do fotógrafo Paulo Nozolino no Centre Pompidou, em Paris. Se esta reunião de artistas portugueses poderia parecer, aos olhos do público desconhecedor do trabalho dos três artistas, justificada pela geografia, ela está, na verdade, longe de o ser. A folha de sala descreve-os como parte de uma geração de criadores cuja actividade se inicia e desenvolve no período dos pós-25 de Abril, mas também o vínculo geracional é por si só insuficiente para explicar a proximidade e a amizade de longa data. Serem portugueses nascidos nas décadas de 1950 e 1960 é, na verdade, quase irrelevante, até enganador, já que aquilo que os aproximou, que os levou, no passado, a fazer exposições juntos<sup>1</sup> ou a integrar mostras uns dos outros<sup>2</sup>, é o mesmo tipo de afinidade que uniria praticantes de artes distintas, de séculos e países diferentes. Essa transversalidade temporal e geográfica está de algum modo presente na exposição, nomeadamente através de ideia de recorrência, de repetição de motivos, noções de modo algum despreciadas, especialmente se pensarmos que um dos comissários é Philippe-Alain Michaud, historiador de arte que dedicou um livro à relação entre o pensamento de Aby Warburg e a imagem em movimento.

As obras incluídas em *Le reste est ombre* foram criadas ao longo de um período de trinta anos, em diferentes países. De Chafes, temos seis esculturas, de diferentes dimensões, mas todas elas em ferro pintado de negro: *As tuas mãos* (1998-2015), *Véu* (2016), *Veneno* (2020), *Fina camada de gelo III* (2021), *Corpo final* (2022), *Sem voz* (2022); de Costa, duas instalações de vídeo e um filme, respectivamente: *Minino macho*, *Minino fêmea* (2005), *As Filhas do Fogo* (2019) e *Sweet Exorcist* (2012); de Nozolino, dezassete fotografias, todas, à excepção de uma, verticais e com a mesma dimensão<sup>3</sup>, algumas delas agrupadas em trípticos: *Callac I* (2010), *Callac II* (2010), *Vila Viçosa* (2008), *Lan Merzer* (2012), *Sarajevo* (1997), e os trípticos *Untitled* (2008, 2010, 2002), *Untitled, Blodelsheim* (1999), *Remember the Damned, the Expropriated, the Exterminated... Bucarest, Madrid, Auschwitz* (2003, 2003, 1994), *Acid Rain, Ukraine* (2008).

Que unidade é aquela de que falo acima? A estrofe de Ricardo Reis de onde vem o verso que oferece título à exposição faz parte da resposta a essa pergunta:

Segue o teu destino  
 Rega as tuas plantas,  
 Ama as tuas rosas.  
 O resto é a sombra  
 De árvores alheias. (Pessoa, 1994: 68)

Nesses primeiros versos do poema, apela-se à prossecução de um caminho individual, à atenção e ao amor ao que é próximo, porque, como se diz de seguida, “A

<sup>1</sup> Chafes e Costa, em particular, organizaram quatro exposições conjuntas nos últimos vinte anos: *Fora!* (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Outubro de 2005-Janeiro de 2006); *MU – Pedro Costa e Rui Chafes* (Hara Museum, Tóquio, Dezembro de 2012-Março de 2013); *Família Aeminiun: Pedro Costa e Rui Chafes* (Criptopórtico Romano do Museu Nacional Machado de Castro, Coimbra, Outubro de 2015-Janeiro de 2016), *Distant Rooms* (Ilmin Museum of Art, Seul, Junho-Julho de 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Como é o caso de *Pedro Costa: Companhia* (Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto, Outubro de 2018-Janeiro de 2019), em que foram apresentadas obras de diversos outros artistas, entre os quais Chafes e Nozolino.

<sup>3</sup> Impressões em gelatina de prata, 120 x 80 cm.

realidade/ Sempre é mais ou menos/ Do que nós queremos”, sempre além ou aquém, nunca em concordância com o que se imaginou ou desejou. A sombra do título, diferente das muitas sombras da exposição, é atributo de árvores alheias e remete para aquilo que é distante, imponderável e que merece por isso pouco interesse. Num dos textos que integra o catálogo de *Le reste est ombre*<sup>4</sup>, peça fundamental para melhor compreender a exposição, o pesquisador e crítico Gaspard Nectoux sugere algo que ecoa esta ideia:

C’est une évidence qu’il appartient à chaque cinéaste, au cours de la vie qu’il emprunte, faite d’une poignée des films fragiles et arrachés au doute, ou d’un œuvre ininterrompue et nourrie jusqu’à l’épuisement, de découvrir à sa façon au moins une fois: que la part du monde qu’il regarde est toujours moindre que celle *qui ne le regarde pas*, (2022: 95)

Perante a miríade de possibilidades, da multiplicidade do real cantada pelo poeta oposto de Reis, Álvaro de Campos<sup>5</sup>, o caminho de Chafes, Costa e Nozolino é o de uma atenção concentrada, circunspecta. A esse propósito, é relevante um outro contributo incluído no catálogo, uma carta da autoria do arquitecto José Neves, dirigida aos três criadores, de quem é próximo e com quem colaborou em exposições e iniciativas anteriores. Nessa carta, fala da obra que cada um dos três escolheu para integrar uma exposição comissariada por si<sup>6</sup> — um filme, uma escultura (juntamente com uma obra arquitectónica) e uma fotografia. O que há de comum às três escolhas, diz Neves, é o recaírem sobre casas e sobre um tipo particular de casa, sejam elas de cimento, ninhos, caravanas. Apesar da distância geográfica entre cada uma das três — Portugal, Japão e Córsega —, escreve, unia-as o facto de todas serem “maisons fermées sur elles-mêmes”<sup>7</sup>. A natureza remota das casas e o facto de elas existirem viradas para a sua própria vida interior são recuperados em *Le reste est ombre*, também este um espaço virado para dentro, com diferentes divisões que se reúnem num centro<sup>8</sup>.

Pensando nesta ideia de isolamento do mundo, não por acaso, a primeira obra que vimos, antes mesmo de termos entrado no espaço expositivo, foi um fragmento de apenas alguns segundos da curta-metragem *Sweet Exorcist*, incluída na sua totalidade no interior. Nesse fragmento, Ventura, protagonista deste e de outros filmes

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<sup>4</sup> A par da publicação, a exposição foi também acompanhada por um programa de cinema, uma carta branca a Pedro Costa, apresentado na galeria Jeu de Paumme, em Paris. O realizador seleccionou, além de filmes seus, obras de Paulo Rocha, António Reis e Margarida Cordeiro, Jean-Marie Straub e Danièle Huillet.

<sup>5</sup> “Álvaro de Campos — o que é bastante curioso — encontra-se no extremo oposto, inteiramente oposto a Ricardo Reis” (Pessoa, 1996: 343).

<sup>6</sup> *A Arquitectura dos Artistas* (Ciclo de conversas e exposição). Comissariado de José Neves. Lisboa, Atelier-Museu Júlio Pomar, 15 de Setembro a 16 de Outubro de 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Na frase completa lê-se: “Toutes étaient des maisons fermées sur elles-mêmes: sans la moindre fenêtre, coïncée par d’autres baraquements du bidonville, comme celle de la famille Duarte; hermétique, comme la maison de la famille japonaise qui voulait une maison où « l’on ne se sentirait pas au Japon », ce qui faisait écho à l’inaccessibilité du nid au sommet de la sculpture fragile, à trois mètres du sol; avec des fenêtres obscures, qui semblent ne devoir jamais s’ouvrir, comme celles des roulottes isolées et immobiles des tziganes corses” (Neves, 2022: 158).

<sup>8</sup> Neste espaço virado para dentro oscila-se entre duas formas de existência, que Andy Rector descreveu a propósito do filme *No Quarto da Vanda*, realizado por Costa, como “a solidão e a união” (Costa et al., 2012: 23).

de Costa, mantém os braços erguidos em cruz, em frente ao rosto, como se recusasse o que se encontra do lado de fora. Aquela figura, posicionada num limiar, marca a separação entre exterior e interior, dois mundos opostos: de um lado, o bulício e a vastidão do enorme centro artístico, do outro, o silêncio e a concentração de *Le reste est ombre*, como as casas de que Neves fala, alheadas das paisagens onde se inserem.

Como essas casas, o espaço expositivo é uma unidade isolada do exterior. A sua arquitectura é despojada, mas ao mesmo tempo inclui recessos que complicam uma ideia de simplicidade, como as esculturas de Chafes — monolitos em cujas arestas brota a delicadeza; é pequena, ou deveríamos antes dizer compacta, mas labiríntica, como o bairro das Fontainhas, onde Costa filmou uma importante parte dos seus filmes: não existe um percurso específico, mas convida-se o visitante a escolher o seu próprio trajecto, numa ausência de coordenadas a que só a sala anterior responde, como nos trípticos verticais de Nozolino, que ecoam nas paredes alongadas, e no interior dos quais se geram narrativas. Como uma casa, o espaço tem várias divisões que comunicam umas com as outras, como se as paredes, sólidas, não fossem mais do que sombras. A integridade das partes é construída a partir de elementos como o som, que acentuam a vizinhança: é relevante, por exemplo, o modo como o som proveniente de duas das obras de Costa atravessa o espaço. Ao caminhar por estes corredores, ouvimos intermitentemente os gritos de Ventura, em *Sweet Exorcist*, enquanto escutamos ao fundo o barulho da demolição das Fontainhas, vindo de *Minino macho*, *Minino fêmea*, que reúne *rushes* do filme *No Quarto da Vanda* (2000), como se tudo se passasse afinal no mesmo tempo e no mesmo espaço.



Fig. 1. Vista da exposição *Le reste est ombre* | Rui Chafes, *As tuas mãos* (1998-2015) © Rui Chafes

A outra diferença evidente entre o exterior e o interior da exposição é a luminosidade. Na entrada, existe um aviso sobre a penumbra em que se encontra

mergulhado o espaço e sobre a necessidade de os visitantes esperarem algum tempo para que os olhos se adaptem à falta de luz, de se demorarem na visita, sob pena de pouco ou nada conseguirem ver. O trabalho de luz e sombra nas fotografias de Nozolino, nos vídeos de Costa, nas esculturas de Chafes, desorienta o olhar, evidenciando detalhes mínimos, que passam despercebidos a quem passa depressa pelas obras. A escuridão permite que estas, e as suas diferentes partes, se tornem visíveis, o que corresponde a um dos aspectos mais bem conseguidos da exposição, operando-se uma inversão de termos.

Numa conversa com o crítico e professor de cinema Cyril Neyrat sobre o filme *No Quarto da Vanda*<sup>9</sup>, Costa fala da rodagem do trabalho que antecedeu esse, *Ossos* (1997), e da violência que era encher aquele bairro de luz a meio da noite (Costa et al., 2012: 37). À semelhança da via que Costa adoptou em *Vanda*<sup>10</sup>, em que utiliza uma iluminação muito reduzida, na exposição, em vez de se encher de luz o espaço que se quer observar, apagam-se as luzes para melhor perceber a luminescência daquilo que se tem à frente, num gesto de adaptação do observador ao objecto. Como Chafes escreve na introdução à sua tradução de *Fragmentos* de Novalis: “A Noite é o reino da luz espiritual, o mais profundo santuário, o seio de todas as revelações. A Humanidade dorme ainda um sono profundo num estado de sabedoria solitária e esquecida, à espera do Novo Mundo que se aproxima” (1992: 11).

É a penumbra, associada à colocação estratégica de focos sobre certas obras, que permite um dos efeitos mais interessantes desta exposição, indicativa da obsessão, comum aos três artistas, de jogar com zonas de luz e sombra nas suas criações. A fotografia analógica, a preto e branco, nomeadamente as impressões em gelatina de prata de Nozolino, é de entre os três tipos de obras expostas aquele que de modo mais evidente dá conta desse jogo. Num negativo fotográfico, a sensibilidade dos sais de prata contidos na emulsão que reveste a base plástica do filme permite criar imagens: as zonas escuras do negativo dão origem à zona clara da fotografia e vice-versa, num regresso modificado à distribuição de zonas claras e escuras da imagem *original*. Este movimento de inversão de uma imagem, da sua duplicação numa dimensão invertida, é basilar à exposição. Esta constituiu-se como uma espécie de espaço contrário ao exterior, enquanto as peças expostas integram também elas próprias uma dualidade entre luz e sombra, positivo e negativo.

As fotografias de Nozolino, precisamente, projectam no chão negro a luz que recebem do tecto; as esculturas de Chafes, expostas à luz, transformam-na nas sombras que vemos arrastar-se pelo chão; das telas suspensas de *As Filhas do Fogo*, vemos os dois lados, a face e o reverso espelhado da imagem. Em qualquer um dos três exemplos, a origem da luz é aparentemente reposicionada, fazendo reverberar a peça exposta, como se a claridade proviesse dela. Se nestes exemplos o que é cindido e invertido é a luz, este movimento de espelhamento tem diferentes manifestações em *Le reste est ombre*.

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<sup>9</sup> Publicada originalmente em 2008, foi depois editada em tradução portuguesa em 2012.

<sup>10</sup> “...lembro-me do *Vampyr* de Dreyer, que é um filme muito iluminado pelas próprias personagens. O que significa que a luz estava por vezes de tal modo no limite, era de tal modo escassa, que o plano era iluminado pela pouca luz que vinha da janela e que se reflectia na cara da Vanda ou da Zita” (Costa et al., 2012: 59).



Fig. 2. Vista da exposição *Le reste est ombre*

Em *Minino macho, minino fêmea*, dois planos alternam entre imagens de casas e quartos das Fontainhas, onde o filme foi rodado, e imagens dos espaços comuns desse bairro, pátios exíguos, filmados a partir do interior das casas. A dupla projecção em *loop* constrói uma indistinção entre dois espaços, fora e dentro, privado e público, dualidade que *Sweet Exorcist* também integra. O filme inicia-se no exterior, numa espécie de mata onde várias figuras procuram Ventura, que veremos depois, durante grande parte da curta-metragem, no interior de um elevador, conversando com os seus fantasmas, envolto numa mistura entre passado e presente. A certa altura já não sabe mais em que tempo se encontra, como um visitante que se tivesse escondido na exposição para lá passar todo o dia e se visse depois desorientado à saída.

A relação com o submundo, tão presente em *Cavalo Dinheiro* (2014), o filme de Costa de que esta curta constitui uma parte, ecoa na construção de *Le reste est ombre*, uma espécie de subterrâneo quando comparada com o resto do Centre Pompidou. A eleição de um lado não solar do mundo é comum aos três artistas. Se Costa será aquele a propósito de quem mais se terá falado e escrito sobre esta questão, com a sua atenção a uma parte do mundo social e politicamente destituída e esquecida, as obras de Nozolino são na verdade as que de modo mais evidente apontam para esses espaços de exclusão e esquecimento. São fotografias de lugares degradados, abandonados, em que se constrói um tom carregado e fúnebre, retratando espaços directamente associados a um lado trágico da história europeia. Dessa degradação surge, surpreendentemente, alguma luz, como se através da destruição e da morte se entrevísse o outro lado.



Fig. 3. Vista da exposição *Le reste est ombre*

A proximidade entre pólos opostos é recorrente nas esculturas de Chafes, caracterizadas por um peso e uma severidade que contrastam com a sua leveza. Alguns dos títulos dessas peças remetem para uma ideia de separação entre duas zonas através de uma camada (*Véu, Fina camada de gelo III*) e para uma convivência entre o material e o imaterial, o profano e o diáfano, extremos percorridos pela exposição. Se, como vimos no poema de Reis, a sombra era atributo da realidade, como se a realidade se tivesse tornado incorpórea, no domínio da exposição invertem-se os termos, as sombras são sólidas. Na entrevista com Neyrat, Costa critica em Robert Bresson, realizador que lhe é caro, aquilo que considera ser uma recriação excessiva da realidade: “Porque mesmo o *L’Argent*, totalmente filmado em exteriores em Paris, não é bem Paris: não são jovens, mas fantasmas de jovens. É o mais abstracto de todos, o Bresson.” (Costa et al., 2012: 39). Nos quinze anos que se seguiram a esta entrevista de 2008, Costa acabou por fazer exactamente aquilo que apontou a Bresson, o que apenas confirma a sua constituição, ao lado de Chafes e Nozolino, como um criador que parte de uma materialidade radical para uma imaterialidade radical, afastando-se completamente do objecto perante o qual inicialmente se posicionou.

*Le reste est ombre* constitui-se não como um percurso cronológico ou temático pela obra de três profissionais de artes distintas, mas antes como um espaço interior comum aos três artistas, um território atemporal e ageográfico (ainda que cada obra integre uma profunda consciência do seu lugar histórico), um regresso aos mesmos lugares, pessoas, objectos e materiais. Mas se tantas das peças ali expostas, bem como a sua disposição, são herdadas de exposições conjuntas anteriores, cabe perguntar o que existe de novo aqui. De igual modo, para aqueles que seguem o trabalho de Chafes, Costa e Nozolino, pouco haverá de novo no que até agora se escreveu aqui. Vale por isso a pena pensar na diferença que é visitar esta exposição conhecendo-se ou não os seus criadores. Começo pelos visitantes que não os conhecem, por existirem

certamente em maior número. Desses, a maior parte terá passado por aquele espaço sem se demorar o suficiente para o ver. A exposição, pretendendo ser imersiva, está longe de uma ideia de imersividade mais lúdica e não é exactamente convidativa. É convite, de alguma forma generoso, à entrada num espaço privado, fundo, com muitas camadas. Mas não é um convite brando, antes duro, porque oferece tanto quanto exige. No seu reverso está não exactamente a altivez, mas o aprumo, de quem passou muito tempo num sítio e não pode oferecer facilmente a quem passa esse sentido de extensão e permanência.

Apesar da dimensão que os três artistas alcançaram em termos institucionais, aquilo a que constantemente e paradoxalmente eles dizem regressar é a uma espécie de humildade de quem se dedica ao seu pequeno canto. Muitos perguntarão ainda assim se esta é uma forma democrática de trabalhar e estar no mundo ou se posições semelhantes se aproximam de uma certa mistificação. Isto porque, como dizia, não existe maneira de se transmitir a experiência, apenas a possibilidade de que duas experiências vizinhas se toquem. Na introdução de Chafes aos *Fragmentos*, o escultor fala da noite como experiência iniciática. Parece acertado pensar que *Le reste est ombre* deve ser vista sobretudo como um percurso iniciático, e não como caminho repetido que existe só para tranquilizar os iniciados. Esses terão de encarar a visita como um regresso, como a possibilidade de se encontrar algo de novo no velho lugar.

O lado ingrato de uma exposição como esta é o pressentir-se uma espécie de estagnação nas formas de diálogo, faltando a impressão de passo em frente que ainda se presente quando se vê obras isoladas de cada um dos três. É eventualmente nesse ponto que se tocam as experiências dos que já conheciam e as experiências dos que são agora apresentados a Chafes, Costa e Nozolino. Todos terão de procurar caminhos novos aqui e encontrar o tempo necessário para sair de um espaço de produção e consumo de arte em que é necessário apresentar e ver algo *inovador* constantemente. Terão de sair daí para regressar uma e outra vez aos mesmos excertos, escolhendo passar mais tempo com uma ou duas obras do que com a imensidão de um museu cheio de milhares de outras coisas para ver.

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**Sakiko Nomura and Ango Sakaguchi. Ango.  
Bookshop M, 2017.**

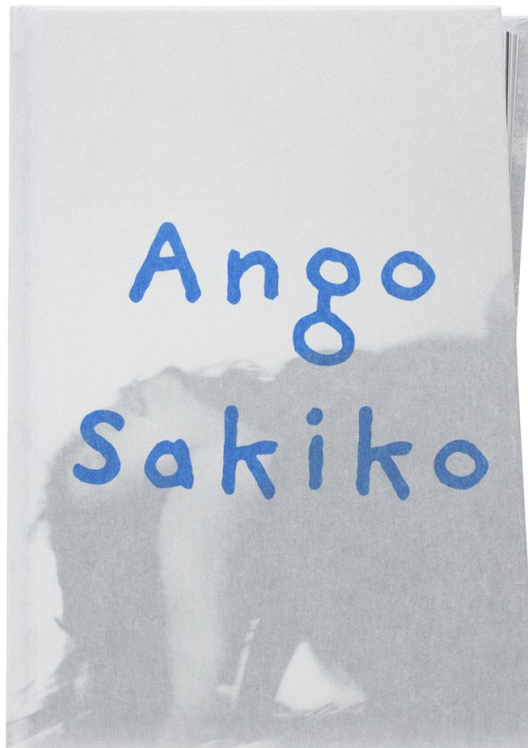
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*Ango* is part of a collection planned and developed by Satoshi Machiguchi, the Japanese graphic designer behind both the creative design studio based in Tokyo MATCH & Company and the publishing house Bookshop M. The main feature of this collection is that all the books included combine a literary work by a classic Japanese author with photographs by a contemporary photographer.

Before the title in review, three other volumes were published in this collection: in 2016, *Dazai* combined Osamu Dazai's short story "Villon's Wife" (1947) with photographs by Daido Moriyama; still in 2016, *Odasaku* joined Oda Sakunosuke's tale "At the Horse Races" (1946) with photographs, again, by Moriyama; in 2017, *Ango* matched Ango Sakaguchi's "In the Forest, Beneath Cherries in Full Bloom" (1947) with photographs by — for the third time — Moriyama.

Also published in 2017, *Ango* includes text by Sakaguchi as well — this is the reason why it shares the same title with the other book of the same year — but it also marks the first collaboration between Machiguchi and a photographer other than Moriyama in the context of the collection. This time, the editor's choice fell on Sakiko Nomura, a photographer who was already part of the catalogue of MATCH & Company with the photobooks *Tsukuyomi* (2005), *Kondo Ryohei* (2006), and also one of her most celebrated works, *Nude / A Room / Flowers* (2012).

The entire set of books — *Dazai*, *Odasaku*, *Ango* and *Ango* — clearly responds to a poetics of the collection on the part of Machiguchi. This emerges firstly from the combination of classic texts with contemporary artworks; secondly, from the material and graphic construction of the books; and thirdly, from the specific authors and stories selected to be part of the collection. In this regard, it is certainly not accidental that all the Japanese authors represented lived throughout the World War II, and that the specific stories selected by Machiguchi were published between 1946 and 1947, that is, in the immediate post-war period.

The stories have various points in common, but two of them are prominent and must be highlighted. To begin with, all the narratives are primarily humanistic, albeit with pessimistic undertones, tackling human relations, and especially the relations between men and women. In addition, a traumatic memory of war is (more or less explicitly) inscribed in all the stories, being especially apparent in the authors' depiction of physical and psychological violence.

War occupies a central place in Sakaguchi's "The War and a Woman". The tale revolves around a man and a woman, a former prostitute, throughout and after the World War II. As stated in a prefatory note, the text was first published in 1946, but was highly censored by the Civil Censorship Detachment of the GHQ (the offices of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers during the occupation of Japan) due to alleged "Militaristic/Love of War Propaganda". The original, uncensored version of the story would only be published in Japan in 2000.

An important aspect of this edition of Sakaguchi's story is that the censored passages are included in grey, contrasting with the rest of the text in black. This allows the reader to read the original story or the censored version (should s/he choose to not read the words in grey). Interestingly, some of the most striking passages are among those that were censored and deal with the abovementioned question of "Love of War":

“The woman came to enjoy the war.”

“She was not aware of it herself, but what she had been in love with was not to be found in Nomura; it was within the air raids. If she could always stay like this, he thought, maybe I could find some happiness. If only the war could go on forever.”

“The war had become mixed up in their love. Please, he begged. Let the war go on forever.”

“I should have enjoyed the war more. I should have thrown myself into every second of it, enjoyed it until completely exhausted. Until I spat blood, until I dropped dead. I should have sucked all the joy from it that I could get. I should have absorbed it, become one with it — and there before him, the war had turned into a beautiful, petite body.” (Nomura and Sakaguchi, 2017)<sup>1</sup>

These censored passages are some of the most important from a literary standpoint, because, on one hand, they materialize the psychosexual dimension of the story, and, on the other hand, they reveal Sakaguchi’s critical stance against the war and how it affected the daily lives (and loves) of the Japanese. In fact, it is ironic that the censorship committee described these passages as “love of war propaganda”, when in fact Sakaguchi seems to be criticizing the war and questioning the ways it affects people, turning them into psychologically and emotionally ill human beings, unable to untie their personal lives to the collective war. There is thus a metaphorical dimension in “The War and a Woman” that had been lost for decades in the censored version. Sakaguchi’s criticism of the war — and the exploitation of the war by everyone involved (and *all* were involved, since this was a *world* war) — becomes clear in this passage (censored, as one might guess): “War, he thought, is just a way to live out fantasies; a plaything. It is not just me. Everyone, he thought, everybody has used it as their toy”.

In Sakaguchi’s tale, we are a far cry from the honest and simple humanism of works such as Erich Maria Remarque’s *A Time to Love and a Time to Die...* Sakaguchi denounces the horrors of the war, but not in a pamphlet-like way; rather as a satire.

The choice of this tale for the fourth book in the collection is explained by Machiguchi in an afterword. In this brief but instigating text, the editor recounts the impact of the war on the lives of his father and Sakiko Nomura’s grandmother. He also explains that with war being absent from his and Nomura’s lives (he was born in 1971, she in 1967), what remained in the Japan of recent decades was an “attitude towards war”. Well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and over 70 years since the end of the last world war), the choice of this story by Sakaguchi also seems to aim at raising awareness for what one can perceive as an impending doom. Machiguchi writes: “Let us continue to think ever more clearly, ever more coolly. After all, an attitude toward the war is still within our reach”.

As shown, this book can be seen as part literature and part literary history, but it is also a photobook. It will find most of its readers among those interested in photography, particularly in an international context, where Sakiko Nomura’s name is better known and has more currency than Ango Sakaguchi’s.

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<sup>1</sup> Pages are not numbered in this edition.

Sakiko Nomura reportedly said about this book: “There’s the writer Ango Sakaguchi, and there’s me. I hope that, through the selection of photographs that seek to add another dimension to the work, the readers will be able to experience a brand-new universe” (Nomura *apud* Robert, 2021). And this is exactly what is intended with the book (and the collection it belongs to): to not be entirely about literature, nor about photography, but about something in between. The text is contaminated by the photographs, and vice-versa, or, borrowing from Nomura’s words, one adds another dimension to the other, in a mutual relationship.

While looking into Nomura’s photographs, we are faced with most of the attributes that made her work known to the public: the images are in black and white, grainy and generally dark. The way Nomura photographs bodies, and their visual relationship to the environment, is remarkable, and harks back, perhaps, to some of the work of Nobuyoshi Araki, to whom she was an assistant before starting her career as a photographer. In what concerns the human figure, the most unique aspect of this photobook is that we only see naked female bodies, which may be surprising, given that Nomura is known as one of the few female photographers who depicts male nudity (and certainly one of the best doing it). In fact, men are almost absent from this visual narrative, appearing only in the final images. This creates a noticeable — and particularly productive — dissonance with Sakaguchi’s text, in which the male protagonist is always present. We are also reminded that *Ango* can be perceived as the product of Nomura’s (and Machiguchi’s, let us not forget) interpretation of Sakaguchi’s text. The fact that she chose to leave the male protagonist out of the visual and narrative flow created by the photographs may say something about the way she read the story and chose to work from it.

Although the dominant subjects of the photographs are women, interior spaces and flora — familiar to those acquainted with Sakiko Nomura’s work —, there is a great diversity of subjects and photographic genres in the book. Uniting everything is her characteristically melancholic mood and a noirish expressionism that takes us back to some cinema of the 1940s — coincidentally or not, the decade in which Sakaguchi story was written.

The interplay between Sakaguchi’s text and Nomura’s photographs is sometimes direct and easy to decipher, but most of the times the relations between them are not that clearcut. This apparent divergence between text and image produces some interpretive resistance on the part of the reader but also incites him/her to create his/her own reading of the connections, thus becoming an active agent in the meaning-making of the book. This attests not only to the symbolic and expressive richness of Sakaguchi’s tale and Nomura’s art, but also to the mastery of Satoshi Machiguchi (assisted by Minori Asada) as a book designer with a special talent for sequencing images.

I conclude with a note on the material quality of the book, which is — as always is the case with books designed by Machiguchi — striking. The book comes in a cardboard box, and the hardcover has a pleasing texture to it. In it, we read the title, *Ango*, and the name of the photographer, Sakiko, below. The book has different versions in different languages — English, French, German, and Japanese —, and in each of them the words in the cover are in different colours. Inside the book, the visual interplay between the text and the images is creative and diverse: sometimes

a spread contains text and image; at other times, it contains only text (a single phrase or whole blocks); and in other occasions only images are displayed. The paper is thick, slightly glossy, and the quality of print is as commendable as ever in Machiguchi's editions, with deep, rich blacks.

An interesting and quirky characteristic is the fact that on the right side of the cover, the paper cut side, the book is cut on an angle. At first glance, this may seem like a design choice with a decorative function. However, in a book built around ambience, fluidity and imbalance, this decision may convey, from the outset, important qualities regarding the identity of this book at conceptual and visual levels.

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**AAVV. Literatura-Mundo Comparada,  
Parte III: Perspectivas em Português — Pelo  
Tejo Vai-se para o Mundo.** Coordenação: Helena  
Carvalho Buescu e Simão Valente. Tinta-da-China, 2020.

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Os presentes volumes 5 e 6 concluem a ampla série *Literatura-Mundo Comparada, Perspectivas em Português*, de que formam a terceira parte, subdividida em dois. A colecção contou com coordenação científica geral de Helena Carvalhão Buescu. Nesta meia dúzia de momentos se agrupa aquele que é, certamente, o mais ambicioso projecto antológico alguma vez entre nós dedicado à literatura. A forma de intitular este longo e arrojado labor cumpre a função de encerrar uma eloquente demarcação e um descritivo exacto. O leitor está diante de uma *imago mundi, um mapa mundi*. Porque este empreendimento fornece uma imagem, que é um complexo espelho, e uma cartografia, com a qual se abre caminho para um emaranhado de trilhos — no panorama incalculável do mundo vasto. Não o faz apenas em extensão, mas também em variedade e fundura, senão em surpresa.

No seu avanço organizativo, este conjunto antológico desenha um itinerário que se espraia do interior para fora, mas que se volta para a globalidade, um desígnio que mais se evidenciará nestes dois volumes. Assim, a primeira parte (volumes 1 e 2) concentrava-se nos *Mundos em Português* que a intitulava e onde estavam patentes oficiais que, de Camões a Clarice Lispector, formavam a evidência luminosa de uma lusofonia que se acende com a produção do idioma comum nas obras de Germano Almeida, Nelson Rodrigues e Eça de Queiroz. A extensão dos praticantes mais ilustres de uma língua que equivale à multiplicidade das literaturas tricontinentais. África, América e Europa acolhem, absorvem e reinventam a herança viva em múltipla partilha.

Os volumes 3 e 4, da parte II desta série, a um tempo avançavam e retrocediam. Se prosseguiram a senda para fora da geografia nacional, rumo à larga Europa e ao Médio Oriente, recuavam também no tempo, até às eras passadas e até ao universo do Velho e do Novo Testamento, mas ainda ao mundo dos Helenos. É, portanto, da dupla matriz, a judaico-cristã e a grega, que se trata. E, uma vez mais, é a vertigem das eras, o tumulto fascinante do passado, como prenúncio de todos os presentes e dos menos adivinháveis futuros. A basezinha, diria um bem-intencionado eclesiástico.

Nos dois volumes derradeiros da magna antologia, o repto que o título constitui — *Pelo Tejo vai-se para o Mundo* — converte-se em prática. Realmente, a parte III, nos seus dois volumes, leva ainda mais longe, no tempo e no espaço, do que as suas antecessoras, dado que, conforme podemos ler na “Introdução”, “abrange as tradições literárias mundiais que não são recobertas pelos volumes anteriores” (31). Uma vez que, no conjunto dos três tomos o “escopo histórico” é “progressivamente maior”, como se lê, ainda, na “Introdução”, e devido à “diversidade estruturalmente mais densa que caracteriza as várias tradições e culturas aqui aproximadas”, a organização dos volumes 5 e 6, de que nos ocupamos, segue uma orientação dupla. Num primeiro segmento (volume 5), geográfico e cronológico, desde “O Mundo Antigo (III milénio a.C. – 500)” até “A Idade Moderna (1500-1800)”, num arco temporal e transcultural com o qual o leitor atravessa geografias e tempos tão distintos quanto o Mundo Árabe Islâmico, Bizâncio, a Pérsia, ou a China e o Japão do período clássico, mas também tradições pré-coloniais dos continentes africano e americano. Posteriormente, a encerrar o volume 5, a estruturação passa a ser temática, sob a titulação englobante “A Revolução do Século XIX”, cujas subsecções permitem, por exemplo, emparelhar, sob a mesma divisória (“Literatura e Condição Humana”), a poesia de Emily Dickinson,



Kobayashi Issa, Amado Nervo, Masaoka Shiki e John Greenleaf Whittier, ou seja, dois continentes e épocas paradoxalmente próximas e remotas entre si: o Japão entre o século XVIII e as vésperas de Novecentos, e a América, central e do Norte, entre o século XIX e o XX, mas sobretudo através de tão divergentes formas de encarar o fenómeno poético, entre a abertura ao mundo e a criação de universos paralelos e imaginários, entre o compromisso e o (por vezes sublime) alheamento. A partir destes momentos de conclusão do volume 5, a forma de organizar a antologia permanecerá temática. Assim, no volume 6, cria-se uma cúpula estruturante, que envolve todas as obras antologiadadas — “Século XX: O Mundo em Viragem”. Sob essa designação global e maximamente inclusiva, parte-se dos “Crioulos de Base Lexical Portuguesa” para chegar, debaixo da rubrica “Natureza e Tecnologia”, a “Humor, Sátira e Ironia”. Se, no primeiro desses estágios, se percorre uma diáspora que leva de Macau e Malaca a São Tomé e Guiné; no outro, o leitor segue dos alvores do século XX japonês ao Senegal em pleno século passado.

Estes são, porém, marcos apenas de uma extensão demasiado vasta, heterogénea e instigante, para se descrever em pormenor, ou mesmo abreviadamente, e muito menos pelas extremidades que encetam e concluem cada um dos volumes. De qualquer forma, fique-se com o esqueleto de um corpo cujas proporções são verdadeiramente colossais. Entretanto, se descermos um pouco à particularidade de cada um dos volumes, sempre podemos destacar de que forma, por exemplo, a “Literatura no Mundo Cananaico e Bíblico”, título de uma das suas secções, permite o contacto com um património contíguo ao bíblico, mas de acesso menos comum: “A literatura de Ugarit ficou a ser a única representante directa das culturas que se desenvolveram em Canaã, no tempo anterior à Bíblia, e que lhe serviram de fundamento” (199), conforme esclarece José Augusto Ramos. Assim, os textos aqui antologiadados (em tradução directa do ugarítico), “representam três secções do ciclo mitológico do deus Baal” (id.) — “E replicou Kotharu-Hasisu:/ ‘Não te disse eu, ó príncipe Baal,/ de forma repetida, ó auriga das nuvens?/ Agora, o teu inimigo, ó Baal,/ agora o teu inimigo deves esmagar./ Apoderar-te-ás do teu reino eterno,/ do teu domínio pelos séculos dos séculos” (vol. 5, 205). Além da raridade do texto recolhido (tradução inédita), acresce que a leitura de tal espécime literário garante ao leitor o ingresso num território que o autoriza a testemunhar novas perspectivas, ou assaz antigas, mas que ficam ocultas sob a influência normalizadora de um cânone ou uma grelha histórica e cultural.

Nem só das mais recuadas raízes vive esta antologia, como já se tentou sugerir. A abrangência mesma das suas inclusões é um vivo testemunho em contrário. Apesar do elevado número de traduções inéditas (recentes e antigas; algumas, por exemplo, do início do século passado), esta é também uma antologia de antologias, arquivando e fazendo reviver antecedentes ilustres como *Rosa do Mundo: 2001 Poemas para o Futuro* (Assírio & Alvim, 2001), entre várias outras publicações mais ou menos conspícuas. Mas detenhamo-nos por instantes no caso oposto. O de um poeta que lança não negligenciáveis desafios, tanto ao descuidado ou ocioso leitor, quanto àquele que se aventura a traduzi-lo, John Ashbery. Aqui se optou por tradução original de João M. P. Gabriel:

*E Ut Pictura Poesis* é o seu nome  
Já não podes dizer isso assim.

Incomodado com beleza tens de  
 sair cá para fora, para uma clareira,  
 E descansar. É certo que o que for engraçado que te aconteça  
 É OK. Exigir mais do que isto seria estranho  
 Da tua parte, tu que tens tantos amantes,  
 Pessoas que te admiram e estão dispostas  
 a fazer coisas por ti, mas achas que  
 Não é correcto, que se te conhecessem a sério...  
 Lá se vai a auto-análise. (vol.6, 355)

E aqui poderia perpetrar-se a ilegitimidade de um parêntesis, para sugerir, em regime de reiteração, as arduidades de uma tradução nestes moldes. Basta elencá-las. Gerir uma autêntica multidão: diferentes respirações e proveniências (espécie de interseccionismo muito depois, e muitos ismos volvidos), a prática do verso. As limitações que há na espacialidade do verso, na ingerência perversa e tão sub-reptícia do coloquial, imiscuído como está na peleja onde comparecem Horácio; o balancé do “eu” e do “tu”, que podem ou não ser o mesmo; efeitos de confessionalismo, difuso e mui oblíquo, semelhante a morrinha: leve mas capaz de molhar os néscios. Para nada dizer, ou tudo sugerir, das armadilhas montadas pela embalagem idiomática, o horizonte de intraduzibilidade, como sina e maldição. E ainda há a velha senha: traidor é quem traduz.

Um dos aspectos mais interessantes na integração de fontes bibliográficas de vária ordem e proveniência reside na possibilidade de confrontar versões feitas por diferentes tradutores de poetas pertencentes à mesma tradição cultural, ou inclusivamente o mesmo poeta. É o caso da poesia chinesa, no âmbito da qual se podem ler traduções de Gil de Carvalho em paralelo com as de António Graça de Abreu (responsável pela introdução ao capítulo “China: A Tradição Clássica”):

Um verde pinho está no pátio leste  
 Ervas e muitas prendem-lhe a beleza  
 O gelo queima outras espécies todas  
 A ele o vemos direito e alto de ramos» (319).

E eis como Gil de Carvalho teleporta D. Dinis da Idade Média portuguesa para a China do século IV e para Tao Yuanming, portanto anterior inclusivamente ao século VIII e aos numes Du Fu e Libai. Os quais integrarão posterior momento da antologia, vertidos por ambas as mãos tradutoras:

Jiao Sui, com cinco jarros de vinho,  
 liberta coração, fala como um deus,  
 a suprema eloquência, o pasmo em todos os convivas.  
 (457, Du Fu, por António Graça de Abreu);

Vem das obras, a fama?  
 O letrado retira-se, velho  
 E doente — sempre errante —,  
 Que sou eu senão uma gaivota  
 Entre céu e terra? (458, o mesmo, por Gil de Carvalho).

Num volume como o 5 desta coleção não falta o sortilégio das cosmogonias míticas, como a do Rigvede, aqui antologado em tradução inédita de José Carlos Calazans — “(No início) não existia nem o existente nem o não existente; não existia o espaço vazio nem o céu acima dele. O que havia então? Em que lugar? Quem zelava (por tudo)? Havia água (ou) o céu infinito?” (vol.5, 279). É sobremaneira tentador valorizar o modo interrogativo, a inquirição com que abre este “Hino da Criação” elaborado cerca de milénio e meio antes de Cristo. Mas nem só de tradições canónicas se faz esta antologia. Veja-se a partição intitulada “Meso-América e América do Norte”, cujo arranque se dá com uma “Canção de Trabalho de Escravos Negros das Ilhas Barbados”, em tradução inédita de Bernardo Diniz Ferreira — “O senhor comprou-me, ele não me matará, oh/ Antes de me matar ele manda-me para venda” (683). É, definitivamente, de outros enquadramentos que se trata, de geografias alargadas, mas sobretudo de modos muito distintos de conceber a gesta da humanidade, onde há lugar para os espoliados e os vencidos, como em “Os Últimos dias do Cerco de Tenochitlan”, em tradução, uma vez mais inédita, com a mesma autoria:

Basta: um pobre custava  
apenas dois punhados de farinha de milho,  
apenas dez pastéis de mosquito;  
o nosso preço não é mais que  
vinte pastéis de erva salitrosa. (685)

Não se trata de má consciência, mas, porventura, de dar forma e consistência prática e actuante ao desiderato aventado no início desta resenha: fornecer, esta antologia, um espelho do mundo, uma sua imagem, ao longo das eras. E, bem sabemos que, para retomar um título consagrado, esta foi uma história geral de infâmia.

Alguma coisa mais se poderia, talvez, dizer acerca do modo como se escolheu terminar cada um destes volumes. O primeiro deles encerra-se com dois textos, os que compõem a rubrica “Humor, Sátira e Ironia”. Ruben Darío e Nguyen Khuyen, um nicaraguense e um vietnamita. Uma opção que distende as geografias e repesca autores que repensam e interrogam, que questionam e desarranjam. Sintomaticamente (ou pelo contrário?), a última linha deste volume encerra uma interrogação, um verso que lança: “Como está a nossa pátria? Ou não sabe?” (vol. 5, 835), e também o volume final se fecha sob a mesma clave: “E agora que ia ser dele? Que fazer?” (vol. 6, 714) Ambos os volumes partilham o título no seu segmento final, o qual destaca a irrisão e a verruma irónica. Talvez se possa ver nestas duas interrogativas um mote eficaz para esta antologia. Não se tratou propriamente de fornecer uma resposta, mas de apresentar perguntas, levantar dúvidas, pôr em causa sistemas, complementando-os, ou invertendo os seus quadros de valores. Perguntando, à maneira da maiêutica de Sócrates, mais do que apresentando a solução.

Encerram ambos os volumes um importante conjunto de Notas Críticas, assinadas e a cargo dos mais variados especialistas, estudiosos e investigadores.

# COMPENDIUM

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