Rewriting/Reprising in Literature

Rewriting/Reprising in Literature: The Paradoxes of Intertextuality

Edited by

Claude Maisonnat, Josiane Paccaud-Huguet and Annie Ramel

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INTRODUCTION

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The widespread contemporary practise of reprising literary works of the past—the latest form taken by intertextuality—raises many aesthetic and ethical issues, at the back of which lies a more general and fundamental question: where do texts come from? In a recent book entitled *The Sexual Night*, the French contemporary writer Pascal Quignard argues that art is inevitably an attempt to answer the question of man's origin—not in the sense of the anthropological origin of mankind but in the sense of the origin of the individual subject: the one issue we cannot fail to face, and which will haunt us lifelong, is that of knowing where we come from.[1] Looking at a series of famous paintings, Quignard observes that there is necessarily an image lacking in the representation of the subject. Art being one of the most elaborate modes of shaping human subjectivity, it gives us access to this crucial truth: we come from a scene from which we were absent, radically excluded—whose Freudian name is the primal scene. Quignard considers this gap in representation in its three modes: the uterine night as the loss of origin, the mundane night as the absent referent conjured up by the signifier, and the night of death as the demise of the artist's author-ity.

We would like to put forward here that what holds water for painting also obtains for the art of writing, in spite of the differences between the linguistic and the iconic codes. The void, the darkness that precedes creation—incidentally called by Quignard the sexual night—could be used as a metaphor for the act of literary creation. Such radical but challenging views seem particularly relevant to the context of contemporary literature: beyond the mere fashion effect, there must be deeper motivations when contemporary novelists produce works that rewrite *Jane Eyre*, or *Robinson Crusoe*, or *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

[1] Pascal Quignard. *La Nuit Sexuelle*, Paris, Flammarion, 2007.

Authority and anxiety

Are we not inclined to believe that those novelists who make of reprising a deliberate practise are honouring their debt to the Fathers of literature, and that their position, between homage and pillage, presupposes the existence of a traceable source of the literary Word? How can we read this tendency against the general subversion of authority, of "the authority of the monologic science, of filiation,"[2] the irreversible phenomenon brought about in the mid-sixties by post-structuralist theories of intertextuality—Kristeva (after Bakhtin), Barthes (who proclaimed the death of the author), Derrida (who called into question the notion of "origins"), etc. We all have in mind Roland Barthes' description of the text as being

> […] woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation.[3]

It is by now taken for granted that the origin of the text is not "a unified authorial consciousness".[4] Any new utterance is always already written, already spoken, already read; the author arranges and compiles those utterances into "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash."[5] Could it be that the idea of literary "filiation" therefore is but a myth, a useful fiction—an attempt to make up for the original cacophony?

Indeed, the point of origin fascinates not only a writer like Pascal Quignard but all artists, as Liliane Louvel, one of the authors of this book, points out in her study of Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation*.[6] Her reference to Gustave Courbet's famous painting, *L'Origine du Monde*, is surely not accidental: Courbet's work bears witness to the desire to retrieve the irretrievable, a desire also at work in the act of reprising earlier works. How very tempting to displace the impossible knowledge onto the mystery

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[2] Roland Barthes. *The Rustle of Language*, Richard Howard (trans.), Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, 168.
[3] Roland Barthes. "From Word to Text", *Image—Music—Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), New York: The Noonday Press , 1977, 160.
[4] Graham Allen. *Intertextuality*, London, Routledge, 2000, 72.
[5] Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Image—Music—Text*, 146.
[6] Liliane Louvel, "Dorian's New Clothes".

of a woman's body, the uncertain origin of human life and the supposed locus of an unspeakable *jouissance* to which this painting scandalously gives an image. Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers* is a perfect literary case in point: a critic in love with the "dying fall" of Jeffrey Aspern's poems that spoil the reader's ear with delight, is looking for the secret of creation which, if found, would provide the answer to "the riddle of the universe".[7] The critic displaces the issue of literary creation onto the matter of the poet's illegitimate child supposedly born from an affair with his muse, Juliana Bordereau. He fancies he might solve the enigma by locating it in a woman's body, but he is ultimately confronted with the opaque sexual night of literary creation.

At the root of all this lies another scandal: the shadowy, unsubstantial nature of enunciation which is founded on an outrageous void. There is indeed an unbridgeable gap between the subject that speaks (the elusive subject of enunciation) and the grammatical subject (the subject of the statement). If I say "I", I can never know whether I am the same as that of which I speak; besides, anyone may shift into the place indexed by "I" or "you". Thus the shifter "I" refers to no fixed signified, which is another way of saying that in order to gain a symbolic place we must give up the dream of an ideally unified being.[8] The same applies to our name which represents us in the uncontrollable discourse of the Other, and which gives no clue as to our individual essence. Such is the initial trauma of our birth to socially symbolic space, a separation / partition which throws us into a world where we have to accept the intrusion of foreign air in our lungs in order to breathe, and then to speak with the words previously used by others.

This has an immediate bearing on our topic. For if the rift introduced in the speaking subject compromises his/her "authority", what chance of success is left to those embarked like Henry James's critic-biographer on a quest for the origin of poetic enunciation, for the literary father? The death of the author is not just a passing fad that engaged the attention of French theorists in the sixties. The emergence of the concept chimes with the switch to a conception of the divine Author/Other/Father as incomplete, aligned with a void.[9] What, then, becomes of the desire at work in re-writing/reprising—the desire to retrieve the lost object, the Ur-text sprung

[7] Henry James, *The Aspern Papers and The Turn of the Screw*, Penguin Classics, 1986, 46.

[8] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sheridan (trans.), London, Peregrine Books, 1977, 138-139.

[9] About the lack of being which characterizes the Other, See Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, 627.

from the sacred fount of enunciation? What becomes of the concept of filiation, including literary?

The central vacuity so far covered by symbolic fictions of authority, it seems, cannot be veiled any more. We live in an age that, in its passion for the real thing beyond semblances,[10] has been peeling off the deceptive layers of reality. As Joseph Hillis Miller writes, there was a time when it seemed that God dwelt in the human world. Then, society, nature and language mirrored one another in "the polyphonic harmony of microcosm and macrocosm."[11] But there also came a time when, in Virginia Woolf's terms, "the mirror was broken," the time of our modernity when it became difficult "to continue, as one walked by the sea, to marvel how beauty outside mirrored beauty within."[12] A similar transformation has occurred in literature:

> Mallarmé, with his poetry of 'the absence of all bouquets', or of 'the notion of an object, escaping, which fails to be', is merely the climax of a long evolution in modern literature. In this evolution words have been gradually hollowed out, and have lost their substantial participation in material or spiritual reality […] modern literature betrays in its very form the absence of God. [13]

Which does not mean, as Hillis Miller explains, "blank atheism, the 'God is dead' of Nietzche as it is often interpreted."[14] It simply means that, of the existence of God, there is no immediate evidence, no *guarantee*, in the "wild unfather'd mass" that is our world.[15] The question that concerns us

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[10] Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle*, Paris, Seuil, 2005.

[11] Joseph Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard UP, 1963, 5.

[12] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, London, Flamingo, [1927] 1995, 146.

[13] Hillis Miller 6.

[14] Hillis Miller 1.

[15] "In Utrumque Paratus", Matthew Arnold. That lack of guarantee is betrayed by the void that opens in a poem by John Henry Newman, "The Dream of Gerontius". The speaker, a fervent believer, prays Jesus and Mary to help his departing soul:
"Jesu, Maria - I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now.
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my brow, —"
As Gerontius is about to breathe his last, the dash marks a point of silence: obviously because the dying man is short of air, but also because he falters on the radical impossibility to find a "token" that could guarantee that God is really calling him. The poet seems to be confessing (unwittingly) that any statement rests on no authority but its own enunciation.

here is this: is there a relation to be drawn between the "death of the author" and the fact that reprising has become so popular among contemporary writers? A possible answer is that appropriating the work of a great author is both an acknowledgement of his death, and a desperate attempt to revive him. For confrontation with incompleteness often gives rise to fantasies of father-figures to be revered, or to be hated when they are conceived of as being fully "alive" in their obscene dimension—the "fathers of enjoyment" whose emergence Žižek signals in Twentieth Century literature.[16] An early modernist work like *The Aspern Papers* gives the "divine poet" existence in the critic's mind by a pseudo act of faith that seems to turn Aspern into a most ambivalent pagan godlike figure. In the postcolonial age when the semblances of Empire have collapsed and laid bare the predatory vacuity on which they were founded, detestation may give birth to various forms of writing, such as "writing back".

Like the protagonist of James's story, many re-writers waver between homage and pillage, in a complex attitude founded on the *illusion* of filiation. It is in this conflictual context that the "anxiety of influence" motif may arise: when "defence mechanisms" prompt (re)writers to defend themselves against what they need to keep repressed, as Harold Bloom has famously argued. Viewed from this perspective, the intertextual process still amounts to the substitution of a hypertext for a hypotext—just as metaphor consists in a "sacrifice" substituting one word for another—the process inevitably causing anxiety in the writing subject.

Bloom's theory, however, was founded on the Œdipus complex pattern, and a culture of guilt. Contemporary criticism has to take into account post-Freudian developments, especially those that have brought to the fore the inconsistency of father figures, and revealed the fallacy of the belief in an Ur-text. That the concept of filiation is not enough to account for intertextual practises is a point agreed upon by most of the authors of this volume, and to them it is a truth that emerges from the very *texture* of the works they have analysed. For Alistair MacLaren, *The Ebony Tower*, by John Fowles, seems to display a concern with origins—with its Ur-text, the Celtic romance *Eliduc*, its supposed source. Yet, Mac Laren argues, if Fowles's stories and novels "appear to be founded on another text, could it not also be said that, to a certain extent, they founder upon it?" Pascale

[16] About the "Father of enjoyment" in contemporary popular culture, see Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy your Symptom*, New York & London, Routledge, 2001, 124-125. See also Jean-Claude Maleval about the persecuting figure of the Father: "It is the confrontation with the incompleteness of the Other which gives rise to the Father of enjoyment." *La Forclusion du Nom-du-Père*, Paris, Seuil, 2000, 290.

Tollance argues in her study of Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping* that “rewriting is neither about revering the father or ‘wrestling him into submission,’ but about making do with his absence, or his failure, which is not just the lot of orphans.” Camille Manfredi demonstrates how Alasdair Gray, by leading us on a series of wrong tracks in *Lanark*, undermines the very concept of creative authority[17]. The memory of the past ostensibly displayed is a hoax, a simulacrum. Along similar lines, Karima Thomas Ben Salah[18] shows how Angela Carter “shatters the reader's faith in fixed entities, thus undermining the idea of a model or an origin”.

It could well be argued, then, that "reprising" represents not a primordial object, but the very lack of such an object. In one of Angela Carter's tales, Richard Pedot studies the ways in which Blue Beard’s bloody chamber is “not the real thing but […] a representation of former representations. It is a catachresis of the unimaginable, and Carter's own misprision of that misprision.”[19]

Which leads us logically, inevitably, to a somewhat paradoxical proposition: a creative act, whether it be the reprise of a former text or not, is a creation *ex nihilo*, that is to say a certain mode of organisation around a void which the artist makes visible/audible. The void, writes Claude Maisonnat, “ can easily be equated with *Das Ding*, or the primordial lost object of Freudian theory.” In J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*, it is metaphorized by the dark hole of Friday's tongueless mouth around which the narrative revolves. In Tony Harrison's play, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*, the void is the rubbish mound excavated by two “trackers” who eventually discover a lost satyr play by Sophocles on tattered bits of papyrus. The true source of inspiration is not the Ur-text: it is the holes in the papyrus which, Cécile Végéhan-Marshall argues, are an incentive for the playwright.[20]

Roland Barthes has made us familiar with such gaps when he described textuality as a permanent criss-crossing of threads that weaves holes into a fabric. There is, however, another type of gaps, those which are unexpected, accidental: a sudden traumatic intrusion of the shapeless and the nameless which tears the fabric open, whether it be in the narrative of our lives or in the stories which try to give shape to such disruptive events. This brings forth another, more literal sense of the French word

[17] Camille Manfredi, “Aesthetic encounter, literary point-scoring, or theft? Intertextuality as a tool for undermining narrative authority in the fiction of Alasdair Gray”.
[18] Karima Thomas Ben Salah, “Angela Carter in the Wonderland of Nonsense”.
[19] Richard Pedot, “Rewriting the fetish: Angela Carter's Tales”.
[20] Cécile Végéhan-Marshall, “Harrison, fanatic pillager”.

reprise as darning a fabric/text: rewriting/reprising may be understood as an endless attempt to heal such breaches loaded with silent affects.

Trauma and terror

It is no great surprise to affirm that ours was a century of major *man-made* traumas, whose impact tore up the fictions built on the belief in the *goodness* of man, or in knowledge and progress. Darwin's theories were, among others, such a trauma which shattered the notions of teleology and causality in the Biblical narrative, and brought forth the notion of *contingency*. What happens by accident—a sentence, a gesture, a discovery—drives a hole in the subject's symbolic fabric and such chance encounters are often associated with what Freud has called "hyperaesthesic impressions." Darwin is invited as a character in Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping*, where Dark, the patriarch, stumbles on a cave full of fossils from far beyond Biblical times. For the first time in his life Dark feels lonely, as once more the question of the world's origin is displaced onto the female body in his recollection of the scene:

> He remembered his fingers in the hollow spirals of the fossils. He remembered his fingers in her body. No, he must not remember that, not ever.[21]

Terror is the name for the affect related to such disruptive events—whether it be in some individual or collective historical situation. Reprising here will assume its twofold meaning: the symptomatic, compulsive repetition of the trauma, and the endless stitching of what is being constantly ripped up.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, it is a series of violent deaths that has left "[a] history-shaped hole in the Universe […] through which darkness poured like liquid tar." A family's twin children have been more or less closely involved in those deaths, the curious thing being their sense of guilt without "objective" reason. Clinical experience shows that if we are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the hyperesthesic surplus related to such scenes, it becomes a trauma, then a symptom, a form of repetition whose function is to deaden the surplus. As Elsa Sacksick points out in her essay[22] which brings forth the darning/tearing processes, "[t]he text, haunted by the same scenes, phrases and sounds, seems to be affected

[21] Jeanette Winterson, *Lighthousekeeping*, London, Harper Perennial, 2005, 120.
[22] Elsa Sacksisk, "As Ye Sew, Ye Shall Rip":The Aesthetics of Stitching up in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy.

by the same pathology as the characters who, haunted by traumatic memories, endlessly play the same scenes again in their heads." Thus for the sensory memory left by Estha's sexual molestation as he stirs banana jam:

> Gradually, as Estha stirred, the banana jam thickened and cooled […] Estha's hairs stood on end. The jam-stirring became a boat rowing. The round and round became a back and forth. Across a sticky scarlet river.[23]

This kind of repetition conveys the enduring affect, the sheer terror[24] that emerges as the *impressions* return, without any apparent link between banana stirring and boat rowing.

Throughout the various stages of culture, there have been various artistic ways of dealing with terror, one of them being tragic catharsis. But nowadays it seems that the purgation of passions is of no avail, for there is too much *jouissance* on the stage—an unsymbolizable excess which characterizes post-colonial experience. Alternative modes will have to be invented, so as to give the terror *in share*. Many such narratives do present formal symptoms: static or blurred temporality, obsessional modes of repetition, fragmented images, parataxis, which are less marks of poeticity than of the impossibility to structure meaning. But narrativity remains essential: if Roy's characters are "unwilling to seek refuge in fiction" (Roy, 311), the text itself will attempt to bind voice and body into what we might call a post-traumatic fiction. In her essay on Graham Swift's novel, Laurence Tatarian shows the constitutive link between trauma and repetition, and suggests the ways in which the latter ultimately seems to have become the energizing force of Swift's narratives.[25]

What we may infer is this: the question will be less to erase than to transmute the symptom which is the most real part of subjective experience—not to get rid of the ambivalent *jouissance* locked in the hyperaesthetic impression, but to explore and exploit its awakening power; to transform the deadly energy through varying modes of repetition that will diffract, refract, reflect the disruptive event which thus becomes the driving force of narrative. In other words, to amplify what Roland Barthes,

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[23] Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Flamingo, London, 1997, 194-196.

[24] Freud (1926) differentiates terror (a state provoked by an actual danger which takes you by surprise), from anxiety (a construction which means to protect the subject from the terror by means of anticipation): Freud considers anxiety as a signal which gives a frame to the expected traumatic scene, there is no element of surprise in it: it is a kind of deadened, muffled repetition of the traumatic experience.

[25] Laurence Tatarian, "Reprising or the subject in the making".

referring to the rhetoric of the image, has called the "*terror of uncertain signs*":

> Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction, even if this dysfunction is recuperated by society as a tragic silence. God provides no possibility of choosing between signs or a poetic (the panic 'shudder of meaning' of the Ancient Greeks) game; in the cinema itself, traumatic images are bound up with an uncertainty (an anxiety) concerning the meaning of objects or attitudes. Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs.[26]

There are also texts that refuse to answer, to play the tragic or poetic "game", or to downplay the anxiety by relating it to a question of influence. Rather, they will take advantage of the traumatic potentialities of the familiar words and stories we have heard.

How can we relate this to the question of voice?

Symptom and creation

The intertextual effect is in its essence an intrusive voice effect that is not devoid of affect. How to explain the shudder when we come across this echo of Virginia Woolf, in Winterson's novel, when the female character looks back at the territory of childhood:

> Behind me, smaller and smaller, was my tipped-up house that had flung us out, my mother and I, perhaps because we were never wanted there. I couldn't go back. There was only forward, northwards into the sea. To the lighthouse. (19)

The last three words take us by surprise, like a sting whose delight lies in our remembering a title which, among the great circulation of literary voices, has had a naming effect for us. As Adolphe Haberer observes,

> Among the scraps, orts and fragments of *jouissance* which now and again I receive from the intertext, some are likewise caused by my remembering something I didn't know I knew, others by the uncertain feeling that in the word-hoard of my forgetful memory there lies something I know but cannot remember.[27]

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[26] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image", *Image—Music—Text*, 39.

[27] Adolphe Haberer, "The Intertextual Effect". *Symbolism: An International Annual of Critical Aesthetics* (AMS Press, New York), vol. 5, 2005, 35-60.

Something like a traumatic experience, then? More relevant than the mere satisfaction of erudite knowledge, the intertextual effect is both one of loss, and recuperation:

> […] loss of meaning, of control, and identity. It is like what Yeats called 'that something over and above utility, which wrings the heart, both desirable and feared. (Haberer 58)

In short, *jouissance* which emerges in-between the processes of ripping and darning.

Mathieu Duplay[28] brings to mind Soren Kierkegaard's 1843 essay on repetition, first entitled "resumption", or "reprise": a form of forward-looking recollection which seeks the past in the present, "not so as to bemoan its loss, but in order to sense its capacity for renewal and surprise". So that successful resumption "requires a leap from one step to the next, and thus sets the tempo for the dynamic unfolding of life itself, unlike mere recollection, whose effects are essentially deadening". In short, such a form of reprising may be part of a creative invention that necessarily takes the reader beyond sheer voyeuristic complacency. The intertextual effect, no doubt, is a form of resumption.

Whether the emphasis is on loss or gloss, we have to deal with the return to and anticipation of a certain effect upon "a given reader envisaged in his singularity as *subject* […] *to*, not master of, language." (Haberer, 49; our emphasis). Why, then, not make a joy of the dying fall produced by equivocation, another modality of the floating voice effect? Quoting David Markson, ("If Nijinsky was mad, was rose madder?"), Mathieu Duplay writes:

> If the word 'madder', as used to refer to a colour, can be heard either as a noun or, more creatively, as a comparative, there is no guarantee that any written word will always be perceived exactly in the same manner, nor indeed that it is possible to anticipate all the ways in which it may be received and reprised by others.

Clearly, the absence of guarantee, the felicitous "scandal" of enunciation is essential to the circulation of textual energies—it is less a question of suppressing the vacuity, than of creating something new out of it. The gaps that show are indeed part of a new aesthetics which is also an ethics of the reading subject's response-ability. As Catherine Delesalle argues in her

[28] Mathieu Duplay, "'Accept the Illusion': Recollection and Reprise in *Going Down* by David Markson".

study of Malcolm Lowry's "Through the Panama", "we sometimes feel we are given the patches of fabric and the thread, and the sewing lies in our hands."

Hence the significance of reprising as darning—stitching a fabric that is being constantly ripped up. The stories told by the heroine of *Lighthousekeeping* are "like a loose web where the gaps are as visible as the threads that hold things together," Pascale Tollance notes. The female heroine practises "an art of crossing threads and of going backwards and forwards," but "the holes in the jumper of her life can only be roughly darned and must continue to show." This last point is extremely important. Ultimately, the back and forth stitching in the unstable signifying substance will bring rhythm where there was none: or rather, it creates a new narrative temporality meaningful in itself, by a kind of *re-naming* process which cuts out a new object for a different subject.

In the heyday of patriarchy, even as late as the eighteen nineties when Oscar Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, traditional patterns of authority were still capable of mending the rents in the social fabric—as is shown by Annie Ramel in her study of the novel's ending. It seemed then that what is nowadays known as the "paternal metaphor"[29] was able to relegate the primordial object of desire beneath the bar of the metaphor. In her own analysis of Will Self's *Dorian: an Imitation*, Josiane Paccaud-Huguet shows how, one century later, the relation between hypotext and hypertext is less a question of metaphor/repression, than of metonymy/proximity: ultimately, is there such a thing as the dimension of textual depths? It could be that the hypotext is less repressed by/under the hypertext, than exterior to it, while being an intimate part of it—they now work like the two sides of a Möbius strip where the recto and the verso of the same sheet seem to belong to one surface.[30] Most of the articles in this volume have underlined this sense of both discontinuity and continuity. For instance, Liliane Louvel shows how *Dorian: An Imitation* is a reprise "on a fluid model": the (lethal) circulation of fluids ending up in the

[29] See Žižek 2001: "[…] any shelter in which may be established a viable, temperate relation of one sex to the other necessitates the intervention […] of that medium known as the paternal metaphor. […] (i.e., the emergence of the obscene father who supplants the father living up to the symbolic function) renders impossible a viable, temperate relation with a woman […]. The femme fatale is nothing but a lure whose fascinating presence masks the true traumatic axis of the noir universe, the relationship to the obscene father, i.e. the default of the paternal metaphor." (159-160)

[30] Josiane Paccaud-Huguet & Annie Ramel, "From *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to *Dorian*: rending, mending, and ending".

transmission of a disease is also "that of a text, of an heritage, of a myth, of a (his)tory". "In/fusing, trans/fusing, dif/fusing, are all variant forms of fusing, of one text percolating through to another one."

What, then, is the impetus that causes the slight turn of the Möbius strip in this type of narrative economy? Similar answers emerge in several articles. For Alistair Maclaren, it is a differing type of functioning of language, based on sound and letter, which does the trick, suggesting "other ways of reading the text than through the prism of meaning-conferring 'Ur-text'"—thus the "weasel" of the Celtic romance turns into the "easel" that will enable the painter in Fowles' novel to find his identity—we can note that in-between, a letter has fallen off, thus silencing the earlier voice. In many ways, reprising produces a loss in meaning through the power of the letter—through the silent, meaningless part of the signifier. The *writing through* and *writing with* will, literally, *matter* more than the image depositing itself on the mirror of fiction: Marcin Stawiarski's study of Gabriel Josipovici's *The Big Glass*, a reprise of Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, explores this process.[31] Duchamp's plastic work, made of two panes of glass with the Bride on one, the Bachelors on the other, and an unbridgeable gap between the two—inscribes the traumatic separation between genders. The mirror of fiction itself will be at best a surface for *refraction* that causes the light to change direction, or for *diffraction* of the image into a spectrum.[32] Here *reading through* is just experiencing "a series of thresholds" which cancel the dichotomy surface/depth.

The rewriting subject may re-invent a world of his/her own with the fragments of disintegrated symbolic fictions, revisiting filiation. In *Lighthousekeeping*, it is the mother herself who cuts the "umbilical" rope and falls in the abyss in order to save her own daughter—she performs the symbolic father's task of separation. Her daughter Silver then meets Pew, the blind lighthouse keeper who nurtures her with bits of loosely related stories. Similarly the text sends "the original adrift on a sea where origins dissolve",[33] imposing upon them a change of direction. Thus the creative act, with its destructive-creative energy, de-fetishises the sacrosanct *œuvre*.

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[31] Marcin Stawiarski, "*Writing Through*: Gabriel Josipovici's *The Big Glass* and the Idea of Intermediacy in the Process of Rewriting".

[32] "[…] the novel mirrors the mirror of delay by a mechanism of filters. The circularity of the gaze abolishes causality and teleology, admitting a degree of randomness. The image seems to be dead. Nothing deposits itself upon the surface." (Stawiarski)

[33] See Pascale Tollance, "Jeanette Winterson's *Lighthousekeeping* or How to Invent a Story Already Written".

Like Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson was interested in the binding power of myths which is also, paradoxically, a power of emancipation from fixed meaning:

> Myths hook and bind the mind because at the same time they set the mind free, they explain the universe while allowing the universe to go on being unexplained.[34]

Likewise for canonical texts when they are being reprised. In Arundhati Roy's novel, reference to the grand historical narrative *à la Walter Scott* becomes an opportunity to exploit the constitutive amphibology in the master languages of the West—in this case, Latin or English: *no locus standi* becomes, according to the interpreter, *no locust stand I*, or *no low cast stand I*, producing a new subject of enunciation whose voice scandalously undermines the supposed Ur-text.

Voice and "textimacy"

The question that now comes to the forefront is this: what do we mean when we talk about voice in a literary context? The notion carries a wide scope of meanings, one of them being the physical act of producing a sound under the impulse of the respiratory system which produces vibrations in the larynx—the initial impetus generating the speech flow with its dynamic properties. In the case of a literary text, however, the power of the *phonè* is more or less limited to the production of rhymes, alliterations and assonances, rhythms, and to the phonemic games inherent in poetry.

As far as phenomenology and metaphysics are concerned, the notion of voice is a purely abstract construct that tries to account for the subject's self-awareness in relation to social environment. Such a voice is of course not vocal, although the subject's thoughts pass through the Symbolic code of language. This kind of voice pertaining to Derrida's metaphysics of presence[35] is not negligible in our context, because it produces the affects that sway the subject, and participate in the process of self-awareness. It is somewhat akin to the voice of conscience, of which the *vox populi* is an interesting variant: its collective dimension places the subject within

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[34] Jeanette Winterson, *Boating for Beginners*, London, Minerva, 1990, 63.

[35] See in particular the indispensable *La Voix et le Phénomène: Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Jacques Derrida), Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967. (2. ed. 1972 - *Epiméthée: Essais philosophiques* - 3. ed. 1976, 4. ed. 1983).

communal relations. As far as the textual realization of such phenomena is concerned, there is indeed a certain amount of sophistry in speaking of voice in the case of characters, narrators, or even the authorial voice, let alone the voice of the real and implied writer. All these are but figures of what by definition cannot be represented. As for the narratorial voice, it merely reflects the act of enunciation that is a prerequisite for a text to be produced. This voice without a face is necessarily outside the text: it is not an object, but an act that consists in taking charge of a narrative.

The authorial voice is another problematic metaphor, a *simulacrum* aiming at preserving the belief that there is an identifiable cause for the existence of the text, a cause that functions as a guarantee of author-ity. In short, the authorial voice stands for the origin of the text, but its power is severely challenged by the fact that no writer, except again in a metaphorical sense, creates his own linguistic instrument. This actual enunciation does not in any way precede the emergence of the text, in fact it proceeds from the text while simultaneously being the agent of its causation. In other words, the silent textual voice that can speak volumes has no existence prior to the production of a set of utterances. It becomes perceptible at the very moment when it gives its rhythm to the sentences and the paragraphs - by rhythm, however, we should not understand the conventional devices used in prosody, but something more likely to be found in the syntactic arrangements, the lexical groupings characteristic of a singular speaker's style.

We wish to argue, then, that the possible origin of a text is not the authorial voice alone, it has to share its power with the textual voice understood as that part in the enunciative act over which the author has no control—in other words, the silence of the uterine night. Such a voice circulates in the interstices that ruin textual continuity, in the gaps and holes generated by devices like aposiopeses, amphibolies, polysemy, puns, not forgetting all the games that can be played with the materiality of the signifier and the Letter.

There have been many attempts at coming to terms with the loss of textual origin: Michel Foucault's[36] *epistemes* in *Les Mots et les Choses*, the figure of the Muses of Ancient Greece, the God of Christianity. When Descartes challenged the supremacy of divine authority with his *cogito*, the individual became responsible for his/her choices, but still laboured under the yoke of tradition: writing consisted mainly in compiling, re-writing or glossing the texts of great predecessors, it was never felt to be problematic. Later on, when the notions of copyright, ownership and

[36] Michel Foucault. *Les Mots et les Choses*, Paris Gallimard, 1966

plagiarism became economic issues, the question of the status of the text began to draw some critical attention, and it is only in the nineteen sixties that the literary voice in literature acquired a philosophical status. M. Bakthin[37] proposed the term of heteroglossia or plurality of social voices dialogically but unconsciously present in a single utterance, as distinct from polyphony, a web of narrative voices consciously used by writers to alternate points of view without any vocal dimension whatsoever. As such, they do participate in the overall textual voice effect, a friction within the fiction which alters the perception, and therefore the interpretation, of the final *énoncé*.

Over several critical generations, the task of the critic was to try to find what the author had in mind,[38] so that criticism itself was a form of reprising, patching up what could be inferred of the writer's intention. It is now widely accepted that this belief stemmed from a confusion between the text and its irretrievable origin. Another mode of access to the origins of a text was felt to be the quest for sources, for a long time the favourite task of scholars who found it somewhat reassuring. This type of source study which may be helpful to retrace the myths behind stories, also includes genetic criticism, undoubtedly productive when it takes into account the texts themselves and not only some alleged intentions. Genetic material is indeed part and parcel of the textual voice, to the extent that it opens up different perspectives on the process of interpretation. Thus Catherine Delesalle's and Pierre Schaeffer's studies of anterior versions, as well as various intertextual sources for two of Lowry's long stories, investigate yet another version of the textual voice: the metafictional game in which Lowry lavishly indulged. Catherine Delesalle[39] shows how Lowry, in "Through The Panama", came to terms with the "anxiety of influence" by resorting to pastiche, humour and self-parody through the portrait of Sigbjorn Wilderness, while Pierre Schaeffer scrutinizes the complex relationship between the major novel *Under the Volcano* and the

[37] See M. Bakthin: *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. M. Holquist ed., Austin University Press of Texas.

[38] M.C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt came up with the notion of intentional fallacy: the erroneous belief that the text came straight out of the writer's head, so that he was supposed to know best what he actually meant (Wimsatt, William K .and Monroe C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *Sewanee Review*, vol. 54 (1946): 468-488. Revised and republished in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, U of Kentucky P, 1954: 3-18).

[39] Catherine Delesalle, "Playing with literary influences: "Through The Panama" as Malcolm Lowry's 'celestial meccano'".

later texts.[40] Stéphanie Bernard does the same in her essay on Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*,[41] by citing the little known Biblical Epistle of Jude as a structuring intertext to the novel.

Isabelle Roblin, in her study of Harold Pinter's cinematic adaptation of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant Woman*",[42] focuses on the way Pinter managed to turn the notoriously unfilmable novel into a successful adaptation. It is actually a case of what Genette calls trans-textuality, since the passage has to be effected from verbal code to visual code. In this instance the self-reflexive dimension of the novel is rendered by the film-within-the-film device, to which can be added the way the trick of the triple ending is accommodated. The innumerable cuts Pinter had to make, as well as the new elements he had to introduce, show quite clearly that if he wants to be creative at all the artist has to take his distance from the original text. The consequence is that the authority of Ur-texts is disowned, a state of affairs for which an author like John Fowles compensates by enjoying the recomposition of the source-text.

It ultimately appears that the intertextual effect, whatever its modalities (sources, voice, polyphony etc.), is what brings air and relief to the textual fabric. In J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Claude Maisonnat argues, Susan proves unable to reprise the discontinuity of her narrative. Her quest for the missing story of Cruso, as well as the references to Defoe's works, boil down to an awkward attempt at denying the existence of a textual voice over which she could exercise no control. Yet the metaleptic impulse—the leaps from one narrative level to another—is a clear trace of the invisible presence of a textual voice effect at the very heart of the novel.[43] J.A. Miller is right to assert that:

> The voice is undoubtedly a function of the signifier or even better, of the signifying chain […] the voice, is not an instrument, it is located within language, it haunts it.[44]

If we want to put the issue into a larger perspective we could say that, although it is by definition silent, the textual voice speaks through the

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[40] Pierre Schaeffer, "Metafictional Reprising in *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*".
[41] Stéphanie Bernard, "The two Judes: Thomas Hardy and the Biblical Intertext".
[42] Isabelle Roblin, "Rewriting Squared: Harold Pinter's Cinematic Adaptation of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant Woman*".
[43] Claude Maisonnat, "Seamy Rents and Tell-Tale Stitches in J. M. Coetzee's *FOE* or the Function of the Object Voice".
[44] Cf. Jacques Alain Miller: "Jacques Lacan et la Voix" in *Quarto*, ACF Belgique, N°54, June 1994; our translation.

dynamic properties of syntax, a dynamic force that propels the narrative onward, like a flow constrained by the laws of semantics, rhetoric, and grammar, compelled to sinuate and break off, the better to start again toward an ever receding goal: impossible completeness, which the signifying chain tries to cover up. It would seem that Joseph Conrad, like all great writers, was keenly aware of the necessity for the true artist to give full scope to this energy. In a letter to his friend Richard Curle, he mentions that his unusual syntactic constructions and perspectival shifts provide the basis of his narrative:

> […] It is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective. It is in those matters gradually, but never completely, mastered, that the history of my books really consists.[45]

Conrad's perceptive comment is another way of saying that the textual voice effect constitutes, beyond the other theoretical descriptions of intertextuality, a whole system of textual reprising in itself. Paradoxically, it is the structuring element inherent in reprising that guarantees the pre-semantic cohesion and coherence of a text, as Pierre Alferi[46] argues:

> It is the voice that inaugurates the text as such. The syntactic connections that are the product of contiguity only serve to meet the demands of narrative progression: to narrate, to argue, to dialogue etc. […] If the text requires a voice it is because, above all, it is a network of relationships between discontinuous énoncés. And that network is motionless, it hovers above the linearity of discourse; the voice is its coherence proper, it defines it as text, as fabric, as intertexture. (Alferi 69)

Could we not say that when we identify a literary voice, sometimes at first glance, or first reading, we actually recognise a style? In that sense the textual voice is a written voice—the basic modality of reprising in action: therefore, a writing voice.

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[45] Joseph Conrad. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. 8, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, 131

[46] See Pierre Alferi: *Chercher une phrase*, Paris, Christian Bourgois éditeur, 1991, 69 (our translation/adaptation).

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PART I:

AUTHORITY AS A SEMBLANCE

DORIAN'S 'NEW CLOTHES'

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The choice of a metaphor to approach a text already is in itself a theoretical stance. "Reprise" in English belongs to the musical lexis and we could say that the subject of my development is a reprise of a musical score. At least it purports to be the rewriting and revisiting of a former score onto which it is going to add its own word-notes, its own rhythm and energy. "Reprise" is, together with the "mending" metaphor chosen here to point to us the way we must follow, an interpreting tool. The latter implies that there has been a textual deterioration, an accident or a hole due to wear and tear in the textual unity. Another adjacent textile metaphor, that of embroidery, will also come in handy —and we still stick to the overall Barthesian text-as-fabric metaphor[1]—as *Dorian, An Imitation*, a "self"-declared rewriting of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* not only fills in the gaps in the matrix but also endows the previous storyline with its own flourishes, adornments and other supplementary concoctions. The work has already been tooled, "œuvré", and we are given an opera of an opera. The subtitle itself, "an imitation" sets its aesthetic mores claiming to be, not an imitation of life but an imitation of a former piece of work placing itself at least at two removes from its origin, a fact which would have angered Plato even more. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* serves as a *canevas*, a tapestry work, as a framework.

A few textual justifications to prove my point: in the text itself "reprise" appears:

> Along with the drip-drip of limpid minutes, the opaque flowing droplets of hours, the slow-moving, turbid course of days, came an unconsciousness of anything save the possibility of pain, the pain itself, and the relief at its abatement. It was, Wotton thought, like a reprise of his entire life. (243)

[1] "Texte veut dire tissu: mais alors que jusqu'ici on a toujours pris tissu pour un produit, un voile tout fait, derrière lequel se tient, plus ou moins caché, le sens (la vérité), nous accentuons maintenant, dans le tissu, l'idée générative que le texte se fait, se travaille à travers un entrelacs perpétuel […]" (Barthes 85-86).

And reprise, as revival and repetition, is presented as characteristic of the twentieth century: "Remember, divide the decade of the original style by the decade of its revival to discover how many times it's been revived before. This equation holds good for the entire twentieth century, which was an arithmetic cultural progression of modal repetition. We digress" (43). Imitation is also pinpointed as central with the copycat motif repeated three times as "copycat behaviour, copycat crime, copycat policing" (206). Could Self be a Wildean copycat? And of course the video as palimpsest unveils the whole process: "Conceal them without concealing them […] I'll tape over them—that's what I'll do. Tape over them, and no one will be any the wiser" (249).

Setting to work: threading the needle

Together with "historiographic metafiction" to evoke L. Hutcheon, reprise, (as rerun, repeat, revival) is typical of postmodern literature. Metafiction is "a reflexive awareness of the condition of meaning-construction" (Currie 15). For Currie there is a need for a definition that would not be essentialist that would "designate[s] a kind of problem in the philosophy of language, an irreducible difference and a non-identity" (Currie 15).

Let us draw a line here between such works as Banville's *Kepler*, Winterson's *The Passion*, or Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, *Chatterton*, etc. for instance, and *Dorian an Imitation*. The former are fictional representations of a historical situation or character. They are more or less similar to historical novels or biographies with a distance, I'll grant you that. They recapture the atmosphere of a time and place but freely develop their own storyline. *Dorian*, on the other hand, as its title indicates, refers to a novel located in a particular time and place, but still, to a novel. Thus it refers back to the history of literature. It is a fictional imitation of a fiction which is itself a Harlequin's coat of other pieces[2] (wish-come-true tale, Gautier's *Emaux et camées*, Flaubert's esthetic mores, Huysmans's *Against Nature*). It is neither a pastiche nor a parody of a genre like *Northanger Abbey* or Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, but it uses a novel as its backbone, as its hypotext. Famous examples would be Joyce's *Ulysses* and Coetzee's *Foe*, each with a specific purpose, be it nostalgia, the elaboration of political or social tableaux or postcolonial satire. Another difference could be drawn between partial (fragments, quotations, allusions) and total "reprise/rerun" of a whole framework (as is the case with *Dorian*) or of whole passages

[2] Cf Liliane Louvel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray Gray, le double visage de l'art*.

such as Borges's "Pierre Ménard". Thus Dorian offers itself as art and artifice, which is in keeping with Wilde's concerns, as it articulates the questions of Art and life, truth (ethics) and reality (pragmatics), when life imitates art and art copies…art.

One question we may first ask is: why? What does it take for a work of art to be taken up again? What makes it still exciting and readable today whereas other works are not? Why does a writer feel like filling in the "gaps" giving free range to his/her imagination and why do readers still enjoy it? First there have to be gaps, hazy borders and enigmas to appeal to desire. So that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides a structure, a "canevas" on which one can embroider, embroidering being more in Wildean spirit than mending or darning. Self found Wilde's novel fascinating enough to make him feel like spending his writing time padding it out, so as to appropriate the work and revive it 100 years later. Rewriting it was a way of endlessly rereading it. He adapted it to today's situation showing that its stakes were still valid in our own world although, art, sexual attitudes, politics have changed. Does this make a myth of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*? I do not know, but a canonical piece of work, certainly, its storyline becoming a *topos*. The fantastic element still plays a part even if it is denied as *unheimlich*, even if video-adapted. But we will come back to this later. Yet, we cannot ignore that the ghost of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* still works as an influence, that it belongs to our heritage and still puzzles us even more so as Will Self gives it one more turn of the screw.

To answer these questions we might resort to Walter Benjamin's conjunction of three "evolutionary lines" which account for the emergence of a new work of art. Copying and adapting them we could advance that first, we would need the emergence of a new technique preparing the appearance of a new form of art. The New technologies apply well here with their productions: video installations, the internet which Dorian2 uses to broadcast *Cathode Narcissus* on the web, hypertexts and links. The titles of the different parts of the book point in that direction: Part 1: Recordings, Part 2: Transmission, Part 3: Network, then: Epilogue. They play on words associated with modern technology, broadcasting, recording, networking as well as *Dorian* is a recording or remembrance of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, transmitting it like a disease. Like a web it expands on its matrix to trap characters and readers in its silken threads.

Secondly, the exhausted traditional forms are revitalized by the new technique which corresponds to Self's taking up the threads that have been worn out. Thirdly, we would need a writer whose mind would be caught