

Anxiety, Angst,
Anguish in
Fin de Siècle Art
and Literature

Anxiety, Angst, Anguish in Fin de Siècle Art and Literature

Edited by

Rosina Neginsky, Marthe Segrestin
and Luba Jurgenson

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INTRODUCTION¹

LUBA JURGENSON, ROSINA NEGINSKY
AND MARTHE SEGRESTIN

En voyant l'aveuglement et la misère de l'homme, en regardant l'univers muet et l'homme sans lumière, abandonné à lui-même, et comme égaré dans ce recoin de l'univers, sans savoir qui l'y a mis, ce qu'il y est venu faire, ce qu'il deviendra en mourant, incapable de toute connaissance, j'entre en effroi comme un homme qu'on aurait porté endormi dans une île déserte et effroyable, et qui s'éveillerait sans connaître où il est, et sans moyen d'en sortir.

When I see the blind and wretched state of humanity, when I survey the whole universe in its dumbness, its silence, and humanity left to itself with no light, as though lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put us her, what we have come to do, what will become of us when we die, incapable of knowing anything, I am moved to terror, like a person transported in sleep to some terrifying desert island who wakes up quite lost and with no means of escape².

This well-known statement by Blaise Pascal, located in the Section XI of his *Thoughts* (entitled "The Prophecies"), leads one to believe that there is some degree of risk related to our conceptual undertaking: to show that the "anguished man" of the *Fin de Siècle* is quite contemporary. Even in the middle of the "classical period," which seeks to ground itself in reason and to illuminate even the most hidden corners of intellectual space, we encounter one "blind," "misled," and "left" to himself. This means it is vain wishing to retrace the genesis of an experience as fundamental as anguish, as well as of its artistic, literary, and philosophical expression. That origin shies away; we will always find in front of any "origin" the occurrence that would be more "original," even if it appears in a different form. It is also vain to unambiguously connect that experience to political schemas or to their outbreak when the connections appear between the area of the thought and the organization of life. Indeed, how not to hear the echo of Pascal's complaint in the one Søren Kierkegaard formulated almost two centuries later:

Hvor er jeg? Hvad vil det sige: Verden? Hvad betyder dette Ord? Hvo har narret mig ind i det Hele, og lader mig nu staae der? Hvem er jeg? Hvorledes kom jeg ind i Verden; hvorfor blev jeg ikke adspurgt, hvorfor ikke gjort bekjendt med Skikke og Vedtægter, men stukket ind i Geledet, som var jeg kjøbt af en Seelenverkoper? Hvorledes blev jeg Interessent i den store Entreprise, som man kalder Virkeligheden? Hvorfor skal jeg være Interessent? Er det ikke en fri Sag? Og skal jeg nødsages til at være det, hvor er da Dirigenten, jeg har en Bemærkning at gjøre? Er der ingen Dirigent? Hvor skal jeg henvende mig med min Klage?

Where am I? What does it mean to say “the world”? What is the meaning of the world? Who tricked me into this whole thing and leaves me standing here? Who am I? How did I get into the world? Why was I not asked about it? Why was I not informed of the rules and regulations and just thrust into the ranks as if I had been bought from a peddling shanghaier of human beings? How did I get involved in the big enterprise called actuality? Why should I be involved? Isn’t it a matter of choice? If I am compelled to be involved, where is the manager—I have something to say about this. Is there no manager? To whom shall I make my complaint?³

Life experiences and their virtual representations evolve and resurface, according to the cultural processes and political systems. This allows to think not only in terms of continuity, but also in terms of thresholds. These notes of revolt and despair indicate a composer of different music from the author of *Thoughts*, even though we recognize variations around the same theme. Between Pascal and Kierkegaard there is the vast continent of the German idealist philosophy with which—or against which—one thinks henceforth about being. The concept of anguish is born to free “the one who exists” from the hindrance of speculative reason and its abstractions. Kierkegaard in *Begrebet Angest (The Concept of Anxiety)* describes that state as a fear of existence on the one hand, and as “the vertigo of freedom” on the other. Thus, a man who finds himself on top of the cliff, feels the fear of falling as well as the desire to jump into the precipice. Such a contradictory situation is the root of withdrawal within oneself and the will to act. That is to say that Kierkegaard replaces hegelian dialectics, where being and nothingness absorb each other, with the absolute paradox, and he also replaces dialectical reconciliation of opposites with despair. Thus, anguish is not only an experience, but also a tool for thinking it, since its inclusion assumes a radical reversal between points of view: the “one who exists”, who does not look at himself from the place of eternity, must make out of anguish the object of his premier investigation. As anguish appears among the objects deserving attention, humanity takes hold of existence and of the experience-of-existence. From

that point on, the existing human being becomes a concrete subject confronting *aporias* of the real, and no longer an abstract subject of knowledge.

In relation to this new philosophical configuration, the question of interiority begins to emerge in art and in literature (through, for example, the internal focalization). Hegel offers a reflection on interiority in his *Aesthetic* that prepares the new way of perceiving a man who goes against himself. From Kierkegaard up to Heidegger, including Nietzsche and Rosenzweig in between, the rehabilitation of negativity, which is inseparable from a real existence and responsible for the appearance of anguish, will go against the Hegelian System and its capacity of abstraction (from now on perceived as deadly). In order to be alive one is obliged to confront oneself with the anguish of death. The intellectual constructions that reduce or annihilate it deprive one of real identity, which is to seek for in the “living” experience of nothing. This way of thinking brings us into the heart of the 20th century, with Heidegger who, at his inaugural lecture of 1929, « Was ist Metaphysik? » attacks Hegel’s inability to conceive the true meaning of nothingness, and replaces the hegelian notion of « un-being » with the notion of anguish. This, in turn, will open new epistemological horizons, notably in France, with Blanchot, Levinas and Foucault.

On this anti-Hegelian path (which in reality begins with Schelling, Hegel’s contemporary), what is the place of Symbolism? What are the connections between the essence of that broad European movement and the new human interiority which makes place for nothingness? It is more common to correlate anguish with Existentialism or Expressionism, which means with post-Symbolist currents (not excluded here, thus presenting Symbolism in its broad sense, meaning the change in paradigm from which new ways of expression would emerge). Thus looking at anguish as a phenomenon of 19th and early of 20th centuries allows us to situate Symbolism precisely in the chain of changing aesthetics, both nested and antagonistic. In the wake of Romanticism, opposition arose between referential and non-referential languages on the one hand, and between motivated and arbitrary languages on the other.

To consider anguish through the spectrum of Symbolism – and both in its before and aftermath – is a way of grasping the mechanisms of rupture as well as how these mechanisms are transcended. These complex exchanges between different artistic languages make exact periodization difficult and blur borders. Thus, it is in Realism that the representations of interiority take form, while paradoxically, it is these representations that reveal its limits. These representations are at the origin of irrational

subjectivity, which negates the positivist assumptions, thereby giving access to underground consciousness and opening studies in psychoanalysis. These complex entanglements between the realist and symbolist aesthetics will be discussed in Andrey Faustov's article.

Symbolists inherit the dismantlement of rational philosophical systems, in particular Hegelianism, but at the same time they reevaluate the reality that arises from the exposure to anguish as an illusion. Thus comes forth an expressive language that claims to be motivated, at the opposite of the arbitrary nature of sign. Luba Jurgenson will offer a reflection on connections between anguish and language. It is here, where these contradictions and exchanges converge, that we decided to reflect, together, on Symbolist aesthetics and its load of anguish, a topic as of yet not specifically studied from this point of view, even if there are partial contributions to the study of the anxiety in Symbolist movement. We can cite the conference "Semiotics of Fear," organized by Nora Buhks and Francis Conte at the Sorbonne in 2001, that led to the publication of a seminal book with the same title.⁵

Symbolism in its beginnings (Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism, where anguish arose through the representation of madness and cruelty, e.g. in Goya and Füssli) and in its posterity (Existentialism, Abstraction, the Absurd) encompasses the historical period rich in "revolutions" but also in "restorations," and it cannot be divorced from politics. Furthermore, the expression "fin de siècle" engages thought toward the question of terminations and (new) beginnings. End of Romanticism? End of metaphysics? Or a new departure for one and/or the other? This is the period in which art, literature, and music go towards the reinvention of romantic motifs of negativity, toward the redistribution of shaded and illuminated areas. The Symbolist anguish is able to evoke a reflection about the subversive heritage and the apocalyptic anticipations on the threshold of a modernity that has to deal with the deficiency of being.

The international conference "Angst in European Symbolism" as well as this volume—*Anxiety, Angst, Anguish in Fin de Siècle Art and Literature*—study various manifestations of angst, anguish, and anxiety in art, literature, and philosophy. One of the important aspects of this book is underlining the difficulty of describing the feeling and the phenomenon using only one word. Indeed, the concept that Kierkegaard and Heidegger analyzed does not admit exact description by only one word. There are a number of words that correspond to this concept, as we point out already in the title of our volume. Around this notion there exist a considerable number of terminological hesitations, appearing from one language to another and within the same language, which link to the uncertainty of the

anguish itself. It is especially striking in English. This hesitation is reflected in the history of translations of Kierkegaard's work, *Begrebet Angst*. The word "angest" did not particularly cause problems to German translators (*Der Begriff Angst*). But it was not that simple in English. The first translator, Walter Lowrie, proposed the title *The Concept of Dread* (1944), before the essay was rebaptized in English as *The Concept of Anxiety* (Reidar Thomte, Princeton University Press, 1980). This example illustrates the difficulty of transposing that philosophical object with words already existing in English, and it explains that the word angst finds its way next to the words anxiety and anguish in the Anglophone environment of the 19th century.

In French the ambiguity appears much smaller. If at first the words "angoisse" and "anxiété" were differentiated—"angoisse" had a psychological *value*, whereas "anxiété" was more related to psychological *state*—in the 18th century they got closer in order to depict the state of psychic and physical discomfort, characterized by a diffused fear. Nonetheless, the differences between the two terms survived. Being linked in particular to the translations of Kierkegaard, not only has "angoisse" started to mean a more philosophical and existential phenomenon, but in a more general way it has a stronger meaning than the "anxiété." It is not accidental then that in articles written in French it is the word "angoisse" that is privileged, and not the word "anxiété."

It is not the case in Russian. All articles written about the notion of angst in Russia stress a complexity of the semantic and linguistic expression of different shades of the ideas of angst, anguish, and anxiety in Russian language. From articles written by Andrey Faustov, Natalia Gamalova, Jean-Philippe Jaccard, Claire Delaunay, Laure Troubetzkoy and Tatiana Victoroff we learn that there are many words that express the complexity of the feeling associated with angst and that there are different "types" of angst in Russian language and culture. Jean-Philippe Jaccard explains that "there are many words in Russian that might be associated with a general notion of angst," and that "in Russian there is not an exact word to translate what is covered in French under the word '*angoisse*.'" In analyzing Annensky's reasons for using multiple manifestations of a complex linguistic range of "Russian" anguish, Natalia Gamalova cites Vladimir Dal's definition of the word anguish, which describes "soul's constraints, soul's languor, torturous sadness, soul's anguish, worry, apprehension/fear, boredom, grief, heart's pain, sorrow." Andrey Faustov demonstrates that in Russian literature the terminology of anguish depends on nuances of the feeling of anguish, which in its turn is partially a socio-psychological phenomenon, to which its treatment in literature directly

relates. According to Claire Delaunay, when Tolstoy uses three Russian words (*toska*, *strakh*, and *uzhas*) none of them is an exact equivalent of anguish, but each is able to depict the feeling's effect and to translate that term. Laure Troubetzkoy shows that in the Russian concept of anguish could coexist "the meaning of melancholy, boredom, nostalgia, inner torture, and the torture of *ne to* 'it is not that.'" These numerous definitions of different forms of anguish that we discover in the linguistic range of Russian language allow us to understand the complexity of the studied phenomena of angst, anguish, and anxiety as emotional, philosophical, literary, and historical concepts.

The conference in Paris brought us to understand that the experience of anguish manifested itself in a spectacular way in the arts at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. But it especially made obvious the extraordinary tension between anguish and art. On the one hand, art was for many people the means of expression, a way to give a form to their undetermined emotions and diffused fears, often in order to master and overcome them. Thus art acted as a struggle against anguish. On the other hand, however, as many examples demonstrate, it was a creative force, the laboratory of new forms of artistic expression. In the area of arts we find then a double determination of anguish, which is evil when it puts on the slope of nothingness, and good when it allows one to reveal artistic potential. One of the main challenges is to transform the trial of the anguish in experience—we might even say in experimentation—of the anguish.

Art offers to artists and to scholars a space to decode the anguish which appears quite often as a sign and symptom of the "vertigo of possibilities" during that tormented turn between the 19th and 20th centuries. Art is also a place where the mysterious trial of anguish is able to express itself. For anguish the work of art can be a sounding box or merely the opposite, the tool of resorption. Finally, the art at the turn of centuries is also an immense field of experimentations born out of the anguish which opened radically new paths for creativity.

Thus, the first part of our volume gathers together articles which first offer an etiology of anguish by adopting a diagnostic approach while confronting certain artistic practices at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. If the indetermination of the phenomenon is underlined everywhere, anguish yet has a very important value of sign, illuminating the breathtaking thresholds and questioning their crossing. It is about that concept of threshold that Britta Benert invites us to think in her article with a suggestive title "The Salomean *Land Between*" which refers to the collection of essays by Lou Andreas-Salomé entitled *Im Zwischenland*. It

demonstrates how the writer, immersed similar to her contemporaries in a period of anguishing transition, made out of it her poetics. Andrey Faustov, who analyzes the anguish in works of Russian poets at the threshold of the 20th century, shows especially how they invented “world sorrow.” This describes the pessimism and the vague fears of a generation standing at the threshold which has the shape of a precipice. As Merezhkovsky explains in 1893: “There are two worlds between which there is a whole precipice. The modern generation was unfortunate to be born between these two worlds, located in front of that precipice. That is the reason of its weakness, ill anguish.”⁶ It is also the anguish between two worlds that Jana Kantořiková examines in her article about Czech Symbolism. In that article she analyzes this anguish as *horror fragmenti*, which manifests itself at the hinge of the world that ends and the world that is to come. The anguish of threshold takes the shape of fear in front of the abyss in Mechthild Albert’s article about the Spanish Modernist poets. In Albert’s article it is the whole generation of Latin American poets who recognize themselves in the way in which the Cuban author José Martí describes feelings—“la Intranquilidad, la Inseguridad, la Vaga Esperanza, la Visión Secreta” (“Anxiety, Uncertainty, Vague Hope, A Secret Vision”). They arise at the moment when the old world topples over and modern times are still to come. The abyss then becomes the obsessive metaphor of that anguish. Maia Varsimashvili-Raphael’s article likewise centers on poetry, discussing the Georgian Symbolist poets. After demonstrating that the sources of anguish are not clearly identifiable, but multiple and elusive, Maia Varsimashvili-Raphael links them to a faltering of both the world and of history to the uncertainties that lead poets in a worrisome swirl. One in which “the soul is thirsty of limits” as Galaktion Tabidzé writes.⁷ It is again in poetry that Mateusz Chmurski sees one of the most spectacular manifestations of “the era of anguish” in Poland. In his article, he examines the case of Maria Komornicka (writing as Piotr Włast) in whose poetry he sees an anguish that represents the symptom of the modern consciousness seeking emancipation from “polonity.” Finally it is Jean-Philippe Jaccard who sums up this first section dedicated to the anguish of thresholds. In the “Post symbolist *horror*, or the End of Anguish,” he opposes the horror that one experiences in immediacy, to anguish, which is felt in the duration. As opposed to horror, anguish voices the uncertain wait of the consciousness that finds itself at the threshold of all possibilities.

The second part of the book concerns anguish as a trial and how it manifests itself in art. Indeed, some works are saturated with anguish, but they might have a different vocation, whether they amplify that anguish or,

just the opposite, manage to master, or rather overcome it. There are indeed writers for whom anguish is the *leitmotiv* of the work. This is so in the works of the Russian writer Leonid Andreev, whose works Serge Rolet examines in his article. Rolet shows that Andreev's characters have moods which derive from the fundamental experience of nothingness, one which Heidegger would later describe. In this same line, Natalia Gamalova demonstrates how in the poetry of the Russian Symbolist Innokentij Annenski anguish is a kind of immanent characteristic of the world. Larry Shiner's article "Odour and Anxiety in *À Rebours*" studies the smells and odors connected to the phenomenon of anguish in Huysmans' work. Shiner brings an original light to the idea of anguish-as-trial, focusing on the sensory and psychic. Finally, according to Deborah Cibelli, the work of English artist Aubrey Beardsley inspired by *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, an Italian novel printed in 1499, reflects his yearning and his angst given the impossibility of fully realizing erotic love within earthly boundaries.

If the first articles of this section are dedicated to art forms which serve as a sounding board for anguish, the following articles instead center around questions of remission and of the outcomes the artistic practice offers. Three Russian experiences are good illustrations of the latter. The first relates to Leo Tolstoy and his experience of anguish, analyzed by Claire Delaunay. The examination of *Journal d'un fou* (*The Diary of a Madman*), allows us to go back to the spiritual crisis Tolstoy went through in the 1870s, and to understand how he, after having gone mentally and physically through the trial of anguish, attempted to free himself. The second experience is of Russian writer Andrey Bely, examined by Tatiana Victoroff. She studies three stages of what she calls his "life work," illuminating how his work was for him simultaneously a way to express his own anguish, the anguish of his generation, and a reply to those anguishes, starting with mysteries he writes at the beginning of his career, until *Carnets d'un toqué* (*Notes of a Nut*) where he manages to conjure the anguish. It is also to Bely that Olga Skonechnaya refers. She especially examines his *Silver Dove*, in which the experience of anguish and persecution is the matrix of that "paranoid novel." Finally, Laure Troubetzkoy brings up the case of Russian essay writer Mikhail Gerschenson, who was distressed by both the First World War and the Revolution, and whose writings are marked by anguish and pessimism, even if he persists in his desire to believe in the future.

And lastly, the concluding section allows us to demonstrate that anguish is not only the sign of a threshold to walk over, or a manifestation of the crisis to cross and overcome, but it is also a dynamic phenomenon: a constructive element in the rapidly changing artistic context. This is

particularly the case in the area of theater. At a time when many Western dramatic traditions are questioned – whether it relates to aesthetic foundations, to the ways of practicing theater, or to their finalities – Anne Ducrey shows how the Symbolists invent a new form of tragedy using in particular the dramatic potential of anguish. Thus she studies that dramaturgy of anguish through examples in works of Maurice Maeterlinck, Fernando Pessoa, and Alexandre Blok. Marthe Segrestin also uses the expression “dramaturgy of anguish” in her article on August Strindberg in order to describe his last plays, in which he not only intends to overcome anguish, but uses it as a resource that helps the progress of the plays. One might see that the renewal of dramaturgy requires a renewal of the stage. That is what we find in the article by Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu about the first performances in Russia of the theater of death by Maeterlinck. Her analysis centers around two important theater directors, Stanislavski and Meyerhold, and around the research they do in order to produce the dramaturgy of anguish on the stage, which requires completely rethinking not only the way the actors play, but the stage space. The article by Laetitia Le Guay-Brancovan on *Le Château de Barbe-Bleue* (*Bluebeard's Castle*) – the opera Béla Bartók composed after the Béla Balázs' libretto, and which premiered in Budapest in May of 1918 – adds the musical dimension to previous studies. It illustrates how anguish combines a new dramaturgy with new musical colors.

Next to theater and music, a series of articles brings up all the experimentations that anguish induced in the area of visual arts. This is the theme of Marja Lahelma's article on the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, whose most famous work *The Scream* “has become a symbol of the existential anxiety modern humanity experiences.” Describing the drawing *Art*, the painting *Metabolism*, the central image of *The Frieze of Life*, and a few other Munch's works, Lahelma elaborates on the meaning of Munch's art and the new language he develops to express his powerful inner life and troubling emotions. Rosina Neginsky is also interested in the artistic potential of anguish, and she examines it in her article on the French painter Odilon Redon. The subtitle of her article is quite telling in itself: “The Invention of a New Visual Language.” Rosina Neginsky demonstrates how Odilon Redon, using literary works, along with new scientific and psychological discoveries, creates a new visual language in order to paint the universal feeling of existential anxiety, his permanent companion. In her article “Art Déco Portrayals of Animal Angst,” Anna Mazzanti explains how the representations of animals and animal-human hybrids intimately correlated with the expression of human anguish and invented a new artistic language. Finally, in his article “Flatness and

Anxiety at the Edges of Symbolist Art,” Andrew Kent-Marvick makes a connection between urbanization, anguish, and a new way Symbolist artists and their successors developed to represent the space. He examines in particular the works of Khnopff, Mondrian, de Chirico, and their successors such as Pollock. He demonstrates how each of them created his own visual language for the representation of space and how through their artistic representations of space they succeeded in sublimating their anxiety and partially forgetting about it.

Through this journey we observe a remarkable impact of anguish on the arts at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The analyzed works give us an idea of the magnitude of anguish generated by the historical events, scientific advancements (especially in psychology), and metaphysical inquiries. Through the invention of new artistic languages, those works also illustrate the fecundity of anguish for artists.

Notes

¹ Translated from French by Rosina Neginsky.

² Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer, London, Penguin Books, 1966.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Gjentagelsen. Et Forsøg i den eksperimenterende Psychologi af Constantin Constantius*, Kjøbenhavn, Reitzel, 1843 (*Repetition, A Venture in Experimental Psychology*, by Constantin Constantius, Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, 1983, Princeton University Press).

⁴ Martin Heidegger, « Was ist Metaphysik ? », Bonn, Friedrich Cohen, 1929.

⁵ “Семiotика страха” (“Semiotics of Fear”), под редакцией Норы Букс и Франсиса Конта, Сорбонна. Русский Институт. Париж – Москва, 2005. (ed. Nora Buhks, Sorbonne. Russian Institute. Paris-Moscow).

⁶ In “About Reasons of Decline and About New Trends of Contemporary Russian Literature” («Это два мира, между которыми целая бездна. Современное поколение имело несчастье родиться между этими двумя мирами, перед этой бездной. Вот чем объясняется его слабость, болезненная тревога», «О причинах упадка и о новых течениях современной русской литературы»).

⁷ G. Tabidzé, « Éphéméride » (« efemera »), 1922.

PART ONE

THRESHOLDS

CHAPTER ONE

LE *PAYS INTERMEDIAIRE* SALOMEEN : UN LIEU ENTRE EXPERIENCE DE L'ANGOISSE ET LIBERATION CREATRICE

BRITTA BENERT

Abstract

Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1902) published the collection of short stories *Im Zwischenland* in 1902. With my reading of "Die Schwester" ("The Sister"), one of the five stories in this collection, I would like to show how the experience of anguish in this text, is linked both to the theme of the Self in crisis, and consubstantially to the author's own poetic reflections. I will first present the *context* in which "The Sister" fits in, and secondly, focus upon the text itself. This approach - or detour - comes not without echoing the author's posthumous reception. This traditional reception, being the only one acceptably valid over several decades, can be characterized by a kind of distorting and unfortunate contextualization, one that reduces the author to the state of mere pretext to focus on the achievements of the illustrious encounters by Lou Andreas-Salomé, while at the same time diminishing the value of his novels in particular. The more recent criticism, however, being right to underline the fact that the focus on the Nietzsche/Rilke/Freud triad in particular may have prevented full recognition of the active role that the novelist and future analyst played in the invention of a new aesthetic at the turn of the century. These same works that collectively aimed at bringing to the fore the obvious creative presence of women also allowed us to take a fresh look at the many links between the salomean work and the various literary movements of its time. In other words, the most recent critique has (re)opened the way to a contextualization that would allow one to better evaluate the impact of Lou Andreas-Salomé in this *turn of the century*, caught up in full aesthetic blooming. Lou Andreas-Salomé opens the short story that interests us here on a poem from Rilke "Ich war ein Kind und

träumte viel", so it is not limited to accompanying his young friend on a journey of poetic realization. On the contrary, the observation of the chronology reveals that Lou Andreas-Salomé and Rilke served as muses for each other. With this example, it is Lou Andreas-Salomé who captures his friend's poem in its innovative potential and then draws inspiration from it to form her own literary work. What is clearly illustrated here is a new understanding of the work of art, in an open understanding within which the identity of the creator is seen multiplied by as many readers as are able to read it, and thus recreates it as a work of art. Lou Andreas-Salomé is therefore one of those authors in whom the open character of the work is a part of a sought-after aesthetic, the very one that Umberto Eco designated as specifically characteristic of modernity. Modern, "The Sister" is also distressing in its ambiguity, which results in its indecisiveness: *Au pays intermédiaire* – a text with a title so programmatic and highly symbolic - refuses to give a univocal interpretation, but instead gives rise to a multiplicity of questions.

O

Aborder l'œuvre de Lou Andreas-Salomé (1861-1937) sous l'angle du phénomène existentiel de l'angoisse, c'est toucher à un élément important de l'esthétique de l'auteur. Dans un petit ouvrage¹, j'avais interrogé cette esthétique en son lien avec la question d'altérité, frôlant ainsi la thématique du présent colloque.

En effet, les notions d'angoisse et d'altérité invitent toutes deux à questionner la place qu'occupe l'individu dans le monde 1900, ce nouveau monde en plein chamboulement qui peut effrayer et qui peut aussi complètement remettre en question la relation qu'entretennent les uns aux autres, le Moi à soi-même. Aussi, avec la lecture que je propose de « Die Schwester » (« La Sœur »), l'un des cinq récits que rassemble le recueil *Im Zwischenland* (*Au Pays intermédiaire*) publié en 1902², je voudrais montrer comment, dans ce texte, l'expérience de l'angoisse s'avère être tout à la fois liée à la thématique du Moi en crise, et consubstantielle aux réflexions poétologiques de l'auteure. Je présenterai tout d'abord le *contexte* dans lequel « La Sœur » s'inscrit pour, dans un deuxième temps seulement, m'arrêter au texte lui-même. Rappelons que cette démarche – ou ce détour - n'est pas sans faire écho à la réception posthume de l'auteure. Cet accueil traditionnel, le seul valable sur plusieurs décennies, peut se caractériser par une sorte de contextualisation déformante et malheureuse, qui réduit l'auteure à l'état de simple prétexte³ pour se focaliser sur les réalisations des illustres rencontres de Lou Andreas-Salomé, tout en minorant dans un même mouvement la valeur de ses écrits

romanesques en particulier⁴. La critique plus récente, quant à elle, a eu raison de souligner le fait que la focalisation sur la triade Nietzsche/Rilke/Freud notamment a pu empêcher la pleine reconnaissance du rôle actif que la romancière et future analyste a joué dans l'invention d'une nouvelle esthétique au tournant du siècle⁵. Ces mêmes travaux visant à mettre au premier plan l'évidente présence créative des femmes ont également permis de jeter un regard nouveau sur les nombreux liens existants entre l'œuvre saloméenne et les divers mouvements littéraires de son temps. En d'autres termes, la critique plus récente a (r)ouvert la voie à une contextualisation qui permettrait davantage d'évaluer l'impact de Lou Andreas-Salomé en ce Tournant du siècle en pleine ébullition esthétique. Et c'est bien sûr dans cette approche que je souhaite inscrire les réflexions qui vont suivre.

Pour une nouvelle contextualisation : Andreas-Salomé et Rilke, muses l'un pour l'autre

La raison la plus évidente de mettre au premier plan l'une des rencontres de Lou Andreas-Salomé parmi les plus célèbres : « La Sœur » s'ouvre sur « Ich war ein Kind und träumte viel » (« J'étais une enfant et rêvais beaucoup »), poème que Rainer Maria Rilke avait composé en mai 1898, puis publié à Noël 1899. Composition et publication du poème datent donc du temps de la relation amoureuse du jeune poète avec Lou Andreas-Salomé. Citons les premiers vers de ce poème :

Ich war ein Kind und träumte viel
und hatte noch nicht Mai;
da trug ein Mann ein Saitenspiel
An unserm Hof vorbei.
Da hab ich bange aufgeschaut :
„O Mutter, laß mich frei...“
Bei seiner Laute erstem Laut
Brach etwas mir entzwei [...].

J'étais une enfant et rêvais beaucoup
et n'avais jamais connu mai
quand un homme et son luth
passa dans notre cour.
Je l'ai scruté, anxieuse alors :
“O mère, laisse moi partir...”
Au premier son de son luth,
quelque chose me déchira [...]»⁶.

Ce qui nous intéresse est bien sûr l'occurrence de « anxieuse/bange ». L'Angoisse est déjà le mot clé dans ce poème, qui constitue l'une des premières tentatives littéraires de Rilke. Le poète allait bientôt en faire le fondement même de son expression poétique : « faire des choses avec de l'angoisse » comme il le formule dans une (célèbre) lettre à Lou Andreas-Salomé⁷, se mue en effet en crédo esthétique dans le sens où pour Rilke, son travail de poète devait désormais consister à arracher un nouveau langage poétique des insoutenables angoisses qui n'ont cessé de l'habiter tout au long de sa vie. Aussi, *Les Carnets de Malte Laurids Brigge*, préparés par le magnifique chant que constitue la correspondance entre Lou Andreas-Salomé et Rilke, est ce roman de la modernité, entièrement tourné vers le phénomène existentiel de l'angoisse⁸. Ces choses concernant Rilke et son roman sont bien connues, de même que la fécondité littéraire exceptionnelle du couple Rilke/Lou Andreas-Salomé. Il est clair aussi que de cette relation, Rilke est sorti le maître incontestable. Cela étant, ce que le poème de Rilke permet de bien illustrer, en ouverture de la nouvelle saloméenne, c'est la *réciprocité* qui fonde leur rencontre. Lou Andreas-Salomé ne s'est nullement limitée à accompagner son jeune ami dans l'épanouissement poétique, ils n'ont en fait cessé d'être muse l'un pour l'autre⁹. La chronologie est à ce titre importante : Lou Andreas-Salomé s'appuie sur le poème de Rilke aux alentours de 1900, probablement peu avant qu'elle mette fin à leur relation en refusant tout contact¹⁰, interdiction qui allait perdurer jusqu'en 1903, date à laquelle elle autorise Rilke à lui écrire à nouveau. C'est également le moment où Rilke commence à travailler son *Malte* (avec l'angoisse). C'est donc bien Lou Andreas-Salomé qui, en évident précurseur, saisit avec sa nouvelle « La Sœur » le poème de son ami dans son potentiel novateur et qui s'en inspire pour bâtir sa propre œuvre romanesque.

Que Lou Andreas-Salomé eût du flair pour détecter les personnalités les plus imposantes de son temps est une donnée que la réception posthume a rapidement prise en considération¹¹. Cependant, tout comme son œuvre romanesque garde jusqu'à aujourd'hui un caractère confidentiel, l'intense réflexion critique que Lou Andreas-Salomé a consacrée aux bouleversements esthétiques du tournant du siècle reste largement méconnue. Cela est d'autant plus regrettable que c'est justement la méticulosité avec laquelle elle scrute les tendances littéraires de son temps qui forme le volet le plus volumineux de son œuvre théorique composée d'un ensemble de plus de 200 contributions¹². La rédaction de « La Sœur » se fait dans le contexte de l'intense réflexion critique que mène Lou Andreas-Salomé, publiant dans des revues parmi les plus influentes de son temps. À travers ses écrits consacrés aux dramaturges

allemands et scandinaves, à la culture et littérature russes ou encore au chef de file du mouvement symboliste allemand Stefan George, notre critique se montre fine observatrice des représentations réaliste et naturaliste, des trouvailles et des limites de ces dernières. Si l'intérêt de Lou Andreas-Salomé est ainsi porté à l'analyse des changements esthétiques de son temps, sa préoccupation première est de réfléchir au potentiel esthétique de la *transition* qu'elle aborde en sa fragilité, en son caractère spatial et éphémère. Ainsi non seulement Lou Andreas-Salomé est parfaitement consciente de vivre dans ce moment de transition (esthétique), mais cette idée de transition est aussi au fondement même de son esthétique. Ses contemporains avaient bien compris cette prédilection : « Im Übergang stellt Lou Andreas-Salomé gern die Menschen dar, im Übergang von Land zu Land, im Übergang der Lebensanschauung der alten und der neuen Zeit [...]. Im Übergang von sinnlicher und geistiger Liebe [...] »¹³ (« C'est dans la transition que Lou Andreas-Salomé aime représenter l'homme, dans la transition d'un pays à l'autre, dans la transition d'une vision de la vie à l'autre, entre l'ancien temps et le nouveau, entre l'amour sensuel et l'amour spirituel »). Le titre de notre recueil constitue alors un poignant signal : *Im Zwischenland* comme métaphore et programme esthétique de Lou Andreas-Salomé. Revenons à Rilke qui a employé également le néologisme dans son journal dit de Worpswede. À la date du 13 décembre 1900, le pays intermédiaire rilkeén se révèle être une métaphore de son angoisse, de sa peur d'échouer en tant que poète. Des crises d'angoisse l'avaient pris déjà lors de son deuxième voyage en Russie, à l'été 1900, en compagnie de son amante Lou Andreas-Salomé; elles se poursuivent donc à son retour en Allemagne, Rilke ne cessant de vivre dans un effroyable *Zwischenland*, lieu où se noue sa crise existentielle :

Es ist eine unendliche Demütigung für mich, die Namen der letzten Tage hier zu verzeichnen [...] Ich fürchte, solche Tage gehören nicht dem Tode, wie sie auch dem Leben nicht gehören. Sie gehören...o, Zwischenland, ist ein Zwischengeist, ein Zwischengott über dir, dann gehören sie ihm, diesem verheimlichten Unheimlichen [...] Über dem Leben und über dem Tode ist Gott. Aber über das Zwischenland hat er keine Macht, es ist trotz seiner Gewalt und Gegenwart, hat nicht Raum, nicht Zeit und nicht Ewigkeit. Hat nur Herzschläge von unsäglich traurigen, hoch aufgehängten, geängstigten Herzen, die nicht voneinander wissen, die fortgenommen sind von allen Beziehungen und Zusammenhängen, ausgeschaltet sind, sinnlos sind und deren Klopfen ebenso wenig wahr und wirklich ist wie die Thronrede, die ein Wahnsinniger in der Zwangsjacke vor roh lachenden Wächtern und beängstigten Irren hält¹⁴.