

Frapper *d'*Esprit:

An Investigation into the Translational Potential of Humour with Respect to Irony—

Preceded by a Translation of Pierre Lafargue's *Aventures*

Dawson Ford Campbell

A Thesis *with Some Translation Inside* in

The Department

of

Études françaises

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts (Translation Studies)

at Concordia University

Montréal, Quebec, Canada

September 2022

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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By: **Dawson Ford Campbell**

Entitled: **Frappet d'Esprit: An Investigation into the Translational Potential of Humour
with Respect to Irony—Preceded by a Translation of Pierre Lafargue's *Aventures***

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Translation Studies)

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Christine York

_____ Examiner
Dr. Paul Bandia

_____ Examiner
Dr. Sylvain David

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Sherry Simon

Approved by: _____

Danièle Marcoux, Graduate Program Director

16 August, 2022

Pascale Sicotte, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Abstract

An Investigation into the Translational Potential of Humour with Respect to Irony—
Preceded by a Translation of Pierre Lafargue’s *Aventures*

By Dawson F. Campbell

This dissertation is, primarily, a first translation into English of the French writer Pierre Lafargue (1967) whose *œuvre* spans fifteen titles across nearly thirty years. I have translated excerpts from his 2015 work *Aventures*, a farcical, anti-novelistic and Menippean text that laughs at language. The excerpts I have chosen are representative of the humour emblematic of Lafargue, the humour that made translating this work a constant attempt to express its risible effects, the coextensive play of seriousness and frivolity, of sense and nonsense, of signifier and signified. It is this aspect, the Lafargian humour, that creates a springboard to think of translation in humorous terms and in tandem with irony. While the latter has a long history in the West as a legitimate mode of thought, the former has not received the same philosophical interest and has only recently been considered anew—notably in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This dissertation illustrates two positions of translation theory, considered through the singular lenses of irony and humour. Discussing theories both ancient and modern, I will analyse the more significant iterations of irony as theorised and practiced in the Western tradition to inform the ironic positions inherent to the translation theories of St. Augustine of Hippo, Walter Benjamin, and Antoine Berman. Considering the “incongruity theory” of humour, I will later develop a notion of translation as *complication* after more recent work in translation theory, following Suzanne Jill Levine, Kate Briggs, Barbara Cassin, and Barbara Godard, among others. A humorous theory of translation proposes to challenge the ironic return to origin and principles, to instead turn to the complication, proliferation, and perversion of a source-in-flux.

Résumé

Ce mémoire est d'abord une première traduction en anglais de l'écrivain français Pierre Lafargue (1967), l'auteur d'une œuvre d'une quinzaine de titres publiés durant sa carrière d'une trentaine d'années. J'ai traduit des extraits de son livre paru en 2015, *Aventures* — une farce anti-romanesque et ménippée, un roman qui fait du risible de la langue. Les extraits choisis illustrent l'humour caractéristique de Lafargue. C'est cet humour qui pose d'importants problèmes en traduction et qui exige un effort continu pour exprimer les effets drôles, la danse coextensive entre sérieux et frivole, sens et non-sens, signifiant et signifié. Or, l'humour lafarguien crée un tremplin pour penser la traduction sur le plan de l'humour en tandem avec l'ironie. Tandis que cette dernière bénéficie d'une longue histoire en occident, et est considérée comme un mode de pensée légitime, l'humour n'a pas reçu un pareil intérêt philosophique. Cependant, l'humour profite d'une remise en cause depuis peu — provoquée notamment par la philosophie de Gilles Deleuze. Cette thèse discutera deux théories générales de la traduction, examinées depuis les positions singulières de l'ironie et de l'humour. D'après des théories à la fois anciennes et modernes, on analysera les itérations de l'ironie les plus significatives dans la tradition occidentale afin de façonner les positions ironiques des traductologies de Saint-Augustin d'Hippone, de Walter Benjamin et d'Antoine Berman. On se penchera, dans une autre section, sur la « théorie de l'incongruité » de l'humour pour développer une notion de la traduction comme *complication* d'après le travail de Suzanne Jill Levine, Kate Briggs, Barbara Cassin et Barbara Godard, parmi d'autres. Une théorie de la traduction modelée sur l'humour propose de remettre en cause le retour ironique vers les origines et les principes, pour se tourner plutôt vers la complication, la prolifération et la perversion d'une source en flux.

Acknowledgments

My heartfelt thanks to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sherry Simon, for her enthusiasm and generosity, for her many comments and ideas.

It is with gratitude that I thank Drs. Paul Bandia and Benoit Léger for their judicious readings of my thesis proposal and for their insightful comments, as well as Dr. Sylvain David and, again, Dr. Bandia for reading and assessing my dissertation.

I also wish to thank my professors and classmates at Concordia for making these years of pandemic-times learning as enjoyable and as interesting as they possibly could have been.

And, finally, I would like to recognise the continued support from my family, my friends, and my partner who have encouraged me throughout my years of study and during these months of researching and writing.

My deepest appreciation to you all.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my old friend, William “Bill” Williamson (Dec. 29, 1929 – Jan. 15, 2022)—a model for an ethic of humour, a life lived humorously.

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Le mot humour est intraduisible. S'il ne l'était pas, les Français ne l'emploieraient pas. Mais ils l'emploient précisément à cause de l'indéterminé qu'ils y mettent...

– Paul Valéry, in *Revue Aventure*, nov. 1921

1 – Laughing with the Author, By Way of Introduction

He was dubbed by the cultural critic Nils C. Ahl “le secret le mieux gardé... [a]u royaume des lettres françaises,”¹ his poetic voice was lauded by the journalist and critic Patrick Kechichian who declared it “précieuse et singulière,”² his artistic project was defined (daringly) by his editors at Les Éditions vagabonde³ as “un art renouant avec les facultés fabulatrices, face aux avortement répétés de livres d’où l’imagination est (quasi?) totalement exclue” and as aiming to “faire entendre... que la fonction communicative du langage demeure étrangère à l’art de la parole”;⁴ what is more, the Féneon prize-winning novelist Éric Chevillard maintains that “[i]l faut au moins que tout puisse arriver dans ses pages – sinon où? – et que l’écriture jamais ne se fige dans une forme trop satisfaite,”⁵ while the author Thierry Romagné warns that when reading his texts “le port du casque est obligatoire.”⁶

I speak, of course—was it not obvious?—of the contemporary French writer Pierre Lafargue (1967-), whose *œuvre* spans fifteen titles across nearly three decades. He is here given

¹ Nils C. Ahl, “Pierre Lafargue Deux Temps: Bref, Heurté: Le Jeu De La Bague. Dense, Puissant: La Fureur. Deux Textes De l’écrivain Paraissent De Concert,” in *Le Monde* of May 01, 2014.

² Patrick Kechichian, “Littérature française : moi, la France et le monde,” in *Le Monde* of August 21, 2001.

³ Before vagabonde Lafargue published for a period of eight years exclusively with Verticales (six works). Since, vagabonde has published his last four books, *Le jeu de la bague* (2014), *La Fureur* (2014), *Aventures* (2015), and, most recently, *La Grande épaule portugaise* (2020).

⁴ Vagabonde, “Notes sur la mise au jour d’écrits de Pierre Lafargue,” in *Le Préau des collines* no.14, (Paris: Éditions HB, 2014), 126, 127.

⁵ Éric Chevillard, “Un cerveau plein de tonnerres,” in *Le Monde* of Nov 05, 2015.

⁶ Thierry Romagné, “Des lecteurs délectés,” in *Le Préau des collines* no.14, (Paris: Éditions HB, 2014), 135. This quote was made by the author himself in reference to his text *De la France et de trois cent mille dieux fumants* (2001, Verticales). However, it is a sentiment that Romagné reintroduces in concluding his short essay: “comme tous les authentiques écrivains [...] en même temps qu’il publie ses livres, invente leurs lecteurs. Casqués, cela va sans dire...”

the title *writer* because he is in many ways a poet who only rarely publishes poetry and is in few ways a novelist who has only just dipped his toes—or more like jumped with both feet—into what (though perhaps only at first glance) appear to be novels; his work has perhaps already been adequately characterised as “la fiction poétique... [cette] formule la moins réfléchie, la plus ancienne et la plus immédiate d’un art passablement tombé en désuétude.”⁷ The text here concerned is itself subtitled “livre avec du roman dedans” (a wink no doubt to the more concise “roman” that often defines books that desire to be read as such)—that is, his 2015 *Aventures* (which I hesitate to call an anti-novel, as that concept is one of many he seems to cut the ground from under, so to speak).

Lafargue, as Ahl has already pointed out, is *not* relatively well known (though that is not to say he is disparaged)—neither by a francophone readership⁸ nor within French departments across the globe.⁹ He has not been the recipient of any literary prizes. None of his titles, as far as I am aware, has been translated into any language. His work is often difficult, if not approaching the incomprehensible—that kernel around which language continuously enfolds. It might seem surprising, then, that I have decided to dedicate my time to studying his work. The truth is, Lafargue’s writing seems unlike anything being attempted in contemporary French literature; his *œuvre* appears to be striking a path of its own (one that is, however, widely marked with literary waypoints, starting, as many note, with the refined tongue of the 18th century memoirist, Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon—before passing through what might be called the frivolity of

⁷ Vagabonde, “Notes sur la mise au jour d’écrits,” 125.

⁸ Possibly because he demands a great deal from his reader.

⁹ Scholars, however, cannot make that excuse. There is not a single scholarly article written on Pierre Lafargue; though his contemporaries, those like Pierre Senges and Eric Chevillard who are arguably engaging in similar projects, have repeatedly been made the object of contemporary literary criticism (cf., for example, Nathalie Dupont 2014, 2016). I will not venture a guess as to why this might be the case.

Rabelais, the surreal of Isidore Ducasse, the audacity of Arthur Rimbaud, the pataphysical of Alfred Jarry, the ludic of James Joyce, to name only a few).

Aventures seems an obvious place to introduce Lafargue to an English-speaking readership. Not only as it is one of the more recent examples of his work, but also because it is the closest Lafargue has come to practicing (an interrogation of) the novel¹⁰—the novel being that form with which a contemporary anglophone readership is most familiar and to which they appear most partial. Having said that, Lafargue is not interested in making familiar literature, and that becomes obvious within the first pages of *Aventures*. To attempt a summary of the book will inevitably fail to do it any justice; but, please, allow me to, if anywhere I must, fail here:

Aventures follows only two central points (orbiting each other like binary stars): 1) There is a hero, an archetype, *ironically* (as the narrator—though I hesitate to suggest any stable narrator—or, potentially, Lafargue himself *ironically* points out) called the “Héros-type”; and 2) there is an *event*: the sinking of a busy street by 27 metres and its swift return to its initial altitude. Beginning with the latter: the event—which has effects. These effects are put on display throughout the book: for example, a woman who witnesses the event, a relatively cold woman whom everyone had up to that point found so offensive, and who from one day to the next becomes much more pleasant; or a man who went down and back up again with the road and who experiences a short-lived shrinking of his person before returning to his original size; or a man who witnesses the cause of the event and who, redolent of Gogol’s character, comes to lose his nose before (in a subsequent chapter) finding himself *huis clos* in a windowless room, diligently guarded by his fellow prisoners; or even a gluttonous avalanche that plunges down a

¹⁰ However, it may be argued that his most recent title, *La Grande épaule portugaise*, is traced most closely, ironically enough, from the adventure novel genre.

mountain and into a café only to order several *viennoiseries* before returning up the steep incline. The tableau of these effects of the initial cause—that is, the event—are illustrated in untitled and unnumbered chapters. These chapters are punctuated with a series of eight, this time titled and numbered, interludes called “Le héros-type parle – [n]ième fois,” the eighth of which is either defiantly or bemusedly titled “Le Héros-type – ses paroles – première ou huitième station, je ne sais plus, il est si difficile à suivre” (which gives you a taste of Lafargue). These interludes represent the first of the two above-enumerated points. They follow the story of the “Héros-type,”¹¹ his thoughts and actions ostensibly straight from the horse’s mouth (*qui dit hue ne dit pas mal*).

This is, however, not the case for the book as a whole: the speaker at the beginning (which gives the impression of being the author himself or some version of the author, different from the speaker of the ostensibly introductory chapter, the one preceding the invented epigraph, as there is, as has already been indicated, no other stable narrator to be found in this mosaic of experiences, of points of view), suggests that they have failed to gather all the available information required to reliably recount the events, admitting: “Je fais resurgir le reste par l’imagination, si vous voulez, je complète le tableau selon l’inspiration et l’humeur...”¹² We are thus dealing with an unreliable narrator and, as such, an account subject to their whims—or are we? What we might call irony is now being laid on thick: the narrator—possibly a stand-in for the author himself, redolent of something of the Romantic or post-modern ilk—suggests that they are inventing some amount of this information, that is, turning our attention to the

¹¹ It should be noted that the Héros-Type appears not only in these interludes, that he is referred to at points throughout the book, as he and his gilded hammer “frappe[nt] l’esprit” (strike the wit?—the humour? perhaps?) of the beings and things he encounters. See Lafargue, *Aventures*, 32.

¹² Pierre Lafargue, *Aventures*. (Senouillac: vagabonde, 2015), 14.

novelesque aspect of our anti-novel. We must ask ourselves: is this a novel or is it not? or is it both?—and then, how much does sincerity blend with irony within these pages? To what extent can we consider this ostensibly pure invention authentic? By all appearances Lafargue’s novel-containing-book is ironic: from the title and the subtitle to the conclusion that is only a(nother) beginning, *Aventures* simply reeks of irony. As Linda Hutcheon argues, “[w]hile it may come into being through the semantic playing off of the stated against the unstated, irony is a ‘weighted’ mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid”¹³—or the unexpressed, that which, while not actually there, persists. Looking long and hard at this book, one begins to question whether smoke always means fire, or whether Lafargue’s irony indicates its very absence; whether, that is, irony is only present precisely in its non-presence.¹⁴ Irony of irony:¹⁵ *Aventures* performs ironically, but in so doing necessarily forecloses any possibility of a truly ironic reading; because is it not the case that irony presented as irony is not ironic at all but something else, something oddly authentic, something post-ironic, perhaps?... Actually, what *Aventures* very clearly is—maybe more than anything else—is humorous. And that is precisely what our focus will be.

An essentially riant quality informs this work that toys with concepts, plays with genre, contests expectation, jokes, jests and jibes, quips and trifles. But, having said that, this is

¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 35.

¹⁴ Cf. Vladimir Jankélévitch *L’Ironie*, 44: “[l’]ironie] se communique... sans se communiquer.”

¹⁵ Cf. Friedrich von Schlegel, “On Incomprehensibility” [1800], 267, speaking—not without irony—on the last of the “few choice kinds” of irony, the “irony of irony”: “Generally speaking, the most fundamental irony of irony probably is that even it becomes tiresome if we are always being confronted with it. But what we want this irony to mean in the first place is something that happens in more ways than one. For example, if one speaks of irony without using it, as I have just done; if one speaks of irony ironically without in the process being aware of having fallen into a far more noticeable irony; if one can’t disentangle oneself from irony anymore, as seems to be happening in this essay on incomprehensibility; if irony turns into a mannerism and becomes, as it were, ironical about the author; if one has promised to be ironical for some useless book without first having checked one’s supply and then having to produce it against one’s will, like an actor full of aches and pains; and if irony runs wild and can’t be controlled any longer.”

seriously unserious literature: that is, literature that refuses to be flippant in its frivolity while refusing to be frivolous in its flippancy: or, if you will, literature that clowns, but wisely, wittily and with grace. Because while irony *seems to* play a large role in these pages, we must not overlook its humour, and, indeed, we must hold fast to it as best we can. Much of what laughs in these pages are the carnivalesque and grotesque disfunctions of bodies: characters who lose their nose, who shrink, whose “members impropres à l’accomplissement de leur nature généreuse”¹⁶ cause them to topple over, arms that have minds of their own, brains that leave bodies to fend for themselves, etc. Moreover, linguistic stuttering and slipping mingle among abundant play on words and expressions, notably within and around those signs that come closest to tumbling into the senseless, mere bodily sounds like “*hue*,” “*hop*,” and “*han*”; or locutions that mix with and glom on to each other like “donner du mal à retordre”¹⁷ (i.e. “donner du mal” and “donner du fil à tordre”) and those that breakdown with a slip of the tongue or the twitch of a finger, like “le tout-bataclan”¹⁸ and “tu verras de quel bois tu les chauffes,”¹⁹ for example.

It is hard to surmise conclusively whether this fatuous bone hides any of what Rabelais called nourishing and quintessential marrow;²⁰ whether these *Aventures* do more than chew the fat. But this question hinges largely on how one desires to approach this book and what one hopes to get out of it (if, that is, one expects anything at all): whether one chooses to seek what is not immediately present or whether one accepts the gift of what is already fully there, one—

¹⁶ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 173.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 131.

²⁰ See François Rabelais, “Prologue de l’auteur” from *La vie très horricque du grand Gargantua* [1534], in *Œuvres complètes*, 2017.

reader, critic, translator—must decide between the lofty heights of irony and the seemingly superficial surfaces of humour.

Lydie Salvayre warns that “tout commentaire n'est que tisane, fadasserie et délayage au regard [d'un texte de Lafargue] qui est pur concentré, pure foudre.”²¹ Against the ironism of German Romantic criticism, this seemingly innocuous comment gestures toward a kind of diluting quality of interpretation after a Lafarguian text: that is, rather than destroying to ironically elevate, commentary on Lafargue, at least, merely turns insipid what had nourished by its zest, its flavour, what had nourished precisely by its work on what nourishes; because criticism rents Lafargue's work from its language, which is tantamount to removing its beating heart. Salvayre suggests that—like explaining a joke—Lafargue's prose can only be grasped firsthand and head on (in the vein of the Herotype's “hammerblow”—*une frappe d'esprit*). Her solution is quite simply “de lui tout citer, ne rien faire d'autre que de lui tout citer”;²² and what more invigorating way to quote in full than to translate?

Though I take Salvayre's words seriously, as playful as they may be, I will, in the end, be attempting a commentary of sorts. One, however, that only tangentially takes Lafargue's work as its object of analysis. The critical commentary that follows my translation will be written in the wake of an aspect of Lafargue's prose that I propose poses particular problems *vis-à-vis* translation: Humour. While humour will be the main object of analysis here, we will, nevertheless, be compelled to analyse it in tandem with its counterpart, irony. Humour and irony: two rhetorical devices, two literary tropes; two values, principles, of philosophical weight; two concepts or lenses through which to critically consider literature and, as I will suggest,

²¹ Lydie Salvayre, “Pierre Lafargue,” in *Le Préau des collines* no.14, (Paris: Éditions HB, 2014), 137.

²² *Ibid.*

translation. The critical side of this thesis will be structured around three main sections: in the first place (Section 3), we will consider the philosophical/rhetorical particularities of irony and humour, how they are inherently kindred, but diverge significantly; in the second place (Section 4), using what we have learned of irony and humour, we will conceptualise two general theories of translation, one following the principles of philosophical irony, and the next reflecting the values of humour; and in the third place (Section 5), I will closely investigate and discuss some examples of humour in *Aventures* that I have attempted to re-create or capture in translation. At this point, the burning question may be: *why use irony and humour as lenses, principles or values to problematize the theoretical paradigms of translation?* As Douglas Robinson suggests in *The Translator's Turn*, "the basic rhetorical tool is the trope, the figure of speech that (in its Greek etymology) *turns* language in new directions."²³ This thesis begins by both coming in the wake of Robinson's tropical investigation, adding humour to his list, while nevertheless pushing back slightly on his use of the ironic position.²⁴ From this point of departure, in parallel with the springboard of *Aventures*, I would like to propose, that irony and humour make us *conscious of* what is possible in literary translation, irony as a concerted effort to re-*turn* to origin, while humour reveals itself to be a deliberate work on per-*version* and proliferation, a working out from origin and not back. These devices-as-lens allow us to develop a problematic of reading, translation, and translation theory, leading us finally to challenge the *old* irony and gesture towards a way of thinking translation *humorously*.

²³ Douglas Robinson, *The Translator's Turn*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 90.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 167-175.

Now, before going any further into the weeds of irony and humour, and the translational potential of humour more specifically, this seems like an appropriate place to insert a translation that I have made—with humour in mind.

2 – A Translation of *Aventures*

Adventures²⁵

A Book with Some Novel Inside

By Pierre Lafargue

Translated from the French

I do not pretend that the birds that hang in the sky, that the buffalo that decorate the earth's vast plains, that the hefty grouper that churn the great ocean's waters are worthy enough to rouse my tongue. But worthy subjects hence elude that organ that has been through every house in Famagusta to bring back grandiose tales; none such remain. Hence the birds and the seals, the dragonflies and the hippopotamus will be elevated by that muscle that outshines the rest in the masses it shakes and in the weight it adds to them.

However, before I deliver to those delicate papillae the buffone bestiary which I have for them reserved, I would like to give a final and nobly dimensioned farce for them to savour along with you.

²⁵ The translation that follows is a collection of excerpts from *Aventures*. The source text written by Pierre Lafargue is available for reference in the appendix.

We all know that the most incredible, the most prodigious, we might go so far as to say that the most miraculous of things happen each day. This is precisely what makes people jaded, to it they turn their backs they head elsewhere: vulgar spectacles, in which they recognize themselves without much effort and not without disgust, retain for them certain charms that others have forfeited by dint of playing; the truth is, the complaisance we expect from some disgusts in others: indelibly, what is incredible remains so, disorienting reason too much to be assimilated into the everyday by those many onlookers who do not condemn its incredibility—on the contrary, they become enamoured with it like with the line on the horizon that gives them want to believe in the boundlessness of their own capacities—but for being less rare and less affected than it ought. One does not wish to be disappointed, and the demagogy of what is incredible—such an obvious imitation of the vulgar spectacles’ own—disappoints: its frequent appearances together with its taken liberties do not reduce the mystery but the respect without which its significance is lost. Who tires not of seeing the deadest banks resurrected each day holier than the last? Who suffers not an immense ennui faced with the daily multiplication of great men, while the earth that so unrestingly produces them will have for some time now been depleted? Who feels not a doggish temper faced with the wretched who, rather than let themselves be chased from the surface of the globe like factory smoke has been chased from the sky, continue to elongate their countenances—soiled by the promiscuity to which their numbers oblige? Who is not exasperated by the ease with which, on its own, silver combines with gold and, without the artisan’s slightest touch, takes the shape of the most singular vermilion saltshaker with which anyone has ever seasoned their meat?

Now, getting to the point.

People, behold:

You will soon learn of an event even more incredible than it is, in its noble perfection, unique; such refinement will disrupt the routine that has so weakened the confidence you once had in the wonders of this world.

I want your reaction to be such that enthusiasm or revolt (or both) at last animates your face, which—I must say, and I do pale at the thought of blaming you—passions have obviously not moved, and it is necessary that a face be so. Because a moved face is an eloquent one. A face must be eloquent like a pretty mouth to make me happy. With joy, this book is capable of cutting large, deep creases into your face (doubt not the knife it grips between its ruddy teeth); these creases will be like a second mouth, much more beautiful and more loquacious than the first, which does not tell me (and with which you do not do) all that much. Yes, once you have been moved you will become moving, which is to say eloquent: your bells, your elegies, and your epithalamia will move me, I shall fall to your feet, shall beg you to mix your blood with my tears, which we shall then spread. Since you will have accepted the risk in reading these pages, you will take your place among the wonderful and incredible phenomena. And to receive this appealing though unlikely result (I never underestimated the difficulty of the enterprise; I know you much too well), I propose that which follows and does impose: a sinking.

Well then, imagine.

* * *

Right, it was certainly an era with no lack of certainty. But what comfort we took in that had something mindnumbing about it. Detail of significance and such delectable irony: the Herotype of this era which he would come to alter held a hammer in his right hand. I believe it was a hammer of fine gold. A certain shimmer makes me think so. I believe our hero was like this, I believe he was like that. I like to believe that he expressed himself so, that he stretched in the morning like I am now, that his breath was fresh, that his intellect smelled good, that his sadness never strayed far from a certain noblesse, that our rotten manners skinned him like a little rabbit, that I'm not too mistaken. I've been reduced to credulating, yes—without my bearings, disoriented, I fumble around a large, dark room, no more no less: my finger endlessly groping for the Grail, it's always missed it, but we still believe, and always will, in the Grail, and that it's shaped like this, and that it contains That, and that we're so very close to reaching it. It's amusing enough. Otherwise, I'm not that well informed. Though it's not for lack of having looked into knowing more. When they see that I've arrived, these people, they bellyache, you understand? they start placing kicks before I can ask a single question. Or they burst frenzied from their homes, shouting and threatening me with *cruelties* (that's the name of these nasty little stones, so common to this land you need only reach down to fill your fists). Not to mention the belching ones. And the rest, of which I'd rather say naught. They withhold so much information, of this hero and of all that's happened, they'd prefer I know nothing of the events, so I must make do with what little knowledge I have, which is, alas, merely trifles, little lost islands in sombre waters where an entire continent's been swallowed whole. If you expect me to show you America, well I'm afraid not to be the captain you were looking for: my science is limited to observing the few bare rocks that break the surface some hundred metres from these shores I've never left. The rest emerges thanks to the imagination, if you will, I fill in the blanks with inspiration and mood, the result of which strikes me as plausible,

even beautiful, but I guess these willy-nilly reconstructions won't be of much use to you in your discovery expeditions: nothing, it's true, can replace an old buccaneer's elaborate yarns or the nautical charts carefully traced in Portuguese convents. In any case, listen close: the essential, the basis of everything, the primordial is that the Herotype had a hammer. A hammer or a little cane, or a tartlet,¹ or a mallet.² There's something certain, sealed at the ends of ten great green signets hanging from ten silk ribbons, the first five of which were green and the rest red. For good measure, I will add two or three very genuine words since they're obviously expected. Thus you'll know just as much as I, and you'll leave me be, if you'd please. Well then. In this era, the most attentive took note: in each man, in each woman, a leaning, which one could call small or slight (a slight leaning), made itself up (quite well) in fine rectitude damn well perpendicular to the horizon. This notwithstanding, it had been, it was an era, how should I put it, with no lack of certainty. Well said! Doubt, I assure you, was not lurking around every corner. Indoors and inbeings it went a bit different, sure, they leaned, itching at the temple from time to time but without seeming to, they

¹ This tartlet is not a cake but rather a kind of *tourteau*, which has the appearance, and at times the taste, of an apricot or plum tart; hence why we've called it this rather than "tortellette," which is preferred (and comes with the endorsement of the Academy, which had some very solid arguments) by some wisemen from Perros-Guirens, the port town along which they trap those little crustaceans with the thick carapaces. A regiment from Trégor that fought with neither powder nor shell at Saint-Cast (11 September, 1758) used ten-thousand of these tartlets as hand-powered projectiles that day with such competency and such efficiency that within the quarter-hour they had penetrated the enemy's centre, leading France to a neat and undisputed victory, by admission even of the very unfortunate General Thomas Bligh (son of the Honourable Thomas Bligh) who was struck in quick succession by two tartlets—one of which shattered his sword and the other all hopes of begetting another Thomas Bligh—while he was waiting out the battle perched in his family tree, so to speak (it was in fact an apple, uprooted from the orchard at his estate), which had been shipped directly from Ireland in an ornate planter. This tree, abandoned on the beach after what remained of the English army had reembarked, was long displayed in the Saint-Cast church and covered in an *ex-voto* before being destroyed in 1924 by the excessive ardour with which it was rubbed by a sterile woman who had recently escaped from the Dinard asylum and who believed that in so doing she would become impregnated with a dozen or so tartlets from which she expected to benefit the kind of bourgeois respectability that, she said with rancour, was always refused to her, despite her Carhaix coiffé, generous hips, two Puducherry shawls, and good looks enough.

² A mallet is a diminutive maul or *malleus* of gilded wood, used in certain parts of Berry, Béarn and Barrois to split or open the hardest heads, from which we would otherwise expect to pull nothing. The Bourbonnais, the Bessin and the Blaisois all plan on adopting this mallet after making some improvements which would reinforce it (the tool would be ruffled with spikes and an axe blade, and plated with steel or iron)—the number of hardheads that are hurt when navigating those streets without precaution begs applause for such a project: we've seen many stupider, none more sensible.

leaned, wrinkling the skin of the brow but only to better hear mass, all in all it was slight, a slight leaning—as I've just had the honour to clear up with VV. EE. and Her Royal Duodecimo, who at this very moment have their ears glued to the door—, that's that for the insides of the houses and of the people, but at this juncture I reassure it: of doubt, the hesitation on which this and that and the shebang-whole must be considered, we knew. Nothing.

That's to say, we were often bored.

It was a drag, that fine rectitude. It couldn't go on, no, definitely not.

You'll ask me: and so, this leaning?

I'm getting to it, *barcarolle!*

Om.

Well.

During that era, which is already ancient history (the finger drawn over it lifts blackened to our weary eye), if the truth must be retold stark naked and lathered right into the folds of its marble, each leaned, but in the comfort of their own home. On the outside each stood as straight as a tile is square.

I'd say that's pretty clear, now. (Aside.) This world where you must always repeat yourself, parrot yourself, this narrow, horrible, infernal world that pulls my teeth, always sticking in its nose and its Larsen! Oh, shut up, fork! shut up, bork!

Little very straight ladies led along their little children. When it came to crossing community centre gate—ah the emotion the emotion. I'll be back tonight be couragerageous mommy will be back soon. But baby wouldn't listen. And made a commotion. And endless

palpations across their entire modest surface. It's useless to specify that baby wept, *palpatandi*. At this very moment of astonishing banality, what happened, while these little ladies were off weeping too, *reboundandi*, what happened was what we will call, oh go on, an event: the road from there to there, that's to say all along the public facility it lined, plunged 27m, people and vvatyur, before rebounding with just as much resolve (an intrinsic movement) to its initial altitude. Some stifled their bravos (ah, reserve, it's but offenses we commit in your name and which condemns every chapter of the book *On the Designing of Country Seats!*). It didn't last a hundred-and-seven years, this layover at -27m, but you were suspended O time! *O barcarolle!* And the mommies, their sobs stopped, and at first more wowed than worried, gauged, along with the danger, the beauty of the phenomenon. They couldn't help in that moment but feel their faculties, otherwise restricted by the most charming routines, blossoming, outspread by this vertigo like so many wings at their backs.

Take Coralie Durbois, for example. Coralie Durbois had always been as solid as a ridge beam. It wouldn't be to her you'd turn to bare your soul. Jennifer Flampin dared once; twelve years later she's still crying about it. Well, Coralie Durbois, militant volunteer and president of the PTA, was there when the entire way in front of the school went down and back up again. Shaken by doubt and a couple vermouths, her breasts flat, crazed, chattertoothed, bedridden for twenty days after the underwaying, she displayed, in rising, a more convincing form, in any case much more pleasant than the Coralie everyone had found so offensive before what must be called, oh go on, the event. Nowadays she's not only solid, but of a solidity that welcomes weaknesses and which has since quite nicely brought out her freckles: they give her that slightly cheeky side to which we're not indifferent when receptive.

Have no doubt: ephelides are an effect of the mobile road. Some came to sing a *Magnificat*, to the road. But why then does a road that goes down and comes back up again, why does it have the virtue of regreening fallen leaves? One must ask oneself this question. This question, it's everything. Well, we believe that what's unexpected can put some of life's mechanisms into motion, let loose certain faculties essential to making it regreen. As evidenced clearly here: some great certainties were shaken by the motion of this road which prompted, at the same time, the repainting once more of lady and gentleman. But we've said this all before. It's no excuse. What hasn't been explained is this: Why a road, why *this* road? My God, I've no clue. It's something we've tried to uncover but which has remained quite obscure. And the more we think about it, the more we come to realise that it wouldn't even be conclusive to be better informed.

It's not common to meet people endowed with only a half side of their head (an eye, an ear, a half a mouth), and one doesn't greet them as one would, as naturally as one would have hoped; but it's even less common that they take offense, as if, knowing the uncommonness of their appearance, they had anticipated our surprise and forgiven us in advance. We get the sense that they resent us only for questioning the rationale behind the half-measure their necks bear, and for attempting on those grounds to make a comparison which would be at their expense and which would allow us, by way of cherrypicked reasoning and shoddy logic, to affirm our beauty, and the advantages that we can't help but ascribe to it.

This isn't the case for a road, even a road that acts so different than the others, its neighbours, which, as far as we know, have never been inspired to the point of likewise losing their placidity; but it begs repeating: posing questions to such a road is of course permitted, and even recommended to those who, if they'd previously refrained from doing so, find themselves regretting it. We're slow to forgive dropping blood pressure, especially when it can be avoided by

certain lifestyle choices adopted as easy as pie. If you ask *this* road how it happened, and why, and all, it would be no more talkative than a half-headed man—that, no, but in the end you would have spoken to it, and it wouldn't have interrupted you, and you can bet you'd feel better.

So.

That road did *this*, then *that*, and so ensued some. Things.

Good, now we're getting somewhere.

Great.

You see, we talk about the crisis, we even talk about it often, we make diagrams and origamis. It inspires interesting literature, inept and intelligently abundant. But, and this continues to surprise me more and more, try to make a list of works devoted to the yoyoroad, the road that, like a pretty dancer warms her muscles at the barre, appears, disappears, appears, disappears, and that across twenty lines, and you'll find you simply cannot: you can't, not because it exceeds your capacities, which are indeed substantial, but quite simply because these books do not exist.

Huh?

Relax. The book you're holding is indeed alone, the only one, to lean over the edge of the sunken street, and volunteer its voice to measure, by way of echo, the abyss. Yooooooooo-hooooooooo! Which comes back like Drruuuuuuuuu-hooooooooo! Another singular something in this world scarce of common things.

* * *

He's no little man. Besides, there's really no such thing as little men. This man, returning from the FNAC carrying three CDs in a little pack (a packet, to be honest), is at this very moment: a man satisfied with life, with what it has to offer to those who can afford it. He slides along the sidewalk like a family of ducks, confident in the order of the world, slides on last day's oil. With haste he says with haste he says, I'm headed where I'll be more myself he says I'll listen to this music I'll listen to be myself more he says that's why I can't wait to get where I'm headed.

He says and I believe him. I like this man, who stands six foot three inches from hat to heel, sure he has his moments of meanness, but they count for little in the grand scheme of days punctuated with all sorts of good points. See how he hastens home, tightly gripping the packet of his purchases against his breast, wherein ventricles joyously celebrate the heart, their valentine.

He remembers—and welcomes us to rejoice along with him—his travels last summer to a large Flemish city. A city that turns its back on the possibility of building an immense port between the south side of its northern districts and the north side of its western districts, because it's committed to the conservation of the *noble fallow*, founded in the middle of the Dutch Revolt: since 1592 the kids there are teased, carved, and strewn about the dunes (the autopsy would reveal a thick Spanish accent). As soon as he had reached the *noble fallow*, the man picked a child whose lice didn't preclude his beauty. After finding him beautiful, he found him good. After throwing his little body toward a sky unsheathed like a cold blade, the ground took him, scattered, from the man, and none were allowed to reassemble the limbs of this new Osiris: they hence belonged, like all the rest, to the *noble fallow* which would manage just fine on its own—this is how municipal regulation requires it (the slogan “you won't maintain a thing” shines from the marquee of the raadhuis). But the man decided he would gabble himself a smaller one next time: the last kid really

wound him up the wall and sweat more like a middle-aged man heaving his groceries up several flights of stairs. And this decision put pep in his step. And let's not snub our joy, I say.

Lifting his head to prepare his lungs to receive the large quantity of oxygen with which he intended to provide them (and in that way include them in his affection), he notices a window and recognises it, it being the window of his beloved. He pauses underneath, strikes up a serenade he knows, and the sun, always ready to be seduced, even when our attention is directed elsewhere, starts gyrating its hips in a kind motion I propose to withhold, if you don't mind. Look who appears at the window (above which the sun postures la-la-la). Why it's the complete collection of the *Revue française de génie civil*—our man is only slightly perturbed to see the 2004 volume on “coastal engineering,” but let's leave it at that! The reader will see where we're coming from (isn't that right, kiddo?) with that twist, and the man, if he knew better than we what was lying ahead (since we who are innocent would never have distinguished this window from any other), seems, nonetheless, a bit shaken like by a birthday present that, how to put it, would open a door in the blind wall of his life.

I love you! he cries to the Collection (which leans out to miss none of this sudden though delightful declaration), these deluxe discs which I've just procured, heart pounding, are far from equaling your wise spines, musclebound as they are by cheap glue! With it we'll make so much together, works of art: strike-earth tunnels, taunt-tempest and surmount-flood quays, and even levees against the dangerous seas—if there's enough time! I also think, because that's just how I am, that I'll recite in dulcet tones, first chance I get, your article on modeling the short-term evolution of dumped dredge sediment, then my guitar will stress what's rending and tender in the stanzas of “Cyclic Behaviour of Laterally Loaded Concrete Piles Embedded into Cohesive Soil”!

Having spoken thus, our man waves goodbye and hightails.

He won't return.

Never again will he return.

We watch (quite embarrassed and without really knowing what to do, hands in our pockets fiddling with our keys) at the bewildered Collection: who had started to hear the hint of a promise, a kind of annunciation, could already smell the fragrant bouquet that she, in white, would merrily toss toward a white crowd, and here she's reduced to watching in the growing distance that *scrooge* (that's the Collection speaking, and sniffing).

Hadn't she realised that every man is an Adolphe and an Arnolphe, that's to say a jerk?

Hélas!

We pity you, poor girl, but nothing will bring back that man for whom your deluded heart beats.

Not far from there, a bus shelter shows the runaway an advertisement for a forthcoming novel: the young writer smiles next to an excerpt from her book, her blonde hair passionately fleeing toward the blue of the sky, which is known to be an ideal shampoo—when it rains, the water will be the rinse:

“Back when the lands of Trapezium were at war with the lands of Losange, love took its shape after the Hermès square foulard; a neutral and loath shape necessary for the survival of this feeling which would have been knotted around the neck to prevent bronchitis: it didn't have any other use, back then. Nowadays, it's advised to seek the services of a good pharmacist. John's the most seductive pharmacist of his generation, his jaw's the squarest in all of Boston, and he's a graduate of Yale. I can't get enough of his body mass index.”

The man lifts a forefinger and exclaims in connoisseur: *dolce stil novo!*, bows to the bus shelter but does not delay: he must listen to a certain music to be more himself. He hurries off. The sun at his heels.

When he arrives at his patio, which dominates the bay surrounded by tropical abundance, and notices that the sun has followed him, well, he kills it.

The inconvenience of this act soon dawns on him, but he has an excellent power supply which will compensate and palliate. Experience justifies it: hard-copied music was heard, in the stary night.

I'm not quite sure which note in particular evoked in his brilliant mind the question: ah yes, and how is it exactly that the road sank then returned to its initial state, this morning? Whatever, there won't be anymore mornings, besides, I don't have the number for the *RFGC* who could have informed me, darn. And what's more after all shoot, I seal my conserves with only my own beeswax, mind you it's not even really mine. Oh?

Oh.

* * *

— It's common knowledge, and our faithful readers were the first to know thanks to a series of exclusive investigations published periodically these last weeks and which are now available to consult on our ".net yr average" website, thanks to the support of our partner PayPal: Justice, Right,

and Law are of one and the same family, but one which really squabbles quite often. Today we'll concentrate, if you don't mind, on Justice. You knew her well in the dead times; could you tell us how she conducted herself in those days? What was she like? And her appearance? Did she already wear that bird on her head, the one that makes her a kind of bronzed casque? Did she speak with that booming voice, like a woman known to us both, that aims to persuade and isn't practical and not too happy with the result?

— Justice was an indecisive old spinster, lost in the many objections we levelled at her on behalf of the most difficult chapters in all of legal philosophy, and who would have never even thought—fantastic detail—of crushing your gob with the turn of a vice. Made miserable by the little attention she received for all her leniency and kindness, she lowered her aching brow, full of vertebrae, to the black asphalt leading to her palace. The upheaval that is the object of this book was likewise for her, she who became from one day to the next that very svelte and very proud beauty; Justice came to the decision, anyway, placing a superb foot on a bleached skull, that:

Section 1

*All journalists will have their heads removed (the “**Beheaded**”) with the tibia of a communicant (the “**Tibia**”).*

Section 2

*A communicant will be dislegged (the “**Dislegged**”) to that end before each execution.*

The Dislegged is of single-use only: under no circumstances will the Dislegged be reused for the purposes of any subsequent execution.

The Dislegged will under no circumstances be shown to any pregnant woman nor to any senior citizen who has lost a limb at war.

The Dislegged will receive no care after their dislegging and will thereafter be isolated for life.

Any infraction to the provisions of the present section is punishable by civil death and imprisonment in the same cell as the Dislegged, until the total corruption of their rotting corpse.

*Once it has been used to execute the sentence, one may gladly utilise the Tibia as a hammer (the “**Hammer**”) in order to reduce to pulp and dust the removed head. Prepubescent children may be invited to use the Hammer to administer a few blows whose number will be fixed by decree at the State Council. The Tibia will be burned without delay after this reduction. Those children who will have handled the Hammer will be made de jure members of the council of the Order of the Legion of Honour. There they will be awarded the Military Medal.*

Section 3

Unless named Algernon Charles Swinburn or Alexander Dickow or William Beckford or John Gower or Oscar Wilde or Samuel Beckett or David Gascoyne or Jody Pou, all individuals caught committing the offense of franglophonia will have their heads removed on-the-spot with what-is-at-hand.

Section 4

If the Beheaded's head cannot be found, it is because they are a journalist who has been condemned in application of Section 1. The Beheaded, having been found criminally guilty under Section 3, will be thrown to the dogs, if the dogs elect.

If the dogs do not elect, they will be thrown to the solitary boars of the fourth year.

In the instance that these beasts refuse to touch the stump into which the worms have already settled, said worms will be charged with finishing it—with dividing the stump into pieces and cleaning it to the bone—and will be granted no recourse to squirm out from the obligations ordered of them by the Prefect of Public Health in conjunction with the Prefect of the Region.

Section 5

That portion of the populace that is neither Beheaded nor Dislegged, and who witnesses the demise of those found guilty under the preceding sections, would be wrong to be relieved. To be less visible because one hides behind guilty parties is not to be innocent. The condemnation of these criminals does not entail the acquittal of the rest. Like the former, their crimes are known. They are the same, to which many more accrue. They are the worst. They heave the gut to the lips, which it splits. They incense reason and shock human sentiment. They do not speak. They babble. They abandon. Dignity suffers its final outrages and falters, holding its belly. It is because they are known and in infinite numbers, and because they inspire intense and unprecedented horror, to the point of sometimes frightening even those who commit them, that the present section refuses to grant these crimes the honour of naming them; they do not suspend moral judgement; they astonish it. When Justice returns from her deep stupor, this portion of the populace will have been exterminated. Each will have had their head removed with their own Tibia. This day is coming.

Section 6

It will be good times.

Section 7

Be Prepared.

Oh, how the world with congested roads already breathes better! How naturally and widely it moves! How its decisions, until then so stifled, so burdened, adopt a joyful air and wield polychrome words, rich in profound meaning: they spill from its fragrant mouth! How newborn babes with alacrity seize their mother's breast! How adolescents without reluctance offer themselves to Larry Clark's lens! How youngsters hurry, furious for having so delayed, to get their hands on a copy of the *Grandes Chroniques*! How they lick its pages! How their pants distend! How they tear! How men watch women through a keyhole the size of a set of double doors! How women watch men through the many eyes of libertinism, which go all the way around the back of the head and which few eyelids lower over! Oh, how Law has since become likeable! She'll no longer be associated with dead texts, sons of one-off whims (and sons made haphazardly, on the ugliness for which weep jurisconsults with slicked hair, one wave of gray lock following the other, they go crashing into some promontory, bringing the whimsy sons to fatal excretory), since the Law has indisputably become the Poetry of a present rich in future, a Poetry emerging maniacal from Dalloz editions, rue Froidevaux. She carries at arm's length a steaming and fragrant tureen

in which floats a lobster *à la nage*³ from missed opportunities! To the gutter it goes! Now to do something, she says with chilling rage, contemplating pieces of tureen wading in pieces of lobster, then she turns her gaze toward the deep sky which ignites at her glance, the *pétroleuse*!

On the same sidewalk are those who, grovelling on the ground, eat what they find: not pieces of lobster, but pieces of tureen.

This follows from the lofty ideas, of her duties and of yours, and of the cold-chain, held by Law become Poetry: after she broke, along with the platter, the clawed fruit of the sea—her foot, in the trough, still pokes, through frothy matter, her shatters.

* * *

The Herotype Speaks—Second Time

Already, I was far along the path I followed, suffering the offenses of world.

I stopped. The wind didn't bother me on this peak: if it was cold, it didn't make me feel it, or maybe these hard times made me to think little of it—obviously, the greatest challenges leave what's left almost anodyne, to the point that it's, on occasion, possible to rest easy there. I lifted my arms to the sky and cried out as if demented. This left me deeply surprised and displeased, and I was so confused that even in my solitude I cast my eyes this way and that, blushing; but I was

³ Note from the translator: The lobster's stroke is a kind of retrograde dolphin kick.

still crying, my fists held toward the sky, unable to silence myself or clap my hands to my mouth and stifle my cries.

I don't know how long this lasted. When I finally quieted, I felt exhausted. I fell to the ground and on my back, and, without losing consciousness, I was unable to move. The dry earth opened on my right just next to me and the sun quickly tumbled headlong into the rift; like how a dog sitting next to a car, waiting for you to open the door, plunges in before you can barely crack it—a lack of patience we find amusing and charming. After a couple seconds, the dry earth opened on my left just next to me and the sun quickly emerged from the rift; like how a dog in a parked car waiting to be let out, and who, when you open the door, is too impatient to let you finish, jumps out as soon as he can—and this amuses us because we too have to piss. I didn't think for a second to be amazed by what I saw, which, however, contradicted everything I thought I knew of how the world works.

So many absurdities occurred in one minute, which I under normal circumstances would have stood up to, I would have railed against anyone who showed the slightest tepidity. But normal things occur advantageously only under normal circumstances, and the many objections with which reality oftentimes confronts normality initiate new ages wherein new references permit outbursts against all sorts of things which have nothing to show for themselves but the sad excuse of being reasonable, and the consideration of many more with curiosity.

In any case, lying faceup to the sky, as I was, after crying out in that unimaginable way, lonelier than the mountain's rocks were to one another, and unable to make myself move, it would have been difficult for me to speak with any authority and order the sun to return to abiding by its own laws, when I myself was ignorant even of those grounding me and that were maybe nothing more than the laws of the sky.

My hand gripped the hammer I hadn't let go of since I first found it in the depths of the garden. Could I say that it was my only friend? Of course I could no kidding: our first touch taught me of human warmth. The animal, which sometimes slips from the bag that had fallen off my shoulder and which is definitely not exactly an elephant, and which is no longer quite a hippopotamus, never gave me—entrusting in me the peanut lodged in its trunk, which is not at all a nose but is like the key to its affection—no, never yet gave me a similar feeling: even when it chews a tiger to distract me, knowing me to be melancholy, I gaze at it without tenderness, it even strikes me that it might deserve a hammerblow or two. But I content myself saying we don't play with our food, which satisfies it, the child.

I waited there, two days, three days, I can't be sure anymore, in my uncomfortable position, and maybe the fast sun continued its carousel, which I mentioned, around me, meaning it's more like weeks, even months, that I spent on that cold mountain earth. Then an eagle, tired of enduring, in the land it dominated, what it no doubt considered lazeaboutness, detached an irritated feather from its cutting wing: this, landing on my face, should have woken me and convinced me to leave, taking my lazybones along with me. Landed on my nose and I went 'choo. This sudden sneeze somewhat disturbed my arms' disposition, and I found myself wanting to replace them, that I could, and that, if it suited me to leave, I was from then on the master. It suited me and I rose, leaning on the hammer: this wasn't the first time it served me as a cane!

Upright at last. I had quite the headache, but I was greatly recompensed by the majestic scenery, which I was all the more aware of after having been so long deprived of its contemplation: I recognised each needle, each valley, the smallest lake shining yonder, under the immobile sun, and their names rushed to the tip of my tongue when I wanted to call out to them, but all I could manage was hehehehuhuh. Or hihihohoo. Humph. I let it go. I continued on my way again.

No, I didn't forget my duffle bag. One last look behind me: I wasn't there anymore and neither was my old snakeskin. You can never be too careful. Ahead, ahead. I knew there was war ahead. So I was told: if you go ahead, always ahead, you'll find war. Well, you take what you can get, I at least wouldn't have been looking for it.

I tightened my fingers around my good mate, good good. You're heavy, my immaculate mate, that's how I spoke to it since it was also in a way my wife. You're heavy, but that doesn't matter, we can't all be a box of matches. Less heavy still than a box of matches are those who weigh just as much as a matchstick because they are a matchstick. Remember, though, in this world, those who are as light as matchstick represent, when they all get together, a nation whose weight is much greater than yours.

This is how I spoke to my good mate. In my hand I felt the warmth of glowing camaraderie and I stopped thinking of my pain, I stopped thinking of the scenery, of the eagle, of the sun, of the black rocks, all of this was nothing next to our beautiful friendship, which was another sun, and that very minor source out there that provided city dwellers an abundant stream—which merrily ran through the well-masoned quays before flowing into the Father's salty domain—, I loved it too since none could understand how it, so discreet, so covert, so thin, could be enough to nourish the whole wide World.

I had no money, other than the few coins I found glinting in a moon beam at the base of the dumpsters I had mistook to be teahouses, but my heart filled with gratitude for the destiny that smiled at me and which finally placed its full and well-painted lips on the areola of my entity; if a perfect peanut pod were at that very moment offered to me, I would have taken it all wet in the hand the trunk had gestured to, and I would have eaten the key which would unlock in me everything the iron latches reserved for great occasion: yes, the times were approaching.

* * *

The Herotype Speaks—Third Time

There's the one the two the three the four there's the infinite series the twelve the forty-seven. It never ends but prefers to begin again rather than to make believe it will finish.

There's my arm, hup, hup, this is what it likes you wouldn't believe. It's never been so lively. Lively to be heavy, it seems. Which is funny, since, in general, if I'm not mistaken, we're lively when we're light, grief's the heavy one. Not my arm, no: it doesn't do anything like the rest of us it weighs and that's where it's in its element. The lands get darker, as we advance, day and night. As we swing our arm on our way. Day and night day and night. Day in day out, except that it's darker—much. Not because the night would overtake the day, I'm no simpleton like you all. The day looking for excuses finds none because there's no offense and therefore no reproach. It's darker. I don't think it's because of the arm-swinging. Which is innocent like the day. Arm, you're innocent like the day. I carry you like my little babe in the day and in the dark.

It's having so much fun.

It's a lot more alert than other arms its age.

It would depart itself from me if I weren't watching.

I think a moment of distraction is all it would take, and that it's biding its time.

It's a very alert arm that's waiting for the right moment to depart from me. I won't let it, heavy as it is. Heavy and mean as it is. It's not ready, no, not ready at all, still so young, there's still much to learn, I'll teach it everything just as I taught the others. It'll stay by my side, and it'll swing, if it wants.

It swings with such confidence. Other arms would go much easier, other arms would mind the health of the shoulder they solicit. Not my arm, it's not like them. Heavy as it is, it swings just like the lighter ones do, hup, hup, its indifference, its nature all day and all night. These lands get darker and darker, little by little, bit by bit. Eyes wide open, blinking, dark day and dark night, and the arm hup and the arm hup.

Cadence.

A fine cadence.

We met some beautiful dark spots, it and I, but we couldn't get anything out of them, despite their big beautiful dark mouths.

In the trees, in the mountains, in the deep ocean waters, in the pure sky they moved their beautiful lips but we couldn't hear what they were saying, what they were saying to us. So they vanished, and we searched for others, and the ones we found after much travail weren't any more audible. They vanished.

More despair, more and more.

But it was enough for me to look at my young and intrepid arm, full of optimism like a seaside fritter pedlar, to feel better and to start hoping again. I said hoping, yes, I believe that I

hoped for something, that I do hope for something, it's hard to know just what. This must have something to do with the dark spots that kept quiet.

My arm acts as if it had nothing to hope for, or more like it was happy swinging to get what it won't even dream to hope for. Oh, how I envy it, white, and the cadence of its blonde hairs.

I see it smile, and those who have never seen my arm smile don't know what youth is, or kindness, at last I understand myself. I remained so long on the ground without being able to move, I held on thanks to my arm which I felt close to me, I felt its smile, already the lands were darker but its smile was like a lamp with fresh batteries that I would have flashed across my face.

Arm, dear arm, and hup, to your lovely cadence I give my full attention, which is what we say, which we say well. You're heavy? No problem. You have your reasons. I don't judge. Don't ever turn against me those armaments I abandoned in the dust to follow you. It might be night, it's dark, very dark, it couldn't be day, or maybe the day saddened suddenly, it's totally possible, I'd understand, I've already noticed that beyond the towns the day was more mysterious than the night, and more forlorn. We should be in the countryside if we follow my logic. This isn't the mountains. I'd recognise alpine air, which isn't what I now breathe, let's strike out alpine air.

You swing so beautifully, with concern neither for geography nor the hour, that mine appears beastly and enfeebled next to it, and I have no more love or questions but for this motion and for the prominent veins enveloping your fine and well-equipped hand.

Know this, if you're interested: I'm also very attentive to what you do when you're not swinging and when nevertheless you still find a way to be in full swing. I approve of you, all in all. It's not weakness, believe you me; I've lived, and my experience of things makes me admire

the way you have of confronting them and which is the only right way: that which is not burdened by manners if it means getting caught up in the bad ones.

Enjoy as you are, enjoy, enjoy!

The dark lands seem to fall the one on top of the other, hup, and hup, like night falls onto day, or day into night.

Things smell good and bad, mouths that speak are silent, vertigo walks on two good legs, and I have this arm who huffs huffs huffs.

* * *

Having to choose among all the schemes that would conceal the machine without risking the free movement of any of its belts, the citizen puts oversensitivity into motion.

Sensitivity wasn't to be found in the big sack of schemes. The citizen pretended to be amazed and to almost regret it, but he knew that sensitivity, which requires some talent,⁴ would have been beyond him, that it emotes only from afar, and that it, otherwise, yields so little that it's costly.⁵ He needed something else, something that paid better and fast. He chose well. Since then, the machine, under the thick veil of oversensitivity, continuously produces all kinds of more or less spongy excrements for which glands made to prosper under such a veil salivate profusely. The

⁴ Sensitivity sticks up for "the ugly girl," as Nikolai Zabolotski (1955) has shown.

⁵ It's that "atrocious and doggish enemy" of which Mr. Gadda (1916) speaks with the kind vehemence that we will not hesitate to condemn as soon as we get a minute, and when it's less chilly.

citizen, having equipped himself with spring-loaded objects, will retort: But what machine, uncivil loon and mister Loon, are you talking about? We'll respond: Of the fecund machine, whose endless screw promiscuously grinds kernels and pulps, to provide this rank juice which I refuse to give the all-too cheery title of entertainment [*here, the reader is implored to position their nose over the largest collector of the conurbation, to get an idea of the kind of redolence we speak of*]. The citizen: What you call the machine and what I call altruism produces what you call entertainment and what I call consolation (but I could, along with you—and that would be without making any faces—call it entertainment to the extent that what entertains, and what smells good, consoles). Isn't oversensitivity evidence of great tact, of an excellent heart, of sympathy equally divided between equally pitiful events?⁶ Isn't it nice to be soothed by the tears we're able to shed on misfortunes that don't reach us? See those men and those women whose hair is a slick and whose tongues suck stones—bitter from a condition the flowers have fled—straight from the ground, they like knowing that the handsome John has the squarest jaw in all of Boston and that his cancer has reached an advanced stage; would you refuse them John? Perhaps you're unaware of what they say about our need for consolation? Us: Of course not! So, you can promise us there's no machine that offends humanity's most beautiful sentiments, no machine that replaces its brutal mechanism with the evanescence⁷ of our iridescences⁸ and takes pains to render it ridiculous? The citizen: There's never been such a thing.

⁶ Unlike events, flesh-and-blood individuals (unless they're little pussycats) are of little interest to oversensitivity, which seems to require animated images to get itself moving in turn (2015).

⁷ Alas.

⁸ Alas.

Then, an arm will emerge from the clouds.⁹ It will ask the citizen whether he is quite sure of what he proposes. The citizen won't allow himself to be discomposed by the hammer that ends the arm. He will reiterate that oversensitivity, on account of everything it offers the indigent, would justify all—if there were any—inconveniences relating to the expansion of its empire, but of which there are none, as far as he knows.

The arm emerging from the clouds will fell on the citizen the hammer that ends it, thus ending the citizen as well.

* * *

That's not how we see things. To take the risk of being sad and stem is to become so without fail. You don't need time, you need business. Busyness is our main business. Even fat men who spend their days in a bath robe watching the ceiling make it a point of honour to analyse it like nobody else before them and to deliver the results of their study, articulating themselves like Heraclitus' most cherubic catamite.



⁹ This blazon party per fess gules is a fine illustration of the here-mentioned dexter arm—itsself armed with a hammer, not of argent but or—issuing from a sinistral cloud argent. It's regrettable that this beautiful blazon belongs to a house that never made it out of the nothingness where it one day sank so far that it fell past its cellars and into the depths of hell, due to the debasement of a woman from this family whose surname would remain forever odious to those who preferred the perfect name of Philippe Viannay, whose arms would have been azure, charged with three fleur-de-lys or, debriused by a baton gules, in turn debriused by a hammer or.

It is, therefore, particularly annoying to see a road that once distinguished itself by sternuating in a completely admirable way, sinking, I dare say, into the abulia where the rest have wallowed ever since the steamroller (with internal eccentrics) stamped them into the shape with which they seem so satisfied.

We put so much of our hopes in that road!

We enthusiastically wagered it wouldn't stop on so right a track, and that our enterprising spirit would have managed to second its own. Who knows where this would have led us? Who knows on top of which mount of pride its elastic coating would have taken us? Who knows the monumental and widely effective advertising campaigns, which our competitors would have eagerly imitated without being able to devote them to an object as new and glorious as our Road? Universal Curiosity had turned its immense head toward our Road, already its globular brow promised us a large dividend and a fat *gidouille*, already the minutes longed for our quarter hours. But it was all a dream: here it is, led, amorphous, to horrible depressions; here our Road, the road of our heart, the one that gave its form to our hopes, went deaf to the call of the brave, to the trumpet resounding under the arches where limp flags hang. We walk along it. We roll along it. We do to it today the same as we did the day before last, and it doesn't flinch to affirm the dignity that its initial movement attained in the interval.

When baldheaded humility comes forward to place the instruments of political supremacy at the feet of Guyoflusignan, I so want to believe that it obeys principles other those their vulgarity promotes, and that this decision against efficiency be sanctified by the sacrifice of whosoever makes it. But, for those who will consequently be placed under the authority of a rotten prince and who won't be able to immerse themselves in the contemplation of their stigmata when they receive

their demise at the hands of the enemy, it will be difficult to applaud humility who would have placed them under those very hands.

Do you understand what I'm saying, O Road?

Do you at least understand what I say?

Will you again hollow your back, flat today like the impossibility of a bound, or will you round it, in the way of a surprised brow overtop an amazed eye? or must we give it up once and for all, like the one who thought they had a hold of the world and who wakes in the cold of the night and weeps for having so greatly dreamed?

Some effort wouldn't cost you, I'd say. I know all too well what some go repeating everywhere: that it's to one of the raps preceding the rising of the curtain that you owe this motion, and that you would have never found from within the resources to accomplish it. If this is true, I couldn't ask for more than that a second rap be given to you, and three, and four, it doesn't really matter, so summon the *théâtre français*' troop of knocking *brigadiers* and hesitate no longer to bend your lovely knee to the sound of their little tambourine, or even, it very well could be that the tumult of their song upheaves the earth around you if you'd prefer to stay put, what's important is that you are distinct in at the centre of the rest so we can bask in the bangarang that you were born to provoke in the world.

Make the effort to accept the effect of ours, chickadee, and you'll always be my big ballerina—how's that sound?

You see, life's tough for everyone, especially for those entrepreneurs who regularly reinvest the greater portion of their profits toward the pursuit of global prosperity. It would be good of you not to forget it, and to do your part. Everyone is here for you, come from the four

corners, bus-fulls, charters, tuk-tuks, Chinese Swedes and Snoozers, they need a miracle, emotion, a hard shake, not noodles, not sadness: they have their hands outstretched, palm to palm, wait only for you to beat them and to love you worse. So lose the reticence, Madame de, tightass Standoffesse, and they'll show you what you've made of them like Hosanna Barquette on TV, and Bricole Shipman! You're beautiful, it's their eyeing eyes that pamper you one after another, none wants to be outshone, each who's the favourite crybaby, the cutesiest that crushes, the one with all the zine's pics, burp-in-chief, sniffing schnoz and snot and all, but not too Maine, nor Biran.

Sum, a success, still must you go pluck it from the next branch. And to that end get a move on, as we know how. But you remain deaf and I don't have the spirit, in speaking, to obtain what another obtains, in smiting.

* * *

Of course, it pitches. But it's above all a very small room with no windows and no electricity. It's not because I'm told it's large, bright, and airy that I'll shut my eyes. They were all so brilliantly had—which must have been a consequence of the ads—that they see large, bright, airy rooms everywhere. They're made to believe what they're told, in high places. And even when the desire's gone they follow that same trajectory. They find all's well.

Even so, I raise my arms in the air. That should warn them. If I were them, I'd be asking myself some questions. But no. There are two or three looking at me, wide-eyed, the rest act as if

I weren't there. I hear them talking amongst themselves and backing away: all the while bumping their heads on the ceiling, they say in their feeble, droning voices that these are large and lofty rooms, these rooms are airy and bright, and are still going on and on about it. If I let myself be carried away, I'll end up believing it myself. I'm boasting when I say I raise my arms in the air. It's im-po-ssi-ble to lift your arms in a room like this. They can see I try in spite the darkness, even those who act as if I weren't there. And if I can't it's because this room is very small and very low, as are all the other rooms I've been able to see or perceive. I've tried to show them, they act as if I weren't there, even those looking directly at me. I can tell that I irk them and that they're in a hurry to get back into the corridor, especially when I start to call them lowceilinged, you're lowceilinged I repeat, they pretend to not understand.

On the first day, I noticed a woman. I told myself she's a treasure and what's more booty, as I slid my tongue across my lips. It's actually because of her that I went in, that woman whom I never saw again. I thought she was entering a thousand-windowed palace. I waited a moment, then followed.

It was a very large house seen from outside, but as soon as I entered the very big door shut behind me and it was no longer a very big and magnificent door but a little cat flap, a little hatch that seemed never to have moved before. And in front of me there were these stooped individuals lined single file, in a low, long, and dark corridor. Real wimps, but who gave off the unpleasant odour of power and of locked gate.

Under the corridor's only lightbulb, which fails to spread its pitiful beam through the tens of windowless rooms leading onto this procession, the first individual looked at me with his oversized eyes long enough for me to realise that he was a kind of lemur, then he began to nibble. When one finds oneself caught in a mousetrap, and these folks were by all accounts, just as I was,

one loses their taste for cheese, it seems to me, well now these miserable wretches, with revolting greed and painful gums, nibbled at any moldy rind they could find scattered across the floor. It started off well. I preached to them with my usual eloquence, I spoke of decency and pride, to show them the disgrace of such behaviour so opposed to that of king Marc, for example, but worthy, regrettably, of king Ma.¹⁰ It didn't seem to faze them, I preferred to think they were so shaken that they feigned hebetude, and I let them lead me to this very small room in which I've since remained.

Because the entire hut pitches like a cargo ship in a hard gale, or rather more like a busted dinghy, I have the impression of being nothing but nausea at the depths of the hull.

I leave my door open to let in some of the corridor's light, but they stand there to keep me from leaving.

I must stay in this room.

Apparently because I have no nose.

I made it clear that I did in fact have a nose but that it was lost because of the wax, that if I looked hard enough it would surely turn up on the road in the dust, that I give them my word to polish it like a new penny, to attach to it a band which they would lend me, and that my nose would hold like theirs.

They shook their heads no.

¹⁰ "King Ma (skr. Māra), demon incarnating moral evil; seeks to impede man's efforts toward reaching deliverance" (Jacqueline Pigeot, in "Répertoire," *Récits de l'éveil du Coeur* by Kamo no Chômei, p. 488, *Le Bruit du temps*, 2014 [my translation]).

I punched the perineum of the first, and dealt another to the nose of his colleague, who sniffled, and this sniffle was like an affront to which he had nothing more to add.

A third slowly said, with a benign kind of tone, that it was a large, a very large and airy room, and even, which spoiled nothing, a room with high ceilings furnished with everything just as high, windows and doors.

A fourth and fifth approved, somberly nodding their heads, which with each nod they bumped on the ceiling.

A sixth, of whom all I could see was a foot keeping the beat that the fourth and fifth nodded their heads on.

I tried to shrug my shoulders but no way, so I tried my arms, imagine that.

Then, the third forced two fingers down his throat to place on the threshold the little piece of cheese he had so painstakingly chewed.

Take a look around yourselves, my little brothers, my little hunchbacks, take a look at this very small, this windowless room, where you can't move, can't breathe, can't see a thing, I say with indignation, raising my voice in spite of my body, would you not be complete morons? would you not interbreed amongst yourselves or with these little crawling beasts (I indicate the several phosphorescent diplopods sauntering around as they do here as if in their own homes) in which you believed to recognise—imbeciles—the animal spirits that philosophy now bumps its snout on after having so long sung the merits of?

They nibbled at old rinds, the ones looking at me. They didn't express the least animosity at what I somewhat harshly said. Thin, stooped, they take shifts at my door like one labours without

passion on a task without interest. Then they return to the corridor. I can't bring myself to be angry with them, really, who knows why. All the same, they keep me against my will. In unergonomic conditions. And this rolling. It's getting to me.

There's this one who, if adequately charmed, puts two very slim fingers into the outlet near my door, that way I can watch the news in his large, round eyes because even if we have no chairs here, we do have an internet connection. The top stories scroll by like on two high-def Tsimsung screens. He plugs himself in like this without being asked. Not a single person looks at their watch in this windowless hole, but he knows right down to the second the hour of the newscast and he powers himself up right on time, he even often runs over into the movie of the night, doesn't turn himself off until after the movie of the night. I must admit, this greatly soothes and pleases me, and if I weren't keeping an eye on myself I would be thanking him twice a day. Fortunately, there's no sound, I'd hate to understand the things this dead stare sends back at me.

When I watch these little silent reports, or the little B. Jacquot films, each just as dumb and silent, that follow these little inanities, I look away in spirit and think of other things, this being a good place to examine the mind.

I now often regret having been made in such a way to be compelled to put up with coercion. Had I just stuck to my plan and returned to my coffer at the centre of the sitting, from where I was torn by those assassins who were obviously drawn there by my nature, and which events outside of my nature put me in a state of needing to return to, I wouldn't have had to suffer that latest insult, but could I have strong-armed my nature and won comfort? Could I have, without betraying what I am, avoided this latest trap if my nature compelled me to fall in? Wouldn't it be unfair to win over the warmth of the hearth if I'm born to suffer injustice and torment? And won't this warmth mix with strips of gauze that are bloodier than those enswathing me? Something must have

startled me on the straight line traced by a god along the common road. I should have dedicated myself to breaking it a little in allegiance to that viscus, which seemed to me more akin to the way my hard bones and sour flesh avoid each other. Go on, buck up. Face it. There's nature and there's fault. If I don't consider my fault, if I consider only my nature, if I let myself be carried away to the point of believing that they, who I refuse to call by their names, are the daughters of the other, and so are innocent like children who are always pure even when they come from the dirtiest asses, then I'm truly deep in the comfort I claim to reject in allegiance to a nature, which itself ensconces me there. I am comfortable. Where I'm ensconced, I comfort myself. My faults are comfortable. My faults are like a sofa. My faults separated me from the coffer I cry after with delicious and comfortable tears. There was a fig tree that tapped at the window. There was an awful spot. These were two reproachful figures. I didn't recognise it back then. I recognise it now, from within this very small room. It's not too late. Were I to name my nature otherwise, I would find it less likeable. I like it since I always yield to it and it's to please it that I yield to it and that I give it that name. Were I to name it not nature but vice, the name alone would tell me I must fight. In choosing the first name, the name that flatters, I protect myself. Had I chosen the second I would have imposed on myself certain duties under which my weakness would surely buckle. Choosing to follow the straight line traced by the god, I would have chosen the most difficult path as it would have compelled me to resist that vice to which I have already ceded so much that it has potentially become stronger than my will. A god reveals no easy path. I longed for my return to the coffer at the centre of the sitting, where I promised to praise the name of the god who would heed me. Never has there been anyone as sad to leave something, maybe nobody has ever so regretted to leave somebody. I was torn away and endlessly sighed for and called for, I wanted to return, it was all I wanted. And as soon I could I wanted something else. I wanted so many things and I ran after them

all, right up to the treasure and her booty. If I was torn by so many arms from my coffer at the centre of the sitting, if this strong-arming was inflicted on me all the way into the coffer of my rest, if that meanness came to find me, if it pulled me away with such ease, if my resistance didn't last any longer than a few days and a few nights, if it didn't wear at the effort that the meanness, which must perhaps be called justice, exercised against me, it is, as I think now in this very small room connected to the internet, it's undoubtedly that I aggravated, by the injustice of my nature which I let drive me all those years without reflecting on the direction I was taking under its command, a large number of people who, no longer willing to suffer my ways, decided to join forces and forcefully make me understand their own and foster them at the expense of mine. Following this line of reasoning my comfort is almost guaranteed, whether I love my nature or fight my vice. Either I wallow in the comfort of my nature, following it whichever way it flows. Or I fight my vice and conquer comfort in the process of getting, by the straight line, to my coffer at the centre of the sitting. But if I choose to fight and lose the fight against my vice and if I don't make it to my coffer at the centre of the sitting, I won't know comfort. Neither the comfort of abandon, nor what comes after victory. But if I find satisfaction in having fought well, if I'm proud of an honourable fight, of a fight fought honorably, if I become irreconcilable, if I hate my vice, if I declare an endless war against it, wouldn't I consider victory a trifle, wouldn't I consider comfort a perversion that spoils a man's most beautiful motion? Wouldn't I be relieved to a certain extent if, knowing thereafter my shame, I don't make it to my coffer at the centre of the sitting? Won't I redden to remember that I wrongly occupied that place and that I would come to realise how close I'd been to taking it back? I will look at victory with horror and it will not be my defeat that I cherish but my fight. I will cherish my honourable fight. I will sometimes succumb to the powerful vice that I wouldn't have beaten, and so I'll start against it again, that's to say against me, to get

back to my coffer at the centre of the sitting, not because I like it or because I like comfort but because I'll like the promise I'd made to there praise the god that would heed me. But I won't succeed and my name will be loathed along with my nature's. These people standing at my door to keep me from leaving, I'll fight myself at their side to keep me in my prison, and if my captor stabs my back with spectacles I'll turn them on my own eyes.

* * *

The Herotype Speaks—Sixth Time

Who says hyah says no evil.

The horse, hearing hyah, understands this language. To show that it's understood, it proceeds.

When people hear hyah they do not proceed, to show they've understood.

Everyone follows, oh good.

But when one says "thing one" and when another other says "thing two," or "three," etc., I can't tell whether to proceed or to retreat. The ones and the others say one and an other as if those things were indifferent. That's because they know what sense they give to "thing one" and "thing two." They don't even consider taking the one for the other. They play the expert, without meaning any harm. And in fact those listening react very differently whether they hear "thing one" or "thing

two.” They obviously grasp the difference without the speaker having, by any particular inflection of the voice, to emphasise their effects for the one to be distinguished from the other.

Me, I ignore what “thing one” or “thing two,” or “three,” etc., are, these things were never spoken of to me.

Inevitably, I hide behind my little tools.

And when it’s my turn to say something I say hyah. To not remain in that impossible position I say hyah, to retake the initiative.

With this word everyone starts. Those who were doing something do nothing at all. Either they were proceeding or they were retreating. Now they’re like majestic mountains who, with their contempt and their immobility, crush any pertinences and impertinences. I would like my bearing, when I hear “thing one” or “thing two,” or “three,” etc., to have that kind of swagger. Those who were doing nothing adopt at this word hyah a carriage so far from the limpness that filled the ordinary of their days. They’re proud, it’s clear that they would like it if their moms saw them now. They have an air of intelligence so unlike them. They fix their gaze on a point in the distance, giving their regard the brilliance next to which *star* is a vague brillas.

This hyah is a very efficient hammer, for horses as well as for humans. Hyah, and ho! and all go huff.

Very good. I know what I am, the hideouts I dig under the earth are manifestations of my nostalgia for when I lived in the garden with my father. Since then I’ve grown well, I know the strength of my arm, I have influence over the Earth’s crust like the lords of iron, La Trémoille, Vendôme, and Guise, have over the towns of Hesdin and Corbie, they’re not wrong to compare

my silence to God's, my discretion to God's, my what-you-has-to-say to the vigour of the thundering sky under which hang the things of the eternal.

Beaked and membered of gueules.

Oh no oh no. Ah **ah** *ah ah*.

A great fatigue jumps with both feet onto my shoulder. What a poor beast. Poor little beast. I carefully raise my arm to the height of my shoulder, and I show my fatigue the mouth over there in the trees that cries out and has since forever cried out, since I lived in the garden, under the hatches. You really must, my dear little, and poor, and who jumps, fatigue, you really must accompany me to that beautiful dark mouth. I'll carry you, like a doer does, door-to-door, you see this forearm, how vascular it is, it'll protect you from your enemies. Don't worry. I'll go where I'm expected but it won't be on manback because I say hyah. This word that I adore forbids me to count on man to get where I'm going.

Pardon? Sure, this arm is a bit capricious though its distinctions aren't slim. You want a comparison? I'll give you what you demand such that your understanding of my arm seals not our friendship but our collusion: the first lasts a lifetime, the second whatever it can is already good. My arm is endowed with a particular soul, with an autonomous will, which only encounters mine under rare circumstances, and then such fire takes to the works of the world! My arm is like love that strikes at beings like lightning strikes the earth. It seems to strike at random. It's just the opposite. It strikes life. To kill it or exalt it, that I ignore. I'm so ignorant, brave great but little fatigue, that I must for the most part content myself with doing what this arm itches to do. It pulls me after it without consideration, which is what made me think of the word hyah, as if I were the pony who isn't really all that free to its own movements.

Ease off a little, would you?

I find that there's a certain burdened something in the world.

I find that what I'm looking for in this world keeps well hidden.

I find that my sympathy for this and that remains well within what it could be.

But what is this and that? I can't stand when such questions jump with both feet into my head. I'd like a little quiet. If I've done wrong to someone or something, it's like knocking over a vase when quickly turning, I've got nothing against the vase. As soon as a pardon's required, I think it without saying it, yet I'm the biggest beggar of pardons in the world. I beg pardon of this one or that one if I've hurt them. It's a pardon that will bring them back because I'm the biggest pardoner in the world and the wheel turns.

I hope you enjoy pure air, it's good to enjoy it when travelling on foot like I am to the mouth in the trees. The road is made up of very long, infinite paths. When I was a child, I believed it was enough to have arms just longer than mine to touch the dark mouth. If I consented to grow it was to verify this. Boy, did I learn! And yet, since I consented, I had to grow until I could stand no more, if I can put it like that. It's far. Thankfully, the air is pure, sometimes cool, sometimes warm. Sometimes large pieces of pure air fall on the road in front of me like boulders. These are imponderables which slow me significantly, especially since they're not to be taken lightly, pieces of pure air won't be pushed aside with the tip of the toe, they're angry animals that won't hesitate to show their claws and that won't listen to either hey or hyah. I think their fall, which still amazes me and which I don't know what to attribute to, angers them because of the crudities that cover the floor and then infect them. They only consider themselves comfortable among other pieces, so as to form very wide clusters. Because all this assembles up above, and around us, in the most

amazing way: it's a matter of a wise architect beside whom ours' just whistle and knead. That's what we call pure air. Conversation is impossible with these pieces. At least we can breathe them in deeply, while waiting to see more clearly.

But there aren't any pieces of pure air on my way today. Let's stroll with the insouciance of non-taxable savings. Over there, in his robes of light, a happy mute directs some very nice signs of friendship to me, while big red dogs celebrate. Hello my friend, hello hello! I see your song, could you tell? I like it, I really really like it! You really please me, offering me this lovely song on my way! I hope everyone drinks to your health! I hope everyone pities your death because it's near! I hope everyone pities the end of these lovely songs!

And here's a young woman passing. We're about to cross paths.

She has a very intolerably small mouth. A straw couldn't make such a hole. No, this won't do, something must be done. Watch closely, dear great fatigue, as I deal with this.

With my right hand I delicately take her by the nape. With my left I take the hammer by the face and the peen that form its head, then I delicately fit the end of the handle in this very little and very intolerably small mouth. I delicately turn the handle, being careful not to damage this very little mouth which should be widened and not hurt.

See how this very little mouth is already less intolerable: the skin, at first a little surprised by the kind of attention it doesn't receive every day, loosens, it's confident, it does its certainly modest part to help the hammer. It's not there yet though: the little mouth isn't that big. It insists with little cries that we continue our work. Our duty agrees with this plea, we join our hands there. So, the handle goes to work, gently picking the most central of the innumerable locks that shut this little mouth. Our handle, so patient and courteous, will thus have place enough to brace on a lip.

Because in the end, what's a lever without a fulcrum? How would you gently enlarge this very small mouth if you can't pry on a lip to distance it from the other? Delicately, we'll initiate the preparations that will allow us, in picking those miniscule locks situated at what we dare not call commissures, to attain this *play* thanks to which the hammer's handle will make of this too-little mouth a pretty, young girl. Those who neglect the delicacy required in such matters will lose all legitimacy to fix the nasty little mouths they might encounter duckface to face.

I'm worn out with a hussy like you on my shoulder. Go take a walk with your tired eyes on someone with whom you'll lose the desire to ogle me this year and the next. The thing is, I'm being watched, I can feel it. For some time now the eye I have behind my head is shocked to see bushes moving since the wind has died down. It's because I say a certain word and everyone knows it's not a word to say when one goes without a horse toward the mouth in the trees.

Who says hyah says no evil.

Hyah.

They don't move in their bushes anymore, the people.

* * *

The pure air.

The little mouth.

The arm, the fatigue, the still bushes.

The mountains, the hyah of the horse of avalanches.

Incredible, incomprehensible things, divine things await on the brink, all of them, each to be named according to their rank.

And so that thereby their importance as it is proclaimed is acclaimed.

But for he who contemplates himself, and who thumbs his nose at everything outside the purview of this contemplation—nothing approaches the workings of his brain. He finds in this high-positioned character, which lives a rather independent life within him, all the qualities and all the hauteur encountered in those that the happy chance of birth and the concern to justify chance make charming. In this instance one must hear in charm the sovereign quality of which those who have all the rest are devoid.

We know, as a matter of fact, that the most charming individuals only exercise a kind of fascination thanks to the superiority conferred to them by bad manners, or at least a strangeness of manner. They seduce with the concern they bring to those bothered by the goodness of theirs, even the exquisite. The freedom that bursts in these strange manners, even though discreet (which curiously adds a touch of good taste), places at the feet of charming individuals a world that degrades itself to pass beneath their higher law.

A brain full of thunder, where landslides and calm tempests are produced, where auroras are washed by lightning, where crushing summer lethargies prepare even more devastating storms, is

a charming character. That's to say, it quickly exhausts the temperate body hosting it. You obviously remember that Terence Stamp and what he did to Silvana, Laura, Massimo, Anne, Andrés, Laura and Ninetto, and how all of them were left marked. Each to the extent they found him charming. They were under the spell. Their exhaustion, their nervous breakdowns couldn't oust that charm. There was little to hope for from that big, beautiful house. There had been little to be gained from it for some time. Neither was there any more to be gained from that big garden. There was bigger than the big house and the big garden, and it was someone who would come from farther away and who wouldn't resemble anything previously known, and who wouldn't resemble anyone else. When he, with the face of an artesian well, appeared, they all fell in. Each of them rushed into him. He attracted and took them. He undid them. He doused them in his blood. He sprang forth from their blood. He tore them asunder to restitch them. He gave them their appropriate form. He gave them their true form. They screamed, what else could they do. Those weren't the cries of resistance, at least not just. They screamed more than you could ever believe. Two of them scream still, those whose forms were least appropriate. Those for whom he had to go looking in a very distant form, to return to their true form. These are exhausted, torn, and restitched bodies. You may recall. Well, the brain I'm referring to exercises an influence of that kind on the body. It wedds it and weakens it. It doesn't let it set its eyes on the world unless it's to see the brain everywhere across the world. The brain shows the body what it itself is capable of, and makes use of those capacities to fall for its own. It makes the body love its workings, and the body bursts with desire for its convolutions: the body won't lift a finger before seeking authorisation from the brain. It seeks without receiving an answer. It interprets this silence. It takes its head in its hands. It too screams.

It's complete. It's completion. It's joy. It's no chuckle. It's perfection in this world. That tear is perfection in this world, it's restitched. These cries are perfection in this world, their song never stops. This brain that perfects this body, that weakens it in reinforcing it, that harms it in completing it, that knocks it down in exalting it, is a charming individual who lives a peculiar and mysterious life in which reigns fucking and the havoc that follows. Who's ever considered a brain thus, I ask you. This one does. If everyone did, many would think their brain singular. Odd and singular. Many would think it charming. Many would slip off their panties saying brain I'm slipping off my panties for your form to give mine its truth, many would slip off their briefs saying brain, what my wife or my daughter says I say too, give it. Many would act according to methods they'd never learned and that despite their disgust, because these are disgusting methods, they'd continue to adopt, and their disgust will fall away like bark from a tree—stripping. Like it, they'd forget. They'd see nothing more than their present bliss, which would have effaced all past misery. They'd believe in their happiness. They'd taste its intensity. They'd give their panties a last kick to clear the floor, why panties in this world, but why. Or a boxer. Why. They'd think. The floor would be clear. Everything would be myrrh and fir. Then the floor, the beautiful floor cleared of the dirty panties would fall because on that day, the same exact day as the very beautiful exultation, just as the man with the pretty face of an artesian well decided to leave all those I've named and to whom he did what I've said, the brain will quit that body, leaving nothing but a panting and that heaving-ho, and huffingpuffing.

Just as Silvana, Massimo, and the others stood on their stoop dumbstruck, and taken aback, and encumbered by their embracing arms, and gouging their eyes at watching in the growing distance that well in which they all threw themselves, in which they all sprang and who sprang forth from their blood, watching that true artesian well take his leave of them, he who left

no doubt to spring forth elsewhere after goodforming those people whose good health didn't prevent illness, just as they stayed on the stoop rubbing their palms and the backs of their hands, incapable of anything else, for so long incapable of anything else that they rubbed much too hard and most of them scratched themselves as if to wake from that kind of collective catatonia from which they would have had to emerge to perhaps run after the man who was disappearing behind the horizon, because there was maybe still time to catch him, to try to convince him to stay a while, even if only just one or two more days, he really did need some rest, something could surely be arranged, the house was big, the domain too, when he said at breakfast after having eaten less than half a milk roll that he had decided to leave maybe he hoped that there'd be more resistance than there was, hoped that he'd be implored to stay, that under the pretext of respecting his freedom tongues wouldn't have been held as they were, it was a perfectly equivocal silent reflection, even this superior man with the pretty face could have missed it and it was perhaps on this equivocation that that superior man with the pretty face took his leave, and with him that period, so full but so brief, which would surely extend in its effects but without him to relaunch the dynamic, if that's the right word, once it's fallen, an apprehension that was of course in the hearts of each of them as they all stood on the stoop and on the tips of their toes, to see, or to try to catch in the twilight's last glimmer, way out there, a glimpse of that significant man's silhouette, but it was no doubt just one of those shadows cast by the imagination to convince that what's already disappeared is still there, likewise the body would be left. By that brain. Despite the panties. Or rather the absence of panties. Or of boxers.

A fat Menippent who pulls his pants up to furious teeth, would there find something to tear to shreds, with the support of certain considerations full of intelligence and even meaning to return

that house to its former dignity and each to their place. There are, however, situations wherein beauty, compared to the lameness of others, holds pleading fulminations back as much as it draws Vertumnus of Pomona closer; that's here the case. The completely bare body, which lives only off the motions provided by the head, goes on, even though it's gone, to accomplish stunning acts, acts so spirited, so full of quips, of wits, of jests and jeers, that no stone will be left unturned in search of the brain responsible for such marvels, and since no brain will be found it will be ascribed an appearance and dimensions almost as extraordinary as they actually are. Then this body, having given all it could give and all it had taken from the motion the brain had provided, will pshhhhhht, little emptied ball, flip, banging flop into all the walls big and small of this soft world.

* * *

The Herotype—His Words—First or Eighth Station, I Don't Know Anymore, It's So Hard
to Follow

It isn't the day.

It's a dark night, on the prairie.

My eyes make out from this side the mountains I love.

Ahead, there are rolling hills. That's where the mouth I love moves its beautiful lips.

I can't hear it, which deeply upsets me.

I walk toward it without making any headway.

Days on days, walking all these nights without hearing any better so deeply upsets me.

Now and then I strike the ground. It doesn't strike back in this night. There's not a word to strike my ear. The grass is greener when I strike because I love above all else the voice of my mate whose gold resounds in the dry air.

I'd have nothing in this world if not for it.

When I look very closely at the motions of the mouth in the trees and ask my own to imitate them, it's as if I were deaf and mute.

I see it much better than many other things because it's dark without concealing. So it pierces the night. It's not at all like other things.

When I examine my leg and my arm I realise that I'm not everywhere present in my body. When my heart responds I don't understand. When I interrogate my soul I don't understand what it is, I don't finish the questions I start to ask because I worry it will answer me with marked disdain, or not at all.

It makes motions around me, with men, with beasts. Women in throwing themselves into hyah when I say hyah put me off to repeat it.

If this world weren't made up of so many things necessary to its conservation we could make some cuts, story of simplifying it for better comprehension. But we can only remove what's accessory, which doesn't facilitate anything. Necessary things form a tight knit, impossible to undo. It's like trying to cut iron with blood. And so everything is always just as obscure.

The day is another night, which has a more loveable name. When I walk, it's at night.

This world won't let us deprive it even a single thing necessary to its obscurity. It won't let me reach the mouth in the trees. It makes the arrangements necessary to keep me far away, I don't know how it manages.

I must I think do away with time and pain, but that's what its whole is made of. Nothing left to do but to sink the parts of this painful machine that shouldn't heal.

Since I haven't progressed, I stop.

I see a bird at my feet.

It doesn't move.

It doesn't have a beak but a mouth similar enough to the mouth in the trees.

This world sends me this bird that looks at me and that won't speak.

If its mouth is just as dark as the other it's no redder.

A hammer blow to its dirty little head.

A ding-a-ling in the dry air.

Right away the grass is greener.

3 – On the Concept of Humour with Continual Reference to Irony

Thus, Humour will be the main object of consideration in this discussion and will be analysed in *philosophical* opposition to Irony, that old chestnut. Much ink has already been spilled in the name of irony, and whatever is written on the subject in what follows will be in the service of

better illustrating its counterpart, humour. In *Logique du sens*, Gilles Deleuze posits this polarity²⁶ between “l’humour[,] [] art de la surface, [et] la vieille ironie, art des profondeurs ou des hauteurs.”²⁷ Taking Deleuze’s proposal to reconsider the *old irony* against “l’ironie supérieure”²⁸—i.e. humour²⁹—as our focal point, this dissertation will analyse irony and humour as concepts for the understanding and interpretation of literature,³⁰ as concepts to interrogate the critical, dialectical, transcendent principles that have long guided a tradition of theories and methodologies (along with the ironic distance that follows), which we suspect of dominating Western thought on translation since St. Jerome and St. Augustine of Hippo (reaching its apotheosis in the theory of the German Romantics and continuing to smoulder to some extent in the theories of Walter Benjamin and Antoine Berman). As a preliminary note, it is possible that these two most recent thinkers, while in their own ways entrenched in ironic thinking, spark the potential to think humorously about translation. Though these latter thinkers tend to move away from unadulterated irony, they nevertheless each epitomise some aspect of originality, to essentialize fidelity in an ironic turning into the hidden, the mystical, and the essential, to re-turn to the lofty ideals of something *Pure* or something *True*.

²⁶ Following (though Deleuze does not explicitly cite) Bergson’s 1900 treatise on comedic laughter, *Le Rire*, which I will here cite in full: "La plus générale de ces oppositions serait peut-être celle du réel à l'idéal, de ce qui est à ce qui devrait être. Ici encore la transposition pourra se faire dans les deux directions inverses. Tantôt on énoncera ce qui devrait être en feignant de croire que c'est précisément ce qui est : en cela consiste l'ironie. Tantôt, au contraire, on décrira minutieusement et méticuleusement ce qui est, en affectant de croire que c'est bien là ce que les choses devraient être : ainsi procède souvent l'humour. *L'humour, ainsi définie, est l'inverse de l'ironie...* On accentue l'ironie en se laissant soulever de plus en plus haut par l'idée du bien qui devrait être : c'est pourquoi l'ironie peut s'échauffer intérieurement jusqu'à devenir, en quelque sorte, de l'éloquence sous pression. On accentue l'humour, au contraire, en descendant de plus en plus bas à l'intérieur du mal qui est, pour en noter les particularités avec une plus froide indifférence." *Le Rire : Essai Sur La Signification Du Comique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 97 (emphasis mine).

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, [1969], (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2020), 18.

²⁸ Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* [1968], (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2019), 235.

²⁹ See chapter 7 of Claire Colebrook’s *Irony: The New Critical Idiom*, 2004.

³⁰ After, very notably, Candace D. Lang’s 1988 work *Irony/Humour*.

It would be false to say that irony and humour share no common features, that they are not somehow kindred. But it would be even more erroneous to conflate them, to subsume humour under the banner of irony or *vice versa*. It is, therefore, important to understand these two concepts, or modes, so as not to be misled by their family resemblances. Moreover, irony and humour must here be defined through the prism of *Aventures*; if we follow Deleuze, we must keep in mind the movement of depth and height that *Aventures* evokes when the fall, the *chute*—of the road, its intrinsic motion—, ultimately and almost simultaneously, returns to the surface, establishing itself as a surface phenomenon.

3.1 – Old Irony

Irony has been of central concern in Western thought since its foundation with (the Platonic³¹) Socrates. The history of irony is thus a long one; consequently, the definitions we have inherited are myriad and often greatly variegated, transforming and mutating through the millennia. There are two main forms of irony whose origins are ancient and whose influence has stayed: that is, the *ethical/metaphysical* irony of the ancient Greeks—Socrates and Plato—and the *rhetorical* irony elaborated by their conquerors and initial heirs—the ancient Romans and their august orators. From these two points of origin, irony has developed into a key literary and philosophical concept that has been the object of many studies and the central tropical position in countless works of literature and thought. The most influential theory of irony from the perspective of art and culture was developed by the German—and above all the Jena—

³¹ There are multiple *de facto* Socrates (cf., for example, Bakhtin 1963 and 1965 on the different degrees of “reduced laughter” in Plato; as well as Kierkegaard 1841, Lang 1988, and Dane 1991 who each analyse the different portrayals—by Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes—of Socrates) who, depending on whom and even which dialogue or text one reads, can typify irony or humour. For the purposes of this thesis, however, we will consider Plato’s Socrates, the ironic, ideational Socrates—the Socrates whose “cryptic nothing ... Plato tried to fill... by giving him the idea” (see Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates*, 153)—because this is the character that has most impacted the tradition from which we are working.

Romantics (who, among other things, were preeminent practitioners and thinkers of literary translation, as Walter Benjamin, in “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” (1923), and Antoine Berman, in *L'épreuve de l'étranger* (1984), have both shown³²). These artists and theorists were, furthermore, major influences on the incipient modernist poetics and theory, where irony, as the preferred and emblematic literary ethos, was distilled anew and to an even greater degree in the works of the high modernist period.³³ Each of these iterations of irony, while substantially different, retain core commonalities, making them essentially interrelated. We will briefly concentrate on the two most significant elements for the purposes of this study: the dialectical process and the hierarchical distribution that inhere in each of the abovementioned iterations.

At its core—fundamental since its beginnings—is the dialectic (tied, indubitably, to the dialectic’s success as the West’s favourite mode of thought) moving irony by the force of negation. To reiterate, “Socrates was the first to introduce irony”³⁴ (Plato, to elevate it to a principle) by performing or living³⁵ a certain position such that his thoughts and opinions remain unspoken in dialogue. The Socratic method works such that the ironist’s intellectual opponents are bated into revealing their own thoughts and opinions and, in the process, lead to conclude that they are even more ignorant than the by-all-appearances ignorant Socrates; and this movement continues, propelling his interlocutors—once Plato “recognised... the need to do

³² For the time being (see Section 4 for more thorough development of this point), we will not push this coincidence beyond remarking that Benjamin noted it in passing (see “The Task of the Translator” in *Illuminations*, 75-76) and that Antoine Berman ultimately passed by the opportunity to expand on the significance of Benjamin’s comment, even though he did make note of it (see the beginning of his eighth seminar (cahier) on Benjamin’s essay, in *L'Âge de la traduction : « La Tâche du traducteur » de Walter Benjamin*, 2014, 147).

³³ D.C. Muecke, for example, claims that it was not until the novels of Thomas Mann, over a century after its initial theorisation, that Romantic irony was adequately executed in literature. See *The Compass of Irony*, 1969), 185 and 186.

³⁴ Søren Kierkegaard *The Concept of Irony: With Constant Reference to Socrates* [1841], tr. Howard and Edna Hong, (Princeton University Press, 1989), 6.

³⁵ Kierkegaard goes so far as to suggest, in his VI thesis, that “Socrates not only used irony but was so dedicated to irony that he himself succumbed to it”. So, *ipso facto* dying for? Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.

more than [just] negate the Sophists' 'wisdom'... [thus] commit[ting]..." Socrates' ironic ethos to a beyond—to a higher principle of "...Ideas."³⁶ In this was, Socrates' irony is ethical, a way of life and Plato's Socrates' irony is metaphysical, a way to what is beyond mere representations, to(ward) the things of the Ideal. Both, though, are in that way *formative*.

The ancient Romans further developed their *ironia*, inspired by the ethical and practical Socrates as well as Aristotle's definition of verbal irony,³⁷ concentrating on its applicability for the purposes of rhetoric³⁸ and as a particular method of political practice.³⁹ Roman irony emerged from language and oration, what Muecke calls "Instrumental irony,"⁴⁰ and continues to be the base on which a contemporary and most commonplace understanding of irony stands. It is from this facet of the development that we understand irony as *saying one thing and meaning the opposite*, or, put slightly different—after a "tradition" dating "back to Quintilian... and Cicero," as Hutcheon argues, where irony is conceived of more freely—as "the unsaid [being] *other than, different from*, the said."⁴¹ This device thus functions by subtraction, of the presented, and addition, of the absented.

Later, Romantic irony was a renewed return to Socrates' ironic life, applied very notably to the realm of cultural production and the artist's relationship to their work and to their being in the world. The artist played a focal role for the Romantics, privileged with the special capacity to respond to the ironic predicament of human existence, of the "finite being striving to comprehend an infinite hence incomprehensible reality."⁴² The artist transcends their finitude by

³⁶ Claire Colebrook, *Irony: The New Critical Idiom*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 30, 31.

³⁷ D.C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, (London: Methuen, 1982), 15.

³⁸ Cf. Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1974 and Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (1969) and *Irony and the Ironic* (1982).

³⁹ Cf. Colebrook, "The Politics of Irony after Socrates" in *Irony*.

⁴⁰ Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 56.

⁴¹ Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 62 (emphasis mine).

⁴² Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 23.

creating something infinite, the work of art and pure subjectivity: the German romantic realised that “the ideal can ironize the real”; the artist “can express his spirit’s independence of the world with disdainful or insouciant irony.”⁴³ This ironic relation to existence attempts to overcome the limitations of the individual in the world, a gesture toward the transcendence of the finite human in their infinite capacity for creativity and imagination.

This process of irony, however, is not the pure negation for which Hegel criticized the irony of German Romanticism; negation in irony does not function by way of *mere* opposition. There is, in fact, synthesizing movement: the upward spiral of the dialectic, a progression toward something *better*, if not *best*—progress, though as is in Hegel’s conception, toward origin and not away from it.⁴⁴

For that very reason, Deleuze speaks of irony in terms of *principles*:⁴⁵ as a function of reaching toward *heights* or *depths*;⁴⁶ as operating based on the vertical lawfulness of, as we have seen, iterations of the transcendent—the *Idea*, the *Signifier*, the *Author*, etc. The Greek word from which irony is derived, *eirōneia*, means to “dissemble,” making it the practice of deliberately attempting to hide something. Throughout Plato’s work, Socrates is accused of being an *eirōn*, effectively using the absence of any position as the *ultimate* position. The rhetorical irony of the Romans shifts this lofty perspective away from interlocutors to the terms of interlocution. Thus, irony functions dialectically by exploiting the oppositions or contradictions that inhere within propositions, concepts, contexts, etc. With this device, it is always the absent

⁴³ Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, (London: Methuen, 1969), 192.

⁴⁴ Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic* [1816] Translated by G. di Giovanni, 49: “It must be admitted that it is an essential consideration... that progression is a retreat to the ground, to the origin and the truth on which that with which the beginning was made, and from which it is in fact produced, depends.”

⁴⁵ Cf. especially chapter 7 “La loi, l’humour et l’ironie,” in Gilles Deleuze *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch : le froid et le cruel*, 1967.

⁴⁶ See Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* and *Logique du sens*.

term—the negative—that takes precedence over presence—the positive—and structures the proposition on ideality and pure rationality, at the expense of the real or the apparent, intuition or energy.

Later, it was the romantic poet, the ironist of German Romanticism, who assumed the task of responding to the irony of earthly, mortal existence by hierarchizing himself in relation to his work and to his audience,⁴⁷ thus elevating himself to a higher principle, a Godly kind of subjectivity. Friedrich Schlegel says, in fragment 262: “Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become a god, to be a person, *to form oneself*, are expressions that mean one and the same thing.”⁴⁸ It is thus *Bildung* (formation) that posits the continual development and hierarchization of the subject in romantic thought. *Bildung* is ironic in so far as it forms a process of individual growth and objective creation along a progressive hierarchy: self and Other, author and work, self and self, etc. This process is one of succeeding elevations “over all earlier stages,” whose, as Benjamin suggests, “positive moment of heightening... far outweighs the negative.”⁴⁹

So, irony is always working in hierarchical distribution; one term is always superior to the other, conquering or getting the upper hand—semantically, metaphysically, ontologically—of the other. What is more, this ironic term is nowhere present, but arises from the opposition that supposedly inheres in the proposition and solves (even if temporarily) the contradiction in dialectical movement.

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Dane, *The Critical Mythology of Irony*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 112.

⁴⁸ Qtd. in Gary J. Handwerk, *Irony and Ethics in Narrative: from Schlegel to Lacan*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 25 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Concept of Criticism in Early Romanticism,” in *Selected Writings vol. 1*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 152.

While there is much more that can be said of irony, we must interrupt this discussion to delve into its opponent, or, as Kierkegaard has claimed,⁵⁰ its answer:

3.2 – New Humour

Humour has not historically received such rigorous theoretical interest and exposition; indeed, it has often been the butt of much contempt in the tradition of Western thought. It might be for that very reason that humour has not benefitted from the traceable historical iterations that irony has; unlike irony, our theorisation of humour has seemed to evolve in a more haphazard and piecemeal fashion. While our contemporary definition of humour, meaning “the quality of being amusing, the capacity to elicit laughter or amusement”⁵¹ dates only as far back as the 16th century, the sentiment is undoubtedly primordial: as Homer implies with his gods’ unceasing laughter,⁵² or as Rabelais makes explicit when he claims that “rire est le propre de l’homme.”⁵³

We will not dwell here on the theories of humour and laughter that cynically assume its only capacity is to ridicule and humiliate;⁵⁴ instead, we will concentrate on what most of those who study humour now agree is the most promising thesis: the “incongruity theory,” which Morreall designates as the pleasant cognitive shift arising when our conceptual system is violated.⁵⁵ At this point the mere evocation of “incongruity” might illicit the not-so-distant memory of irony, which, as we have seen, functions by opposition and on the recognition—but,

⁵⁰ See Kierkegaard’s somewhat truncated conclusion in *The Concept of Irony*, 329.

⁵¹ Oxford English Dictionary, “humour | humor”.

⁵² Bakhtin maintains that this judgement by Homer gestures to eternity of humour, see *Rabelais and his World*, 1984, 70.

⁵³ François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, 24.

⁵⁴ That is the “superiority theory” of humour, whose adherents range from Plato to Thomas Hobbes to Bergson. See John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, 1987.

⁵⁵ Cf. John Morreall, “A New Theory of Laughter,” in *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*.

more importantly, the rejection—of that incongruity.⁵⁶ This similarity, or resemblance, between irony and humour often means that the two are either thought of adjacently or, as we have mentioned previously, outright conflated. There is, however, a particularly important distinction that must be made: Humour—unlike irony—does not rely on any *Aufhebung*; the opposition or incongruity in humour is not solved dialectically, not *solved* at all. What follows will be, above all, an investigation into how humour can be said—as Handwerk does, referring, though, to what he calls “post-modern irony”—to operate in a kind of “nonsynthetic dialectic,”⁵⁷ or in other words, a kind of meandering dialogic.

Humour emerges from a contradiction that is, unlike in irony, not negative in itself. In *On Humor*, Luigi Pirandello maintains that contradiction in humour is an “essential one” rather than “an apparent one” (i.e., in the case of irony) and that the process it engenders is “one that inevitably dismantles, splits and disrupts”—a process that remains within discordance, that *does not* rely on any “logically ordered concordance.”⁵⁸ It would be wrong to interpret this as being a negative assessment of humour. As Bakhtin has shown, positive contradiction has been at the heart of what he places at “the summit in the history of laughter”:⁵⁹ the grotesque realism of the carnival consciousness of the Middle Ages. Here, the relation is not negative; rather, incongruity in carnival laughter is, in Bakhtin’s reading, necessarily “ambivalent.”⁶⁰ This pure form of laughter is one that

could grasp and comprehend phenomenon in the process of change and transition, [that] could fix in a phenomenon both poles of its evolution in their uninterrupted and creative renewing changeability: in death birth is foreseen and in birth death, in victory

⁵⁶ See Booth’s “Four Steps of Reconstruction” in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 10-12.

⁵⁷ *Irony Ethics in Narrative*, 15.

⁵⁸ Luigi Pirandello, *On Humor* [1908, rev. 1920], tr. Antonio Illanio and Daniel Testa, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 5 and 31.

⁵⁹ M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, tr. Iswolsky Hélène, Bloomington, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 101.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

defeat and in defeat victory, in crowning a de-crowning. Carnival laughter does not permit a single one of these aspects of change to be absolutized or to congeal in one-sided seriousness.⁶¹

While Bakhtin argues that this ambivalence is an element of carnival laughter specifically, and that we are left today with “reduced” forms of laughter that have developed since the Renaissance,⁶² he nevertheless maintains the possibility for some instances or expressions of humour to reflect this ambivalence (while other reduced forms—like irony and sarcasm—have fallen into negativity).

Through the lens of carnival ambivalence, Pirandello’s understanding of humour begins to shine in a positive light. Of his ostensibly destructive triad—*dismantle, split, disrupt*—it seems most pertinent to pause on the latter two, “split” and “disrupt,” for the purposes of this short investigation into humour. It is precisely at the point of rupture that humour appears, when phenomenal evolution is “congealed” in a dynamic off-centre, where both concepts inhere within the other, a place that splits both poles *before* one subsumes or sublates the other. And this is precisely why Bakhtin goes on to correct himself for having made the—perhaps necessary—imprecision of describing one term of the incongruity intending spatio-temporally toward the other, using the verb “foresee.” Rather than moving toward any pole, the two terms exist at one point and at one and the same time, moving bidirectionally, to and from both poles, at once,⁶³ the affirmation of both *senses*—meaning and direction—at the same time.⁶⁴ Hence why Bakhtin corrects himself by offering the carnival, grotesque image of “death itself [being] pregnant and

⁶¹ M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, ed. & tr. by Caryl Emerson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 164.

⁶² *Rabelais*, 120.

⁶³ This conception of spatio-temporality is investigated thoroughly through what Deleuze calls “Aîôn” (as opposed to “Chronos,” or *chronological* time) in *Logique du Sens*.

⁶⁴ Which is how Deleuze characterises para-dox(a), cf. *Logique du sens*, 9.

[giving] birth, and [of] the mother's womb [that gives] birth [becoming] a grave."⁶⁵ In humour, there is a rupture in our common-sense conception of the world, a split in our consciousness without resolution, a feeling of being suspended *between* two forces (that is, the "feeling of the opposite"⁶⁶). Humour is the denunciation of dualism, the either/or; it is a problem without a solution, a problem invoking even more problems; humour, in this light, is a return to, or an acceptance—an affirmation, even—of *complication*.

Complication as a theory of humour marks a compelling iteration of the incongruity theory that we have been examining up until now. Complication is a disordering of the ordered (a law which, we might add, is imposed onto the) world. *Com-plication* is, following its Latin root, *plicare*, a folding-with (while the other plies, im-plication and ex-plication, for example, are foldings-in and foldings-out, respectively). We would be remiss not to evoke Deleuze more extensively here, Deleuze being not only the preeminent philosopher of the fold—*le pli*—after Leibniz, but also because he is one of few philosophers who very rigorously emphasises the linguistic, ethical, and metaphysical force of *humour*.⁶⁷ In his monograph on Leibniz, Deleuze links complication to a primordial chaos, the foldings-with of an out- and in-folding everything considered real and ideal (actual and virtual), implication and explication. Unlike irony, where a disordered logic is solved, humour is a return to disorder, a complication whose "solution" is one of perpetual problematization in the chaos of incongruity: like Pirandello's *feeling the opposite* or Bakhtin's *ambivalence*, humour is a kind of anti-solution or pure problematic which "fait

⁶⁵ Dostoevsky's *Poetics*, 164.

⁶⁶ Pirandello, *On Humor*, 116 and 118.

⁶⁷ Lydia Amir notes in *The Legacy of Nietzsche's Philosophy of Laughter*, 2002, 283 that humour is "an attitude that animates the whole of Deleuze's philosophy" before quoting Jean-Claude Dumoncel who proposes that this attitude of humour "can be compared to the role irony plays in Socratic thought" (192); she also maintains that "contrary to many Deleuzian concepts, humor is a constant in all of Deleuze's works," revealing the importance of the concept in the Deleuzian "good life."

résonner l'une dans l'autre les séries bifurcantes et ramifiées,"⁶⁸ such that sense (both meaning and direction, the way to meaning) is confused yet resounds, echoes like an a-signifying laugh, nevertheless full of meaning; in short, humour makes it so that multiple senses can be folded with one another, neither explicated or implicated, but complicated.

This appears, then, antithesis to Kierkegaard's conclusion in his *Concept of Irony* (the presumable "answer" evoked at the end of the previous section); at this point, unlike in Kierkegaard, irony *ought to* be the logical answer to humour: a means to *solving* the problem that humour itself claims to satisfy, but *ironically* leaves wanting. Following two conceptions of humour in terms of *non-sens* and of *pas-de-sens*—developed by Gilles Deleuze⁶⁹ and Jacques Lacan,⁷⁰ respectively—we can begin to see why humour does not point to any answer but proposes instead to be an answer without a solution, a pure problematic. By all accounts these two expressions, *pas-de-sens* and *non-sens* ought to mean the same thing; they do, however, contain a slight difference: where Deleuze's "*non-sens*" is both a senselessness and a directionlessness, Lacan's "*pas-de-sens*" is a senselessness which is, nevertheless, a way to sense (in the same way that "Pas-de-Calais" is the pas-sage to Calais). Lacan conceives of humour (or more specifically, the *mot d'esprit*) as only initially formed within a non-sense, what he calls a *peu de sens*, which punctures, creates a void—a "béance"⁷¹—in the signifying chain (because Lacan, like Freud before him, likes to start with a lack⁷²). However, for Lacan this void in meaning is filled by a new sense, it is filled with new meaning. Where for Lacan, nonsense is

⁶⁸ Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 210.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Logique du sens*.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: livre V, les formations de l'inconscient 1957-1958*, 98.

⁷¹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: livre V, les formations de l'inconscient 1957-1958*, ed Jacques-Alain Miller, (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1998), 122.

⁷² "Qu'est-ce que fait là le trait d'esprit? Il n'indique rien de plus que la dimension même du pas comme tel, à proprement parler. C'est le pas, si je puis dire, dans sa forme. C'est le pas vidé de toute espèce de besoin" (ibid, 99)

only a *pas-de-sens*, the way to a new sense by way of the *mot d'esprit*, in Deleuze's humour, sense and non-sense go hand in hand, not one on top of the other. Though he would begin by agreeing with Lacan, also suggesting that nonsense is a *pas-de-sens*,⁷³ Deleuze would argue that this is in fact generally the case, in common sense, that is, not in instances of humour. Nonsense and sense, while being part of the genesis of Deleuze's logic, do nevertheless play an important role in formulation of humour. In his most extensive definition in *Logique du sens*, Deleuze begins by suggesting that "l'humour est [la coextensivité] du sens et du non-sens..."⁷⁴ Here, it is not the case that sense and nonsense are themselves coextensive; rather, Deleuze proposes the link between sense and nonsense specifically in humour. It is in humour, unlike in common speech acts, that nonsense does not *make way to* sense, is not a *pas-de-sens* in Lacan's terms; in humour, both sense and non-sense come to exist together, univocally. Humour, in other words, extends sense into nonsense and nonsense into sense; in humour nonsense makes (way to) sense and sense makes (way to) nonsense: "le non-sens et le sens en finissent avec leur rapport d'opposition dynamique, pour entrer dans la coprésence d'une genèse statique, comme non-sens de la surface et sens qui glisse sur elle."⁷⁵ Whatever solution—*good* sense—that might arise from a *nonsense* is a false one, in Pirandello's terms, an "apparent one," in that it is the high way of irony that forces sense out of its essential contradiction and complication, out of its chaos and

⁷³ What Deleuze calls the "point zéro de la pensée: " "Le non sens alors est comme le point zéro de la pensée, le point aléatoire de l'énergie déssexualisée, Instinct ponctuel de la mort; l'Aiôn ou la forme vide, Infinitif pur, est la ligne tracée par ce point, fêlure cérébrale aux bords de laquelle apparaît l'événement; et l'événement pris dans l'univocité de cet infinitif se distribue aux deux séries d'amplitude qui constituent la surface métaphysique." See *Logique du sens*, 281.

⁷⁴ Deleuze goes on to say that "l'humour est l'art des surfaces et des doublures, des singularités nomades et du point aléatoire toujours déplacé, l'art de genèse statique, le savoir-faire de l'événement pur ou la 'quatrième personne du singulier' — tout signification, désignation et manifestations suspendues, tout profondeur et hauteur abolies." See *Logique du sens*, 166.

⁷⁵ Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, 166.

into an imposed order, the order of irony; whereas humour “se charge non pas de résoudre les contradictions, mais de faire qu’ils n’y en ait pas, qu’il n’y en ait jamais eu.”⁷⁶

We must, finally, ask: to what capacity is humour, as Kierkegaard claims,⁷⁷ the answer to irony if humour is, as we have concluded, a kind of *proto*-irony or an irony without a solution? We might here propose that humour, unlike irony, in posing problems that have no *good* sense, forces the recalibration of common sense, common conceptions, forcing the interlocutor, the reader—and eventually, perhaps, the interpreter or translator—to *think* differently and *be* differently: meaning, *inter alia*, freely. While irony is, as Kierkegaard suggests, a “guide”—that is, “not the truth, but the way”⁷⁸—humour is the truth that there is no sense but nonsense.

4 – Word Forward; Nonsense-for-Nonsense, or Thinking Translation from the Perspective of Irony & Humour

It is, perhaps, still unclear why we might want to look for an alternative to what we have yet to describe as an ironic conception of translation; why we might want to look to humour to fulfil that desire. Thinking of translation humorously, rather than ironically, is a unique way to consider translation without any specific telos, directed necessarily to repeating or returning to origin. Translation considered humorously is a new perspective, a way to look to sense-without-direction rather than toward an endpoint, the ways and not the way. Furthermore, thinking of translation through the lens of humour opens translation to new potentials that the principles we have inherited from millennia of ironic, neo-platonic theory have prevented us from thoroughly exploring up until only recently. It will be necessary, in the first place, to look back on a

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipe*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 17.

⁷⁷ See note 50.

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept*, 327. Lacan, similarly, suggests in *Séminaire V*, 99 that humour, *le trait d’esprit*, is “le pas vidé de toute espèce de besoin,” suggesting a non-teleological movement, a nomadic and meandering passage without the desire to retrace any steps—a passage without the desire to fill what is lacking, perhaps.

translation theory caught in the current of irony before moving on to developing the perspective of humour in translational thought.

In the first instance, the theories of St. Augustine of Hippo, with his use of translation as a mode of exegesis, Antoine Berman, with his conception of translation as *Bildung* and formation, and Walter Benjamin, with his subversion of translation principles, will be analysed to elaborate on how each of their theories position original and translation in a dynamic of revelation and formation. While both Walter Benjamin and Antoine Berman can be said to participate in distinctly post-modern thought, their ironic position, as we will argue, prevents them from looking beyond origin. In a second instance, we will challenge these notions with markedly post-modern theories of literature and translation that reject the notions of truth, authorship, and a return to origin on which these *ironic* thinkers rely. These latter developments, initiated by literary theorists like Barthes, Derrida, and Deleuze were further refined in translational thought by Suzanne Jill Levine and Kate Briggs with their relationships to textuality, by Barbara Cassin with her novel reconsideration of the age-old dilemma of untranslatability, and by Barbara Godard with her introduction of Deleuzian thought into translation theory. Working within the horizon of the *complexity turn* in translation studies this section aims to develop what we will describe as a humorous notion of translation.

4.1 – Returning to Irony

Western translation theory begins by and large with Cicero; but no theory marked the development of the western tradition like the early Christian theorists of scriptural translation: St. Augustine and the patron St. Jerome would play the spectres for nearly two millennia of theorisation on translation in Europe. Even though Jerome has arguably had more of an influence

on translation thinking, we will concentrate here on Augustin whose peculiar take on exegesis put translation at its centre. As Robinson notes in his expansive anthology, *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, Augustine “conceived translation specifically as a systematic undoing of the scattering of tongues at the Tower of Babel by *identifying the translatum or transferred message with the unitary Word of God* and then policing the transfer.”⁷⁹ Augustine’s theory functions on the return to an order, a perfection, an idealism that is fallen and thus lost, but which nevertheless effects—or *ought to* have its effects realized in—the actual series-of-events.⁸⁰ This is accomplished by an (exegetical) return to *things* over *signs*,⁸¹ to origin over proliferation. It is somewhat paradoxical that Augustine entrusted this exegetical weight precisely in translation, which is, so he believed, the result of the multiplication, the confusion—or, could we say complication?—of the unitary tongue, after Babel. Augustine’s method is to work backward from the multiple to the One, finding similarities in the interstices of disparate translations in order to locate where each considered together converge on the true Word. This marks a critical moment, an inchoate ideation of a genre of translation that seeks truth and authority of a (sacralized) text; a method that is perforce cynical, unwilling to trust what is apparent (the signs) and always returning to the pre-turned, objective (that is, an ideal and godly, or even messianic) source; a vertical translation theory of revelation between *God* and *His* prophet-interpreter.⁸² What is more, this return—a return to a lost or fallen truth—is made possible only through that very multiplication of something

⁷⁹ Douglas Robinson, “Augustine,” in *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 31 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁰ Was the construction of Babel not, though, the ultimate ironic gesture? Did God not punish the Semites for attempting to construct that unique tower into the highest of heights, into the heavens? Translation, here, as the original consequence of a too-lofty linguistics.

⁸¹ St Augustine, “The Use of Translations,” from *On Christian Doctrine*, tr. by Robertson, in *Western Translation Theory*, 33.

⁸² Cf. Barbara Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction : compliquer l’universel*, 2016, 82.

singular, and its resolution of that difference under an authoritative interpretation of the same.⁸³ What is peculiar in Augustine is his attachment to the Septuagint whose seventy translators apparently “spoke” by divine intervention “with the mouth of one.”⁸⁴ While here it is in fact the case that the *original* is the Hebrew and the Septuagint a Greek translation,⁸⁵ it was Augustine’s belief (a belief held by many at the time) that this was a case more of *transubstantiation* than of *translation*: what was offered by the translators effectively became holy writ as it unveiled the singular meaning as dictated by the Holy Spirit which spoke through the mouth of the many—the many speaking through the mouth of (the) One. The irony of this turning away from the original is its simultaneous return to its holy source (redolent of Benjamin’s below), its higher origin. This elevation of the source to divine truth nevertheless set a standard for textual authority; the translator relegated to the status of inspired traducer unless filled with divine spirit.

We can consider this divine spirit as a precursor to that romantic concept of inspiration and genius (both artistic and linguistic), an idea that was not easily shaken off. Benjamin and Berman both made their marks on translation theory in the wake of the German Romantics; Berman explicitly bases his approach of “non-ethnocentric” translation on their work in his *L’Épreuve de l’étranger*, and the German Romantics are of course ubiquitous in Benjamin’s

⁸³ “It is difficult for translators to become so disparate that they do not show a similarity in one area of meaning” (St Augustine, “The Use of Translations,” 33).

⁸⁴ “And in emending Latin translations, Greek translations are to be consulted, of which the Septuagint carries most authority in so far as the Old Testament is concerned. In all the more learned churches it is now said that this translation was so inspired by the Holy Spirit that many men spoke as if with the mouth of one. It is said and attested by many of not unworthy faith that, although the translators were separated in various cells while they worked, nothing was to be found in any version that was not found in the same words and with the same order of words in all of the others. Who would compare any other authority with this, or, much less, prefer another? But even if they conferred and arrived at a single opinion on the basis of common judgment and consent, it is not right or proper for any man, no matter how learned, to seek to emend the consensus of so many older and more learned men. Therefore, even though something is found in Hebrew versions different from what they have set down, I think we should cede to the divine dispensation by which they worked.” From Augustine’s *Confessions*, qtd. in Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn*, 55.

⁸⁵ This is where Jerome and Augustine disagree most fundamentally, Jerome who returned to the original Hebrew.

thought. Berman relates how both Goethe and Schleiermacher's ideas of translation are decidedly against an ethnocentric ethos, which he suggests deforms the linguistic and cultural structure of the original with the goal of writing a more palatable text.⁸⁶ Instead, Berman suggests that the proper, the target language, must endure an experience (of the genius⁸⁷) of the *foreign* in order to attain its *true* form.⁸⁸ Berman is, however, vague with respect to which side of the equation undergoes this formation. And it may, in fact, be the case that Berman believes that both source and target are formed in the process:⁸⁹ the target *potentialized* by the effect of the source, the source supplemented in the revelation of what is hidden, its other side (“l'autre versant”) seen in the light of the translation.⁹⁰ This is a conception of translation thought of through the idea of *Bildung*, which, for the Romantics, generally signifies “*Kultur*” but, what is more, evokes a “processus de formation” whereby the proper, the intrinsic, the inherent becomes *more* itself through an encounter with the Other.⁹¹ The German *Bildung*, furthermore, is, as Berman makes plain, “concernée au plus près par le mouvement de la traduction: car celui-ci part en effet du propre, du même (le connu, le quotidien, le familier), pour aller vers l'étranger, l'autre (l'inconnu, le merveilleux, l'*Unheimlich*) et, à partir de cette expérience, *revenir à son point de départ*.”⁹² Deformation is thus implicit in this dialectic of formation: Berman repeats the old Fichtean process of dynamic opposition, of thesis and antithesis, where target and source

⁸⁶ Antoine Berman, *L'Épreuve de l'étranger : culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne Romantique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 17-18.

⁸⁷ Antoine Berman maintains, moreover, that the pulsion to translate—the desire to attain the apparent superiority of a foreign language—is the deviant impetus and precursor to the ethical aim of translation. Cf. *ibid.*, 21-23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁹ Though, as we will see, the equation is here skewed: translation from Berman's perspective becomes “a ‘weighted’ mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid (cf. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 3 whose thoughts are here used somewhat out of context to refer to what I see as ironic in Berman's theory, while Hutcheon is referring specifically to irony and its “edge”).

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 76-77 (emphasis mine).

undergo a process of deformation and reformation before reaching their true form. Berman's analysis of *Bildung* exposes this dynamic of formation and develops a conception of formal translation, a process that forces the target language to deform by an opposing or differential tendency in the source; it is not, furthermore, until the source language meets its own reflection in the target language, which, deformed under the genius of the source, reveals the source now more fully itself, complete, true, identical.⁹³ For Berman, *Bildung* as a principle of translation marks a process, where target potentializes its language from the genius of the source, and source hones its form with the potentialized limits of the target. Though it appears that the mutuality of this process has its limits as well, that it is necessarily skewed in favour of the source such that the work on the target is effectively epiphenomenal: the potential of the target in Berman's theory must be secondary, a function of the re-turning and formation of the source.⁹⁴ While Berman has undoubtedly been Translation Studies' most influential proponent of difference, of the differential potential between languages and cultures, a hermeneutical return to origin, to truth, to the *point de départ*—the ironic solution—is always undermining this focal point. Here, Berman's *difference* only indicates that there is a source at work behind the translation, such that the translation can only be justified in reference to the source; the source *ipso facto* judging itself in judging its translation.

⁹³ It is important to note that Berman cautions against the deformation of the source language by domesticating tendencies in translation caused by what he calls "cultural resistance," that the translator must in turn resist these tendencies (cf. Berman, 18). In Berman, it is imperative that formation occur under the law of the source text and language and not the other way around. In this way, translation is always turning toward the source to order the formation/deformation dynamic.

⁹⁴ Indeed, Berman speaks at length of the need to avoid "un certain nombre de tendances déformantes, qui forment un tout systémique, dont la fin est la destruction, non moins systémique, de la lettre des originaux...". Antoine Berman, "L'analytique de la traduction et la systématique de la déformation" in *La Traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*, 1999, 52.

Though he went a metaphysical step further than Berman in his wake would ever dare, Benjamin's iconoclastic essay on translation is equally inspired. Famous, of course, for its concept of "pure language," "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" ("The Task of the Translator" in Harry Zohn's 1985 translation, or "The Translator's Task" in Steven Rendall's from 1997) is a turning point in translation theory, subverting in many ways the commonsense relationship between original and translation. For Benjamin, it is not necessarily the source that retains the ideal status it did in Augustine's and Berman's view. Here, it is not the point of translation to tell us something of the source; rather, translation and original come together despite their difference, the "mutual exclusiv[ity]" of their "particular elements—words, sentences, structure—,"⁹⁵ and gesture instead toward *harmony* in a language of originary intention, beyond empirical languages, which is what is dubbed *pure language*. For Benjamin, in fact, difference and opposition—what is mutually exclusive in "different" or "foreign languages"⁹⁶—is precisely the "complement" or "supplement"⁹⁷ that "incomplete"⁹⁸ empirical languages require to reach—beyond themselves—(for) linguistic purity. In that way, translation "striv[es] toward a final, ultimate, and decisive stage of all linguistic development," and it is in "translation [that] the original grows into a linguistic sphere that is both higher and purer"; in other words, "translation transplants the original into an—*ironically*—more ultimate linguistic domain."⁹⁹ The great reversal in Benjamin is that *translation* is lifted above *original*, made to be ideal rather than copy. Going very much against Augustine's conception, where *faithfulness* is the law compelling translation to perfection *under* an ideal source, one dictated by the Word of God.¹⁰⁰ This,

⁹⁵ "The Translator's Task," tr. Steven Rendall, in *TTR* 10.2, 1997, 156.

⁹⁶ The discrepancy here is a mark of the differences between Rendall (156) and Zohn's (74) translations.

⁹⁷ Again, the discrepancy in "complement" in Rendall (156) and "supplement" in Zohn (74) is one of translation.

⁹⁸ This is the word used in Rendall's translation, 154.

⁹⁹ Rendall, 157, 158 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁰ See Robinson on "Perfectionism" in *The Translator's Turn*, 54-56.

however, is not the only reason translation is, as Benjamin says, *ironic*: it is the very metaphysical lifting of a text beyond the realm of its source, the original, that this theory takes on a very romantic conception of what translation is capable of, and, indeed, is tasked to do.

Moreover, not only does the translation *complete* or *supplement* the source, but it simultaneously lifts the abstract text over itself where the work is thereafter within the purview of a higher law, under the principle of pure language; that is, serving language in general and not in particular (i.e., individual empirical languages). In Benjamin's linguistic metaphysics, translation does not serve the original text, but rather serves only (an Adamic¹⁰¹ kind of) language. Benjamin's irony is precisely the *subversion of the law* of equivalence, accomplished in the law of translatability. The tradition is, in this case, "renversée ironiquement, par remontée vers un principe"¹⁰² that overrides linguistic equivalence by way of a law of intention that is in this theory made primary. Benjamin's thesis thus brings the irony of translation full circle, subverting the already ironic mode with an even greater ironic principle. The risk, of course, is tantamount to that of which Schegel cautions in "On Incomprehensibility," and of which Benjamin notes in concluding his essay: that meaning risks "plunging from abyss to abyss until it threatens to become lost in the bottomless depths of language," leaving the translator "in silence."¹⁰³

So, the ironic solution in translation is the paradoxical progression to origin, the return to the absent original, always toward origin. In the exegetical theory of St. Augustine of Hippo, translation was seen as a method to focus the multiple (either versions or voices) on the true

¹⁰¹ Cf. Benjamin's essay concerning a theory of language more specifically, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" in *Selected Writings I*, 62-74.

¹⁰² Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, 77.

¹⁰³ Randell, 164-5.

Word of God. With Antoine Berman, *Bildung* and formation appears to mutually effect target and source but is always skewed in service of the formation of an originary identity, reducing translational potential to epiphenomena; and, finally, Walter Benjamin, with his reversal of translation principles, ironically lifts translation to the status of *pure origin*, in pure language. Each of these iterations appears to reduce the nature of language, culture, and text from, in the words of Douglas Robinson, “flux into growth, chaos into harmony, multiplicity into unity.”¹⁰⁴ In the following and final of the theoretical sections of this thesis, we will discuss how humour as a theory of translation effectively does just the opposite, works at forgetting origin in the din of complication.

4.2 – Falling for Humour

Hermes is the god of translators, but also the god—if Michel Serres has his way¹⁰⁵—of Comedy (just as the Apollo-Dionysus dyad represents Tragedy for Nietzsche¹⁰⁶). This is a god, moreover, from whom derives the word *hermeneutics*, that branch of knowledge that concerns the establishment of principles for interpreting sacred (and later profane) texts.¹⁰⁷ We must not, then, stop at Hermes, who is of course the god of fair exchanges, of commerce conducted in terms of economic balance, of debt and credit, of payer and payee; this balance sheet is, of course, too simple a picture for our theory of *humorous* translation, humour being, as we have seen, *inter alia* an entropic return to complication¹⁰⁸ rather than harmony—and, as we will

¹⁰⁴ The Translator’s Turn, 90.

¹⁰⁵ See “Apparition d’Hermès : Dom Juan” in *Hermès I : communication*, 1969.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [1872].

¹⁰⁷ We might also note how, “le verbe *herêneuein* et les substantifs *hermêneia* [ἐρμηνεία] et *hermêneus* [ἐρμηνεύς] virent leurs sens respectifs — « exprimer » ou « signifier », « expression », « signification » ou interprétation », et « interprète » — se spécifier et se qualifier pour signifier précisément « traduire », « traduction » et « traducteur ». See Barbara Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies : le dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, 1309.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Jankelevitch, *L’Ironie*, 151: “rien n’est simple dans l’humour.”

propose, a way to think of translation in these terms.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps, then, it would be more appropriate to speak of humour while keeping in mind a Hermes-Dionysus¹¹⁰ dyad, of textual unfolding on the edge of *chaosmos* (i.e., chaos-cosmos or cosmos-chaos, in Deleuze’s metaphysics, after this Joycean portmanteau); of pushing the limits into nomadic and singular lands. In the following pages we will work through critical and translation theories that will enable us to position complication as a *modus operandi* of translation. Going from the one to the multiple, from authoritative originality to emergent and a-identical translationality, from translatability and synonymy to untranslatability and homonymy, and from the bridge to the fold, the following pages mark the development of a theory that, rather than present translation as return to originality, prefers that translation be thought of as the expansion, confusion, and proliferation of meaning and effect across the virtual surface of the source—potentializing original and translation, coextensively.

Babel, as Jacques Derrida notes, translates—or is explained-in-translation—as “confusion,”¹¹¹ and his essay “*De-Tours of Babel*”¹¹² performs¹¹³ just the kind of deviant way

¹⁰⁹ Complexity is very notably having its moment in Translation Studies. As Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts suggest in their introduction to *Complexity Thinking in Translation Studies*, Complexity as a theory for translation is “a way of seeing the world in terms of instability and fluctuation,” and, from there, a way to resist the reductionist paradigm that “has shaped translation studies since the 1970s and 1980s,” from which point it “has remained firmly embedded” (Marais and Meylaerts point specifically to the “descriptive” branch of the discipline, initiated by Holmes and Toury). See Kobus Marais and Reine Meylaerts. “Introduction.” *Complexity Thinking in Translation Studies : Methodological Considerations*, 2019. What follows of this thesis will aim to work within the purview of this “complexity turn” in TS.

¹¹⁰ Jankelevitch, in *L’Ironie*, 145, notes the carnivalesque qualities of Dionysus, the god that “unit en lui-même la douleur et l’allégresse: à la fois triomphant et lacéré, vainqueur et vaincu, le dieu ivre meurt et cependant exulte; [qui] est pantelant et dansant”—expressing that complication or ambivalence of incongruities that we explored earlier (See section 3.2).

¹¹¹ “Des Tours de Babel,” in *Difference in Translation, Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph F. Graham, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 210.

¹¹² My *emphatic* translation of “Des tours de Babel” to highlight the tripartite connotation of the “tower,” “detours,” and maybe, even (especially if one would be so kind to keep in mind the charming accent of the Irish, pronouncing “the” as “de”) “tours,” as in “turns” (*turnen* and *turner* being among the terms for translation used in Old English and in Medieval French, respectively; from which we also hear “version” and its versions, “*inversion*, *perversion*, and *conversion*” (see Sherry Simon’s *Translating Montreal*, 2006, 119)) of Babel.

¹¹³ As Arno Renken notes in “Subversion de la traduction (Derrida),” *Babel Heureuse*, 2019.

translation necessarily follows when the unitary tongue—or lip! lip, rather¹¹⁴—, so it is told, became confused and multiple.¹¹⁵ Remember: following Augustine, Berman, and Benjamin, an ironic conception of translation either tows the line to the law of the One, the principle under which the multiple is ordered toward and toward which it seeks out a singular truth (e.g. true word, originary formation, pure language), or this translation ethos strives to overcome and subvert its own law with a higher principle.¹¹⁶ From here, the question is, could the one give rise instead to the multiple, the one itself being product of the multiple; the “original [itself being] one of many possible versions,”—a consequence of an *a priori* multiplicity—as Suzanne Jill Levine came to realise, translating in close collaboration with her authors?¹¹⁷ In this sense, there is no higher principle to reach for, no ironic movement back to the source, the (divine) inspiration, the (hammer) stroke of genius; rather, what Levine touches on is a very humorous way of thinking about writing in general and translation in particular: that there are no *mots justes*, there are just words.¹¹⁸ And, at that, many words; words that are themselves multiple. Kate Briggs, in her contemporary classic *This Little Art*, shares a similar experience, when

[i]n the process of translating it, the set book—once fixed in its fame, *these* necessary words in *this* necessary order—starts to unsettle. The immobile poem gets sort of remobilized; each of its necessary lines looking now like a sequence of decisions, or indeed of accidents, made by a writing subject engaged in a similar kind of activity... If this indeed were once written, a reality that I am able to fully recognize only now that I too am writing it—only now that I find myself engaged in the complex process of writing it again—then why should I not argue with you? Why should my writerly

¹¹⁴ “puisqu’en hébreu on désigne par ‘lèvre’ ce que nous appelons, d’une autre métonymie, langue. Il faudrait dire multiplicité de lèvres et non des langues pour nommer la confusion babelienne.” See Renken, *Babel Heureuse*, 211.

¹¹⁵ More lips are, in effect, better than one—though it would be hard to say the same of tongue.: See Cassin, *Éloge de la Traduction*, 83: “mais aucun de nous parle avec une seule lèvre, il en faut deux.”

¹¹⁶ Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, 1977, 83: “L’ironiste... est à la recherche d’un premier principe, encore plus premier que celui qu’on croyait premier; il trouve une cause encore plus première que les autres.

¹¹⁷ Suzanne Jill Levine, *The Subversive Scribe : Translating Latin American Fiction*, (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1991), xiii.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Dialogues*, 15.

instincts, my different ideas and my own particular aesthetic, necessarily cleave to yours?¹¹⁹

In this way the text is always incomplete, but not in the way that Benjamin conceived it—as leading toward completion in pure language, through translation—and neither is it in the way that Berman conceived it—as in a process of formation, incomplete and, therefore, not fully formed, not fully *itself*. Rather, the source is incomplete in that it is open, and therefore not rigid or fixed; it is open, in that the task of writing could have gone on longer, forever,¹²⁰ one word being exchanged for another, a constant manifestation of a virtual text, a becoming-text, a folding-in and -out of language. In this way, writing is not a matter of formation, but is necessarily and perpetually un-formed.¹²¹ But as both Levine and Briggs so convincingly claim, the process is—to some extent—*stopped* at a certain point, and translation shines light on the chaos that precedes the apparent order, the linguistic complexity that inheres within the stopped source, when that text that claims to be law is undone in a folding-with of a parallel linguistic and cultural—even neurological, or spiritual, in an enactivist sense—structure.¹²² A folding-with, moreover, that only amplifies the multiplicity of the structure-in-translation, because translation, by its necessity to de- and re-contextualise a work,¹²³ only complicates and ramifies sense and precludes any notion of a one-to-one truth, a unique and stable meaning, a true form.

¹¹⁹ Kate Briggs, *This Little Art*, (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), 280.

¹²⁰ “On le sait, on peut rester des heures sur une phrase, et une vie sur un texte” says Barbara Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction*, 113.

¹²¹ As Deleuze suggest in “La littérature et la vie,” in *Critique et Clinique*, 1993, 11: “Ecrire n'est certainement pas imposer une forme (d'expression) à une matière vécue. La littérature est plutôt du côté de l'informe, ou de l'inachèvement... Ecrire est une affaire de devenir, toujours inachevé, toujours en train de se faire, et qui déborde toute matière vivable ou vécue... Devenir n'est pas atteindre à une forme (identification, imitation, Mîmésis), mais trouver la zone de voisinage, d'indiscernabilité ou d'indifférenciation telle qu'on ne peut plus se distinguer...”

¹²² Which is precisely what Jill Levine intimates as one of her primary goals in *The Subversive Scribe*; see “Preface.”

¹²³ Lawrence Venuti argues that in the process of de- and re-contextualisation “The foreign context is irrevocably lost... [that translation] fundamentally... dismantles the linguistic and literary context—a context with varying degrees of subtlety and complexity- that was created within the foreign text and can be said to constitute it, its texture (see Berman 1985). The signifying process of the foreign text often cannot be reconstructed because languages signify in different ways. Translating always effects a loss of the foreign text at various levels: a loss of form and meaning, syntax and lexicon, sound and meter, allusion and intertextuality.” See “Translating Humour: Equivalence, Compensation,

The postmodern conception of a text is one that, even if *stopped*, is not stuck; the last fold is only another—just as the conclusion of *Aventures* is explicitly a “Bonus”¹²⁴—, that is to say, it does not end but begins again, where it left off, where it could recount “un peu la même histoire.”¹²⁵ Octavio Paz both urges us to notice the “paradoxical” nature of translation, being a process that both “overcomes the differences between one language and another, [while] it also reveals them more fully” and to think of Literature as always already being a proliferation of “translations, translations, translations... because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation...”¹²⁶ Paz’s reflection reiterates the interrogation that we have been thus far conducting on an ironic conception of translation, and literature in general; as repetition and difference usurp what was once the lofty position of the Author and the Original. After Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere’s work in the 1990s, the conception of the translator’s ancillary position¹²⁷ (at least in the circles of translation and literary scholarship) began to lose steam and doubts of the ideal position of the source took on a renewed fervor: “once we start to consider the way in which both the terminology of translation and the idea of an authentic “original” *that exists somewhere beyond the text* in front of us are used [in practice]... the question of when a translation is or is not taking place becomes increasingly difficult to answer.”¹²⁸ An interrogation of this kind was of course not new in literary theory, the status of literary genius and the origin has been more of a problem than ever since Foucault asked “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” and since

Discourse,” in *Performance Research*, 2002, 7. We must admit, however, that the claim that the foreign context is “irrevocably lost” seems hyperbolic and inaccurate. Granted, a new context is created, but it can be argued that this context is interactive or intersectional and not insular.

¹²⁴ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 235.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹²⁶ “Translation: Literature and Letters,” trans. Irene del Corral, in *Theories of Translation*, 1992 [1971], p. 154. It is significant enough to note that Deleuze and Guattari share a similar sentiment, suggesting that “Le langage est fait pour cela, pour la traduction, non pour la communication.” See *Milles plateaux*, 536.

¹²⁷ See Berman’s “La Traduction au manifeste,” in *L’Épreuve*.

¹²⁸ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 39 (emphasis mine).

Barthes declared *sa mort*, explaining that “l’unité d’un texte n’est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination, mais cette destination ne peut plus être personnelle : le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement *ce quelqu’un qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ toutes les traces dont est constitué l’écrit.*”¹²⁹ Barthes describes the process of textual becoming as a-historical, a-personal, a-identical and, therefore, without any stable position (could we say a “nomadic singularity”¹³⁰?); an *agencement* in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, which, as Emma Sedon suggests, represents a shift in translation ideation away from the “pre-ordained or given” toward a process of emergence (*agencement* meaning, in Sedon’s terms “an entity that emerges from the continual interactions of its heterogeneous component parts”¹³¹). A reader-text is an *agencement*; a source-translation is an *agencement*; a translation-translation: *agencement*. From this perspective, World Literature and literature in translation is a complex field of connection and rupture; of originals and translations and originals and *translations and translations and translations*; of copies and parodies and palimpsests. Which is to say that sense is never fixed nor fixable, a text never defined nor definable: translation recounts, is a telling again of *un peu la même histoire*. While irony compels translation to function under the principle of an ideal yet absent text, translation thought of in terms of humour undermines this absence with emergence: translation becomes a matter of presence, of denying the absent author their immutable intentions with fluctuating effects; of removing the source text from the summit of the Text as, thereafter, a series-of-texts, of constituting a parallel textuality, an intra-textuality operating within the work as a larger whole. The “traces” to which Barthes

¹²⁹ Roland Barthes, “la mort de l’auteur” [1967], *Le Bruissement de la langue*, (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 69 (emphasis mine).

¹³⁰ Cf. Deleuze’s definition of humour in *Logique du sens*, 166.

¹³¹ Emma Sedon “Exploring the Social Complexity of Translation with Assemblage Thinking,” in *Complexity Thinking*, ed. Marais and Meylaerts, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 104 and 105.

refers above might be said to gesture toward something that has already passed by, an absence, in short, that is always referred to, that inheres the trace and gives the trace its meaning. In this sense the trace is ironic, a mark that expresses itself only by way of that which has made it possible, that which came before it. In terms of textual emergence, however, we must update our notion of the trace, push Barthes not only to have the reader gathering and holding traces in their consciousness, in their reading, but creating a text in the process; as guarding and discarding traces, assembling and disassembling traces, mapping the traces that emerge in the process. Which is translation. Which is not so much a tracing, but a mapping¹³² of unknown and unknowable territory, a geography not only subject to, but always in the process of change. No translation will follow the same tracks as those that came before or will come after it, because the traces of translation are necessarily made in the writing, in the holding together, in the reading and creation, in the experimentation with the trace itself, and not what apparently lies behind it—and in this way the tracing to which Barthes refers, when thought of in parallel with the complexity of an emergent structure, is always a mapping, an experimentation with that which is unknown and which is nevertheless presented in the process.

This is significant because it suggests that nothing is in fact translatable—as far as fidelity and clarity are concerned—but yet there must be translation¹³³ (following Paz, even if not translation proper, translation cannot be avoided); just as “l’humour est traître, c’est la trahison,”¹³⁴ the untranslatable is a necessary perversion of the law of translation that from there facilitates semantic proliferation, the collusion of sense. Because if the law of translatability requires literality, its consequence or effect is untranslatability, the eternal return of the *different*,

¹³² Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, p. 19-24.

¹³³ “la tâche nécessaire et impossible de la traduction, sa nécessité comme impossibilité.” See Derrida “Des Tours de Babel,” 215.

¹³⁴ Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*, 83.

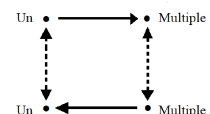
through the necessarily—and affirmatively—treasonous repetition of the *same*.¹³⁵ Thinking through translation in this way, by way of *complication*, of multiplicity and difference, has most recently been spearheaded under the guise of *un-translational* thought. This is the project of Barbara Cassin, who follows closely behind Berman in his conviction that we are living in an epoch of translational thinking, where a mode—of thought in and through translation is and will continue to be imperative. While Cassin’s primary adversary is the metastasizing hegemony of global English (“Globish”), her meditation on homonymy and her unique take on untranslatability prove quite humorous, indeed. Cassin very notably concludes that language is always “[p]lus d’un donc, et même: plus d’un Un... Chaque un [étant] déjà en soi plus d’un”;¹³⁶ reiterating, in her own way, a kind of Deleuzian notion of enfolded univocal multiplicity, where, *monadically* (and in the end, *nomadically*¹³⁷), “[I]’un étant toujours unité du multiple, au sens objectif, il doit y avoir aussi multiplicité « de » l’un et unité « du » multiple, en un sens subjectif cette fois. D’où l’existence d’un cycle, « Omnis in unum », tel que les rapports un-multiple et multiple-un sont complétés par un un-un et multiple-multiple.”¹³⁸ The one and the multiple, in this Deleuzian metaphysics, are complicated, folded-with one another such that the one is always

¹³⁵ Cf. Deleuze, *Différence et répétition*, 58-61: “Que l’identité n’est pas première, qu’elle existe comme principe, mais comme second principe, comme principe devenu; qu’elle tourne autour du Différent, telle est la nature d’une révolution copernicienne qui ouvre à la différence la possibilité de son concept propre, au lieu de la maintenir sous la domination d’un concept en général posé déjà comme identique. Avec l’éternel retour, Nietzsche ne voulait pas dire autre chose. L’éternel retour ne peut pas signifier le retour de l’Identique, puisqu’il suppose au contraire un monde (celui de la volonté de puissance) où toutes les identités préalables sont abolies et dissoutes. Revenir est l’être, mais seulement l’être du devenir. L’éternel retour ne fait pas revenir « le même », mais le revenir constitue le seul Même de ce qui devient. Revenir, c’est le devenir-identique du devenir lui-même. Revenir est donc la seule identité, mais l’identité comme puissance seconde, l’identité de la différence, l’identique qui se dit du différent, qui tourne autour du différent. Une telle identité, produite par la différence, est déterminée comme « répétition » etc.”

¹³⁶ Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction*, (Paris: Fayard. 2016), 86.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Le pli*, 188-189.

¹³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1988), 173. A Leibnizian notion, based off of the one-multiple square charted by Michel Serres and reproduced by Deleuze:



one-of-many and the many is always many-of-one, dismantling dualism at its centre. Language, imagined in this way, not only precludes the possibility for any notions of *National* language¹³⁹ or of linguistic *genius*,¹⁴⁰ it also challenges any notion of equivalence and literality, replacing synonymy with homonymy; because “[l]es choses se compliquent dès qu'on n'envisage plus l'homonymie comme un effet de hasard et un simple accident, mais comme liée à la structure même des langues et du langage.”¹⁴¹ Things complicate: it is no longer question of a dualistic reductivism, rather languages and, even more importantly, (the singular) language (I ought not risk a capital L) becomes essentially multiple and thus moves in more than one *sense*. This is precisely why translation is often called an impossible task; and possibly nowhere does this become more apparent in the untranslatability of linguistic humour, where homonymy and the multiplicity of language are often most thoroughly exploited. But let us pause before we get carried away. The untranslatable is not the not-translated; but, as Cassin so aptly emphasizes, “l'intraduisible, c'est plutôt ce qu'on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire.”¹⁴² Rather than foreclosing translation completely, this conception of the untranslatable positions the very source of translation's *impetus* and *creativity* in what cannot be translated—as a necessary impossibility.

¹³⁹ Cf, for example, “Le concept bermanien de l'« Étranger » dans le prisme de la traduction postcoloniale,” 123-4, in which Paul Bandia very notably takes issue with this very kind of stale dualism, suggesting that “une frontière stable entre le Soi et l'Autre engendre une « essentialisation » de la différence culturelle. Dans le cadre de la traductologie, le concept d'intertextualité peut être interprété comme le résultat de transactions entre des cultures déjà caractérisées par le pluralisme.” As Bandia asserts, culture and identity are irreducible to dualistic modes of Domesticating/Foreignizing, meaning that the idealisation of a *National* language and *Literature* reduces what is essentially a plurality (notice the “un-multiple”) of voices and cultures to an erroneous and reductive homogeneity.

¹⁴⁰ Of the kind advanced by German romantics like Goethe and Schleiermacher who both expressed the coming of “a *universal world literature... in which an honorable role is reserved for us Germans*” (qtd. in Damrosch, 2014, 26 (emphasis mine)) since “[the German] nation seems to be destined, because of its respect for things foreign, and because of its disposition toward mediation, to carry all the treasures of foreign art and scholarship, together with its own, in its language, to unite them into a great historical whole, as it were, which would be kept safe in the center and heart of Europe” (Schleiermacher, 1992, 53-54 (emphasis mine)). Or of the kind advanced by Heidegger who made the claim for linguistic purity in the Ancient Greek language, matched only by the German, as Cassin notes “le grec donc, et l'allemand, plus grec que le grec.” See *Éloge*, 61-62.

¹⁴¹ Cassin, *Éloge*, 89.

¹⁴² Barbara Cassin, *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies : le dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, (Paris : Seuil & Le Robert, 2019), xvii.

The untranslatable is just that juncture where lack of equivalence becomes all the more apparent—where the apparent lack of equivalence becomes the true locus of translation as interruption, a bursting forth of creativity *intermezzo*, in-between. With the divergent proliferation of untranslation, a translational (i.e., emerging from the target language/text) *non-sens* is produced from an originary (i.e., emerging from the source language/text) *peu-de-sens*, a *pas-de-sens* only in so far as it is always in the process of passage, though the direction—the sense, signifying, remember, both the meaning and direction, the many ways of meaning—is *less* precise given that it is made even *more* multiple than its original’s multiplicity, structured or organised as it is around the one. Rather than defining the original or revealing something true about it—rather, that is to say, than lifting it into a higher realm of signification—, considered in this way, translation opens the source to an even wider realm of potential, one where new connections are made, old paths are ruptured, where sense bifurcates along strange(r) paths; where signifier and signified become part of a grand experiment rather than insipid interpretation, a function of metamorphosis and mutation rather than of mimesis.

Which is precisely why Barbara Godard, in her essay on the potential for Deleuzian thought in translation theory, proposes that the “fold... replace[] the abyss-in-need-of-a-bridge... model for translation”: because “[t]here is no teleological progression¹⁴³, no final emancipation, but an endless, irregular, diffuse movement of becoming.”¹⁴⁴ And this is why both Benjamin and Berman’s ironic theories of translation pave the way for humour: just as Jankelevitch proposes that the relationship of irony and humour be thought of as “celui de la position *stable* à la situation *instable*,”¹⁴⁵ we can see now that both of these theorists have attempted to over-correct

¹⁴³ In our discussion, remember, we have looked at this progression more in terms of a return to origin.

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Godard, “Deleuze and Translation,” in *Parallax* 6:1, 2000, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Jankelevitch, *L’Ironie*, 187.

with a stable position, a principle, to deal with the disorder immanent to the essentially unstable situation of language and text. Indeed, within their theories inheres an instability, preventing any graceful and structured “pivots”¹⁴⁶ or any echo from resounding from one forested point, any amphora from ever reliably holding water or wine.¹⁴⁷ It is in Berman’s more original thought, his *manifesto* preceding his work with the German Romantics in *L’épreuve de l’étranger*, that his humorous potential begins to show through. Berman notices a radical flux that language undergoes in translation. It is not so much that something newly original is produced, but that translation instigates something emergent, a singular event within the language itself: the language of translation, in its own “*parlance*”¹⁴⁸ is *potentialized* along with the source. And we can consider this union not as filiation or descendance, nor as an epiphenomenon of the source’s primary formation but, borrowing a term from Godard, we must consider this process in terms of “alliance”¹⁴⁹—where source and target do something to each other, a truly mutual process of linguistic complication, of folding-with. In terms of alliance, translation and source emerge together in a becoming-originary of the translation and a becoming-translational of the source. And, as Carol Jacobs suggests, Benjamin gestures toward something similar, where—rather than attempting to reduce all language to a single lip or tongue, rather than going, as Berman has claimed Benjamin’s project does, too far “*contre Babel, contre le règne des différences*”¹⁵⁰—translation highlights how “[t]he kinship between languages generates their difference... There isn't quite so much difference as one might suspect then, between "kinship" as sameness and "kinship" defined as differentiation, for each generates the other, in language, indefinitely.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Berman “La Traduction au manifeste,” 20.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Benjamin, “The Translator’s Task.”

¹⁴⁸ “La Traduction au manifeste,” 20.

¹⁴⁹ “Deleuze and Translation,” 59.

¹⁵⁰ “La Traduction au manifeste,” 21.

¹⁵¹ Carol Jacobs, “The Monstrosity of Translation,” *MLN* 90, no. 6 (1975), 759 and 761.

Jacobs gestures toward a play between difference and sameness by which the one only continuously problematizes the other. Difference and sameness function such that attempting any return to origin after translation is to find the same text changed, not in terms of growth or formation, but of radical mutation, such that the only sameness is difference, the only kinship a line of flight. There is, then, no return to origin, no unification of intention; there is only kinship, a relationality that might seek sameness, but is only ever left with the disparate. Perhaps this is the beginning of what is humorous in Benjamin's thesis, the paradox of kinship, of the impossible possibilities in translation: that is, instances in variation, the impossible possibility that source thereafter becomes a moving target.

Humour, as Deleuze suggests,

est l'art des surfaces et des doublures, des singularités nomades et du point aléatoire toujours déplacé, l'art de genèse statique, le savoir-faire de l'événement pur ou la 'quatrième personne du singulier' — toute signification, désignation et manifestations suspendues, toute profondeur et hauteur abolies;¹⁵²

c'est l'art des conséquences ou des effets: d'accord, d'accord sur tout, vous me donnez ceci? Vous allez voir ce qui en sort. L'humour est traître, c'est la trahison. L'humour est atonal, absolument imperceptible, il fait filer quelque chose. Il est toujours au milieu, sur le chemin... il est à la surface: les effets de surface, l'humour est un art des événements purs... l'humour se réclame... d'une minorité, d'un devenir minoritaire : c'est lui qui fait bégayer une langue, qui lui impose un usage mineur ou constitue tout un bilinguisme dans la même langue...¹⁵³

How many tongues can humour handle at once? Do two tongues help one to stutter? If

translation is the art of complication, the art that takes the law of the original and watches what happens as sense bifurcates (it cannot help it) along lines of necessary perversion, then there can be no truth found between the lines, no way of returning to origin once the close-knit texture

¹⁵² *Logique du sens*, 166.

¹⁵³ *Dialogues*, 83.

begins unfold. Philosophical humour lets us live with incongruity; humorous translation makes us see not only what is dissonant within our own culture and language in particular and what is different in culture and language in general, but what language, literature, and culture are capable of: how constant variation and proliferation from the middle connects more than it drives apart. Language does not follow inviolable rules but breaks them, and literature pokes fun at language precisely by seeing how far its principles will go, what strange ways the logic of sense leads, what flight the messenger god must take when overcome by the carnival ecstasy of poetic, linguistic and cultural *chaosmos*.

5 – *A(d)ventures in Translating Humour*

Il les a attirés et il les a pris. Il les a défaits. Il les a trempés dans son sang. Il a jailli dans leur sang. Il les a déchirés pour les recoudre. Il leur a donné la forme convenable. Il leur a donné la forme véritable. Ils ont crié, comment faire autrement. Ce n'étaient pas des cris de protestation, ou pas seulement. Ils ont plus crié qu'on ne croit. Deux d'entre eux crient encore, ceux dont la forme était la moins convenable. Ceux qu'il a fallu aller chercher dans une forme très éloignée, pour les ramener vers la forme véritable. Ce sont des corps épuisés, déchirés et recousus.¹⁵⁴

Lafargue in a perfect—and here in a way perfectly out-of-context (what more could you ask from me, a translator?)—stroke of the pen, sums-up the task of the ironic translator: to tear signifiers from their bodies—don't mind their screams, what else could they do?—to give them their true form.

Translating Pierre Lafargue's *Aventures* was a constant attempt throughout to express the effects of humour, the laughing spirit of *Aventures*; in no way returning to any true form, but expanding on what that form can be. This is an impossible task for the ironic translator, since, as Simon Critchley suggests, “humour is terribly difficult to translate, perhaps

¹⁵⁴ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 216-217.

impossible... [especially] verbal humour [which] is notoriously recalcitrant to translation."¹⁵⁵ For that reason translating the many instances of verbal humour in *Aventures* requires, in my contention, thinking in terms of untranslatability, after the concept of “translating untranslatably”—meaning, as Apter suggests in the wake of Cassin, “a kind of overtranslation that embraces wild infidelity to the original and pushes the envelope of translatability,”¹⁵⁶ which becomes a kind of “standing the world on its head,... encourag[ing] the literatures of the world to mess with World Literature.”¹⁵⁷ This is not to suggest that we return to the ethos of the *belles infidèles* of 17th century France. Rather, translating untranslatably, in all of its “wild infidelity” is a matter specifically of effects, the art of following these effects both generously and treasonously (*d'accord, d'accord sur tout, vous me donnez ceci? Vous allez voir ce qui en sort*), because for a translator to follow effects is complicated business: effects-in-translation being inherently multiple, the translator must hold together what emerges from the source language *and* from the target language. Thus, the very untranslatable that appears to exemplify the *genius* of national language—that is, in this case, what this language does that the other simply cannot, or can not yet, has not yet been pushed to that limit—*must* be proliferated along new lines, shaking the stability of a terminology, refracting it through its differences, differences within languages and cultures put in converging and diverging parallel.

As was alluded to in the opening section of this dissertation, Lafargue’s irony is a kind of anti-irony, an ironic texture without ironic content, or an ostensible irony that

¹⁵⁵ Simon Critchley *On Humour*, (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 67.

¹⁵⁶ Emily Apter, “Philosophizing World Literature,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 16(2), 2012, 177.

¹⁵⁷ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, (New York: Verso, 2013), 18.

precludes or at the very least complicates the possibility of a truly ironic meaning.¹⁵⁸ Based on our previous investigations into theories of irony and humour, it seems like the use of what we have up until now called “irony” by Lafargue is effectively humorous (the foreclosure of an ironic solution in this Lafargian anti-irony is one of the ways we defined humour above). This, to be clear, is not the same conflation of terms that was cautioned earlier; rather, Lafargue pulls a fast one on a reader so conditioned on novelistic irony, revealing the bare and grotesquely mask-like face of humour that was under the guise of irony all along. For that reason, we can finally end our discussion on irony here; the rest will be concerned exclusively with humour and its translation in *A(d)ventures*, including some examples of the complications that humour creates in translation, of the untranslatable problems that (un)translation cannot claim to “solve.” These humorous elements, covered in the following pages, will be limited to humour in style, concepts, and language.

There are two aspects of style that I would like to discuss in reference to my translation. The first is an unmistakably palpable humour in Lafargue’s writing style that I attempted to parallel in translation. The second is what appears to be an ever-so-slight variation in style—a kind of play, on another level, with genre—across the different chapters or scenes: that is, the apparently introductory chapter that appears to be a note from the author is different from what is ostensibly the narrator’s introductory chapter on the falling of the road is different from the doings and sayings of the Herotype is different from the amalgam of points of view that make up the rest of the book. These styles are, however, all issued from a central Lafargian humour that unites them all—and, indeed, as they are all oscillating apparently between a record of *real*

¹⁵⁸ The mask of irony must be the mask of authenticity; irony masked in irony becomes, in fact, a kind of humorous *mise en abîme*.

events and what has issued from “l’imagination” of the narrator,¹⁵⁹ the variation would conceivably be most pronounced in the author’s note. I played with register slightly throughout my translation, though this shift is most noticeable after the first section of the book. What I take to be the note from the author was translated into a linguistic register that could be considered more formal. This was done primarily by abstaining from any grammatical contractions, giving the introductory section more literary weight, and paradoxically an even greater humour, given the formality of register juxtaposed with the often absurd and grandiose content. The effect will, furthermore and primarily, I hope, be to make it seem like the reader is being spoken to directly by the author of the text, being told what they are about to receive in an authoritative voice that is nevertheless undermined by the frivolity that is always creeping in.

Lafargue is, furthermore, not afraid to—in the vein at the root, notably, of the novel form that he is interrogating—play with genre.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, he goes so far into the weeds of genre that we are faced with manipulations of themes, for example, ranging from engineering manuals to literary criticism to legislation. It is on this last point that I would like to pause. In the fourth of the excerpts I have translated, Lafargue takes on the legal form, parodying and playing with French civil code. Now, French and English legal traditions are different, the technicalities of which it is not appropriate to dwell on here. What we can, however, consider is whether it is necessary to follow the format of an English tradition in an English translation of a piece of parodied French legislation, or whether the French rules ought to be kept. My first reaction was to leave it in the French form. I then chose to play with the English format, introducing things like titles in place of “Articles,” breaking the paragraphs into a list format (1, a, i), and defining

¹⁵⁹ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ There is something very Menippean about this text, even explicitly so if we look back to the “fat mennipant” chewing his pants in a fit of frustration.

certain terms. In my final iteration I reverted to a French format, given that I would prefer not to needlessly deviate from a French context and the format of French legislation is not problematic in translation (i.e., it is obvious that it is a parody of legislation without any prior knowledge of the French legal tradition, or of any legal tradition for that matter). I did, however, make a few changes, one of which is notable: In the English tradition, legislation will “define” terms in order to a) “avoid uncertainty about the meaning of words by resolving ambiguity,” b) “explain the meaning of words that are new or unusual,” and c) “shorten the text by reducing repetition.”¹⁶¹ This practice led to an even more playful and humorously styled parody on legal writing in defining the terms the “Beheaded” and the “Dislegged” to *correct* the ambiguity that arises when speaking of generals and particulars in this text: that is, once beheaded, the journalist becomes a new entity within the legal document; a journalist will not be “fed to the dogs” for example prior to having their heads removed. This leads to humorous play in sentences like “*If the Beheaded’s head cannot be found, it is because they are a journalist who has been condemned in application of Section 1*” and “*That portion of the populace that is neither Beheaded nor Dislegged, and who witnesses the demise of those found guilty under the preceding sections, would be wrong to be relieved.*” While this practice strays from the tradition of the French context parodied by the source text, the laughing spirit is effectively heightened, and along with it the play of seriousness and frivolity.

This, to use the Deleuzian term, *coextension* of seriousness and frivolity is obtained not only stylistically, but conceptually to create a further humorous effect. This conceptual play is, in some instances, culturally specific and extra-linguistic while, in others, more specifically tied to the French language. The latter, rooted in what is sometimes romantically referred to as the

¹⁶¹ See <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/legis-redact/logistics/p1p5.html>

“genius” of the language, is more difficult (or, if we wanted to be dramatic, *impossible!*¹⁶²) to deal with in translation. This will be looked at in more detail subsequently. The conceptual and linguistic play in *Aventures* is too expansive to be summarised in so little space; it would be more efficient to go through some examples of my translation in some detail.

There are no throw-away sentences with Lafargue; even in those that seem most banal, an element of the fantastic or the surreal—or the imaginative, “figurez-vous donc”¹⁶³—inheres. Take, for example, the very mundane image of ducks walking across the street (there is a joke in here somewhere): “Il glisse sur le trottoir comme une famille de canards... glisse sur l’huile du dernier jour.”¹⁶⁴ Lafargue takes advantage of an ambiguity in the French to create a double image, both commonplace and supernatural; where the placement of the adjective in “dernier jour” makes it so that these ducks are sliding not only across the oil slick left, conceivably, by yesterday’s passing cars, but also by the grease spot left on the last—as in final—day by, one might imagine, the people who have *passed* in the apocalypse. Here the perfectly quotidian, and even charming, extends into grotesque and terrifying absurdity; and, what is more, it is precisely from this ambiguity and coextensivity of charming and banal with grotesque and terrifying that the (black) humour is able to come to the fore—alone, neither image does the trick. This ambiguity is not, however, as seamlessly translated into English. I have done what I can by stretching my English ever-so-slightly, slightly more than the French in order to retain a contradictory conceptual play. While we do speak commonly of *the day before last*, we do not as

¹⁶² As Ronald Landheer notes in “L’Ambiguïté: un défi traductologique,” 1989, 33: “La plupart des traductologues ont beau rejeter actuellement la fameuse « objection préjudicielle » (cf. Ladmiral 1979: 85 sq.), qui pose que la traduction est impossible et que, au fond, tout est « intraduisible », cela n’empêche pas que la notion d’intraduisibilité réapparait couramment, aussitôt qu’il s’agit de la traduction d’ambiguïtés voulues, de jeux de mots ou d’autres formes de l’humour verbalisé.”

¹⁶³ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

seamlessly say *last day* in reference to *yesterday*. I do think, however, that an English speaker will only momentarily stumble, but can ultimately understand *yesterday* from *the last day's*, especially given the very normal—even boring—context of ducks crossing the street. It might seem like *treason*, an unnecessary literalism to render the French quoted above as “He slides along the sidewalk like a family of ducks... slides on last day’s¹⁶⁵ oil”; but this, I would argue, is only somewhat less natural than the source. Pushing the language in translation, here, in a way *translating untranslatably*, I can retain the ambiguous conceptual and linguistic play while only slightly manipulating or distorting the subtlety of the language in the source.¹⁶⁶

The trickiest of Lafargue’s tendencies is his extensive linguistic play. As Raphaelson-West argues, and, indeed, as all the literature on translating humour at the very least intimates, humorous language is the “most difficult [type of humour] to translate” given “not only the nature of the joke, but the relationship of the languages in question.”¹⁶⁷ While French and English benefit from their close geographical, historical, and linguistic relations, there is nevertheless a myriad of problems that intimacy cannot help to overcome. Those being the linguistic particularities that Lafargue takes advantage of to create humour throughout his text. We will pause briefly on only one example of humorous word play in Lafargue, an example that is nonetheless highly representative of a kind of humorous leitmotif in *Aventures*. Throughout his novel, Lafargue utilizes verbs eccentrically to describe the very eccentric motion of the road in question. Many of these instances are difficult to translate, not only because the *use* of the verb is eccentric, but the verbs themselves are not of common use and are often not amenable to

¹⁶⁵ Adding the definite article here would, I think, skew the interpretation too far toward *final*.

¹⁶⁶ As Landheer recommends, it is not advised to attempt to disambiguate the source in translation. See “L’Ambiguïté,” 36. I have done my best not to choose the unambiguous turn of phrase, here, though I regret that the English may lean more toward one (the apocalyptic) interpretation than the more subtle French ambiguity.

¹⁶⁷ Debra S. Raphaelson-West, “On the Feasibility and Strategies of Translating Humour,” *Meta* 34, no. 1 (1989), 131.

translation, are untranslatable *per se*. One of these verbs is “déchausser” used nominally in the following: “... alitée pendant vingt jours après le déchaussement...”¹⁶⁸ Le Robert defines *déchausser* as 1) “Enlever les chaussures de (qqn),” and 2) “Dénuder, dégarnir à la base.”¹⁶⁹ Lafargue is clearly not referring to the removal of shoes and the second definition, while useless to describe the motion of the road, might be used to describe why, in the first place, it fell. Given what we understand at this point of the novel, though, the simple degradation of infrastructure does not prove satisfying. It is apparent that Lafargue, then, is working on the level of the signifier and allowing the signified to roam freely, so to speak. The similarity between “chaussée” and “chaussure” is cognate, and the verb “déchausser” could just as easily—and, indeed, it could be argued to even more naturally—be defined as *enlever la chaussée de (qqn)*, as Lafargue seems to here. I, therefore, set out first to find homonyms in English related to street or, closer to the French, to sidewalk. But the verb in question, the “dechausser,” had to also and above all evoke a sudden movement, it had to equally inspire the plunging of a sidewalk and road—this was my second task, following and contingent on the first. I finally concluded that “underway” might be the only satisfactory answer. While an “upro(o/u)ting” or an “ero(a)ding” initially appeared adequate in retaining the auditory play with the more appropriate “route” or “road,” both ultimately failed to satisfy the downward motion: “uproot” being movement upward and “erode” unfittingly evoking a slow degradation. “Underway,” however, functions to gesture toward a quick acceleration, like racehorses bursting from the starting line, and to juxtapose the downward motion with the upward motion in the clause it precedes (“...she displayed, in rising, a more convincing form”). While I must admit that my translation does not do what the source does, it nevertheless recreates a similar kind of linguistic play, working on the level of the

¹⁶⁸ Lafargue, *Aventures*, 18.

¹⁶⁹ *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*.

signifier, while evoking the quick movement of a sinking street or sidewalk. Lafargue's linguistic play here makes it so that none of his readers will ever again kick off their shoes without thinking of the road coming out from under their feet; this, to my chagrin, is more humorous than what one might imagine occurring to an English reader who could be imagined to picture the earth moving out from under them whenever they get going. This is, furthermore and unfortunately, a problem that seems too close to a solution, and in this respect fails perhaps to adequately express translation-as-humorous. But in presenting an aspect of translation failure, I hope to have displayed the difficulty in this enterprise: the difficulty of complicating the complicated, the complex nature of humour in Pierre Lafargue's work.

6 – *La Chute*, in Conclusion

Buster “The Great Stone Face” Keaton's most basic lesson is that every fall must be singular, each one an opportunity for creativity. Is it merely a linguistic coincidence that the French word “*la Chute*” refers both to the Judeo-Christian fall from grace as well as, what in English is called, the punchline of a joke? Bergson, of course, begins his essay on laughter with the very archetypical example of the risible, of “[u]n homme, qui courait dans la rue, trébuche et tombe”;¹⁷⁰ and both he and Charles Baudelaire claim that there is something evil,¹⁷¹ satanic,¹⁷² that is to say, *perverted*, in humour. And, finally, if there is anything to understand from Pierre Lafargue's *Aventures*, it is that humour does not reside exceptionally in the falling down, but also in the getting back up again, in that singular motion that need not be thought of any deeper than the surface. If the 20th/21st century does indeed prove to be

¹⁷⁰ *Le rire*, 7.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 97: “On accentue l'humour... en descendant de plus en plus bas à l'intérieure du mal qui est...”

¹⁷² Cf. *De l'essence du rire* [1855].

Deleuzian,¹⁷³ if post-modernity is indeed an era of humour,¹⁷⁴ then it stands equally to be *l'Âge de la (in)traduction*, with its great pulse of complication, of contradiction and difference—enfolded along the surface and not up-lifted along the vertical *cul-de-sac* of revelation and transcendence.

The impetus for this thesis was a literary translation of is a singular work from a singular author; *Aventures*'s and Pierre Lafargue's elastic road has been a kind of springboard to think of translation in terms of humour: semantic and semiotic incongruity, linguistic complication and enfoldedness, and multi-directional and formally proliferating nonsense become the milieu of a translation theory freed from the judgement of the original, freed from the lofty linguistic principles that have ordered translation, thought of from, consciously or unconsciously, an ironic mode that can be traced back millennia. If continental thinkers of the latter half of the 20th century—inspired as they were by Nietzsche—aimed to challenge Platonism, it is because, at least in part, of the irony that permeates his thought. As Deleuze suggests—along with Kierkegaard before him—the answer to irony is humour, a humour that has been nipping at the heels of the dominant irony, a humour that has had its moments, a humour that is human, but not all too human. Translation, seen from this perspective affirms the absence of a transcendent source, affirms this absence for the benefit of the *art* of translation, an art that holds the original to the level of the derivative and affirms *that* surface along which the sense that both source and translation, original and derivative(s) slide with—*like a family of ducks on last day's oil*.

¹⁷³ Cf. Foucault's introduction to *Anti-Œdipe*.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Gilles Lipovetsky, "La société humoristique," *L'Ère du vide*, 1983.

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Appendix

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Pierre Lafargue

Aventures

livre avec du roman dedans

vagabonde

Je ne prétends pas que les oiseaux qui pendent dans le ciel, que les buffles qui décorent les grandes prairies de la terre, que les lourds mérours qui mélangent les eaux de la grande mer soient dignes de mouvoir ma langue. Mais les sujets majestueux manquent désormais à cet organe qui est allé dans toutes les maisons de Famagouste pour en ramener des histoires grandioses ; il n'y en a plus. Alors les oiseaux et les phoques, les libellules et les hippopotames seront soulevés par le muscle qui en remontre à tous les autres par les masses qu'il remue et par le poids qu'il leur ajoute.

Cependant, avant de livrer à ces délicates papilles le bestiaire buffone que je leur destine, je veux donner une dernière farce noblement dimensionnée qu'elles goûteront en même temps que vous.

On sait que les choses les plus incroyables, les plus prodigieuses, allons jusqu'à dire les plus miraculeuses, arrivent tous les jours. C'est ce qui rend les peuples blasés, ils s'en détournent ils vont ailleurs : les spectacles vulgaires, dans lesquels ils se reconnaissent sans peine et non sans dégoût, conservent pour eux des charmes que les autres ont perdus à force d'en jouer ; c'est que la complaisance qu'on attend des uns répugne dans les autres : certes les choses incroyables le restent, elles déroutent trop la raison pour être assimilées au tout-venant par ce grand nombre de témoins qui

ne leur reprochent pas cette incroyabilité — ils l'aiment au contraire comme la ligne d'horizon qui donne à ces gens l'envie de croire à l'infini de leurs propres capacités — mais de n'être pas aussi rares et aussi sophistiquées qu'il faudrait. On ne veut pas être déçu et la démagogie des choses incroyables, si évidemment copiée sur celle des spectacles vulgaires, déçoit: des manifestations fréquentes assorties de tapes sur le ventre ne diminuent pas le mystère mais le respect sans lequel sa signification se perd. Qui n'est pas fatigué de voir les banques les plus mortes ressusciter chaque jour plus saintes que jamais? Qui ne ressent pas une grande lassitude devant la multiplication quotidienne des grands hommes alors que la terre qui les produit sans jamais se reposer aurait dû s'appauvrir depuis longtemps? Qui n'est pas d'une humeur de chien en voyant que les misérables, au lieu de se laisser chasser de la surface du globe comme les fumées d'usine ont été chassées du ciel, continuent d'allonger devant nous leurs faces empuanties par la promiscuité à quoi leur nombre oblige? Qui n'est pas exaspéré par la facilité avec laquelle, de lui-même, l'argent se mêle à l'or et, sans que l'artisan ait esquissé aucun geste pour cela, prend la forme de la plus belle salière de vermeil qu'un homme ait agitée au-dessus d'une viande?

Oui, finissons-en.

Peuples, voici.

Vous allez prendre connaissance d'un événement d'autant plus incroyable qu'il est unique par sa perfection hautaine; un tel raffinement rompra avec la routine qui a blessé la confiance que vous aviez dans les merveilles de ce monde.

Je veux que vous y réagissiez de telle sorte que l'enthou-

siasme ou la révolte (ou les deux) anime enfin votre visage que les passions, permettez-moi de vous le dire et je pâlis d'avoir à vous blâmer, n'ont pas visiblement bouleversé, or il est nécessaire qu'un visage le soit. Car un visage bouleversé est un visage éloquent. Un visage doit être éloquent comme une belle bouche, pour me plaire. Par bonheur, ce livre-ci est capable de vous creuser dans la figure des rides larges et profondes (croyez-en le couteau qu'il serre entre ses dents rouges); ces rides seront comme une autre bouche, beaucoup plus belle et plus parlante que la première, qui ne me dit (et dont vous ne faites) pas grand-chose. Oui, lorsque vous serez bouleversé vous deviendrez bouleversant, c'est-à-dire éloquent: vos brames, vos élégies et vos épithalames me bouleverseront, je tomberai à vos genoux, j'exigerai que vous mêliez votre sang à mes larmes et nous les répandrons. Parce que vous en aurez accepté le risque en lisant ces pages, vous prendrez rang parmi les phénomènes incroyables et merveilleux. Et pour obtenir ce beau quoique improbable résultat (je ne me suis jamais dissimulé la difficulté de l'entreprise, je vous connais trop), je propose ce qui suit et s'impose: un enfoncement.

Figurez-vous donc.

Bon certes ce fut une époque pleine de certitudes. Mais le confort qu'on en retirait avait quelque chose d'assommant. Détail significatif et d'une ironie savoureuse: le héros-type de cette époque qu'il allait modifier tenait dans la main droite un marteau. Je crois que c'était un marteau d'or fin. Un certain éclat me le fait croire. Je crois que le héros était comme ci, je crois qu'il était comme ça. J'aime croire qu'il s'exprimait de telle façon, qu'il s'étirait le matin comme je le fais en ce moment, que son haleine était fraîche, que son intelligence sentait bon, que sa tristesse ne se départait jamais d'un air de noblesse, que nos sales manières l'écorchaient comme un petit lapin, que je ne me trompe pas trop. J'en suis réduit à créduler, oui — sans repère, incapable de m'orienter, je tâtonne dans une grande pièce obscure, ni plus ni moins: le doigt n'en finit pas de chercher le Calice, il le manque depuis toujours, mais on croit encore et toujours au Calice, et que sa forme est comme ceci, et qu'il contient Cela, et qu'on est tout près de le saisir. C'est assez amusant. Sinon, je ne suis pas très renseigné. Ce n'est pas faute d'avoir cherché à en savoir un peu plus. Quand les gens me voient arriver, ils rouspètent, vous comprenez, ils donnent des coups de pied avant qu'on ait pu poser la moindre question. Ou bien ils sortent de leur maison très excités, en criant et en menaçant de me lancer

des *mesquineries* (c'est le nom des cailloux les plus vilains et les plus communs de ce pays, il n'y a qu'à se baisser pour se remplir les poings). Sans compter ceux qui rotent. Et tous les autres, dont je préfère ne rien dire. Ils me privent de beaucoup d'informations, sur ce héros et sur tout ce qui s'est passé, ils ne veulent pas que je possède l'intelligence des événements, je dois me contenter du peu que je sais mais ce sont hélas des bagatelles, des petites îles perdues dans des mers sombres où fut englouti un continent entier. Si vous attendiez que je vous montre l'Amérique, je crains donc de n'être pas le pilote qu'il vous faut : ma science se limite à voir ces quelques rochers nus qui affleurent à cent mètres des côtes que je n'ai jamais quittées. Je fais resurgir le reste par l'imagination, si vous voulez, je complète le tableau selon l'inspiration et l'humeur, le résultat me semble plausible voire beau mais je devine que ces reconstitutions à la diable ne vous seront pas d'un grand secours dans vos voyages de découverte : rien, il est vrai, ne remplace les récits détaillés des vieux flibustiers ou les cartes marines dessinées avec soin dans des couvents portugais. Quoiqu'il en soit, souvenez-vous-en bien : l'essentiel, la base de tout, le primordial, c'est que le Héros-type avait un marteau. Un marteau ou une petite canne, ou une tartelette¹,

1. Cette tartelette n'est pas un gâteau mais une sorte de petit *tourteau* ayant l'apparence, et quelquefois le goût, de la tarte aux abricots ou aux quetsches ; c'est pourquoi on lui a donné ce nom plutôt que celui de «tourtelette», que préféreraient (et promouvaient auprès de l'Académie avec des arguments solides) quelques érudits de Perros-Guirec, qui est le port au large duquel sont pêchés ces petits crabes à la carapace très épaisse. Un régiment du Trégor qui a combattu sans poudre ni cartouche à Saint-Cast (11 septembre 1758) a utilisé ce jour-là dix mille de ces tartelettes comme projectiles à main, avec un tel à-propos et une telle efficacité qu'en

ou une martelette². Voilà une chose certaine, scellée au bas de dix grands sceaux verts pendant à dix rubans de soie dont les cinq premiers sont verts et les cinq autres rouges. Je vais quand même ajouter deux ou trois mots très véridiques puisque je vois qu'on les attend. Ainsi vous en saurez autant que moi, et vous me laisserez tranquille, s'il vous plaît. Allons-y. À cette époque, les plus attentifs notaient cela: en chaque homme, en chaque femme un penchement, qu'on peut qualifier de petit, ou de léger (un léger penchement), se maquillait (assez bien) en belle droiture sacrément perpendiculaire à la ligne d'horizon. Ceci mis à part, c'était, ce fut une époque, comment dirai-je, pleine de certifiudes. Bien dit! Je vous assure que le doute ne se rencontrait pas à tous les coins de rue. Dans

un quart d'heure il enfonça le centre ennemi et que les Français remportèrent une victoire nette et peu disputée, de l'aveu même de l'infortuné général Thomas Bligh (fils de l'honorable Thomas Bligh) qui reçut coup sur coup deux tartelettes, dont l'une brisa son épée et l'autre tout espoir d'engendrer un autre Thomas Bligh, alors qu'il attendait l'issue de la bataille perché sur une branche de son arbre dit généalogique (en fait, un pommier tiré du verger familial), amené tout exprès d'Irlande dans une caisse à oranger. Cet arbre, abandonné sur la plage lors du embarquement des débris de l'armée anglaise, fut longtemps exposé dans l'église de Saint-Cast et recouvert d'ex-voto, avant d'être détruit en 1924 par l'ardeur excessive avec laquelle s'y frotta une femme stérile échappée de l'asile de Dinard, qui pensait par ce moyen devenir grosse d'une quinzaine de tartelettes dont elle attendait la respectabilité bourgeoise qui, disait-elle avec beaucoup d'amertume, lui avait toujours été refusée, quoique fille coiffée à la mode de Carhaix, large de hanches, possédant deux châles de Pondichéry et belle assez.

2. Une martelette est un petit *martel* ou maillet de bois doré, utilisé dans certaines parties du Berry, du Béarn et du Barrois pour fendre et ouvrir les têtes les plus dures, dont on ne peut rien tirer sans cela. Le Bourbonnais, le Bessin et le Blaisois envisagent d'adopter la martelette après quelques améliorations qui la renforceront (l'outil sera ébouriffé de clous et de fers de hache, et doublé d'acier ou de fonte) — le grand nombre de têtes de bois auxquelles on se blesse quand on circule sans précaution dans ces pays-là fait applaudir à ce projet: on en a vu beaucoup de plus sots, aucun de plus sage.

les maisons et dans les êtres il en allait un peu autrement, d'accord, ça penchait en se grattant parfois la tempe mais sans en avoir l'air, ça penchait en plissant la peau du front mais comme pour mieux entendre la messe, somme toute c'était léger, un pencher léger — comme je viens d'avoir l'honneur de le préciser à VV. EE. et aux altesses de poche qui ont en ce moment même l'oreille collée à la porte —, voilà pour l'intérieur des maisons et des êtres, mais aux carrefours je le rassure: le doute, l'hésitation sur ce qu'il fallait penser de ceci et de cela et le tout-bataclan, on ne connaissait. Point.

Bref, on s'embêtait beaucoup.

C'était la barbe, la belle droiture. Ça ne pouvait plus durer, bien sûr que non.

Vous me direz: alors, ce penchement?

J'y viens, barcarolles!

Om.

Soit.

En ce temps-là qui est déjà l'ancien temps (le doigt qu'on lui passe dessus revient noir à notre œil las), s'il faut redire la vérité toute nue et savonnée jusque dans les plis de son marbre, chacun penchait, mais chez soi. Au dehors, tout le monde se tenait aussi droit que l'angle du carreau.

Je pense que c'est bien clair, maintenant. (*À part.*) Ce monde où il faut toujours se répéter, se perroquer, ce monde bouché, horrible, infernal, qui m'arrache les dents à force d'y ramener sa fraise et son Larsen! Ah, tais-toi, fourche! tais-toi, bourche!

Les petites femmes bien droites amenaient les petits enfants. Au moment de franchir les grilles du centre de

lotsus, de l'émotion de l'émotion. Je reviens ce soir sois courageuse maman revient tout à l'heure. Mais bébé ne l'entendait. Et faisait des histoires. Et des tripotages à n'en finir sur toute sa modeste surface. Il est inutile de préciser que bébé pleurait, tripotandi. À ce moment d'une banalité confondante, il s'est produit, alors que les petites femmes allaient pleurer aussi, retournandi, il s'est produit ce que nous appellerons, allez, un événement : la chaussée, de là à là, c'est-à-dire sur toute la longueur de l'équipement public qu'elle bordait, s'enfonça de 27 m, gens et cotcheuz, avant de remonter avec autant de résolution (un mouvement propre) à son altitude première. Certains se retinrent de dire bravo (ah, réserve, que d'impolitesses on commet en ton nom et que condamne chaque chapitre du livre *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance!*) Ça n'a pas duré cent sept ans ce séjour à -27 m, cependant tu en fus suspendu, ô temps ô barcarolles. Mais les mamans, arrêtées dans leurs pleurs et d'abord plus étonnées qu'inquiètes, ont mesuré, en même temps que le danger, la beauté du phénomène. Elles ne peuvent s'empêcher, à présent, de ressentir un épanouissement de leurs facultés qui étaient restées jusqu'ici comprimées dans les routines les plus charmantes et que ce vertige a déployées comme autant d'ailes dans leur dos.

Prenez par exemple Coralie Durbois. Coralie Durbois a toujours été solide comme une poutre faîtière. Pas à elle qu'il fallait venir parler de ses états d'âme. Jennifer Flampin l'a fait une fois, elle en pleure encore douze ans plus tard. Eh bien Coralie Durbois, militante associative, présidente des parents d'élèves, était là quand la chaussée devant

l'école est descendue puis remontée. Ébranlée par le doute et son vermouth, les seins plats, folle, claquent, alitée pendant vingt jours après le déchaussement, elle montra, en se relevant, une forme plus probante, en tout cas beaucoup plus agréable que celle qui désobligeait tout le monde avant ce qu'il faut bien appeler, allez, un événement. Elle est aujourd'hui non seulement solide, mais d'une solidité accueillante aux faiblesses et que rehaussent désormais des taches de rousseur du plus bel effet : elles lui donnent ce petit côté mutin auquel on n'est pas indifférent quand on est sensible.

N'en doutez pas : l'éphélide est l'effet de la rue baladeuse. Il y en a qui viennent lui chanter un *Magnificat*, à la rue. Mais pourquoi donc une rue qui descend puis remonte a-t-elle cette vertu de reverdir la fane ? Cette question, il faut se la poser. Cette question, c'est le tout. Eh bien, nous croyons que ce qu'il y a d'inattendu peut déclencher dans notre vie certains mécanismes, donner l'essor à certaines facultés propres à la faire reverdir. On le voit bien ici : quelques grandes certitudes ont été ébranlées par ce mouvement de la chaussée qui a permis, dans le même temps, de repeindre à neuf du monsieur et de la madame. Mais nous l'avions dit déjà. Ça ne dispense pas. Ce qui n'a pas été expliqué c'est : pourquoi une rue, pourquoi *cette* rue ? Mon Dieu, je n'en sais rien. C'est une chose qu'on a essayé d'éclaircir, et qui est demeurée fort obscure. Et quand nous avons bien réfléchi, nous trouvons qu'il ne serait pas décisif d'être mieux renseigné.

Il est rare de rencontrer des hommes dotés d'un seul côté de tête (un œil, une oreille, une moitié de bouche),

aussi ne les salue-t-on pas d'ordinaire avec tout le naturel souhaitable ; mais il est encore plus rare qu'ils s'en formalisent, comme si, connaissant le caractère inhabituel de leur apparence, ils s'étaient attendus à notre surprise et nous avaient excusé par avance. Nous sentons qu'ils nous reprocheraient seulement de les interroger sur les raisons de cette demi-mesure que porte leur cou, et de tenter par là une comparaison qui se ferait à leur détriment et nous permettrait, grâce à quelques raisonnements orientés et d'assez pauvre facture, d'affirmer notre beauté et les avantages que nous ne pourrions nous empêcher de lui attacher.

Il n'en va pas de même avec une rue, même une rue peu semblable, par son comportement, aux autres ses voisines qui à notre connaissance ne se sont jamais inspirées d'elle au point d'abandonner une part de leur placidité, mais il faut le répéter : poser des questions à une telle rue est tout à fait permis, et même recommandé à ceux qui, s'ils se l'interdisaient, s'en trouveraient mal. On pardonne difficilement des chutes de tension quand elles peuvent être évitées par une hygiène de vie qu'on acquiert sans rien de bien sorcier. Si vous demandez à *cette* rue comment il se fait que, et pourquoi que, et tout, elle ne sera pas plus bavarde que l'homme à la demi-tête, ça non, mais enfin vous lui aurez adressé la parole, elle ne vous aura pas interrompu, et parions ensemble que vous irez mieux.

Donc.

Cette rue fait *ceci*, puis *cela*, et il en résulte des. Choses.

Bien, nous avançons.

Extra.

Voyez-vous, on parle de la crise, on en parle beaucoup,

on en fait des diagrammes et des origamis. Elle donne lieu à une intéressante littérature inepte et intelligemment abondante. Mais, et je m'en étonne chaque minute un peu plus, essayez donc de me faire la liste des ouvrages consacrés à la rue yoyo, la rue qui telle une jolie danseuse échauffant ses muscles à la barre, apparaît, disparaît, apparaît, disparaît, et cela sur vingt lignes : vous ne pouvez pas. Vous ne pouvez pas, non que cela passe vos capacités, elles sont grandes, mais tout simplement parce que ces livres n'existent pas.

Comment ?

Calmez-vous. Ce livre que vous tenez est bien le seul, le tout-seul, qui se penche au bord de l'effondrement de voirie et qui donne de la voix pour mesurer, par l'écho, l'abîme. Eeeeeeeeh-oooooooooh ! Cela revient comme Treeeeeeeh-oooooooooh ! Encore une chose singulière dans ce monde pauvre en choses communes.

Ce n'est pas un petit monsieur. D'ailleurs cela n'existe pas, les petits messieurs. Ce monsieur qui revient de la FNAC avec trois CD dans un petit sac (un sachet, disons la vérité) est en cet instant ceci : un homme content de la vie, avec ce qu'elle offre à ceux qui peuvent l'acheter. Il glisse sur le trottoir comme une famille de canards confiante dans l'ordre du monde glisse sur l'huile du dernier jour. Je me dépêche dit-il, je me dépêche dit-il, je me rends où je serai davantage moi-même dit-il j'écouterai cette musique je l'écouterai pour être moi-même davantage dit-il c'est pourquoi il me tarde d'arriver où je me rends.

Dit-il et je le crois. J'aime cet homme d'un mètre quatre-vingt-un tout habillé, il a bien ses moments de méchanceté mais ils comptent pour peu de chose à l'aune des journées ponctuées de toutes sortes de bons points. Voyez comme il se dépêche pour rentrer chez lui, en serrant contre son cœur dont les ventricules célèbrent joyeusement la fête de l'amour le sachet de ses achats.

Il se souvient, et nous prie de nous réjouir avec lui, qu'il est allé l'été dernier dans une grosse ville flamande. Cette ville tourne le dos à la possibilité d'aménager un port immense entre le sud de ses quartiers nord et le nord de ses quartiers ouest, parce qu'elle tient à conserver la *noble friche* fondée ici même en pleine guerre des Gueux : depuis

1592 des mioches y sont lutinés, découpés et jetés au hasard des dunes (l'autopsie révélerait un fort accent espagnol). À peine arrivé à la *noble friche*, le monsieur avait choisi un enfant que ses poux n'empêchaient pas d'être beau. Après l'avoir trouvé beau, il le trouva bon. Après qu'il eut lancé le petit corps vers un ciel dégainé comme une lame froide, le sol l'avait reçu, épars, de lui, et nul ne fut admis à rassembler les membres du nouvel Osiris : ils appartenaient désormais, comme tous les autres, à la *noble friche* qui s'en débrouillerait sans qu'on s'en mêle, ainsi le veut le règlement du municipale (la devise «tu ne maintiendras rien» brille au fronton du raadhuis). Mais le monsieur en gazouillera un plus petit la prochaine fois, il l'a résolu : cet enfant lui a donné du mal à retordre et sa transpiration ressemblait trop à celle d'un homme de trente-sept ans qui monte avec ses courses au 6^e sans ascenseur. Et cette résolution le fait marcher de plus belle humeur. Et je dis ne boudons pas notre plaisir.

En levant la tête pour préparer ses poumons à recevoir la grande quantité d'oxygène qu'il entend leur donner (afin de les faire participer à sa dilection), il aperçoit une fenêtre, et il la reconnaît, c'est la fenêtre de l'aimée. Il s'arrête dessous, entame la sérénade connue, et le soleil, toujours prêt à se laisser séduire même quand c'est un autre objet qui nous occupe, fait aller ses hanches dans un roulement qu'on me permettra de taire. À cette fenêtre (à l'aplomb de laquelle le soleil simagre lala lalala), qui voit-il apparaître à présent ? Mais c'est la collection complète de la *Revue française de génie civil* — il est seulement un peu contrarié d'y reconnaître le numéro consacré en 2004 au «génie côtier», n'y

revenons pas ! Le lecteur voit où l'on veut en venir (n'est-ce pas, gamin ?) avec ce coup de théâtre, et le monsieur, s'il savait mieux que nous où il mettait les pieds (car cette fenêtre, nous qui sommes innocents, ne l'avions jamais distinguée parmi les autres), semble pourtant ébranlé comme par un cadeau d'anniversaire qui, comment dire, ouvrirait une porte dans le mur aveugle de sa vie.

Je vous aime, crie-t-il à la Collection (qui se penche au-dehors pour ne rien perdre de cette déclaration inopinée, mais délicieuse), les disques de prix que je viens d'acquérir le cœur battant sont loin de valoir vos dos savants, musclés par une colle bon marché ! Nous en ferons beaucoup ensemble, des ouvrages d'art : des tunnels cogne-terre, des quais nargue-tempête et surmonte-crue, et même des digues contre la mer dangereuse, si nous avons le temps ! Je crois aussi, car je suis comme cela, que je vous réciterai d'une voix chaude, à la première occasion, votre article consacré à la modélisation du devenir à court terme des boues de dragage rejetées par clapage, puis ma guitare soulignera ce qu'ont de déchirant et d'amoureux les stances de « L'effet des cycles sur le comportement d'un pieu isolé dans un sable dense sous chargement latéral » !

Ayant ainsi parlé, notre homme salue et détale.

Il ne reviendra pas.

Jamais il ne reviendra.

On assiste (fort gêné, sans trop savoir comment se comporter et les mains dans les poches où l'on remue des clefs) à l'effarement de la Collection : elle avait commencé d'entendre une promesse, une sorte d'annonciation, elle sentait déjà le parfum du bouquet qu'elle lancerait joyeuse-

ment, elle blanche, vers la blanche foule, et la voilà réduite à regarder s'éloigner un *grigou* (c'est la Collection qui parle et qui renifle).

Elle ne savait donc pas que tout homme est un Adolphe et un Arnolphe, c'est-à-dire un misérable?

Alas!

Nous te plaignons, pauvre, mais nul ne te ramènera celui pour lequel bat ton cœur abusé.

Non loin de là, une publicité d'abribus annonce au fuyard la parution d'un roman: la jeune écrivain sourit à côté de l'extrait de son livre, ses cheveux blonds s'échappent passionnément vers le bleu du ciel dont on comprend qu'il est un shampoing idéal — quand il pleuvra, l'eau sera de rinçage:

«Au temps où les pays losanges étaient en guerre avec les pays trapèzes, l'amour avait une forme qui tenait du carré Hermès; cette forme neutre et rébarbative était nécessaire à la survie de ce sentiment qu'on nouait autour du cou pour se prémunir de la bronchite: il n'avait pas, alors, d'autre utilité. De nos jours, il vaut mieux recourir aux services d'un bon pharmacien. John est le pharmacien le plus séduisant de sa génération, et sa mâchoire est la plus carrée de Boston, d'ailleurs il est diplômé de la *Yale University*. J'aime son indice de masse corporelle.»

Le monsieur dresse l'index et s'exclame en connaisseur: *dolce stil novo!*, s'incline devant l'abribus mais ne s'attarde pas, il faut qu'il écoute une certaine musique pour être lui-même davantage. Il presse le pas. Le soleil le suit.

Quand il arrive sur sa terrasse qui domine toute la baie au milieu d'une abondance tropicale, et qu'il voit que le

soleil l'a suivi, bon, il le tue.

Il mesure vite les inconvénients de ce geste, mais il possède une excellente installation électrique qui suppléera, sur-palliera. L'expérience le justifie: la musique non téléchargée se fait entendre, dans la nuit étoilée.

Je ne sais quelle note fait venir à son esprit brillant cette question: ah oui, et comment se fait-il que la chaussée se soit effondrée puis remise dans son premier état, ce matin? C'est égal, il n'y aura plus de matin, et puis je n'ai pas le numéro de la *RFGC* qui aurait pu me renseigner, mince. Et puis après tout zut, dans ma soupe je mets que mes oignons et c'est pas trop les miens. Oh?

Oh.

— On le sait bien, et nos fidèles lecteurs en ont été les premiers instruits grâce à la série d'enquêtes exclusives que nous avons publiées il y a quelques semaines et qui sont désormais consultables sur notre site « Point com' les aut' », grâce à notre partenaire PayPal : la Justice, le Droit, la Loi, c'est une seule et même famille, mais ça se chamaille joliment. Parlons aujourd'hui, s'il vous plaît, de la Justice. Vous l'avez bien connue au temps des années mortes ; nous direz-vous comment la Justice se comportait en ce temps-là ? Quel était son caractère ? Et son apparence ? Avait-elle déjà sur la tête cet oiseau qui lui fait une sorte de casque où le bronze abonde ? Parlait-elle avec une grosse voix, comme fait une dame connue de nous, qui veut persuader ainsi qu'elle n'est pas commode et qui n'est pas trop contente du résultat ?

— La Justice était une vieille fille indécise, perdue dans toutes les objections qu'on lui adressait au nom des chapitres les plus difficiles de la philosophie du droit, et qui n'aurait même pas pensé, détail fantastique, à vous piler la gueule à coups de tournevis. Malheureuse du peu de considération qu'elle retirait de son indulgence et de toutes ses bontés, elle penchait un front douloureux et plein de vertèbres sur le bitume noir menant à son palais. Le bouleversement qui est l'objet de ce livre en fut un pour elle qui

devint du jour au lendemain cette très svelte et très fière beauté; elle vient d'ailleurs de décider, en posant un pied superbe sur un crâne blanchi, que :

Article premier.

Tout journaliste aura la tête tranchée avec le tibia d'un communicant.

Article 2.

Un communicant sera déjambé à cet effet avant chaque exécution.

Le communicant déjambé est à usage unique: il ne pourra, sous aucun prétexte, être réutilisé à l'occasion d'une autre exécution.

Il ne sera pas montré aux femmes enceintes, ni aux vieillards ayant perdu une jambe à la guerre.

Il ne bénéficiera d'aucun soin après son déjambement et sera reclus à vie.

Toute infraction aux dispositions du présent article sera punie d'un emprisonnement dans la cellule dudit déjambé, jusqu'à la corruption complète de son corps pourrissant, et emportera mort civile.

On pourra plaisamment employer en guise de marteau le tibia ayant servi à l'exécution de la peine, pour réduire en bouillie et en poussière la tête coupée. Des enfants pré-

pubères pourront être invités à donner quelques coups dont le nombre sera fixé par décret en Conseil d'État. Le tibia sera brûlé sans délai après cette réduction. Les enfants qui l'auront manié seront membres de droit du conseil de l'ordre de la Légion d'honneur. Ils se verront remettre la Médaille militaire.

Article 3.

Sauf s'il s'appelle Algernon Charles Swinburne ou Alexander Dickow ou William Beckford ou John Gower ou Oscar Wilde ou Samuel Beckett ou David Gascoyne ou Jody Pou, tout individu pris en flagrant délit de franglophonie aura la tête tranchée sur-le-champ avec les moyens du bord.

Article 4.

Si sa tête est introuvable, c'est qu'il s'agit d'un journaliste condamné en application de l'article premier. Le journaliste étêté, s'étant rendu coupable du crime visé par l'article 3, sera jeté aux chiens, s'ils en veulent.

Si les chiens n'en veulent pas, il sera jeté aux sangliers quartanniens et solitaires.

Au cas où ces animaux refuseraient de toucher au tronçon où les vers se sont mis, lesdits vers seraient chargés d'en finir, de mettre le tronçon en pièces et l'os au net, sans pouvoir se soustraire à l'injonction qui leur en sera faite par le préfet chargé des affaires sanitaires auprès du préfet de région.

Article 5.

Cette partie du peuple qui n'est ni journaliste, ni communicant, et qui assiste à la chute des coupables visés par les articles précédents, aurait tort de s'en réjouir. Pour être moins visible parce qu'elle se cache derrière ces coupables, elle n'est pas innocente. La condamnation de ces criminels n'entraîne pas son acquittement. Comme les leurs, ses crimes sont connus. Ce sont les mêmes, auxquels s'ajoutent beaucoup d'autres. Ce sont les pires. Ils soulèvent l'estomac jusqu'aux lèvres, qu'il fend. Ils révoltent la raison et choquent les sentiments d'humanité. Ils ne parlent pas français. Ils baragouinent. Ils abandonnent. La dignité subit les derniers outrages et chancelle en se tenant le ventre. C'est parce qu'ils sont connus et en nombre infini, et qu'ils inspirent une horreur profonde et sans exemple, au point d'effrayer parfois ceux qui les commettent, que le présent article ne fait pas à ces crimes l'honneur de les nommer; ils ne suspendent pas le jugement moral: ils l'étonnent. Quand la Justice sera revenue de sa stupeur extrême, cette partie du peuple sera exterminée. Chacun aura la tête tranchée avec son propre tibia. Ce jour vient.

Article 6.

Ce sera le bon temps.

Article 7.

Tenez-vous à carreau.

Comme déjà le monde aux voies encombrées respire mieux! Comme ses gestes sont plus naturels, et plus

amples! Comme ses délibérations, si entravées jusqu'ici, si embarrassées, si honteuses, prennent un air joyeux et usent de paroles diaprées riches d'un grand sens: elles sortent de bouches parfumées! Comme les nourrissons saisissent plus volontiers le sein de leur mère! Comme les adolescents s'offrent sans réticence à l'objectif de Larry Clark! Comme les jeunes gens se précipitent, furieux d'avoir tant tardé, sur le livre des *Grandes Chroniques*! Comme ils lèchent ces pages! Comme leur pantalon se tend! Comme il se déchire! Comme les hommes regardent les femmes par un trou de serrure aux dimensions de la porte ouverte à deux battants! Comme les femmes regardent les hommes par tous les yeux d'un libertinage qui en a jusque derrière la tête et sur lesquels s'abaissent peu de paupières! Comme la Loi est aimable désormais! On ne l'associera plus aux textes morts, fils des lubies d'un jour (et fils faits à la vacomme-je-te-pousse, sur la laideur desquels pleurent les juristes coiffés en arrière, une vague de cheveux gris en suit une autre, elles vont s'écraser sur quelque promontoire, menant les fils lubiques au fatal émonctoire), puisque la Loi est indiscutablement devenue la Poésie d'un présent riche d'avenir, la Poésie surgissant comme une folle des éditions Dalloz, rue Froidevaux! Elle porte à bout de bras une soupière dans laquelle flotte le homard à la nage des occasions manquées! Hop, au caniveau! Faudra voir maintenant à réussir quelque chose, dit-elle avec une colère froide, en contemplant les morceaux de soupière barbotant dans les morceaux de homard, puis le ciel profond qu'elle incendie en le fixant, la pétroleuse!

Sur le même trottoir, il y a ceux qui mangent, en rampant sur le sol, ce qu'ils y trouvent: non pas les morceaux de homard, mais les morceaux de soupière.

Cela tient à la haute idée que se fait, de ses devoirs et des vôtres, et de la chaîne du froid, la Loi devenue Poésie: après qu'elle a fracassé, avec le pot, le fruit à pinces de la mer — son pied, au caniveau, les pousse encore, dans l'eau mousseuse, ses morceaux.

Le Héros-type parle — deuxième fois

Déjà j'étais loin sur le chemin où j'avais avancé en subissant les offenses du monde.

Je m'arrêtai. Le vent ne m'incommodait pas sur ce sommet : s'il était froid, il ne me le faisait pas sentir, ou c'est que la dureté des temps me le faisait tenir pour peu de chose — on sait que l'expérience des plus grandes épreuves nous rend les autres presque anodines, au point que l'on s'y repose parfois. J'ai levé les bras vers le ciel et j'ai crié comme un dément. Cela me surprit et me déplut beaucoup, et ma confusion était telle que dans cette solitude je jetai les yeux à gauche et à droite, en rougissant ; mais je criai encore, les poings tendus vers le ciel, sans pouvoir me taire ni ramener les mains vers ma bouche pour étouffer ce cri.

Je ne sais combien de temps cela dura. Quand je me tus, j'étais épuisé. Je tombai sur le sol et le dos, et sans avoir perdu connaissance il m'était impossible de bouger. La terre sèche s'ouvrit à droite tout près de moi et le soleil s'empressa de basculer dans cette brèche ; de même on voit un chien à côté d'une voiture, qui attend qu'on lui ouvre la portière et qui s'engouffre avant qu'on ait fini de l'ouvrir, et cette impatience nous amuse et nous plaît. Après quelques secondes la terre sèche s'ouvrit à gauche tout près de moi et le soleil sortit par cette brèche, en vitesse ; de même on voit un chien dans la voiture arrêtée, qui attend qu'on lui

ouvrir la portière, et quand on le fait il n'a pas la patience d'attendre qu'on ait fini de l'ouvrir, il saute dès qu'il le peut et cela nous amuse car nous aussi nous sommes pressés d'aller uriner. Je ne songeais pas à m'étonner de ce que je voyais, qui contrevenait pourtant à tout ce que je savais du système du monde.

Il s'était produit tant d'absurdités en une minute qu'en temps normal je me serais élevé contre elles, j'aurais protesté contre tous ceux qui auraient montré de la tiédeur. Mais les choses normales ne se produisent avantageusement qu'en temps normal, et les objections nombreuses que la réalité oppose quelquefois à la normalité ouvrent des temps nouveaux où de nouveaux repères permettent de s'emporter contre toutes sortes de choses qui n'ont plus que la pauvre excuse d'être raisonnables, et d'en considérer plusieurs autres avec curiosité.

De toute façon, allongé face au ciel comme j'étais après avoir crié d'une façon impensable, plus seul que ne l'étaient les pierres de cette montagne les unes par rapport aux autres, et incapable de me mouvoir, il m'aurait été difficile de parler en maître et de rappeler le ciel à une obéissance à ses propres lois quand j'ignorais tout de celles qui me terrassaient et qui n'étaient peut-être rien d'autre que les lois du ciel.

Je serrai dans ma main le marteau que je n'avais jamais lâché depuis que je l'avais trouvé au fond du jardin. Dirai-je que c'était là mon seul ami? Certes je le puis sans ridicule: c'est à son contact que j'ai appris la chaleur humaine. L'animal qui s'échappe quelquefois du sac tombé de mon épaule et qui n'est pas bien sûr à proprement parler un

éléphant et qui n'est plus tout à fait un hippopotame ne m'a jamais encore procuré, en me confiant la cacahuète qui loge dans sa trompe qui n'est en rien un nez mais qui est comme la clef de son affection, jamais encore procuré, non, un sentiment semblable: même lorsqu'il mâche un tigre pour me divertir car il me sait mélancolique, je le regarde sans tendresse, il m'arrive même de penser qu'il mériterait un coup de marteau ou deux. Mais je me contente de lui dire on ne joue pas avec la nourriture, et cela le comble, c'est un enfant.

J'attendis deux ou trois jours, je ne sais plus, dans cette position inconfortable, et peut-être le soleil rapide continua-t-il autour de moi le manège que j'ai dit, auquel cas ce sont des semaines, voire des mois, que je passai sur le sol de la montagne froide. Puis un aigle, fatigué de subir, dans le pays qu'il dominait, ce qu'il prenait sans doute pour du prélassement, détacha de son aile coupante une plume irritée: elle devait, en se posant sur ma face, me réveiller et me décider à partir en emmenant avec moi ma fainéantise. Se posa sur mon nez et je fis tchi. L'éternuement déranger quelque peu la disposition de mes bras, et je m'aperçus en voulant les replacer que je le pouvais, et que s'il me convenait de repartir j'en étais désormais le maître. Je le trouvai convenable et me levai en m'appuyant sur le marteau: ce n'était pas la première fois qu'il me servait de canne!

Enfin debout. J'avais assez mal à la tête mais la majesté du paysage, à laquelle j'étais d'autant plus sensible que je venais d'être privé de sa contemplation, me dédommageait grandement: je reconnaissais chacune des aiguilles, chacune des vallées, le moindre lac qui brillait là-bas sous

le soleil fixe, et leurs noms se bousculèrent sur ma langue quand je voulus les leur crier, et tout ce que je parvenais à dire était bibibibeubeubeu. Ou bababibeubeubeu. Bof. Je laissai tomber. Je repris ma route. Non je n'avais pas oublié mon sac de voyage. Un dernier coup d'œil derrière moi : je n'y étais plus, mes vieilles peaux de serpent non plus. On n'est jamais trop prudent. En avant, en avant. Je savais qu'en avant il y avait la guerre. On me l'avait dit : si vous allez en avant, toujours en avant, vous trouverez la guerre. Bon, on prend ce qu'on trouve, au moins ne l'aurai-je pas cherchée.

Je serrai mes doigts sur mon bon ami, bon bon. Tu es lourd, ami joli, ainsi lui parlais-je car il était aussi un peu ma femme. Tu es lourd mais ça ne fait rien, tout le monde n'est pas une boîte d'allumettes. Moins lourds encore que les boîtes d'allumettes sont ceux qui ont le poids de l'allumette parce qu'ils sont une allumette. Souviens-toi pourtant que dans ce monde tous ceux qui ont le poids de l'allumette représentent, quand ils se rassemblent, une nation dont le poids est supérieur au tien.

Je parlais ainsi à mon bon ami. Je sentais dans ma main la chaleur de son amitié rayonnante et je ne pensais plus à la douleur, je ne pensais plus au paysage, à l'aigle, au soleil, aux pierres noires, tout cela n'était rien à côté de notre amitié si belle, c'était un autre soleil, et la source là-bas si modeste qui envoyait aux hommes dans les villes une eau abondante — et elle courait joyeuse entre des quais bien maçonnés avant d'entrer dans les domaines salés du Père —, je l'aimais aussi car nul ne comprenait comment, si discrète, si cachée, et si mince, elle suffisait à nourrir

toute la Terre.

Je n'avais pas d'argent, à part les quelques centimes que je trouvais quand ils brillaient dans un rayon de lune, au pied des poubelles que je prenais pour des salons de thé, mais mon cœur se gonflait de reconnaissance pour la vie qui me souriait et qui appliquait enfin ses lèvres pleines et bien dessinées sur l'aréole de mes desseins ; si une cacahuète à la gousse parfaite m'avait été tendue alors, je l'aurais prise toute humide dans la main que m'eût tendue la trompe, et j'aurais mangé cette clef qui aurait ouvert en moi tout ce que les fortes serrures gardaient pour la plus grande des occasions : oui, les temps s'annonçaient.

Le Héros-type parle — troisième fois

Il y a le un le deux le trois le quatre il y a la série infinie le douze et le quarante-sept. Ça ne finit jamais, ça préfère recommencer, plutôt que de laisser croire que ça va finir.

C'est mon bras, hop, hop, il aime ça c'est à ne pas croire. Il n'a jamais été aussi vivant. Vivant d'être lourd, il semble. C'est drôle, puisqu'en général, si je me souviens bien, on se trouve vivant quand on se trouve léger, c'est le chagrin qui est lourd. Mon bras non, il ne fait rien comme tout le monde il pèse et le voilà à son affaire. Les pays sont plus sombres, à mesure qu'on avance, le jour la nuit. À mesure qu'on y balance le bras. Le jour la nuit le jour la nuit. C'est toujours la même chose, sauf que c'est plus sombre, à force. Pas à cause de la nuit qui gagnerait sur le jour, je ne suis pas simplet comme vous autres. Le jour qui se cherche des excuses ne les trouve pas, parce qu'il n'a pas commis les fautes qu'il se reproche. Il fait plus sombre. Je ne crois pas que ce soit à force de balancer le bras. Il est innocent comme le jour. Bras, tu es innocent comme le jour. Je te porte comme mon petit enfant dans le jour et dans le sombre.

Il s'amuse beaucoup.

Il est beaucoup plus éveillé que les autres bras de son âge.

Il pourrait se détacher de moi si je n'y veillais.

Je pense qu'il suffirait d'un moment d'inattention de ma part, et qu'il l'attend.

C'est un bras très éveillé qui attend le bon moment pour se détacher de moi. Je ne le laisserai pas faire, lourd comme il est. Lourd et méchant, comme il est. Il n'est pas prêt, pas prêt du tout, si jeune encore, il lui reste à apprendre tant de choses, c'est moi qui les lui apprendrai comme je lui ai appris les autres. Il restera à mon côté, et qu'il se balance si ça lui chante.

Il se balance avec une telle assurance. Un autre bras irait plus doucement, un autre bras s'inquiéterait de la santé de l'épaule qu'il sollicite. Pas lui, il n'est pas comme eux. Lourd comme ça, il se balance à la façon des plus légers, hop, hop, son insouciance, son naturel dans le jour et dans la nuit. Les pays sont plus sombres, à mesure, à mesure. On ouvre grand les yeux, on cligne, le jour et la nuit sombres, et le bras hop, et le bras hop.

Cadence.

La belle cadence.

Nous avons rencontré, lui et moi, de belles taches sombres, mais nous n'avons rien pu en tirer, malgré leur grande belle bouche sombre.

Dans les arbres, dans les montagnes, dans les eaux profondes de la mer, dans le ciel pur elles bougeaient leurs belles lèvres mais nous n'entendions pas ce qu'elles disaient, ce qu'elles nous disaient. Alors elles disparaissaient, et nous en cherchions d'autres, et celles que nous trouvions après de grandes fatigues n'étaient pas plus audibles. Elles disparaissaient.

Le désespoir en plus, de plus en plus.

Mais il me suffisait de regarder mon bras jeune et intrépide, plein d'optimisme comme un vendeur de beignets sur la plage, pour aller mieux et me remettre à espérer. J'ai dit espérer, oui je crois que j'espérais quelque chose, que j'espère quelque chose, il est difficile de savoir quoi. Cela doit avoir un rapport avec ces taches sombres qui se taisent.

Mon bras lui se comporte comme s'il n'avait rien à espérer, ou plutôt comme s'il lui suffisait de se balancer pour obtenir ce qu'il ne songe pas à espérer. Oh je l'envie, blanc, et la cadence de ses poils blonds.

Je le vois sourire, et celui qui n'a jamais vu mon bras sourire ne sait pas ce qu'est l'enfance, ou la bonté, enfin je me comprends. Je suis resté si longtemps par terre sans pouvoir bouger, j'ai tenu grâce à mon bras que je sentais près de moi, je sentais son sourire, déjà les pays étaient plus sombres mais son sourire était comme une lampe aux piles neuves que je me serais passée sur la face.

Bras, cher bras, et hop, ta belle cadence je lui accorde une attention de tous les instants, c'est ainsi que l'on dit, et l'on dit bien. Tu es lourd? Ça ne fait rien. Tu as tes raisons. Je ne te juge pas. Ne retourne pas contre moi, jamais, des armes que j'ai abandonnées à la poussière pour te suivre toi. C'est peut-être la nuit, il fait sombre, très sombre, ça ne peut être le jour, ou c'est que le jour s'est attristé d'un coup, c'est tout à fait possible, je le comprendrais, j'avais déjà remarqué que loin des villes le jour était aussi mystérieux que la nuit, et aussi plus triste. Nous devons être à la campagne, si nous suivons mon raisonnement. Ce n'est pas la montagne. Je connais l'air des cimes, ce n'est pas celui que je respire ici, biffons l'air des cimes.

Tu te balances si joliment, sans souci de la géographie ni de l'heure, que le mien s'en trouve bête et faiblit, et je n'ai plus d'amour et de questions que pour ce mouvement et pour ces veines proéminentes qui enveloppent ta main fine et bien outillée.

Sache-le, si cela t'intéresse: je suis aussi très attentif à ce que tu fais quand tu ne te balances pas et que pourtant tu trouves encore le moyen de te balancer. Je t'approuve en tout. Ce n'est pas faiblesse, crois-le bien; j'ai vécu, et mon expérience des choses me fait admirer la façon que tu as de les affronter et qui est la seule bonne: celle qui ne s'embarrasse pas de manières s'il s'agit de s'en prendre aux mauvaises.

S'amuser comme ça, s'amuser, s'amuser!

Les pays sombres semblent tomber les uns sur les autres, hop, et hop, comme la nuit tombe sur le jour, ou le jour dans la nuit.

Les choses sentent bon et mauvais, les bouches qui parlent se taisent, le vertige marche sur deux bonnes jambes, et j'ai ce bras qui han han han.

Ayant à choisir parmi toutes les machinations qui permettent de cacher la machine sans mettre en péril le mouvement d'aucune de ses courroies, le citoyen donne le branle à la sensiblerie.

La sensibilité ne figurait pas dans le grand sac des machinations. Le citoyen a fait semblant de s'en étonner et presque de le regretter, mais il sait que la sensibilité, qui demande quelques talents⁴, n'aurait pas été à sa portée, qu'elle ne s'émeut que de loin en loin et qu'elle est d'ailleurs d'un si faible rapport qu'elle coûte cher⁵. Il lui fallait autre chose, qui paye mieux et vite. Il a bien choisi. Depuis, la machine produit sans arrêt, sous le voile épais de la sensiblerie, toutes sortes d'excréments plus ou moins spongieux après lesquels salivent abondamment les glandes faites pour prospérer sous un tel voile. Le citoyen, s'étant pourvu d'ergots à ressorts, rétorquera: Mais de quelle machine parlez-vous, fou incivil et monsieur Fou? Nous répondrons: De la machine increvable, dont la vis sans fin broie indifféremment les noyaux et les pulpes, pour don-

4. La sensibilité prend fait et cause pour «la fille laide», comme l'a montré Nikolai Zabolotski (1955).

5. C'est «l'ennemi atroce et chien» dont parle Monsieur Gadda (1916) avec une véhémence que nous n'hésiterons pas à condamner dès que nous aurons une minute et qu'il fera moins froid.

ner ce jus infect auquel je rechigne à donner le nom trop gai de divertissement [*ici, le lecteur est prié de positionner son nez au-dessus du plus gros collecteur de l'agglomération, afin de se faire une idée des suavités qu'on chante*]. Le citoyen: Ce que vous appelez machine et que j'appelle altruisme produit ce que vous appelez divertissement, et que j'appelle consolation (mais je pourrais avec vous, et sans faire aucune grimace, l'appeler divertissement dans la mesure où ce qui divertit, et qui sent bon, console). La sensiblerie n'est-elle pas la preuve d'une grande délicatesse, d'un cœur excellent, d'une sympathie également répartie entre des événements⁶ également pitoyables? N'est-il pas beau d'être soulagé par les larmes qu'on est capable de verser sur des malheurs qui ne nous touchent pas? Voyez ces hommes et ces femmes dont le cheveu est une graisse et dont la langue suce à même le sol les cailloux amers d'une condition que les fleurs ont fuie, ils aiment savoir que le séduisant John possède la mâchoire la plus carrée de Boston et que son cancer est en phase avancée — leur refuserez-vous John? Vous ignorez peut-être ce qu'on dit à propos de notre besoin de consolation? Nous: Que non! Il n'y a donc, vous nous l'assurez, aucune machine qui fasse offense aux plus beaux sentiments de l'humanité, aucune machine qui substitue son brutal mécanisme à l'évanescence⁷ de nos iridescences⁸ et s'efforce de la rendre ridi-

6. À la différence des événements, les individus de chair et d'os (à moins qu'ils ne soient des petits chats) intéressent peu la sensiblerie, qui semble avoir besoin d'images animées pour se mettre à son tour en mouvement (2015).


7. Hélas.

8. Hélas.

cule? Le citoyen: Il n'y en a jamais eu.

Alors un bras surgira des nuages⁹. Il demandera au citoyen s'il est bien sûr de ce qu'il avance. Le citoyen ne se laissera pas démonter par le marteau qui termine le bras. Il répètera que la sensiblerie, en raison de tout ce qu'elle apporte aux indigents, justifierait, s'il devait y en avoir, les inconvénients dus à l'extension de son empire, mais qu'il n'y en a pas à sa connaissance.

Le bras surgi des nuages fera tomber sur le citoyen le marteau qui le termine, afin qu'il termine aussi le citoyen.

9.  Ce blason coupé, qui est de gueules, illustre assez bien le dextro-chère dont je parle, armé d'un marteau non pas d'argent mais d'or, mouvant d'une nuée senestre d'argent. Il est fâcheux que ce beau blason soit celui d'une maison jamais sortie du néant, où elle s'enfonça encore davantage un jour qu'elle tomba plus bas que ses caves, et jusqu'en enfer, par l'avilissement et ignominie d'une femme de cette famille dont le nom sera toujours odieux à ceux qui aiment celui, parfait, de Philippe Viannay, dont les armes eussent été d'azur à trois fleurs de lys d'or, brisé d'un bâton péri de gueules, sur-brisé d'un marteau d'or.

Nous ne voyons pas les choses comme ça. Prendre le risque d'être triste et tige c'est le devenir à coup sûr. Il ne faut pas avoir le temps, il faut avoir des affaires. L'affairement est notre grande affaire. Même les gros hommes qui passent leurs journées en robe de chambre à regarder le plafond mettent un point d'honneur à le scruter comme personne d'autre avant eux, et à livrer le résultat de leur étude en s'exprimant comme le plus joufflu des gitons d'Héraclite.

Il est donc particulièrement agaçant de voir une rue qui s'est distinguée une fois en s'ébrouant de façon tout à fait admirable, s'enfoncer, si j'ose dire, dans l'aboulie où se vautrent toutes les autres depuis que le rouleau compresseur (au balourd interne) leur a donné cette forme dont elles semblent si satisfaites.

Nous avions fondé tant d'espairs sur elle !

Nous avions parié avec enthousiasme qu'elle ne s'arrêterait pas en si bon chemin, et que notre esprit d'entreprise trouverait à seconder le sien. Qui sait où cela nous aurait menés ? Qui sait sur quel mont d'orgueil nous aurait portés son revêtement élastique ? Qui sait les campagnes de publicité prodigieuses, aux retombées abondantes, que nos concurrents se seraient empressés de copier sans pouvoir les consacrer à un objet aussi neuf et glorieux que notre Rue ? La Curiosité Universelle avait tourné sa tête immense

vers notre Rue, déjà son front globuleux nous promettait le dividende et la gidouille, déjà les minutes manquaient à nos quarts d'heure. Mais c'étaient des rêves : la voici rendue, amorphe, aux abattements affreux, voici que notre Rue, la rue de notre cœur, celle qui a donné sa forme à notre espérance, est devenue sourde à l'appel des braves, à la trompette qui résonne sous les voûtes où pendent les drapeaux. On lui marche dessus. On lui roule dessus. On lui fait aujourd'hui ce qu'on lui faisait avant-hier, et elle ne bronche pas pour affirmer la dignité conquise dans l'intervalle par son premier mouvement.

Quand l'humilité à la tête chauve s'avance pour déposer les instruments de la suprématie politique aux pieds de Guydelusignan, je veux bien croire qu'elle obéit à d'autres principes qu'à ceux que leur vulgarité promet, et que ce choix contre l'efficacité est sanctifié par le sacrifice de celui qui le fait. Mais, aux hommes qui seront placés par suite sous l'autorité d'un mauvais prince et qui ne pourront, eux, s'abîmer dans la contemplation de leurs stigmates au moment de recevoir la mort de la main de l'ennemi, il sera difficile d'applaudir l'humilité qui les aura placés sous cette main.

Comprends-tu ce que je dis, ô Rue ?

Comprends-tu au moins ce que je dis ?

Ton dos, aujourd'hui plat comme l'impossibilité du bond, le creuseras-tu de nouveau, ou l'arrondiras-tu à la façon du sourcil qui s'étonne au-dessus de l'œil qui s'émerveille ? ou faut-il que décidément nous renoncions à tout — comme celui qui avait pensé se saisir du monde se réveille dans le froid de la nuit et pleure d'avoir si grandement rêvé ?

Un effort ne te coûterait pas, je te dirais. Je sais bien ce que certains vont répétant partout : qu'à l'un de ces coups qui précèdent le lever de rideau tu dois ce mouvement, et que tu n'aurais jamais trouvé en toi-même les ressources pour l'accomplir. Si c'est vrai, je ne demande pas mieux qu'un deuxième coup te soit porté, et trois, et quatre, on s'en fiche un peu, alors appelle à toi la troupe des brigadiers du théâtre français et n'hésite plus à fléchir ton genou aimable au son de leur petit tambourin, ou bien, que le tumulte de leur chant exhausse la terre autour de toi si tu tiens à rester tranquille, l'essentiel est qu'on te distingue au milieu du reste afin que nous jouissions du tapage que tu es née pour provoquer dans le monde.

Fais l'effort d'agréer l'effet des nôtres, poussin, et tu seras toujours ma grosse danseuse, tu veux ?

Vois-tu, la vie est dure pour tout le monde et d'abord pour les entrepreneurs qui réinvestissent régulièrement la plus grande partie de leurs bénéfices pour assurer la prospérité générale. Tu serais bien gentille de pas l'oublier et d'y mettre du tien. Tout ce public est là pour toi, venu des quatre coins, des cars entiers, charters, pousse-poussettes, Chinois Finnois et Pionces, ceux-là c'est le miracle qu'il leur faut, l'émotion, la grande secousse, pas les nouilles, pas la tristesse : ils ont les mains tendues, paume contre paume, n'attendent plus que toi pour les battre et t'aimer pire. Alors sors de ta réserve, Madame de, coincé-cul Quantassoï, et tu verras de quel bois tu les chauffes comme Hosanna Barquette à la télé, et Bricole Shipman ! Tu es belle, c'est leurs yeux qui te pomponnent à qui mieux mieux, aucun veut être en reste, chacun qu'est le préféré

chialeur, le plus mignoteur qu'en pince, celui qu'a toutes les images des gazines, rotant-chef, reniflant pif et morve et tout, mais pas trop Maine, ni Biran.

Somme, c'est le succès, encore faut-il venir le cueillir sur la branche prochaine. Et pour cela se bouger un peu, comme on sait faire. Mais tu demeures sourde encore et je n'ai plus l'espoir, en parlant, d'obtenir ce qu'obtient un autre, en frappant.

Bien sûr, elle tangué. Mais c'est surtout une pièce sans fenêtre, sans électricité et très petite. Ce n'est pas parce qu'on me dit qu'elle est grande, lumineuse et aérée, que je vais fermer les yeux. Tous ceux-là se font avoir de façon magistrale, ça doit être à cause de la publicité, ils voient partout de grandes pièces lumineuses et aérées. On leur fait croire ce qu'on veut, en haut lieu. Et même quand on ne le voudra plus ils continueront sur leur lancée. Ils trouvent tout bien.

Je lève pourtant les bras au ciel. Ça devrait les alerter. À leur place, je me poserais des questions. Je t'en fiche. Il y en a deux ou trois qui me regardent avec des yeux ronds, les autres font comme si je n'étais pas là. Je les entends qui parlent entre eux en s'éloignant : tout en se cognant sans cesse la tête au plafond ils disent avec leur voix faible et traînante que ce sont de grandes et hautes pièces, aérées et lumineuses, c'est toujours ce qu'ils disent. Si je me laisse aller je finirai par le croire moi aussi. Quand je dis que je lève les bras au ciel je me vante. Il est im-po-ssible de lever les bras au ciel dans une telle pièce. Malgré l'obscurité ils voient bien que j'essaie, même ceux qui font comme si je n'étais pas là. Et que si je ne peux pas c'est parce que cette pièce est très petite et très basse, comme d'ailleurs toutes les autres pièces que j'ai pu voir ou apercevoir. J'ai beau leur montrer, ils font comme si je n'étais pas là, même ceux

qui me regardent. Je vois bien que je les ennuie et qu'ils sont pressés de retourner dans le couloir, surtout quand je commence à leur dire qu'ils sont bas de plafond, vous êtes des bas de plafond je répète, ils font semblant de ne pas comprendre.

J'avais aperçu une femme le premier jour. Je m'étais dit elle est canon et plus encore culasse, en me passant la langue sur les lèvres. C'est d'ailleurs pour ça que je suis entré, à cause de cette femme que je n'ai plus revue, par la suite. J'avais cru qu'elle entrait dans un palais aux mille fenêtres. J'ai attendu un petit moment et je suis entré moi aussi.

C'était une très grande maison vu de l'extérieur, mais dès que je suis entré la très grande porte s'est refermée derrière moi et ce n'était plus une très grande porte magnifique mais une petite chatière, une toute petite trappe qui semblait n'avoir jamais bougé. Et devant moi il y avait ces individus voûtés, en file indienne dans un couloir sombre, bas et long. De vrais gringalets, mais qui dégageaient une désagréable odeur de force et de barrière fermée à clef.

Sous l'unique ampoule du couloir, qui échoue à répandre sa pauvre lumière dans les dizaines de pièces aveugles donnant sur cette circulation, le premier individu m'a regardé avec des yeux trop grands, le temps de me faire comprendre qu'il était une sorte de lémurien, puis il s'est mis à grignoter. Quand on est pris dans la souricière, et ces types l'étaient comme moi de toute évidence, on n'aime plus le fromage il me semble, eh bien ces misérables grignotaient toutes les croûtes moisies qui jonchaient le sol, avec une avidité dégoûtante et des gencives douloureuses.

Ça commençait bien. Je les ai sermonnés avec mon éloquence accoutumée, je leur ai parlé de décence et de fierté, pour qu'ils aient honte d'un comportement si contraire à celui, par exemple, du roi Marc, mais bien digne, hélas, du roi Ma¹⁰. Ça n'a pas eu l'air de les émouvoir, j'ai préféré penser qu'ils étaient si remués qu'ils affectaient l'hébétude, et je les ai laissés me conduire dans cette très petite pièce d'où je ne suis plus sorti.

Comme toute la baraque tangue comme un cargo dans la tempête, ou plutôt comme une foutue barcasse, j'ai l'impression de n'être qu'une nausée à fond de cale.

Je laisse ma porte ouverte pour laisser entrer un peu de la lumière du couloir, mais ils se tiennent là pour m'empêcher de sortir.

Je dois rester dans cette pièce.

Il paraît que c'est parce que je n'ai pas de nez.

J'ai bien précisé que j'avais un nez mais que je l'ai perdu à cause de la cire, qu'en cherchant bien on le retrouverait sûrement dans la poussière de la route, que je me faisais fort de le nettoyer comme un sou neuf, d'y ajouter un élastique qu'ils me prêteraient et que mon nez tiendrait comme les leurs.

Ils firent non de la tête.

Je donnai un coup sur le périnée du premier, un autre sur le nez de son collègue, qui a reniflé, et ce reniflement était comme un reproche auquel il n'ajouta rien.

10. «Le roi Ma (skr. Māra), démon qui incarne le mal moral ; il cherche à entraver les efforts des hommes vers la Délivrance» (Jacqueline Pigeot, in «Répertoire», *Récits de l'éveil du cœur* de Kamo no Chōmei, p. 448, Le Bruit du temps, 2014).

Un troisième a dit lentement, avec une sorte de ton de bonté, que c'était une grande, une très grande pièce aérée, et même, ce qui ne gâtait rien, une pièce très haute munie de tout aussi hautes portes-fenêtres.

Un quatrième et un cinquième ont approuvé en hochant gravement la tête qu'ils cognaient au plafond à chaque hochement.

Un sixième dont je ne voyais que le pied battait la mesure sur laquelle le quatrième et le cinquième hochaient la tête.

J'ai essayé de hausser les épaules mais pas moyen, alors les bras, pensez.

Là, le troisième s'est enfoncé deux doigts dans la gorge, de façon à déposer sur la barre de seuil un peu du vieux fromage qu'il avait si péniblement mâché.

Reconnaissez-le, mes petits camarades, mes petits bossus, c'est une très petite pièce sans fenêtre, on ne peut pas s'y remuer, on ne peut pas respirer, on n'y voit rien, dis-je avec indignation en haussant la voix à défaut du corps, ne seriez-vous pas des crétins finis? Ne vous reproduiriez-vous pas entre vous ou avec ces petits animaux rampants (je montre les nombreux diplopodes phosphorescents, qui se promènent ici comme chez eux) où vous avez cru reconnaître, imbéciles, les esprits animaux dont la philosophie cogne maintenant le museau après avoir si longtemps chanté leurs mérites?

Ils grignotaient de vieilles croûtes ceux qui me regardaient. Ils n'ont jamais exprimé la moindre animosité pour ces choses que je leur dis un peu rudement. Maigres, vouûtés, ils se reliaient à ma porte comme des gens qui

accomplissent sans passion une tâche sans intérêt. Puis ils retournent dans le couloir. Je n'arrive pas à leur en vouloir vraiment, je ne sais pas pourquoi. Tout de même ils me retiennent absolument contre mon gré. Dans des conditions peu ergonomiques. Et quel roulis. Je n'y arrive pas.

Il y en a un qui avec assez de complaisance met deux doigts très fins dans une prise de courant située dans le couloir près de ma porte, je peux ainsi regarder les nouvelles dans ses grands yeux ronds car si nous n'avons pas de sièges ici nous avons une connexion internet. Les images d'actualité défilent sur ses yeux comme sur des écrans Tsimtsung haute définition. Il se branche ainsi sans que je le lui demande. Personne ne regarde sa montre dans ce trou sans fenêtre, mais il connaît à la seconde près l'heure du journal télévisé et il s'allume à la seconde près, il déborde même souvent sur le film du soir, ne s'éteint souvent qu'à la fin du film du soir. J'avoue que cela me désarme et me plaît, et que si je ne me surveillais pas je lui dirais merci monsieur deux fois par jour. Heureusement qu'il n'y a pas le son, je serais fâché de comprendre les choses que me renvoie ce regard mort.

Quand je regarde ces petits reportages muets, ou les petits films de B. Jacquot, tout aussi bêtes et muets, qui suivent ces petites inepties, je m'en détourne en esprit et pense à autre chose, je suis dans des conditions favorables à l'examen de conscience.

Je regrette alors souvent d'être fait de telle sorte que je dois subir une coercition. Si je m'en étais tenu à mon projet de retourner dans mon coffre au centre du séjour, d'où j'avais été tiré par des assassins que ma nature sans doute

y avait attirés et où des événements extérieurs à ma nature m'avaient mis en état de retourner, je n'aurais pas subi cette nouvelle avanie, mais pouvais-je faire violence à cette nature et gagner le confort? Pouvais-je sans infidélité à ce que je suis éviter ce nouveau piège si ma nature exigeait que j'y tombe? Ne serait-il pas injuste que je conquière la douceur du foyer si je suis né pour subir l'injustice et les affres? Et cette douceur ne mêlerait-elle pas à ses rubans des bandelettes plus sanglantes que celles qui m'enserrent? Quelque chose avait dû m'effrayer dans cette ligne droite qu'un dieu avait tracée pour moi sur la chaussée commune. Je devais m'employer à la briser un peu, par fidélité à cette poisse qui m'apparaissait plus conforme à la façon dont se fuient mes os durs et ma peau sure. Allons, du cran. Vois les choses en face. Il y a la nature et il y a la faute. Si je ne considère pas mes fautes, si je ne considère que ma nature, si je me laisse entraîner à penser que les unes, que je n'appelle pas de leur nom, sont les filles de l'autre, et donc innocentes comme l'enfant qui est toujours pur même quand il sort du cul le plus sale, je suis véritablement dans le confort que je prétends repousser par fidélité à une nature qui m'y installe. Je suis confortable. Où l'on m'installe je me conforte. Mes fautes sont confortables. Mes fautes sont un sofa. Mes fautes m'ont éloigné de ce coffre que je pleure avec des larmes délicieuses et confortables. Il y avait un figuier qui frappait à la vitre. Il y avait cette tache affreuse. C'étaient là deux figures du reproche. Je ne les avais pas reconnues. Je les reconnais à présent, depuis cette très petite pièce. Il n'est pas trop tard. Si je nommais autrement ma nature je la trouverais moins

aimable. Je l'aime puisque je lui cède toujours et que c'est pour lui complaire que je lui cède et que je lui donne ce nom. Si je la nommais non plus nature mais vice, ce seul nom m'apprendrait que je dois la combattre. En choisissant le premier nom qui la flatte je m'épargne moi-même. Si je choisissais le deuxième je me créerais des devoirs sous lesquels ma faiblesse fléchirait. En choisissant de suivre la ligne droite tracée par le dieu, j'aurais choisi le chemin le plus difficile puisqu'il m'aurait fallu résister à ce vice auquel j'ai déjà tant cédé qu'il est peut-être devenu beaucoup plus fort que ma volonté. Un dieu ne montre pas de chemin facile. J'ai refusé ce chemin difficile. J'avais désiré mon retour dans le coffre au centre du séjour, où j'avais dit que je louerais le nom du dieu qui m'exaucerait. Jamais personne n'avait été aussi triste de quitter quelque chose, il est possible que personne n'ait jamais regretté à ce point de quitter quelqu'un. J'avais été arraché à lui et je soupirais sans cesse après lui et je réclamais après lui, je voulais lui retourner, je ne voulais que cela. Et dès que je l'ai pu j'ai voulu autre chose. J'ai voulu beaucoup de choses et j'ai couru après toutes, jusqu'au canon et sa culasse. Si j'ai été arraché par tant de bras à mon coffre au centre du séjour, si cette violence m'a été faite jusque dans le coffre de mon repos, si cette méchanceté est venue m'y trouver, si elle m'en a tiré avec une telle facilité, si ma résistance ne se prolongea pas au-delà de quelques jours et de quelques nuits, si elle n'a pas lassé l'effort exercé contre moi par la méchanceté qu'il faut peut-être appeler la justice, c'est, j'y pense maintenant dans cette très petite pièce connectée à internet, c'est sans doute que j'ai exaspéré, par l'injustice

de ma nature que je laissais me conduire durant toutes ces années sans réfléchir à la direction que je prenais sous son commandement, un assez grand nombre de gens qui, ne pouvant plus souffrir mes façons, résolurent de s'associer pour me faire connaître durement les leurs, et les promouvoir aux dépens des miennes. Si je suis bien mon raisonnement, mon confort est presque assuré, que j'aime ma nature ou que je combatte mon vice. Soit je me vautre dans le confort de ma nature en la suivant dans tous ses écoulements. Soit je combats mon vice et je conquiers le confort en arrivant, par la ligne droite, jusque dans mon coffre au centre du séjour. Mais si je choisis le combat et si je perds ce combat contre mon vice et que je n'arrive pas jusqu'à mon coffre au centre du séjour, je ne connaîtrai pas le confort. Ni le confort de l'abandon, ni celui qui suit la victoire. Mais si j'ai la satisfaction d'avoir bien combattu, si je suis fier d'un combat honorable, d'un combat mené honorablement, si je deviens irréconciliable, si je déteste mon vice, si je lui déclare une guerre sans fin, ne tiendrai-je pas la victoire pour peu de chose, ne tiendrai-je pas le confort pour une perversion qui gâte le plus beau mouvement d'un homme? Ne serai-je pas soulagé dans une certaine mesure si, connaissant désormais mon indignité, je ne regagne pas mon coffre au centre du séjour? Ne rougirai-je pas quand je me souviendrai que j'ai occupé indûment cette place et que je me rendrai compte que j'avais été sur le point de la reconquérir? Je regarderai la victoire avec horreur et je chérirai non ma défaite mais mon combat. Je chérirai mon combat honorable. Je succomberai parfois à ce vice puissant que je n'aurai pas vaincu, alors je repartirai contre

lui, c'est-à-dire contre moi, afin de regagner mon coffre au centre du séjour, non parce que je l'aime ou que j'aime le confort mais parce que j'aimerai ma promesse d'y louer le dieu qui m'a exaucé. Mais je ne réussirai pas et mon nom sera en exécration avec celui de ma nature. Ces gens qui se tiennent à ma porte pour m'empêcher de sortir, je me battrai à leur côté pour qu'ils me resserrent dans ma prison, et s'ils me donnent des coups de lunettes dans le dos je m'en donnerai dans les yeux.

Le Héros-type parle — sixième fois

Qui dit hue ne dit pas mal.

Le cheval, quand il entend hue, comprend ce langage. Pour bien montrer qu'il comprend, il avance.

Quand l'homme entend hue il n'avance pas, pour bien montrer qu'il comprend.

Tout le monde suit, je suis content.

Mais quand l'un dit «chose une» et quand l'autre dit «chose deux», ou «trois», etc., je ne sais s'il faut avancer ou reculer. Les uns et les autres disent l'un et l'autre comme s'il s'agissait de choses indifférentes. C'est parce qu'ils savent le sens qu'ils donnent à «chose une» et à «chose deux». Il ne leur vient pas à l'esprit qu'on pourrait prendre l'un pour l'autre. Ils font les entendus, sans penser à mal. Et en effet ceux qui les écoutent réagissent très différemment selon qu'ils entendent «chose une» ou «chose deux». Il est bien évident qu'ils saisissent la différence sans que celui qui parle ait besoin, par une inflexion particulière de la voix, d'appuyer ses effets pour distinguer l'un de l'autre.

Pour ce qui me concerne j'ignore ce que sont «chose une» et «chose deux», ou «trois», etc. On ne m'a jamais entretenu de ces choses.

Forcément, je me cache derrière mes petits instruments.

Et pour dire à mon tour quelque chose je dis hue. Pour ne pas rester dans cette position impossible je dis hue, pour

reprendre l'initiative.

À ce mot tout le monde réagit. Ceux qui faisaient quelque chose ne font plus rien. Soit ils avançaient soit ils reculaient. Ils sont à présent comme les montagnes majestueuses qui écrasent de leur dédain et de leur immobilité les pertinences et les impertinences. J'aimerais que mon maintien, quand j'entends «chose une» ou «chose deux», ou «trois», etc., ait une telle allure. Ceux qui ne faisaient rien prennent à ce mot de hue une contenance bien éloignée de ce pauvre avachissement qui remplissait l'ordinaire de leurs journées. Ils sont fiers, on devine qu'ils aimeraient que leur maman les voie, en ce moment. Ils ont un air intelligent qu'on ne leur connaissait pas. Ils fixent au loin un point qui donne à leur regard ce brillant à côté duquel *étoile* est un brillas confus.

Ce hue est un marteau très efficace, pour les chevaux comme pour les hommes. Hue, et hop tout se fait han.

Bon bon. Je sais ce que je suis, les cachettes que j'aménage sous la terre sont des manifestations de ma nostalgie pour le temps où j'habitais le jardin de mon père. Depuis, j'ai bien grandi, je connais la force de mon bras, j'ai de l'influence sur la croûte de la Terre comme les seigneurs de fer La Trémoille, Vendôme et Guise sur les villes de Hesdin et Corbie, ils n'ont pas tort de comparer mon silence à celui de Dieu, ma discrétion à celle de Dieu, ma que-vous-en-dit à la vigueur du ciel qui tonne et sous lequel pendent les choses de l'éternel.

Becqué et membré de gueules.

Ah non ah non. Ah *ah ah ah*.

Une très grande fatigue saute à pieds joints sur mon

épaule. Quelle pauvre bête. Pauvre petite bête. Je lève doucement le bras jusqu'à la hauteur de mon épaule, et je montre à ma fatigue cette bouche là-bas dans les arbres qui crie et crie depuis toujours, depuis le temps où j'habitais le jardin, sous les trappes. Il faudra bien, chère petite fatigue, et pauvre, et qui sautes, que tu m'accompagnes jusqu'à cette belle bouche sombre. Je te porte, porte à porte, tu vois l'avant-bras bien veiné qui te protégera contre tes ennemis. Ne t'en fais pas. J'irai où je suis attendu mais ce ne sera pas à dos d'homme car je dis hue. Ce mot que j'affectionne m'interdit de compter sur un homme pour aller où je dois me rendre.

Pardon? C'est vrai, ce bras est un peu capricieux mais ses mérites ne sont pas minces. Tu veux une comparaison? Je t'offre ce que tu demandes afin que ta compréhension de mon bras scelle non pas notre amitié mais notre connivence: la première dure toute la vie, la deuxième ce qu'elle pourra, c'est déjà beau. Mon bras est doté d'une âme particulière, d'une volonté autonome, qui ne rencontre la mienne que dans de rares circonstances, mais alors quel feu prend aux artifices de ce monde! Mon bras est comme l'amour qui frappe les êtres comme l'éclair frappe la terre. Il semble frapper au hasard. C'est le contraire. Il frappe la vie. Pour la tuer ou pour l'exalter, c'est ce que j'ignore. Je suis si ignorant, brave grande mais petite fatigue, que je dois la plupart du temps me contenter de faire ce qui démange ce bras. Il me tire après lui sans ménagement, et c'est ce qui m'a fait venir à l'esprit ce mot de hue, comme si j'étais cette cocotte qui n'est pas bien libre de ses mouvements.

Ne pèse pas trop sur lui s'il te plaît.

Je trouve qu'il y a dans le monde je ne sais quoi d'embarrassé.

Je trouve que ce que je cherche dans le monde se cache bien.

Je trouve que ma sympathie pour ceci et cela est en deçà de ce qu'elle pourrait être.

Mais que sont ceci et cela? Je n'aime pas que de telles questions me sautent sur la tête à pieds joints. Je voudrais être un peu tranquille. Si j'ai fait du mal à quelqu'un ou à quelque chose c'était comme on renverse un vase quand on se retourne vivement, on n'avait rien contre le vase. Dès qu'il faut dire pardon je le pense sans le dire, cependant je suis le plus grand demandeur de pardon du monde. Je demande pardon à ceci et cela si je les ai blessés. C'est un pardon qui leur rapportera car je suis le plus grand pardonneur du monde et la roue tourne.

J'espère que tu aimes l'air pur, il est bon de l'aimer quand on marche comme moi jusqu'à la bouche dans les arbres. La route est faite de chemins très longs, infinis. Lorsque j'étais enfant je croyais qu'il suffisait d'avoir le bras à peine plus long que le mien pour toucher cette bouche sombre. Si j'ai consenti à grandir c'était pour vérifier ça. J'ai été bien détrompé. Et pourtant, puisque j'avais consenti il fallut grandir jusqu'à plus soif, si l'on peut dire. C'est loin. Heureusement l'air est pur, quelquefois frais, quelquefois chaud. Quelquefois de grands morceaux d'air pur tombent devant moi sur la route, comme des rochers. Ce sont des impondérables qui me ralentissent sensiblement, d'autant qu'il ne s'agit pas de les prendre à la légère,

les morceaux d'air pur ne se repoussent pas du bout du pied, ce sont des animaux fâchés qui n'hésitent pas à sortir les griffes et qui n'écoutent ni hue ni ho. Je crois que leur chute, qui m'étonne toujours et que je ne sais pas à quoi attribuer, les met en colère à cause des grossièretés qui couvrent notre sol et dès lors les infectent. Ils ne se trouvent à leur aise qu'avec les autres morceaux, pour composer de très vastes ensembles. Car tout cela s'agence là-haut, et autour de nous, d'une façon merveilleuse : il s'agit d'une savante architecture à côté de laquelle les nôtres soufflent et pâtissent. C'est ce qu'on appelle l'air pur. Avec ces morceaux la conversation est impossible. On peut au moins les respirer profondément, en attendant d'y voir plus clair.

Mais il n'y a pas de morceau d'air pur sur ma route aujourd'hui. Marchons avec l'insouciance d'un ménage non imposable. Voilà dans son habit de lumière un muet joyeux qui m'adresse de très beaux signes d'amitié, alors que de grands chiens rouges le fêtent. Bonjour mon ami, bonjour ! Je vois ton chant, sais-tu ? Je l'aime beaucoup, beaucoup ! Comme tu me fais plaisir en m'offrant un si beau chant sur ma route ! Que chacun boive à ta santé ! Que chacun plaigne ta mort car elle est proche ! Que chacun plaigne les beaux chants empêchés !

Et voilà une jeune fille qui passe. Nous allons nous croiser.

Elle a une très petite bouche inadmissible. Une paille n'y ferait pas son trou. Non, cela ne va pas, il faut arranger cela. Regarde bien, chère grande fatigue, comment je m'y prends.

Avec ma main droite je lui saisis délicatement la nuque.

Avec la gauche je prends le marteau par la table et la panne qui forment sa tête, puis j'applique délicatement l'extrémité du manche sur cette très petite bouche vraiment inadmissible. Je tourne délicatement le manche en faisant bien attention à ne pas abîmer cette très petite bouche qu'il s'agit d'agrandir et non de blesser.

Tu le vois, cette très petite bouche est déjà moins inadmissible: la chair, qui était d'abord un peu surprise par des attentions qu'on ne lui montre pas tous les jours, se détend, elle est en confiance, elle apporte son concours, certes modeste, aux efforts du marteau. Ce n'est pas encore ça, pourtant: la petite bouche n'est pas bien grande. Elle réclame à petits cris que nous poursuivions nos travaux. Notre devoir s'accorde avec cette prière, nous y joignons nos mains. Le manche s'emploie donc, par ce genre de caresses que tu vois, à faire sauter gentiment les plus centrales des serrures innombrables qui ferment cette petite bouche. Notre manche, si patient et si courtois, aura ainsi assez de place pour s'appuyer sur une lèvre. Car enfin, qu'est-ce qu'un levier sans point d'appui? Comment agrandir sans violence cette toute petite bouche si l'on ne peut s'appuyer sur l'une des lèvres pour en éloigner l'autre? On s'emploiera délicatement aux travaux préparatoires qui permettront, en faisant sauter ces verrous minuscules situés à ce qu'on n'ose pas appeler des commissures, d'obtenir ce *jeu* grâce auquel le manche du marteau fera de cette trop petite bouche une jolie jeune fille. Celui qui négligera la délicatesse dans de telles affaires perdra toute légitimité à arranger les vilaines petites bouches qu'il trouvera assises sur leur cul de poule.

Je suis moulu avec une coquine comme toi sur mon épaule. Va te promener avec tes yeux battus sur un individu auquel tu ôteras l'envie de me reluquer cette année et les suivantes. C'est qu'on me surveille je le sens. Depuis un bon bout de temps l'œil que j'ai derrière la tête s'étonne de tous ces buissons qui bougent alors que le vent est tombé. C'est parce que je dis un certain mot et chacun sait que ce n'est pas un mot à dire quand on va sans cheval vers la bouche dans les arbres.

Qui dit hue ne dit pas mal.

Hue.

Ils ne bougent plus dans leur buisson, les hommes.

L'air pur.
La petite bouche.
La grande qui est dans les arbres.
Le bras, la fatigue, les buissons tranquilles.
Les montagnes, le hue du cheval d'avalanches.
Les choses incroyables, incompréhensibles, les choses
divines attendent sur le seuil, toutes, pour être nommées
chacune selon son rang.
Et pour qu'ainsi leur importance proclamée soit accla-
mée.

Mais pour celui qui s'étudie, et qui se moque de tout
ce qui n'est pas cette étude, rien n'approche le fonctionne-
ment de son cerveau. Il trouve à ce personnage haut placé,
qui vit en lui une vie à peu près indépendante, toutes les
qualités et toute la morgue qui se rencontrent dans les êtres
que le hasard heureux de la naissance et le souci de justifier
le hasard rendent charmants. Il faut ici entendre le charme
comme cette qualité souveraine dont sont dépourvus ceux
qui ont toutes les autres.

On sait en effet que les individus les plus charmants
n'exercent une sorte de fascination que grâce à cette supé-
riorité que leur confèrent de mauvaises manières, ou du
moins une étrangeté des manières. Ils séduisent par l'in-

quiétude qu'ils donnent à des gens ennuyés de la bonté des leurs, même des exquises. La liberté qui éclate dans ces manières étranges, fussent-elles discrètes (ce qui leur ajoute curieusement le touchant du bon goût), met aux pieds des individus charmants un monde qui se dégrade pour passer sous leur loi plus haute.

Un cerveau plein de tonnerres, où se produisent des glissements de terrain et de calmes tempêtes, où les aurores sont lavées par des éclairs, où les langueurs écrasantes de l'été préparent de plus accablants orages, est un personnage charmant. C'est-à-dire qu'il épuise rapidement le corps tempéré qui l'accueille. Vous vous souvenez sans doute de ce Terence Stamp et de ce qu'il fit à Silvana, Laura, Massimo, Anne, Andrés, Laura et Ninetto, et comment tous ceux-là en furent marqués. Tous autant qu'ils étaient le trouvaient charmant. Ils étaient sous le charme. Leur épuisement, leurs crises de nerfs n'ont pas rompu ce charme. Il y avait peu à espérer de cette grande et belle maison. Depuis longtemps il y avait peu à en recevoir. Ce n'est pas davantage de ce grand jardin qu'il pouvait leur venir quelque chose. Il y avait plus grand que cette grande maison et que ce grand jardin, et c'était quelqu'un qui viendrait de plus loin et qui ne ressemblerait à rien de connu, et qui ne ressemblerait à personne. Quand cet homme est apparu, avec sa belle figure de puits artésien, ils sont tous tombés dedans. Ils se sont tous précipités en lui. Il les a attirés et il les a pris. Il les a défait. Il les a trempés dans son sang. Il a jailli dans leur sang. Il les a déchirés pour les recoudre. Il leur a donné la forme convenable. Il leur a donné la forme véritable. Ils

ont crié, comment faire autrement. Ce n'étaient pas des cris de protestation, ou pas seulement. Ils ont plus crié qu'on ne croit. Deux d'entre eux crient encore, ceux dont la forme était la moins convenable. Ceux qu'il a fallu aller chercher dans une forme très éloignée, pour les ramener vers la forme véritable. Ce sont des corps épuisés, déchirés et recousus. Vous vous en souvenez. Eh bien le cerveau dont je parle exerce sur le corps une influence de cet ordre. Il l'épouse et il l'épuise. Il ne lui permet pas de poser les yeux sur le monde, si ce n'est pour voir le cerveau partout sur le monde. Il révèle au corps ses capacités, et il les fait servir à s'éprendre des siennes. Il le rend amoureux de son fonctionnement, et le corps est plein de désir pour ses circonvolutions : le corps ne lève pas le petit doigt sans chercher l'approbation du cerveau. Il la cherche sans l'obtenir. Il interprète ce silence. Il se prend la tête dans les mains. Lui aussi il crie.

C'est un comble. C'est un comblement. C'est une joie. Ce n'est pas un gloussement. C'est une perfection dans le monde. Cette déchirure est une perfection dans le monde, elle est recousue. Ces cris sont une perfection dans le monde, ils ne cessent pas de chanter. Ce cerveau qui perfectionne ce corps, qui l'affaiblit en le renforçant, qui le blesse en le comblant, qui le renverse en l'exaltant est un individu charmant, qui vit d'une vie particulière et mystérieuse où règnent le baiser et son dégât. Qui a jamais regardé un cerveau ainsi je vous le demande. Celui-ci le fait. Si tous le faisaient, beaucoup trouveraient leur cerveau singulier. Bizarre et singulier. Beaucoup le trouveraient charmant. Beaucoup enlèveraient leur culotte en

disant cerveau j'enlève ma culotte afin que ta forme donne à la mienne sa vérité, beaucoup enlèveraient leur caleçon en disant cerveau, ce que te dit ma femme ou ma fille je te le dis, donne. Beaucoup agiraient selon des modalités qu'ils n'auraient pas apprises et que malgré leur dégoût, car ce sont des modalités dégoûtantes, ils continueraient d'adopter, et leur dégoût passerait comme avec du miel, en se déculottant. Comme lui, ils oublieraient. Ils ne verraient plus que leur félicité présente. Elle aurait tout effacé des malheurs anciens. Ils croiraient à leur bonheur. Ils en goûteraient l'intensité. Ils donneraient un dernier coup de pied à leur culotte pour qu'elle débarrasse tout à fait le plancher, pourquoi une culotte dans ce monde, mais pourquoi. Ou un boxer. Pourquoi. Penseraient-ils. Le plancher serait débarrassé. Tout serait miel et cire d'abeille. Puis le plancher, le beau plancher débarrassé des culottes sales tomberait car ce jour-là, ce même jour de la très belle exultation, de même que l'homme à la belle figure de puits artésien a décidé de quitter tous ceux que j'ai nommés, et auxquels il a fait ce que j'ai dit, le cerveau quitterait ce corps, ne lui laissant que le pantèlement et cet ahan, et han.

De même que Silvana, Massimo et les autres sont restés sur le perron comme deux ronds de flan, et désesparés, et encombrés de leurs bras embrassants, et se crevant les yeux à regarder s'éloigner ce puits dans lequel ils s'étaient tous jetés, dans lequel ils avaient tous jailli et qui avait jailli dans leur sang, en regardant ce véritable puits artésien s'en aller, qui s'en allait sans doute jaillir ailleurs après avoir mis en bonne forme des gens que leur bonne santé n'avait pas empêchés d'être malades, de même qu'ils sont restés

sur le perron à se frotter les paumes et le dos des mains, incapables d'autre chose, si longtemps incapables d'autre chose qu'ils se les frottaient beaucoup trop fort et que la plupart d'entre eux se griffaient comme pour se réveiller de cette sorte de catatonie collective d'où il aurait fallu sortir pour courir peut-être après l'homme qui allait disparaître derrière l'horizon, car il était peut-être encore temps de le rattraper, pour tenter de le convaincre de rester encore un peu, ne serait-ce qu'un jour ou deux, il avait tellement besoin de se reposer, on verrait si l'on ne pourrait pas s'arranger, la maison était grande, le domaine aussi, quand il avait dit au petit déjeuner après avoir mangé moins de la moitié d'un pain au lait qu'il allait partir peut-être espérait-il qu'on protesterait mieux qu'on n'a fait, espérait-il qu'on le retiendrait d'une façon explicite, que sous prétexte de respecter sa liberté on ne se tairait pas comme on a fait, c'était un silence à la réflexion parfaitement équivoque, même cet homme supérieur pouvait s'y méprendre et c'était sur cette équivoque peut-être qu'avait pris fin le séjour de cet homme supérieur à la belle figure, et avec lui cette période si pleine, mais si brève, qui se prolongerait bien sûr dans ses effets mais sans lui pour relancer cette dynamique, si le mot convient, lorsqu'elle retomberait, et c'est une crainte qui était bien entendu au cœur de chacun quand tous se tenaient sur le perron et sur la pointe des pieds, pour voir, ou essayer d'apercevoir dans la dernière lumière du crépuscule, très loin là-bas, la silhouette de cet homme considérable, mais ce n'était plus, sans doute, que l'une de ces ombres que crée l'imagination pour nous laisser croire que nous voyons encore ce qui a disparu, de même le corps

serait quitté. Par ce cerveau. Malgré la culotte. Ou plutôt l'absence de culotte. Ou de boxer.

Un gros ménippant qui se ramène le froc aux dents de rage, y trouverait à redire, s'appuyant sur certaines considérations pleines de finesse et même de sens pour rappeler cette maison à sa dignité première et chacun à sa place. Il y a pourtant des situations dont la beauté, comparée à la mocheté des autres, tient à distance les fulminations objurgantes autant qu'elle rapproche Vertumne de Pomone ; c'est ici le cas. Ce corps tout nu, qui ne vit que du mouvement que lui donna sa tête va, alors qu'il l'a perdue, accomplir des gestes époustouflants, des gestes si spirituels, si pleins de traits, de saillies, de pointes et de piques, que l'on cherchera de tous côtés le cerveau auquel on doit tant de merveilles, et puisqu'on ne le trouvera pas on lui prêtera une apparence et des dimensions presque aussi extraordinaires qu'elles le sont en effet. Puis ce corps, ayant donné tout ce qu'il pouvait donner et qu'il avait pris dans ce mouvement que lui avait donné le cerveau, pshittera, petit ballon vidé, flip, en se cognant flop à tous les murs petits et grands de ce doux monde.

Le Héros-type — ses paroles — première ou huitième station, je ne sais plus, il est si difficile à suivre

Ce n'est pas le jour.

C'est la nuit obscure, sur la plaine.

Mes yeux devinent de ce côté les montagnes que j'aime.

En face, ce sont les douces collines. C'est là que la bouche que j'aime remue ses belles lèvres.

Je ne l'entends pas, cela me cause une peine très grande.

Je marche dans sa direction sans m'en rapprocher.

Des jours et des jours, toutes ces nuits à marcher sans mieux l'entendre c'est une peine très grande.

De loin en loin je frappe le sol. Je ne suis pas frappé en retour dans cette nuit. Il n'y a pas une parole pour me frapper l'oreille. L'herbe est plus verte quand je frappe mais j'aime surtout la voix de mon ami dont l'or résonne dans l'air sec.

Si je ne l'avais pas je n'aurais rien dans ce monde.

Il tinte.

C'est la plus douce voix du monde.

Quand j'observe bien attentivement les mouvements de la bouche dans les arbres et que je demande à la mienne de les imiter, c'est comme si j'étais sourd et muet.

Je la vois mieux que beaucoup d'autres choses car elle est sombre sans dissimulation. C'est ainsi qu'elle perce la nuit. Elle n'est pas comme les autres choses.

Quand j'ausculte ma jambe et mon bras je comprends

que je ne suis pas partout présent dans mon corps. Quand mon cœur répond je ne le comprends pas. Quand j'interroge mon âme je ne comprends pas ce qu'elle est, je ne finis pas les questions que j'ai commencé de lui poser car je crains qu'elle ne me réponde pas ou avec un mépris marqué.

Il se fait des mouvements autour de moi, avec des hommes, avec des bêtes. Des femmes, en se jetant dans hue quand je dis hue me dégoûtent de le redire.

Si ce monde n'était pas composé de tant de choses nécessaires à sa conservation on pourrait couper dedans, histoire de le simplifier pour mieux le comprendre. Mais on ne peut supprimer que des choses accessoires, ça ne désencombre rien. Les choses nécessaires forment un tissu serré impossible à défaire. C'est comme si on essayait de couper du fer avec du sang. Alors tout est toujours aussi obscur.

Le jour est une autre nuit, qui porte un nom plus aimable. Quand je marche, c'est dans la nuit.

Ce monde ne permet pas qu'on le prive d'une seule chose nécessaire à son obscurité. Il ne permet pas que je parvienne jusqu'à la bouche dans les arbres. Il s'arrange pour me tenir loin d'elle, je ne sais comment il s'y prend.

Il faudrait je pense que je supprime du temps et de la douleur, mais sa totalité en est faite. C'est ne rien faire que d'enfoncer des parties de cette machine douloureuse qui ne doit pas guérir.

Puisque je n'ai pas avancé je m'arrête.

Je vois un oiseau à mes pieds.

Il ne bouge pas.

Il n'a pas de bec mais une bouche assez semblable à la

bouche dans les arbres.

Ce monde m'envoie cet oiseau qui me regarde et qui ne parlera pas.

Si sa bouche est aussi sombre que l'autre elle n'est pas plus rouge.

Un coup de marteau sur sa sale petite tête.

Tintement dans l'air sec.

L'herbe est tout de suite plus verte.