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## Faire-valoir et seconds couteaux Sidekicks and Underlings

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# ESSAIS

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## **Faire-valoir et seconds couteaux** *Sidekicks and Underlings*

Études réunies par Nathalie Jaëck et Jean-Paul Gabilliet

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En peignant le monde nous nous peignons nous-mêmes, et ce faisant ne peignons « pas l'être », mais « le passage »\*. Dialogues, enquêtes, les textes amicalement et expérimentalement réunis ici pratiquent activement la citation et la bibliothèque. Ils revendiquent sinon leur caractère fragmentaire, leur existence de processus, et leur perpétuelle évolution.

Créée sur l'impulsion de l'École Doctorale « Montaigne-Humanités » devenue depuis 2014 Université Bordeaux Montaigne, la revue *Essais* a pour objectif de promouvoir une nouvelle génération de jeunes chercheurs résolument tournés vers l'interdisciplinarité. *Essais* propose la mise à l'épreuve critique de paroles et d'objets issus du champ des arts, des lettres, des langues et des sciences humaines et sociales.

Communauté pluridisciplinaire et plurilingue (des traductions inédites sont proposées), la revue *Essais* est animée par l'héritage de Montaigne, qui devra être compris comme une certaine qualité de regard et d'écriture.

Parce que de Montaigne nous revendiquons cette capacité à s'exiler par rapport à sa culture et à sa formation, cette volonté d'étrangement qui produit un trouble dans la perception de la réalité et permet de décrire une autre scène où l'objet d'étude peut être sans cesse reformulé. Ce trouble méthodologique ne peut être disjoint d'une forme particulière d'écriture, celle, en effet, que Montaigne qualifie de façon étonnamment belle et juste d'« essai ».

Avec la revue *Essais* nous voudrions ainsi renouer avec une manière d'interroger et de raconter le monde qui privilégie l'inachevé sur le méthodique et l'exhaustif. Comme le rappelle Theodor Adorno (« L'essai comme forme », 1958), l'espace de l'essai est celui d'un anachronisme permanent, pris entre une « science organisée » qui prétend tout expliquer et un besoin massif de connaissance et de sens qui favorise, plus encore aujourd'hui, les formes d'écriture et de communication rapides, lisses et consensuelles.

Écriture à contrecourant, l'essai vise à restaurer dans notre communauté et dans nos sociétés le droit à l'incertitude et à l'erreur, le pouvoir qu'ont les Humanités de formuler des vérités complexes, dérangeantes et paradoxales. Cette écriture continue et spéculaire, en questionnement permanent, semble seule à même de constituer un regard humaniste sur un monde aussi bigarré que relatif, où « chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage ».

C'est ainsi qu'alternent dans cette « marqueterie mal jointe », numéros monographiques et variés, développements et notes de lecture, tous également *essais* et en dialogue, petit chaos tenant son ordre de lui-même.

**Le Comité de Rédaction**

\* Toutes les citations sont empruntées aux *Essais* (1572-1592) de Michel de Montaigne.





**Faire-valoir  
et seconds couteaux**  
*Sidekicks and Underlings*

Dossier coordonné par

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**Dossier**



# Sidekicking the sidekick: from a reassuring stable position to a disturbing narrative process

## Introduction

Nathalie Jaëck

What is quite remarkable, when one considers the following collection of essays dealing with sidekicks and underlings in English-language literature, film, popular culture and history, is that none of the favourite usual suspects turn up –with the notable exception perhaps of Tonto to the Lone Ranger in the article written by Lionel Larré and Aaron Carr. No long-enduring Watson to domineering Sherlock, no Robin to Batman, no Ron Weasley to Harry Potter, no Hastings to Poirot, no Tinker Bell to Peter Pan, not even a passing tribute to prototypical Sancho Panza, *in memoriam*. While one could expect the present volume to characterize the figure of the sidekick, to list their typical characteristics through a telling choice of worthy representatives and an inventory of case-studies, the articles frustratingly side-track expectations and certainly do not read as a reference gallery of the most impressive sidekicks and their collective idiosyncrasies.

While one might expect to find in this volume an academic version of the best-selling *The Official Sidekick Handbook. How to unleash your inner second banana and find true happiness*, where the pair Too Slim and Texas Bix Bender list what it takes to be a perfect sidekick<sup>1</sup>, the different authors thwart easy anticipations, and, each in their respective fields, insist upon questioning obvious characteristics and hierarchies about sidekicks.

Crucially, instead of considering the figure of the sidekick as an identifiable stable position to be circumscribed in detail in order to celebrate these familiar “fool figures in the traditional Shakespearean sense” (Roof 14), the authors

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1 In this funny handbook, which basically constitutes an adequate example of the nature of most of the literature on the subject, the authors list elements that have come to constitute our basic shared idea of what a proper sidekick should be –as indeed there are rules to be an adequate, validated sidekick. Among these pieces of advice, one can read such valuable elements as: “Become one with the wallpaper. If your hero has an awkward or embarrassing moment, you disappear.” (78); “Be the butt of the joke” (83), in Too Slim & Texas Bix Bender. *The Official Sidekick Handbook. How to unleash your inner second banana and find true happiness*. Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2011.



all explore the ambiguous, mobile and strategic dynamics of such hierarchies. They collectively illustrate how highly unstable the admitted positions are, how they are indeed quite often ironic pretexts to inversions of power. Beyond mere patterns of inversion, they also highlight the mobility that marks these seemingly static pairs and explore the multiple dynamics of these positions. Most importantly, they demonstrate that the sidekick is not so much a typical fixed form, a conservative reproduction of hackneyed and easily listed reassuring functions (comic relief, help to the hero, glorification of his power, truthfulness and permanence<sup>2</sup>), as rather a destabilizing force at work.

Endowed with seeming harmlessness, with the “quality of unnoticeableness” (Roof 14), they are able to disturb and subvert dominant modes, to propose alternative narratives, the more so efficient indeed as they seem so easy to discard, or to be patronized over. The following papers are thus different illustrations of the fact that “while the sidekick is almost always subservient to the main character, it enriches and complicates every narrative through which it rides” (Cameron 1).

Decisively, they also analyse the critical links between narration and the *production* of sidekicks: reading the collection of essays, it becomes obvious that the authors are interested in sidekicking as a process, in as much as it is often a product of discourse. They analyse how some populations, some classes, some genders are deliberately sidekicked, placed in a subservient, secondary and minor position –or alternately how they can decide to sidekick themselves, in order to occupy a sort of unassuming back base, as harmless decoys: they deliberately choose to operate from this inconspicuous off-centre position in order to subvert the major mode of the narration or of the institution they are supposed to serve and glorify. They can also decide to “unsidekick” themselves and to claim prominence and power, like the heiresses to Biblical female characters in the contemporary British novels analysed in Ewa Rychter’s paper.

More than sidekicks then, more than the reassuring static figures that take part in a binary hierarchical organization and people our imagination with unassuming endearing characters, the present volume defines sidekicking as a tactical activity and dissenting process.

Binary pairs become not only deceitful but also eminently mobile; duality gives way to multiplicity as sidekicks uncannily grow and multiply, until they completely dispense with the necessity of a centre; sidekicking is dealt with essentially as a production of discourse, and the major contribution of this volume is probably to be found in the exploration of the links between sidekicks and narration.

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2 In his Preface to *Sidekicks in American Literature* by Ann Cameron (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), Alan T. McKenzie insists that Sancho Panza is the vivid matrix of such a static conception of sidekicks: “Sancho Panza is a convenient and fruitful prototype as he served most of the various narrative functions the sidekick could fulfil: messenger, agent, explainer, sounding board, mentor, articulator of alternative (and often more sensible) values, comic relief, or butt (and thus receiver of arrows, blows or kicks), devil’s advocate, and, most importantly, grounder in realism.” (ii)

In her article, “A working class hero’s sidekick is something to be’: sidekicks and underlings in British social realist cinema (1956-2014)”, Anne-Lise Marin-Lamellet demonstrates, through a sweeping analysis of over twenty films, the vital importance of the presence of the sidekick for the working class hero in contemporary British films. She links that crucial presence both to the genre of social realist cinema and to the notion of class, highlighting that the significance of the sidekick cannot be separated from genre expectations and from class structures. It becomes obvious that the sidekick is produced and determined by overhanging structures, and serves an ideological function: in the British working class as it is pictured in these films, dispensing with the typical obedient sidekick in order to replace him with a multiplicity of equals amounts to dispensing with typical hierarchies by processes of levelling and companionship. Indeed, far from being a mere underling or foil, the sidekick often proves to be more of a double or a partner in the couple he constitutes with the hero. Even more importantly, the ranked individual relationship emblemized by the hero/sidekick couple is dissolved into group dynamics and solidarities, as these films pluralise sidekicks: the hero is then just the “first among equals” in a group of multiple sidekicks, and such a move is of course to be interpreted as an alternative to strategies of domination, as a praise of collaboration, collective action and solidarity.

Marin-Lamellet’s analysis insists that this process of multiplication is part of a wider modern phenomenon, and indeed, sidekicks and underlings are gradually gaining ground in fiction and film, they occupy centre stage and quite often dispense with the domineering figure of the hero. In some instances, particularly among contemporary popular genre fiction, the hero is so amounting sidekicked that he actually becomes kicked to the side, and nearly a comical relic. The buddy movies of Judd Apatow often stage such funny cohorts of highly endearing pathetic sidekicks that pluralise and colonise the elected space of the hero. In many contemporary superhero movies, the typical hero/sidekick pair, as in prototypical Batman/Robin, is replaced by a palatable collection of multiple sidekicks that people the movies, and break with the convention of the unique hero endowed with a foil. In the *X-Men* series or in *The Fantastic Four*, hierarchy is replaced by collaboration among equals, while, on a more parodic mode, in *Guardians of the Galaxy*, a 2014 American movie directed by James Gunn, Gamora, Drax the Destroyer, Groot the tree-like humanoid and Rocket the genetically engineered raccoon team up to mock the heroic pretensions of Star Lord. Sidekicks are there obviously no longer defined as the lesser character in a pair, but as the central multiple focus, the hero being radically done up with in his own very sanctuary—a oxymoronic superhero movie without a hero.

Marin-Lamellet’s paper is interesting to contrast with Carr and Larré’s *Indian Sidekicks and American Identity*. They show precisely what strategies of domination are at work in a genre—the Hollywood movies featuring Indians—

that insists on maintaining the role of the sidekick and on assigning that role to specific populations. It is quite clear in their paper how the role of the sidekick in such films is pre-coded by racial expectations as to what kind of people should be maintained in the circumscribed and secondary role of the sidekick. The sidekick is then manipulated as a defining and discriminative category, with an obvious political agenda –a way to minorize minorities, to maintain them in a hierarchically inferior position. Native American actors are relegated to playing sidekicks, static characters forcing the Indians into the stereotypes associated to them by Western representations, while non-Indian actors are employed to portray the full-blown heroes, which obviously conditions expectations and manipulates identities— typically the very controversial choice of Johnny Depp as Native American warrior Tonto in Gore Verbinski's *The Lone Ranger* in 2013. The paper also shows how the category has recently acquired some mobility, through an analysis of over a dozen movies. The authors demonstrate how the evolution of Indian characters in Hollywood from villains to sidekicks may be a way for mainstream America to bring into the fold the Indians who, contrary to what was hoped and/or expected, did not vanish, and also to come to terms with that part of their own identity –a process of gradual incorporation perhaps, a way to internalize a duality in the self, and pave the way for a reflexion on the notion of American identity.

Larré and Carr's paper finds two echoes in the present volume –one that develops the purely American side of the issue by concentrating on the dynamics of relegation and power at work in the character that can be considered as the United States' super sidekick, the Vice-President, and one that develops the role of the sidekick in the constitution of the self.

The papers by Pierre-Marie Loizeau and Christopher Griffin, both of which deal with the American Vice-Presidency, provide invaluable analysis about the use and functioning of that institutional sidekick position, and contribute to highlight the multiple and mobile strategies of power that are at work in that seemingly static pair –though they also hint at the potential artificiality of the role play. In this context, Loizeau examines the sidekick as an institutional position, as a status, beyond the individuals that have occupied it; he highlights the subservient role of that function, in which the Vice-President is not a second in command, but literally a sidekick, a “running mate” not chosen as for himself but as part of the package deal, as part of the presidential ticket. Loizeau shows how the Vice-President is a tricky identity, cornered between the unique President and the multiplicity of advisers who organize and reorganize in a more dynamic way. He crucially highlights how an official sidekick can hide a more underground one, by developing the “case of triangulation” specific to the Clinton presidency when Hilary Clinton, the First Lady, not mentioned in the Constitution, not elected, not remunerated, nonetheless side-tracked the Vice-President, and relegated him to third rank. Yet, though

Griffin agrees that historically, the American Vice-President has had very little power in foreign and defence policy, despite his seat on the National Security Council, he proves that since 2000, the Vice-President has become much more visible as a powerful member of the executive branch. He examines the two cases of Dick Cheney who, after the election of George W. Bush, rapidly became one of the most important, if not the most important single person in the formulation of foreign policy, and of Joe Biden who, with extensive experience on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as well as a certain expertise in terrorism and Homeland Security, seemed at least on the surface to follow Cheney's example in foreign and defence policy. Beyond the valuable information both articles provide about the American Vice-Presidency, the authors highlight the ambivalence of the position of the sidekick –both a space of relegation and a potentially empowering back base, the more so efficient as it seems unobtrusive.

In his paper on several *Frankenstein* movies, *It's alive and (side-)kicking! Frankenstein's double acts*, Jean-François Baillon concentrates on the other aspect of Larré and Carr's paper, exploring the role of sidekicks in representations of the self, defining the sidekick as a potentiality of the hero, as a sort of inner double –an “insidekick” to take up Baillon's brilliant shortcut. While in Mary Shelley's novel, published in 1818, Victor Frankenstein works on his own in his lab, the many movie adaptations or parodies examined by Baillon have obsessively insisted on endowing the scientist with a sidekick. In the process, the sidekicks are not so much opposed foils as expressions of the characters' inner duality: sidekicks then become ways to highlight the different aspects of the personality of the hero, they redouble the identity of Frankenstein, highlight and develop possible streaks. A character in search of a sidekick to better circumscribe himself –or to be allowed the many developments that he does not and cannot recognize as his own, in a sort of Jekyll and Hyde pattern.

The reflexion on identity is further developed in Laurence Machet and Lee Schweininger's paper, *“Billy walked and I rode: John and William Bartram Roam the World Over”* in which they illustrate the fact that sidekicks are necessary to constructions of the self, and that as such, they are also products of partial narrations of the self. Machet and Schweininger focus on two complementary travel accounts of the same expedition –one by a father, one by a son, where the respective positions as hero and sidekick are proved to depend upon who holds the pen. In 1765, John Bartram (1699-1777), an American-born naturalist that had been commissioned to lead an expedition in order to chart Florida, which Great Britain had recently acquired from Spain, convinced his twenty-six-year-old son William (1739-1823) to accompany him. As the authors examine the expedition through the father and son's respective travel accounts, they come to the conclusion that the sidekick is in fact a product of narration, a function of discourse: just as the “self” or the “I” of the narrative is “a construct, a



persona, not the person” (Barros 20), the sidekick is more a *persona* than a character, a useful projection to secure the self. In other words, characters may be sidekicked by others, forced into the persona of the sidekick in order to glorify themselves, and the confrontation of these two accounts is quite telling about the reversibility of the process: the constructed personae and resultant “characters” in the respective travel accounts render John’s son William through his father’s sometimes humorous accounts a sort of sidekick on what is very much the *father’s* exploratory journey. Conversely, William presents a persona in his own first-person travel account (1791) that is very much that of the hero.

That sidekicking is a narrative process more than a stable objective position, and that the narrator has got virtually all power in manipulating and stabilizing these dynamics is also developed in Paris’s paper about the respective positions of Sam and Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. As the subject leading the quest, Frodo is typically presented as the hero and Sam as the sidekick, literally “by his side”, a complement to the hero: ““But I don’t think you need to go alone. Not if you know of anyone you can trust, and who would be willing to go by your side –and that you would be willing to go by your side– and that you would be willing to take into unknown perils.”” (*The Lord of the Rings* I, 2) But Paris shows that tables are turned by the fact that Sam becomes the narrator, and decides to cast himself in the persona of the helper –to sidekick himself. As for the Bartrams, the sidekick becomes a strategic position to be either delegated or occupied, according to one’s own agenda and priorities– indeed, Sam’s success as a narrator depends upon his glorification of Frodo, in his ability to repeat a very efficient narrative stereotype and to please the readers accustomed to the code; casting himself in the position of the faithful dependable sidekick may also be a way to disguise his own thirst for power.

The process described by Paris is indeed similar to one of the essential characteristics of the Holmes/Watson famous prototypical pair: Watson definitely fits the costume of the sidekick to perfection, but that immensely enjoyable static distribution of roles is cunningly complicated by the fact that Watson is the narrator indeed. Though his narrative status could totally enable him to enhance his own role in the resolution of their cases, he systematically underplays it, masochistically minimizing himself, an “I” with no ego. His narration aims at glorifying Holmes’s brilliance, and at undermining his own role in the stories: he casts himself as the incompetent though well-meaning sidekick, wallowing in his own deficiencies, and loses no occasion to solidify for the readers the necessary respective roles. Sidekicking himself becomes a very efficient narrative strategy, enabling him both to dazzle the reader with the exploits of his hero-character, and to flatter his sense of superiority by confronting him with an acolyte that is seemingly on the dumb side –himself. Such self-effacing manipulation of the function of the sidekick is totally jubilatory, and illustrates another facet of sidekicking as a narrative strategy.

In his paper, “Subverting sidekicks—inversions and instability in Kem Nunn’s *Tapping the Source*”, Jeffrey Swartwood focuses on documenting and beginning to qualify the sidekick roles within Kem Nunn’s Surf Noire narrative, *Tapping the Source*. Within that emerging genre, it becomes obvious that the dissenting use of leading and secondary figures provides a tentative framework that leaves traditional structures askew. Nunn breaks the character codes of loyalty and hierarchy, as he redistributes and multiplies the roles of sidekicks along different rules than the ones reiterated by the long-standing literary code of by-the-book sidekicks. On top of analyzing processes of inversion and multiplication, Swartwood opens a new interesting line of analysis: in *Tapping the Source* it is not only the characters that are engaged in a constant unstable redistribution of roles. The sense of insecurity and disorientation is increased by the fact that the several narrative levels themselves disturb their own hierarchy: what seemed to be the major plot is likely to be overrun, overwritten by a secondary plot that takes over, and that suddenly reshuffles the statuses, not only of the characters but of the embedded plots themselves. According to successive viewpoints and to the evolving relative importance of some plots over others, the sidekick becomes what we could call a shared and iridescent status that can be distributed at random, and no longer a meaningful reassuring hierarchy.

In his paper “Les égarés de la narration dans *Neverwhere* de Neil Gaiman” (“Lost in Narration in Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*”), Aurélien Royer proposes in a similar way that the sidekicks there might well be heroes caught in the wrong stories; he develops the idea that the sidekick figure is not so much relative to that of the hero, as to generic rules and narrative habits, to conventions and choices. There again, Royer is faced with sidekicks that are both proliferating and flamboyant: the young hero, a rather bland unexceptional character at first, caught in the literary tradition of the bildungsroman and acquiring his status very progressively, is characterized against a gallery of colourful helpers that constantly pop up in the novel, minor but all wonderful, secondary but highly striking. It reads as if they had escaped from their own individual stories and temporarily relinquished central roles to be willing accessories to another’s story. Reading clues to a missing intertextuality, they hint at the existence of other texts, of other versions—we could say that they read as quotes or extracts that enhance a text that is only *provisionally* the major text. *Neverwhere* thus highlights the essential arbitrariness and temporariness of such fixations: it only takes a shift in the narration to subvert seemingly solid hierarchies. In *Neverwhere*, sidekicks occupy a highly dynamic textual middle and alternative: they are there to support the major story, the major mode of the text, but they also hint at other alternative stories, they open lines of escape in radically different directions. They illustrate Roof’s position that “minor characters hint at the possibility of multiple entrances to a text and a wandering away from organization, structure.” (Roof 5) They de-concentrate the text, and are also there to value what is eccentric, marginal, outside,

collateral, and to forcefully insist that there are possible alternatives to the major narration. Their function is to prevent meaning from completely settling, from being stabilized, and to hint at other possible versions of the text. In *Neverwhere*, the several sidekicks are thus both useful detours, comforting the central narration by performing the typical function of helpers, and threatening short-circuits, as “the minor often provides the elements that clash, undermine, or undo any sense of textual unity or consistency”. (Roof 6)

On this subject, Ewa Rychter strikes a very impressive note. In “We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth.” Re-writing Biblical Women in Contemporary British Novels”, she details how several contemporary British novels rewrite the *Bible* in ways that reverse and re-distribute the roles played by men and women in the authoritative hypotext narrative. Analysis J. Diski’s *Only Human: A Comedy* (2000) and *After These Things* (2004), C. Toibin’s *The Testament of Mary* (2012), and M. Roberts’s *The Wild Girl* (1984) and *The Book of Mrs Noah* (1987) she shows how the nameless wife of Noah, as well as Sarah (Abraham’s wife), Rebecca (Isaac’s wife), Mary (Jesus’ mother) and Mary Magdalene shed their traditional status as underlings and mere sidekicks to their husbands, and come to dominate the narrative, tossing the male heroes into the background. On top of highlighting such a militant reversal that is of course to be interpreted in terms of gender politics, Rychter’s analysis shows how the *Bible*, the ultimate prototypical authoritative text, is dethroned and used as a mere literary sidekick by these contemporary writers: the heroic reference is dealt with as a simple quote to be questioned –sidekicking the conservative *Bible* for the sake of reformative fiction. Taking the example of the *Bible* and its gendered patriarchal distribution of roles, Rychter further illustrates that from the beginnings of narration, sidekicking has been a textual effect aiming at maintaining hierarchies –and that it can be undone. These contemporary novels not only fight back for the rehabilitation and empowering of these sidekicked female characters; they also propose a dissident rewriting, a narrative mutation.

If one is thus to generalize from this collection of essays, it seems that the reassuring narrations of typical sidekicks are up and done with: the sense of order and reproduction they flattered seems to have lived, the individual recognizable static figures seem to yield under multiple anonymous peer pressure and these stable stories are now quoted to be used as mere narrative sidekicks to other more dissident narratives, manipulated as static parodies to be questioned. If Watson, Robin *and Co* still come to mind after reading the volume, it is now partly as static endearing relics of a narrative mode that has grown much more diverse, and that has explored its potential for subversion.

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# De « Sidekicks and Underlings » à « Faire-valoir et seconds couteaux » : remarques sémantiques

## Avant-propos

Jean-Paul Gabilliet

La thématique de ce numéro d'ESSAIS, « Faire-valoir et seconds couteaux », est la « traduction » française de l'intitulé du colloque organisé en octobre 2014 à l'Université Bordeaux Montaigne par l'équipe CLIMAS, « Sidekicks and Underlings ».

Formulé initialement en anglais, le titre de la manifestation a posé un certain nombre de problèmes quand est venu le moment d'en proposer une traduction. Si *sidekicks* et *underlings* sont pour des locuteurs anglophones des termes relativement univoques, leur transposition n'est pas une tâche facile dans la mesure où ces deux substantifs s'inscrivent chacun dans un champ sémantique qui s'ajuste imparfaitement à des équivalents français.

*Sidekick* émerge d'une inextricable brume étymologique au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle en anglais américain. La page Wikipedia qui y est consacrée retient une origine issue de l'argot des pickpockets selon laquelle le terme renvoyait à la poche de devant dans un manteau ou un pantalon (par opposition à la poche arrière, qualifiée en anglais de « poche de hanche », *hip pocket*) ; cette poche étant la plus difficile d'accès pour un pickpocket, elle était assimilée au meilleur ami de la victime potentielle.<sup>1</sup> Dans son dictionnaire d'argot américain, Robert L. Chapman propose deux autres origines : une dérivation de *sidekicker*, lui-même issu de *kicker*, qui désigne la carte finale donnant la victoire dans une partie de cartes ; ou une allusion au compare qui, dans un combat, donne des coups de pied (*kick*) par le côté (*side*) là où le combattant principal les donne par devant.<sup>2</sup> Si on se souvient, par ailleurs, que *kick* désigne en menuiserie une pièce de bois qui en soutient une autre, s'ouvre une nouvelle piste qui embrouille davantage la recherche.

Devant le caractère labyrinthique de la piste étymologique, il est préférable de se rabattre sur la piste sémantique : tous les dictionnaires de la langue anglaise s'entendent à définir *sidekick* comme un compagnon qui est parte-

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1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidekick> (consulté le 18 août 2015).

2 Robert L. Chapman (ed.), *American Slang* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 399 p.



naire et/ou subordonné. C'est de cette ambiguïté que procède le problème de traduction en français : acolyte, assistant, associé, auxiliaire, comparse, compère, complice... – tous ces noms gravitent autour de *sidekick* sans le transposer de manière satisfaisante. Aucun d'eux n'est porteur de l'exacte ambivalence sémantique (partenaire *et/ou* subordonné) qui confère au substantif anglais la valeur notionnelle large permettant de faire entrer dans une même rubrique le Sancho Panza de Don Quichotte, le Catalinon (Sganarelle, Leporello, etc.) de Don Juan, le Watson de Sherlock Holmes, le Robin de Batman, le Bérurier de San-Antonio, etc.

Simultanément, tous relèvent en français de la catégorie générale du *faire-valoir*, personnage de rang deux dont la fonction est de faire ressortir les caractéristiques profondes, aussi bien positives que négatives, du personnage de rang un. On pourra objecter à bon droit que « faire-valoir » a un équivalent anglais : *foil*, issu du vieux français *fueille* (qui a donné *feuille*), qualifie à partir du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle une fine feuille de métal puis, à partir du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les feuilles métalliques sur lesquelles sont présentées les pierres précieuses pour faire ressortir leur éclat.

Au bout du compte, *sidekicks* et faire-valoir renvoient bien aux mêmes personnages. Ils *repèrent* le héros au moyen d'une détermination spatiale : le *sidekick*, qui se situe par définition sur le *côté*, contribue à construire l'*espace central* occupé par le protagoniste, de la même façon que le faire-valoir qui, si l'on suit la racine étymologique de *foil*, se situe en arrière du protagoniste (auquel la position en avant confère sa centralité). Comme quoi la dialectique centre-périphérie est une stratégie fort ancienne et infiniment répandue de mise en scène des personnages au sein de toutes les espèces narratives.

Et *underling* dans tout ça ? À l'inverse de *sidekick*, c'est un terme dont l'histoire est clairement attestée : apparu au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle, il désigne en moyen anglais un valet, laquais, etc. En anglais contemporain, le terme a pris la connotation négative d'un inférieur hiérarchique au libre arbitre limité, prêt à exécuter tous les ordres qui lui sont donnés ; son synonyme le plus proche est *minion*, terme récemment remis à la mode par des personnages de dessin animé à succès. D'où la traduction finalement choisie, « second couteau » : tant pour le *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* que pour le *Petit Larousse illustré*, l'expression renvoie aux seconds rôles du théâtre (alors que l'anglais, pour l'image équivalente, emprunte sa métaphore au domaine musical en parlant de *second fiddle*, « deuxième violon ») et, par extension, désigne un comparse. Dans l'usage français, l'expression véhicule clairement une idée d'infériorité dans un ordre ou une hiérarchie, connotation absente a priori de « faire-valoir ».

Au final, « faire-valoir et seconds couteaux », tout comme « sidekicks and underlings », couvre un large spectre de seconds rôles : de ceux qui contribuent directement à la construction des protagonistes jusqu'aux hallebardiers qui traversent le scène ou aux « porte-flingues » qui décèdent par cohortes dans les films d'action !

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# “We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth”. Re-writing Biblical Women in Contemporary British Novels

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This paper discusses the way four contemporary re-writings of the Bible –Jenny Diski’s *Only Human: A Comedy* (2000) and *After These Things: A Novel* (2004), Michèle Roberts’s *The Wild Girl* (1984) and *The Book of Mrs Noah* (1987)– re-imagine their Bible-derived women characters. It also examines some strategies these novels use to change the asymmetrical men-women relationships established in the biblical hypotext. The idea through which I want to open the interpretation of these novels is that the Bible is an androcentric (male-centred) text, which devotes more of its space to stories of men, relegating women to men-dependent positions and reducing them to ancillary and marginal characters. Though in the course of my argument this initial idea will be modified, refined and revised, it will help to bring into focus what will later emerge as complex, if not ambivalent, relationships between the Bible and women characters.

As Esther Fuchs argues, women in biblical narratives are “men-related ciphers who appear as secondary characters in a male drama”<sup>1</sup>. In their standard roles of mothers, brides, wives, daughters and sisters –labelled by Fuchs “gynotypes”<sup>2</sup>– biblical women are defined by their relationships with males. Mother-figures –relatively the strongest women characters in the Bible– are routinely subordinated to the task of sustaining patrilinear continuity, giving birth to a son, after which they are whisked out of the narrative, dying either a mimetic or diegetic death. As wives, women are “objective correlatives”<sup>3</sup> of different phases in their husbands’ lives and careers. As daughters and sisters, they are shown as dependent on their male relatives, who tend to dominate even those narratives in which women suffer the most. All gyno-

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1 Fuchs Esther, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2003, p. 11.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 172.

types are restricted in their possibilities of delivering speeches or narrating events. Biblical women characters most often function as objects (or even male property) rather than subjects of actions. Their reactions, thoughts and feelings are rarely mentioned—a phenomenon noticeable even in the context of the famous biblical reticence about human motivations or internal struggles. As Fuchs sums up, “in its final representation the biblical text reduces women to auxiliary roles, suppresses their voices and minimizes their national and religious significance”<sup>4</sup>.

The contemporary re-writings of the Bible on which I want to focus remove biblical women characters from the shadows of their male counterparts and put them in the spotlight. Far more than mere “enablers”<sup>5</sup> or foils, women in Roberts’s and Diski’s novels function as primary characters, strong subjects and focalizers or narrators. Thus, in Diski’s novels—both of which re-write the Genesis stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel—women dominate and/or frame the narratives. While the Bible “virtually nullifies”<sup>6</sup> women’s independent point of view, Diski’s novels devote much space to the presentation of their motivations, plans, opinions. For most of their length, the novels focus on actions of the biblical matriarchs, their complex inner life, showing full range of their emotions (hopes, love, desolation, bitterness, depression, despair, rage). Unlike in the Bible, in Diski Sarai does not disappear from the text having fulfilled her maternal role, but *decides* to leave Abram after the Binding-of-Isaac episode. Diski emphasises her women characters’ freedom to choose, and their special knowledge and household power. It is Sarai who knows the truth about God—his act of creation and destruction, his capriciousness and divisiveness—of which Abram is completely ignorant, and it is she who is God’s true “rival”<sup>7</sup>, reducing Abram to a mere object between her powerful will and the will of Abram’s Lord. Rebekah utterly dominates her simultaneously gross and whimpering “ghost-beast”<sup>8</sup> of a husband, shown as mentally and physically incapacitated by his near death at the hands of his father Abraham. Also, *Only Human* is structured as a clash between two narratives interrupting, correcting and warring with each other—“her story”<sup>9</sup> in free indirect discourse and God’s first person narrative. If to narrate is “to presuppose a measure of authority”<sup>10</sup>, *Only Human* repositions the woman from the object of reporting to the one who shapes, if not creates, her narrative world.

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4 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

6 Fuchs Esther, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

7 Diski Jenny, *Only Human: A Comedy*, London, Virago Press, 2000, p. 145.

8 Diski Jenny, *After These Things: A Novel*, London, Little, Brown, 2004, p. 43.

9 Diski Jenny, *Only Human*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

10 Fuchs Esther, *op. cit.*, p. 95.



In Michèle Roberts's *The Wild Girl* and *The Book of Mrs Noah*, women are no longer home-bound underlings or passive listeners to men's (or God's) words, but leading prophetesses, preachers or miracle-workers. In *The Book of Mrs Noah*, it is Noah's wife's dream of the oncoming catastrophe that spurs Noah (Jack in the novel) to consult “his” God and to start preparations for the flood. It is her interpretation of the rainbow that Noah/Jack later ascribes to his God, which she comments wryly, “your God is just copying me”<sup>11</sup>. Also, it is Noah's wife who invents writing and the first script<sup>12</sup>. In *The Wild Girl*, Mary –a literate woman surrounded by illiterate men– is entrusted with the task of writing down an account of Jesus' teaching and her prophetic visions. In both novels, women are depicted as independent and autonomous in their decisions about the type of sex life they want to have, and about the type of life they prefer in the future (in the case of Noah's wife, it is life without her family; in the case of Mary Magdalene, it is a mission outside her original community). Also, Roberts emphasises her women characters' special relationship with the divine –Noah's wife's bond with an immanent, world-tied God, and Mary Magdalene's status of Jesus' chosen companion, whose spiritual and sexual relationship with the Lord is hailed by Jesus himself as an image of the sacred marriage between God's feminine and masculine aspects and an icon of the true sense of resurrection.

Notwithstanding these examples of women underlings raised to superior positions and advanced to the roles of primary characters, the idea that the four novels by Diski and Roberts merely reverse the hierarchy preferred by the Bible suppresses the complexity with which these re-writings engage with the biblical text. Neither Diski nor Roberts are naïve enough to believe that the simple change of places within the otherwise unaltered hierarchic thinking about sexes can be anything but a repetition of patriarchal mentality. As an alleged corrective to androcentrism, gynocentrism would actually imitate what it meant to improve<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, neither Diski nor Roberts perceive the Bible as a *simply* androcentric text. Rather –like some feminist biblical scholars (to whom I will refer in a moment) who disagree with Esther Fuchs's single-minded description of the Bible as out-and-out sexist– they stay tuned in to the Bible's many intricacies, which in the long run complicate, or momentarily suspend, its androcentric effect. As an exceedingly complex, heteroglot, even contradictory text –more of a library than a unified book<sup>14</sup>– the Bible does not offer a

11 Roberts Michèle, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, London, Minerva, 1993 [1987], p. 77.

12 For King, this is a vital motif in the novel, through which Roberts reclaims women's power to shape the symbolic order and represents their will to achieve autonomy (King Jeanette, *Women and the Word. Contemporary Women and the Bible*, London, Macmillan, 2000, p. 45, 54).

13 See Irigaray Luce, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca & New York, Cornell UP, 1985, p. 33.

14 For more on the heterogeneity and polyvocality of Bible, see e.g., Timothy Beal, *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*, Boston & New York,

perfectly homogeneous perception of femininity. For Mieke Bal, though the main tenor of the Bible is patriarchal and androcentric, “there are traces of a *problematization* of man’s priority and domination. [...] Dominators have, first, to establish their position, then to safeguard it. [...] Traces of the painful process of gaining control can therefore be perceived in [...] biblical] myths”<sup>15</sup>. A similar conclusion is reached by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who –like Bal– rejects both apologetic approaches to the Bible (i.e., those that seek to de-patriarchalize it) and condemnatory interpretations à la Fuchs. As Fiorenza contends, “On the one hand, the Bible is written in androcentric language, has its origin in the patriarchal cultures of antiquity, and has functioned throughout history to inculcate androcentric and patriarchal values. On the other hand, the Bible has also served to inspire and authorize women and other nonpersons<sup>16</sup> in their struggles against patriarchy”<sup>17</sup>. Arguing in the same vein, Ilana Pardes observes that in the Bible the dominant patriarchal discourses intersect with women’s counter-voices, or “antithetical female voices”<sup>18</sup>. For a group of scholars, some of these female counter-voices belong to women authors or editors, who participated in writing and/or redaction of the biblical texts<sup>19</sup>. In his sensational and stimulating, if over-simplified<sup>20</sup>, “imaginative surmise”<sup>21</sup>, Harold Bloom claims the earliest strand of the Hebrew Bible –the Yahwistic Document (abbreviated as J)– was written by an aristocratic woman, the ultimate strong poet.

Far from simply reversing or undoing biblical androcentrism and patriarchy, Diski’s and Roberts’s novels engage in complex and subtle relationship with the Bible, whose polyvocality they tacitly acknowledge. In their

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Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011, or McConnell Frank, “Introduction”, *The Bible and the Narrative*, Frank McConnell (ed.), New York, Oxford UP, 1986, p. 3-18.

- 15 Bal Mieke, *Lethal Love. Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana UP, 1987, p. 110.
- 16 The problem of the tension between the repressive and emancipatory dimensions of the Bible has been famously expounded by Ernst Bloch. For Bloch, the Bible contains two Scriptures: one, only vestigial because repressed, speaks for the underprivileged, the excluded non-persons; the other Scripture, much stronger, speaks against the poor and serves the purposes of the rich, the exploiters and “the drudge-merchants” (Bloch Ernst, *Atheism in Christianity. The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, London & New York, Verso, 2009, p. 8).
- 17 Schüssler Fiorenza Elizabeth, “Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of The Woman’s Bible”, in *Searching the Scriptures. Volume One: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001, p. 5.
- 18 Pardes Ilana, *Countertraditions in the Bible. A Feminist Approach*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, Harvard UP, 1993, p. 11.
- 19 See e.g., Schüssler Fiorenza Elizabeth, *But She Said. Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1992, p. 28.
- 20 For a balanced criticism of Bloom’s claims about J, see Pardes Ilana, *Countertraditions in the Bible. A Feminist Approach*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, Harvard UP, 1993, p. 33-37.
- 21 Bloom Harold, *The Book of J*, New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1990. p. 11.

re-writings, they work out a multifaceted response to biblical heterogeneity, a response which I propose to discuss with the help of Schüssler Fiorenza’s (somewhat modified) four-part model of feminist biblical interpretation. Admittedly, the model is not the only one available –on the one hand, Fiorenza herself offers a ten-part alternative; on the other hand, there are models devised by non-biblical scholars, focusing on women’s literary revision of myths, of the Bible and other authoritative texts<sup>22</sup>. Fiorenza’s four-part model, however, has the advantage of embracing both the purely corrective and imaginative aspects of women’s biblical re-writings, and those elements of their revisionary texts which neither demystify the Bible nor create its new narrative components, but which –gleaned from the biblical text and stitched together– explore and test the emancipatory potential of their re-visioned hypotext. The first three strategies in Fiorenza’s model are: the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of remembrance and the hermeneutics of imagination. To better fit Fiorenza’s model to my discussion of literary re-writings of the Bible, her last strategy –the hermeneutics of proclamation– will be modified and renamed as the hermeneutics of weakening.

Proceeding via an ever repeated, dance-like<sup>23</sup>, non-linear movement through the four strategies, women’s re-writings of the Bible function as shifting and flexible texts, able to cope with many different challenges posed by the patriarchal elements of the Bible. The hermeneutics of suspicion, compared by Fiorenza to the practices of a detective, is energised by the recognition of the male-centred character of the Bible. As such it informs those aspects of Diski’s and Roberts’s novels which identify, explore and question the androcentric-patriarchal dimension of the Bible. Thus, for example *The Wild Girl* tries to resist the typical biblical strategy of making female sexuality a vehicle of faithfulness –or lack thereof– to God. In many biblical texts, all that is sensual and tempting is projected onto the women’s body, which comes to

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22 Alicia Ostriker’s offers a model based on three strategies characteristic of women’s biblical revisions: (1) “the hermeneutics of suspicion”, concerned with the problem of power and powerlessness and informing the woman writer’s attack on, or mistrust of texts’ patriarchal power; (2) “the hermeneutics of desire”, which describes women’s self-insertion into the revised text and her finding there whatever she wanted to find; and (3) “the hermeneutics of indeterminacy”, responsible for revision’s playfulness, or irreducibility to any truth-claim (Ostriker Alicia Suskin, *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p. 66-67). There is also DuPlessis’s two-fold paradigm of the “narrative of delegitimation” and “narrative of displacement” (DuPlessis Rachel, *Writing Beyond the Ending. Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1985, p. 108). The former consists of bringing the text’s ideological premises to readers’ attention by deforming its patriarchally determined grammar, vocabulary, plots, and by disturbing the conventional narrative and politics. The latter is understood as writing from non-canonical perspective, as a committed identification with otherness and with taboo aspects of femaleness. It gives voice to the muted, the despised and the marginalized, articulating what was hardly noticed before.

23 Schüssler Fiorenza Elizabeth, *But She Said*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

epitomise filth, whoredom and corruption; all that is desirable is symbolised through “the stereotyped purity of good femininity”<sup>24</sup>. Roberts re-writes two Revelation passages about the sun-clad woman (Revelation 12:1-6) and the great harlot (Revelation 17:1-6) in ways that undo the earlier contrast and establish an intimate bond between the saint and the sinner. In *After These Things*, the common biblical device of making women (brides, wives, sisters) into objects of male gaze –or prized objects whose perspective is bracketed off– is foregrounded and resisted when Rebekah, Isaac’s bride, is positioned as the focaliser, whose view of her betrothed defines the reader’s understanding of Isaac, and corrects his biblical portrayal as a major patriarch. Also, Rebekah is shown as perceiving herself through the eyes of men who look at her hungrily, which both complicates the structure of focalisation and establishes Rebekah as a narcissistic figure. In *The Book of Mrs Noah*, Mrs Noah recognises the lethal, violence-breeding effects of God’s post-deluvian order to offer Him burnt meat as a sacrifice and to hold dominion over the earth, decodes its true meaning for her husband and finally, rejects it, announcing her own covenant based on the refusal to enslave any creature.

The hermeneutics of remembrance –likened to the activity of quilt-maker, who stitches patches together– reconstructs from the fragments scattered and hidden in the Bible (and from non-canonical sources) a new story or representation of women, one which allows them a full historical and narrative presence and which dislodges the patriarchal structure of the biblical text. Fiorenza called this strategy a “dangerous” and “subversive” memory<sup>25</sup> because it reclaims and keeps alive the suffering and struggles of women of the past, throwing a challenge to the deep-rooted and complacent male-centredness. Diski’s *Only Human* and *After These Things* bring together analogous motifs from the conjugal lives of different women characters and emphasise the similarity of their suffering and loss, repeated across generations<sup>26</sup>. Significantly, Sarai/Sarah, Rebekah, Leah suffer primarily either because they lose love (Sarai) or because they are not loved by their husbands (Rebekah, Leah). Unlike in the Bible, in which wives’ lives are subordinated to and defined by procreation, in the two novels the matriarchs are in the first place craving for

24 Keller Catherine, *Apocalypse Now and Then. A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996, p. 74.

25 Schüssler Fiorenza Elizabeth, *Bread Not Stone. The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984, p. 19.

26 In one of the very few existing commentaries on Diski’s re-writings of the Bible, Wright argues that the novels draw extensively, though subversively, on midrashic literature, from which Diski appropriates the emphasis on the complexity of human feelings, especially on the devastating effects of the Akedah on Sarah (Terry Wright, *The Genesis of Fiction: Modern Novelists as Biblical Interpreters*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, p. 85-112). For Wright, the novel’s focus on women’s internal life is the result of Diski’s insistence on humanising and psychologising the Genesis story.

love. The puzzlingly marginalised theme in the Bible of a wife’s love for her husband (only Michal, king David’s first wife, is said in the Bible to love her husband<sup>27</sup>) is re-membered in Diski’s novels and fanned out into a new narrative life. In *The Wild Girl*, Roberts focuses on the submerged story of women preachers and apostles who not only supported the Jesus movement with material means (hosting missionaries and donating money) but also actively proclaimed the Word. She re-writes the well-known story of two sisters from Bethany, Mary and Martha, in such a way as to gradually eliminate the rivalry between them (the motif introduced in Luke 10:38-42) and reinforce their roles of apostles (the motif visible in John 11 and 12), visible in their ministering of the word, gathering followers, working miracles and having prophetic dream visions. In *The Book of Mrs Noah*, Roberts recovers the motif of the loving relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, present in the biblical Book of Ruth, and develops its emphasis on the deep affection and loyalty between the two women into a non-saccharine<sup>28</sup> story of slowly developing intimacy between two strong-willed women on the Ark –Noah’s wife and her daughter-in-law, Sara.

The hermeneutics of imagination helps women writers to retell biblical stories from a new perspective or intensify the more emancipatory elements. Fiorenza compares the imaginative freedom of this strategy to “the feminist ‘leaven’ of the bakerwoman God that will transform patriarchal biblical religion, making the biblical story truly a resource for all who seek a sustaining vision in their struggle for liberation from patriarchal oppression”<sup>29</sup>. Importantly, the hermeneutics of imagination (together with the hermeneutics of remembrance) is always supported by the hermeneutics of suspicion, directed here at discursive practices employed by the women writers and relied on lest the re-writings replicate the patriarchal (hierarchical, dualistic) way of thinking. In *The Wild Girl*, Roberts’s Mary Magdalene is Jesus’ lover and mother of his child, a daughter named Deborah. Developing the theme of Jesus kissing Mary on the lips, contained in the Nag Hammadi library of gnostic writing, Roberts allows Mary and Jesus to have quite passionate sexual life. There are descriptions of their kissing (“His tongue gently exploring my

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27 Fuchs Esther, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

28 Pardes describes the Book of Ruth as “idyllic” in its representation of the way female loyalty and faithfulness overcome all difficulties in the life of Naomi and Ruth, and brings about a happy resolution for all their problems (Pardes Ilana, *op. cit.*, p. 99). Admittedly, Roberts’s depiction of the relationship between Mrs Noah and Sara handles the pivotal moment in the Book of Ruth –the older woman’s advice to the younger one to re-start her life apart from the mother-in-law– in a completely different way. Unlike Ruth, Sara (pregnant and with her own plans for the future) leaves Mrs Noah, who, caring for Sara’s wellbeing, is deliberately harsh and drives her “newly found daughter” (Roberts Michèle, *The Book of Mrs Noah*, *op. cit.*, p. 88) away.

29 Schüssler Fiorenza Elizabeth, *Bread Not Stone*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.



mouth was one of the sweetest and sharpest pleasures I have ever known”<sup>30</sup>), of their first “awkward and fumbling” love-making<sup>31</sup>, and of their ecstatic sexual acts during which Mary feels “taken upwards and transformed”<sup>32</sup>. It is during sex with Jesus that Mary whispers words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John, words which in the canonical text described Jesus’ special position. Here, uttered during orgasm, the sentence “it is the resurrection and the life”<sup>33</sup> communicates the deep relation between what is experienced through the body and the divine or holy<sup>34</sup>. By such a re-writing and imaginative expansion, Roberts counters the dualistic tradition which holds the spirit against the body and male spirituality against female sexuality. By treating the dogma of Jesus’ celibacy with suspicion, she emphasises the positive, spiritual character of human erotic life. In *Only Human*, the motif of Sarai as Abram’s half-sister (the motif present in Genesis 20:12) is creatively expanded so that the childhood brother-and-sister love adds more complexity to Sarai and Abram’s multifaceted and ever-changing relationship. In *After These Things*, the artistic recreation of Leah and Jacob’s wedding night (during which Jacob was tricked, thinking he was with Leah’s beautiful sister and his beloved, Rachel), the description of their perfect physical love never repeated with Rachel (whom Jacob marries later), supplies the otherwise missing element of Leah’s identity –passion– and transforms her from a mere underling into a truly round character.

Fiorenza’s fourth strategy of feminist biblical interpretation is the hermeneutics of proclamation, which focuses on the interaction between the patriarchal text and contemporary religious culture, assesses the current use of biblical texts, and evaluates its significance for present-day readers of Bible-related confessions. Since the Bible can be (mis)used to reinforce or legitimise oppression of women, it is vital that feminist biblical scholars pay attention to the role of the Bible in contemporary religious communities. Neither the hermeneutics of proclamation,<sup>35</sup> however, nor any of the previously discussed types of herme-

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30 Roberts Michèle, *The Wild Girl*, London, Minerva, 1991 [1984], p. 41.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

33 *Ibid.*

34 This motif has provoked mixed reactions. For Haskins it is an unnecessarily “romantic” element, which defuses the argumentative power of Roberts’s text, otherwise commendable for its Christian feminist ideas (Haskins Susan, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor*, New York, Riverhead Books, 1995, p. 380). For King, it provocatively “interweaves [...] the Christian gospels with mother-goddess mythology and imagery in such a way as to indicate their common ground” (King Jeanette, *op. cit.*, p. 110). Falcus appreciates the motif and reads it in the context of Roberts’s poetry, in which the link between spirituality and sexuality is similarly explored (Falcus Sarah, *Michèle Roberts: Myths, Mothers and Memories*, Frankfurt a. Main, Peter Lang, 2007, p. 58).

35 In the case of women literary re-writings of the Bible what matters more than the pastoral

neutics are calibrated to deal with an important dimension of women biblical re-writings, namely with the simultaneous urge to present the so-far suppressed truth and the realisation that to brandish the “true” version of truth against its “false”, i.e., male version is to yield to the violence inherent in patriarchal and androcentric thought. Women re-writings of the Bible do not try to resolve this tension or dilemma, but build it into their texts and make it the warp and weft of their novels. More than simply allowing their re-written bibles the status of “the made thing, the playful poetic fiction” free from truth claims,<sup>36</sup> women biblical revisionists dramatise the act of giving up on an absolute –the only true– perspective. I suggest that this aspect of women biblical re-writings can be called the hermeneutics of weakening, and seen as linked with Gianni Vattimo’s weak thought (*il pensiero debole*). Vattimo’s weak thought is based on the observation that in modernity the strong structures of metaphysics, which are the source of metaphysical violence –i.e., the concept of universal, absolute or objective truth, or of the ultimate foundation– are weakened but not entirely eliminated. They are retained within weak thought, functioning, as Vattimo puts it, “like traces of an illness or sorrow to which one is resigned”<sup>37</sup> and from which one is convalescing. *Il pensiero debole* is meant to correspond with the Heideggerian concept of weak overcoming (*Verwindung*), which does not try to leave behind metaphysical devices (this would reinscribe it as another form of metaphysics), but which “aims to short circuit the logic of repetition in attempting to overcome a metaphysical tradition driven by the compulsion to overcome”<sup>38</sup>. To do so, it accepts its own weakness, its inability to lay new foundations, treating its own frailty “as the possibility for a change, the chance that it might twist in a direction that is not foreseen in its own nature”<sup>39</sup>.

Like Vattimo’s *debolezza*, the hermeneutics of weakening in women biblical rewritings does not reject truth claims altogether or collapse into relativism, but proposes an enfeebled mode of truth –one which gives itself historically

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diagnosis of the Bible’s use and status, is the way women writers re-vision the Bible from the non-confessional perspective and re-work it for the not-necessarily-confessional reader.

- 36 This is how Ostriker characterises the hermeneutics of indeterminacy (Ostriker Alice, *op. cit.*, p. 67). She emphasises the overall sense of non-dogmatism of women poetic revisionism, and enumerates its symptoms, e.g., ambivalent and mutually incompatible words or terms. While her hermeneutics of indeterminacy overlaps to some extent with my hermeneutics of weakness, it seems to be predicated on the idea that women revisionist see themselves as liberated from the constraints of truth-claim making rather than –as it is the case of the hermeneutics of weakness– with the deliberate exploration of the limits and dangers of truth claims.
- 37 Vattimo Gianni, “*Verwindung*”: Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy”, *Contemporary Italian Thought*, Spec. issue of *SubStance* 16.2 (1987), p. 12.
- 38 Vattimo Gianni, and Sebastian Gurciullo, “Interpretation and Nihilism as the Depletion of Being: A Discussion with Gianni Vattimo About the Consequences of Hermeneutics”, *Theory & Event* 5.2 (2001), note 4.
- 39 Vattimo Gianni, “*Verwindung*”, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

and non-absolutely, one which is bound to women who enunciate it but is not made by them, one which is ultimately groundless but enables them to comprehend the world. Like the weak thought, which does not try to transcend metaphysics, the hermeneutics of weakening does not aim to ultimately overcome androcentrism and prove the stronger party; rather, it hopes to enfeeble androcentrism, making itself similarly weak and provisional. In Diski's and Roberts's novels, women characters are aware of the pluralistic and incomplete character of all truth claims, including their own. They divest themselves of the status of masters of "Truth" and effectively de-strengthen the claims of God and men to be so. Shorn of triumphalist tones, hermeneutics of weakening resonates with the sense of accepted, yet painful, defeat of "Truth", with the sense of characters' resignation to their no-win situation. Through the hermeneutics of weakening, Diski and Roberts short circuit the desire to overcome androcentrism, leaving its traces in their re-writings, which come to resemble an enfeebled body (of writing) recuperating from an illness.

Thus, in Roberts's *The Wild Girl* Mary Magdalene is shown as a guardian of Jesus' real teaching about equality and mutual dependence of sexes, and as the antagonist of Simon Peter, who distorts the original Christian ideas to make them fit his androcentric and patriarchal worldview. Mary is commissioned by the mother of Jesus to write down the true account of Jesus' life and teaching, and the novel we read turns out to be her gospel. However, Mary Magdalene considerably weakens the status of her text as the only true story of the Jesus movement when she emphasises that this (or her) truth is neither stable nor single. She acknowledges that she cannot deny Peter's right to see events differently and to follow his inner voice. Moreover, she admits that Peter is her dark side –her desire to dominate, master and take revenge– and together with his ideas, a part of everything that happened ("Was not Peter also a part of all that?"<sup>40</sup>). She says, "I have been commanded to write down the truth as I, who am not Simon Peter or John or any other male disciples, saw it, and I shall do so. Our different truths, collected up and written down in books, are for the use and inspiration of the disciples who come after us. [...] I am telling the truth, my truth, as fairly as I can. It is not simple, and it is not single, and the telling of it changes me and changes it"<sup>41</sup>. Mary Magdalene simultaneously claims authority and undermines it, singles out her own insight and denies the possibility of privileging any truth. The idea of single truth (or truth as correspondence), like the one Peter claims to be *the* guardian of, is part of the patriarchal, violent game of exclusion and repression. Yet, the novel neither simply repeats it nor pretends it can redeem it, but inscribes it as *Verwindung* –a distortion and drained force, an object of resigned acceptance, an ineradicable trace of illness inside women writing, with which they should come to terms and try to convalesce from.

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40 Roberts Michèle, *The Wild Girl*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Jenny Diski’s *Only Human* dramatises the dissolution of all that poses for an absolute foundation or the uncontested origin. Neither of the two major narrating voices –the woman’s and God’s– manages to firmly establish its priority over the other; instead, they become entangled in an ever-more-complex process of mutual mirroring and reflecting back, the effect of which is the weakening and defeat of both. God claims to own the story, to actually *be* both the ur-narrator and the narrative itself, its “commencement and the conclusion”<sup>42</sup>. His greatest power is interruption –he not only interrupts eternity to make time, but also, even more importantly, interrupts human relationships, longing “to remain implicated”<sup>43</sup>, and in the meantime, undoing human love. Admittedly, God’s first appearance in the novel is through an interruption, when he interferes with the other narrator’s story, saying “Damn impertinence! Who dares to speak of the beginning”<sup>44</sup>. But God’s power proves limited and kept in check by the force of human interruption, effected in the woman’s story. The woman narrator and her story represent “the inconclusive middle: the wish, the desire”<sup>45</sup>, which interrupt the smooth flow of both God’s world and God’s narrative in ever new ways. Though initially the power of creation belongs to God, it quickly becomes a human prerogative: humans create disobedience<sup>46</sup>, responsibility and death<sup>47</sup>, sex<sup>48</sup>, cooperation<sup>49</sup>, justice<sup>50</sup>, love<sup>51</sup> and meaning<sup>52</sup>. God finds himself “way behind [...his] creatures”<sup>53</sup>, who outdo him and whom he starts to imitate or mirror, using what humans created to his own ends. Ultimately, God who “made a mirror” and “imagined a likeness”<sup>54</sup> becomes a reflection in the mirror he created, “too weak, too fearful, too human”<sup>55</sup> to retain his privileged position. Also, by becoming implicated or dependent on humans –their future and their continuing mirroring of him– God deprives himself of the power to end the story, i.e., to destroy his creation. The weak God is mirrored by the weak woman narrator, who –despite her privileged (women-only) knowledge of God’s earliest history and character, and despite her mature restraint, contrasting with God’s childish impetuosity– does not control her narrative either.

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42 Diski Jenny, *Only Human*, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 190.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

52 *Ibid.* p. 185.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

If “only the ending makes sense of anything that went before” and if all endings are “nothing but artifice, just ways of stopping short”<sup>56</sup>, her ending is God’s interruption of Sarai’s long-desired family happiness. The female narrative stops short when God destroys Sarai (and Abraham, together with Isaac) demanding that Isaac be sacrificed. When the woman narrator asks Sarai to indicate “the central thread”<sup>57</sup> of her life –the yarn of her life story– she learns “it was all endings [...], no conclusions”<sup>58</sup>, i.e., it was all God’s destructive intrusions. Thus, for neither of the narrators is there any possibility of the strong overcoming of the chronic or incapacitating presence of the other.

In *After These Things*, it is the editor who seems to hold the ultimate control over the whole story. The editor is a “stitcher together of disparate narratives, a ruthless cutter out of anything that would hold up the progress and logic of the story”<sup>59</sup>. The editor’s privileged status, however, is repeatedly weakened, for example, when we learn that characters like Rebekah, Rachel, Leah or Jacob are also editors: “the editorial function takes many forms. Us managers of things, us behind the scenes tailors of reality are truly to be found everywhere”<sup>60</sup>. Rebekah cutting Esau out of the main story, Leah stitching herself into it, are all forms of life editing, far more than the prerogative of the editorial voice we hear from time to time in the novel. Though identified with the scheming God<sup>61</sup> or the objective way of the world<sup>62</sup>, the editor himself (herself?) is only human, a “*homo fabulans*”<sup>63</sup> who wrenched the control of the story from the deity, and who, together with others, keeps re-shaping the narrative, adding “just another story [...] to the mountainous heap”<sup>64</sup>. Diski’s editor emphasises that all stories are somebody’s, i.e., that they depend on the perspective of the one who shapes his or her narrative, and in that sense, they are interpretations (the editor asks if there can be a narrator “[w]ith no story of his or her own to tell? Hardly. Such a one has never been”<sup>65</sup>). Unlike the biblical redactors of the Documentary Hypothesis, who do not flaunt their perspectival predicament, this redactor makes no secret of it and therefore, considerably weakens the impression of his/her objectivism. Like the women characters who struggle for meaning in their lives, the editor struggles with

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56 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

59 Diski Jenny, *After These Things*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

65 *Ibid.*



various life stories and manipulates them to “see if they make... anything”<sup>66</sup>. Thus, *After These Things* offers a glimpse into the conditioned construction of truth, performed both by women, who desperately want meaning in their lives, and by the editor, who tries to make sense –or “anything”– of their lives.

Diski’s and Roberts’s re-writings of the Bible seek to transform and complicate the pattern applied to women in many biblical narratives, namely that “women are foregrounded as active agents at the beginning of a story, and disappear by the end of it”<sup>67</sup>. In their novels, women are defined outside or against the usually allotted gnotypes and moved beyond the standard position of secondary characters. However, far from believing that androcentrism can be simply negated, reversed or overcome, the novels dramatise the more subtle, more equivocating, relationship to the largely male-centred biblical text. Intensifying (or radicalising) biblical heteroglossia, Diski’s and Roberts’s re-writings on the one hand, allow both the female and male voices to resound in the novels, but on the other hand, enact the process during which the voices weaken and restrain each other (contrary to the Bible, which enfeebles solely the female voice). Congenially with Vattimo’s concept of *debolezza*, the novels present a weak truth of biblical women: once the cultural context is re-written and the discourse in which female characters are described is re-worked –once the Bible is filtered through the hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, imagination and weakening– a different approximation or disclosure of reality emerges, one in which a weak truth of the women’s perspective becomes possible. Unlike the strong (metaphysical but also patriarchal) truth, the weak truth does not offer the absolute version of truth, replacing the previous, bad one, but promises to significantly qualify and recalibrate our experience of the world. In the re-written order of the (biblical) world, Jenny Diski and Michèle Roberts “call the damsel and enquire at her mouth” (Genesis 24:57), eliciting neither a violently androcentric nor a crudely gynocentric narrative, but a self-conscious and mature women’s story.

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I focus on four contemporary British novels which re-write parts of the Bible [Jenny Diski’s *Only Human: A Comedy* (2000) and her *After These Things: A Novel* (2004); Michèle Roberts’s *The Wild Girl* (1984) and *The Book of Mrs Noah* (1987)] and examine the

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ostriker Alicia, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

way those novels deal with the androcentric (male-centred) character of biblical narratives. Drawing on the taxonomy proposed by Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza, I argue that Diski's and Roberts's re-writings engage in a complex and subtle relationship with the Bible, in the course of which they do much more than merely trying to reverse or undo biblical patriarchy and androcentrism. I explain and give examples of how the four novels rely on strategies similar to Fiorenza's types of feminist hermeneutics (the hermeneutics of suspicion, the hermeneutics of remembrance, and the hermeneutics of imagination). To account for the nuanced self-consciousness of Diski's and Roberts's novels, I introduce the concept of the hermeneutics of weakening, which –emerging from Gianni Vattimo's *il pensiero debole*– is meant to conceptualise the enfeebled mode of truth. I see as established by the two woman writers.

### **Keywords**

Sidekicks, Bible, gender.

### **Résumé**

Cet article se concentre sur quatre romans contemporains britanniques qui copient les extraits de la Bible. [Il s'agit de *Only Human: A Comedy* (2000) et *After These Things: A Novel* (2004) par Jenny Diski, et de *The Wild Girl* (1984) et *The Book of Mrs Noah* (1987) par Michèle Roberts]. L'article présente les façons dans lesquelles les romans cités confrontent l'androcentrisme des histoires bibliques. En me penchant sur la taxonomie proposée par Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, je constate que Diski et Roberts trouvent une relation subtile et compliquée avec la Bible dans laquelle elles ne se limitent pas uniquement sur le fait de renverser ou d'annuler le patriarcalisme et l'androcentrisme. Dans mon article, je montre des exemples et j'explique que les romans auxquels je fais référence, profitent de la stratégie propre aux types d'herméneutique féministe chez Fiorenza (de l'herméneutique de soupçons, de souvenirs, et de l'herméneutique de l'imagination). Cependant, pour mieux approcher l'autoconscience nuancée des romans de Diski et de Roberts, j'introduis la notion de l'herméneutique affaiblie qui, prenant ses sources de *Il pensiero debole* par Gianni Vattimo, a pour objectif de conceptualiser la vérité affaiblie, laquelle dans mon opinion a été atteinte par ces deux écrivains.

### **Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, Bible, genre.

# Hollywood Indian Sidekicks and American Identity

Aaron Carr & Lionel Larré

Recently, an online petition was launched to protest against the casting of non-Native American actress Rooney Mara in the role of an Indian character in a forthcoming adaptation of *Peter Pan*. An article defending the petition states: “With so few movie heroes in the US being people of color, non-white children receive a very different message from Hollywood, one that too often relegates them to sidekicks, villains, or background players.”<sup>1</sup> Additional examples of such outcries over recent miscasting include Johnny Depp as Tonto in *The Lone Ranger* (2013), as well as, to a lesser extent, Benicio Del Toro as Jimmy Picard in Arnaud Desplechins’s *Jimmy P.: Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian* (2013).<sup>2</sup>

Neither the problem nor the outcry are new. Many studies have shown why the movie industry has often employed non-Indian actors to portray Indian characters. This trend, which Ted Jojola calls “absurd,”<sup>3</sup> has increasingly raised the ire of Indian activists, who forced Hollywood to open its eyes on such issues in 1973, when Marlon Brando refused to accept his Oscar for his role in *The Godfather* and sent onstage in his stead Apache actress Sacheen Little Feather to make a statement against “the treatment of American Indians today by the film industry.”<sup>4</sup> This activism targets two issues: Indian characters are

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- 1 Puchko Kristy, “Online Petition Launched to Protest Rooney Mara’s Casting in *Pan*.” *CinemaBlend*. <http://www.cinemablend.com>. Consulted on June 4, 2015.
  - 2 “The Real Problem With a Lone Ranger Movie? It’s the Racism, Stupid.” *Indian Country Today* July 8, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com>; Rothman Lily, “Johnny Depp as Tonto: Is *The Lone Ranger* Racist?” *Time* July 3, 2013, <http://entertainment.time.com>; Squires Camille, “The Lone Ranger’ Movie: Why Are Native Americans Angry At Johnny Depp?” *Mic.com*. <http://mic.com>. All websites consulted on June 4, 2015.
  - 3 Jojola Ted, “Absurd Reality II.” Peter C. Rollins & John E. O’Connor (eds), *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998, p. 15.
  - 4 The video of this protest is visible on youtube. Consulted on August, 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

only sidekicks, villains, or background players; and Indian actors are not cast in roles of heroes. Even in Westerns, where the presence of Native Americans should be taken for granted for obvious historical reasons, Indians are only extras or fake. In a thorough study of the genre, Jane Tompkins sums up Hollywood's treatment of Natives "as props, bits of local color, textural effects. As people they had no existence. Quite often they filled the role of villains, [...] a particularly dangerous form of local wildlife. But there were no Indian characters, no individuals with a personal history and a point of view."<sup>5</sup> When they do appear in a more substantial way, they are "fake Indians": "How do you take Charles Bronson and Anthony Quinn seriously, when they're surrounded by nameless figures who *are* natives?"<sup>6</sup> Thus, both Indian characters and Native American actors remain relegated to playing sidekicks or underlings, never full-blown heroes.

Overall, Hollywood's relationship to American ethnic groups has been notoriously problematic as far as both characters and actors are concerned. In the words of Ralph and Natasha Friar, "*all* minorities, cultures, and races have been capriciously invented, stereotyped, and falsified by Hollywood."<sup>7</sup> What is specific to the Indian, though, is what signifies the very term *Indian*. As Robert Berkhofer demonstrated, as well as Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, in the wake of "five centuries of perceptions –and misperceptions,"<sup>8</sup> filtered through and nourished by 19<sup>th</sup> century literature and dime novels, Hollywood has lumped together people from very different cultures to shape a completely fabricated "fictional identity" called the "Indian."<sup>9</sup> The Hollywood Indian is a "white man's Indian," in Berkhofer's terms; he argued in his seminal study that "Native Americans were and are real, but the Indian was a White invention and still remains largely a White image, if not stereotype."<sup>10</sup> Thus, Hollywood's Indian is but a reboot of an old invention. For lack of space, we will not delve deeply into the reasons for Hollywood's re-invention of the Indian at the expense of more realistic and complex representations of Native Americans, but they have been analyzed by many scholars as having to do mainly with dramatic simplification and economic imperatives.<sup>11</sup> The

5 Tompkins Jane, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 8.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

7 Friar Ralph E. & Natasha A. Friar, *The Only Good Indian... The Hollywood Gospel*. New York: Drama Books Specialists/Publishers, 1972, p. 1.

8 Kilpatrick Jacquelyn, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999, p. 1.

9 Friar, p. 2.

10 Berkhofer Robert, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Random House, 1977, p. 3.

11 Among others, cf. Kilpatrick, *op. cit.*; O'Connor John. "The White Man's Indian: An Institutional Approach." Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (eds.), *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky,

Indian sidekick, the one form of that invention that is certainly more complex than earlier depictions, at times close to attaining full realization as hero, was widely overlooked by the prolific scholarship on Hollywood's Indian. It is the focus of this article. Overall, we will refer to the invention as "Indian" and to actual tribal members as "Native Americans" or by their tribal names.

One may argue that portraying the Indian as the White Man's sidekick is an improvement of sorts, since, for the longest time, Hollywood has relied exclusively on the "Indian-as-an-obstacle formula,"<sup>12</sup> portraying him, as Jim Jarmush says, as "the savage that must be eliminated, the force of nature that's blocking the way for industrial progress."<sup>13</sup> By definition, the sidekick is an individual, which is the first step into being depicted in a positive way in Hollywood: "Individual Indians could be 'good,' but the group had to be depicted as 'bad' in order to justify the existing philosophies of government and religion."<sup>14</sup> It may also be an improvement from the stereotypes defined by Kilpatrick as mental, sexual, and spiritual/ecological.<sup>15</sup> At the very least, as Bradford Wright argues in *Comic Book Nation*, the sidekick is usually a "well-meaning" image, even if he considers it is "still degrading": "At least these characters were portrayed positively as likeable and heroic, they were still never portrayed as more than mascots or subordinate partners."<sup>16</sup> In any case, in Hollywood, the sidekick status allows for at least some complexity in Indian characterization, necessarily nuancing the above stereotypes to some degree.

However, since the silent era, when the Indian was "a very popular character,"<sup>17</sup> as well as Cherokee actor Will Rogers' work in the 1920s and '30s, it is difficult to name one Hollywood movie whose lead hero is played by a Native American actor whether the character is Indian or not. Additionally, Native American actors rarely portray characters whose Indianness is not a determining characteristic, in the same way that African American actors such as Samuel L. Jackson or Denzel Washington can and often do portray heroes whose skin color is not a defining factor. On the other hand, there are few Hollywood movies in which the hero is Indian, although *The Lone Ranger*

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1998, p. 27-38; and Aleiss Angela, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*. Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2005.

12 Aleiss, p. xv.

13 Rosenbaum Jonathan, "A Gun Up Your Ass: An Interview with Jim Jarmush." *Cineaste* 22.2 (1996): 20-23, p. 23.

14 Bataille Gretchen & Charles L.P. Silet, "The Entertaining Anachronism: Indians in American Film." Miller Randall M. (ed.), *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*. Englewood, NJ: Jerome S. Ozer, 1980. 36-53, p. 38.

15 *Op. cit.*, p. xvii.

16 Qtd in Sheyahshe Michael A, *Native Americans in Comic Books: A Critical Study*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008, p. 10.

17 Film critic Jesse Wentz in *Reel Injun*, Neil Diamond (dir.), Lorber Films, 2009.



has recently featured one notable and ironic exception.<sup>18</sup> Beginning with the 1930s radio serialization and continuing through the popular television series, *The Lone Ranger's* well-known Indian character, Tonto, has always existed to be the masked hero's loyal sidekick. However, in the 2013 Hollywood reboot, Tonto attains a full-blown heroic stature. The irony lies in the fact that Tonto is portrayed by Depp, who is not usually perceived as Native American—despite his tentative claim to Native American ethnicity<sup>19</sup>—but who possesses enough audience appeal to not only introduce such a surprising change of status of an Indian character but also to presume wide acceptance of this reincarnation to a global audience. It is such that the very stardom of the actor—as well as the fact that he is one of the executive producers—is what has allowed a minority sidekick to become a hero, something that may not have happened if Tonto had been portrayed by a less famous Native American actor.

One may agree with historian Wilcomb E. Washburn that Hollywood, which seized the image of the Indian because it could be conveyed in the “dramatic, violent and exotic terms” that the movie industry thrived upon, “helped promote the recovery of the contemporary Indian in the early and mid-twentieth century” (ix-x), if only by keeping the Indian—in whatever form he was depicted—present in popular imagination.<sup>20</sup> Considering the massive influence that Hollywood has on ethnic representation not only in the media but in American society as well, we propose that the relegation of both Indian characters and Native American actors to roles of sidekicks and underlings can tell us something critical about the American psyche. Starting from the historic ambivalence regarding Indianness which remains at the core of American identity, where there is both a repulsion, in Philip Deloria's terms, by the “savage barbarity” against which civilization had to be erected, and yet an attraction to its “savage freedom,” our study examines whether it is possible to consider the American Indian sidekick as a construct that enables and allows American identity an inevitable coming-to-terms with its Indian facet.<sup>21</sup> Whether he helps to humanize the Euro-American hero, or supports the latter in finding his true self; or whether he simply helps him save the day, the Indian sidekick allows the American psyche to consistently choose the noble side of the double-bind representation of the Indian and to complete what D.H. Lawrence called the “unfinished” American identity.<sup>22</sup>

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18 *The Lone Ranger*, Gore Verbinski (dir.), Johnny Depp (perf.), Armie Hammer. Disney, 2013.

19 “I guess I have some Native American somewhere down the line. My great grandmother was quite a bit of Native American, she grew up Cherokee or maybe Creek Indian.” *Entertainment Weekly*, quoted in Kaufman Amy, “Armie Hammer: Native Americans on set loved ‘Lone Ranger.’” *Los Angeles Times*, April 22, 2013. Consulted on September 22, 2014.

20 Washburn Wilcomb E., “Foreword.” Peter C. Rollins & John E. O'Connor (eds.), *op. cit.*, ix-xi, p. ix-x.

21 Deloria Philip J., *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 3.

22 Lawrence D.H., *Studies in Classic American Literature*. London: Martin Secker, 1924, p. 160.

Ron Buchanan asks “Where would the Lone Ranger be without Tonto?” We attempt to answer the question: “Where would the American hero be without the Indian sidekick?”<sup>23</sup>

### The sidekick as a foil

Comic relief seems to be a crucial function offered by some Indian sidekicks in Hollywood, a function that is arguably related to a traditional Native American character, the heyoka (among the Sioux and some other Plains tribes), or even the trickster in other tribes. According to anthropologist James Howard, “The heyoka cult is made up of individuals who [...] are obliged to assume the role of antinatural clowns.”<sup>24</sup> At least in the twentieth century, the heyoka assumed a sacred function of parody and satire: white people or drunkards, for example, were mocked, presumably to highlight, and confront them with, their flaws or problematic attitudes. According to anthropologist Thomas Lewis, mockery, in Oglala society, is a way to discourage deviant behaviors and promote conformity.



**Fig. 1:** Dakota heyoka dancers (photograph by Frank Fiske, Fort Yates, north Dakota, featured in Howard).

23 Buchanan Ron, “Side by Side: the Role of the Sidekick.” *Studies in Popular Culture* 26.1 (oct. 2003), 15-26, p. 15.

24 Howard James H., “The Dakota Heyoka Cult.” *The Scientific Monthly* 78.4 (april 1954), 254-258, p. 254; and Lewis Thomas H., “The Heyoka Cult in Historical and Contemporary Oglala Sioux Society.” *Anthropos* 69.1/2 (1974), 17-32, p. 30.

Although the heyoka is not literally a sidekick, his humor, subversive behavior and function as a foil, are features he has in common with some Hollywood Indian sidekicks. Other than causing welcome laughter in otherwise tense and serious movies, the sidekick, by providing comic relief often to the hero's detriment, helps the audience sympathize with the latter by harmlessly making fun of him, thus revealing flaws big enough to make the hero more human and yet not so big that we, the audience, forget that he is in fact the hero. The sidekick mediates access to the hero. Similarly, the heyoka will often single out individuals who deserve respect but who are sometimes forgotten or who do not put themselves or what they do forward.

Another key function of the Indian sidekick as a foil is to demonstrate the superiority of the white American hero. In that sense, Depp's Tonto subverts the sidekick's function to the point of turning him into the real hero of the movie. Both characters are outsiders in American society, joining forces as crime fighting partners. The reasoning behind Tonto's attachment to the Lone Ranger in the original 1938 movie serial is not made clear although "popular belief is that Tonto was created only so that, for the radio listeners, the Lone Ranger would have someone to speak to other than his horse."<sup>25</sup> In any case, Tonto would not exist without the Lone Ranger. In Depp's interpretation, however, Tonto is given a more substantial purpose; avenging the massacre of his community or, more clearly, bringing the murderers to justice. His attachment to the Lone Ranger thus becomes looser and more motivated by needs of self than by the presence of his "White Brother." He has an autonomous existence.

The functions and completion of Depp's Tonto reminds us of Chief Dan George's rendition of Lone Watie in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.<sup>26</sup> Both outsiders on the run, Wales (Clint Eastwood) and Lone Watie meet by chance and complement each other, watching each other's back on their journey to render justice. Lone Watie is an Indian sidekick whose humor not only makes fun of the hero but of himself, as well. In a DVD feature documenting the making of the movie, director Clint Eastwood explains how humor was important in depicting his Native characters: "I wanted the treatment of the Native Americans to have more than just the cliché that had been presented in the past, where you have the Indian treated as a very stoic personality without much sense of humor and this one was the first story I'd read where they were treated with humor."<sup>27</sup>

Besides the humanness provided Lone Watie by humor, what gives him a far more complex and full-fledged personality than other types of Indian characters, is that it is politically charged by the moviemakers themselves. In 1976, a movie

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25 Sheyahshe, p. 40.

26 *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. Clint Eastwood (dir.), Clint Eastwood (perf.), Chief Dan George. Warner Brothers, 1976.

27 "Hell Hath No Fury." Warner Home Video, 1999.

about the destructiveness of war (*Josey Wales* is set in the wake of the Civil War) on the individuals inevitably echoed the impact of the Vietnam War on many people, a link that Eastwood explicitly makes clear in a short introduction to the movie on the DVD. According to Jojola, the depiction of Hollywood's Indian at the end of the 1960s and in the '70s, in movies such as *Little Big Man* (also starring Dan George) and *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (both 1969), benefitted not only from anti-Vietnam War sentiment but also Native rights activism.<sup>28</sup> Not only did moviemakers use such film to express criticism of a US presence in Vietnam<sup>29</sup>, but parallel protest events such as the occupation of Alcatraz (1969), of the Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters (1972), and of Wounded Knee (1973) awakened many Americans' awareness about the plight of Native Americans; up to and including the Brando/Little Feather protest at the Oscar ceremony, which ensured the same year that Hollywood itself could not ignore the overall problem. Such a context made it difficult not to cast Native American actors in Indian roles, and to continue portraying Indians in stereotypical ways. *Josey Wales* shows Native Americans in more sensitively written roles (besides Chief Dan George, Geraldine Keams was cast as Moonlight, another sidekick, and Will Sampson as the Comanche chief Ten Bears), and also depicts them as heroes in such a way that had been seldom seen before. Thus culminating in positive scenes where, without any justification from the storyline, Lone Watie is given an opportunity to voice criticism directed at the "white men [who] have been sneaking up on us for years" and to remind audiences of the history of the removal and the tragic episode of the Trail of Tears, as well as the absurdity of any such notions as "civilizing" the Indians. In character, and humorously, Eastwood's Wales falls asleep as the old man continues talking. Eastwood the director, however, has allowed his Native American actor—who was also an activist for Native American rights—to convey a critical message. And when Wales responds that it "seems like we can't trust the white man," viewers are signaled that both characters are on common ground, truly partners, as Lone Watie puts it 1h36' into the movie, and that we are meant to identify with both. According to Geraldine Keams, thanks to the authenticity of the Indian characters, "the Native Americans really embraced this film, because they saw themselves on the screen."<sup>30</sup>

Lone Watie stands as an exception in the gallery of Indian sidekicks. Oftentimes, and quite ironically, a good Indian sidekick often bolsters the superiority of the white hero by an agreeable deference to him and stepping aside as the hero becomes a better "Indian" than the Indian himself. *Dances With*

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

29 The climax in *Soldier Blue* (1970), for instance, could not but remind audiences of what they had heard about the My Lai massacre in 1968, the Colorado 11<sup>th</sup> Volunteers of the movie echoing the infamous 11<sup>th</sup> infantry brigade.

30 "Hell," *op. cit.*

*Wolves*'s John Dunbar (Kevin Costner) is a perfect illustration of the process, but Sheyahshe prefers calling it the "Mohican syndrome" after Fenimore Cooper's character, Natty Bumppo, the hero of *The Last of the Mohicans*: "With the Mohican syndrome, a white man becomes Indian in every way that counts. In comic books, these individuals are not only transformed into the best representation of that Indigenous culture, but they also become heroes."<sup>31</sup> The first few minutes of Michael Mann's free adaptation<sup>32</sup> of the novel blatantly signify that the Indian sidekick's function is to be a foil for a super-wannabe. Three American Indian actors –AIM activist Russell Means, Eric Schweig and Wes Studi– are cast alongside Daniel Day-Lewis and yet, in spite of the fact that the very end of the movie makes clear that the last of the Mohicans is Russell Means's character, Chingachcook, the prominent place of Day-Lewis in the opening credits and throughout the film –for obvious reasons of star name recognition and audience appeal– may have the viewers believe that his character is in fact the title-character. Means appears fourth in the credits, and Schweig, his character's son and Nat's adoptive brother, is placed sixth after Studi's Magua, the Huron villain. The first character to appear physically is Day-Lewis's. He is running, perhaps chasing someone, or being chased. Then Schweig appears, also running. Day Lewis's attire is supposed to evoke an Indian costume but the audience knows him, and also that he is British. So, at the start of the movie, are we the audience to presume that an unknown Indian villain is chasing a white settler? Or, that a white settler is chasing an Indian victim? Yet appears a third character, embodied by Means In the next shot, Day-Lewis and Schweig are now running side by side and soon we see that Schweig becomes a sidekick by giving his gun to the star-hero, who's taken the lead. At the end of this scene, the hero, suddenly and heroically bare-chested –as an Indian in the woods should be, according to popular imagination– is allowed to give the killing shot, while his by-now Indian sidekicks stand by to legitimize the hunt by performing some Indian ceremonial gesture. Both Indian characters are appropriately stoic and of few words, and will remain so throughout the movie.

### A good Indian helps save the day before he dies

The Indians of *Windtalkers* are Code-talkers, mainly Navajo Indians, who were enlisted in the U.S. forces and who used their Native language as an undecipherable code in the war in the Pacific.<sup>33</sup> At the beginning of the

31 *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

32 *The Last of the Mohicans*. Michael Mann, (dir.), Daniel Day-Lewis (perf.), Madeleine Stowe, Russell Means, Eric Schweig, Wes Studi, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1992. Cf. Philip Deloria, "The Last of the Mohicans." Howe, LeAnne *et al.* (eds), *Seeing Red: Hollywood's Pixeled Skins*. East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2013, p. 65-68.

33 *Windtalkers*. John Woo (dir.), Nicolas Cage (perf.), Adam Beach, Christian Slater, Roger Willie,

narrative, Ben Yazhee (Adam Beach) is not properly speaking the sidekick of Sergeant Jo Enders (Nicolas Cage). On the contrary, because Jo and Sergeant Pete “Ox” Anderson (Christian Slater) are assigned to protect Yahzee and Charlie White Horse (Roger Willie), the two Euro-American officers might be perceived to be the sidekicks of their Indian fellow marines. However, as if Hollywood was not quite ready yet to show duos in which the white man would be the Indian’s sidekick, it is bluntly stated in the film that what Jo and Ox are really protecting is not the men but the code itself, as is made clear by Jo himself: “I was following orders, Ben. My orders were to protect the code. If one of you got caught, talked, the code would be useless.” Thus, when Charlie is captured by Japanese soldiers, and his own white sidekick is killed, Jo reluctantly kills him to preserve the more important secret code.

Leading up to and immediately after this climactic scene, various staging details and dialogues further illustrate the overall positive changes Hollywood has made in its depiction of the Indian sidekick. For example, in the combat scene leading to their death, Ox and Charlie play each other’s literal sidekicks, that is to say, watching each other’s back by “kicking” enemies attacking them from all sides. Then, more than Jo simply killing Charlie, the viewers see the latter sacrificing himself—stated visually by his somewhat heroic nod to Jo—for the protection of the code, and subsequently of the nation. This sacrificial function, which can be attributed to the sidekick since it allows the hero to be saved, can be seen as a sort of transition between the status of the Indian as an enemy and his status as a hero in popular representation. The Indian still must die but at least now, he dies willingly and for a good cause: defending the nation instead of his savage way of life. This transition is verbalized in the dialogue between Jo and Private Chick (Noah Emmerich) after Charlie’s death. The latter is a stereotypical prejudiced redneck, who learns in the war, as shown in this conversation, to accept the Indian, whom his grandfather used to “hunt.”<sup>34</sup> At the end of the day, though, the sacrifice of the Indian sidekick merely seems to be a gentler restatement of General Sheridan’s proverbial phrase: “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.”

If there is slow improvement in Hollywood, it seems that something as yet remains not quite right for movies to portray cowboys playing sidekicks for Indians. As Ben says of Charlie after his death, and referring to Ox and

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Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 2002. The Marines tracked down already-enlisted Native personnel and then trained these soldiers as code-talkers.

34 Private Chick: “You know, White Horse, he saved my bacon. I wonder what George Armstrong Custer ‘d make of that. I remember my granddad sittin’ on the porch talkin’ about huntin’ Indians, like he was talkin’ about gophers or somethin’, about gettin’ paid three dollars per Comanche ear. I know, it gets you thinkin’. In another fifty years, who knows, we c’d be sittin’ down with the Nipponese, drinkin’ their sake, shootin’ the shit, lookin’ for somebody else’s ass to kick.”



Jo protecting his friend and himself, “He wondered about cowboys watching Indians’ backs. Something about it didn’t seem right.” Indians are instrumental for the heroes, but they are just that: instruments, code-talkers, not quite heroes yet. Thus far, they have not quite rid themselves of the subservient function that Buchanan attributes to the sidekick. However, their role is becoming more and more a key ingredient in the war between good v. evil, and they are approaching full acceptance.

The Indian sidekick as essential to the American hero symbolizes the part the Native Americans played in the construction and defense of the nation. *Cowboys and Aliens* plays out that symbolism in a light, tongue-in-cheek manner.<sup>35</sup> The title of Jon Favreau’s film is an obvious reference to the traditional opposition –cowboys and Indians– played out in the Western movies, a genre that Favreau renews by blending it with the sci-fi genre. However, because these cowboys and Indians are in fact all “Indians” to the conquering aliens who have come to colonize, exploit and steal the resources of their land, settlers and Apaches all side against the invaders. In a way, this is a similar dynamic as illustrated by the dialogue between Jo and Private Chick in *Windtalkers*: in the face of a common evil, they are all Americans fighting on the same side.

In his essay *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria argues that when Bostonian rebels disguised themselves as Indians to attack British ships and throw British tea overboard during the 1773 Boston Tea Party, these Americans shifted the definition of Indians from “exterior others” to “interior others,” which marked a step toward the acceptance of Indianness as part of a national identity to oppose the tyrannical mother-country.<sup>36</sup> In the climactic battle scene of *Cowboys and Aliens*, the Apaches, who used to be exterior others to Civil War veteran Colonel Dolarhyde (Harrison Ford) become interior others in the face of a common enemy attacking a land claimed by both settlers and Indians in a co-ownership. In the process, however, Dolarhyde loses his Indian adoptive son (Adam Beach), who has to die before being actually called a son.

## Native filmmakers in Hollywood

This acceptance as an interior other brings up the critical role of the audience and Hollywood’s response to audience expectation, a key factor in the stereotyping of sidekicks. At this point, it may be useful to briefly consider Native America’s relationship with Hollywood, namely as to how, if at all, Native filmmakers express themselves within the so-called American Dream

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35 *Cowboys and Aliens*. Jon Favreau(dir.), Daniel Craig (perf.), Harrison Ford, Olivia Wilde, Adam Beach. Dreamworks, 2011.

36 *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

Machine. Often, a film's popularity with an American audience depends on acceptance of the characters' qualities, which may or may not include ethnicity. With Native films, however, entertainment for a viewing audience still plays a key role in acceptance or denial of Native characters and the narratives that these protagonists set into motion. Hollywood bases its production green-light process on this fact, thus stereotyping remains extant. Such that a film like *Powwow Highway*, a film considered to be less popularly relatable yet more authentic in terms of contemporary Native American life cannot survive, but a film like *Smoke Signals* has more of a fighting chance to be produced and to succeed as it fits more neatly into popular imagination since it was written, in the words of its director, for "Indian people but certainly for the over culture" (Chris Eyre in *Reel Injun*).<sup>37</sup> Both films describe the journey of a duo the members of which are so equally developed that there is no telling who is whose sidekick. Similarly, *Naturally Native*, another Native independent film, presents no sidekicks, since each character possesses her own narrative trajectory; a necessity in driving plot and enriching character development and thus making for complex story lines. In movies with Indian sidekicks, the hero's own personality and history only come into play in the attainment of his/her goal. In *Naturally Native*, each sister becomes a heroine in her own right, each with distinct personalities and goals that mix and complicate and ultimately enrich this tale of Native American women creating a start-up business. It is a satisfying movie experience in terms of the unique female Native ingredients which are practically unknown to a non-Native audience. The question here is not to ask why movies striving for authenticity fail with American audiences, and a film more reliant upon stereotypes wins, but rather, Is there hope for change?<sup>38</sup>

This is the critical point, where Hollywood is slow in changing and where Native filmmakers could succeed but have not. Because Native filmmakers can, in fact, produce a meaningful yet entertaining tale and fashion it in such a way that it satisfies, to some extent, a Native tradition and yet also satisfies, to a more necessary extent, the needs of a movie audience. Compromise is the key here.

Partially, the reason for the success of *Smoke Signals* is that both filmmakers and audiences agree with what the stereotypical Hollywood Indian should be, and this is accepted and built upon even by the Native filmmakers themselves. The fact of the rejection of the film by Native people themselves is fundamentally a rejection of the stereotypes, as Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe explained in a

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37 Chris Eyre in *Reel Injun*.

38 *Powwow Highway*. Jonathan Wacks (dir.), Gary Farmer (perf.), A. Martinez, Joannelle Nadine Romero. Handmade Films, 1989; *Smoke Signals*. Chris Eyre (dir.), Adam Beach (perf.), Evan Adams, Irene Bedard. Miramax, 1998; *Naturally Native*. Jennifer Wynne Farmer & Valerie Red-Horse (dirs), Valerie Red-Horse (perf.), Yvonne Russo, Irene Bedard. Red-Horse Productions, 1998.

review of the film.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, *Powwow Highway*, a box-office flop, was a rental success among Native American youths because its makers “rework and refute the stereotypical image of the Hollywood Indian,”<sup>40</sup> and Cayuga actor Gary Farmer “came closest to revealing the ‘modern’ Indian-self,” and his character is “believable to Indians and non-Indians alike.”<sup>41</sup> But the point for Hollywood is that *Smoke Signals* is entertaining enough to meet a financial goal. Compromise on the part of the Native filmmakers in this instance worked and money is made for everyone. For any filmmaker, the goal is to continue to work in the film business is to make sure your last production’s revenues doubled, at least, its production budget.

One aspect of the evolution that must occur now is for Native filmmakers to accept compromise and, in a sense, to regard the Indian sidekick as he stands in the American psyche and then take the audience beyond the stereotypes, where there are fresh narrative fields to harvest. Not necessarily to break down the role of the Native sidekick, but to turn it on its head and make him one of the tribe.

### The Indian sidekick as part of the American hero

The humor of the sidekick contributes to building the character hero, or revealing his true personality. The sidekick, like the heyoka, highlights flaws and deficiencies so that his direct audience—that is his partner—can take it upon himself to improve, to become a better person, thus fulfilling himself as a hero. This can endow the Indian character with a deeper, a more fundamental and more humanizing dimension. Depp’s Tonto, for example, literally creates the masked hero in a scene in which the duo decides to ride together to render justice. Tonto, as it were, hires Reed to help him on his quest, gives him the mask to turn him into the Lone Ranger: more than a sidekick, Tonto has become the creator of a hero, and so takes on a loftier, instead of subservient, position. In *Dead Man*, Jim Jarmusch playfully depicts such a hero-making scene when the Indian savior/sidekick/spiritual guide, tellingly named Nobody (Gary Farmer), vehemently tells his new companion (Depp), so far an anti-hero, fatally wounded in a gunfight over a one-night affair, who he truly is: “You are a poet, and a painter, and now, you are a killer of white men.” William Blake remains incredulous to the identity bestowed upon him by a Nobody who passionately recites excerpts from the English poet’s “Auguries of Innocence”: “Some are born to sweet delight, some are born to endless night,” Nobody recites as a lullaby, as he tucks in Blake.<sup>42</sup>

39 Howe LeAnne, “*Smoke Signals*.” Howe LeAnne *et al.* (eds.), *op. cit.*, 113-115, p. 115.

40 Anderson Eric Gary, “Driving the Red Road: *Powwow Highway* (1989).” Peter C. Rollins and John E. O’Connor (eds), *op. cit.*, 137-152, p. 137.

41 Jojola, p. 15.

42 *Dead Man*. Jim Jarmusch (dir.), Johnny Depp (perf.), Gary Farmer. Miramax, 1995.

The Indian sidekick sometimes serves to reveal the true self of the hero, to the audience as well as to the hero himself. In this role, the Indian is still only instrumental to the construction of the white hero. Where one can see a positive evolution, though, is when that true self of the white hero implies either an acceptance of his own Indian identity or an Indian perspective as part of his worldview or society.

The positive side of the Indian stereotype has made acceptance of Native people in the American fabric of history, tradition and myth slightly easier than for other groups. This acceptance can manifest itself as a unique transference of Self. The idea that to become Indian, or to possess some form of ancestral connection with Native Americans can bestow a form of true or bedrock Americanness still holds true to this day. Of course, there is sometimes financial or some other gain to be had in this, but this transference, when explored fully, becomes more complex. This accepted transference of Indian self to American heroism is well illustrated by the playful representation of Disney's Pocahontas in the attire of Captain America, by artist Christopher Stoll (see **Fig. 2**). On film, two movies feature this transference, in two different ways. In the first, the Indian sidekick becomes a hero; in the second, the hero becomes Indian.



**Fig. 2:** *Captain Native-America*, Christopher Stoll. "I wanted [...] to bring across both the position of Captain America as the leader of the group, and Pocahontas' willpower and self-sacrifice. Ultimately, to try and make her look empowered." (<http://christopher-stoll.deviantart.com/art/Princess-Avengers-CAPTAIN-AMERICA-336921248>. Consulted on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015).

Throughout *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, “Chief” Bromden (Will Sampson) is the “real hero,”<sup>43</sup> but he goes through various stages of the typical Indian sidekick. The first encounter between him and the “hero”—meaning the one who rebels against the authoritarian institution and becomes a mentor of sorts for a group of characters—R.P. McMurphy (Jack Nicholson), shows a caricature of an Indian: Bromden is a huge man with long black hair and a stoic face—McMurphy compares him to a mountain, salutes him with the stereotypical “How,” and performs a mock dance and war whoop. Throughout the movie, he calls him “Chief,” a common ethnic slur to refer to Native Americans, although used here as a buddy nickname. To everybody’s knowledge—characters and audience—Bromden is deaf and dumb, conveniently making him the perfect subservient sidekick when McMurphy starts using his immense body, which he manipulates as a puppet, to serve his objective of victory in a basketball game against the asylum personnel. Thus, in the first few interactions between the two characters, the Indian sidekick appears utterly devoid of volition. This changes gradually. The first time the viewers see him move of his own volition, he jumps to McMurphy’s rescue in a fight, thus becoming the faithful backup of the hero. Later, in the sole presence of his partner, he speaks. In this scene, he not only lets his partner in on his secret (see **Fig. 3**); he also departs from the stereotype of the stoic Indian/silent sidekick and, in a way, becomes a full-fledged character. According to Jojola, in this brief scene, resounding with McMurphy’s words—“Well goddam, Chief! And they all think you’re deaf and dumb. Jesus Christ, you fooled them Chief, you fooled them... You fooled ’em all!”—“a new generation of hope and anticipation was heralded among Native American moviegoers. Long the downtrodden victims of escapist shoot-’em-and-hang-’em-up Westerns. Native Americans were ready for a new cinematic treatment—one that was real and contemporary.”<sup>44</sup> Although Bromden’s loss of the narration, in the process of adaption of Ken Kesey’s novel into a movie, can be deemed “unfortunate,”<sup>45</sup> one may argue that, at the end, Bromden becomes the hero by proxy by fulfilling his partner’s dream of freedom, at the same time that he saves the lobotomized hero—turned victim of the institution—from a lifetime of miserable, mental as well as institutional, alienation.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Aleiss, p. 137.

44 Jojola, p. 12.

45 Kilpatrick, p. 100.

46 *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Milos Forman (dir.), Jack Nicholson (perf.), Louise Fletcher, Will Sampson. Fantasy Films, 1975.



**Fig. 3:** “Chief” Bromden is about to “open up” to McMurphy, No traditional garb or stereotypical headdress here: their identical attire puts them on an equal footing.

The ultimate dimension of the Indian sidekick’s role as revealing the Indian self of American identity is illustrated in *Thunderheart*.<sup>47</sup> In this politically-charged, based-on-true events movie by Michael Apted, whose documentary *Incident at Oglala*, released the same year, investigates the truth behind the arrest of activist Leonard Peltier, and who cast other former activists (notably John Trudell of Alcatraz fame), young idealistic FBI agent Ray Lavoie (Val Kilmer) leads an investigation that turns into a quest to find himself, with tribal policeman Walter Crow Horse (Graham Greene) as a sidekick. On one level, Crow Horse serves Ray as what Buchanan calls a “buffer from his environment”;<sup>48</sup> he introduces Ray to a world that rejects everything he represents. During their first encounter, Crow Horse speaks Lakota to Ray, whom he knows is part-Sioux. Ray does not understand him. During their second encounter, Crow Horse speaks to Ray in a tongue-in-cheek cliché Indian way –telling him to “listen to the wind” and “talk to the sand”– but actually making a lot of sense, to which Ray remains impervious. In these encounters and conversations between the hero and his sidekick, we see that Ray, although a Sioux, is first of all an FBI agent. As such, in the rez, he is in a hostile environment. Crow Horse appears to provide fun to Ray’s detriment. However, what he really does is protect him and introduce him to the people who can help his investigation. On a more fundamental level, more than acting as a mere buffer, Crow Horse eases Ray’s way into his own world, into

47 *Thunderheart*. Michael Apted (dir.), Val Kilmer (perf.), Sam Shepard, Graham Greene. Tristar, 1992.

48 *Op. cit.*, p. 24.



being Sioux more than FBI, into learning exactly who he is, into not being—as Crow Horse says in a translation of Grandpa Sam Reaches’s words—“as far from himself as the hawk from the moon,” into moving his Indian side from a quite literally interior other to a whole self, the ultimate step of acceptance. Ray’s self-acceptance can be broadened to symbolize the American psyche’s acceptance of its Indian identity.

## Conclusion

While it can be understood that Native American activists are wary of misrepresentations and wish that Indian characters were heroes instead of villains or sidekicks, one also has to keep in mind that Hollywood’s movie industry is a money-making business which, as such, cares little about such political and ethical considerations. As far as producers are concerned, the issue boils down to what celebrity is likely to appeal to the largest audience. Certainly, one can regret that Indian actors are not given the opportunities to become as bankable as Depp or Del Toro but one can agree with the latter when, questioned on the controversy around his performance as Jimmy Picard, he said: “there is a money issue in doing movies, and the fact that I have a career created the chance of the movie being made. That is a fact of life at this moment in time. So, when I read the story, I just felt it was a really strong story that should be out there. And, with all due respect, I dared to do it.”<sup>49</sup>

There are really two perspectives from which to look at the fact that Native American actors start being cast in non-necessarily Indian parts and that Indian characters tentatively approach full-blown heroism. In Sheyahshe’s terms, “some Indigenous characters find limited acceptance from white culture by becoming the token sidekick to the dominant white character.”<sup>50</sup> This evolution may be seen as a sign of the gradual integration of Indians within the fabric of American identity. Or it may be seen as “limited acceptance” only.

It is difficult to say whether *Frozen River* is an illustration of a new positive trend coming from the margins of Hollywood, or just one exceptional occurrence subverting the traditional Indian sidekick formula.<sup>51</sup> This dark but hopeful indie drama shows the growing friendship between two women struggling with economic strains and family disruptions. Ray (Melissa Leo) is a Euro-American resident of New York; Lila (Misty Upham) a member of the Mohawk nation. If, from a formal perspective, Lila appears to be Ray’s

49 Godreche Dominique. “Benicio Del Toro: ‘Native Americans Are the Real Americans.’” *Indian Country Today Media Network*. <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/09/26/benicio-del-toro-native-americans-are-real-americans-151462>. Consulted on July 19, 2014.

50 *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

51 *Frozen River*. Courtney Hunt (dir.), Melissa Leo (perf.), Misty Upham. Harwood Hunt Productions, 2008.

sidekick, riding on the passenger's seat while Ray drives the Spirit (by Dodge) with which they try to escape their dire strait, they quickly reach a balanced relationship: they need each other and they end up having each other's back, both ready to sacrifice themselves for the other. If Ray's goal drives the storyline, Lila's character's complex development offers a realistic view of one Native American woman's life today. In *Frozen River*, the Indian sidekick becomes, according to Ray, "a friend."

So, is there a possibility for Native filmmakers to move beyond the "sidekick ceiling" and to take on the mantle of hero/heroine in Hollywood? The big-budget *Lone Ranger* movie that turned the tables on a beloved American myth and featured the Indian sidekick as hero demonstrates that room exists for growth. Its relative failure does not preclude the possibility that an independent, small-budgeted Native-produced movie featuring a Native hero and an enthralling story that contains some stereotypes but only those particular ones that the filmmaker considers relevant to his/her tribal culture, will be made and distributed and garner subsequent box office success. For this to happen, however, there may be a painful process of downplaying what Native filmmakers consider as important to convey about their culture, to make it less regional or tribal-specific, and to possibly merge a tried-and-true Hollywood narrative with a traditional Native one. Hollywood is brutal to ethnicity, but it is open to experienced talent whose films consistently bring in big revenues, no matter where they originate.

For this process to work, it may become more critical to consider as important the authenticity that actors –Native or non-Native– bring to their portrayals of the psyches of Native peoples. In other words, for a Rooney Mara or a Benicio del Toro to be cast as Native may be less important than how their portrayals represent and redefine the representation of Native people, past and present; perhaps even how these actors' talents can help authenticate the Native stories that Native filmmakers wish to tell. This collaborative process between Native and non-Native film artists could be the keystone to an expanded presence of American Indians in the cinema. The evolution of the Indian sidekick may in fact help to build and solidify a New Native Cinema –one that garners the Native in all Americans and merges all our collective stories together. This process is still embryonic to be sure, but not without hope of success.

Traditionally, the sidekick "is aiding the reader's acceptance of the main character."<sup>52</sup> It is certainly true in most of the movies we mentioned. We would like to argue in conclusion, however, that the Indian sidekick might be urging, in American audiences, an acceptance of the Indian part of the American psyche, signaling a completion of the American identity. Kilpatrick

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52 Buchanan, p. 20.

argues that “the Native Other as sidekick has always been comforting to that part of the audience that desired a painless solution to racial harmony.”<sup>53</sup> The American Indian sidekick may be seen as a construct to move beyond the representations of Indians as opponents or supports. Just as *Moby Dick*’s narrator Ishmael and Queequeg “the cannibal pagan,” the Euro-American and the Indian are in bed together in an inextricable and welcome embrace,<sup>54</sup> or tied together, for better and for worse.<sup>55</sup>

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### Abstract

The Hollywood movie industry has often employed non-Indian actors to portray Indian characters, and reduced Indian characters to villains or secondary roles. In the wake of centuries of misperceptions and misrepresentations, Hollywood has invented a new form of the “white man’s Indian,” the Indian sidekick. Drawing examples from a dozen movies, this paper attempts to analyze how the Indian sidekick is a symptom of the ambiguous place Native Americans have in the American psyche. Without the Indian sidekick, would the typical American hero be complete?

### Keywords

Sidekicks, Native American, hollywood.

### Résumé

Hollywood a souvent employé des acteurs non-Indiens dans des rôles d’Indiens, et réduit les personnages indiens aux méchants ou aux seconds couteaux. À la suite de plusieurs siècles de méconnaissance et de représentations fallacieuses, Hollywood a inventé une nouvelle forme de « l’Indien de l’homme blanc », le comparse indien. À partir d’exemples tirés d’une douzaine de films, cette contribution s’efforce de montrer comment l’on peut dire que le comparse indien est un symptôme de la place ambiguë occupée par les Indiens dans l’imaginaire américain. Sans son comparse indien, le héros américain serait-il totalement accompli ?

### Mots-clés

Faire-valoir, Indien, Hollywood.

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53 *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

54 “I found Queequeg’s arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife [...] For though I tried to move his arm –unlock his bridegroom clasp– yet, sleeping as he was, he still hugged me tightly, as though naught be death should part us twain.” Melville Herman. 1851. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 43-45.

55 “So that for better or for worse, we two, for the time, were wedded; and should poor Queequeg sink to rise no more, then both usage and honour demanded, that instead of cutting the cord, it should drag me down in his wake.” *Ibid.*, p. 310.

# “Billy walked and I rode”: John and William Bartram Roam the World Over

Laurence Machet & Lee Schweninger

“He fancied it was right and requisite, as well for the support of his own honour as for the service of his country, that he should make a knight-errant of himself, roaming the world over...”<sup>1</sup>

In 1765 American-born naturalist John Bartram (1699-1777) –through the influence of his patron and friend, London merchant Peter Collinson– received a royal appointment to explore and chart the land that Great Britain had recently acquired from Spain (essentially present-day Florida). John promptly sent a letter to his son William (1739-1823), cajoling the twenty-six year old into accompanying him on this journey of exploration: “as thee wrote to me last winter & seemed so very desirous to go there: now thee hath A fair opertunity so pray let me know as soon as possible.”<sup>2</sup>

Nothing seemed to predestine the relatively uneducated son of a Quaker farmer born in 1699 near Philadelphia to become the most famous American botanist of the period and have one of his children, William, follow in his footsteps. Yet, from somewhat humble beginnings, the Bartrams, father and son, achieve what might be called heroic stature. What lay before them was literally an unmapped country and figuratively an essentially unmapped field of study, the relatively new science of botany.<sup>3</sup> They were pioneers in their field, and as pioneers they had to face the dangers of disease, wild beasts, and the occasional hostility of Native Americans.<sup>4</sup> Travel was difficult and expensive; roads were often mere trails if they existed at all; and camping gear was

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- 1 Cervantes Miguel de, *Don Quixote* (1605), trans. John Ormsby, 1922, chapter one, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/996/pg996-images.html>, accessed August 19, 2015.
  - 2 Letter from Bartram, John to Bartram William, 7 June 1765, in *The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734-1777*, Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley (Eds), Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1992, p. 652.
  - 3 Carl Linnaeus published *Species Plantarum*, the book which marks the beginnings of modern botanical nomenclature in 1753, exactly the time John and Billy were exploring the Catskill Mountains and searching for and discovering species new to them.
  - 4 John Bartram’s father, William, Sr., had been killed by Indians in 1711.

heavy and cumbersome. Despite all obstacles, however, John Bartram became a competent and esteemed botanist, deemed by Carl Linnaeus, for example, as “the greatest natural botanist in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Later, of course, John’s son William became an even more accomplished artist and better-known writer, as well as a botanist in his own right. Throughout his career as traveler and botanist, however, the son remained cognizant of his father’s importance and legacy, and he acknowledges his debt to him.

Reading the Bartram’s published travel accounts as well as several posthumously published letters, we make a multi-fold argument in this paper. In the footsteps of several recent autobiography theorists, we maintain that in the Bartrams’ autobiographical travel accounts, as in any other autobiographical writing, the “self” or the “I” of the narrative is “a construct, a persona, not the person,”<sup>6</sup> and this hypothesis allows us to maintain that the two authors construct personas in their respective travel accounts (as well as in other writings, including personal letters). Taken this way, one can argue that John Bartram renders his son William as a sort of sidekick through sometimes humorous accounts on what are very much the father’s exploratory journeys, at first through the Catskills and later through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Similarly, this method allows us to suggest that William presents a persona in his own first-person travel account, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1791)<sup>7</sup>, a presentation which enables him to describe himself as a self-sufficient, fully competent traveler in his own right as he ultimately travels independently from his father. William certainly becomes the heroic traveler he describes, but at the same time, by his own telling, the man presented in this travel account never actually loses sight of his father. Thus by combining a somewhat literary analysis of these historical documents we explore the two naturalists’ relationships with each other in terms of principal and sidekick, mentor and mentee, father and son, as well as fellow botanists. This combination of methods ultimately allows us to argue that on a certain level the motif of the sidekick is present in these naturalists’ autobiographical travel accounts

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- 5 Duyker Edward, *Nature’s Argonaut. Daniel Solander 1733-1782*, Melbourne, Miegunyah Press, 1988, p. 66.
  - 6 Barros Carolyn A., *Autobiography: Narrative of Transformation*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1998, p. 20. See also Jay Paul, *Being in the Text: Self-Representation from Wordsworth to Roland Barthes*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984; Morris John, *Versions of the Self*, New York, Basic Books, Inc. 1966; Olney James, *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1972; Sayre Robert, *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964; Spacks Patricia Meyer, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976; and Sprinker Michael, *Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980.
  - 7 Bartram William, *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, Philadelphia, 1791. Rpt. *Travels*, Francis Harper (Ed.), New Haven, Yale University Press, 1958. This edition hereafter referred to as *Travels*.

and that the two authors of these accounts create literary personas, personas which relish humor, irony, and perhaps occasional hyperbole. In this sense, they thus profit from and contribute to the tradition of literary and cultural side-kicks. Our own exploration, we argue, can help readers appreciate the special relationship between father and son and provide a fuller understanding of their interdependence than has been articulated to date. It also allows us to appreciate anew the respective contributions the Bartrams have made to American history, to botany, and to letters.

In the context of autobiography, it has become a commonplace to argue that the "self" described is necessarily a construct, a representation. The writer makes choices concerning what aspects of a life to include, what to emphasize, and what to leave out altogether. These decisions alone suggest the creation of a persona. In *Autobiography: Narrative of Transformation* Carolyn A. Barros, writes that "the construction of... autobiography is clearly a conscious act"<sup>8</sup>. Further, she stipulates, "when Morris speaks of a 'version' of the self, he is assuming that the self of autobiography is a form, a rendering, an account of the self that can take many shapes, or when Spacks posits the self as 'imagined,' or 'imaged,' she is indicating, again, that the self appears in autobiography as a creation. When Olney contends that Carl Jung's 'metaphor of self' is myth, he is arguing that Jung both saw his life and inscribed that life in *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* as myth."<sup>9</sup> When Sprinker speaks of 'fictions of the self,' he is explaining how the self of a text is an 'articulation of an intersubjectivity structured within and around the discourses available to it at any moment in time'<sup>10</sup>. Such self-conscious constructions of the self are not limited to autobiographical writing, of course.

Readers see similar tendencies and characteristics among writers in other genres as well. Even in a private correspondence or diary accounts of travel experiences, one can argue, the author creates a persona. In the context of early American writing generally, according to David Shields, "private societies [such as societies for the promotion of practical knowledge] were instrumental in the formation of the public sphere, and their modes of discourse necessary to the creation of public opinion."<sup>11</sup> A fine instance of such early American constructions is evident in the writings of the well-known Benjamin Franklin, John Bartram's American contemporary, friend and correspondent. Franklin biographer Jeff Osborne suggests that once written, "the self is rendered textual" and is thus read by a public "which judges it according to the specific

8 Barros Carolyn A., *Autobiography: Narrative of Transformation*, p. 19.

9 See Jung Carl & Jaffé Aniela, *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1963.

10 Barros Carolyn A., *Autobiography: Narrative of Transformation*, p. 20.

11 Shields David S., *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997, p. xv.



set of social codes available to it.” In this context, then, “Franklin’s recognition that the self functions as print allowed him the coincident insight into the function of the self in the public eye.”<sup>12</sup> (emphasis ours). In this sense, the private self necessarily becomes –or is simultaneously– a public self. According to Stephanie Volmer, “in the eighteenth century [letters] bridged the public and private spheres of knowledge. There was an implicit assumption that letters would be exchanged and shared within one’s epistolary community... [L]etters were frequently excerpted and published in periodicals.”<sup>13</sup> Hence –in addition to sharing and exchanging knowledge– letter writers knew full well that there was a need for creating a persona, a character they were willing to present to the scrutiny of a public eye.

Scholars have made similar assertions in reference to the writings of John Bartram, who was aware that his letters to Peter Collinson were often either read before the Royal Society in London –the attendance of which grew large after the 1740s<sup>14</sup>– or circulated among the London merchant’s circle of friends. In an essay in which he highlights issues of Quaker literary self-representation, James Peacock writes that John Bartram’s writings, especially his letters, advertise “a traditional Quaker problem: the imperfect transmission of the self and its spiritual ideas through the debased language of man.” Bartram’s correspondence with Collinson, Peacock continues, provides “fascinating insights into John Bartram as a Quaker, a botanist, and most importantly an American keen to define himself in amicable opposition to his English counterpart [Collinson].”<sup>15</sup> (our emphasis). What is perhaps most interesting in our context here is the attribution of self-awareness on Bartram’s part in his defining a self. In our own explorations of the self-representations of John and William Bartram, it is that constructed self, that persona, which we are investigating. Thus we are, in a sense, interested in the intersection of literary and historical writing, arguing for their underlying similarities. According to Jacques Derrida, for example, “In both expression and indicative communication the difference between reality and representation, between the true and the imaginary, and between simple presence and repe-

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12 Osborne Jeff, “Benjamin Franklin and the Rhetoric of Virtuous Self-Fashioning in Eighteenth-Century America”. *Literature and History* 17.2 (2008): p. 14-30, (19).

13 Volmer Stephanie “Taste, ‘Curiosity,’ and the Letters of John Bartram and Peter Collinson”, in *America’s Curious Botanist: A Tercentennial Reappraisal of John Bartram*. Nancy E. Hoffmann and John C. Van Horne (Eds.), Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 2004: p. 67-76, (69).

14 Stearns, Raymond Phineas, *Science in the British Colonies of America*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1970, p. 96.

15 Peacock James, “Who was John Bartram? Literary and Epistolary Representations of the Quaker”, in *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations* 9.1 (April 2005): p. 29-44. Rpt. electronically 2007: [http://repository.keele.ac.uk:8080/intralibrary/open\\_virtual\\_file\\_path/i8477n165423t/9.1Peacock\[1\].pdf](http://repository.keele.ac.uk:8080/intralibrary/open_virtual_file_path/i8477n165423t/9.1Peacock[1].pdf), 3, 12. Accessed August 19, 2015.

tion has always already begun to be effaced."<sup>16</sup> In our context, we argue that this overlap helps readers of Bartram appreciate the reciprocal relationship between the Bartrams' writings and their historical moment.

In arguing the effacement of difference between historical and literary creations, we are ready to look at specific aspects of the general definition of sidekick, most particularly the notion of sidekick as underling who learns from the hero and at the same time acquires or possesses qualities or characteristics that complement that hero's. The sidekick serves to highlight a specific aspect of his counterpart, and can ultimately in some ways even overshadow or out perform him. On their first recorded journey together, we see John depict his son William as an underling who accompanies the father on excursions into the wilds, and—according to historian and Bartram biographer Francis Harper, for example—William "seems to have had a very humble part as his father's assistant on the present journey."<sup>17</sup> Despite a somewhat unequal pairing and the father's initially representing the boy as thoroughly a pupil, the father is at the same time careful to include hints that his son is nevertheless a faithful, competent companion who definitely has promise. But it was perhaps the first of several exploratory excursions that laid the groundwork for Billy to become William, the author of *Travels*, mentioned above, one of the most important and widely read travel accounts by a naturalist-botanist in eighteenth-century America. We maintain here, however, that William's later success and renown as travel writer and artist, and even his career as botanist and gardener, remain very much dependent upon the father's earlier tutelage; that is, William repeatedly represents himself in large measure as the product of his apprenticeship with his father.

During the eighteenth century, botany became a favorite pastime of members of the British gentry and nobility; these men were fascinated by the exotic discoveries made in the colonies and displayed in published works such writers as Mark Catesby. John Bartram's own interest in botany, which he turned into a profitable seed business, may have had its origins in his religious background, Quakers being educated to recognize plants. Indeed, Friends founder George Fox (1624-91) is said to have advocated that all Quaker schools should provide education in plants: "Fox, in conjunction with Penn and others wanted to establish a school in London replete with a botanical garden. He subsequently bequeathed a plot of land to the Friends' meeting in Philadelphia for this purpose."<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, in 1733, the British cloth merchant Peter Collinson,

16 Derrida Jacques, "Speech and Phenomena" [La Voix et le phénomène, 1967], in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, Peggy Kamuf (Ed.), New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 6-30 (11).

17 Bartram, John, *Diary of a Journey through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida from July 1st 1765 to April 10, 1766*, Rpt. American Philosophical Society, New Series; p. 33, part 1 (December 1942), annotated by Francis Harper, p. 81. This edition hereafter referred to as *Diary*.

18 Greaves Richard L., "The Early Quakers as Advocates of Educational Reform" in *Quaker*

an amateur botanist and Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS), started a correspondence with John Bartram who was to supply him with plants and seeds for his own garden. In these contexts, then, the historical Bartrams became important contributors to the era's interest in botany.

Whatever the genesis of John Bartram's interest in and knowledge of plants, his plant collecting for Collinson necessitated a correspondence, and that correspondence soon outgrew the merely friendly exchange of letters between two fellow Quakers. Collinson became a sort of middleman for Bartram, who ended up providing specimens for the British gentry, as well as for nurserymen and scientists in Great Britain. In spite of his geographical isolation, John Bartram found himself at the center of a cultural and scientific network that enabled him to finance his botanical expeditions, accounts of which he then sent to Peter Collinson and/or published, most often through Collinson's connections. John Bartram's son William in turn engaged in the same activities as his father, ultimately producing the book *Travels*, a detailed account of his four-year long exploration of the Southeastern colonies.

When examining the accounts by John and William Bartram alongside each other, one cannot help but notice the differences in approach to both travel itself and to the method of recounting that travel. It has been repeatedly argued that for John, exploratory travels that kept him away from his large family and home were dictated not only by his acknowledged passion for botany,<sup>19</sup> but first and foremost by economic necessity. His very pragmatic concerns, at odds with the image of the hero he at times endeavored to construct, are evident throughout his letters to Collinson but are also very much apparent in the no-nonsense, matter-of-fact style of his travel narratives themselves. Bartram scholar William Scheick, writes that John

Bartram's weak formal education left him ill-equipped for written expression, and in fact he never did learn to spell, to compose well-structured sentences, to range in vocabulary, or to devise a conscious stylistic manner. Even several of his friends and correspondents who highly regarded his knowledge—Peter Collinson and Peter Kalm, for example—explicitly criticized Bartram's apparent limitations as a writer.<sup>20</sup>

Keenly self-aware of his plain style and awkward grammar, John Bartram turned this apparent deficiency into an asset, posing as a spokesperson for nature. He repeatedly presents himself as the heroic and often solitary explorer who refuses civilization's artifices in order to be closer to truth. Indeed, as he

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*History*, 58:1 (Spring 1969): p. 22-30 (28).

19 John Bartram writes that "...ye Botanick fire set me in such a flame as is not to be quenched until death..." Letter from John Bartram to Templeman, July 6<sup>th</sup> 1761 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 525).

20 Scheick William J., "Telling a Wonder: Dialectic in the Writings of John Bartram", in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107.2 (April 1, 1983): p. 235-248 (235).

writes to Collinson in 1754, "Good grammar and good spelling, may please those that are more taken with a fine superficial flourish than real truth; but my chief aim was to inform my readers of the true, real, distinguishing characters of each genus, and where, and how, each species differed from one another, of the same genus."<sup>21</sup>

By asserting that he maintains his simple writing style for the sake of exactitude, he also creates the persona of the objective scientist. This creation is apparent in his diaries, especially in *Diary of a Journey through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida from July 1<sup>st</sup> 1765 to April 10, 1766*, sections of which were published in London in 1769. His entries systematically start with a daily temperature reading followed by additional remarks on the weather and geological and botanical surveys: "Thermometer 77. Lovely clear morning. Walked out of donahoos Creek to search for fossils with billy..."<sup>22</sup>. But in spite of the terse style, mention of the obstacles encountered, as if merely in passing, enables the reader to picture John Bartram as an almost heroic figure: the rocks he and Billy have to climb are "of very large dimensions," with "great cavities"; he and Billy kill "a Mocasine snake," i.e. a poisonous and thus dangerous viper, and at midday, the storm and thunder rage<sup>23</sup>. This narrative pattern repeats itself over and over, and it enables John Bartram to create the persona of the devoted and fearless scientist working tirelessly for the advancement of knowledge, albeit with the assistance of a faithful apprentice-companion, his son Billy.

As early as 1742, John Bartram recounts for his friends in Britain the dangers he typically faced on his trips, and he complains about the absence of an assistant by his side:

I can't find one that will bear the fatigue to accompany me on my peregrinations. Therefore, consequently, thee may suppose I am often exposed to solitary and difficult traveling beyond our inhabitants, and often under dangerous circumstances, in passing over rivers, climbing over mountains and precipices amongst the rattlesnakes and often obliged to follow the track or path of wild beasts for my guide through these desolate and gloomy thickets.<sup>24</sup>

The self-representation he indulges in here, in addition to that of the scientist, is that of the solitary hero fending for himself in the wilderness. He does however acknowledge that he would welcome an assistant to face the same throes he faces, and he ultimately finds just such an assistant in the person of

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21 Letter from John Bartram to Peter Collinson, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1754 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 374-375).

22 Bartram John, *Diary*, p. 18.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Letter from John Bartram to Alexander Calcott, 26<sup>th</sup> May 1742 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 324).

his son, whom he had already convinced to accompany him on his first trip to the Catskill mountains, mentioned above, in September 1753. On this initial trip, documented both in the published *Journal through the Catskill Mountains with Billy*<sup>25</sup> and in a lengthy letter to Collinson, fourteen-year-old Billy helped his father collect seeds and samples of plants. John mentions that he instructs him in the process and places himself in the position of mentor: “I took this road to show my son ye broken mountainous desolate part of ye country where we took ye first perticular notice of ye alder with A silver color on ye branches of ye North river.”<sup>26</sup> At one point the father notes that he regrets that his gifted son should not have “brought his box of paints with him”<sup>27</sup> to draw their discoveries. William was in fact already a skilled draftsman and painter, whose works later charmed John’s correspondents in London. According to Collinson, “Billy’s elegant drawings are admired by all that see them.”<sup>28</sup> The son’s artistic ability in this particular context helped to fill a gap in his father’s skill set, and John used it both as a complement to the parcels he sent to his overseas clients<sup>29</sup> and ultimately as a means of securing a living for William.<sup>30</sup> In his *Diary*, John thus first presents Billy as an underling who accompanies his father on his excursions into the wilds, but at the same time, the father appears to be very careful to present a picture of his son as a faithful support, as one who has great potential, and as one who will ultimately gain competence. Billy’s role is simultaneously multifold in that he is also called upon to make up for the father’s shortcomings. Thus, historically there is record of John’s awareness of his son’s artistic promise; at the same time, literarily, as it were, the author acknowledges that the assistant has useful talents that the principal lacks.

Throughout John’s corpus of writings, the father offers varied accounts of his son’s roles. Billy serves as a young apprentice, but later he takes on a different role. As noted above, in 1765 William went to Florida with his father, who had been appointed Botanist to King George III. William was involved in a rather unsuccessful business venture on the Cape Fear River

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25 Bartram John, *Journal through the Catskill Mountains with Billy*, Bartram Family Papers (Collection 36), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

26 Letter from John Bartram to Peter Collinson, undated but probably fall 1753 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 359).

27 Letter from John Bartram to Peter Collinson, probably fall 1753 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 357).

28 Letter from Peter Collinson to John Bartram, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1766 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 476).

29 “Wee are much obliged to Billey for giving us so perfect an Idea of this Glorious Hibiscus as it grows in Carolina.” Letter from Peter Collinson to John Bartram, 29<sup>th</sup> February 1768 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 699).

30 “He (Peter Collinson) proposed that I should engage thy son to make drawings of all your land Tortoises.” Letter from John Fothergill to John Bartram, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1768 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 707).

in North Carolina. We know that on that journey John did not always keep the scientific diary-travel account himself. Quite often Billy substituted for his father, either collecting specimens for him or writing the journal entries when his father was too weak to do so.<sup>31</sup> The entry for 23 October 1765, for example, reads as follows: "I am so very weak can hardly stand without reeling. Billy is gone over to ye island to gather seeds & specimens."<sup>32</sup>

From somewhat humble beginnings, then, one can see that Billy acquires the fundamentals to become William the full-fledged traveler, botanist, and writer in his own right. In 1773, almost a decade after the first trip to Florida, he embarks on his own journey to the Southeast and subsequently publishes a detailed account. William decides to make his solo trip after a failed venture as a planter, this time in Florida, where he had decided to remain after his first journey there with his father in 1765-66. As John recalls, "I have left my son Billy in Florida. Nothing will do with him now but he will be a planter upon St Johns River about 24 mile from Augustine & 6 from ye fort of Picolata."<sup>33</sup> After that new failure, William pondered his destiny and wrote in the summer of 1772 that he was determined "to retreat within myself to the only business I was born for, and which I am only good for (if I am entitled to use that phrase for anything)."<sup>34</sup> That business was botany and the drawing of plants, which, as early as 1755, John had identified as his son's "darling delight(s)."<sup>35</sup> Strangely enough, despite having noticed that his son's calling seemed to be similar to his own and even though the father took him as a companion on his trips, John Bartram does not seem to have encouraged that passion, replying to William in July 1772: "We are surprised at thy wild notion of going to Augustine."<sup>36</sup> One wonders if John the hero was worried that his apprentice son would become the better and more renowned writer, illustrator, and even botanist than himself. William, as his father might correctly have surmised, was about to become an independent hero in his own right.

Dwelling more on John Bartram's possible reasons for not promoting his son's talent would be futile, but one cannot help but emphasize that when William did indeed embark on his own four-year-long exploratory journey

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31 Francis Harper notes a difference in handwriting for the entry of December 4, for example. (Bartram John, *Diary*, p. 26).

32 Bartram John, *ibid.*, p. 34.

33 Letter from John Bartram to Peter Collinson, June 1766 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 668).

34 "William Bartram's Common Place Book and Original MS. Notes of William Bartram circa 1760-1800, Philadelphia, Pa", in Smith Berkeley Edmund and Dorothy (Eds.), *The Life and Travels of John Bartram: From Lake Ontario to the River St. John*, Tallahassee, University Press of Florida, 1982.

35 Letter from John Bartram to Peter Collinson, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1755 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 387).

36 Letter from John Bartram to William Bartram, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1772 (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 749).



to the Southeast, he did so alone, albeit with the occasional help of Native American guides. The travel account he produced is much more elaborate and polished than his father's diaries. Though he returned from his journey in January 1777, William published his book only in 1791, a delay which allowed him to revise and refine his writing. William's written account of his travels thus differs substantially from his father's. *Travels* contains numerous paintings or engravings of plants and animals, making it a much more desirable object for European readers. In addition, William's narrative, a few examples of which we elaborate upon below, proved much more sensational, with a real and consistent attempt on the author's part to picture himself as an epic figure, a lone romantic hero, exploring the American wilderness and fending for himself against certain dangers of the wilds. As Pamela Regis states in *Describing Early America*, "Individual action, represented in *Travels* through narrative, is both external, as Bartram moves through the world, and internal, as he experiences his own actions."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, William gives himself center stage through the exuberant reactions to the landscapes that meet his eyes, and those descriptions and narrated episodes are just as important a part of his narrative as factual descriptions of plants, animals, and people.

Because of the sophistication and scope of his *Travels* in comparison with the limitations and style of his father's writings, critics consider that William Bartram outdid his father both in terms of writing and discovery. We maintain, however, that despite his critical success, William is always finishing the business he and his father started when they made their first Florida expedition; William can thus be seen to remain indebted to his father, in his narrative itself and in his life decisions, literally walking in his father's footsteps. It may well be true that William possessed "a talent for literary expression far superior to that of his practical father," as Harper maintains,<sup>38</sup> and the son William does present a fully articulated persona, a metaphor for the inscribed self, in his book *Travels*. But William's trip to Florida, sponsored by John Fothergill, a member of John's vast social network in Britain, was a reenactment, on a grander scale, of the trip John had undertaken with his son ten years before. In a way the Fothergill/William Bartram relationship mirrors the relationship between Peter Collinson and John Bartram. In the course of his narrative, William refers to his father a dozen times, writing at one point that "recollecting many subjects of natural history, which I had observed [...] some years ago with my father, John Bartram, that were interesting, and not taken notice of by any traveller; and [...] having reason to think that very many curious subjects had escaped our researches: I now formed the resolution of travelling into East Florida" (35-36). William retraced much of the

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37 Regis Pamela, *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, and the Influence of Natural History*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. 41.

38 Bartram John, *Diary*, note by Harper Francis, p. 81.

trip he had taken with his father, especially the exploration of the Altamaha River. Indeed he frequently alludes to that first trip and references his father in the course of his own narrative.<sup>39</sup> Retracing his father's footsteps, however, was not only literal but also figurative. William eventually returned to his father's home, and after his father's death in September 1777, the son became an associate in the management of the father's botanical garden and the seed business. The garden itself became a place attracting a new generation of botanists like Benjamin Smith Barton, mirroring what it had been in John's time, when the likes of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur visited it.<sup>40</sup>

A few specific examples from the writings of John and William will serve to demonstrate how father and son present personas, how their writings actually speak to each other, and finally how William perhaps outshines his mentor father but never quite loses sight of him. The first example comes from an early experience on a journey to the Catskill Mountains.

As early as 1753, the father "was pleased indeed to be able to include his 'little botanist,' his son Billy, in his plans for a trip to the Catskills" (Berkeley 148). At the time "little billy" was fourteen years old and still had much to learn from his internationally renowned father.<sup>41</sup> In a letter John wrote to Collinson, during this early excursion, we read that Billy almost kicked a rattlesnake that he mistook for a large toadstool. Here is the father's account of the incident:

Billy saw A great black rattle snake quailed [coiled] up thought at first sight it had been A great mushroom was going to kick it but found his error before he came too near it & called out a rattle snake I cut A stick & claped my handkerchief about one end of it presenting it to ye snakes mough but he would not stir I then took my hat & held it near his mouth he slided his head over his quoil& seemed to smell at my hat then drew his head back again I then pushed him out of his quoil & he crept away...<sup>42</sup>

Compare William's account of the same occurrence written two decades later:

Again, when in my youth, attending my father on a journey to the Catskill Mountains... having nearly ascended the peak of Giliad, being youthful and vigorous in the pursuit of botanical and novel objects, I had gained the summit of a steep rocky precipice, a-head of our guide, when just entering a shady vale, I saw at the root of a small shrub, a singular and beautiful appearance, which I remember to have instantly apprehended to be a large kind of Fungus which we call Jews ears, and was just drawing back my foot to kick it over, when at the instant, my father being near, cried out, a rattle snake my son, and jerked me back, which probably saved my life; I had never before seen one...<sup>43</sup>

39 His father had ten years earlier noticed "curious shrubs." Bartram John, *Diary*, p. 31.

40 Crèvecoeur narrates his visit to John Bartram in late spring of 1765. See "Letter XI", Hector St. John, *The Letters of An American Farmer*, 1782.

41 Josephine Herbst, *New Green World*, New York, Hastings House, 1954, p. 25.

42 Bartram John, undated letter to Peter Collinson, Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 361.

43 Bartram William, *Travels*, p. 169.

Obviously there are marked differences between two accounts. We want particularly to stress that in father's version Billy himself recognizes his mistake, whereas in William's own (later) record, it is the father who identifies the danger and "saves" the son's life. It is possible, of course, to attribute the differences to faulty memory, but in that case everything either of the travelers writes becomes suspect in the same way. Alternatively, then, John's account can be seen as an intentional attempt to represent his son as a worthy, reliable and wise-for-his-age companion, deserving of recognition for his early skills as a naturalist. The father praises the son to his readers, specifically to his benefactor Collinson and the latter's London friends. In contrast, in William's version, written about twenty years after the incident itself, the son wants to present the father as heroic, saving the boy's life, acknowledging his debt to his father and thereby embracing his own status as an underling.

Another passage worth looking at more closely in our context is the reference to the snake in the last sentence in William's account above: "I had never before seen one." William might be referring to having never before seen a "black" rattlesnake. According to John's account, however, the two of them had actually just seen and teased a rattlesnake, albeit a "yellow one." John describes the moment:

We descended down toward ye river & low lands of ye minisinks in which way my son spyed A large rattle snake quailed up in ye compass of ones hat we dismounted & cut A stick to try to anger him drawing him out at length but he ofered to run away from us... I wished my son had brought his box of paints with him... to have drawn him in his greatest beauty for he was A yellow one such as Catesby drew.<sup>44</sup>

Color and size might differ from species to species, but the behaviors and shapes of rattlesnakes are similar, and their rattles are unmistakable. So again, we see the possibility here that William is creating his persona as that of an innocent boy relying on his father, and very much a novice in the wild. This rendition of himself in the face of rattlesnakes stands in stark contrast to the presentation of himself as an adult and experienced naturalist, as is evident from his several other accounts of encounters with rattlesnakes. In one instance, posing as a reluctant hero, he recounts how his interpreter invited him to rid the Indian camp where he was staying of a rattler. He even pictures himself as having greater ability to deal with the American wilderness than its Indigenous inhabitants. In his account, his act of heroism elicits their gratitude:

Being armed with a lightwood knot, I approached the reptile, who instantly collected himself in a vast coil (their attitude of defence) I cast my missile weapon at him, which luckily taking his head dispatched him instantly, and laid

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44 Bartram John, undated letter to Peter Collinson. (Bartram John, *Correspondence*, p. 361)

him trembling at my feet; I took out my knife, severed his head from his body, then turning about, the Indians complimented me with every demonstration of satisfaction and approbation for my heroism, and friendship for them.<sup>45</sup>

That William continued to follow in his father's footsteps in his subsequent explorations is evident throughout his own trip to the South, which he eventually reports in *Travels*. According to Ernest Earnest, "John Bartram could not have written the *Travels*, but his explorations with his son laid the groundwork for it, and there is evidence that William made his later journey with his father's journal before him."<sup>46</sup> Another characteristic of a sidekick is the possibility of using the hero as a model for action. An especially pertinent instance of William's debt in this context is his description of his rediscovery and report of what he named the Franklin tree, *Franklinia alatamaha*. In John Bartram's initial brief description of the Franklin Tree that father and son discover on the banks of the Alatamaha River in Georgia, we can note the relatively awkward syntax and the sparseness of his prose:

...the tree generally very tall straight, and pretty close together at twenty to one hundred yards distance... And exceeding tall grass, very thick like a meadow... generally covered the ground. Unless in ponds, thickets of brush, or some sand hills interspersed toward the river, or where small palmettos grew, which generally is between the swamps and higher piney ground, though it commonly grows in the moister piney soil.<sup>47</sup>

William's (later) accounts are much more elaborate. He offers lengthy and detailed descriptions of the plant, recounts how he found it, mentions what it looks like, and then provides a painting and a minute account of its flowers (an option not available to John because they saw the tree in winter without flowers):

I had the opportunity of observing the new flowering shrub, resembling the *Gordonia*, in perfect bloom, as well as bearing ripe fruit. It is a flowering tree, of the first order for beauty and fragrance of blossoms: the tree grows fifteen or twenty feet high, branching alternately; the leaves are oblong, broadest towards their extremities, and terminate with an acute point, which is generally a little reflexed; they are slightly serrated, attenuate downwards and sessile, or have very short petioles [...] the flowers are very large, expand themselves perfectly, are of a snow-white colour, and ornamented with a crown or tassel of gold coloured refulgent stamina in their centre...<sup>48</sup>

He follows this long description with a reference to his father and to himself as his father's "attendant":

45 Bartram William, *Travels*, p. 165.

46 Earnest Ernest, "Review of *Diary of a Journey through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida*, by John Bartram", in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 67.4 (1943), p. 415-17 (p. 416).

47 Cruickshank Helen G., *John and William Bartram's America: Selections from the Writings of the Philadelphia Naturalists*, New York, Devin-Adair, 1957, p. 49.

48 Bartram William, *Travels*, p. 295.

This very curious tree was first taken notice of, about ten or twelve years ago, at this place, when I attended my father (John Bartram) on a botanical excursion; but, it being then late in the autumn, we could form no opinion to what class or tribe it belonged.<sup>49</sup> (our emphasis).

In the rattlesnake episode recounted above, William presents his father as the hero and life saver, and in the account of the Franklin tree, he gives his father credit for one of the duos most significant and original botanical discoveries, and, according to Lawrence Hetrick, “William’s paintings of it in bloom were a memorial to his father.”<sup>50</sup>



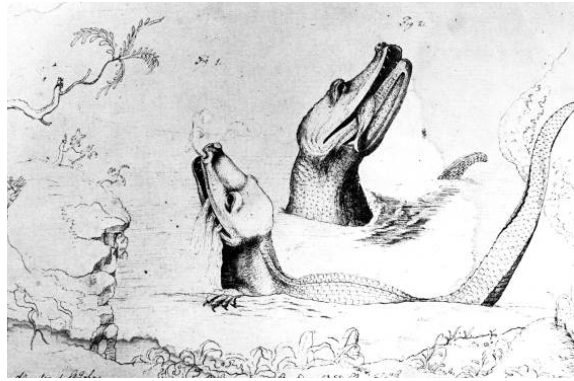
Dessin de *Franklinia Alatomaha* (Arbre de Frankin). William Bartram, *Travels*.

In the context of the newly gained American independence, moreover, William’s insistence on the originality and beauty of that specific tree and of the American flora in general, as well as his emphasis on the magnificence and power of the fauna, and on the achievements of American naturalists like his father acquires political value. We thus have multi-layered meaning in this very interesting development between father and son, hero and sidekick, in that the son –for all his talent and adventurousness, all his own heroism– retains a narrative respect for his hero father who broke new ground. William attributes much to the father –even though he simultaneously presents himself as quite the adventurer and naturalist himself in what has become a free country.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 295-296.

50 Hetrick Lawrence, “The Origins, Goals, and Outcomes of John Bartram’s Journey on the St. John’s River, 1765-1766” in *America’s Curious Botanist: A Tercentennial Reappraisal of John Bartram*, Nancy E. Hoffmann and John C. Van Horne (Eds.), Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 2004, p. 127-36 (p. 127).

As another instance of the differences between the styles of father and son, we turn to what is perhaps the most striking example of William's presenting himself as a hero in his own right. We refer to the well-known passage in which William Bartram recounts the story of his encounter with alligators. Without human companions in the Okefinokee Swamp of Georgia, William does heroic battle with dragon-like wild beasts. Regardless of the accuracy or veracity of Bartram's descriptions of these ferocious creatures and of the account of his being attacked by several at once, the descriptions are exceedingly lively and engaging.



Les alligators de la rivière St John. William Bartram, *Travels*.

The veracity of William's account is perhaps not as important in our context as the fact that it exists at all. Also important are the differences between William's descriptions and his father's. John offers a very matter-of-fact diary-entry account of seeing alligators: "saw four or five alligators which soon dived into the river before we came near them" (*Diary*, 3 September 1765). The alligators William reports seeing and doing battle with are not nearly so shy. Indeed, as he sets up his camp, William notices the alligators gathering threateningly along the shore:

The evening was temperately cool and calm. The crocodiles began to roar and appear in uncommon numbers along the shores and in the river. [...] From this open, high situation, I had a free prospect of the river, which was a matter of no trivial consideration to me, having good reason to dread the subtle attacks of the alleigators, who were crowding about my harbour.<sup>51</sup>

William then describes a fight between two rivals. Here is a segment of the description of what he witnesses from the shore:

Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from

51 Bartram William, *Travels*, p. 75.



the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. They now sink to the bottom folded together in horrid wreaths...<sup>52</sup>

William acknowledges the possibility of an attack and thereby alerts the reader to the danger, yet he nevertheless sets out in his canoe to do some late afternoon fishing. As he paddles “with all [his] might”<sup>53</sup> he is overtaken by aggressive alligators and this now-famous description ensues:

I was attacked on all sides, several endeavouring to upset the canoe. My situation now became precarious to the last degree: two very large ones attacked me closely, at the same instant, rushing up with their heads and part of their bodies above the water, roaring terribly and belching floods of water over me. They struck their jaws together so close to my ears, as almost to stun me, and I expected every moment to be dragged out of the boat and instantly devoured, but I applied my weapons so effectually about me, though at random, that I was so successful as to beat them off a little; when finding that they designed to renew the battle, I made for the shore, as the only means left me for my preservation...<sup>54</sup>

Bartram’s rhetoric in this passage is extremely sophisticated on several levels. His account inscribes itself in the controversy that was raging at the time between the old and the new world about the so-called degenerate character of American wildlife. Countering Buffon and De Pauw’s allegations that the American continent only produced weak and misshapen species,<sup>55</sup> William Bartram here goes to great lengths to show that nothing is weak or degenerate in the alligators he depicts. He first offers a hint of danger as the alligators gather; he then seems to forget (and let the reader forget) his own danger, to witness the epic battle between two gators. Having offered his reader a harrowing account of the reptile’s boldness, aggressiveness, fierceness, and strength, he offers the description of his own encounter and battle. The juxtaposition makes his encounter all the more heroic, of course. Moreover, there is a marked difference in style between the description of the fight between rivals and the subsequent attack on his canoe. In the former, William strings together a series of simple declarative sentences as if to suggest grammatically that the combatants are indeed fierce, but they are only reptiles. In the latter, in contrast, his sentences are much more typical of his style in general: longer, more complex sentences, rich in adverbs (as opposed to adjectives only) and with subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. The grammatical complexity suggests the actual complexity and precariousness of the man’s situation vis-à-vis the beasts.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

54 *Ibid.*

55 « C’est sans doute un spectacle grand et terrible de voir une moitié de ce globe tellement disgraciée par la nature que tout y était ou dégénéré, ou monstrueux. » De Pauw Cornelius, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains*, t. 1, iv, Berlin, 1770, [https://archive.org/stream/recherchesphilos17701pauw/recherchesphilos17701pauw\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/recherchesphilos17701pauw/recherchesphilos17701pauw_djvu.txt), accessed 21 August 2015.

William hints at his own awareness and consciousness of his style when at day's end, in relative peace and quiet in his camp, by the fireside, he acknowledges, at least implicitly, that his account is carefully constructed, written and rewritten: "I was revising the notes of my past day's journey"<sup>56</sup>. He is then interrupted by the arrival of "two very large bears"<sup>57</sup>. The description of another encounter with wild beasts ensues.

In many such episodes in the wilds, though perhaps none so harrowing nor vividly described as the one of battle with alligators, William Bartram recounts his excursions. He often succeeds in representing himself –sometimes in great and engaging detail– as heroically encountering and ultimately overcoming the vicissitudes of nature, whether in the form of wild beasts or inclement weather. If the father's earlier excursions in nature seem to be somewhat diminished by the grandeur of William's accounts, it is important to remember that William often refers to his father and those earlier excursions. It is also important to note that at the end of four years of travel, William returns not to a farm in Florida, nor to a business enterprise on the Cape Fear River in North Carolina, but to his father's estate and gardens outside Philadelphia. Part III of *Travels* ends with this: "arrived at my father's house on the banks of the river Schuykill, within four miles of the city"<sup>58</sup>. Here again the son is walking in his father's footsteps; he essentially spends the rest of his life tending his father's garden. It is also here that William spends nearly fifteen years writing and revising the *Travels*, the book in which he both honors the accomplishments of his father, acknowledges his debt to him, but also extols his own powers, skills, and daring, which in some ways transcend those attributed to his father, the esteemed John Bartram.

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### **Abstract**

In this essay the authors make a two-fold argument. In the footsteps of several recent autobiography theorists, they argue, first, that in any autobiographical travel account the "self" or the "I" of the narrative is a construct, and this hypothesis allows them, second, to maintain that

<sup>56</sup> Bartram William, *Travels*, p. 79.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

the constructed personas and resultant “characters” in the respective travel accounts of John and William Bartram render John’s son William a sort of sidekick on what is very much the father’s exploratory journey through the American Southeast.

**Keywords**

Sidekicks, exploration, Bartram, narration.

**Résumé**

L’argument des auteurs de cet essai est double. Tout d’abord, s’appuyant sur plusieurs études récentes, ils soutiennent que dans tout récit de voyage autobiographique le « moi » ou le « je » est une construction. Cette hypothèse leur permet, dans un deuxième temps, d’avancer que les personnages qui en découlent et qui sont représentés dans les récits respectifs de John et William Bartram font de William, le fils de John, une sorte de faire-valoir de son père lors de l’exploration par ce dernier du sud-est de l’Amérique.

**Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, explorateur, Bartram, narration.

# Personnage secondaire ou second héros : la place paradoxale de Sam dans *Le Seigneur des Anneaux*

Antoine Paris

« Assurément, Sam est le personnage le plus minutieusement dépeint, le successeur du Bilbo du premier livre<sup>1</sup>, le Hobbit authentique. Frodo n'est pas aussi intéressant, parce qu'il se doit d'être digne et possède (pour ainsi dire) une vocation. Le livre s'achèvera sans doute sur Sam. Frodo va naturellement devenir trop ennobli et raffiné par la réalisation de cette Quête grandiose, et il passera à l'Ouest avec toutes les grandes figures ; mais S. va se fixer en Comté, avec ses jardins et ses auberges. » Ces lignes extraites d'une lettre adressée par John Ronald Reuel Tolkien à son fils Christopher comportent plusieurs éléments qui, me semble-t-il, posent le problème des places respectives de Frodo et Sam à l'intérieur de son œuvre la plus connue, *Le Seigneur des Anneaux*<sup>2</sup>.

Le terme même de « Quête » employé par Tolkien peut inciter à analyser les relations narratives entre les deux personnages en fonction du schéma actantiel de Greimas<sup>3</sup>, où la « quête » est centrale. Le terme apparaît également dans le roman lui-même, notamment dans les paroles de Frodo, qui vient de détruire l'Anneau : « “Yes”, said Frodo. “But do you remember Gandalf’s words: *Even Gollum may have something yet to do?* But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and now all is over. » (VI, 3<sup>4</sup>) Frodo, dans les termes de Greimas, serait le « sujet »,

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1 *The Hobbit*, premier livre publié par John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, en 1937 par Allen & Unwin.

2 « Extrait d'une lettre à Christopher Tolkien » datée du 24 décembre 1944. 354 lettres de Tolkien ont été sélectionnées et éditées par Humphrey Carpenter dans *The letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (HarperCollinsPublishers, 1981). Je cite la traduction française de Delphine Martin et Vincent Ferré (J.R.R. Tolkien, *Lettres*, Christian Bourgeois Éditeur, 2005). Il s'agit de la lettre 93, figurant à la p. 106 de l'édition anglaise et à la p. 155 de la traduction en français.

3 Greimas, Algirdas Julien, *Sémantique structurale : recherche et méthode*, Larousse, 1966.

4 J'indique en chiffres romains le livre, suivi du numéro du chapitre. (Selon une habitude qui s'est perpétuée, *Le Seigneur des Anneaux* est le plus souvent édité en trois volumes, chacun regroupant deux livres.)

menant la « quête » qui constitue l'intrigue principale du roman, à savoir la destruction de l'Anneau unique, seul acte capable de vaincre le Seigneur du Mordor, Sauron. Mais étrangement, ce statut même rendrait Frodo moins « intéressant » et expliquerait qu'il soit moins « minutieusement dépeint ». En termes d'intérêt, la première place serait ainsi occupée par Sam, pourtant simple « adjutant » dans le schéma narratif. De la même façon, paradoxalement, c'est en raison de la quête qu'il a menée et qui lui confère son statut de « héros » que Frodo devrait, à la fin du roman, céder la place et le dernier mot à Sam. Signalons toutefois une limite à l'application du schéma actantiel dans le cas du *Seigneur des Anneaux*, due à une caractéristique du monde narratif de Tolkien. Comme l'indique la référence à Gollum dans la citation précédente, la quête n'a pas été menée à son terme par Frodo. Parvenu dans le Sammath Naur où il pourrait enfin jeter l'Anneau dans le feu qui y brûle, Frodo cède au pouvoir de l'objet maléfique et refuse de le détruire. C'est seulement parce que Gollum s'empare alors par violence de l'Anneau avant de tomber dans la fournaise que l'artefact de Sauron peut enfin disparaître. Ainsi, d'une certaine manière, la quête est réussie *malgré tous les personnages*, ce qui ne peut qu'amener à relativiser l'idée de « sujet » ou de « héros ».

La lettre de Tolkien comporte un dernier paradoxe, concernant la relation entre Sam et Bilbo : alors que Frodo est, dans le récit, le neveu de Bilbo et à ce titre son héritier, Sam serait, d'une autre façon peut-être, « le successeur du Bilbo du premier livre ». Ainsi, malgré le fait que Sam ne soit pas le responsable de la « Quête grandiose », il y aurait comme un passage de témoin entre le héros du premier livre de Tolkien et lui.

Après avoir étudié ce qui pourrait faire de Sam un second couteau du *Seigneur des Anneaux*, je m'intéresserai à un chapitre décisif concernant sa place en tant que personnage. À la fin du livre IV, Frodo semblant mort, Sam hésite à prendre l'Anneau pour poursuivre la « Quête », ce qui ferait de lui le personnage principal de l'intrigue. Enfin, je me demanderai si le statut de Sam comme second couteau ne peut pas être éclairée par la dimension métalittéraire du *Seigneur des Anneaux*.

Lorsque Gandalf présente à Frodo la quête qui sera la sienne, le magicien évoque la possibilité pour lui de choisir un compagnon, en des termes qui seraient presque une définition du rôle d'un adjutant : « But I don't think you need to go alone. Not if you know of anyone you can trust, and who would be willing to go by your side –and that you would be willing to go by your side– and that you would be willing to take into unknown perils. » (I, 2) Sam sera la figure parfaite de ce compagnon recherché.

Par plusieurs aspects, Sam Gamgee est inférieur à Frodo, que ce soit socialement ou, pourrait-on dire, en termes de registre littéraire. La chronologie présente dans l'appendice B indique que, né en l'an 2980 du « Troisième Âge », il est de douze ans plus jeune que Frodo, dont la naissance est située en

2968<sup>5</sup>. Une autre manifestation de l'infériorité de Sam serait sa maladresse. En Lorien, il éprouve de grandes difficultés à traverser un pont provisoire en corde : « Sam shuffled along, clutching hard, and looking down into the pale eddying water as if it was a chasm in the mountains. » (II, 6) Par ailleurs, Sam se caractérise par une certaine simplicité d'esprit. Ce serait le sens de l'étymologie anglaise de son nom, selon une lettre de Tolkien : « Sam est une abréviation non de *Samuel* mais de *Samwise* [Samsagace], équivalent au vieil anglais de *half-wit* [simplet]. »<sup>6</sup> Cette naïveté fait de Sam un gaffeur potentiel, comme lorsqu'il révèle à Faramir l'objet de la quête de son Maître, que ce dernier avait tout fait pour maintenir secret (IV, 5). Par cette caractéristique, Sam semble se rattacher à un registre littéraire différent de celui auquel appartiennent Frodo et la plupart des personnages du récit, le registre comique, en décalage avec ces figures héroïques. Ainsi, irrité par les soupçons de Faramir à l'égard de Frodo, Sam « planted himself squarely in front of Faramir, his hands on his hips, and a look on his face as if he was addressing a young hobbit who had offered him what he called "sauce" when questioned about visits to the orchard. » (IV, 5). Outre le choc entre l'univers épique de Faramir et le monde villageois de Sam, la citation d'un idiolecte du serviteur de Frodo (« sauce » - « balivernes » en français) est en total décalage avec la situation. Il rappelle en outre que Frodo et Sam appartiennent à deux classes sociales différentes : avant que la Quête ne commence, Sam est le jardinier de Bilbo et de son oncle<sup>7</sup>.

Ses liens avec Frodo sont ceux d'un serviteur (« servant ») à son maître (« master ») selon deux termes fréquemment employés. Dans son article de 2004, Mark T. Hooker a proposé de voir dans cette relation un reflet de celle qui unissait lors de la Première guerre mondiale un officier anglais et son « *batman* »<sup>8</sup>. La comparaison qu'il propose avec certains romans de guerre décrivant les actions de ces serviteurs militaires est convaincante et d'autant plus pertinente que Tolkien lui-même compare Sam aux « soldats anglais, aux combattants et aux *batmen* que j'ai connus pendant la guerre de 1914 »<sup>9</sup> Le *batman* a d'abord pour tâche de s'occuper des bagages de l'officier auquel il est attaché, comme l'indique son nom, formé sur le français « bât »<sup>10</sup>. Les préparatifs au départ de Fondcombe montrent toute l'importance que Sam accorde au service zélé de Frodo quant à

5 Appendice B, p. 1064.

6 « Lettre à Christopher Tolkien », portant le numéro 72 dans le recueil déjà mentionné (p. 83 dans l'édition anglaise, p. 124-125 dans la traduction française).

7 Cette différence de classe sociale est notamment étudiée par Mark T. Hooker, qui y voit le reflet de la société anglaise de l'époque de la Première guerre mondiale. (Hooker, Mark T., « Frodo's batman », *Tolkien Studies* 1.1, 2004, p. 125-136, p. 131 à 133 pour ce point précis.

8 Hooker, Mark T., art. cit.

9 Cité dans Carpenter, Humphrey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: a biography*, George Allen & Unwin, 1977, p. 91.

10 Hooker, Mark T., art. cit., p. 125.



ce point précis : il rassemble « various small belongings of his master's that Frodo had forgotten and Sam had stowed to bring them out in triumph when they were called for. » (II, 3) Sam est aussi celui qui s'occupe de préparer les repas pour son maître, comme lors de l'épisode relaté dans le chapitre « Of herbs and stewed rabbits » (IV, 4). Ceci pourrait encore être caractéristique de la mémoire des tranchées : Anna Smol cite le cas de « men taking on traditionally female domestic and nurturing role in the First World War »<sup>11</sup> et Mark T. Hooker rapporte plusieurs anecdotes concernant des *batmen* improvisant des repas pour leurs officiers, même au milieu de villages dévastés<sup>12</sup>. Tout comme les serviteurs d'officiers, Sam témoigne d'une fidélité obstinée envers son maître. Au conseil d'Elrond il lui-même insiste pour accompagner Frodo (II, 2). Voyant dans le miroir de Galadriel la possible ruine de la Comté si chère à son cœur, mais aussi de la maison de son propre père, il fait le choix de suivre son maître plutôt que de rentrer chez lui (II, 7). Lorsqu'à la fin du livre II, Aragorn propose de choisir parmi les membres de la Compagnie de l'Anneau des alliés pour soutenir Frodo dans son voyage au Mordor, cette liste comprend en premier lieu Sam « who could not bear it otherwise » (II, 10). Enfin, son maître ayant décidé de partir seul au Mordor, il manque de se noyer en se lançant dans l'eau à sa suite (II, 10). Cette importance du personnage en tant qu'adjuvant apparaît surtout à partir du livre IV, lorsque Frodo commence son voyage avec Sam à travers les terres désolées qui le séparent de la Crevasse du Destin. Son aide prend à la fois la forme d'une assistance matérielle et concrète mais se manifeste aussi par de nombreux gestes de tendresse, tels que celui par lequel il répond à une inquiétude de son maître dans le chapitre 2 du livre IV : « Sam nodded silently. He took his master's hand and bent over it. He did not kiss it, though his tears fell on » De tels gestes ont pu déconcerter et amener à voir Frodo et Sam comme des figures homosexuelles, d'autant plus que le verbe « aimer » est plusieurs fois employé par Sam pour décrire ses sentiments pour Frodo (« I love him », peut-on lire en IV, 4). Anna Smol propose une interprétation très fine de cette question. À nouveau, le souvenir de la Première guerre mondiale a pu jouer un rôle ici et l'auteure cite à ce sujet Santanu Das,<sup>13</sup> qui évoque une « largely nongenital tactile tenderness »<sup>14</sup> parmi les soldats des tranchées, suscitée notamment par la proximité des dangers et de la mort. Plutôt que d'« homosexualité », il faudrait parler d'une « homosocial relationship »<sup>15</sup> qui, de fait, constitue une transgression des codifications de genre traditionnelles. Cet aspect transgressif

11 Smol, Anna, « "Oh... oh... Frodo!": Readings of male intimacy in The Lord of the Rings », *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 50, n° 4, hiver 2004, p. 949-949, p. 954.

12 Hooker, Mark T., art. cit., p. 126 notamment.

13 Smol, Anna, art. cit., p. 955.

14 Das, Santanu. « "Kiss me, Hardy": Intimacy, gender, and gesture in World War I trench literature. » *Modernism/Modernity* 9, 2002, p. 51-74 (p. 52).

15 Smol, Anna, art. cit., p. 956.

de la relation entre les deux hobbits, socialement parlant, apparaît d'ailleurs, me semble-t-il, lors du retour dans la Comté lorsque Sam, marié, emménage avec son épouse auprès de Frodo (VI, 9). Il faudra d'une certaine manière le départ de son compagnon vers l'Ouest pour que Sam commence une vie de famille traditionnelle. La relation entre les deux hobbits pourrait enfin donner lieu à une lecture religieuse. Par plusieurs aspects, Frodo est assimilé au Christ, notamment par le fait qu'il « porte » le fardeau de l'Anneau, comme le Christ porte sa croix. Dans cette lecture, Sam pourrait correspondre à Simon de Cyrène, aidant Jésus à porter l'instrument de son supplice : « I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you and it as well. », déclare Sam à Frodo en VI, 3, lors de l'ascension de Mount Doom.

Plusieurs modèles pourraient ainsi permettre de décrire la relation entre Frodo et Sam, dont chacune paraît pertinente et en même temps insuffisante : outre la lecture religieuse, l'interprétation homosociale et les parallèles avec la Première guerre mondiale, il serait encore possible de voir dans les liens entre les deux hobbits ceux d'un écuyer et d'un chevalier, tels qu'ils se présentent dans la littérature médiévale. Il me semble que deux autres éléments peuvent être notés, qui correspondent à l'originalité de Sam en tant que personnage secondaire.

Sam est le jardinier de Bilbo et de son neveu Frodo. Cette information est la première qui nous est donnée à son sujet, en même temps que sa filiation : « old Ham Gamgee, commonly known as the Gaffer (...) had tended the garden at Bag End for forty years (...) Now that he was himself growing old and stiff in the joints, the job was mainly carried on by his youngest son, Sam Gamgee. » (I, 1) Cet aspect de la personnalité de Sam explique que, même au milieu de leur périple vers le Mordor, traversant l'Ithilien, il observe les plantes inconnues qui s'y trouvent, sans souci du péril (IV, 4). Le cadeau que lui offre Galadriel est parfaitement adapté à ses amours : « “For you little gardener and lover of trees”, she said to Sam, “I have only a small gift.” She put into his hand a little box of plain grey wood, unadorned save for a single silver rune upon the lid. “Here is set G for Galadriel”, she said; “but also it may stand for garden in your tongue. In this box there is earth from my orchard, and such blessing as Galadriel has still to bestow is upon it”. » (II, 8) Grâce à cette terre bénie, Sam pourra à la fin du roman repeupler d'arbres magnifiques toute la Comté dévastée par les méfaits de Saruman (VI, 9). Ce rapport particulier à la nature trouve son prolongement dans l'amour de Sam pour son pays natal. Ainsi il a un rôle de premier plan dans les combats pour libérer la Comté de l'emprise du magicien malfaisant, alors que justement Frodo apparaît comme plus effacé lors de ces événements (VI, 9). Son nom même, selon une étymologie imaginaire présente dans un des appendices, correspondrait à cette vie de village : « *Gamgee*. According to family tradition, set out in the Red Book, the surname *Galbasi*, or in reduced form *Galpsi*, came from the village of *Galabas* (...) » (Appendice F).

Par ailleurs, il me semble important de souligner que le départ de Sam à la suite de Frodo n'est pas dû à une décision de sa part. Au moment où Gandalf révèle à Frodo la vérité sur l'Anneau et l'encourage à quitter la Comté au plus vite avec l'objet maléfique, il surprend Sam qui les écoutait à la fenêtre. (I, 2) C'est pour cette raison que Gandalf le désigne comme serviteur de Frodo dans son voyage : « I have thought of something better than that. Something to shut your mouth, and punish you properly for listening. You shall go away with Mr. Frodo! » (I, 2) À nouveau, me semble-t-il, l'idée de schéma actantiel et les notions de « sujet » et d'« adjuvant » doivent être nuancées. Comme dans la scène finale de la destruction de l'Anneau, ce sont les circonstances – ou une forme de providence – plutôt que leurs choix et liberté qui guident les personnages. Sam n'a pas fait le choix d'accompagner Frodo dans sa quête, pas plus que ce dernier n'a choisi d'en être le sujet.

Il me semble que cette idée d'absence de choix initial pourrait éclairer le chapitre final du livre IV, justement intitulé « The choices of Master Samwise ». Trahis par leur guide Gollum, Sam et Frodo sont attaqués par la terrifiante araignée géante Shelob. Sam retrouve son maître allongé à terre, sans respiration ni battement de cœur. Le présumant mort il doit choisir entre rester défendre son corps ou prendre l'Anneau suspendu à son cou pour poursuivre la Quête. En d'autres termes, Sam aurait ainsi à choisir entre rester un second couteau ou devenir le nouveau personnage principal. Je suivrai ici la narration du passage en m'interrogeant d'abord sur la décision de Sam d'assumer la Quête à la place de son maître, puis sur son revirement. Enfin, je me demanderai dans quelle mesure le rapport à l'acte de choisir lui-même pourrait permettre d'éclairer le personnage de Sam en tant que personnage secondaire.

Après la supposée mort de Frodo, Sam prend son épée Dard et la fiole que le héros avait reçue de Galadriel. De cette façon un passage de relais semble s'opérer. Mais seul l'Anneau pourrait permettre de constituer Sam en personnage principal. « Frodo had died and laid aside the Quest. » (IV, 10) La question sera de savoir si Sam décide de la poursuivre à la place de son maître ou non. L'enjeu narratif derrière ce choix apparaît, me semble-t-il, dans le monologue qui suit.

« "What am I to do then?" he cried again, and now he seemed plainly to know the hard answer: see it through. Another lonely journey, and the worst.

"What? Me, alone, go to the Crack of Doom and all?" He quailed still, but the resolve grew. "What? Me take the Ring from him? The Council gave it to him."

"But the answer came at once: And the Council gave him companions, so that the errand should not fail. And you are the last of all the Company. The errand must not fail."

"I wish I wasn't the last", he groaned. "I wish old Gandalf was here, or somebody. Why am I left all alone to make up my mind? I'm sure to go wrong. And it's not for me to go taking the Ring, putting myself forward."

"But you haven't put yourself forward; you've been put forward. And as for not being the right and proper person, why, Mr. Frodo wasn't, as you might say, nor Mr. Bilbo. They didn't choose themselves." »

L'expression « put oneself forward » exprime le fait de se porter volontaire. Mais il me semble qu'elle pourrait aussi signifier « se mettre en avant ». Le choix que doit faire Sam oppose en effet deux possibilités : rester derrière Frodo, même s'il ne s'agit plus que de protéger sa dépouille, ou bien choisir de poursuivre la quête et ainsi passer de l'arrière-plan à l'avant-scène. C'est l'un des sens que pourrait revêtir la mention de Frodo, mais aussi de Bilbo dans la dernière phrase. Bilbo était le personnage principal du *Hobbit*, Frodo fut celui du *Seigneur des Anneaux* jusqu'à ce chapitre où la mort semble l'avoir emporté. Sam pourrait être à leur suite le héros d'une seconde partie du *Seigneur des Anneaux* qui commencerait maintenant. Considérant l'intérêt général – que le monde est perdu si l'Anneau tombe aux mains de l'ennemi – c'est ce choix que commence par faire Sam.

« "Let me see now: if we're found here, or Mr. Frodo's found, and that Thing's on him, well, the Enemy will get it. And that's the end of all of us, of Lorien, and Rivendell, and the Shire and all. And there's no time to lose, or it'll be the end anyway. The war's begun, and more than likely things are all going the Enemy's way already. No chance to go back with It and get advice or permission. No, it's sit here till they come and kill me over master's body, and gets It; or take It and go." He drew a deep breath. "Then take It, it is!" »

Mais Sam revient aussitôt sur cette décision lorsqu'une compagnie d'Orcs surgit et qu'ils découvrent le corps inanimé de son maître.

« I wonder if any song will ever mention it: How Samwise fell in the High Pass and made a wall of bodies round his master. No, no song. Of course not, for the Ring'll be found, and there'll be no more songs. I can't help it. My place is by Mr. Frodo. They must understand that –Elrond and the Council, and the great Lords and Ladies with all their wisdom. Their plans have gone wrong. I can't be their Ring-bearer. Not without Mr. Frodo. »

Au moment où le corps de son maître est menacé, la considération d'un intérêt général n'a plus de sens. Sam évoque à nouveau la menace qui pèse sur toute la Terre du Milieu, à travers l'évocation des chansons qui ne seront plus, mais ce futur de destruction générale est désormais pris comme une fatalité : il ne pourra en être autrement car « la place » de Sam est « auprès de M. Frodo ». Par l'expression de « Ring-bearer », niée, Sam rejette la possibilité d'être le porteur de l'Anneau et ainsi le nouveau personnage principal. Bien qu'elle se trouve *a posteriori* justifiée par la nouvelle que Sam apprendra par la suite – que Frodo n'est pas mort mais qu'il a seulement été paralysé par le venin de Shelob – cette décision apparaît comme suicidaire, et pour lui-même, et pour le monde : plutôt mourir sur le corps de son maître et faire périr toute la Terre du Milieu avec lui que d'abandonner Frodo à l'ennemi, fût-ce à l'état de cadavre.

Mais s'agit-il vraiment d'une décision ? Sam, au moment de choisir l'Anneau, est persuadé que quoi qu'il arrive il fera un mauvais choix : « Ah well, I must make up my own mind. I will make it up. But I'll be sure to go

wrong: that'd be Sam Gamgee all over. » De fait, une fois que ce choix est fait, Sam ressent aussitôt que l'option choisie est « against the grain of his nature ». Une idée similaire est exprimée à la fin du chapitre : « You fool, he isn't dead, and your heart knew it. Don't trust your head, Samwise, it is not the best part of you. » (IV, 10) Il y aurait ici comme l'expression par Sam de la conscience de sa propre naïveté, mais en même temps, il pourrait apparaître comme la seule figure dans *Le Seigneur des Anneaux* à savoir qu'au fond, les choix sont un leurre, que les événements sont guidés par une logique qui nous échappe, celle qui à la fin de la quête permettra la destruction de l'anneau *malgré* Frodo. C'est cette conception même qui brouille la distinction entre personnage principal et second couteau et qui, dans le cas de cette scène, invaliderait l'idée que Sam deviendrait le héros du roman en devenant le porteur de l'Anneau. La différence entre personnage principal et secondaire pourrait-elle revêtir une autre forme, non actantielle pourrait-on dire ?

La piste que je voudrais suivre commence avec la mention en apparence incongrue de la « chanson » que pourrait devenir la mort tragique de Sam. Le personnage se projette ici dans un avenir où ses actions deviendraient un sujet de poème. Dans le chapitre 8 du même livre IV (« The Stairs of Cirith Ungol »), une telle idée était déjà présente, dans les paroles qu'il échangeait avec Frodo :

« I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards. And people will say : "Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!" And they'll say: "Yes, that's one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn't he, dad?" "Yes, my boy, the famousest of the hobbits, and that's saying a lot." "It's saying a lot too much", said Frodo, and he laughed, a long clear laugh from his heart. (...) "Why, Sam", he said, "to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you've left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted." "I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn't they put more of his talk, dad? That's what I like, it makes me laugh". And Frodo wouldn't have gone far without Sam, would he, dad? »

Ce passage, par la conscience manifestée par Sam d'être « dans » une histoire, correspond à la dimension métafictionnelle des romans de Tolkien<sup>16</sup>. Mais ces paroles manifestent quelque chose de plus qu'une simple mise en relief de la nature narrative du roman. Sam envisage le moment où, dans un avenir indéterminé, ce que les deux hobbits sont en train de vivre sera raconté au coin du feu et où le public commentera leur histoire. Mais, par les mots de Frodo, un basculement temporel et logique se produit : « to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written » : ce qui était imaginé par Sam

16 Étudiée notamment dans deux articles récents : Bowman, Mary R., « The story was already written: narrative theory in *The Lord of the Rings* » (*Narrative*, vol. 14, n° 3, octobre 2006, p. 272-293) et Brljak, Vladimir, « The books of lost tales: Tolkien as metafictionist » (*Tolkien Studies*, vol. 7, 2010, p. 1-34).

comme une prolepse renvoyant à un avenir indéterminé apparaît concrètement dans le présent du récit lui-même, par le rire et les mots de son maître. Frodo fait même mine de presser Sam de demandes semblables à celles des enfants de ce conteur futur et, par cet étrange phénomène, Sam devient lui-même ce conteur, le narrateur de sa propre aventure, *au moment même où il est en train de la vivre*<sup>17</sup>. Par cette étrange conflagration, l'aventure présente se dédouble : elle serait à la fois une action et, déjà, le récit qui en rend compte. Ce serait un sens possible de la phrase de Sam : « We're in one, of course. » Il en résulte ce que Verlyn Flieger a décrit à propos de cette scène comme « an image of postmodern indeterminacy », les lecteurs ne se trouvant « neither wholly in the narrative (for we have been reminded that we are reading a book) nor wholly outside it (for as long as we are reading it, the book we are reading has not yet been finished). »<sup>18</sup> Une même indétermination affecte Sam et Frodo, ni totalement dans l'histoire, ni totalement à l'extérieur. Leur différence n'est plus celle d'un sujet et d'un adjuvant, mais celle qui sépare un conteur de son public, mais aussi de son héros puisque, dans le titre du récit envisagé (et conté !) par Sam, seul le nom de Frodo apparaît : « Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring! » Ici, Frodo apparaîtrait comme sujet non pas parce que ses actions le caractériseraient ainsi, mais parce que Sam, en tant que narrateur, l'a institué comme tel.

Cette conception de Sam pourrait être mise en lien avec son goût pour les chansons et les légendes. Dès le premier chapitre, son père dit de lui : « Crazy about stories of the old days he is, and he listens to all Mr. Bilbo's tales. » Deux passages essentiels peuvent être réinterprétés dans cette perspective. J'ai indiqué précédemment que Sam n'avait pas fait le choix de partir avec Frodo : parce qu'il l'a surpris écoutant à la fenêtre, c'est Gandalf qui lui a imposé cette « punition ». Mais si Sam a commencé à tendre l'oreille au discours du magicien, c'est justement à cause de son goût pour les histoires : « "Don't be a fool! What have you heard, and why did you listen?" (...) "Well, sir," said Sam dithering a little. "I heard a deal that I didn't rightly understand, about an enemy, and rings, and Mr. Bilbo, sir, and dragons, and fiery mountains, and –and Elves, sir. I listened because I couldn't help myself, if you know what I mean. Lor bless me, sir, but I do love tales of that sort. And I believe them too, whatever Ted may say." »

17 Dans cette étrange situation d'énonciation, il apparaît aussi curieusement comme le père de Frodo.

18 Flieger, Verlyn, « A postmodern medievalist? », in *Tolkien's modern Middle Ages*, édité par Jane Chance et Alfred K. Sievers, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, nouvelle impression en 2009, p. 17-28 (p. 24-25).



Qu'en est-il maintenant de la place de la « chanson » imaginée par Sam au sujet de sa mort héroïque dans sa décision finale de courir défendre le corps de son maître plutôt que de poursuivre la Quête ? Peut-être pourrait-elle être mise en relation avec la « nature » et le « cœur » que Sam jugeait plus fiables que « la tête ». Contre une prise de décision qui ferait intervenir des arguments rationnels comme l'intérêt du monde passant avant celui d'un individu seul, Sam privilégierait une autre façon de diriger sa vie : un choix juste serait celui qui pourrait faire une belle chanson, et ce, même si un tel choix conduisait à un anéantissement général. Mary R. Bowmann a montré comment cette façon de décider guidait les actions d'autres personnages du roman : ainsi, en V, 3, Merry supplie le roi du Rohan de le laisser l'accompagner parce que « I would not have it said of me in song only that I was always left behind. »<sup>19</sup> Mais Sam, contrairement à Merry, aurait la possibilité de devenir lui-même un conteur ou un chanteur de récits.

Ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard si Sam apparaît comme un conteur alors que tel n'est pas le cas de Frodo. Dès le deuxième chapitre de l'œuvre, Sam « chante à demi » les mots par lesquels il évoque le départ des elfes loin des rivages de la Terre du Milieu (I, 2). De même, au chapitre 12 du premier livre, Sam entonne une de ses créations, relatant, dans un style de conte folklorique, la rencontre d'un dénommé Tom avec un troll<sup>20</sup>. Au contraire, de Frodo il est dit que « He was seldom moved to make song or rhyme » (II, 7). La seule création dont il soit l'auteur est le poème en hommage à Gandalf, présumé mort dans la Moria, et Frodo préfère laisser à Sam le soin de le compléter, en écrivant un couplet sur les feux d'artifice<sup>21</sup>. En tant que héros, Frodo aurait une activité d'écriture différente, celle, comme Bilbo avant lui, de compiler dans un livre les informations recueillies au cours de ses voyages : les textes qu'il écrit sont des « mémoires » au sens le plus technique du terme et non des contes, chansons ou récits. Le titre des volumes que Frodo remet à Sam au moment de son départ est ainsi intitulé « THE DOWNFALL OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS AND THE RETURN OF THE KING (as seen by the Little People; being the memoirs of Bilbo and Frodo of the Shire, supplemented by the accounts of their friends and the learning of the Wise) » (VI, 9). Cette œuvre appartient au dispositif de métafiction extrêmement complexe mis en place par Tolkien et analysé en détails par Vladimir Brljak.<sup>22</sup> Dans le prologue de l'œuvre, l'auteur décrit l'histoire complexe des quatre volumes de mémoires écrits par Bilbo et Frodo, auxquels furent ajoutés au cours du temps d'autres textes, tels que « commentaries, generalogies, and various other matters concerning the hobbit members

19 Bowmann, Mary R., art. cit., p. 278.

20 En ce sens, Sam pourrait être, comme cela est suggéré dans la citation de Tolkien mentionnée au début de ce travail, le successeur (encore maladroit) de Bilbo, dont il est justement dit qu'il « écrivait de la poésie » (« he wrote poetry » I, 11).

21 II, 7, p. 351.

22 Brljak, Vladimir, art. cit.

of the Fellowship ». Cet ensemble constitue « the Red Book of Westmarch », existant en Terre du Milieu sous la forme de copies très différentes les unes des autres. Ce livre est décrit comme « the most important source for the history of the War of the Ring », ce qui donne l'impression qu'il constitue la source du *Seigneur des Anneaux*, voire que *Le Seigneur des Anneaux* serait une traduction en anglais de ce texte. Or, les noms « memoirs », « accounts » et « learning » qui apparaissent dans le titre du volume écrit par Bilbo et Frodo ne correspondent pas à une forme narrative telle que celle du roman du Tolkien<sup>23</sup>. Entre les deux, une étape essentielle a dû se produire, qui n'apparaît pas dans l'histoire du texte telle qu'elle est présentée dans le « prologue » : « the shift to third-person narration, addition of dialogue and various other narrative detail, careful handling of the plot, and so forth – anything, in short, that would be involved in the literarization of a non- or at best semi-literary text »<sup>24</sup>, autrement dit, le passage des mémoires à un conte. Vladimir Brljak suggère de voir dans cette faille de l'histoire du texte – faille selon lui consciemment mise en place par Tolkien – un moyen de miner l'authenticité du texte<sup>25</sup> et ainsi de mettre en place un univers imaginaire, tout en empêchant d'y croire totalement<sup>26</sup>.

Dans le cadre d'une étude sur le personnage de Sam, il serait possible de proposer une autre solution au problème. Présenté de façon proleptique en IV, 8 comme le conteur de l'histoire de Frodo, Sam pourrait être le chaînon manquant entre le « Red Book of Westmarch » et *Le Seigneur des Anneaux* de Tolkien, celui qui aurait opéré la transformation décisive des mémoires éparés en une narration. C'est ce qui semble apparaître au début du chapitre qui avait été envisagé par Tolkien comme épilogue du *Seigneur des Anneaux*<sup>27</sup> : « And one evening in March Master Samwise Gamgee was taking his ease by a fire in his study, and the children were all gathered about him, as was not at all unusual, though it was always supposed to be a special treat. He had been reading aloud (as was usual) from a big Red Book »<sup>28</sup>. Tolkien mentionnait dans le prologue l'existence de plusieurs exemplaires du Livre Rouge, présentant chacun un texte différent. Celui dans lequel Sam lit à voix haute pour ses enfants pourrait être une de ces versions, la version décisive, celle où Sam aurait recomposé les mémoires de ses amis pour en faire l'histoire de « Frodo et de l'anneau ».

23 Brljak, Vladimir, art. cit., p. 11.

24 Brljak, Vladimir, art. cit., p. 12.

25 Brljak, Vladimir, art. cit., p. 16.

26 Brljak, Vladimir, art. cit., p. 23.

27 Supprimé sur les conseils des premiers éditeurs, il a depuis été publié dans *Sauron Defeated*, un ensemble de textes de Tolkien rassemblés par son fils Christopher (HarperCollinsPublishers, 1992).

28 *Sauron Defeated*, p. 114. Dans la suite de la scène les enfants de Sam l'assaillent de questions assez semblables à celles qu'il imaginait dans sa conversation avec Frodo dans les escaliers de Cirith Ungol.

Ainsi, ce ne serait pas leur statut actanciel différent par rapport à la Quête du roman qui ferait de Frodo un héros et de Sam un second couteau. La différence décisive se situerait à un autre niveau, le rapport à l'action en tant que récit en puissance : celui que parcourent les lecteurs du *Seigneur des Anneaux*. Parce que Frodo est le héros, il est plongé dans les événements sans posséder une telle conscience. Au contraire, Sam sait que ces exploits et ces revers de fortune, ces malheurs et ces joies inattendues, seront un jour racontés. Il est celui qui, peut-être, finit par les transformer en récit, celui en tout cas qui, dans les escaliers de Cirith Ungol, est déjà par avance leur narrateur. Sam est un personnage secondaire parce qu'il sera – et est déjà – autre chose qu'un personnage.

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### **Résumé**

Subordonné à Frodo par le schéma actanciel du *Seigneur des Anneaux* et par son statut social qui le rattache à un autre registre ou genre littéraire, Sam peut aussi être vu comme l'image d'un serviteur de la Première guerre mondiale, tendrement fidèle à son officier. Une importance particulière sera donnée au chapitre final du livre IV, dans lequel Sam pourrait devenir le héros du roman, mais le refuse. Cet épisode manifeste qu'il est un personnage secondaire parce qu'il a conscience d'être dans un récit ; parce qu'il en est, en puissance, déjà un narrateur.

### **Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, Frodo, Tolkien.

### **Abstract**

*Sam is subordinate to Frodo because of the actantial model of the Lord of the Rings and of his social status, which makes him related to another register or literary genre. Sam may also be seen as similar to a First World War "batman", tenderly faithful to his officer. Close attention will be paid to the final chapter of book IV, in which Sam could become the hero of the novel, but refuses to do so. This episode shows Sam as a sidekick because he is aware of being in a story; because potentially he is already its narrator.*

### **Keywords**

*Sidekicks, Frodo, Tolkien.*

# Subverting Sidekicks – Representational Inversions and Instability in Kem Nunn’s *Tapping the Source*

Jeffrey Swartwood

Like the physical world, the literary narrative can be seen as operating according to a system of rules and their transgression, explicit or implicit, governing among other things both transmission and reception. This article intends to focus on the mechanisms used by writer Kem Nunn in his 1984 novel *Tapping the Source*, and more specifically in those character constructions that can be categorized as sidekick figures with the goal of better understanding both the conception and transmission of the narrative. If, as our title suggests, the intent behind such constructions may be open to debate, their presence –indeed, almost omnipresence– in the text is a fertile ground for analysis.

In this paper, our analysis will be presented along two principal themes focusing on documenting and beginning to qualify the sidekick roles within Kem Nunn’s narrative. The first section *Establishing Sidekicks* will examine the multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory secondary roles that the protagonist assumes. The plural form of sidekicks is used as Kem Nunn creates an interesting structure in which the main character serves as a sidekick –or underling– to two different heroes, or anti-heroes, in the course of this work. The second part of this text, *Instability and Inversion*, will then focus on how the sidekick construction is systematically deconstructed, inverted or abandoned in a series of developments that continually alter the narrative landscape and remove most any sense of constancy in the relationships between the characters in the narrative. While this paper places a great focus on documentation, it should be construed as a starting point for further analysis of the mechanics that Kem Nunn employs in a work that has largely influenced the Surf Noire genre.

Before plunging into the work itself, however, a brief introduction to both the author and his work within the genre recognized as *Surf Noir* will help to provide a constructive framework. Kem Nunn is a native Californian writer whose first work of fiction –*Tapping the Source*– was released in 1984. Subsequently, five other novels have been published, the most recent of which being *Chance*, published in English in 2014 and translated into French for

a pending publication. The author has also developed a strong presence in American screenwriting, working on the HBO series *Deadwood* and *Sons of Anarchy*. For his fictional work, he has received a National Book Award (1984), Los Angeles Times Best Fiction Award (1984), Best Scenario from the Writers Guild of America for *Deadwood* (2007), and an Edgar Allen Poe Prize for best novel (1993), among others. This contextualization is intended to support the premise that despite its relatively little known status, this work and genre are to be seriously considered. This analysis thus seeks to contribute to the revision of the connotations of surf culture, a subculture that is simultaneously eulogized and yet decried as superficial despite its cultural impact and the growing body of serious work devoted to it.

While Kem Nunn's representational fictional writing is largely regional as a whole, certainly Western and more specifically Californian, this paper focuses on his contribution to the *Surf Noir* genre. Largely based in Southern California, intent on exploring the lesser-known or lesser developed aspects of the underside of surf culture, this genre draws both from the police or detective genres, notably from authors such as Raymond Chandler—and from the Western with its emphasis on the frontier and the maintenance or transgression of codes of conduct.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Kem Nunn's work, there is also an element that appears to draw from the Southern Gothic tradition, with a highlighted sense of the exaggerated and the grotesque,<sup>2</sup> though whether such elements are in fact exaggerated or grotesque is largely a question of perspective when relating a regional culture that is known for its extremes.<sup>3</sup>

Our examination is limited to *Tapping the Source*, a novel of particular interest in that it is one of the earliest works of this genre, and in many ways it appears to lay the groundwork for subsequent efforts. This novel also predates such literary ventures as Dean Kootz' *Fear Nothing* (1998), Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* (2009) and Don Winslow's *The Dawn Patrol* (2009), as well as a collection of short stories, *Californios –a Surf Noir Collection* published by Jeff McElroy in 2012.

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- 1 These codes have been examined in great detail in both academic and popular press, frequently cited as consisting of individually tailored codes involving honor, independence, loyalty and bravery in an extra-institutional framework influenced by context. An effective synopsis can be found in Stephen McVeigh's *The American Western* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 44-46).
  - 2 Certainly it can be argued that Kem Nunn's writing matches Carson McCullers' description of "the tragic with the humorous, the immense with the trivial, the sacred with the bawdy, the whole soul of man with a materialistic detail." See: Carson McCuller, *The Aesthetics of Place and the Comedy of Discomfort: Six Humorists* (Ann Arbor, UMI, 2007, p. 96).
  - 3 While the wide range of particulars are beyond the scope of this work, Southern California via its connotations with extremes ranging from Hollywood decadence to Hell's Angels violence, has a generalized reputation for larger-than-life proportions, both real and represented.

*Surf Noir* writing provides a counter-representation of the *Gidget*-spawned mass culture vehicles, which dominated representations of surfing from the 1960's through most of the 1980's, though it cannot be considered a complete rejection of the literary representations of the surfing sub-culture. Moments of description of the act of surfing itself are reminiscent of other works, including Jack London's writings on the subject,<sup>4</sup> while the elevation of surfers, via the representation of larger-than-life figures, is reminiscent of those heroes of the quintessential American Western.<sup>5</sup> In fact the surfer-outlaw connection extends back to at least the late 1940's<sup>6</sup> and is somewhat present, though in candied form, even in films such as *Gidget*.<sup>7</sup> What *Surf Noir* does is to take the anti-hero figure, and the underside of surf culture, and move both to the forefront of the narrative, complexifying the beach landscapes potentially familiar to the audience.

To briefly synthesize the narrative, following the disappearance of his sister and a vague story from a fleeing surfer, a young man named Ike makes his way from an inland desert town to Huntington Beach in order to attempt to discover her fate. Once there, he slowly integrates the two dominant subcultures of this quintessential surf town on the verge of the massive changes brought about by the 1980s, which is to say the cultures of surfers and bikers. The town itself—dirty, gritty, and dark, alternating between alleyways, surf shops, flop hotels, and beer bars, is offered in its underground splendor, and in flagrant juxtaposition with the stereotypical visions of beach and of the ocean itself, though the latter is often also depicted as unwelcoming and violent as well: “angry, grey and black, streaked with white” (60). Becoming further involved with two main figures, a charismatic biker named Preston and a surfer-guru named Hound, Ike alternately explores these two social universes. Brought increasingly into a central role in each, he serves—at times simultaneously—as a sidekick to each of these men, as he pieces together the story of his sister's possible fate and tries to find his own place in the conflicting communities of Huntington Beach. Loyalties are tested, broken and mended, leading to a final choice between two representative figures in a conclusion that largely deconstructs relationships built throughout the novel. In short, most everyone either dies or flees the scene, in a mixed-message finale that we will return to in the conclusion.

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4 Jack London originally wrote a detailed description of the act of surfing in his article “Riding the South Seas Surf” (*Woman's Home Companion*, 34:10, 1907) which was later incorporated into his novel *Voyage of the Snark* (New York, Macmillan, 1911).

5 See: McVeigh, p. 27-37, for an explanation of this elevation in popular American culture.

6 See the 2004 documentary film *Riding Giants* directed by Stacy Peralta or Nat Young's *History of Surfing* (Tucson, The Body Press, 1983, p. 53-67) for a brief introduction to this theme.

7 In the film *Gidget*, the figure of “Kahuna” played by Cliff Robertson is a Korean War veteran who initially resists reintegration into civilian society with its rules and regulations, preferring the decidedly anti-establishment of a “beach bum”.



But the primary focus of this text is on that of the representation and role of sidekick figure(s). The protagonist, Ike, serves as sidekick to two principal figures as the story develops, allowing the character to explore two different potential paths but also permitting those paths to connect. This construction provides what can be viewed as the intersecting links in the spiral DNA model of the narrative, the junctions between imperfect context and imperfect role models. How can we construe the forcible intersection of biker and surfer sub-cultures? In this particular setting, the combination is not altogether surprising: a *Lords of Dog Town* hybrid crossing with *Easy Rider* and perhaps a bit of Eastwood's *Unforgiven* is not an unreasonable representation of the Huntington Beach of the late 1970s. In such a mixed context, the choices that Ike makes are therefore choices based on shades of grey, rather than black and white, in an undermining of the traditional Western's clear-cut imagery that is much in line with the perpetual questioning of the revisionist Western narratives.<sup>8</sup>

### Establishing the side kick figure

In certain texts, the sidekick role is made explicit, or is rendered obvious by association with one of the more famous existing sidekick relationships. But the *adolescent-biker-surfer-sidekick* model does not clearly follow these precedents, so we have to look for more subtle clues in the text.

Initially, when considering the narrative structure of the novel, it appeared that Ike clearly represented a sidekick to figures with greater experience and a higher level in the relative hierarchies of their sub-cultural groups. Upon closer examination, however, the clarity of that position wavered somewhat before again consolidating in an affirmative, though nuanced, position. This is partially due to an ongoing conversation with the author himself, who initially suggested that the relationships portrayed existed more along those lines of paternal role models, and partially due to the ongoing examination of the complex and contrasting roles played by each of the characters. At this point in the discussion, the author has acknowledged the sidekick element as being unconsciously but strongly present, while I have certainly deepened my appreciation for the complexity of his multi-faceted depictions. While lacking the clean bipolar structure of a *Batman and Robin* (dynamic) duo, or their interesting costumes for that matter, Ike nonetheless serves as a mostly

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8 A visual concordance of this position is to be found in the frequent references to the "shades" or sunglasses worn by the characters, and put on and removed as if to provide a different filter through which to perceive the object of focus. At times, this transition is formalized as when "Morris methodically removed the wire-rimmed shades, folded them with great care, and slipped them into the pocked of his jacket" (141) prior to summarily knocking Ike to the ground. Seeing Ike both emotionally and physically hurt, and that with Preston's consent, marks a decided change of direction in the Ike-Preston relationship.

loyal sidekick to Preston and a hesitantly loyal underling to Hound. One of the elements that can be insisted upon is that in this representation, as perhaps in life, there are consistently multiple perspectives and realities associated with relationships and actions. That Ike is searching for his sister does not exclude him from equally pursuing other aspects of his life. Similarly, that Ike is seeking a father figure does not keep him from adopting a sidekick role in his relationship with Hound Adams. The narrative figure can be simultaneously friend and sidekick, like Holmes and Watson, or mentor and sidekick, or even lover and sidekick, and the author explores each of these possibilities within his text.

In his relationship with Preston, the duo comes about unexpectedly, with Ike offhandedly proposing to adjust Preston's carburetor in a beach parking lot. Gaining acceptance for his knowledge of bikes, Ike then discovers that Preston is a 'former' surfer who helps him acquire a suitable board while 'getting back' at the shop where Ike had been ripped off, then helping with his surfing progression. Preston ultimately agrees to look into Ellen's disappearance, though he is not quite candid as to his knowledge of this event.

What he is though, throughout much of the text, is the dominant figure in their relationship. Does this alone, however, make Ike his sidekick? Examining the prevailing patterns, one can argue that yes it does. In the search for Ellen, it is Preston who determines the lines that the search will follow: directing Ike where and with whom to investigate, providing the insider perspective that allows Ike to decipher the complex social codes of the city, even providing pragmatic advice that allows Ike to progress in his surfing. In the realm of integrating the bikers, it is also Preston that provides the means for Ike to integrate the group, going so far as to "Put in a good word... as it were" (57) so that Ike can work with Morris.

Without being exhaustive, Preston provides Ike with a sense of direction and physical assistance, but their bond goes beyond this construct and the depth of their relationship is what makes Ike, in our sense, an interesting sidekick. While an excellent surfer, Preston had virtually given it up—he was "retired" to use Ike's terms—and yet he decides to bestow his comradeship and knowledge on Ike exclusively. His girlfriend confirms this when she states that "I mean, no one has been able to get Preston on a board in a long time..." (97-98). One simple gesture that Ike uses when going surfing with Preston, a touch on the arm to a man whose personal space is sacred, is highly revelatory of their relationship. "He touched Preston's arm as they started down. Thanks, he said, thanks for bringing me. Preston just laughed and led the way" (76). Preston has clearly not only brought Ike surfing and accepted Ike as his sidekick, he has brought him along in his life, in his quest, and he continues to lead the way though constantly encouraged or enabled by Ike. While not a "literate sidekick" in the sense of Williams and Zenger, he none-

theless provides the intellectual stimulus “necessary to help the hero achieve his goals”<sup>9</sup> –though in this instance the hero is not the protagonist and he is somewhat unclear as to the exact nature or extent of his own goals.

Further, Preston, normally evasive of extended conversation and compliments, is expansive with Ike on a multitude of subjects and even boasts to others of his skill as a mechanic. And, in a scene that we will develop further in the second part, he goes as far as to explicitly refer to Ike as his “partner” –a term that rings with sidekick associations across multiple genres.

Briefly, when Preston is injured, it is Ike who emotionally supports Preston’s girlfriend. Ike is among the rare few who visit Preston in the hospital and during his convalescence, he offers assistance, and ultimately, Ike is the only non-biker present at Preston’s funeral. Through these elements, we see the characteristics of loyalty and support that partially define a sidekick. While not always in agreement, Ike largely follows Preston’s lead –despite the physical or emotional cost to himself.

A final episode is worthy of mention in establishing Ike as a sidekick, occurring near the conclusion, when Preston wants Ike to ride with him to check out the BSA. Instead of allowing Morris to assault Ike, Preston responds by elevating Ike’s role in the partnership to potentially Biblical proportions<sup>10</sup>: “Behold a pale horse”, Preston croaked above the roar of the engine. “And his name that sat on him was death, and Hell followed with him” (237). In a closed social context in which one’s capacity for violence and destruction appears to concur with one’s status –Ike is raised by this assertion into the inner circle– not on an equal footing with Preston, but riding close behind him. As the character of Morris more bluntly puts it, “Look, the little pussy’s gone and grown himself some balls” (236). This quotation reinforces the elevated sexual status that Ike acquires, in a convergence of sidekick roles.

This scene, taken in conjunction with an earlier scene while Ike and Preston camp at the mythical Ranch ‘secret spot’,<sup>11</sup> appears to support the idea of an

9 See: Bronwyn T. Williams and Zenger Amy A., *Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy* (New York, Rutledge, 2007, p. 100).

10 An analysis of the scriptural references in the novel is outside the scope of this work, but it should be noted that they are frequent and operative in the creation of tension between the elevated spiritual elements and the gritty underside of surf culture, a construct consistent with the Southern Gothic tradition of juxtaposition that warrants further exploration.

11 Nunn’s ranch is based on the Hollister Ranch north of Santa Barbara, California –a surf spot rendered famous by Ron Stoner in the mid-1960s and frequently represented as a terrestrial surfing paradise. The ranch, off limit to surfers during its working period and currently difficult to access for non-residents, is part of the greater surfing mythology. See: Matt Warshaw, *The Rise, Fall, and Mysterious Disappearance of Surfing’s Greatest Photographer* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2006, p. 129-130) and Nat Young, *History of Surfing* (Tucson, The Body Press, 1983, p. 84-85). An interesting possible connection can be made to the Hearst Castle property, with its private movie theatre and relative isolation, in a blending of cultural references and popular mythologies.

almost ‘superheroesque’ duo.<sup>12</sup> “The last he saw of Preston, he was seated by the fire, a joint held to his lips, his dark hair loose, resting on his shoulders, so that he reminded Ike of certain airbrushed drawings he’d seen on the fuel tanks of bikes, the covers of magazines: the dark scowl beneath the long hair, the heavy tattooed shoulders and arms lit by the orange light of the fire. He looked like a figure out of some remote past, a slayer of dragons” (89). If Preston is indeed slaying dragons in this narrative then Ike is, ultimately as we will see in the conclusion, his faithful squire in a pairing that elevates the status of the quest and thereby its participants by this rich evocation.

The way in which Ike comes to serve as a sidekick to Hound Adams differs greatly from that of his relationship development with Preston, although as we will see there are certain parallels in their relationships. Ike deliberately seeks to join Hound’s inner circle as a way to find out more about his sister. While some ambiguity remains as to Hound’s real interest in adopting Ike into his circle, he nonetheless does so, helping him with surfing and finance, as well as providing an escapist development in terms of available sex and drugs.

Here again, one may ask if Ike is merely participating in Hound’s activities, or if he is actually a sidekick to their instigator. Several clues indicate that the latter is actually occurring. A few of these include Hound’s persistent use of the term *hermanos del mar* (114),<sup>13</sup> indicating a higher level of comradeship. Associated with this is his overt offer to serve as a teacher or even a mentor to Ike when they meet at a party. Insinuating Ike’s complex relationship with Preston, he states, “We all need a teacher, the trick is in finding the right one” (116). Hound thus appears in direct competition as that leading role. This relationship, both as it exists and as it might be further developed, is reinforced constantly throughout the second and third parts of the novel. When Ike has trouble surfing bigger waves, Hound offers “rest a minute, then we’ll go out together. I’ll show you the way” (161). The latter part of the sentence is clearly loaded in this moment of self-doubt for Ike.

And following this session, when a fight erupts between Bikers and Surfers, there is a key moment where Hound steps in to defend Ike, placing himself in danger to do so. This event not only exemplifies Hound’s interest in Ike, it also provides the grounds for others to see them as linked. Michelle, Ike’s girlfriend, sees this occasion as proof that Ike is indeed integrated into the inner circle at a special level. Other examples can be found in Hound’s providing

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12 Without pushing the comic book association, Ike’s lower skill set as a surfer and status as a relative outsider to both surf and biker culture as practiced in Southern California, correspond to the Marvel Database definition: “The sidekick has the literary function of playing against the hero, often contrasting in skill, asking the questions the reader would ask, or performing functions not suited to the hero.”

13 “*Hermanos del mar*” can be literally translated as “brothers of the sea” and is used alternately in Spanish and English (115) to make this perfectly clear.

Ike with a board, of involving him in the drug traffic, of his continual offering of advice and counsel. Throughout the development of this relationship, it is interesting to note the parallels to Ike's dealings with Preston, the two leading figures appearing to be, in many ways, two sides of the same coin.

But again, does this make Ike Hound's sidekick or merely one of a close circle? Does Hound sharing advice and money and inclusion make Ike more than just one of several secondary figures? A key to seeing Ike as a sidekick appears near the final scene, when Ike is clearly distinguished from Hound's other associates, even those whose relationships are much older. In regards to Frank Bayer, Hound's shadow, he states that Ike is different. "We've worked well together, haven't we? And I could use someone new around the shop "I don't mean just working there, I mean really looking after things... I want to know things are in good hands when I'm gone... What about Frank?... Frank's a loser" Hound replies before saying to Ike "You could have it all" (259). Of course, in the context, Hound is not merely talking about the shop which is already the key to the social surfing universe; he is talking about the drug and pornography trade, about the travel and the lifestyle, even about access to the mythical Ranch surf spot—which in the narrative serves as a sort of Shangri-la incarnation of the ultimate goal. While Ike neither explicitly accepts nor refuses the offer, his *de facto* acceptance via participation appears to qualify him as a sidekick, though one with certain reservations.

One of the interesting elements in this novel is the way in which the figure of Ike appears to take a secondary role in his interaction with characters outside of the Preston/Hound binomial construction. Two examples will serve to illustrate this: Ike's relationship with Morris, a motorcycle mechanic who rides with Preston, and his relationship with Michelle—a runaway adolescent who is increasingly brought into Hound's inner circle.

The relationship with Morris begins uneasily as Ike offers to adjust the carburetor on Preston's Harley. A very drunk Preston agrees, over Morris's protests that he had already done the job. In the ensuing conversation and repair, several textual clues give one side of this representation. Preston asks rhetorically, "what's this... your little brother?" (34). While the question to Morris is rhetorical, it does draw an image of Ike as the little brother figure, or, in classic mainstream American iconography, the ultimate "sidekick" figure. That this sidekick can be a somewhat unwelcome accomplice is an element that we will develop further. After this initial introduction, Ike goes on to work at Morris's shop—and numerous descriptors are used "to help, to help out, to work with..." all in the close confines of the workshop. Thus Morris' status, both professional and within Preston's group, as a mechanic allows him to take the dominant role in a master-apprentice relationship in which Ike's ability to work is dependent upon his acceptance. While both Ike and Morris are unsure of this arrangement, it is Preston who ensures that the apprenticeship takes place and continues throughout the first half of the novel. It

is tempting to see this structure as a hierarchy of sidekicks –Morris is clearly beneath Preston, although in his own clumsy way he is also a solidly reliable secondary figure, and the contention then lies in determining whether he or Ike have the dominant role. The fact that Preston regularly intervenes to keep Morris from physically harming his apprentice is one area in which the overlapping circles of relationships become clear. Still, on at least one face of what appears to be a many-sided coin, Ike is an underling figure to Morris as well.

The second relationship that is of interest is that of the primary love interest in the story –that is between Ike and Michelle. Coming from a very small town and being a self-described loner, Ike admits to having no real experience with girls when he moves to Huntington Beach. Michelle, on the other hand, has had as the reader is to learn “lots of boyfriends” (118) and is much more world-wise. When their relationship begins, it is systematically Michelle who initiates the contact and interaction, and this dominant role extends into their sexual relationship in which she serves as the leader and mentor. She thus leads Ike –a hesitant though not exactly unwilling figure– into their experiences as a couple. In this process, Ike becomes what you might call a ‘sexual sidekick’ as both characters seek to develop a relationship and to experience something beyond the emotional doldrums of youth beach society.

### **Instability and inversion**

Having carefully constructed a complex sidekick persona for his protagonist, the author also nearly systematically deconstructs those same relationships in his work. In what appears to be a reverse parallel structure, the interwoven interactions provide grounds for character development and complexification, with interesting results.

In part one of the novel (the novel is clearly divided into five parts), we saw how Preston slowly elevated Ike to sidekick status. In the second part, however, following a fight and his arrest, he distances himself in a surprising turn of events. Having already hidden certain aspects of his knowledge from Ike, the betrayal becomes increasingly manifest as the story continues. The most explicit rendering of this distancing takes place when Ike is walking down the street and suddenly finds himself confronted with Morris outside a bar. In a scene that could have initially taken place in a library, “Morris methodically removed the wire-rimmed shades, folded them with great care, and slipped them into the pocket of his jacket” before he “came after him, grinning broadly now, and swung” (141). The physical violence is secondary to the psychological impact of the episode. This is made evident when Preston appears, drunk and menacing, and Ike learns that he had allowed Morris to attack him on a bet that he could knock him out with a single punch. Any illusions of loyalty disappear as he says “Get the picture, queer bait?” (141) –adopting the homophobic language of Morris and thereby clearly excluding Ike.



In the subsequent pages, Preston once again rejects not only Ike, but his association with surfing altogether, apparently regressing into the role of the simplistic biker. Even after he is hospitalized, when Ike comes to visit, his language is flagrantly aggressive and he repeatedly belittles and berates Ike with a series of slurs that ultimately reveal that he is aware of Ike's growing relationship with Hound. "You don't know shit. Working for Hound Adams. You think I don't know what's going down, what are you doing for him, pimping or letting him fuck you in the ass?" (217). Such altercations shift the focus of the text from the relationship between Ike and Preston to that between Ike and Hound—undermining much of what Ike thought he had developed in terms of community in the town. But the deconstruction is not unilateral: just as Preston is rejecting Ike, Ike himself had been, in a sense, betraying Preston by his increasing dealings with Hound. Both the leading and sidekick figures have thus been corrupted, with neither truly respecting their roles.

It is not until the conclusion that this relationship is again inverted, with Preston's apology for the physical attack on Ike with the simple statement explanation: "I was wrong to let that happen. You were my partner, man. And I never stood back and let a partner get dumped on that like that before. I was kind of hoping it would scare your skinny ass out of town. But I was wrong to let it happen" (239). Here we see the repletion of the term partner, and the emphasis upon the elevated status that Ike had, through the use of the past tense in regards to that status also indicates that their relationship has devolved. Paradoxically, in the assertion of the sidekick relationship that existed, and that its demise was in fact a form of loyalty, is also found the confirmation that it has been broken. This construction appears to both elevate and undermine the relationship, as being faithful to one's sidekick may in fact mean losing him.

Another form of inversion takes place in the subtext of primary narrative. While Ike is explicitly the second-figure in this duo, it is interesting to note that it is in fact Ike who often takes the dominant role. If Preston's involvement in surfing is one that he highly values, one that represents a potential return to the "hero" status and relative innocence that he had in his youth, it is only through Ike that this renewal becomes possible. Further, while Preston is presented as almost the "ultimate" biker—from his tattoos to his heavy boots and his physical domination of his surroundings—it is Ike that allows him to do so: first, through the repair of his motorcycle, and second, through the conception of a suicide-shift system that allows Preston to ride even after his hands are injured. It is Ike's insistence, rather than Preston's, that finally allows Preston to confront his past and his own passivity concerning Hound's actions. In his albeit flawed consistency, Ike proves to be the driving force in the relationship in many ways. The instability inherent in this process greatly contributes to the tension in the novel and the general ambience of uncertainty.

As Ike's relationship with Preston changes, so does that with Hound: he apparently forsakes one mentor for another. This switch is fundamentally driven by Ike's quest to find his sister but is also a function of his developing integration into the darker local culture of underage sex and drugs. But just as his relationship with Preston proves to be unstable, Ike's role as a sidekick to Hound is constantly undermined.

While Ike gains access to Hound's inner circle, it is an access that is based on dishonesty from Ike as he is already suspicious of a potential role in his sister's disappearance. As the narrative progresses, the reader becomes aware that Hound was aware of this deception and goes along with it, as "a good game makes life more interesting" (258). He is, himself, constantly misleading or deceiving Ike as to his real intentions and knowledge, at one point provoking Ike to reflect that a comment made about Preston "was the first honest thing that Hound had told him" (224).

This point leads us to another level of undermining of the sidekick role: it is consistent neither in its duplicity nor in its honesty. The character of Hound alternately offers Ike inclusion and exclusion in response to a rapidly changing scenario, while Ike honestly debates with himself about simply adopting the sidekick role—with its many fringe benefits—and allowing his reservations and relationships with Preston or Michelle to disappear. In the end, both Ike and Hound reject their relationship though in different ways and for different reasons: Ike doing so when he chooses Michelle over Hound's proposal to take their relationship, or their "voyage of discovery" (258) as he puts it, to the next level, and Hound doing so when he agrees to sacrifice Ike for a pornographic "snuff film" in order to maintain his position with his benefactor. This betrayal is a partial parallel to that of Preston, but with infinitely more dramatic consequences.

Essentially, despite the high valorization of surfing in the novel, the "*hermanos del mar*" rhetoric is shown as an empty promise—a relationship of convenience that may provide a temporary sense of conviction but which signifies nothing when sacrifice is required. As discussed earlier, the sidekick characteristics assigned to Ike extend to his relationships with the secondary figures in the narrative. And just as the author is extremely consistent in his portrayal of Ike's role in these relationships with the main characters, Kem Nunn also extends his inversions and undermining of the sidekick role—whether willing or unwilling—to those interactions with the secondary figures.

In the relationship with Morris, it is Morris who is the recognized mechanic among the bikers in Preston's group. However, it is Ike who holds the real skill and in fact far surpasses Morris in his ability as a mechanic. In the scene of their initial meeting, it is Ike who knows how to adjust the carburetor whereas Morris has failed. Ike then repairs Preston's gas tank, and while using Morris' tools and space, accomplishes a better job than Morris could

have hoped to have done. He also handles Harley renovations with which, implicitly, it is understood that Morris would have had problems undertaking on his own. Thus the realities of the roles are inverted: while technically the mentor, it is Ike who has the real skills and role of mechanic. Even towards the end of the novel, when Morris modifies a bike so that an injured Preston can ride, he does so using plans drawn up by Ike. This underlying tension, not only in the explicit dislike that Ike and Morris harbor for one another—a conflict frequently bordering on and occasionally spilling into physical violence— but also in the form of constantly changing relational dynamics, serves as an additional source of constant unease for the reader. Nowhere, it seems, are the structures clearly defined and concrete. Instead, the main character, like the reader, is left to negotiate fluctuations in context like one negotiates the changing surges of an ocean than one can accommodate but certainly not master.

The other important relationship that we have discussed is that between Ike and Michelle, one in which Michelle initially provides the leading role. As Ike is drawn into Hound's inner circle, and increasingly exposed to the drug-related and sexual aspects—including adolescent pornography—he, in turn, becomes the more experienced and controlling of the two. This is made clear not only through the profusion of partners, scenarios, and experiences that Ike accumulates in a brief time, but also in his desire to impose certain aspects of this new experience in his relationship with Michelle. In this turn of events, it is she who is led—and not always willingly—into the next stages of their couple prior to its demise. Again, the relationship which appeared to provide Ike with his most sure refuge in the earlier stages of the novel, is deconstructed: the roles inverted and the loyalties broken, removing the primary source of surety for the protagonist and reader alike.

The inversion of the roles takes place only gradually, and the reader is never sure at what point it will stop—or to what extent this inversion is inter-related with other inversions in the narrative. Without going into a lengthy plot description, there are multiple conflicts between Ike's relationship with Michelle and that he has with Hound. Supporting Hound may mean betraying Michelle, and vice-versa, rendering Ike a dubious sidekick at times. The extent to which this duality is present is expressed explicitly in the conclusion to the second part on the novel when Ike, having cheated on Michelle expresses his own conflicts as “some vicious circle in his head” as he explores his possibilities: “Somewhere in the midst of all that guilt and disgust, there was this other feeling that was in some way connected to that curiosity about himself he had felt earlier, a dark sense of satisfaction lurking in the gritty morning, a sense of awe almost, at what he had done, him, Low Boy...” (186). Brusquely, the reader is reminded that despite his secondary-figure status in relation to other characters (here confirmed by the capitalized title

“Low Boy” that he gives himself), Ike is indeed at the center of his own narrative and is himself having to negotiate his way through his multiple quests, including that for his own identity. This complexity is certainly operative in the narrative, providing not only a sense of realism but also uncertainty as the perspective provided through Ike is in constant flux and therefore potentially unreliable at any given moment.

This element of ambiguity is drawn out, and coupled with the sexual tension present in the text, sometimes takes on subtle forms. For instance, towards the end of the novel when Ike is seeking reconciliation, he surfs just before joining Michelle on the beach. Her comment, “You’re getting good, I was watching” (246) precedes their making love. However, in light of the sexuality of the scene, there is a lingering doubt: was she referring to his progress in surfing (itself an inversion of his previously dismal status as a surfer) or was she making a reference to the pornographic movies in which he played an increasingly active role and which she has perhaps seen? In the latter case, she is affirming the reversal of his earlier sexual inexperience and awkwardness as well as introducing the notion that Ike himself was an accessory –or sidekick– in the film making process both. While it is certain that his underling role is being contested, or inverted, whether this inversion corresponds to Hound or to Michelle is unclear.

While this relationship is eventually “righted”, though in a manner that is forced to accept the multiple inversions and failings, it does so with a note of hopeful uncertainty. This aspect of the work, the recognition of a flawed existence and yet a persistent sense of hope, is one that we will return to in the conclusion.

## Conclusions

The profusion of sidekick representations in *Tapping the Source* virtually forces the reader to constantly realign their perception figures and relationships within the narrative. Within this process of realignment, the frequent inversions of leading and secondary figures create an apparently unusual situation: while becoming increasingly aware of the literary sidekick construct the reader is potentially also increasingly led to question its role, and even perhaps its relevance. While Kem Nunn has apparently gone to great lengths in the construction of secondary figures or sidekick roles in *Tapping the Source*, it also appears that he has gone to nearly as great of lengths in their deconstruction. Heroic figures are successively elevated to the lead status as the protagonist attempts to negotiate his own quest, only to be successively reduced in Ike’s esteem before a final scene of confrontation and redemption, at least in the case of Preston. Confrontation and contradiction thus seem as much a part of the relational landscape as do the traits of consistency and loyalty, sub currents boiling unexpectedly to the surface.

While a sidekick to both Preston and Hound in most senses, it is Ike that leads Preston to rediscover himself, and perhaps a better path, rather than the other way around, and it is Ike who ultimately works the social machine that Hound Adams so carefully observes, in order to meet his own objectives, and again, it is Ike who, ultimately, physically survives.

In the conclusion, the author is playing on a theme that is common to both the Western and the Surf Noir genres, that of a dramatic confrontation involving some form of self-sacrifice. From James Stewart's last stand in *Fort Apache*, to Clint Eastwood's final showdown in *Unforgiven*, passing by the over-the-top dark comic mayhem of Fred Reiss's finale in his 1995 *Gidget Must Die*, the final confrontation is one of the longstanding hallmarks of frontier literature—whether that frontier lies in the desert or near the Pacific. In this case, Preston confronts his own role in Hound's criminal activities, and puts an end to them while sacrificing himself in order to do so. It is this conclusion, however, that allows Ike both to reclaim and to surpass his sidekick roll: by reestablishing Preston as the leading figure that Ike had hoped him to be, and yet in his removal (literally by his death) Ike is able to truly free himself to move on—leaving both this particular physical setting and the turmoil of conflicted loyalties that are inherent to it. This final confrontation also allows Ike, in a turn reminiscent of John Wayne's romantic involvement in *Stagecoach*, to begin anew with Michelle after their respective failings.

In crafting his novel Kem Nunn appears to be, deliberately or unconsciously, subverting the sidekick role or at the very least providing the reader with another perspective on it. Through intersecting storylines, inverted hierarchies, utilization and ultimate rejection of categorical sidekicks, the author leads the reader further into the realm of uncertainty. If Ike ceases to be Preston's sidekick, whether in the water or in a greater sphere in the selection of both characters' life paths, can we question whether he has ever really been a sidekick at all? Here, the author's emphasis on conveying *a* reality—though perhaps not *an exclusive* reality—not only in terms of a specific place and time but of a broader human experience—comes into play.

While clearly a sidekick, often playing a secondary part in his own narrative, Ike is never reduced to “a companion who sometimes gives the protagonist important information or insights”<sup>14</sup>. Instead, while serving as the foil to other characters in certain strands of the story, Ike remains above all his own central figure, ultimately responsible for his own decisions and courses of action. Escaping a certain form of cliché in an effort at depicting complex social realities, the author reminds us that relationships are neither simple nor static, and that the individual is always part of a larger whole—one which

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14 Turco, Lewis, *The Book of Literary Terms* (Hanover, University Press of New England, 1999, p. 49).

can, though not always easily –provide a context for personal and collective growth. This analysis appears to concur with the author’s position, explained in a June 2104 interview:

Another way to think about this maybe in the context of community. If it’s true, and I think it is, that we find the highest expression of our humanity in community, well then that’s a kind of fluid thing. One might need to be a leader one day, a follower the next. I often write about characters who begin in some form of isolation, then something happens, some inciting incident, and they are pitched into the world and forced to make some accounting for themselves with regard to others and I think that this is true of Ike.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, all fiction and all sidekick relationships depict some form of reality. Fans of *Batman and Robin* can assuredly find valid social and philosophical statements and criticism being forwarded in the complex causalities in the nefarious deeds of the cast of Gotham City’s underworld as well as the caped crusader’s attempts to foil them. But here, Kem Nunn escapes the binary construct common to most sidekick relationships, broadening the scope of possibilities in his narrative –both a step closer to realism and a crucial element in setting the tone of his work.

This emphasis on reciprocity within the community also provides a humanistic counterpoint to the grit and violence that is contextually present in the narrative. Undermining the sidekick role runs parallel to undermining, in a sense, the *noir* in *surf noir*: for the narrative can be viewed as a success story. Preston’s ultimate redemption and Ike’s sense of belonging allow a tentatively optimistic ending, despite the erring and sense of loss.

While he may not be riding into the sunset on a white stallion (even the esteemed ’36 Harley Davidson Knucklehead is forsaken in the end, replaced by a more efficient BSA) Ike’s departure in a Greyhound bus is nonetheless a sort of victory. Elevated by association with the classical Western image of the heroic departure as well as with disassociation with a potentially redeemed Preston via the representation of the means of transport, Ike remains true to his hybrid narrative nature. Riding off to an uncertain future in rainy Oregon, Ike as a leading figure-sidekick composite is nonetheless offered the chance at a new beginning while aware of, and at times even savoring, life’s inescapable flaws.

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15 This interview was conducted over a period of several weeks, during June and July of 2014.



**Abstract**

This paper focuses on documenting and beginning to qualify the sidekick roles within Kem Nunn's Surf Noire narrative, *Tapping the Source*. Our goal is to examine the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory secondary roles created by the author as a starting point for further analysis of the mechanics that Kem Nunn employs in a work that has largely influenced the emerging Surf Noire genre.

**Keywords**

Sidekicks, Kem Nunn, surf culture, noir fiction.

**Résumé**

L'objectif de ce texte est la documentation – ainsi que le début d'une analyse critique – des rôles de second couteau dans le récit *Tapping the Source* de l'écrivain Kem Nunn. Cette exploration des rôles complexes et parfois contradictoires des personnages créés par l'auteur est un point de départ pour une analyse plus profonde de la mécanique narrative employée dans un livre qui a largement contribué à l'émergence du genre Surf Noire.

**Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, Kem Nunn, surf, roman noir.

# *Neverwhere* : les égarés de la narration

Aurélien Royer

## Introduction

*Neverwhere* est un roman fantastique écrit par Neil Gaiman en 1996, à la suite de l'écriture et de la diffusion sur la BBC de la série du même nom. Confronté aux coupes dans son scénario original, coupes rendues nécessaires par le format télévisuel et les contraintes de production, N. Gaiman raconte dans son introduction à l'édition 2005 du roman, qu'il n'a surmonté cela qu'en disant par devers lui qu'il remettrait le tout dans le roman (« *I'll put it back in the novel* », I)<sup>1</sup>. Dès l'origine, nous constatons une frustration (véridique ou feinte) à ne pouvoir tout dire, tout montrer, tout raconter. Dans cette optique, la forme romanesque de *Neverwhere* serait censément la plus complète. Or, et c'est ce à quoi nous allons nous intéresser au cours de notre examen, le texte apparaît étonnamment troué pour quelque chose de prétendument entier. Cela est d'autant plus flagrant que le récit prend souvent la peine de sortir de ses rails pour éclairer quelque chose qui, sans cela, serait resté dans l'obscurité. Des informations manquent, d'autres surgissent, et c'est à nous, lecteurs, qu'il revient de recoller les morceaux. Ce jeu de lumières et d'ombres est rendu possible avant tout par la focalisation du récit. Cette dernière, plutôt que de suivre constamment un personnage principal, est éclatée. Bien sûr, elle s'intéresse surtout à un personnage précis, un héros par défaut, dirons-nous, mais aussi à la galerie de personnages secondaires qui l'entoure, que les dénominations de faire-valoir ou de seconds couteaux ne saisissent qu'improprement. De sorte que finalement le statut des personnages s'estompe jusqu'à disparaître. Il n'y a pas de héros de plein droit dans *Neverwhere* et, par là même, il n'y a pas de personnage proprement secondaire. Chacun devient l'adjuvant ou

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1 Toutes les références à *Neverwhere* seront, par la suite, matérialisées par un numéro de page entre parenthèses. Sauf indication contraire, toutes les citations sont issues de : Gaiman, Neil, *Neverwhere*, Londres : Review, 2005. Enfin, précisons que les numéros de page de l'introduction sont les miens, l'édition utilisée ne les numérotant pas.

l'opposant de l'autre, changeant plusieurs fois de rôle dans le récit, sans jamais atteindre de stabilisation dans une fonction ou une autre. Les personnages du roman semblent ainsi perdus, égarés dans une narration qui les déplace à loisir. C'est ce mouvement que je souhaiterais explorer dans ce texte, en montrant en quoi chaque personnage du récit est un héros qui s'est trompé d'histoire, en quoi chaque personnage du récit est un faire-valoir sporadiquement éclairé par la narration.

Pour ce faire, il convient tout d'abord de proposer un aperçu de l'œuvre. Ceci sert de tremplin à l'analyse des schémas actantiels<sup>2</sup> du roman, analyse qui montre combien les fonctions des personnages sont opaques. L'enjeu étant de mettre au jour le statut duel du roman dont est issue cette perte de repères fonctionnels qui frappe le récit.

## Méandres

Comme précisé en introduction, *Neverwhere* fut d'abord le scénario d'une série télévisuelle britannique. N. Gaiman a réécrit et étendu ce scénario sous forme de roman, publié par la BBC en 1996, la semaine de diffusion du troisième épisode de la série. Un éditeur américain a ensuite offert à l'auteur de proposer le roman aux États-Unis et N. Gaiman en a profité pour rédiger une nouvelle mouture du texte. Cette version parut en 1998. Finalement, une édition définitive (intitulée « *The Author's Preferred Text* ») vit le jour en 2005 chez Review et c'est sur celle-ci que nous nous appuyons. Pour cette édition, N. Gaiman réunit les versions antérieures, supprimant et ajoutant quelques milliers de mots (« *a few thousand words* », II). Voici, en quelques mots, la génétique du récit.

Malgré cette genèse complexe, le roman présente une *fabula* d'apparence simple. L'œuvre nous fait suivre les péripéties du personnage focalisateur principal nommé Richard Mayhew, analyste financier écossais immigré à Londres, vivant une existence sans intérêt au début du roman. Sa rencontre avec un second personnage va bouleverser tout ceci et, dans la tradition populaire des romans de formation, le voici plongé dans une série d'aventures qui lui permettra, à terme, de se connaître lui-même. En sus de l'introduction, le péri-texte du récit se compose d'un prologue placé, naturellement, au début et, en annexe, d'un prologue tout à fait différent (« *an altogether different prologue* », 377), que nous évoquerons plus tard. Pour l'instant, c'est le prologue de plein droit qui doit retenir notre attention. Nous y voyons Richard Mayhew fêter son départ d'Écosse dans une ambiance un peu amère, au milieu de ses anciens camarades de travail.

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2 Pour ce faire, nous nous servons du modèle établi par Greimas, Algirdas Julien dans *Sémantique Structurale*, Paris : PUF, 1986 (2007), p. 180.

Ce point de départ mérite examen. En tant que prologue rédigé par l'auteur lui-même, il participe de la catégorie des préfaces originales qui « [ont] pour fonction cardinale *d'assurer au texte une bonne lecture* »<sup>3</sup>. De sorte que, par sa visée programmatique, le prologue « fournit le mode d'emploi du livre »<sup>4</sup> : il dirige l'attention du lecteur, il oriente la lecture. Ainsi, en étant focalisé sur Richard, le prologue en fait le personnage focalisateur mais aussi le personnage principal. En nous présentant cette première aventure – où, très ironiquement, Richard se fait lire son avenir – le prologue établit dans l'horizon d'attente du lecteur le personnage de Richard comme héros. Or, le premier paragraphe du texte opère un changement radical puisqu'en place de Richard, c'est un pronom personnel sujet féminin (SHE) qui apparaît, anonyme et fuyant quelque chose. Aussitôt après, la focalisation présente un nouveau déplacement en mettant en lumière Ms. Croup et Vandemar, poursuivants du personnage précédent. C'est seulement trois pages plus loin que nous retrouvons Richard, de nouveau focalisateur. Cette hésitation du texte va se poursuivre jusqu'à la fin du premier chapitre où finalement elle sera résolue, rappelant le procédé cinématographique du montage alterné (on pense notamment au final du *Parrain*, par Francis F. Coppola).

Le texte hésite ainsi dès l'abord sur sa composition. Il n'y a pas d'exposition proprement dite d'un personnage principal comme cela peut-être le cas dans la plupart des romans populaires (voyez plutôt l'introduction des personnages chez T. Pratchett, ou encore les premières pages généalogiques de *The Lord of the Rings*). Au contraire, au travers de ce montage alterné, le récit échappe à toute tentative de stabilisation.

Notons encore que la résolution du parallélisme permet au lecteur d'envisager l'hypothèse d'un personnage principal double mais cette idée vole assez vite en éclat. En effet, très rapidement, à la fin du deuxième chapitre, Door, le personnage féminin, qui avait rejoint Richard, le quitte. À partir de ce moment, le récit, bien que demeurant principalement focalisé sur Richard alterne de nouveau avec des scènes évoquées *via* Door, ou Croup et Vandemar ou d'autres personnages encore. De sorte que, pendant quelques pages, des personnages qui semblent secondaires servent de héros de plein droit au récit. C'est le cas par exemple de Croup et Vandemar à l'occasion du second prologue, où le lecteur les aperçoit regardant brûler un monastère toscan auquel ils ont mis le feu. Les mini-séquences de récit de ce type sont légion dans *Neverwhere* et elles brouillent activement les repérages fonctionnels des personnages.

Mais revenons à notre récit. En fin de premier chapitre, Richard sauve Door de ses poursuivants. Elle va alors lui demander d'aller chercher quelqu'un pour l'aider. Richard se retrouve alors à servir d'adjuvant pour un person-

3 Genette, Gérard, *Seuils*, Paris : Seuil (coll. Points Essais), 1987 (2002), p. 200. Sauf indication contraire, toutes les italiques des citations sont de leurs auteurs.

4 Novalis, *Encyclopédie*, in Genette, Gérard, *Seuils*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

nage principal effacé pour aller chercher un second adjuvant, tout en restant l'objet de la focalisation du récit. On perçoit ainsi combien les fonctions sont poreuses. C'est ainsi que Richard ramène à Door le Marquis de Carabas. Ces deux derniers quittent Richard. Comme de juste, l'histoire ne s'arrête pas ici : Door, le Marquis ainsi que Croup et Vandemar sont issus d'un monde, *London Below*, invisible aux yeux de ceux d'en dessus. Richard a été contaminé par ces personnages et se retrouve précipité dans *London Below* contre son gré.

Cette chute est l'occasion de reprendre le montage alterné, faisant suivre au lecteur tantôt l'enquête du Marquis et de Door pour retrouver les assassins de la famille de la jeune fille, tantôt les mésaventures de Richard, tantôt la marche différée de Croup et Vandemar. Un groupe se constitue finalement lorsque Richard retrouve le Marquis et Door alors qu'ils recrutent un garde du corps. Celui-ci sert d'adjuvant à Door et se nomme Hunter. Nous étudierons ce nom, programmatique comme beaucoup d'autres, plus bas. Pendant un temps, l'hésitation narrative s'estompe à quelques regards près chez Croup et Vandemar. La narration reste ainsi unifiée jusqu'au départ du Marquis pour un acte héroïque où il trouve une mort provisoire. En parallèle, Hunter trahit Door par intérêt personnel mais échoue dans sa quête et meurt. Ensuite, Richard, Door et le Marquis ressuscité affrontent le responsable de la mort de la famille de Door, l'ange Islington. Une fois celui-ci et Croup et Vandemar vaincus, Richard récupère sa vie d'avant. Bien entendu après toutes ses aventures, il ne s'en satisfait pas et retourne dans *London Below*, dont il est à présent un membre tutélaire, « *the warrior* » (319, 347).

Par volonté d'efficacité, j'ai limité ce résumé aux événements majeurs du récit et ainsi tu l'existence de personnages moins importants. Pourtant, tout incidentels qu'ils sont, il est nécessaire d'au moins citer leurs noms pour référence, car ceux-ci les inscrivent dans un espace extradiégétique et donc participent à l'indécision du statut des personnages. Nommons alors Old Bailey, le comte (*The Earl*), les *Black Friars* ou encore Lady Serpentine. Nous nous intéresserons à ces noms un peu plus loin.

## Cadres

Dans un premier temps, parce que nous nous sommes surtout intéressés à Richard, notre résumé nous invite à considérer le récit comme un roman de formation. La focalisation principale du récit sur Richard, son émancipation finale, la découverte de son nom, son adoubement et son retour à *London Below* en font un personnage arrivé, qui contraste fortement avec le personnage effacé, manipulé et mièvre présenté en début du roman. Ce contraste est rendu possible par le dernier chapitre qui fait agir Richard dans le monde du Londres d'en haut et le montre lassé par celui-ci.

The old Richard, the one who had lived in what was now the Buchanans' home, would have crumbled at this point, apologised for being a nuisance, and gone away. Instead, Richard said "Really"... (358-359)

Ce chapitre de conclusion permet de cadrer le récit sur Richard. Cependant, ce cadrage large de roman de formation n'arrive pas à subsumer l'ensemble des événements du récit, ne serait-ce que du fait que le roman ne commence pas sur Richard mais sur Door. Ainsi, le récit de la formation de Richard serait incidentel, secondaire. Richard n'est pas le personnage qui déclenche les aventures et encore moins celui qui les résout, à deux exceptions notables près. Il est celui qui subit, toujours de manière piteuse. Ainsi, par exemple, l'épisode du « *Mind the gap thing* » (141-142).

Ceci s'expliquerait par le fait que Richard glisse dans la mauvaise histoire au moment précis où il sauve Door agonisante sur le trottoir. Jusqu'à cet instant, il suivait un chemin narratif banal, classique, qui s'impose une dernière fois à lui à la fin du récit quand il voit son avenir se dérouler devant ses yeux :

And it came to him then [...]: the rest of his life. He would go home tonight with the girl from Computer Services, and they would make gentle love, and tomorrow, it being Saturday, they would spend the morning in bed. [...] In a year, or a little less, he would marry the girl from Computer Services, and get another promotion, and they would have two children, a boy and a girl, and they would move out to the suburbs... (365)

Ce récit, que Richard refuse en fin de roman, est pourtant celui qu'il pourchasse précisément tout le long de l'histoire : « *I'm trying to get to the real London, and my old life* » (227). Ajoutons encore pour renforcer l'idée d'égarement du personnage que, avant sa chute dans *London Below*, Richard était mené de manière caricaturale par sa future femme, qui le malléait selon ses désirs : « *And Jessica saw in Richard an enormous amount of potential which, harnessed by the right woman, who would have made him the perfect matrimonial accessory.* » (12). Ainsi, du début jusqu'à la fin, Richard est un personnage littéralement égaré dans les mauvaises histoires.

Non seulement Richard peine à déchiffrer le récit de *London Below* (274) mais en plus il interrompt les récits des autres, les parasite, parce qu'il est le focalisateur<sup>5</sup> principal. Il agit comme un trou noir narratif. Chaque récit où il intervient subit une défocalisation qui prive le personnage principal de la lumière qu'il attendrait. Chaque fois qu'un des personnages du récit se retrouve accompagné par Richard, celui-ci devient automatiquement le focalisateur de la narration, quand bien même il ne s'agit pas de son récit et que la narration de ce dernier était précédemment focalisé sur l'autre personnage. Richard fonctionne alors comme un personnage transversal, un faire-valoir

5 Nous reprenons ici les termes définis par Genette, Gérard, *Figures III*, Paris : Seuil (coll. Poétique), 1972, p. 200 et sq.

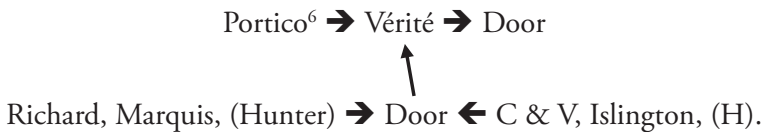


qui permet au récit de mettre en lumière tout ce qui arrive autour de lui. Personnage transversal car il participe de toutes les séquences du récit. Hunter déclare ainsi : « *I saved his life three times today* », 123) pour justifier de ses qualités de garde du corps. Plus tard, il passera la troisième épreuve de la quête que Door doit accomplir pour obtenir une clef. Plus tard encore, il accompagnera le Marquis pour aller sauver Door.

Il serait alors tentant de le classer définitivement dans les personnages secondaires, adjuvant maladroit de tous les autres, mais deux faits s'y opposent. D'abord sa victoire sur la Bête de *London Below*, où il devient un héros de plein droit (et un membre du monde d'en bas, ne serait-ce que par intertextualité). Ensuite, comme il constitue le focalisateur principal, il permet au narrateur de déployer les merveilles du monde sans lasser et avec la fraîcheur de la nouveauté, tout en présentant un visage auquel le lecteur peut s'identifier aisément. Richard est donc double. À la fois personnage principal répondant à des besoins narratifs précis et personnage secondaire dans les schémas actantiels du récit.

En effet, *Neverwhere* compte presque autant de schémas actantiels que de personnages. Pour comprendre cela, appuyons-nous d'abord sur le résumé du récit aimablement proposé par Richard dans une question à Hunter : « *So what are you after? [...] Personally I'm trying to get to real London and my old life. Door wants to find out who killed her family. What are you after?* » (227). La réponse de Hunter est amusante car elle raconte son histoire passée (l'inventaire des bêtes qu'elle a tuées) avant de déclarer qu'elle tuera celle de Londres ou mourra en essayant. Amusante car elle nous permet de situer Hunter sur une ligne narrative déviante par rapport à celle de Door ou de Richard. Hunter, comme son nom l'indique, chasse. Sa coopération avec Door ne peut apparaître qu'incidente.

La question de Richard permet d'identifier la quête de Door et c'est cette quête qui réunit toutes les autres. Le schéma actantiel qui correspond à la séquence de Door est le suivant :



On s'aperçoit alors qu'il réunit tous les personnages autour de Door qui n'est qu'un adjuvant dans le récit de formation de Richard alors même que le texte s'ouvre sur son aventure. D'autre part, Door est révéree par les personnages de *London Below* (elle est Lady Door), elle n'est inféodée à personne et possède un pouvoir magique (elle ouvre les choses). Tout ceci s'ajoute au schéma actantiel pour faire d'elle un héros<sup>7</sup> prototypique des romans populaires, qui va surmon-

6 Père de Door, dont le testament enregistré (et truqué) lance Door sur le chemin de son récit.

7 Comme il s'agit ici du rôle prototypique de héros, hors de toute spécificité, nous conservons le

ter les obstacles pour arriver à ses fins. Sauf qu'elle ne sert pas d'héroïne au roman : le personnage est un faire-valoir brillant de Richard, un contrepoint qui dévoile toute l'ignorance du précédent. Ceci nous permet d'explorer un peu plus l'idée d'égarement. Door ne s'est pas trompé d'histoire. À l'inverse de Richard, elle sait où elle trouve, d'où elle est partie et où elle va.

Cependant, la narration choisit délibérément de l'exclure (voir le prologue et le dernier chapitre, tous les deux centrés sur Richard) pour raconter une autre histoire. Le personnage de Door est un faire-valoir avant tout dans la mesure où la narration le décide, de la même façon que Richard, faire-valoir archétypique devient le personnage principal par les manipulations du narrateur. Ainsi, même si le récit de Door unit tous les autres, y compris celui, cadre, de la formation de Richard, il n'en reste pas moins secondaire. C'est, cette fois-ci, le narrateur qui se trompe de lumière, pourrait-on dire.

Nous obtenons donc un héros d'un récit principal travesti en adjuvant d'un récit accessoire et structurant ; et un faire-valoir du récit principal maquillé en personnage principal du récit secondaire, ce qui annonce la complexité des autres personnages. Door et Richard présentent en effet l'avantage de se partager l'affiche. Tous les deux sont les personnages principaux des récits qui se télescopent. Même si l'hypothèse du double héros ne tient pas<sup>8</sup>, ils n'en restent pas moins tous les deux à l'avant-scène. Les autres personnages révèlent des structures tout aussi plastiques.

C'est principalement le cas pour le Marquis de Carabas dont le nom indique une origine clairement extradiegétique. Le marquis de Carabas est la fausse identité que revêt le fils de meunier sous l'instigation du Chat Botté dans le conte de Perrault<sup>9</sup>. Ici, le rôle est inversé : le Marquis est un flamboyant adjuvant et, comme son nom l'indique, un mensonge. Le marquis énonce lui-même s'être construit comme une vaste blague (« *a grand joke* », 239). Au-delà du nom, le Marquis témoigne de sa portée extradiegétique dans ses aventures au sein même du récit. De fait, le Marquis quitte le groupe principal à un moment du récit et devient le focalisateur pour un temps, se faisant ainsi le « héros de sa propre séquence »<sup>10</sup>. Et c'est effectivement un acte héroïque auquel il se livre puisqu'il va défier dans leur tanière les incarnations de la mort que sont Croup et Vandemar. Il paie cette *hubris* de sa vie. En mourant, il échappe littéralement au récit, pour y revenir plus tard, ressuscité, juste à temps pour sauver Richard. En quelques pages, le Marquis couvre ainsi toutes les fonctions actantielles du schéma et se permet de vagabonder hors du monde narratif.

masculin, censément neutre en français. À l'inverse, deux lignes plus bas, comme nous évoquons le rôle particulier que Door aurait pu endosser dans ce récit précis, nous utilisons le féminin.

8 Ne serait-ce que par la présence des autres personnages à la fois secondaires et héros : le Marquis et Hunter.

9 Perrault, Charles, *Contes*, Paris : Garnier Flammarion 1991 (ed. Soriano, Marc), p. 267.

10 Barthes, « Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits » (1966), in Barthes, Kayser, Booth, Hamon, *Poétique du récit*, Paris : Seuil (coll. Points essais), 1977, p. 34.

Hunter subit une transformation équivalente et encore plus rapide puisqu'en l'espace de quelques paragraphes, elle passe d'adjuvant à opposant, puis à personnage principal de l'affrontement avec la bête, pour redevenir adjuvant et finir cadavre. Ces transformations successives nous permettent de comprendre qu'Hunter participe d'un schéma actantiel qui lui est propre. Elle suit un récit particulier : sa chasse. Dans cet ordre d'idée, son appartenance au schéma de Door est accidentelle.

Les personnages les plus extérieurs au récit montrent de leur côté une nature profondément extradiégétique. Il s'agit des personnages que j'ai nommés plus haut et dont les noms font systématiquement référence à la réalité géographique de Londres : Serpentine, Old Bailey, Islington, les Black Friars ou encore le Comte (Earl). En étant directement liés à la géographie, ils s'inscrivent non pas dans le récit, transitoire, du roman, mais s'insèrent dans un récit géographique, démesurément plus ancien que le récit du roman, qui le sous-tend, l'appuie, le nourrit et lui fournit une forme de stabilisation profonde qui lui est refusée partout ailleurs.

## Éclatements

Avant ce soubassement géographique, il existe deux récits. En effet, deux Londres cohabitent, nous l'avons vu précédemment : en bas et en haut. Cette différence nous renseigne sur le statut des personnages car leur déplacement sur cet axe vertical est en fait un déplacement narratif. *Neverwhere* est marqué par une dichotomie narrative puissante. Les noms des personnages de *London Below* nous le montrent dans un premier temps : soit qu'ils s'inscrivent dans un texte extradiégétique (les toponymes), soit qu'ils témoignent de leur fonction (Hunter, Door), ils prouvent que *London Below* est fondée sur un autre langage que le Londres d'en haut, ainsi que l'exprime Richard : « *He had gone beyond the world of metaphore and simile, into the place of things that are.* » (310-311). Ce déplacement est d'autant plus acté que Richard perd son nom pour gagner une fonction : « *warrior* ». À l'inverse, le Londres d'en haut ne marque pas une telle opérabilité des noms, à tel point que Gary, le collègue de Richard, devient très vite « *Gary-from-work* » (tirets inclus) et que la potentielle compagne de Richard demeure « *the girl from Computer Services* ». Quand les noms de *London Below* témoignent d'une essentialisation de leur possesseur, ceux du Londres d'en haut sont au contraire les marqueurs d'une réification.

Il faut donc considérer *Neverwhere* comme un triple empilement narratif qui viserait à appréhender la réalité de manière de plus en plus immédiate. Le monde d'en haut, celui des métaphores et des comparaisons, serait un échec dans cette entreprise, attendu que les mots ne rendent pas le réel tel qu'il est. Le monde d'en bas chercherait, par ses dénominations fonctionnelles (un personnage se nommant *Hammersmith* est bien évidemment forgeron par

exemple), à réduire au mieux la distance entre le signe et le signifié, distance qui serait abolie dans le troisième monde narratif, le monde souterrain des personnages géographiques et extradiégétiques.

C'est au titre de cet éclatement narratif qu'il est possible de parler d'égarés narratifs lorsqu'on regarde les personnages de *Neverwhere*. Richard est égaré dans le monde d'en haut puis dans celui d'en bas et cherche, dans les deux, une fonction narrative à remplir, il cherche à devenir réel et le devient en retournant dans *London Below*. Door s'égare en haut puis dans l'histoire de Richard et celui-ci est incapable de comprendre sa fonction, faute de langage commun. Hunter, dans sa traque, reste collée à sa fonction narrative mais ne s'intègre jamais au récit. Enfin, le Marquis échappe à l'immédiateté du langage que *Neverwhere* cherche à instaurer dans *London Below*, tant et si bien qu'il échappe au récit lui-même et ne peut rapporter son voyage que dans des termes vagues. Pourtant, malgré cet égarement permanent, le Marquis reste fidèle à sa fonction d'adjuvant. Il serait possible, en exagérant un peu, de supposer que précisément parce qu'il est libre et volage, il ne peut remplir qu'une seule fonction, la sienne. Dans cette optique, le Marquis de Carabas, personnage mensonge, serait le seul personnage vrai du roman.

## Conclusion

La multiplicité des mondes narratifs du roman, l'éclatement des fonctions actantielles et leur distribution aléatoire, la focalisation qui voyage, les personnages qui ne se trouvent pas de rôle définitif et définitoires, l'absence de récits totalisants, la série de récits coïncidant par hasard narratif, tous ces éléments font de *Neverwhere* un texte complexe. Dans *Neverwhere*, « La fonction narrative [a perdu] ses foncteurs, [son] grand héros, [ses] grands périls, [ses] grands périple et [son] grand but »<sup>11</sup>. Il n'y a pas à proprement parler de faire-valoir ou de seconds couteaux ou de personnage principal dans le roman. En lieu et place de cela, nous voyons un tourbillon de personnages qui occupent successivement tous les rôles. Seule la focalisation permettrait de forcer le roman dans les cadres narratifs habituels. *Neverwhere* apparaît comme un roman décentré et postmoderne<sup>12</sup>.

Surtout, *Neverwhere* se positionne en esquivant permanente, refusant toute stabilisation au point tel qu'à la fin du roman, alors que Richard retourne à *London Below* pour devenir une fonction, pour se stabiliser enfin et trouver sa réalité, nous ne voyons rien :

11 Lyotard, Jean-François, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris : Minuit, 1979, p. 7-8.

12 Nous avons cherché ici à le montrer au niveau narratif. Pour une discussion sur la postmodernité de *Neverwhere* au niveau symbolique, voir Romero-Jódar, Andrés, « Paradisiacal Hells. Subversions of the mythical canon in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* », in *Cuadernos de Investigación Filológica* 31-32 (2005-2006), p. 163-195.

And they walked away together through the hole in the wall back into the darkness, leaving nothing behind them; not even the doorway. (372)

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on the characters of the novel *Neverwhere* written by Neil Gaiman and discusses the roles they play in the novel. It tackles their mutability and their lack of stability through a careful analysis of the narrative patterns dictating their actions. Its leading statement is that, despite being presented as sidekicks and underlings, all the characters in the novel are in fact heroes in their own rights, albeit of different stories.

### **Keywords**

Sidekicks, Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, fantasy literature.

### **Résumé**

Cet article propose une analyse des schémas actantiels qui régissent les différents personnages du roman *Neverwhere* par Neil Gaiman. À travers une exploration rigoureuse des rôles successivement endossés par les personnages, il cherche à démontrer la porosité des fonctions narratives classiques. Au terme de cette démarche, on s'aperçoit que le récit met en acte des personnages mouvants, chacun héros, de leur histoire ou d'une autre.

### **Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, littérature fantastique.

# It's alive and (side-)kicking! Frankenstein's double acts

Jean-François Baillon

In *The Evil of Frankenstein* (Freddie Francis, 1964), Frankenstein asks his assistant Hans why he is always with him, getting as only answer that the latter often asked himself the same question. Indeed, this is a very good question as in Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein has no assistant and brings forth his creature alone. In the film versions, however, he is most of the time assisted with one, or more often several assistants who are likely to be young, old, misshapen, queer, female, or any combination of the foregoing features<sup>1</sup>.

The first occurrence of an assistant to Frankenstein was probably in Richard Brinsley Peake's play *Presumption* (1823), based on the first edition of the novel in 1818. In Peake's play, Fritz, much like Sganarelle in Molière's *Dom Juan*, introduces himself and his master in some sort of monologue where he complains about leaving his native village and being the servant of a man who has dealings with the devil. From the start, Fritz appears as a comic figure (on account of the tone of his monologue) while the class dimension of the story is foregrounded by the introduction of a character belonging to the lower classes. However, Fritz is more servant than assistant as he helps Clerval (who in the play is not a fellow student but Elizabeth's suitor) to discover the secret of Frankenstein's experiments. Stephen C. Behrendt, the editor of the online text of *Presumption* comments upon Fritz's functions in a way that implies illuminating parallelisms with the Holmes/Watson pair in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories:

In Fritz, Peake also introduces one of the most enduring features of dramatic and cinematic versions of *Frankenstein*: the assistant or servant. Like the character of Doctor Watson who later figures in the Sherlock Holmes mysteries both as the reader's representative and as –quite simply– someone with whom the otherwise silent and solitary figure can share his thoughts, Fritz performs

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1 For a general analysis of a few major adaptations that takes the motif of the assistant into account, see Menegaldo Gilles, « Le Savant fou au miroir du mythe de Frankenstein : trois avatars filmiques (Whale, Fisher, Branagh) », in Hélène Machinal (éd.), *Le Savant fou*, Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013, p. 173-192.



a comparable intermediary function. Instead of being a direct and integral participant in the main action as Doctor Watson is, however, he is instead an observer, one of whose primary functions is to *report* his observations to others –most notably Victor’s friend Clerval. In *Presumption*, Peake provided Fritz with both a sizable role and a set of distinctive eccentricities (most notably his ever-present case of “nerves”). Largely inexplicable when considered purely in terms of dramatic logic, this prominent role is explained by the fact that it was created expressly for the popular comic actor Robert Keeley (see also below, under Cast and Characters) as a vehicle for his particular talents<sup>2</sup>.

However, against Behrens’s contention, I would like to show that what seems to be some sort of gratuitous addition, an inessential prosthetic invention of misguided and uninspired scriptwriters, is actually much more: as potentialities of Frankenstein –both character and text– get real through innumerable variations on doubles and supplementary characters, its deferred significations are unveiled and amplified. Eventually even the creature and the reader turn out to be sidekicks of the two figures of the creator that have mirrored each other from day one: Victor Frankenstein and Mary Shelley. Depending on the versions, the emphasis is laid on different aspects of the sidekick’s role as reverberator of Frankenstein’s multi-layered signification. In the end, by making viewers more aware of the moral, social or narratological issues at stake –to name but a few of the most obvious aspects of the question– Frankenstein’s sidekicks reflexively refer them to their own interpretive implication in the cinematic process.

Before we enter into such considerations, we need to rely on an acceptable definition of what a sidekick is. The Oxford English Dictionary online offers the following one: “A companion or close associate; *spec.* an accomplice or partner in crime; a subordinate member of a pair or group. More *loosely*, a friend, a colleague.” Now many crimes are committed in the story of Frankenstein, from the actual murders perpetrated by the creature but which Frankenstein ultimately takes responsibility for, to the metaphysical crime of playing God by making a human being out of the remnants of dead bodies, to the literary crime of bringing forth a “hideous progeny” to the world. In all these respects the sidekick/hero binary can be viewed in terms of various combinations, such as the author/reader or narrator/narratee couples and their substitutes, foregrounded by the series of embedded narratives within the initial texts.

Some of the more obvious functions of the sidekick are illustrated in Terence Fisher’s 1957 *The Curse of Frankenstein*. Thus Frankenstein’s ambivalent and reluctant main sidekick Paul fulfils some of the most familiar functions, such as establishing verisimilitude (making the creature alone is *very* unlikely) or wrecking Frankenstein’s ideal by damaging the brain of Professor Bernstein (a variation on a theme introduced in the 1931 version). He also rescues Frankenstein when the latter is attacked by “the thing” and buries both monster

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2 <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/peake/apparatus/drama.html> (consulté le 13 juillet 2015).

and story, a parallelism made obvious by his silence at the end of the film against Frankenstein's insistent "you must tell him". This confirms the sidekick's role in the storytelling process: Frankenstein as narrator is dependent on others for his narrative to be complete and –most important of all– plausible. However, even in an apparently simple adaptation such as Fisher's first version, the monster is also Frankenstein's sidekick since he proves useful in the murder of Justine, the cumbersome pregnant housemaid.

Thus Frankenstein's sidekicks generally fulfil three main functions, as they either supplement or obstruct him in: 1/ his scientific quest; 2/ his criminal career and 3/ his role as a narrator. With this threefold structure in mind it is now possible to approach a succession of significant variations in the *Frankenstein* cinematic corpus, starting with the opening scene from James Whale's 1935 *Bride of Frankenstein*. This scene already relies on the presence of sidekicks: Byron and Shelley as sidekicks to Mary in the writing of a sequel to the first instalment of the story. The whole sequence can be viewed as a veiled version of a creation scene, complete with thunder and lightning. Byron's confusion about the use of the name of Frankenstein is part of the metaleptic import of this introduction. To "create a Frankenstein" is indeed what Mary did.

Later on, the burning windmill becomes a double of the castle where Mary Shelley and Byron are found in the opening sequence of the film, and both closely resemble Frankenstein's laboratory/tower. These formal echoes reinforce the notion that Frankenstein's creation of a monster is not unlike the creation of horror fiction by Mary Shelley, or indeed by James Whale, while in terms of enunciation the opening of the film can be seen as a substitute of the viewer's position<sup>3</sup>.

In *Bride of Frankenstein*, the first thing we notice is the proliferation of sidekicks: Pretorius, the monster, Karl, Ludwig, all can at some point be considered as assistants and therefore sidekicks to Frankenstein. As for Frankenstein himself, he can be considered as a sidekick to Pretorius (the devil himself?). When the film begins, everyone believes that Frankenstein has died in the burning of the windmill that took place at the end of the previous film. Frankenstein is brought back to his castle and just as his fiancée Elizabeth mourns over his body a servant (Minnie) notices that his hand has started to move, which causes her to scream in horror "he's alive", an obvious echo of the creation scene of the first film (around 00:46:00). This equation of creator and creation is repeated later on, when Byron claims that Mary Shelley invented Frankenstein, "a monster conceived from cadavers" (00:03:09) and when, in the last part of the film, Pretorius introduces the new creation as "the bride of

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3 Much later, an echo of Whale's *Bride* can be found in Branagh's *Frankenstein* (1994): the voice of Mary Shelley (in the opening of the film) is that of Helena Bonham-Carter, who plays the monster's bride. Branagh, the director, plays Frankenstein.

Frankenstein" (1:07:25). The "bride" herself, horrified by the appearance of the monster, turns to Frankenstein for protection and hides in his arms in a way that makes them look like a romantic couple (1:08:35). As often therefore, the identities of creator and creation are exchanged. A clear instance of this exchange of identities is provided by the scene when the creature tells Frankenstein to "sit down" (around 00:56:00), in striking repetition –and– of the earlier scene when Frankenstein gave his creature exactly the same order.

The revival of Frankenstein and the reversal of the creator/creature relationship is a situation that recurs in a much later film, Terence Fisher's 1958 *The Revenge of Frankenstein*. The film ends on the notion of the identity of creator and creature and the reversal of the sidekick/master relationship insofar as Frankenstein undergoes the same process as his creature through the work of his assistant Hans –what Peter Hutchings describes as "Frankenstein's climactic transformation into one of his own creations"<sup>4</sup>. Jonathan Rigby notes: "The ironic conversion of Frankenstein into his own monster is capped by the even greater irony, when looking at the Hammer series as a whole, that Frankenstein's only completely successful experiment was the work of a novice assistant"<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly in this version, Hans is the name of his assistant, while Karl is the name of the creature. The characters' names take us back to the original Whale adaptations.

The resurrection of Frankenstein is also a feature of the beginning of *Frankenstein Created Woman* (Terence Fisher, 1966) where Frankenstein is further identified to a creature figure through dialogue. As Frankenstein gradually comes back to life, his assistant Doctor Hertz indulges in a variation on the famous line "It's alive", now applying it to Frankenstein himself: "He lives! See, Hans, he is alive" (00:09:00-00:09:05).

A similar conflation of creator and monster is achieved in Freddie Francis's 1964 *Evil of Frankenstein*. In the opening sequence, the editing is used to create both confusion and identification between Frankenstein and two monstrous and frightening figures in deceptive strategies: first we see a close-up of a little girl lost in a wood and a hand reaching towards her, which causes her to scream in fear. A reverse shot reveals the hand to belong to Baron Frankenstein. In the second scene, the rather uncouth character who has just stolen a fresh corpse in a cabin in the woods knocks at the door of a house and the person who opens says "Baron Frankenstein?" Frankenstein then enters the frame from the left and steps in saying, "I am Baron Frankenstein."

In the first instance, it looks very much as if we could analyse the sequence in terms of Baron Frankenstein being the stand-in of his own creature. Minutes later, his experiment being interrupted by an obnoxious priest, he gets mad

4 Hutchings, Peter, *Terence Fisher*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 97.

5 Rigby, Jonathan, *English Gothic: A Century of Horror Cinema*. London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2000, p. 70.

and attempts to throttle the latter, his assistant preventing him from committing murder. The situation is reminiscent of Frankenstein trying to prevent his creature from turning into some killing machine. Later on (00:17:00) Hans becomes narratee to Frankenstein, at his own request. As for the second extract, it is one of many variations on the theme of the double that we find in the Frankenstein films. Indeed, from *Bride of Frankenstein* to *The Revenge of Frankenstein*, *Flesh for Frankenstein* (Paul Morrissey, 1973) and *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (Terence Fisher, 1974), we find numerous instances of films where the assistant turns out to be a double of Frankenstein.

In *Evil of Frankenstein*, as in many Hammer productions, Frankenstein does not have just one but several assistants. His “second assistant”, as it were, is a deaf-mute woman who helps him discover where his creature lay hidden for ten years preserved in ice. She shows similarities with the creature: she is deprived of speech and she is treated as a freak by the villagers.<sup>6</sup> The “third assistant”, who is required to wake the creature up, is Professor Zoltan, a hypnotist whose show at the local fair includes a brief evocation of Frankenstein's monster, thus reminding us of one of the cinematic origins of the creature, namely *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. Indeed, Zoltan soon congratulates Frankenstein for the fortune he is going to make by showing his monsters in circuses and funfairs all over the world (00:56:30). In an interesting composition (00:57:40) Zoltan is vividly lit drinking brandy in the foreground while, in the background, Frankenstein is attempting to get the creature to obey and Hans is taking notes on the right. It is only when Zoltan says “do as he says” that the creature stands up. At the end of the sequence, Zoltan and Frankenstein have almost traded places, with a bewildered Frankenstein in the foreground, and a victorious Zoltan leaning on the shoulder of the creature while looking at the baron with a vicious smile (00:58:40). The next sequence opens with a dissolve that reveals the face of the young deaf mute woman, that replaces that of Zoltan: she has been left out of the bargain that has just been struck between the three men (00:59:27). What comes next confirms that *Caligari* is, in effect, a hypotext: Zoltan is going to use the creature in order to commit crimes; he sends it out first to steal gold at night in the village, then on a revenge mission: “there are people in the village I want to punish. Do you understand? They are bad men. They must be punished” (01:05:10).

Many compositions (00:47:00, 00:48:00) also highlight the symmetry between mastermind and assistant who, although one gives orders to the other, are engaged in similar tasks in turn (the performances somehow give us to see expressions that are in contrast with the drift of the dialogue). Around

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6 Another deaf-mute female assistant is Sarah in *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell*. In Mel Brooks's 1974 *Young Frankenstein* we find two sidekicks: Igor and Inga, then a third, the creature itself during the “Putting on the Ritz” sequence.

00:48:30, the shot that reveals the creature's first movement (of the hand) starts with a close-up that suggests the similarity between the hand of the creature and the (gloved) hand of the creator.

The finale reprises that of *Bride of Frankenstein*: we notice similar camera angles and the general motif of the sacrifice of the creature is expanded. The assistant leaving with the deaf mute girl replaces the couple Frankenstein/Elizabeth leaving the laboratory-tower at the end of *Bride of Frankenstein*. The destruction of the laboratory by the creature can be seen as part of the general allegorical plot suggesting the inability of the creator to write the destiny of the creature.

The last stage in our exploration of the motif of the sidekick in cinematic Frankensteins will use a detour through a recent literary *rewriting* of the myth: Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2008) is helpful in the way it foregrounds metafictional issues that retrospectively shed light on the process of reinvention of the figure of Frankenstein, as we would like to submit by way of conclusion<sup>7</sup>.

Narrated in the first person by Victor Frankenstein, Ackroyd's novel turns out to be told by the "patient" of the "Hoxton Mental Asylum for Incurables," as the reader finds out on the very last page (296). The last scene consists in a confrontation between Frankenstein and John Polidori, who reveals to him (and to the reader) that there is no creature:

"Now you see my handiwork," I said.

He came in, holding up a lamp, and stood before us.

"Behold the creature. This is what I have made."

"Where?"

"Here. Before you."

"There is no one here," he said.

"Have you lost your wits? See here. Beside me. Here he sits."

"There is nothing beside you, except an empty chair."

"Nothing? I do not believe you. I know you lie."

"Why should I lie, Victor?"

"To deceive me. To betray me. To enrage me."

"There is nothing here. No one is with you. There is no creature." He walked over to my electrical engines. "This is sad stuff, Victor." (295)

If the reader chooses to believe Polidori, then the crimes committed by the creature were actually the "handiwork" of Frankenstein alone. As we now realize, the creature is presumably the name of Victor's other darker self—some inner sidekick that Victor projected and that, like the more material creature of the films, was necessary for him to get rid of the guilt of the murders. This is why the sidekicks provided by film adaptations, whichever way you pronounce them (ee-gor or "eye-gore"), are likely to be physically deformed, unless they are

7 Ackroyd, Peter, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, London: Chatto & Windus, 2008.

pure embodiments of fantasy, as is often the case of female assistants. We find both in Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein*, whose details are sometimes revelatory of the logic this article is trying to uncover. Thus, while young Frankenstein's insistence on the pronunciation of his name forms part of his general strategy to draw a line between sane, hard science, and the kind of criminal speculation his ancestor used to indulge in, his encounter with Igor at the station includes a funny incident which depicts him as somehow delusional—at least if we adopt Igor's point of view. Frankenstein suggests that he can help Igor get rid of his rather bulky hump, thus causing Igor to reply, "What hump?"

The nod to *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* that Ackroyd makes by ending his novel on the revelation that his narrator is a madman may remind us of the dichotomy between Caligari and Cesare in the classic German film. The respectable figure of authority secretly uses the sleepwalking figure to commit murders and spread terror among communities. Similarly, the Frankenstein films we have studied here frequently show the evil scientist using the creature to shun his responsibility, like a classic Gothic villain preying upon his victims or a scientist wreaking havoc upon the natural order.

Ackroyd's rewriting of Shelley's novel is also interesting in at least another respect. His rewriting of the famous creation scene (the "dreary night of November") subtly hints at a parallelism between Frankenstein and Mary Shelley, with the use of the phrase "my odious handiwork" (134), an obvious echo of Shelley's own "hideous progeny." The ending of Ackroyd's novel, which reveals the creature to be fictional, adds to its metafictional status. Again this retrospectively lends support to a vision of the role of the sidekicks of Frankenstein as in fact essential to the making of fiction. Even in Mary Shelley's novel, the role of Walton as co-writer of the tale should not be underestimated:

"Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in *giving the life and spirit* to the conversations he held with his enemy" (146, my italics).

This striking phrasing conflates two dimensions of Shelley's book: the notion of storytelling as re-animation of the creature; the moral and religious interpretation of the tale in terms of a rewriting of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (the "enemy" being a common way of referring to Satan himself).

Thus, the never-ending process of rewriting and adapting Shelley's text on stage, on film and—in the case of Ackroyd—on the printed page can be seen as a process of supplementation and replication of displaced potentialities. We create the text as much as it creates us as readers and viewers. In the end the continued transformations of the myth designate and reassign places and question assumptions concerning the process of creation that the novel had



always already addressed –from the creation of Man through the Miltonian and scientific intertexts through to literary creation with the invitation to an allegorical reading implied by the 1831 preface.

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### **Abstract**

In Mary Shelley's novel, Frankenstein has no assistant and gives birth to the creature alone. In the film versions, however, he is often supported by one or several assistants. According to the logic of the supplement, what looks like a mere adjunct turns out to double Frankenstein's identity in many ways that unveil its deferred and different significations. Frankenstein's cinematic sidekicks might well be expressions of his interal duality, *insidekicks* comparable to those the "hideous progeny" gives in the fertile womb of its mother.

### **Keywords**

Sidekicks, Frankenstein, film, adaptation.

### **Résumé**

Dans le roman de Mary Shelley, Frankenstein n'a pas d'assistant et donne naissance, seul, à la créature. Dans les versions cinématographiques, en revanche, il est souvent flanqué d'un, voire de plusieurs assistants. Selon la logique du supplément, ce qui semble n'être qu'un ajout s'avère redoubler l'identité de Frankenstein de bien des façons qui en dévoilent les significations différées. Les sidekicks cinématographiques de Frankenstein pourraient bien être des expressions de sa dualité interne, des *insidekicks* tels les coups que donne la « hideuse progéniture » dans le ventre fécond de sa génitrice.

### **Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, Frankenstein, cinéma, adaptation.

# Confusion à la Maison Blanche : la bataille du pouvoir entre Hillary Clinton et Al Gore

Pierre-Marie Loizeau

La présidence Clinton, qui s'est étalée sur deux mandats successifs (1993-2001), a déjà fait l'objet de nombreuses études ayant mis en relief les problèmes économiques, les enjeux sociaux et culturels, et les défis internationaux auxquels elle fut confrontée. Comme pour chaque administration, éditorialistes, historiens et politologues ont mené une réflexion sur le pouvoir et l'art de gouverner face aux convulsions de l'histoire contemporaine. Cependant, rares sont les recherches ayant mis en avant les rivalités internes au sein de l'équipe présidentielle durant ces huit années. Or, celles-ci furent bien réelles. Elles apparurent dès le début du premier mandat, au sortir d'une campagne électorale intense qui laissait déjà entrevoir un télescopage des futures responsabilités dans le proche entourage du candidat. Si la capacité de « leadership » de ce dernier ne souffrait d'aucune ambiguïté, c'est l'omniprésence de son épouse Hillary Clinton dans les lieux de pouvoir qui entraîna une redistribution des rôles et jeta le trouble dans la relation traditionnelle entre le président et son vice-président.

Nous chercherons donc dans un premier temps à déterminer les fonctions et le positionnement du vice-président et de la First Lady au sein de la sphère présidentielle et à analyser ensuite comment et jusqu'à quel point la rivalité entre ces deux personnages-clé a pu entraver l'exercice même du pouvoir et éroder la crédibilité du gouvernement Clinton.

## **Vice-présidence : une fonction superflue ?**

Historiquement, la vice-présidence n'a joué qu'un rôle très limité voire symbolique dans la conduite de la nation. À l'origine, cette fonction fut créée essentiellement pour écarter toute éventualité d'absence de président en cas de décès, démission, destitution ou encore incapacité physique ou mentale à exercer le pouvoir. Les auteurs de la Constitution empêchèrent ainsi toute possibilité de voir la nation sans exécutif, sachant que dans le système de gouvernement qu'ils venaient de mettre en place, prenant soin de séparer et

répartir équitablement les pouvoirs, il était impossible de se passer d'un « chief executive ». Le premier vice-président à ainsi accéder à la Maison Blanche, suite au décès du président, fut John Tyler en 1841 en remplacement de William Henry Harrison.<sup>1</sup> En revanche, s'il ne peut y avoir de vacance du pouvoir présidentiel, le pays s'est bel et bien passé de vice-président à plusieurs reprises, la période la plus longue étant celle de 1850 à 1857 (969 jours) sous la présidence Fillmore.

Les Pères Fondateurs réunis à Philadelphie (25 mai-17 septembre 1787) doutèrent de l'utilité d'un vice-président. Comme l'écrit Ray Raphael, « the vice-president was the bastard son of the convention, which knew not how to deal with him. »<sup>2</sup> Il fallut un compromis de « dernière minute » pour inclure le poste dans la Constitution. La seule véritable fonction explicite qui fut alors mentionnée fut celle de président du Sénat. Ainsi George Mason, le père du « Bill of Rights », fustigea-t-il « the unnecessary office of the Vice President, who for want of other employment is made president of the Senate, thereby dangerously blending the executive and legislative branches. »<sup>3</sup> John Adams, le premier vice-président de l'histoire, fut lui-même très critique sur sa fonction : « My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived. »<sup>4</sup>

La ratification du XII<sup>e</sup> amendement apporta une évolution majeure au mode d'élection. Le précédent système, tel que le décrit la Constitution à l'origine, précisait que chaque grand électeur devait voter pour deux personnes à la fois. Le candidat ayant reçu le plus de voix était alors élu président et le second candidat le mieux placé était élu vice-président. Selon l'amendement de 1804, afin d'éviter que ne se reproduise le cas de figure de 1800 où les deux candidats Thomas Jefferson et Aaron Burr avaient obtenu le même nombre de voix, le Congrès requit un vote séparé pour le président et le vice-président.

« The Electors shall meet in their respective states, and vote by ballot for President and Vice-President (...); they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President, and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and all persons voted for as Vice-President (...) »<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 Le libellé très ambigu de la Constitution fut sujet à une grande controverse concernant la succession de Harrison. John Tyler créa en effet un précédent, le fameux « Tyler precedent », en refusant le statut de simple « acting president » et en se déclarant président à part entière.
  - 2 Raphael Ray, *Mr. President – How and Why the Founders Created a Chief Executive* (New York: Knopf, 2012), p. 120.
  - 3 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
  - 4 Waldrup Carole Chandler, *The Vice Presidents* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996), p. viii.
  - 5 « The Constitution of the United States of America », Amendment XII. <<http://constitution-center.org/constitution/the-amendments/amendment-12-choosing-the-president-vice-president>> Consulté le 13 juin 2015.

Ce mode de nomination permet en effet de donner plus de cohérence au processus et plus de cohésion au « ticket », mais fatalement il ne laisse guère de suspense et fait du « running mate » un simple appendice ou faire-valoir du candidat présidentiel. Comme le regretta le Représentant du Massachusetts Samuel Taggart pendant les débats : « the vice president will not stand on such high ground in the method proposed as he does in the present mode of a double ballot » et ajouta « great care will not be taken in the selection of a character to fill that office. »<sup>6</sup> Faible constitutionnellement depuis son origine et désormais dépourvue de prestige politique, la fonction n'attira guère les hommes de talent. « I do not propose to be buried before I am dead », déclara Daniel Webster, le leader du parti Whig quand on lui proposa le poste en 1848.<sup>7</sup> Parmi les vice-présidents du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, figurent d'ailleurs des hommes politiques de moindre envergure ou intégrité. Citons par exemple Schuyler Colfax et Henry Wilson (sous Grant) qui furent impliqués dans le célèbre scandale du Crédit Mobilier dans les années 1870.<sup>8</sup>

Le début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle amorça une nouvelle ère et des évolutions marquantes. C'est Theodore Roosevelt, élu en 1900, qui fut le grand promoteur de la vice-présidence en multipliant les voyages et autres déplacements politiques tout en prenant grand soin d'en informer la presse de l'époque dont la croissance rapide permit de lui offrir une publicité sans précédent. Après avoir terminé le mandat de William L. McKinley, assassiné, Roosevelt obtint la nomination du parti républicain pour être finalement élu président et servir son pays jusqu'en 1909, initiant ainsi un modèle que suivirent les quatre vice-présidents successeurs de présidents décédés ou démissionnaires : Coolidge (1924), Truman (1948), Johnson (1964) et Ford (1976). Seul ce dernier perdit ensuite l'élection. En servant de tremplin vers la présidence, la vice-présidence devint plus attractive pour des hommes de talent, tels Charles Dawes (1925-1929) prix Nobel, Charles Curtis (1929-1933) leader de la majorité au Sénat ou John N. Garner (1933-1941) « Speaker » de la Chambre des Représentants.

Malgré ces progrès, le vice-président restait néanmoins un homme de seconde main, que le président ne tenait pas toujours suffisamment informé. Ainsi, la mort de Franklin Roosevelt en 1945 créa une situation embarrassante où l'ancien sénateur du Missouri Harry Truman se vit propulsé à la tête de la nation. Son manque d'enthousiasme et surtout de préparation à cette succession força les responsables politiques de l'époque à reconsidérer la vice-présidence. L'avènement de la Guerre Froide avec l'Union Soviétique et la prolifération des

6 Nelson Michael, *Guide to the Presidency* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2015), p. 165.

7 *Ibid.*

8 In Handlin Amy (éd.), *Dirty Deals*, vol. 2 « Articles » (Santa Barbara, Cal.: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), p. 415-416.

missiles nucléaires contribuèrent encore un peu plus à cette prise de conscience au sein de la classe politique et de l'opinion publique. En conséquence, la relation entre les deux hommes de l'Exécutif se fit plus étroite, le vice-président étant tenu mieux informé et jouant un rôle plus actif. Par exemple, en 1949, il fut intégré comme membre officiel au « National Security Council ». <sup>9</sup> Le président Dwight Eisenhower fut un grand partisan de cette évolution et déclara solennellement à propos de la mission de Richard Nixon : « I personally believe the Vice President of the United States should never be a nonentity. I believe he should be used. I believe he should have a very useful job. » <sup>10</sup>

Avec la période d'après-guerre, une attention accrue fut portée à la compétence et à la loyauté des candidats à la vice-présidence. Certes, le colistier était toujours choisi en fonction de sa capacité à faire gagner des voix au ticket mais la sélection se fondait aussi sur la bonne connaissance des dossiers et la confiance mutuelle. Ce fut particulièrement le cas avec l'expérimenté Dick Cheney (2001-2009), ancien Ministre de la Défense (1989-1993) et ancien chef de cabinet de la Maison Blanche (1975-1977) qui fut choisi par George W. Bush et jouera ensuite un rôle prépondérant. Comme le rappelle James Pfiffner : « Cheney was chosen for his experience, competence, and his relationship with the head of the ticket. » <sup>11</sup>

Le vingt-cinquième amendement de la Constitution, adopté le 23 février 1967, définit aussi plus clairement la fonction. Dans sa Section 1, il révisa le libellé controversé et ambigu de l'article II (Section 1, Clause 6) de la Constitution qui ne précisait pas explicitement si le vice-président devenait « president » ou « acting president » en cas de décès ou de départ du président. Le nouveau texte, dans la Section 1, indiqua précisément : « In case of the removal of the President from office or of his death or resignation, the Vice President shall become President. » <sup>12</sup> Cet amendement créa aussi une procédure pour sélectionner un vice-président dans deux circonstances exceptionnelles : la vacance vice-présidentielle et l'incapacité du président à exercer ses fonctions. Précédemment, la vice-présidence avait connu la vacance à seize reprises durant les trente-six administrations de l'histoire, amenant les vice-présidents à la présidence sans être toujours remplacés dans la fonction qu'ils abandonnaient. Désormais, dans sa Section 2, le texte stipule : « Whenever there is a vacancy in the office of the Vice President, the President shall nominate a Vice President who shall take office upon confirmation by a majority vote

9 Kengor Paul, *Wreath Layer or Policy Player? The Vice President's Role in Foreign Policy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000, p. 24.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

11 Pfiffner James P., *The Modern Presidency* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), p. 90.

12 « The Constitution of the United States of America », Amendment XXV. <<http://constitution-center.org/constitution/the-amendments/amendment-25-presidential-disability-and-succession>> Consulté le 13 juin 2015.

of both Houses of Congress. »<sup>13</sup> Cette procédure fut mise en application en 1973 dans des circonstances inattendues où Spiro Agnew, impliqué dans une affaire de corruption, dut démissionner et laisser son poste à Gerald Ford. Quelques mois plus tard, la démission de Richard Nixon entraîna sa succession par Gerald Ford et le remplacement de celui-ci à la vice-présidence par Nelson A. Rockefeller. Le nouveau texte sur l'incapacité du président permit aussi de mettre fin au flou du libellé initial (article II, Section 1, paragraphe 6). Comme l'indique Pierre Lagayette :

« The Constitution did not say what a disability was, how the decision that the vice-president should step in would be made, or even whether the vice-president would become president for the remainder of the four-year term or merely assume temporarily the powers and duties of the office. »<sup>14</sup>

Cette imprécision fut particulièrement néfaste lors des présidences Garfield et Wilson. Dans le premier cas, la nation fut privée de président pendant près de trois mois<sup>15</sup> et en septembre 1919, Wilson subit une attaque cérébrale qui le laissa paralysé et très affaibli sans toutefois abandonner le pouvoir. Les Sections 3 et 4 du nouvel amendement levèrent les ambiguïtés. La Section 3 précise d'abord : « Whenever the President transmits (...) his written declaration that he is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, (...) such powers and duties shall be discharged by the Vice President as Acting President. » La Section 4 ajoute : « Whenever the Vice President and a majority of either the principal officers of the executive departments or of such other body as Congress may by law provide, transmit (...) their written declaration that the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office, the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President. »<sup>16</sup>

Investi d'un pouvoir exécutif plus clairement défini, assumant des responsabilités toujours plus importantes, le vice-président est donc devenu progressivement le second personnage le plus puissant de Washington, occupant « the second-highest office in the land. »<sup>17</sup> Ce positionnement a fait des vice-présidents des candidats crédibles à la nomination de leur parti aux présidentielles, huit d'entre eux l'ayant obtenue sur les douze dernières administrations : Nixon (1960), Humphrey (1968), Mondale (1984), Bush (1988), Gore (2000) et les trois présidents successeurs mentionnés plus haut :

13 *Ibid.*

14 Lagayette Pierre, *L'Empire de l'Exécutif (1933-2006) – La présidence des États-Unis de Franklin D. Roosevelt à George W. Bush* (Paris : Presses de la Sorbonne, 2007), p. 76.

15 Garfield, victime d'un attentat, n'était pas en mesure d'assumer ses fonctions et le vice-président Arthur refusa de tenir le rôle de président alors que Garfield était encore en vie.

16 « The Constitution of the United States of America », Amendment XXV. <<http://constitution-center.org/constitution/the-amendments/amendment-25-presidential-disability-and-succession>> Consulté le 13 juin 2015.

17 Raphael, *op. cit.*, p. 121.



Truman, Johnson et Ford. Cette position favorable est aussi la conséquence du XXII<sup>e</sup> amendement (1951) limitant la présidence à deux mandats. Le vice-président est ainsi en mesure de se présenter aux élections durant le second mandat de son président sans gêner celui-ci. Ce fut le cas de Nixon en 1960, Bush en 1988 et Gore en 2000. Certes, obtenir une nomination ne signifie pas gagner une élection comme le vécurent amèrement Nixon et Gore, si courtes furent leurs défaites. Il n'en demeure pas moins que comme le rappelle Michael Nelson, « no office provides a likelier passage to the presidency than the vice-presidency. »<sup>18</sup>

### First Lady : premier rôle ?

L'histoire présidentielle, plus particulièrement au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, montre aussi que parmi les « proches » conseillers du président, figure un personnage de première importance : son épouse, la First Lady. Non mentionnée dans la Constitution, non élue, non rémunérée, sans mandat officiel, elle est néanmoins devenue un élément-clé de l'administration présidentielle. Malgré son absence de statut, elle joue un rôle primordial, aussi bien pendant la campagne présidentielle, par son précieux soutien, qu'au cours du mandat de son mari. Que ce soit dans ses tâches traditionnelles ou dans son rôle de représentation, comme miroir et modèle de la classe féminine ou encore dans sa participation plus ou moins directe aux décisions présidentielles, sa fonction s'avère éminemment politique.

C'est durant la campagne de 1992 et les premières années du mandat de Bill Clinton que le peuple américain vit l'émergence d'une Première Dame fonctionnant, pour ainsi dire, comme membre à part entière du gouvernement. L'interview accordée par Bill Clinton à *Time* dès sa prise de fonction en janvier 1993 est assez révélatrice :

« QUESTION : John Kennedy said that after he was elected, he began to think in terms of who it was he had to have in the room when he made the really big decisions. For him, that was Robert Kennedy. Who is it for you?

ANSWER : Hillary. »<sup>19</sup>

Le président fraîchement élu confirmait ainsi sa promesse de campagne selon laquelle il comptait bien solliciter son épouse dans la prise de décisions. Au-delà de leur effet tapageur, les slogans bien connus tels que « Buy one, Get one Free », « two for the price of one »<sup>20</sup>, marquaient la volonté d'une

18 Nelson Michael, « The Vice Presidency », in Nelson Michael (éd.), *The Presidency—A history of the office of the President of the United States from 1789 to the present* (London: Salamander Books, 1996), p. 41.

19 Muller Henry & Stacks John F., « First we have to roll up our sleeves », *Time*, 4 janvier 1993, p. 27.

20 Voir notamment Burns Lisa M., *First Ladies and the Fourth Estate: Press Framing of Presidential Wives* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), p. 140.

implication politique de la Première Dame. Une telle ligne de conduite n'était pas nouvelle pour les Clinton puisque toute la carrière politique de « Bill » avait été marquée par l'empreinte « Hillary ». Depuis que Bill s'était lancé dans ses premières joutes électorales en 1978 lors de la course au poste de gouverneur de l'Arkansas, le couple avait toujours opéré comme un véritable composé politique que les médias surnommèrent « Billary », terme péjoratif pour certains, admiratif pour d'autres.<sup>21</sup>

Cette administration bicéphale s'inscrivait dans le droit fil des ambitions carriéristes et complémentaires de ce couple hors du commun. Une nouvelle dynamique présidentielle avec redéfinition des postes se mit donc en place. À la différence de ses prédécesseurs, Mrs. Clinton investit l'Aile Ouest de la Maison Blanche, « with all the men. »<sup>22</sup> Ce déménagement fut certainement un des signes les plus symboliques de l'ambition de Mrs. Clinton et des moyens qui lui étaient alloués pour parvenir à concrétiser cette ambition. « Hillary and her sixteen aides », écrit l'historien Gil Troy, « established what would be known as "Hillaryland". This enclave included an unprecedented three aides honored with White House commissions; in contrast, the vice president's staff had one. »<sup>23</sup> La presse n'a pas manqué de relater cette rupture avec la tradition. *Time* le 8 février consacrait tout un article aux nouveaux appartements de la Première Dame, gratifiant même le lecteur d'un graphique très précis sur les affectations des différents bureaux de l'Aile Ouest, intitulé : « WHERE SHE WORKS ».<sup>24</sup> Les titres de presse abondent pour illustrer le pouvoir de la Première Dame : « A Room at the Top »<sup>25</sup>, « At the Center of POWER »<sup>26</sup>, « the most controversial –and most powerful– First Lady in years »<sup>27</sup>, « How much Clout? »<sup>28</sup>, « Hillary Clinton's office, near seat of power, signals her influential role »<sup>29</sup>, etc. Margaret Carlson écrivit alors : « At the moment, other than the President, there is no more powerful person in the White House than Hillary Clinton. »<sup>30</sup>

21 Caroli Betty Boyd, *First Ladies: From Martha Washington to Michelle Obama* (New York/ Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 294.

22 Carlson Margaret, « A Room at the Top », *Time*, 8 février 1993, p. 31.

23 Troy Gil, *Affairs of State—The Rise and Rejection of the Presidential Couple Since World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), p. 356.

24 Carlson, *op. cit.*

25 Titre de l'article de Margaret Carlson, *ibid.*

26 Carlson Margaret, « At the center of Power », *Time*, 10 mai 1993, p. 38.

27 Sous-titre de l'article de Diana McLellan, « What Hillary's learned », *Ladies Home Journal*, août 1993, p. 118.

28 Couverture *Newsweek*, 15 février 1993.

29 Susan Baer, « Hillary Clinton's office, near seat of power, signals her influential role », *Baltimore Sun*, 22 janvier 1993. <[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-01-22/news/1993022176\\_1\\_east-wing-west-wing-main-office](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-01-22/news/1993022176_1_east-wing-west-wing-main-office)> Consulté le 12 juillet 2015.

30 Carlson Margaret, « A Room at the Top », *op. cit.*

## Confrontation

Inévitablement, sont alors apparues des tensions dont la plus marquante émana du vice-président Al Gore qui, relégué au rôle de n° 3, n'apprécia guère un tel dispositif et perçut Hillary Clinton comme sa rivale directe en matière de pouvoir. Il est vrai que ce système exécutif à trois têtes avec un président, une First Lady et un vice-président marginalisait ce dernier, bien que n° 2 officiel, et le privait de son rôle communément admis de « chief lieutenant » du président<sup>31</sup>. William A. Kristol, l'ancien chef de cabinet de Dan Quayle, le précédent vice-président de l'administration Bush, ne se priva pas de railler la situation peu confortable de Mr. Gore : « He [Gore]'s clearly not the second banana. He's the third banana, behind Mrs. Clinton. »<sup>32</sup> Al Gore se voyait en effet éclipsé par sa rivale qui, elle, était scrutée en permanence par le public et les médias, nationaux et internationaux. Contrairement à ceux de la First Lady, les déplacements du vice-président recevaient une couverture médiatique plutôt discrète. En juillet 1993 par exemple, lors d'un voyage à Ontario, Californie, pourtant soigneusement programmé pour passer en « prime time » le soir à la télévision, aucune station locale ne jugea utile de couvrir la venue du vice-président. L'attitude des télévisions<sup>33</sup> était significative du manque d'intérêt à l'égard du vice-président et mettait en lumière le malaise qui régnait à la Maison Blanche avec le rôle croissant d'une Première Dame déterminée et médiatisée face à un vice-président qui paraissait isolé et donc affaibli, contraint de s'accommoder d'un rôle subalterne peu compatible avec une conception moderne de sa fonction.

Et pourtant, Bill Clinton et Al Gore s'étaient préalablement mis d'accord sur les tâches et les missions qui incombaient au vice-président. En le choisissant comme « running mate », le candidat Clinton l'avait présenté comme celui qui allait diriger l'action avec le Congrès pour faire passer le programme présidentiel dès les premiers mois de son administration : « I am going to send Al Gore to Capitol Hill to take the lead in passing our program in the first 100 days of the new administration. »<sup>34</sup> Le choix de Gore se démarquait du mode opératoire habituel selon lequel le candidat présidentiel choisit son colistier avec un souci

31 Williams Irving G. « Vice Presidency of the United States. » *US Government*. Expert Space, 2015. Web. 3 sept. 2015. <<http://freedomflix.digital.scholastic.com/explore-more-pdf/01000364/fflix/ngo/10011289>> Consulté le 2 août 2015.

32 Nelson Michael, « Vice President Gore: Not Second Fiddle », *Baltimore Sun*, 1<sup>er</sup> août 1993. <[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-08-01/news/1993213096\\_1\\_vice-presidency-gore-president-in-history](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-08-01/news/1993213096_1_vice-presidency-gore-president-in-history)> Consulté le 12 juillet 2015.

33 West Paul, « Gore leaves few tracks, stays close to Clinton Profile contrasts to Dan Quayle's role », *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 février 1993. <[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-02-15/news/1993046127\\_1\\_al-gore-president-and-vice-president-ronald-reagan/2](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1993-02-15/news/1993046127_1_al-gore-president-and-vice-president-ronald-reagan/2)> Consulté le 12 juillet 2015.

34 <<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/167288426/Bill-Clintons-Campaign-Promises>> Consulté le 12 juillet 2015.

d'équilibre du ticket, qu'il soit géographique, idéologique ou générationnel, susceptible de récolter le plus grand nombre de voix. Clinton adopta au contraire « the antithesis of the conventional models » rappelle Joel Goldstein, en sélectionnant « the one closest to being a carbon copy of himself. »<sup>35</sup> Gore présentait en effet de nombreuses similitudes avec Bill Clinton : sudiste (Tennessee), baby boomer (Gore est né en 1948 et Clinton en 1946), baptiste, démocrate modéré et fin politicien. Clinton avait choisi ce vice-président car il existait entre eux « a definite simpatico ». <sup>36</sup> Avant d'entrer en fonction, les deux hommes avaient signé un document écrit déclinant les principales missions du vice-président en matière d'environnement, de politique étrangère, de sécurité, de réforme administrative, etc, de même que son rôle plus général de conseiller.<sup>37</sup> Puis les deux hommes décidèrent ensuite, sous l'insistance d'Al Gore, qu'ils se rencontreraient chaque jeudi pour un déjeuner d'affaires privé. Gore avait le sentiment que si une bonne relation, personnelle et professionnelle, n'était pas entretenue, alors elle pouvait devenir « vulnérable. »<sup>38</sup>

Ce sentiment était prémonitoire car l'influence du vice-président fut considérablement réduite par l'omniprésence d'Hillary Clinton. Le terme « co-presidency » fut utilisé dans plus de 92 000 articles en 1993 !<sup>39</sup> Comme l'écrivit alors l'historien D. Herbert Lipson :

« It used to be that when we elected a president, the vice president was automatically tacked on as part of the package. Now, though, we've made a quantum leap. With Bill Clinton, we truly elected the First Couple (...). »<sup>40</sup>

Le couple travaillait en étroite collaboration et l'influence de la Première Dame dans la prise de décisions était à peine voilée. Le président, qui avait une confiance aveugle en son épouse pour son sens politique très affûté, se faisait même un devoir de travailler avec elle : « I would be derelict in my duty to the United States if I did not use her » déclara-t-il.<sup>41</sup> Il en était à la présidence comme par le passé. Le modus operandi restait le même. « Hillary had an obvious advantage over Gore », écrit la biographe Sally Bedell Smith, « because she and Bill had been on the same wavelength for so long that they communicated almost by telepathy. »<sup>42</sup>

35 Goldstein Joel K., « Clinton, Gore and the New Vice Presidency. » In Perotti Rosanna (éd.), *The Clinton Presidency and the Constitutional System* (College Station, TX: ATM, 2012), p. 87.

36 Pfiffner, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Smith Sally Bedell, *For Love of Politics – Inside the Clinton White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), p. 93.

39 Troy, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

40 Lipson D. Herbert, « Off the Cuff », *Philadelphia* magazine, vol. 84, n° 11, novembre 1993, p. 1.

41 Walsh Kenneth T. & Toch Thomas, « Now the First Chief Advocate », *US News & World Report*, 25 janvier 1993, p. 46.

42 *For love of Politics, op. cit.*, p. 92.

Cependant, le rôle de « partenaire » exercé par une personne non élue ne peut évidemment pas être épargné par la critique, particulièrement s'il s'agit d'une femme. Comme le montrent de nombreux exemples dans l'histoire, derrière les critiques à l'égard des femmes de présidents se cache la crainte d'un « petticoat government » censé menacer le pouvoir masculin.<sup>43</sup> Abigail Adams, fervent défenseur de la cause des femmes, ne cessa de maintenir un partenariat politique avec John son mari, ce qui l'amena à être affublée, comme Rosalynn Carter et Hillary Clinton, du surnom de « Mrs. President » ou comme Eleanor Roosevelt de « minister without portfolio ». <sup>44</sup> Sous l'administration Polk (1845-1849) le vice-président George M. Dallas se demanda si Sarah, la femme du président, était le second dirigeant politique le plus important de la nation. « She is certainly mistress of Herself », nota-t-il avec sarcasme, « and I suspect of somebody else also. »<sup>45</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt fut aussi violemment critiquée pour son implication dans l'administration de FDR dont elle était « the eyes and ears. »<sup>46</sup> Un journaliste espagnol la traita de « macherras » et posa la question : « Is Mrs. Roosevelt a sort of Stalin in petticoats? Where does her power lie? »<sup>47</sup> Le chef de cabinet de la Maison Blanche sous Ronald Reagan, Donald Regan, s'en prit vivement à la Première Dame dans ses mémoires : « Mrs. Reagan regarded herself as the president's alter ego not only in the conjugal but also in the political and official dimensions, as if the office that had been bestowed on her husband by the people somehow fell into the category of worldly goods covered by the marriage vows. »<sup>48</sup> Le rôle très actif de Rosalynn Carter, la première First Lady à assister aux réunions de cabinet, amena un journal à titrer « Is Rosalynn really running the country ? »<sup>49</sup>

S'il y a bien eu d'autres Premières Dames influentes avant elle, c'est néanmoins Hillary Clinton qui a exercé cette influence le plus ouvertement dans l'histoire moderne. « Never before *has* a woman been the power behind the throne so much as *Hillary* Rodham Clinton » écrit Gay Smith.<sup>50</sup> Pendant la campagne, Mrs. Clinton avait parfois été présentée comme « the president's running mate » empruntant une expression qui désigne normalement le

43 Weisberger Bernard A., « Petticoat Government », *American Heritage*, octobre 1993, p. 20.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

45 Sferrazza Anthony Carl, *First Ladies – The Saga of the Presidents' Wives and their Power 1789-1961*, vol. 1 (New York : William Morrow, 1990), p. 140.

46 Voir par exemple DuBois Ellen Carol, *Through Women Eyes* (New York: Bedford-St Martin's, 2012), p. 566.

47 In Lash Joseph P., *Eleanor – The Years Alone* (New York: Norton & Co., 2014), p. 307.

48 Regan Donald, *For the Record* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), p. 288.

49 In Kaufman Burton I. & Kauffman Scott, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.* (Lawrence, KS :University Press of Kansas, 2006), p. 214.

50 Smith Gay, *Lady Macbeth in America – From the Stage to the White House* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 15.

candidat à la vice-présidence !<sup>51</sup> À la Maison Blanche, il fallait se faire à l'idée qu'« Hillary along with Bill and Gore had to “sign off on big decisions” » confie le chef de cabinet Mack McLarty.<sup>52</sup> Pour Al Gore, cette mise en avant de la Première Dame, non élue, équivalait à une forme d'usurpation de pouvoir. L'épisode le plus emblématique et le plus conflictuel fut la décision présidentielle de confier à la Première Dame la mise en place de la réforme du système de Santé, étape voulue comme marquante du premier mandat de Bill Clinton, et qu'Al Gore avait lui-même convoitée en raison de ses compétences législatives acquises en tant que Sénateur des États-Unis. C'est pourtant la First lady qui eut les faveurs du président. « Bill was investing Gore with considerable responsibility, but his failure to confide in his vice-president was a telling sign of the real pecking order » explique Sally Smith.<sup>53</sup> Son choix était lié à des raisons de personnalité plus que de compétences. Il avait besoin d'une personne médiatisée et très en vue, capable de « vendre » la réforme et gagner les soutiens nécessaires pour faire passer la loi au Congrès. La First Lady était pour lui la personne idéale. Infatigable et persuasive, elle allait parcourir le pays, tenir des audiences publiques et vanter inlassablement la réforme. Bien que bon orateur, le vice-président avait toujours selon Bill Clinton, une apparence un peu trop rigide, le ton moralisateur, et une tendance compulsive à l'abstraction dans son discours.<sup>54</sup> Or, la réforme de la Santé allait toucher les gens au plus près, et imposait donc un message plus « populaire » dans sa forme, message que la Première Dame était, toujours selon Bill Clinton, plus à même de faire passer.

La culture populaire se fit le témoin du décalage entre le poids politique de Mrs. Clinton et celui d'Al Gore. En 1993, par exemple, les stations de radio diffusèrent une parodie de la chanson de Helen Reddy, « I Am Woman » : « I am Hillary, hear me roar, I'm more important than Al Gore ». <sup>55</sup> Au-delà de la parodie, on voit que Mrs. Clinton donnait une nouvelle dimension au statut de First Lady. Comme l'explique l'auteur Robert P. Watson :

« It is becoming the rule and not the exception that the first lady has surpassed the vice president and even the most senior advisers and cabinet secretaries in terms of visibility and perhaps even power and influence both in and out of the White House. »<sup>56</sup>

51 Voir par exemple Meyer Karl E., « The President's Other Running Mate », *The New York Times*, 27 janvier 1993, p. A 12.

52 In *For Love of Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 91-92.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

55 Voir notamment Green Michelle, « Her own woman », *People Weekly*, 10 mai 1993, p. 83.

56 Watson Robert P., « The First Lady Reconsidered: Presidential Partner and Political Institution », *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, n° 4, automne 1997, p. 814.



Cet ascendant politique de la Première Dame résultait aussi du fait que l'image de candeur et d'honnêteté qui caractérisait Al Gore<sup>57</sup> et qui avait été fort utile pendant la campagne car elle avait permis de contrebalancer celle d'incorrigible « womanizer » de Bill Clinton, surnommé alors « Slick Willie »<sup>58</sup>, n'avait plus beaucoup d'impact maintenant que la Maison Blanche était conquise.<sup>59</sup> Une autre hypothèse fut que Bill Clinton voulait compenser le tort qu'il faisait à son épouse par ses infidélités conjugales en lui accordant un pouvoir qu'elle n'aurait légitimement pas dû avoir, aux dépens du vice-président. Ce sentiment réapparut en 1998, quand Hillary se présenta au Sénat de New York. « Clinton was eager for Hillary to win the Senate race to recompense her for all she had to put up with » raconte Madeleine Albright.<sup>60</sup> Enfin, son rôle croissant en tant que First Lady n'était perçu que comme la première étape stratégique d'une ascension programmée vers la présidence.<sup>61</sup>

Comme le soulignent les chroniqueurs Karen Tumulty et Nancy Gibbs, « Bill et Hillary » ont sans doute formé le plus politique des couples présidentiels américains :

« The history of the Clinton presidency is and always has been the history of the Clinton marriage, which is why the distinction between public and private in this presidency has always been messy. From the start their union was a vessel not only of love but of ambition, a shortcut for two stars in a hurry to reach heaven (...). And there was always the risk that if one stumbled, it would bring down the other too. »<sup>62</sup>

La suite a en partie donné raison à cette prédiction. Le couple Clinton fut vite fragilisé par les révélations répétées des infidélités conjugales du mari-président, lesquelles ont eu l'effet pernicieux d'auréoler les deux époux, à l'origine présentés comme un duo indéfectible, d'un halo d'imposture. Leur image de marque, qui mêlait habilement et harmonieusement leurs relations publique et privée, au service d'une présidence exemplaire, se vida de son sens et vint anéantir l'authenticité du message d'union parfaite. De plus, après l'échec de la réforme de la Santé et les sondages défavorables, la co-présidence fut vite abandonnée et la Première Dame contrainte et forcée par la machine présidentielle de rester en retrait et de tenir un rôle purement traditionnel.<sup>63</sup>

57 Gore fut d'ailleurs affublé des surnoms de « Mr. Clean », « Mr. Faithful » ou encore « Dudley-Do-Right » personnage de dessin animé un peu naïf et ingénu. In Smith, *ibid.*, p. 92.

58 Voir notamment sur l'affaire « Jennifer Flowers »: Maraniss David, *First in His Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 354.

59 *For Love of Politics, op. cit.*, p. 92.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 374.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 92, p. 488.

62 Tumulty Karen & Gibbs Nancy, « Hillary Clinton: The Better Half – During her husband's greatest crisis, Hillary has come into her own », *Time*, 28 décembre 1998. <<http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,989909,00.html>> Consulté le 17 juin 2015.

63 Cf. James Bowman, « The incredible Shrinking Lady », *National Review*, 18 avril 1994, p. 24.

Quant à Al Gore, selon le principe des vases communicants, il retrouva un rôle de vice-président plus estimable comme « general adviser to the president » tout en endossant les tâches exécutives afférentes selon les besoins : présidence du Sénat, politique étrangère, réorganisation des agences gouvernementales, etc. Les relations entre le président et le vice-président s'améliorèrent au fil des semaines et retrouvèrent une certaine forme de normalité, Clinton appréciant la clarté des analyses et les qualités d'organisation de son vice-président, Gore faisant preuve de loyauté à l'égard de son président, recherchant le consensus et apportant une aide précieuse dans la prise de décision.<sup>64</sup> Emboîtant le pas à ses prédécesseurs, il consolida la fonction en contribuant ainsi à faire de la vice-présidence une institution moderne et efficace, « a leap forward for that often-pilloried institution. »<sup>65</sup> Plus tard, avec du recul, Clinton dira même de lui qu'il fut « the single most influential, effective, powerful, and important vice president in the history of the United States of America. »<sup>66</sup>

Pourtant, la rivalité entre Gore et Hillary Clinton ressurgit nettement en 2000 lorsque les deux protagonistes entrèrent en campagnes, l'un pour la présidence, l'autre pour le Sénat de New York. Ce télescopage du calendrier raviva les vieilles rancœurs du pouvoir tripartite des premières années, alors décrit comme « a madhouse »<sup>67</sup> : un président canard boiteux rongé par les scandales, une épouse trahie mais déterminée à se faire élire et un successeur désigné de Martin Van Buren et George Bush, Sr. Novembre mit fin aux ambitions présidentielles de Gore, dont la campagne souffrit en partie de l'affaire Lewinsky, dégradante pour le pays, déclencheur de sentiments négatifs : animosité envers Bill Clinton, lassitude à l'égard du couple Clinton, et volonté d'en finir avec l'administration Clinton<sup>68</sup>. Au grand bonheur de George W. Bush.

## Conclusion

L'historique des deux mandats montre que la confusion ayant régné à la Maison Blanche s'est manifestée à plusieurs niveaux. Dans un premier temps, la « co-présidence » Clinton reléguait le vice-président au rôle paradoxal et subalterne de simple sous-fifre, « underling » au sein de l'organigramme présidentiel. Pour recouvrer du crédit électoral, le président fut ensuite contraint

64 In *For Love of Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 92-93.

65 Goldstein, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

66 « Remarks at a Gore 2000 Meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas, August 7, 1999. » *Administration of William J. Clinton, 1999. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, 1403.

67 Bose Meena, « Reclaiming the "Vital Center" in American Politics through the Clinton Presidency ». In Perotti, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

68 Ces sentiments furent regroupés sous l'appellation « Clinton fatigue ». In Dover Edwin, *Missed Opportunity – Gore, Incumbency and Television in Election 2000* (New York: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 130.

de céder à la tradition en neutralisant politiquement la Première Dame et en collaborant plus étroitement avec le vice-président, lequel retrouva ses galons de « chief lieutenant. » Ce retournement de situation fut complété par une troisième étape tumultueuse, l'affaire Lewinsky, qui vint déshonorer la présidence Clinton et créer un malaise rarement égalé dans l'histoire. Elle mit en scène un « Maître » plus vraiment maître de la situation car empêtré dans une procédure de destitution (« impeachment »), une First Lady trompée, éplorée et amère, et un vice-président qui bien qu'ayant regagné du crédit, se retrouvait malgré lui fragilisé par son appartenance au clan Clinton et au spectacle pitoyable qu'il offrait à son peuple.

Certes, le bilan d'une administration ne se réduit pas aux frasques sexuelles de son président ou à la rivalité de pouvoir entre une First Lady et un vice-président. Cependant, la Maison Blanche Clinton a bel et bien été le théâtre d'une véritable comédie humaine, qui eût pu prêter à sourire si elle n'avait provoqué un désaveu général et une décrédibilisation d'un pouvoir que ses détenteurs étaient, par définition, censés incarner. David Gergen, éminent commentateur politique, conseiller des présidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, et Clinton, ne fut pas tendre avec les protagonistes de ce triumvirat qu'il qualifia sans détour de « rolling disaster. »<sup>69</sup>

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### Résumé

Cet article s'attache à analyser la rivalité entre Hillary Clinton et Al Gore durant la présidence Clinton. Les réformes successives de la fonction de vice-président ont permis à celui-ci de tenir progressivement le rang de n° 2 au sein de l'Exécutif. En inversant la tendance au profit de la Première Dame, l'administration Clinton instaura une rivalité de pouvoir entre seconds couteaux. L'échec de la réforme du Système de Santé écarta Mrs. Clinton et rétablit une collaboration plus traditionnelle entre le président et le vice-président. En fin de mandat, le scandale Lewinsky entraîna le discrédit de toute l'administration y compris du vice-président et de la Première Dame.

### Mots-clés

Président des États-Unis, Vice-Président des États-Unis, Première Dame, Hillary Clinton, AL Gore.

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69 Gergen David, *Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership, Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), p. 293.

**Abstract**

*This paper explores the struggle for power between Hillary Clinton and Al Gore during the Clinton presidency. Historically, the successive reforms of the vice presidency have gradually made it the second-highest office in the land. The trend was reversed as the Clinton administration gave political prominence to the First Lady, thereby antagonizing the two sidekicks. The failure of the Healthcare reform forced Mrs. Clinton aside and restored a more traditional collaboration between the president and the vice president. The end of the Clinton era was marked by the Lewinsky scandal and the ensuing discredit on the whole administration including the vice president and the First Lady.*

**Keywords**

United States President, United States Vice-President, First Lady, Hillary Clinton, AL Gore.



# When the second becomes number one: vice-presidential power in foreign and defense policy in the twenty-first century

Christopher Griffin

It is somewhat misleading to refer to the US Vice President as the “sidekick” of the President, as that was never the purpose of the position. The Vice President was never intended to be the closest advisor to the president. The position has always been much further down the chain of command. John Adams, the first Vice President, called it “the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived,”<sup>1</sup> and it was initially a sort of consolation prize for the runner-up in presidential elections. The Vice President was not considered as part of the executive branch until the twentieth century, as the position as the President of the Senate was considered to be a legislative branch responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Vice Presidents were not allowed even to sit in on cabinet meetings until 1921.<sup>3</sup>

It was a surprise, therefore, to read headlines such as “Is this the real president of the United States?” with a photo of the Vice President in the *Guardian* in July 2007.<sup>4</sup> An entire literature exists that claims that Richard Cheney was in fact the real president during the George W. Bush administration.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that Cheney was the most powerful Vice President to date, and that he wielded considerable influence in the Bush administration. A key example, albeit in particular circumstances, was Cheney’s order to the military to shoot

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1 Cited in Goldstein, Joel K., “The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38 (2008): p. 374.

2 Relyea, Harold C., “The Law: The Executive Office of the Vice President: Constitutional and Legal Considerations,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40 (2010): p. 328.

3 Albert, Richard, “The Evolving Vice Presidency,” *Temple Law Review* 78 (2005): p. 832.

4 Pilkington (Ed.), “Is this the real president of the United States?” *Guardian*, 23 Jul. 2007.

5 See for example: Nichols, John, *Dick: The Man Who Is President* (New York: The New Press, 2004), Goldsmith, Jack, “How Cheney Reined in Presidential Power,” *New York Times*, 15 Sep. 2011, Kattner, Robert, “Cheney’s Unprecedented Power,” *Boston Globe*, 25 Feb. 2009, Warsaw, Shirley Anne, *The Co-Presidency of Bush and Cheney* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

down civilian airliners heading for Washington on 11 September 2001.<sup>6</sup> This was clearly an order that fell outside vice-presidential authority. In an influential article in the *New York Times* in 2003, Elisabeth Bumiller and Eric Schmitt argued that Cheney's extraordinary power was concentrated in three policy areas: national security, homeland defense, and the economy.<sup>7</sup>

This paper will focus in on the first policy area, national security, and examine two related questions. First, how did Cheney become such a powerful leader in foreign and defense policy? Second, how did his power in this issue area evolve during his vice-presidency? This paper argues that Cheney's leadership in foreign and defense policy was not at odds with President Bush, who indeed likely facilitated Cheney's rise. I also put forth the proposition that a relatively unexplored reason for Cheney's power in national security was his close relationship with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.<sup>8</sup> The duo Cheney-Rumsfeld were able to put considerable pressure on the rest of the Bush's decision-making team to impose their particular worldview, especially regarding the decision to go to war in Iraq and on issues of counter-terrorism. When Rumsfeld left office in 2006, Cheney's influence appears to have declined to a certain degree, which indicates that the Secretary of Defense was at least in part important for vice-presidential power.

This paper will first briefly address the well-known changes in the vice-presidency that led to increased power in the position since 1945, which provided a precedent for Cheney's influence in the Bush administration. The paper will then examine the issue areas where Cheney appears to have had decisive impact, most notably the war in Iraq and counter-terrorism policy, and his relationship with Rumsfeld. Finally, the paper will consider what we know about Cheney's influence in the Bush administration after 2006.

## Vice Presidential Power since 1945

A common starting point to discuss the rise of vice presidential power, especially in national security, is with Harry Truman. Truman, on becoming president after Roosevelt's death in April 1945, admitted to having little knowledge regarding the US's military strategy in World War II, and had not been informed about the Manhattan Project.<sup>9</sup> After becoming president,

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6 Cheney, Dick and Cheney, Liz, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011): p. 3.

7 Bumiller, Elisabeth and Schmitt, Eric, "Cheney, Little Seen By Public, Plays a Visible Role for Bush," *New York Times*, 31 Jan. 2003.

8 See also the documentary film *The Unknown Known: The Life and Times of Donald Rumsfeld*, 2013, which is a long interview with the former secretary about his life and his decisions during the Bush administration.

9 Kengor, Paul, "The Vice President, Secretary of State, and Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (2000): p. 175.



Truman attempted to partially remedy the situation by appointing his own Vice President to a position on the new National Security Council (NSC) in 1949. Truman wanted to give the Vice President an idea of what was going on in the national security arena should he be called to take over the leadership of the country.<sup>10</sup> It was clearly necessary to have a ready and informed successor available in case the president was killed in a surprise nuclear attack.<sup>11</sup>

What is important to note, and would later also be crucial for the rise of Cheney's influence, was that vice presidential power increased at the same time as that of the president. According to historian Joel Goldsmith, there were three major changes that provided the Vice President with more power in the 1960s and 1970s. First, Richard Nixon decided that the the Vice President needed more responsibility in foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> This change should be taken with a grain of salt, however, as any Vice President, no matter how powerful, would have been overshadowed in the realm of national security by Henry Kissinger, who combined the office of National Security Advisor and Secretary of State. Second, the Vice President became a real contender for the presidency.<sup>13</sup> Senator and 2008 presidential candidate John McCain, however, claimed in 2004 that the vice presidency was a waste of time, and compared it to his experiences in a North Vietnamese prison camp.<sup>14</sup> Third, President Jimmy Carter became the first president to delegate significant powers to his Vice President, Walter Mondale, and made a number of structural changes that effectively made Mondale a primary advisor and part of the executive branch.<sup>15</sup> Mondale's Chief of Staff, Richard Moe, stated that "Carter put Mondale in the chain of command," where he had some responsibilities in the field of national security, including renewing relations with Vietnam in the aftermath of the war.<sup>16</sup>

Vice presidential influence in foreign policy was not completely unprecedented, even if the extent of Cheney's power surpassed that of all of his successors. George H.W. Bush was given the job of investigating US efforts to combat terrorism in 1986 after attacks by Libya in Europe.<sup>17</sup> Vice Presidents

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10 Relyea p. 329.

11 This would seem to have been Truman's initiative (or irritation at having been kept out of the loop), as danger to the president through assassination was nothing new.

12 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency", p. 376.

13 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency", p. 376.

14 Sandalaw, Marc, "Golden Age of the Second Banana/US Vice Presidency Rises from Anonymity to Become One of World's Most Powerful Jobs," *SF Gate*, 4 Jul. 2004.

15 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency" p. 377-378.

16 Moe, Richard, "The Making of the Modern Vice Presidency. A Personal Reflection," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38 (2008): 398.

17 Ronald Reagan, "The National Program for Combating Terrorism," National Security Decision Directive Number 207, National Security Archive, September 11 Sourcebooks, Vol. I, 20 Jan. 1986.

Dan Quayle and Al Gore also wielded increased power in foreign policy. Paul Kengor claims that Quayle's influence was reduced due to his rocky relationship with Secretary of State James Baker, despite the Vice President's considerable expertise in national security issues.<sup>18</sup> Cheney, however, manifested considerable respect for Quayle while the former was Secretary of Defense.<sup>19</sup> Kengor also argues that Gore's increased foreign policy power came in part due to his close relationship with Secretaries of State Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright, who allowed Gore to influence Russian policy.<sup>20</sup>

Roy Brownell points out the extent to which the position of the Vice President is independent. As the Vice President is technically elected by the public, he or she cannot be fired by the President, and thus can take positions or actions opposed to the administration.<sup>21</sup> Brownell demonstrates that Vice Presidents, unlike the popular perception, have frequently defied their receptive Presidents throughout American history. Cheney opposed Bush on four occasions: the weapons inspectors in Iraq, gay marriage, Senate rules on the filibuster, and litigation on the Second Amendment of the Constitution.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Vice President is not always relegated to a sidekick position, and has a great deal of protection against sanctions coming from the executive branch.<sup>23</sup>

### Vice President Cheney and National Security

The power of the executive branch in foreign policy is one that has stimulated considerable debate. One of the problems is the contention over the term "Commander in Chief," which many Presidents have taken to mean that the executive can make most major decisions regarding war and diplomacy.<sup>24</sup> While most scholars argue that the President does not in fact have full power over the formulation of foreign policy, it is clear that the Bush administration gained considerable powers in the area through Congressional authorizations for the use of force in 2001 and 2002.<sup>25</sup> Congress gave Bush the power to fight terrorism and Iraq in the way that the executive branch wanted, which was

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18 Kengor p. 185-187.

19 Kengor p. 193.

20 Kengor p. 194-195.

21 Brownell, Roy E., "The Independence of the Vice Presidency," *Legislation and Public Policy* 17 (2014): p. 302-306.

22 Brownell, "The Independence of the Vice Presidency" p. 355-356.

23 The only way to remove a Vice President is through impeachment .

24 Adler, David Grey, "George W. Bush as Commander in Chief: Toward the Nether World of Constitutionalism," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): p. 530.

25 Rudalevige, Andrew, "The Decline (and Resurgence) of Congress: Charting a New Imperial Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36 (2006): p. 511-512. See also Whittington, Keith E. and Daniel P. Carpenter, "Executive Power in American Institutional Development," *Perspectives in Politics* 1 (2003): p. 495-513.

coupled with a general reluctance of Congress to oppose the White House on national security.<sup>26</sup>

One might think that Bush would have kept that power for himself, instead of delegating it to his sidekick. For reasons outlined in further detail below, however, the President was willing to delegate many national security responsibilities to Cheney. Bush gave Cheney powers in other, domestic policy areas as well, but the expansion of national security powers in such areas as surveillance and the fight against weapons of mass destruction meant that delegation was necessary.<sup>27</sup> There was also a legal precedent. As Vice President in 1961, Lyndon B. Johnson asked the Assistant Attorney General to study the powers of the Vice President in the executive branch. The surprising answer is that it is the President's decision on how much power to delegate, but that the Vice President has much more legitimacy in foreign affairs and national security than in domestic politics.<sup>28</sup>

James P. Pfiffner claimed in 2009 that: "In the George W. Bush administration... national security advice to the president was dominated by Vice President Cheney."<sup>29</sup> Joel Goldstein said that Cheney was the "Chief Operating Officer" to President Bush's CEO, and that "Vice President Cheney has been seen as the architect of virtually every significant initiative of the administration."<sup>30</sup> How did Cheney come to be such a powerful sidekick in the Bush administration?

Cheney was far from an unknown figure in Washington, despite his reputation for operating in the shadows. He began his political career in 1968 as an American Political Science Association congressional fellow, and was initially rejected for a job by Donald Rumsfeld, who at the time was a congressman from Illinois.<sup>31</sup> After the rejection, however, Cheney later became Rumsfeld's employee and colleague, and the two men worked closely together during the Ford administration. Cheney became Chief of Staff when Rumsfeld gave up the position to become Secretary of Defense in 1975. Cheney's career continued after Ford's defeat, and he was elected as a Republican Representative from Wyoming for ten years during the 1980s. President George H.W. Bush then appointed Cheney as his Secretary of Defense during the Persian Gulf War.

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26 Hess, Gary R., "Presidents and the Congressional War Resolutions, of 1991 and 2002," *Political Science Quarterly* 121 (2006): p. 109-110.

27 Baumgartner, Jody C., *The American Vice Presidency: From the Shadows to the Spotlight* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015): p. 163-164, 168.

28 Katzenbach, Nicolas, Assistant Attorney General, Office of Legal Counsel, "Participation of the Vice President in the Affairs of the Executive Branch," Memorandum Opinion for the Vice President, 19 Mar. 1961.

29 Pfiffner, James P., "The Contemporary Presidency: Decision Making in the Bush White House," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2009): p. 366.

30 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency": p. 384.

31 Cheney and Cheney: p. 41.

Cheney's experience in the White House and in the Pentagon was valuable for President George W. Bush, who came to the White House with little experience in the fields of foreign policy and national security, and delegated much of that authority to Cheney.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, according to Goldstein, Cheney was powerful fundamentally because Bush decided it would be so.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, however, in his memoirs, President Bush says that he was pleased to have Cheney as Vice President, due to his "pro-life, low-tax positions [which] helped cement key parts of our base," which were domestic issues.<sup>34</sup> Cheney was clearly the sidekick of Bush, but at the same time, as we will see below, Bush allowed him to have so much responsibility in foreign policy, that Cheney effectively became the leader in the issue area.

One claim is that Cheney became so powerful because he had no ambition to be president, and thus was not a threat to Bush. The White House Chief of Staff in the first Bush term, Andrew Card, stated that: "The vice president is not looking to be president. Do you know how unusual that is?"<sup>35</sup> The fundamental problem with this argument was that Cheney in fact did want to be president during the 1990s, and even began to set up a campaign for a run in 1996. Cheney stated in his memoirs in 2011: "The idea of serving as president was very appealing. I had worked in the White House or served in the cabinet of three presidents. And I believed I knew what it takes to make an effective chief executive."<sup>36</sup> Cheney had more ambition than is commonly believed, and it is very likely that Bush and other White House officials would have known this at the time. Cheney admits that the run for president would have been a "long-shot prospect" and that he was worried about his family and his history of heart problems.<sup>37</sup>

If Cheney thought himself unfit to become President, then how did he become Vice President? There is a fairly extensive literature on how the Vice President is selected in American politics, and recent scholarship suggests that it is important for Presidents to choose running mates who have a great deal of experience in government.<sup>38</sup> Earlier hypotheses, which indicated that the Vice President was chosen for "ticket balancing," or providing a particular political advantage (the electoral votes of a large state, or an alliance with another faction of the party), have lost significance since the election reforms

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32 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency" p. 385, Relyea p. 335-336.

33 Goldstein, "The Rising Power of the Modern Vice Presidency" p. 386.

34 George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Broadway Books, 2011): p. 70.

35 Cited in Bumiller and Schmitt.

36 Cheney and Cheney: p. 241-242.

37 Cheney and Cheney: p. 242, 246, 254.

38 Hiller, Mark and Kriner, Douglas, "Institutional Change and the Dynamics of Vice Presidential Selection," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38 (2008): p. 402.

of the early 1970s.<sup>39</sup> The three electoral votes in the state of Wyoming make it improbable that Bush would have chosen Cheney to balance the ticket in 2000.<sup>40</sup>

There is a good deal of controversy regarding Cheney's selection as Vice President. Cheney was in charge of the Bush administration's committee to find a running mate in 2000, and he interviewed the other candidates himself. A number of commentators claim that Cheney's intention all along was to appoint himself Vice President, by using his position to eliminate other contenders.<sup>41</sup> With current sources, it is not possible to make a definitive statement on this question, but recent scholars argue that Cheney at least made a deal with Bush for more power if he agreed to be Vice President.<sup>42</sup> A detailed CNN report on Cheney's selection prior to the 2000 election stated at the time that Bush had a great deal of trust in Cheney, which would help explain the delegation of extensive powers to the President's sidekick after the election.<sup>43</sup>

A further reason for the unprecedented scope of Cheney's power was the concentration of national power in the executive branch in the Bush administration. The attempt to gain more power for the executive at the expense of Congress had been in the works since the 1970s after the reduction of presidential power following Watergate.<sup>44</sup> Cheney was at the forefront of this effort prior to 2000.<sup>45</sup> In what is perhaps the most prominent example of Cheney's belief in the importance of executive power, he, as a Congressman in 1987, co-wrote a "Minority Report," defending President Ronald Reagan against the Congressional majority in the Iran-Contra affair.<sup>46</sup> After the 2000 elections, Cheney even went so far as to at least indirectly claim executive privilege for the Vice President to keep secrets in dealing with Congress, which was a long way from the limited legislative role for the office envisaged by the Founders.<sup>47</sup> The first attempt to work outside of Congress was Cheney's

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39 Hiller and Kriner: p. 405.

40 Baumgartner: p. 159.

41 Fisman, David, Fisman, Raymond J., Galet, Julia, Khurana, Rakesh, and Wang, Yongxiang, "Estimating the Value of Connections to Vice-President Cheney," *B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis and Policy* 13 (2012): p. 6.

42 Baumgartner: p. 159.

43 Carney, James and Dickerson, John F., "How Bush Decided," *CNN*, 1 Aug. 2000.

44 Skowronek, Stephen, "The Conservative Insurgency and Presidential Power: A Developmental Perspective on the Unitary Executive," *Harvard Law Review* 122 (2009): p. 2070-2103.

45 Meiers, Franz-Josef, "The Return of the Imperial Presidency? The President, Congress, and US Foreign Policy after 11 September 2001," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 55 (2010): p. 255.

46 For the text of this report, see United States, Cong., "Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair with Supplemental, Minority, and Additional Views," (Washington DC, 17 November 1987): p. 431-633.

47 Brownell, Roy E., "Vice Presidential Secrecy: A Study in Comparative Constitutional Privilege and Historical Development," *St. John's Law Review* 84 (2010): p. 539-540.

claim to secrecy for the minutes of meetings of a new energy task force in 2001.<sup>48</sup> The growth of Cheney's power in early 2001 undermines the claim that Cheney's exceptional responsibilities were due to the 9/11 attacks.

### Cheney, Rumsfeld and Decision-Making on Iraq

While Cheney's expertise in foreign policy, Bush's decision to give him more power, and the expansion of executive powers in foreign policy after 9/11 contributed to the scope of his influence, an under-explored element is Cheney's relationship with other members of the Bush administration. In a review of the memoirs of Bush's advisors in 2013, historian Melvyn Leffler argued that "None doubted that Bush was, in fact, the decision-maker."<sup>49</sup> Cheney was a close advisor, but not the one calling the shots, at least most of the time, considering the order given on 11 September mentioned above.<sup>50</sup> Even if Bush ultimately made the final decisions in foreign policy or in national security, Cheney wielded considerable power on the Bush team. Cheney could not have done this alone, however, and was helped a great deal by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

Cheney was in charge of the transition in 2000, which meant that he had at least some influence over who was hired for key cabinet positions. Cheney interviewed in particular the candidates for Secretary of Defense alongside Bush, and said Rumsfeld was appointed because he "outperformed the others in his interview."<sup>51</sup> He lauded in particular Rumsfeld's experience and vision for the military.<sup>52</sup> Shirley Anne Warshaw wrote that Cheney was really not directly in charge of hiring decisions, however, and that Andrew Card handled that part of the transition.<sup>53</sup> It is clear, however, that Cheney was able to exert important influence over the choice of White House officials, due to his closeness to Bush. Rumsfeld, in his memoirs, seems to have had nothing but the highest respect for Cheney, saying that he "was uniquely influential as a vice president because he thought systematically, did his homework, and presented his ideas with skill, credibility, and timelines."<sup>54</sup>

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48 Montgomery, Bruce P., "Congressional Oversight: Vice President Richard B. Cheney's Executive Branch Triumph," *Political Science Quarterly* 120 (2005/2006): p. 582.

49 Leffler, Melvyn P., "The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy," *Diplomatic History* 37 (2013): p. 211.

50 Leffler: p. 211.

51 Cheney and Cheney: p. 299.

52 Cheney and Cheney: p. 299.

53 Warshaw, Shirley Anne, *Guide to the White House Staff* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2013): p. 186.

54 Rumsfeld, Donald, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel Trade, 2012): p. 320.



As the White House is a highly complicated organization, Cheney was able to use the bureaucratic dynamics to his own advantage, at least in Bush's first term. James Pfiffner has argued that Cabinet secretaries have seen their power increasingly challenged by the large number of White House staff.<sup>55</sup> Cheney increased his own staff, which became very powerful, and at least partially duplicated the NSC, allowing the Vice President to create his own separate policymaking structure that shut out rival Cabinet members.<sup>56</sup> The Vice President's staff was present at every level of the policymaking process, monitoring and intervening in events.<sup>57</sup> While the details of bureaucratic infighting in the Bush White House will not be known for many years, it is probable that Cheney used his extensive knowledge of that bureaucracy from his previous experience to maximize his power over the rest of the Cabinet.

It appears that Rumsfeld and Cheney were able to largely dominate White House decision-making on national security between 2001 and 2006. As is well known, for Iraq policy and counter-terrorism, Bush relied on a small group of advisors, which included Cheney, Rumsfeld, Cheney's Chief of Staff Lewis Libby, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State General Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and CIA Director George Tenet.<sup>58</sup> Aside from Cheney and Rumsfeld, Rice and Powell were the most important members of the team for the decision to go to war in Iraq. Both were repeatedly attacked by Cheney and Rumsfeld so as to push their agenda through the White House decision-making process. That agenda was to overthrow Saddam Hussein, but to do it with as few troops as possible.<sup>59</sup>

Both Rumsfeld and Cheney believed that the attack on Iraq could be undertaken without the 500,000 soldiers believed necessary in the late 1990s for such a campaign. The Afghanistan War validated the theories of the Vice President and Secretary of Defense that the combination of precision-guided weapons and networked warfare, the so-called "Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)," eliminated the need for large numbers of ground troops. Powell, a retired general, was against the plan, and skeptical of the purported successes of the RMA model in Afghanistan, but he was overruled.<sup>60</sup> One of

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55 Pfiffner, James, "Cabinet Secretaries versus the White House Staff," *Brookings*, 12 Mar. 2015.

56 Baumgartner: p. 163.

57 Halperin, Morton H., Clapp, Priscilla A., and Kanter, Arnold, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2006): p. 113. The tactic was also recommended by Elliot Abrams, a close advisor to President Bush. Abrams, Elliot, "The Prince of the White House," *Foreign Policy*, 12 Mar. 2013.

58 Haney, Patrick J., "Foreign-Policy Advising: Models and Mysteries from the Bush Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (2005): p. 289-302.

59 Leffler: p. 205, 209-210.

60 Gordon, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Knopf/Doubleday, 2006). For a military analysis of the problem, see Andres, Richard B., "The Afghan Model in Northern Iraq," *War in Iraq: Planning and*



the reasons for why Cheney and Rumsfeld were able to get their way on this question was that President Bush agreed with their point of view on Iraq and military strategy.<sup>61</sup> The lack of sufficient forces in Iraq at the outset of the war is seen by many analysts as one of the main reasons that the US was unable to defeat the subsequent insurgency.<sup>62</sup>

An even more controversial part of the decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein was the supposed link between Iraq and Al Qaeda. It appears that Cheney and Rumsfeld were key players in pushing the idea that Saddam was linked to the 9/11 attacks. Cheney still believed this in 2011, writing in his memoirs: “When we looked around the world in those first months after 9/11, there was no place more likely to be a nexus between terrorism and WMD capability than Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.”<sup>63</sup> Wolfowitz also believed that it was true.<sup>64</sup> In 2004, Chaim Kaufmann said that Cheney was the one primarily responsible for “threat inflation” in the run-up to the Iraq War, in essence, making the threat from Iraq seem much greater than it actually was. He pressured other government agencies, including the CIA, to present intelligence in a way that favored his case for war.<sup>65</sup> Cheney’s neoconservative worldview included a fundamental belief that the strategies of deterrence and containment were ineffective, despite the lessons of the Cold War, and that threats such as Al Qaeda had to be engaged directly.<sup>66</sup>

Cheney focused on blocking his main adversaries in the White House, including National Security Advisor Rice. The National Security Advisor is at least in theory the main advisor for national security policy, but is not an office that exists in the constitution. A number of previous National Security Advisors had been powerful players in the government, especially Kissinger. President Bush liked and respected Rice, but Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Powell did not attempt to work closely with her on many issues, including on Iraq.<sup>67</sup> As for Powell, both Rumsfeld and Cheney worked to undermine

*Execution*, Mahnken (ed.), Thomas G. and Keaney, Thomas A. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): p. 52-68.

61 Gordon, Michael R. and Trainor, Bernard E., *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Random House, 2012): p. 5-14. See also Metz, Steven and Martin, John R., *Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: Removing Saddam Hussein by Force* (Carlisle Barracks, PA:US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, February 2010): p. 7-8.

62 Bensahel, Nora “Mission not accomplished,” *War in Iraq: Planning and Execution*, Mahnken and Keaney (ed.) (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): p. 138.

63 Cheney and Cheney: p. 368.

64 Leffler: p. 201.

65 Kaufmann, Chaim, “Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,” *International Security*, 29 (2004): p. 20, 37, 39.

66 Metz and Martin, *Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: Removing Saddam Hussein*:p. 22.

67 Daalder, Ivo H. and Destler, I.M., “In the Shadows of the Oval Office: The Next National Security Advisor,” *Foreign Affairs* 88 (2009): p. 125-126.

the power of the State Department in favor of Defense, and Powell sometimes only found out about Cheney's decisions regarding national security on the news.<sup>68</sup> When Powell contradicted Cheney on bringing weapons inspectors back to Iraq in 2002, he was accused of "disloyalty" to the President, indicating the extent to which Cheney directly represented Bush's interests.<sup>69</sup>

As Cheney worked on dominating White House policymaking, Rumsfeld stifled opposition from certain parts of the US military regarding Iraq policy. Rumsfeld's direct and aggressive control of the military establishment was at least one of the reasons leading to his resignation in 2006 after the so-called "revolt of the generals."<sup>70</sup> As cited by James Pfiffner, Powell's Chief of Staff James Wilkerson called the relationship between Rumsfeld and Cheney a "cabal" in which they made all major national security decisions.<sup>71</sup>

### **A Decline in Vice-Presidential Power? After Rumsfeld**

Cheney's power was at its zenith with the decision to invade Iraq, and he supported initiatives for enhanced interrogation techniques and military tribunals for prisoners associated with terrorist groups. It must be noted that Cheney was not the only one in favor of these measures, as Rice, Rumsfeld, Powell, Tenet and Attorney General John Ashcroft also approved.<sup>72</sup> The debate over enhanced interrogation resurfaced at the end of 2014, with the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on CIA interrogation techniques. The report cites Cheney a number of times and indicates that he was briefed extensively about the CIA's interrogation program.<sup>73</sup> While the report does not indicate who made decisions about the program, statements include that "on July 29, 2003, the CIA made a presentation to a select group of National Security Council principals, including Vice President Cheney, seeking policy reaffirmation of the CIA interrogation program."<sup>74</sup> Cheney subsequently claimed that the Senate Report was "deeply flawed," and said that President Bush knew all about the CIA interrogation program.<sup>75</sup>

68 Pfiffner, "The Contemporary Presidency": p. 371, 380.

69 Halperin, *et al.*: p. 186.

70 Owens, Mackubin Thomas, "What Military Officers Need to Know About Civil-Military Relations," *Naval War College Review* 65 (2012): p. 68.

71 Pfiffner, James P., "The First MBA President: George W. Bush as Public Administrator," *Public Administration Review* 67 (2007): p. 8.

72 Ehrenberg, John, McSherry, J. Patrice, Sanchez, José Ramon and Marji Sayej, Caroleen, eds., *The Iraq Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): p. 410.

73 United States, Cong., Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program* (Washington DC: US Senate, 3 December 2014): p. 228, 241. Cheney's name appears 44 times (by this author's count).

74 United States, Cong., Senate p. 353.

75 "Cheney defends CIA interrogation techniques, calls Senate report 'deeply flawed,'" *Fox News* 11 Dec. 2014.

There were setbacks, however, starting in summer 2003. The Valerie Plame affair, where the identity of a CIA agent was leaked to the press in retaliation for an attack in the newspaper on the administration by her husband, embarrassed Cheney's office. His top aide, Libby, eventually took the fall for the affair, but Cheney in his memoirs blamed Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State.<sup>76</sup> While the details remain unclear, what is probable is that Cheney's accusation of Armitage indicated a continued desire to undermine the power of the State Department in favor of Defense.

Another, more pressing problem for Cheney was the problems in the Iraq War. Cheney says in his memoirs that Rumsfeld attempted to resign over torture at Abu Ghraib prison in 2004, but that Bush stopped him, saying he could not resign during the war.<sup>77</sup> In November 2006, however, with midterm elections looming amid the disaster in Iraq, Rumsfeld became a liability for the White House, and President Bush asked him to resign.<sup>78</sup> Bob Woodward goes fairly easy on Rumsfeld, whereas other analysts say that his treatment of the armed forces and senior officers had become untenable.<sup>79</sup> Stephen Metz stated that Bush fired Rumsfeld so as to attribute the blame to his Secretary of Defense for the failed strategy in Iraq.<sup>80</sup>

Rumsfeld's departure appears to have isolated Cheney a great deal in the Bush Administration. Much of the analysis claiming Cheney was in charge of the country appeared during this period, but it was really when his influence was declining. His reputation as a Republican hardliner hampered the Vice President's ability to make policy after the GOP setback in the 2006 elections.<sup>81</sup> Rice also gained more power than before in national security, and Bush appears to have started to listen more to the State Department.<sup>82</sup> Rather than a direct reaction against Cheney, his loss of power and influence appears to have had a great deal to do with sanctioning Rumsfeld's policies, which indicates that many in the administration believed that Rumsfeld had done considerable damage. Rumsfeld's departure was of course not the only reason, and Jody Baumgartner has recently argued that Cheney's decrease in influence in the second term was largely due to his unpopularity with the public.<sup>83</sup>

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76 Cheney and Cheney: p. 407.

77 Cheney and Cheney: p. 421.

78 Woodward, Bob, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008* (London: Pocket Books, 2008): p. 194-197.

79 Feaver, Peter D., "The Right to be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35 (2011): p. 97-98.

80 Metz, Steven and Martin, John R., *Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Strategic Shift of 2007* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, May 2010): p. 43-44.

81 Pressman, Jeremy, "Power Without Influence: The Bush Administration's Foreign Policy Failure in the Middle East," *International Security* 33 (2009): p. 175.

82 Goldstein, "The Contemporary Presidency": p. 133-134.

83 Baumgartner: p. 170.

Cheney, despite his association with Rumsfeld and the failures of the Iraq War, retained some influence, as Bob Woodward points out that senior generals used Cheney as a conduit to contact Bush outside of the chain of command for proposals for sending more soldiers to Iraq in the 2007 Surge.<sup>84</sup> While it remains difficult to identify clearly Cheney's role in the Surge decision, he was in direct contact with military officers in the discussions over sending more troops, which indicates a close relationship, and more generally, support from the military.<sup>85</sup> Cheney was in favor of the Surge strategy, and made an effort to support General Jack Keane's (the strategy's foremost advocate) ideas with President Bush.<sup>86</sup> Metz and Martin indicate that Cheney "likely played a major role," but would never have gone against any of the President's decisions regarding Iraq.<sup>87</sup>

Cheney's relationship with the new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, was much less close than that with Rumsfeld. Gates was generally praised for having improved civil-military relations after the problems between Rumsfeld and the senior officers during 2005 and 2006.<sup>88</sup> Gates had a good deal of respect for Cheney, as did Rumsfeld, but did not have the close working relationship developed over years. He claims that the torture issue and Guantanamo led Cheney to become more "isolated within the senior ranks of the administration," but that he was very calm, and not the "Darth Vader" of his reputation.<sup>89</sup> Gates does indicate, however, that he blocked Cheney's agenda for a military confrontation with Iran.<sup>90</sup> Without going into why, Gates makes an interesting comment at the end of his memoirs, saying that "By early 2007, Vice President Cheney was the outlier on the team, with Bush, Rice, Hadley [Steven Hadley, the National Security Advisor], and me in broad agreement on virtually all important issues."<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

Cheney's isolation and loss of influence after 2006 merits further research as more source material becomes available. It is probable that the departure of Rumsfeld as well as the continued impopularity after Iraq had a good deal to do with Cheney's decline, but the extent of that decline and its nature remains unclear.

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84 Woodward, *The War Within*: p. 331.

85 Woodward, *The War Within*: p. 356.

86 Cheney and Cheney: p. 450-451.

87 Metz and Martin, *Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Strategic Shift*: p. 26.

88 Owens: p. 68-69.

89 Gates, Robert M., *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (London: WH Allen, 2014): p. 98.

90 Gates: p. 98.

91 Gates: p. 584.

Cheney was the most powerful Vice President in American history. While he may not have been the leader of the country, he had substantial influence with Bush and over national security policy in general. He was able to bolster this power both through a powerful staff that created a new power structure in the White House and through his alliance with his one-time mentor Donald Rumsfeld. This association allowed the two men to dominate the policy-making process by marginalizing their less powerful colleagues on the Bush foreign policy team. Bush also appears to have given his approval to this arrangement, delegating powers to his sidekick that often made Cheney the number one power in foreign and defense policy.

Can Cheney's model be replicated? Gates told Joe Biden to follow Cheney's model as Obama's Vice President, and Biden certainly had the political experience and foreign policy experience to do so.<sup>92</sup> Biden is viewed often by the media as largely ineffectual, but a number of analytical articles about his relationship with Obama and his power in the administration indicate otherwise. Biden is taken more seriously than commonly believed.<sup>93</sup> Despite certain military officers' open dislike of Biden, he played an important role during the decision to surge more soldiers to Afghanistan in 2009.<sup>94</sup> When General Stanley McChrystal's staff publicly insulted Biden in a *Rolling Stone* article in 2010, Obama removed the general, who was the commander of US forces in Afghanistan.<sup>95</sup> Biden is clearly seen as less of a formidable power than Cheney, however. More research remains to be done on comparing the performance of Cheney and Biden to show how the Vice Presidency has evolved to become the most important sidekick of the President over the last fifteen years.

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92 Gates: p. 282-283.

93 Hirsh, Michael, "Joe Biden: The Most Influential Vice President in History?" *The Atlantic* 31 Dec. 2012, Viser, Matt, "Gaffes aside, Joe Biden a power in White House," *Boston Globe* 19 Jan. 2013, Osnos, Evan, "The Biden Agenda," *The New Yorker*, 28 Jul. 2014.

94 Woodward, Bob, *Obama's Wars* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

95 Wilson, Scott and Shear, Michael D., "Gen. McChrystal is dismissed as top US commander in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 24 Jun. 2011.

**Abstract**

Richard Cheney was the most powerful Vice President in American history. His influence was primarily concentrated in the arena of national security policy. This article examines how Cheney was able to marshal unprecedented influence in the context of both the greater increase in vice presidential power since 1945 and the decision-making structure of the Bush Administration. A largely unexplored reason for Cheney's influence was his close working relationship with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, which allowed the two men to dominate the White House policymaking team on Iraq and counterterrorism policy.

**Keywords**

United States Vice-President, George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, United States foreign policy, United States defense policy.

**Résumé**

Richard Cheney est le vice-président le plus puissant dans l'histoire américaine, et a exercé une emprise toute particulière sur la sécurité nationale. Cet article examine comment Cheney a pu prendre une telle influence, dans le contexte d'une évolution du pouvoir des vice-présidents depuis 1945 ainsi que de la structure décisionnelle de l'administration Bush. L'influence majeure de Cheney sur la politique américaine tient également à sa relation avec le secrétaire de Défense Donald Rumsfeld. Ce partenariat a permis aux deux hommes de dominer l'équipe de la Maison Blanche en pesant sur les décisions relatives à la guerre en Irak et à la guerre contre le terrorisme.

**Mots-clés**

Vice-Président des États-Unis, George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, politique étrangère des États-Unis, politique de défense des États-Unis.





# *A working class hero's sidekick is something to be: sidekicks and underlings in British social realist cinema (1956-2014)*<sup>1</sup>

Anne-Lise Marin-Lamellet

Because of its unusual, almost oxymoronic association of terms, the working class hero is a concept that took time to make sense and find a definitive label in the history of British cinema. From the moment it appeared on screen in the late 1950s, that type of hero has often if not always been represented with a sidekick.<sup>2</sup> Various genres or subgenres of films related to the mode of social realism have been favourable grounds for their occurrence. They show that the working class hero's sidekick is usually a lifelong friend (the "best mate"), someone met at school (or while playing truant), at work or in the army. Sometimes he is a relative. That is why British films show heroes and sidekicks of all generations. The typology elaborated from a corpus of around a hundred films over sixty years shows that the sidekick, building on a whole literary tradition, has performed several functions from the most trivial to the most essential ones. He can alternatively be an underling and a foil or an alter ego and the hero's other half. The major/minor dialectics which is at the core of this relationship generates tension in the binary hierarchy but also reveals that the constant interplay of the two modes can result in some form of interchangeability between the hero and his sidekick, especially in ultra-contemporary films.

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1 Although, for different reasons, some directors like Ken Loach disown the phrase and film critics increasingly question it, British social realism is here used for lack of a better word. It is to be understood as encompassing all the films which have somehow committed to the portrayal of working-class way of life since the British New Wave and as a mode of cinematic expression which is stylistically-diverse and generically-hybrid. For a detailed study of the evolution of that phrase and concept, see Lay Samantha, *British Social Realism from Documentary to Brit Grit*. London: Wallflower Press, 2002.

2 In *Sweet Sixteen*, one of the hero's friends is even nicknamed Sidekick.

## The sidekick as underling and foil

The sidekick can of course be a mere underling. As his screen-time sometimes shows, he is a secondary character and, as such, the working class hero's sidekick performs most of the traditional functions associated with that somewhat minor figure<sup>3</sup>. The sidekick is there to express admiration for the hero's deeds (car-racing in *Shopping*; dancing in *Billy Elliot*) or purple patches, like Cliff (*Look Back in Anger*),<sup>4</sup> Bert (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*) or Bernie (*Carry On at Your Convenience*) who act as an audience for Porter, Seaton and Spanner's monologues. He is a faithful and staunch partner for good and bad times (pub-going in *Looking for Eric*, *The Angels' Share*; nightclubbing<sup>5</sup> or staying in, looking for a job or stealing in *Looks and Smiles*, *For Queen and Country*, *Human Traffic*, *The Football Factory*, *Kidulthood*, *Somers Town*, *The Angels' Share*). With him, the hero shares memories (*Doghouse*) and family ceremonies (*Raining Stones*). The sidekick is the friend in need the hero can count on when the latter gets out of a Young Offenders' Institute or jail (*Comedown*, *Bullet Boy*, *1 Day*). He provides all kinds of services such as lending his flat when the hero wants to invite a girlfriend (*When Saturday Comes*, *Bullet Boy*).

His role is often to be the hero's confidant for the most intimate confessions (relationships in *Shifty*; homosexuality in *Beautiful Thing*, *Billy Elliot* and *RocknRolla*; impotence in *Human Traffic*; a girlfriend's unwanted pregnancy in *Kidulthood*; guilt over a dead acquaintance in *Better Things*, *Shifty*). He soothes his anger, sympathises in sad moments (*Room at the Top*, *Raining Stones*, *Better Things*, *Looking for Eric*<sup>6</sup>), cheers him up (*Look Back in Anger*) when the hero needs to nurse a broken heart (*Late Night Shopping*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Doghouse*) and he offers support when the hero shows his insecurities. The sidekick is always there to encourage the hero when the latter is deemed atypical of his class and rejected by his family (*Shifty*) or his neighbourhood (*Billy Elliot*). He also compensates for an absent parent or a dysfunctional family, alleviating the pain endured because of an abusive older brother (*Beautiful Thing*, *Purely Belter*, *Sweet Sixteen*, *Somers Town*, *Boy A*, *Ill Manors*)

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3 The phrase is here to be understood in its usual sense, i.e. a smaller, less serious or less important character due to his lower rank in the hierarchical structure.

4 Cliff also admires Porter's talent for jazz trumpeting and his ability to eat like an ogre. Moreover, he acts as a stand-in for Porter who hates his job as a sweet-seller and regularly leaves the market where he works.

5 Many friendships between the hero and his sidekick started over shared musical tastes whether they are in a band, DJs or ravers (*Wild West*, *Young Soul Rebels*, *Human Traffic*).

6 Meatballs, Eric's real sidekick, reads a lot of self-help guidebooks to try and understand his friend's antics. He organises sessions at home to get the hero over his nervous breakdown by asking him to emulate someone famous. Doing so, he contributes to the apparition of Eric's imaginary sidekick, Eric Cantona. He is also the one who organises and leads the punitive expedition against the gangster to get Eric and his sons out of trouble.

or a brutish father (*When Saturday Comes, Meantime*). He sometimes is the hero's only company when the latter is an isolated pensioner (*Harry Brown*). He is just someone the young hero likes to hang about with all day for lack of anything better to do, as shown by the recurrent shot of the two sitting on a swing or a seesaw (*Looks and Smiles, TwentyFourSeven, The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael, Summer Scars, Better Things, Somers Town*).<sup>7</sup> Together, they play videogames, enjoy car-rides and in the gloomiest cases just take drugs. The sidekick can nevertheless help the hero face all kinds of hardships and turn rather desperate situations into a lighter mood and pranks (*Raining Stones, Purely Belter, Sweet Sixteen, Somers Town, The Angels' Share*).

Maybe that is because another major function of his is that of comic relief. A couple of sidekicks can even be used in a subplot in the form of a running gag, especially to bring humour in genre films such as gangster or survival films (*Love, Honour and Obey, Wilderness, Attack the Block*). The hero likes his sidekick because he makes him laugh and acts as a sort of sparring partner. He can alternatively supplement the hero's lack of humour (*Meantime, Scum, Rage, Looking for Eric*) or enter a sort of double act with him (*Look Back in Anger, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, Billy Liar, Looks and Smiles, Raining Stones, Twin Town*). The hero and his sidekick often quip in concert. They have routine jokes and sets of impressions. In case of a duo, the roles can be divided. The sidekick can play the trashier pranks and have the cruder jokes, or suffer from the slapstick and physical comic elements in the story so that the hero maintains a certain level of good taste while still being funny (*Raining Stones, Trainspotting, The Angels' Share*). But the roles can be inverted between the funny man and the straight man. The sidekick can thus also be less outrageous than the hero and humour then derives from his impassive or shocked presence (*Withnail and I*). He sometimes has the funniest one-liners to contrast with the hero's more slapstick humour and can be endowed with a sense of irony as he often is the only one who can deflate the latter's ego and make fun of his pipe dreams (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Billy Liar, Sweet Sixteen*). He can play pranks on the hero just to have a laugh with the rest of the gang (*The Football Factory*).

As becomes rapidly apparent, the hero/sidekick interaction is not always clear cut as, unlike other more traditional heroes, the working class hero does not lack all the qualities that make up a normal, unexceptional man. The sidekick is therefore never completely crushed in that relationship and, most of the time, he takes the shape of the foil whose main role is to enhance the heroic status of a character that originally was not larger-than-life.

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7 *Shifty* also shows the hero and his sidekick on a playground but this is meant to emphasise their friendship dating back to childhood although they have not seen each other in four years.

The opposition between the hero and the sidekick first serves the physical beautification of the hero. The hero is literally magnified and even eroticised through the comparison made with his foil (Seaton vs Jack in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*). He is made to look taller when he mixes with what looks like vertically disabled acquaintances (*A Kind of Loving*). This device can sometimes be used with a comic effect, especially in the case when one of the two characters is black, like the giant American Elmo and small Liverpudlian Felix (*The 51<sup>st</sup> State*).<sup>8</sup> The presence of a frailer sidekick makes an unimposing hero more masculine and an imposing one even more so. The weaker partner is the one who needs protection either because he is effeminate (*When Saturday Comes*, *Billy Elliot*), mentally ill or disabled (*The Caretaker*, *Face*, *Some Voices*, *A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Dead Man's Shoes*, *Meantime*). In this case, the sidekick is also here to reinforce the humane aspect of a hero who would otherwise run the risk of being too brutish and rough. Conversely, when the hero is a negative figure, like a hooligan, a juvenile delinquent, or a gangster, the weaker sidekick or rather henchman in that case, is often here to reinforce the sense of awe in viewers, either because of the way he is treated or because of his disgust at the hero's shocking evil deeds, even when violence remains off-screen [*A Clockwork Orange*, *16 Years of Alcohol*, *Gangster n°1*, *Eden Lake*, *The Firm* (remake), *Cherry Tree Lane*]. It is quite rare for a sidekick to be more attractive or charismatic unless the hero is mocked for his shortcomings (racism in *Love Thy Neighbour*; cowardice in *Carry On at Your Convenience*; impotence in *The Football Factory*). The inversion can also be used to play with the assumptions and expectations of the audience (the debunking of the archetypal American hero in *Green Street Hooligans*) or when the hero is portrayed as a sort of intellectual. In that case, the sidekick is usually a rocker or a Jack-the-lad (*The Family Way*, *The Angry Silence*) to better emphasise the hero's sense of responsibility as a decent family man.

The opposition between the hero and the sidekick can also serve an intellectual purpose highlighting the hero's personality. The hero's brightness is all the more blatant if surrounded by apparently stupid or naïve sidekicks although he may not be an intellectual himself (*Carry On at Your Convenience*, *Made in Britain*, *Purely Belter*, *Four Lions*, *The Angels' Share*). A quiet or silent sidekick can make way for the hero's logorrhoea (*Look Back in Anger*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Cherry Tree Lane*). Conversely, a talkative sidekick makes up for a rather silent hero (*Rude Boy*, *Meantime*, *Love, Honour and Obey*, *Late Night Shopping*, *Harry Brown*, *Adulthood*, *Attack the Block*). The sidekick can reveal a hidden side of the hero's personality and he often softens the working class hero's grittiness

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8 *Divorcing Jack* also plays on the contrast between Northern Irish journalist Dan and American policeman Charles. Although they are relatively the same height, the difference in weight, demeanour and elocution speed is also used to create a comic effect.

(Porter's kinder side with Cliff in *Look Back in Anger*; Smith's youthful and funny side with Mike in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*). He can also reveal the hero's romantic side as they often go out on dates together but behave differently with girls: the sidekick often proves to be more uncouth and caddish to contrast with the hero's shy and gentlemanly manners (*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *Looks and Smiles*, *Late Night Shopping*, to a lesser extent *For Queen and Country*). When the hero and his sidekick are from different ethnic origins, the relationship can be used to reveal the hero's ambiguous stance and more or less open racism (*Love Thy Neighbour*, *Made in Britain*) although, most of the time, it rather reveals other characters' prejudice (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *For Queen and Country*, *Rage*) as the topic is never an issue between them (*A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Human Traffic*).

The main role of the sidekick, however, is to reveal the hero's beliefs and values that single him out from the rest of his class. The working class hero's ambition and aspiration to a better life are thus sometimes underlined by the presence of a colleague who is often moralising and diffident, like Lampton and Charles in *Room at the Top*. This opposition is later confirmed by their respective marriages. Lampton marries the boss's daughter while Charles marries one of the secretaries in the firm where they work. The same pattern is used in the world of juvenile delinquents. Pinball (*Sweet Sixteen*) and Chris (*Shifty*) act as the voice of reason trying to cool down their friends' dream of easy money at the price of an escalation in violence. Similarly, the cheekiness and social irreverence of the hero are often emphasised by the opposition with a more conventional and deferent sidekick who warns the hero of his impending nemesis due to his dissolute lifestyle and inability to comply: Porter and Cliff in *Look Back in Anger*; Seaton and Bert in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*; Fisher and Charlie in *Billy Liar*. The foil device is pushed to the extreme in Borstal or jail films. The rebelliousness of the hero never appears as strongly as when it is opposed to the conformism of a fellow inmate. In *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, Smith is in a sort of duel with Stacey, the other bad boy who still hopes to get in the favours of the director by obeying the rules. He is called the "governor's assistant" by Smith who wishes to keep his underdog status and whose determination wins him the support of other inmates. The same opposition is found in other Borstal films (*Scum*, *Made in Britain*, *Wilderness*, *Shopping*) and in youth films about specific subcultures in which the hero resists selling out whereas the sidekick often gives in to mainstream temptation (*Absolute Beginners*, *Young Soul Rebels*).

The various roles performed by the sidekick thus show how, even if he remains in an inferior position, he helps define the hero's identity as the latter needs him to express his sense of humour, his wit, his kindness as well as his rebelliousness and socially-fuelled anger. Yet the sidekick's presence is so vitally important that a desperate hero can conjure up an imaginary sidekick

if he feels he has no one to talk to (*Looking for Eric*). Going beyond the role of a mere assistant or foil, this close companion holds a strategic position. Although he may not be in the limelight, he has powers over the hero who cannot do anything without him. The bond uniting the hero and his sidekick often clearly turns into a symbiotic relationship.

### The working class hero and his sidekick: doubles and couples

The sidekick takes on the role of a close adviser. He provides an alternative point of view on a given situation and often is the only one who can make the hero see things in a different light whether the subject is personal or professional. For example, in films about strike, the hero/sidekick opposition can be used to explain the reasons that lead some to go on strike and others to break it. When the hero is a strike-breaker, the sidekick represents the mob despite his guilty conscience (*The Angry Silence*). When the hero is a striker, the strike-breaking sidekick becomes a tragic figure (*Brassed Off*, *Dockers*). Similarly, the sidekick is the only person allowed to tell the hero when he is crossing the line, like Cliff (*Look Back in Anger*) who can make Porter stop shouting, playing the trumpet in the middle of the night and gibing at his wife or her friend. In coming-of-age films, the sidekick can help the hero grow up when he has managed to get out of the estate and the violence of the underworld to make a better life for himself (*Shifty*, *Adulthood*). Alternatively, he can have a bad influence on the hero when he is the one who drags him into crime (*Bullet Boy*) although he is often quickly surpassed, as if just revealing the hero's fatal flaw (*The Great Ecstasy of Robert Carmichael*).<sup>9</sup> The sidekick thus sometimes acts as a sort of mentor. Eric Cantona (*Looking for Eric*) becomes Eric the suicidal postman's psychiatrist, coach and trainer. Thanks to hooligan Pete (*Green Street Hooligans*), Matt becomes "the Yank", the only American who earned respect from British hooligans because of his courage and his ability to fight.

Rising above his status, the sidekick can almost destabilise the usual balance of power. Not only contributing to define the hero's characteristics through pure comparison, he also helps elaborating his identity in a more complex way by introducing a dual dimension within the heroic figure as he sometimes turns into a doppelganger or evil twin. If most of the youths found in gangs are just meek followers of their more evil leaders and thus behave like underlings (*A Clockwork Orange*, *Beautiful People*, *New Year's Day*, *16 Years of Alcohol*, *Boy A*, *Harry Brown*), films usually present a twofold, Janus-like figure of leadership. Reminiscent of *Animal Farm* or *Lord of the Flies*, an amoral or reckless leader is

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9 Robert is gradually dragged into a world of drug and violence by a truant who acts as a bully, drug-dealer and thief. For each of these, the sidekick ends up being surpassed. After being initiated to pills, Robert becomes a heavy user and because of his initiative the plan for home invasion ends up in a bloodbath.



pitted against a more humane and redeemable sub-leader who finally tries to stop him (*Downtime*, *Eden Lake*, *Attack the Block*, *Comedown*, *Ill Manors*, *Bullet Boy*, *Bradford Riots*, *Adulthood*, *Shifty*). This device is partly used to better point out the psychological complexity of the hero by decomposing it into two separate characters as gang members are often both victims and criminals. In hooligan films, the leadership is also often twofold and stresses the borderline personality of the firm members. The “top boy” or “governor” is put on a par with the “nutter” who acts as an unofficial leader for the younger hooligans [*The Football Factory*, *Green Street Hooligans*, *The Firm* (remake)]. The sidekick is then used as a sort of inverted mirror to point out the evolution of the main character. War veterans generally work like couples of trusted friends as war or army days seal intense friendships. The sidekick has often saved the hero's life (the opposite is rarer) who therefore remains forever grateful, like Eddie and Tommy's father (*Goodbye Charlie Bright*), Fish and Reuben (*For Queen and Country*), Bill and Albert (*The Football Factory*), Miller and Danny (*The Veteran*). Their respective paths usually show what the hero's life might have been if unlucky, notably when the sidekick suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder. In other words, the sidekick embodies the mad soldier the hero could have become (see also *Looks and Smiles*). Whatever the genre of the film, the duality established between the hero and his sidekick usually achieves the same aim: the moral edification of the hero and/or the viewer. When the sidekick is the more extreme character, because of his –sometimes lethal– addictions or viciousness, he appears as unredeemable whereas the hero does not look so bad by comparison (*Small Faces*, *Downtime*, *Trainspotting*, *Boy A*, *Kidulthood*) and is even spurred to get a grip on his life (*Withnail and I*, *Human Traffic*, *Trainspotting*). When he is not as reckless as the hero, he survives the latter (*Shopping*, *The Firm*, *The Veteran*) or can act sanctimoniously (*Shifty*).

However, most of the time, when almost on an equal footing, the presence of the sidekick emphasises the latent homoerotic nature of his relationship with the hero as he becomes the latter's alter-ego. It goes without saying that the hero/sidekick couple is an overwhelmingly masculine trope. This may be accounted for by the fact that women were often side-lined in films and have tended to be depicted first as secondary characters around the male hero (mother, sister, girlfriend, wife) or as solitary figures (single mothers). The corpus shows that female groups are far from being prevalent in all the genres or subgenres studied although recently more and more films have tended to apply the same pattern when they focus on girl groups.<sup>10</sup> Another reason that could explain the prevalence of male heroes and sidekicks is the problem

10 *Smashing Time*, 1967, Desmond Davies; *Scrubbers*, 1983, Mai Zetterling; *Letter to Brezhnev*, 1985, Chris Bernard; *Rita*, *Sue and Bob Too*, 1987, Alan Clarke; *Bend it like Beckham*, 2002, Gurinder Chadha. Some films also tend to be more mixed including boy and girl gangs (*Kidulthood*, *1 Day*, *The Angels' Share*, *Comedown*).



of potential romantic overtones in case of a male/female duo as shown by *Shopping* and *Disco Pigs*. When one of the two members suddenly reveals their new feelings, they destabilise the close friendship. Of course, the male sidekick enables the hero to stay young and carefree whereas a woman almost always stands for maturity (*The Leather Boys*, *When Saturday Comes*, *Sweet Sixteen*, *Shaun of the Dead*). The cosy world offered by the sidekick is a refuge for a hero who refuses commitment and fatherhood as epitomised by the weekend for “lads only” to get away from intrusive wives in *Doghouse*. Yet, the relationship between the hero and his sidekick is much more profound than a mere regressive temptation and male bonding is widespread among youths, hooligans and gangsters. The opening sequence of *Goodbye Charlie Bright* introduces the main characters as they go streaking throughout their estate and Justin, Charlie’s best friend, is nicknamed “the wife” by the other members of their gang as he is so close to him. Homoeroticism is thus felt by all of them even though it is repressed.<sup>11</sup> Tension between homophobia and homoeroticism is constant among hooligans and gangsters as well. Real couples are not those officially registered but those born out of the special relationships developed between some of the firm members, such as John and Bob in *I.D.*, the three generations of hooligans in *The Football Factory* (Harris and Billy, Tommy and Rod, Zeberdee and Raff),<sup>12</sup> One Two and Handsome Bob in *RocknRolla*, Freddie Mays and the young gangster in *Gangster n°1*.

At first glance, the sidekick may seem much more attached to the hero than the opposite as he is the one who clearly shows signs of jealousy in this intimate relationship. A number of films thus depict what could be interpreted as crimes of passion committed by desperate sidekicks in sorts of lovers’ triangles. Pinball (*Sweet Sixteen*), Liam’s best friend, sees his symbolical couple jeopardised by the oedipal love Liam feels for his mother and the admiration he has for his boss, the local gangster. Pinball thinks he is being side-lined and accuses Liam of being a traitor because of his infidelities. He gets his revenge by stealing the car of Liam’s employer, destroying the window of his gym club, and burning the caravan Liam had bought in the hope of moving in there with his mother. Doing so, Pinball signs his death warrant as Liam’s employer wants him to sacrifice his best friend. Liam thus faces a dilemma and as he

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11 Even the producers saw that homoerotic subtext since they asked the director to include scenes between Charlie and the nurse, Blondie, so that the audience would not think of *Goodbye Charlie Bright* as a gay film. The explanation was given by the director in the DVD commentary (Metrodome Edition, 2004).

12 Besides the firm members, Bill and Albert, the grand-fathers who are not hooligans but are linked to this violent background due to their war veteran status, also develop the same kind of intense relationship. When Albert gives an order to Bill, the latter tells him he is “a nagging old woman” (17’47”). The expression shows both the hero’s misogyny and latent homosociality. Symbolically, soon after Albert’s funeral, Bill collapses in the street (1h07’10”) as if his status as a widower and unbearable grief were more linked to the loss of his best friend than his wife.

cannot bring himself to kill him, Pinball tries to commit suicide in front of his friend to make it easier for him. The way Liam tries to heal Pinball's face as he waits for the ambulance to come shows the highly passionate character of the bond uniting the hero and his sidekick (1h17'40"). The device of the lovers' triangle is similar in *Green Street Hooligan*, *The Firm* (remake) and *Gangster n°1* and each time ends tragically. However, the hero also shows signs of spite and possessiveness. Tommy (*The Football Factory*) feels threatened when Rod moves in with a lawyer he met during one of his trials. The hatred he feels for the woman, a combination of social contempt and misogyny, shows the passionate nature of his friendship. When they first meet, Tommy goes to the toilet as he is so disgusted by the new couple's obvious complicity (46'45"). His jealousy is even spotted by his grand-father as he grumbles on his own (52'45"). Conversely, the beaming smile with which he welcomes his friend back just before the final fight shows how proud he is that his friend chose him over his partner. He kisses him as soon as he arrives (1h11'45"). The male bond thus testifies to the evolution of the sidekick from the position of a double to that of a partner in a couple as the hero simply cannot live without him. He often becomes crazy or desperate if the latter disappears.

The sidekick is so important in the hero's life that he can be on an equal footing with the hero's wife, hence the number of films showing a ménage-à-trois between the hero, his sidekick and his wife (*The Family Way*, *Look Back in Anger*, *The Leather Boys*, *Somers Town*). The words used by the hero to express his affection for his sidekick are always marked by ambiguity. For example, Ezra's memories (*The Family Way*) show that his intimacy with Billy went far beyond the one he has with his wife and the words chosen imply that in his mind Ezra was in a way already married with Billy. "It takes a lifetime to make a proper friend. What was I to do? Desert him? Just because of a few words spoken in front of an altar?" (1h16'35"). The hero's acts and gestures are similarly ambiguous. Porter's games with Cliff (*Look Back in Anger*) look like flirting.<sup>13</sup> The way he wakes him up by stroking his hair as he sits on the bed (6'20", 1h23') shows a relationship that goes beyond mere male friendship or what some film critics today call bromance. The hero's impotence or at least absence of desire for his wife while the hero and his sidekick's relationship is homoerotically connoted also reinforces the interpretation of the male bond as a true love affair. From the moment Reggie meets Pete (*The Leather Boys*), he stops being attracted to his wife, without having any explanation for it but the timing of events leaves the viewer without a doubt (27'30"-34'55"). Each time, the relationship is said to be "odd and queer", evidently playing on words and some wives accuse their husbands of being homosexual, such as

13 Rebellato Dan, *1956 and All That: the Making of Modern British Drama*. London: Routledge, 1999, p. 222.

Dot (*The Leather Boys*) when she learns that Reggie and Pete live together and sees all the pictures of the couple in their bedroom (1h10'35").<sup>14</sup>

If the hero faces an ultimatum imposed by his wife,<sup>15</sup> he always chooses his sidekick as the latter is irreplaceable, which is not the case of the wife as illustrated by the scene following Alison's departure (*Look Back in Anger*). It is absolutely identical to the opening one except that the woman who is ironing while the husband is reading the Sunday papers has changed (1h08'55"). Women thus seem reduced to the status of a charlady while real feelings of companionship are kept for the sidekick as implied by Porter's offhand tone when he comments on Alison's quick replacement with her friend Helena. "Today's meal is always different from yesterday's and the last woman isn't the same as the one before" (1h14'38"). Conversely, he is seriously affected by Cliff's sudden departure and the following kiss and promise of sexual intercourse between Porter and Helena (1h25") seems to come from the disappointment caused by the true soul-mate/lover's desertion. The sidekick can also symbolically take on the role of the wife, like Pete (*The Leather Boys*) after another domestic row which sees Reggie leave Dot. In his company, the hero sleeps in a double bed, one of his obsessions, for the first time. Pete reveals some effeminate gestures, especially in the way he holds his cigarette, and his imitations are reminiscent of Dot's, just as his peroxided hair (48'20"-51").<sup>16</sup> He looks after Reggie like a housewife asking him if he brushed his teeth and suggests running a hot bath (1h05"). The hero's preference for his sidekick rather than his wife is found in hooligan firms and youth gangs as well (*The Firm, I.D.*).

In fact, the hero's affection for his sidekick is so important that the latter has the power to act as a peer whose assent is required for the hero to be set free and start a real relationship with a woman. The assent often comes in the form of self-sacrifice. Only Billy (*The Family Way*) and Cliff (*Look Back in Anger*)'s definitive departures allow Ezra's and Porter's couples to really start or start over. Charlie (*Goodbye Charlie Bright*) cannot commit to any girl or leave his estate until "his wife", Justin, decides to shoot his enemy and goes to jail, thus leaving the field clear for the hero. Extraordinary circumstances are sometimes required. It is only because his friend and flatmate Ed has

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14 Pete later reveals his homosexuality to Reggie who cannot assume his real sexual orientation and goes back to his wife. However, the open ending (the hero leaving alone on the road after yet another domestic row) reinforces the strength of the homosocial bond as it seems the hero cannot live with or without his sidekick.

15 Karen (*Looks and Smiles*) is well aware of Alan's strategy and gives Mick an ultimatum (their relationship or the army). In her opinion, Alan is "trying to split [them] up" by inciting his best friend to join with him (1h37"). When Liz (*Shaun of the Dead*) leaves Shaun because she is tired of his dithering, Ed assures him that he does not need her to be happy since they are together and he makes him laugh at the pub (17'45").

16 In the scene where they meet, Pete immediately takes Dot's place in the frame when he first appears on screen.

become a zombie that Shaun (*Shaun of the Dead*), now on his own almost like a widower, can move in with Liz, his long-time partner.<sup>17</sup> Yet he regularly goes back to the garden shed to meet Ed secretly and play videogames with him, just like in the good old days, while “You’re my best friend” by Queen blares on the soundtrack (1h31’54”). The hero’s relationship to his sidekick thus outlives marriage and non-life/death.

### **A new perspective on the working class hero/sidekick duo: “No more heroes (no more)”? (*The Strangers*, 1977)**

If in the end most of the films representing a group whether they be workers, hooligans, youth gangs, inmates or war veterans still give prominence to a heroic figure, in recent years the sidekick seems to have become increasingly instrumental in the hero’s success through his contribution and sometimes sacrifice, so much so that they almost become interchangeable. The sidekick has always been ready to stand his ground by the hero’s side in case of a fight (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, *Looks and Smiles*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *For Queen and Country*, *Kidulthood*) or to escape the police (*Sweet Sixteen*, *Ill Manors*) and, even though he might hesitate, he can never let the hero down, whatever the consequences (*Shifty*, *The Angels’ Share*). With the rise in knife and gun culture or under exceptional circumstances, he even dies for the hero more and more frequently, thus showing his loyalty and providing emotional power to the film (*For Queen and Country*, *1 Day*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Attack the Block*, *Comedown*). But more surprisingly, the hero can also make extreme choices out of loyalty for his sidekick. He can botch up a job interview or a trial (*Looks and Smiles*, *When Saturday Comes*), go to jail (*Bradford Riots*) or decide to become a vigilante to avenge his death (*Harry Brown*). And sometimes he too dies for him (*For Queen and Country*, *Bullet Boy*, *Outlaw*). The hero is therefore no longer protected by his leading position. Some recent films are somewhat ambiguous concerning the hierarchy of the main characters as they seem to show an inversion of status. For example, the end of *Goodbye Charlie Bright* shows the sidekick accessing the status of local hero because he shot his best mate’s arch enemy while the hero escapes but without glory. *Shifty* supposedly focuses on the title-role yet the film opens on his sidekick who stays with him in practically every scene and eventually saves him by convincing him to leave the estate. Hillier (*Outlaw*) finds in Bryant the leader he needs for the vigilante group he wishes to create. Yet, he is the one who puts up plans and the only one not to “bottle out” as he says. That is why they end up fighting each other as leadership is questioned.

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the question of the real and official couple is also present in this film as, initially, Shaun has yet to introduce Liz to his mother whereas Ed has been part of the family for years.

Recent films also seem to hesitate between focusing on a real hero and presenting multiple sidekicks. Some older films have consciously tried to represent groups of workers like *The Kitchen*, *Carry On at Your Convenience*<sup>18</sup> and *The Black Stuff*. Others have an ensemble-cast look, although one or two characters are often put to the fore in the end (*Brassed Off*, *The Navigators*, *Trainspotting*, *The Full Monty*, *Dockers*, *Late Night Shopping*, *The Firm* (remake), *The Angels' Share*).<sup>19</sup> Recent youth, lad and horror films, however, tend to present teams of sidekicks rather than a hero and his underlings (*Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, *Snatch*, *Kidulthood*, *Adulthood*, *Wilderness*, *Summer Scars*, *Outlaw*, *Better Things*, *RocknRolla*, *Four Lions*, *Doghouse*, *Attack the Block*, *Tower Block*, *Comedown*, *Cockneys vs Zombies*, *Ill Manors*). The ensemble-cast aspect shows through the structure and editing which looks like a collection of juxtaposed vignettes following various characters that are given the same prominence in the story.<sup>20</sup> For example, *Kidulthood* opens with a scene set in the school playground and ends with a house party, which allows the introduction and final reunion of the six main characters.<sup>21</sup> All of them are presented in duos or trios and the film depicts 24 hours of their lives in parallel sequences. In all these films, some characters die prematurely and others finally come to the fore without predictability and some sidekicks prove to be stronger or braver than the supposed leader.<sup>22</sup> Genre films obviously depend on certain conventions which

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18 John Hill, who complains about the predominance of private dramas over a collective representation in British films dealing with the working class, writes: "While it may appear a little unusual, [...] the plots of the Carry On favour a multiplication of leading characters. [...] Such an attenuation of classic narrativity and emphasis upon more than one character structures, in turn, a different attitude towards the collectivity". Hill John, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963*. London: BFI, 1986, p. 142-143.

19 The rather loose aspect of some films that suddenly decide to follow various characters for a while does not mean there is no hero in the story, though titles can be misleading. For example, *Bronco Bullfrog* refers to a character who is not the protagonist.

20 In "fake" group films, the same device is sometimes used but the hero disrupts the precarious balance by being the narrator in voice-over, which evidently gives him prominence over his friends (*Trainspotting*, *Human Traffic*, *Goodbye Charlie Bright*, *South West 9*). Guy Ritchie might be considered as a sort of exception to the rule as he is famous for films that present multiple characters and subplots (no fewer than 10 main characters in the credits of *RocknRolla* all introduced in the first 10 minutes of the film), often using a voice-over/character-narrator that nevertheless does not necessarily unbalance the film. Also, *Ill Manors* starts with a rapping voice-over which is dropped after the first scene.

21 There are many more important characters but these get a name and a face shown in the end credits. The film seems like a harbinger of series like *Skins* (2007-2013) that also focus on multiple characters in the same school.

22 For example, see what Jacques Morice says about *Ill Manors*: "Moult protagonistes s'y croisent, chacun tentant de survivre, hors des limites de la légalité : un Black efflanqué et hâbleur qui sort de taule, une prostituée junkie, un jeune dealeur qui passe une nuit au poste... Selon un scénario imprévisible, certains personnages tombent assez vite sous les balles. Un jeune délinquant plutôt effacé passe au premier plan quand il se retrouve avec un bébé abandonné sur les bras...". Morice Jacques, "Ill Manors." *Télérama*, 3 April 2013. Web. 23 December 2014. In

can account for the rise of multiple sidekicks. The survival horror type that has been successful in Britain recently in its hoodie horror version needs a relatively large cast to better get rid of them as the story unfolds. Whether the characters are friends as in *Doghouse* or *Comedown* or a team of “forced” sidekicks who do not necessarily like one another, like the residents in *Tower Block*, they usually have to learn to get over their initial enmity and show solidarity to escape their attacker. The foil device is here multiplied as each member embodies a type (the brainy one, the crazy one, the voice of reason, etc.) and the “hero” is just the final boy (*Wilderness*) if there are not several survivors (*Doghouse*, *Tower Block*, *Comedown*). Yet, the same trend is noticed in more social realist films. Six or seven main characters are introduced in an egalitarian way through short consecutive or intercut scenes, sometimes ending with their names written on the screen. Musical and rap interludes inserted into the narrative are used to present various crews of characters/rappers (*1 Day*) or provide a backstory for each new character (*Ill Manors*)<sup>23</sup> as split-screens or reels enable the film to move smoothly from one character to another, insisting on the simultaneity of the scenes (*Kidulthood*). The ensemble-cast aspect of these films also shows through the artwork used to promote them. Most of them present two characters (*Meantime*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Withnail and I*, *The Krays*, *Twin Town*, *Purely Belter*, *The 51<sup>st</sup> State*, *Bullet Boy*, *Somers Town*, *Shifty*) or even a group of teenagers or young adults rather than focusing on an individual as used to be the case in the films of the New Wave for example even though, interestingly, some of these films actually have a hero (*Trainspotting*, *Small Faces*, *The Full Monty*, *The Navigators*, *Goodbye Charlie Bright*, *The Football Factory*, *Green Street Hooligans*, *Kidulthood*, *Adulthood*, *This is England*, *Outlaw*, *Doghouse*, *Attack the Block*, *The Firm* (remake), *1 Day*, *Cockneys vs Zombies*, *The Angels' Share*).

The straightforward portrayal of a working class hero clearly dominating his sidekicks thus seems to have fallen out of fashion, favour or may be more and more difficult to imagine. *Attack the Block* is a good illustration of that trend and could be interpreted as the birth of a new form of heroism dependent on sidekicks. The gang of youths facing an alien invasion thus shows mutual support throughout the film as they try to save each other's lives. One of their key expressions (like hooligans and war veterans incidentally) is “I got your back” as they move like a platoon through the corridors of their tower block to protect one another. All members team up to find a solution to get

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fact, the film seems to rely on three leading couples (Aaron/Ed, Kirby/Chris, Marcel/Jake) and flits from one to the other in an unexpected way. When two characters meet, the film loses one to follow another. Moreover, other couples are added (like Michelle/Katya). The final sequence uses the classic intercut device to conclude on all the characters seen on the estate during the film.

23 In this film, each character is thus introduced with a rap song bearing their names and a specific visual style more or less matching their degree of respectability or clandestine secrecy (cut-up montage, slow-motion, grainy super-8 or mobile phone kind of footage).



rid of the aliens and of course some die on the way. Moses, the rather discrete gang leader, finally becomes more prominent in the final sequence but it is a reluctant move based on self-sacrifice. Once his decision is made to lead the aliens to his booby-trapped flat, he is heroised by the way he is shot: a close up on his stern face (1h07"), a shot on his huge back (1h13'30"), the use of slow-motion combined with frequent zooms (1h13'40") and a track shot from toe to head (1h36'35") reveal his growing moral and physical leadership as the viewer, just like his sidekicks, is led to look up to him in a literal sense. Yet his part in the final operation succeeds only because his sidekicks create a diversion and, as the epilogue shows, he is still a nobody for the outside world i.e. outside the estate. He personally does not think of himself as a hero and, as he is about to be arrested by the police for whom he is just another antisocial youth, he needs all the support of his sidekick to eulogise his deed and start spreading his legend to get the crowd to chant his name (see also *Comedown* and *Ill Manors*). The rise of the sidekicks could then be interpreted as a sort of revenge of the underdogs. At a time when the media and some politicians wonder about the existence of a working class and youths on British estates are considered the new public enemy number one, these youths who sometimes call themselves underclass embody a new form of collective heroism resisting marginalisation. So far, there has been no such thing as an underclass hero but the rise in multiple sidekick youth films could be a sign of the difficulty to associate the new British proletarian figures with the concept of hero as was the case earlier in history with the working class hero whom these youths are descended from. Yet, to paraphrase David Bowie, they can be heroes, albeit just for one day (*Heroes*, 1977). They give a new meaning to the well-known slogan "united we stand, divided we fall" that was once used by other working class heroes. The way they stand side by side and roam the streets that scares so many people actually betrays their own fear, which leads them to join gangs to defend themselves (*Comedown*) and their estate as they feel stigmatised wherever they go (shops in *Kidulthood*; fast-food restaurant in *1 Day*). Beyond revealing the increasing interdependence of the hero and his sidekick, the multiple sidekick film could thus be interpreted as a response to the demonization of "Chav Britain"<sup>24</sup> in an era of social transition.

At a time of political disenchantment and ruthless individualism, the rise of the sidekick concomitant with the loss of faith in the figure of the hero as an exceptional being may also signal a wish to return to a form of collective spirit as was the case in British WW2 films or Ealing productions<sup>25</sup> with films trying to promote a unified, collective effort to re-establish a sort of utopian

24 Jones Owen, *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso, 2011.

25 According to John Hill, these films projected "a sense of collectivity on the screen, by loosening narrative form in favour of a more episodic structure and multiplying the number of dramatically central characters". Hill John, *op. cit.*, p. 138.



and egalitarian community mingling generations, classes and races (*Attack the Block*, *Cockneys vs Zombies*). Remarkably, British films, unlike American adaptations of DC Marvel comic superheroes, rarely portray an older hero and a teenage sidekick. When they do, the older man is always seen as a source of threat. Not only does he jeopardise the teenage sidekicks' other friendship but he also disrupts the egalitarian principle at the heart of the working class hero/sidekick relationship because he holds a clear physical and mental ascendancy over his sidekick (*A Room for Romeo Brass*, *Sweet Sixteen*, *This is England*, *The Firm* (remake)).<sup>26</sup> The grown man always reveals to be a psychotic personality who fascinates the teenager but ultimately proves a dead-end and order is restored as the youth goes back to his former teenage friend (if not, it ends in tragedy as in *Sweet Sixteen*).<sup>27</sup> Attempts at creating multi-character stories in which the working class hero is just the "first among equals" (*primus inter pares*) could thus also paradoxically be considered as the true triumph of British cinema in its endeavour to represent the working class collectively, the failure to do so being a recurrent criticism of film analysts.<sup>28</sup>

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### **Abstract**

This essay focuses on the vital importance of the presence of the sidekick for the working class hero in contemporary British films. Far from being a mere underling or foil, the sidekick often reveals to be more of a double or a partner in the couple he makes with the hero. The evolution of the sidekick from the position of second to that of an alter ego seems to be confirmed by recent developments in British films which increasingly present multi-character stories. In what may be a sign of the times, the hero is then just the "first among equals" in a group of multiple sidekicks.

### **Keywords**

Sidekicks, british film, british social realism.

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26 The American portrayal of that very unbalanced relationship was actually criticised as early as 1954 by psychoanalysts such as Fredric Wertham in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. He pointed out the sexual subtext of the relationship ridden with Freudian issues. Latent paedophilia evidently comes to mind.

27 Maybe the genre also impacts the outcome of the relationship as all these films belong to the coming-of-age type but *Sweet Sixteen* also has a gangster element which makes it go beyond mere youthful indiscretions.

28 That would be a way to discard "an ideology of individualism cemented into narrative form". Hill John, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

**Résumé**

La présence du *sidekick* aux côtés du *working class hero* se révèle d'une importance capitale dans le cinéma britannique contemporain. Loin de n'être qu'un second couteau ou un simple faire-valoir, le *sidekick* est souvent un double ou un compagnon au sein du couple qu'il forme avec le héros ouvrier. Ce passage d'un statut subalterne à celui d'un alter ego semble se confirmer dans les films britanniques les plus récents qui présentent de plus en plus des intrigues à personnages multiples, se rapprochant du film choral. Possible signe des temps, le héros n'est alors que *primus inter pares*, un *sidekick* parmi d'autres.

**Mots-clés**

Faire-valoir, cinéma britannique, réalisme social britannique.

The background is a solid purple color with a subtle, embossed texture of a world map. The map is rendered in a slightly darker shade of purple, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The map shows the continents and major landmasses, though the details are softened by the texture.

# Rencontre



# Un braquage dans l'Histoire : la prise en otage de Sparte et d'Athènes par les universités allemandes et françaises

Patrice Brun

Nous savons tous que l'héritage des Grecs, tant au point de vue de la philosophie, de l'histoire, du théâtre, des arts, a depuis longtemps été revendiqué avec insistance par la culture occidentale. Dans ce cadre de pensée qui naît à la Renaissance et s'épanouit au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle avec la naissance des universités modernes, l'histoire grecque a longtemps servi de référence naturelle à des systèmes politiques ou philosophiques, et d'explication commode à une forme ou une autre de permanence des vertus et des tares morales de la nature humaine<sup>1</sup>. Et, dans cette optique, l'*histoire grecque* et singulièrement l'histoire aux temps classiques sous toutes ses formes et toutes ses sources ont donc été une base de réflexion majeure.

Mais une question méthodologique se pose alors : comment une période aussi éloignée que nous dans le temps, l'Antiquité, a-t-elle pu être utilisée pour nourrir des débats contemporains avec des arguments parfois très contradictoires ? Cela fait plusieurs décennies qu'ont été mises en exergue toutes les différences qui nous séparent des Grecs de l'Antiquité et la nécessité d'une mise à distance entre *eux* et *nous*<sup>2</sup>. Dans quelle mesure passe-t-on d'un *actualisme* raisonné, d'un *comparatisme* profitable à une « actualisation sauvage », pour reprendre les mots de Pierre Vidal-Naquet<sup>3</sup>, un *anachronisme* consciemment ou inconsciemment perverti ? La question n'est pas simple à résoudre.

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- 1 On consultera avec profit les actes d'un colloque édités par S. Caucanas, R. Cazals, P. Payen, *Retrouver, imaginer, utiliser l'Antiquité*, Toulouse, 2001, où sont étudiés nombre d'exemples d'utilisation et de détournement de l'histoire antique.
  - 2 Cf. entre autres M.I. Finley, *Democracy ancient and modern*, Londres, 1973 (trad. fr. *Démocratie antique et moderne*, Paris, 1976) ; P. Veyne, *L'inventaire des différences*, Paris, 1976 ; P. Vidal-Naquet, *Les Grecs, les historiens, la démocratie*, Paris, 2000 ; C. Ginzburg, *Occhiaci di legno. Nove riflessioni sulla distanza*, Milan, 1998 (trad. fr. *À distance. Neuf essais sur le point de vue en histoire*, Paris, 2001). Sur l'œuvre de ce dernier, cf. les contributions à elle consacrée par la revue *Essais*, sous le titre *L'étrangement. Retour sur un thème de Carlo Ginzburg*, S. Landi (éd.), hors série, 2013.
  - 3 P. Vidal-Naquet, *Les Grecs, les historiens, la démocratie*, p. 25.

Jacques Rancière et Nicole Loraux ont posé les jalons moins d'une (ré)habilitation de l'anachronisme que de son utilisation consciente et contrôlée pour permettre la connexion d'une ligne de temporalité à une autre<sup>4</sup>. Ainsi que l'exprime brutalement cette dernière, être historien, c'est assumer le risque de l'anachronisme, c'est presque le susciter en allant « du présent vers le passé avec des questions du présent pour revenir vers le présent, lesté de ce que l'on a compris du passé »<sup>5</sup>.

C'est dans ce sens qu'il faut comprendre deux ouvrages, l'un oublié, l'autre bien connu, dont la conception et la rédaction eurent pour terreau la défaite de la France en 1940 et la naissance de la *Révolution Nationale* qui s'en suivit<sup>6</sup>. Les deux historiens, parvenus alors à leur maturité, s'interrogent ouvertement sur les rapprochements qu'ils voient entre des situations qu'ils jugent similaires – ou plutôt parallèles entre l'Athènes de 403 et la France de 1940.

Mais c'est tout autre chose dont il est question lorsque nous parlons de la manière dont les universitaires allemands ont utilisé la Sparte antique ou leurs homologues français l'Athènes de Démosthène. Comme on va le voir, c'est *en conscience*, par les mots employés, et plus encore par les buts poursuivis, qu'ils ont fait de une histoire contemporaine de combat sous le couvert d'une étude de la période antique. Ils ont fait de l'histoire un champ de bataille intellectuel au service de leur pays, je devrais dire, de leur patrie. C'est en cela qu'il est possible de parler d'une *prise en otage de l'Antiquité*, presque d'un *braquage*. Pour illustrer cette manière de faire de l'histoire, je vais utiliser deux exemples du traitement que l'on a fait subir – le mot n'est pas trop fort – aux deux cités les plus célèbres, Athènes et Sparte. Pour des motifs différents, l'université allemande pour Sparte, l'université française pour Athènes, ont utilisé, interprété, déformé à dessein l'histoire de ces cités et de leurs personnages les plus importants. Je vais donc convier ici non pas à une destruction, mais à une déconstruction des mythes de la Sparte de Lycurgue et de l'Athènes de Démosthène et il s'agira alors de comprendre la part de comparatisme et d'anachronisme qui existe dans ces prises de position. Sans négliger le fait que, rien, dans ces approches, n'est laissé au hasard : comme l'indique fort bien l'historien Pascal Payen, « dans la démarche historique, l'analogie n'est pas une donnée ou une évidence ; elle est une construction, une démarche de l'intellect, pour toujours mieux ajuster les rapports entre le présent et le passé<sup>7</sup> ».

4 J. Rancière, « Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien », *L'Inactuel*, 6, 1996, p. 53-68 ; N. Loraux, « Éloge de l'anachronisme en histoire », *Le Genre humain*, 27, 1993, p. 23-39.

5 N. Loraux, art. cit., p. 26.

6 P. Jouguet, *Révolution dans la défaite. Études athéniennes*, Le Caire, 1942 ; J. Isaac, *Les oligarques. Essai d'histoire partielle*, Paris, 1946 (réédité en 1942).

7 J.G. Droysen, *Histoire de l'Hellénisme* (trad. fr.), Paris, 2005, *Introduction*, p. 54.

## L'Antiquité grecque et le nazisme

Entendons-nous dès l'abord : tout historien du nazisme sait bien que ce régime n'est pas né subitement dans quelque arrière-boutique d'une brasserie munichoise, mais que son fonds idéologique racial puise ses origines dans un passé plus profond. Car il existe un *Griechenmythos*, que le non-germanique est tenu de traduire par *le mythe grec allemand* auquel un jeune historien, Anthony Andurand, a consacré un ouvrage<sup>8</sup> : la pensée allemande, depuis la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, a *vénééré* le passé grec, ce qui a abouti à une forme d'identification de l'Allemagne et de la Grèce<sup>9</sup>. Et, ainsi que le remarquait déjà Marc Bloch, à force de vénérer le passé, on est presque naturellement conduit à l'inventer<sup>10</sup>. Si le mythe est plus complexe qu'on ne pourrait le penser, car il a passablement évolué entre Goethe et Hitler, je vais en développer un axe essentiel, sans doute le plus connu, violemment anti-athénien et foncièrement favorable à Sparte et à la Macédoine, qui semble naître peu après les guerres napoléoniennes.

Dès lors, l'impression dominante est que l'émergence du sentiment national après les guerres napoléoniennes et la disparition de la symbolique du *Reich* millénaire, a suscité ses propres justifications historiques<sup>11</sup>. En 1824, un universitaire allemand, Karl Müller, publiait un livre intitulé *Die Doriern*, « Les Doriens ». Ce livre est à la base de l'idée qui a longtemps prévalu selon laquelle il existait dans le monde grec deux « races », les Doriens, dont Sparte puis la Macédoine, étaient les plus beaux fleurons, et les Ioniens, qu'Athènes aurait représentés. Les Doriens, pour Karl Müller, sont des envahisseurs qui viennent du Nord et cette invasion serait la version historique de ce que le mythe désignait sous le nom de « retour des Héraclides », des descendants d'Héraclès, qui auraient mis fin aux royaumes mycéniens vers les XII<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles avant notre ère<sup>12</sup>. Cette théorie a depuis été largement mise à mal sinon à néant par l'archéologie qui montre que les ruptures attendues d'une invasion violente sont invisibles à l'œil de l'archéologue, qui voit davantage à présent les continuités historiques et matérielles. Mais qu'importe ici.

On l'aura compris, les Doriens sont, pour Karl Müller, des Aryens – je rappelle que nous sommes ici un siècle avant la tentative de coup d'État d'Adolf Hitler, un siècle avant *Mein Kampf*. Dans son sillage, c'est toute une littérature à prétention historique ou anthropologique qui reprend cette

8 A. Andurand, *Le mythe grec allemand. Histoire d'une affinité élective*, Rennes, 2013.

9 A. Andurand, *Le mythe grec allemand*, p. 130.

10 M. Bloch, *Apologie pour l'Histoire ou le métier d'historien*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition, Paris, 1993, p. 130. Cette réflexion vaut aussi pour les universitaires français face à un autre mythe, celui de l'Athènes de Démosthène (cf. *infra*).

11 Pour reprendre l'idée de P. Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, 1971, p. 59-60.

12 Thucydide, I, 12, 3 ; Pausanias, IV, 3, 3.



thèse, surtout en Allemagne mais pas uniquement, puisqu'elle est utilisée par Gobineau en France, par exemple. D'éminents professeurs de grec et d'histoire des universités allemandes durant tout le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle et jusqu'en 1945 ont abondé dans cette voie, pro-spartiate et pro-macédonienne, rejetant dans la décadence le reste du monde grec.

Et c'est toute la cité d'Athènes, volontiers cosmopolite, marchande, démocratique, qui est en fait décriée par la science allemande, à l'exception peut-être du temps de Périclès, car il était difficile de nier le Parthénon et l'ensemble des grands monuments de l'Acropole, modèle inavoué de la *Welthauptstadt Germania* dont Albert Speer avait conçu pour Hitler le projet<sup>13</sup> : mais l'Athènes de Périclès, aux yeux des défenseurs de Sparte n'était pas une démocratie. C'était une monarchie déguisée, avec un chef bien identifié. Les universitaires allemands pouvaient respirer et un grand, un immense savant comme Ulrich Wilamowitz, dans un discours officiel en 1877 prend bien soin de distinguer la démocratie athénienne qu'il exècre, du *Reich* athénien – ce sont ses mots –, vraie tentative d'union de la Grèce par une cité impérialiste<sup>14</sup>. Helmut Berve, dont on verra un peu plus loin l'importance qui fut la sienne dans l'image de Sparte, rédigea une biographie de Périclès au tout début de la guerre, dans laquelle il fait de l'Athénien un parfait Aryen, *Führer* de la cité et dans laquelle il cultive un ensemble d'analogies artificielles destinées à rapprocher les figures de Périclès et d'Adolf Hitler<sup>15</sup>.

Mais à cette exception péricléenne près, c'est bien Sparte qui joue un rôle central dans la manière allemande de penser la Grèce, Sparte, considérée à partir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle comme une balise, un repère pour une Allemagne en voie d'unification<sup>16</sup>. Personne ne s'étonnera que les Spartiates soient représentés dans l'imaginaire allemand – et pas seulement nazi – comme de beaux Grecs blonds avec les yeux bleus et qu'ils ressemblent furieusement à une esthétique proche des *Dieux du Stade* de Leni Riefensthal<sup>17</sup>. Mais, à coup sûr, l'épanouissement de cette vision raciale et raciste date du Troisième Reich. Par idéologie ou par intérêt académique (il faut pouvoir obtenir et conserver

13 L.O. Larsson, *Albert Speer : le plan de Berlin (1937-1943)*, Bruxelles, 1983 (2<sup>e</sup> éd.).

14 J. Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l'Antiquité*, Paris, 2008 [2012], p. 183.

15 H. Berve, *Perikles*, Leipzig, 1940, p. 21-25. Sur l'assimilation entre les deux hommes, voir V. Azoulay, *Périclès. La démocratie athénienne à l'épreuve du grand homme*, Paris, 2010, p. 226-229.

16 Outre le livre d'A. Andurand évoqué plus haut (note 8), les rapports entre Sparte et la pensée européenne dans sa globalité ont été analysés par E. Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought*, Oxford, 1969 (rééd. 1991). Sparte et l'Allemagne, du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'au nazisme, font l'objet du chapitre 19.

17 J. Bimbenet, *Leni Riefensthal. La cinéaste d'Hitler*, Paris, 2015, p. 142-145. La traduction française du film, « Olympie. La fête de la beauté », oblitère le titre original en allemand, *Olympia—Das Fest der Schönheit*. Ce titre dit bien tout le lien que Leni Riefensthal faisait avec l'Antiquité.

sa place), nombre d'universitaires nourris au lait de l'humanisme hellénique, ont alors sombré dans des théories raciales invraisemblables et assisté voire participé alors à une nazification consciente des lettres classiques, de l'histoire et de la philosophie antiques, sans que beaucoup de voix se fassent entendre contre ce dévoiement. Peu à peu, ce Nord imprécis a pris les contours d'une Germanie encore dans les limbes. La sophistique est ainsi pour le psychiatre et philosophe Kurt Hildenbrandt, auteur d'un ouvrage joliment intitulé *Staat und Rasse*<sup>18</sup>, « totalement étrangère à la pensée nordique ». Quant au stoïcisme « d'origine sémite » qui dénie l'appartenance à une cité pour privilégier la notion de « citoyen du monde », il est la preuve d'une lourde décadence, amenant, je cite la traduction du passage d'un livre d'histoire générale, « le métissage des Grecs avec des peuples étrangers à la race nordique ». Quant au pauvre Socrate, annonciateur de ce stoïcisme il est pour l'idéologue nazi Alfred Rosenberg, le « social-démocrate internationaliste de son temps » qui a sapé le fondement élitiste de l'inégalitarisme grec<sup>19</sup>.

Et Sparte est alors, comme en contrepoint de cette Athènes détestée, au cœur de cette invention de l'histoire. À la décharge des Allemands du temps, il faut dire que la naissance du « mythe spartiate » date de l'Antiquité, et que, tant Thucydide que Xénophon et surtout Plutarque y mirent leur patte. Le dernier surtout, dans sa pseudo-biographie du législateur Lycurgue, dont il disait par ailleurs que rien n'était certain dans sa vie, décrivit une Sparte largement fantasmée, idéalisée, composée de citoyens ayant suivi une éducation des plus rudes, durs avec leurs hilotes mais obéissants envers leurs magistrats, prêts à mourir plutôt que de reculer d'un pouce de terrain et ce, dès leur plus jeune âge, comme le rapporte Plutarque dans l'historiette bien connue du jeune garçon dévoré par un renard<sup>20</sup>. Dans ses *Apophtegmes laconiens*, il a d'autre part nourri le mythe du « laconisme », manière de parler peu mais avec beaucoup de sens, venu de Laconie, la région autour de Sparte, qui a accredité l'image de Spartiates, taiseux, durs au mal, obéissants aux lois. Toutes choses développées dès l'Antiquité et qui, opposées à des Athéniens plus bavards et volontiers contestataires, firent de Sparte, dès l'avènement du Deuxième Reich qui ne vantait pas la démocratie parlementaire comme un modèle indépassable. On voit donc que ce mythe de Sparte avait des racines anciennes. Si l'on ajoute que les Spartiates parvinrent, à l'image de Guillaume I<sup>er</sup> et de Bismarck pour l'Allemagne, à unifier le Péloponnèse dorien et même, à la fin de la guerre du Péloponnèse, l'ensemble du monde égéen sous sa coupe, on comprend comment et pourquoi le jeune Empire allemand a trouvé dans Sparte un exemple à suivre. Enfin, Sparte doit son aura dans la science germa-

18 K. Hildenbrandt, *Staat und Rasse. Drei Vorträge*, Breslau, 1928.

19 Sur tout cela, voir J. Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l'Antiquité*, p. 306-307 ; p. 313-317.

20 Plutarque, *Vie de Lycurgue*, 18, 1.

nique à ce racisme aryaniste né sous la plume de Müller et qui trouve des adeptes voyant en Sparte l'État « indo-germain » (*Indogermanen*, « indo-européen » en français) idéal, inégalitaire, eugéniste, militariste, expansionniste. On le comprend aisément, la voie était bien tracée pour le nazisme qui, loin là encore de créer une idéologie de toutes pièces, n'eut dans l'affaire qu'à cueillir des fruits déjà bien mûrs.

Presque tous les historiens ont adhéré à ces théories délirantes. L'exemple de Helmut Berve, bien connu des spécialistes de la Grèce antique est particulièrement édifiant<sup>21</sup>. Né en 1896, issu de la grande formation allemande des études classiques et connaissant à merveille le latin et le grec, il publia en 1920, à l'âge de 24 ans seulement un mémoire sobrement intitulé *Sparta*, dans lequel, la plupart des poncifs « indo-européens » sur Sparte étaient déjà en place. Mais en 1937, adhérent depuis 1933 au NSDAP, nommé dans la foulée doyen de la faculté de Leipzig et désireux d'y demeurer et d'y faire carrière, il publie une seconde édition de sa monographie, beaucoup plus agressive et surtout tout à fait en phase avec le nouveau régime. Il y insiste sur l'éducation spartiate, cette *agôgè* très largement fantasmée<sup>22</sup>, qu'il était aisé, une fois déformée, de rapprocher des *Hitlerjugend*<sup>23</sup>. Cette éducation spartiate en classes d'âges, eugéniste, violente, formant à l'obéissance et à l'esprit de corps, était pour les nazis un champ presque inespéré.

Helmut Berve n'était pourtant pas un fanatique, mais un opportuniste qui accepta sans sourciller les thèses du III<sup>e</sup> Reich pour poursuivre au mieux sa carrière : après une éclipse de quelques années à peine (il retrouva sa place à l'université en 1949), il est mort en 1979, entouré d'honneurs, après avoir poursuivi une vie universitaire des plus classiques sinon édifiante dans laquelle il gomma après 1945 toute allusion à ces écrits sulfureux. Il voulut oublier comment, en 1938, il prit la direction d'une revue vénérable, les *Neue Jahrbücher für Antike*, pour la transformer, 113 ans après sa naissance, en *Neue Jahrbücher für Antike und Deutsche Bildung*, dans laquelle la philologie n'occupe plus qu'une place dérisoire, remplacée par l'omniprésence des questions raciales<sup>24</sup>. On voit, à ce changement de nom que l'éducation, la formation d'un homme nouveau devait tirer de l'Antiquité grecque et de Sparte tout particulièrement des exemples destinés à montrer cette filiation entre

21 Sur le parcours de cet historien, S. Rebenich, « Alte Geschichte in Demokratie und Diktatur. Der Fall Helmut Berve », *Chiron*, 31, 2001, p. 457-496.

22 Sur l'éducation spartiate dans son ensemble, cf. J. Ducat, *Spartan Education*, Cardiff, 2006.

23 La position de H. Berve est à comparer avec le jugement qu'en donne P. Roussel dans un livre qui lui répond, *Sparta*, Paris, 1939, p. 160. Très hostile à Sparte, P. Roussel, sans doute pour railler les institutions spartiates, se plaît à parler de leur « caractère primitif » et à rappeler certaines données ethnographiques rapprochant le système militaire de Sparte à celui des Zoulous (cf. J. Sevry, *Chaka, empereur des Zoulous : Histoire, mythes et légendes*, Paris, 1991). Je ne suis pas certain qu'il s'agisse là d'un compliment.

24 In J. Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l'Antiquité*, p. 190.

Sparte et l'Allemagne nouvelle, entre Léonidas et Hitler en quelque sorte était naturelle. Et bien entendu, la guerre était au centre de ce rapprochement. La guerre, fleuron de Sparte. Les citoyens étaient, selon la légende, uniquement destinés à la guerre. Et cette légende, si j'en juge un film récent comme *300* de Zack Snyder<sup>25</sup>, perdure ou si je rappelle ces deux vers de Georges Brassens dans *La guerre de 14-18* :

*Je sais que les guerriers de Sparte  
Plantaient pas leurs épées dans l'eau...*

Non qu'elle soit inventée de toutes pièces : Léonidas, dont je parlais plus haut, est bien mort aux Thermopyles après avoir résisté longtemps à une armée très supérieure en nombre. La phalange spartiate était redoutée et demeura invaincue jusqu'à la célèbre bataille de Leuctres en 371. Mais si l'armée de Sparte était fameuse, il ne faudrait pas oublier que *toutes les cités grecques* étaient modelées sur le principe premier de la guerre et de la défense du territoire. Les auteurs antiques ont largement vanté, pour des raisons souvent idéologiques, les qualités du soldat de Sparte. Mais on trouvait leur équivalent dans toutes les cités grecques.

Or, la bataille des Thermopyles est utilisée par l'idéologie nazie pour glorifier en quelque sorte la défaite de Stalingrad : comme les troupes spartiates face à l'avancée des Perses, l'armée allemande se serait sacrifiée pour empêcher l'ennemi soviétique d'envahir l'Allemagne. On ne s'étonnera donc pas que, en point d'orgue de cette maltraitance de l'Histoire, un manuel à destination des écoles intitulé « Sparta, der Lebenskampf einer nordischen Herrenschicht », « Sparte : la lutte pour la vie d'une élite nordique » (tout est dans le titre), paru en 1940, soit réédité en 1943 avec une préface d'Hermann Goering reprenant ce parallélisme fallacieux<sup>26</sup>...

Vous l'aurez compris, malgré tout le salmigondis universitaire allemand, les Spartiates n'étaient pas un peuple nordique ; ils n'étaient pas franchement blonds avec des yeux bleus, ne ressemblaient guère aux héros taillés dans le marbre par Arno Brekker, mais qu'importait finalement aux adeptes du grand Reich ! L'essentiel était de donner à l'Allemagne naissante des ancêtres intellectuels mieux présentables que des Germains peu ou prou vêtus de peaux de bêtes et de faire de ces derniers le ferment originel de cette Grèce blanche et blonde dont une branche de la famille avait un jour quitté les plaines du nord de l'Europe. Et, pour le Troisième Reich, l'occasion de trouver en un passé que l'on tordait avec allégresse, des traditions ancestrales qu'il fallait retrouver.

25 On se souvient moins d'un film de 1961, *The 300 Spartans* (en français *La Bataille des Thermopyles*), de Rudolph Maté, où les caractères des femmes et des hommes de Sparte, taillés dans le roc, définissent le Spartiate idéal, puisant chez Plutarque nombre de répliques définitives et anachroniques.

26 In J. Chapoutot, *Le nazisme et l'Antiquité*, p. 317-318 ; p. 558-561.

Car il ne s'agissait pas ici de promouvoir un comparatisme historique fécond. À l'image de celui qu'un historien, Henri Jeanmaire, promut dans sa thèse, *Couroi et Courètes*<sup>27</sup>, qui lui permit d'étudier les particularités de l'éducation et des rites d'initiation spartiates en les analysant au miroir de ce qui pouvait se pratiquer dans certaines sociétés africaines<sup>28</sup>.

Le mensonge, la volonté de tordre ce que l'on pouvait savoir de la réalité historique, dans le cas des nazis, étaient manifestes et l'anachronisme, qui nous apparaît au grand jour, était tout à fait nié. Tout au contraire, l'histoire officielle nazie insistait sur les similitudes, quitte bien entendu à les inventer de toutes pièces. Cette réécriture du passé ne leurrait sans doute pas même ceux qui le portaient. Mais, pour l'historien d'aujourd'hui, démasquer la tromperie ne suffit pas : il convient d'en découvrir les raisons<sup>29</sup> et, dans le cas de Sparte et de l'Allemagne nazie, les raisons raciales apparaissent au grand jour.

### Athènes, Démosthène et l'Université française

Face aux positions violemment anti-athéniennes et favorables à Sparte et à la Macédoine, *la défense de la République française et de la démocratie* fut organisée par l'Université depuis la place forte de la Sorbonne. Et, de ce point de vue, on peut dire que les historiens français ont tenu haut et fier le drapeau de la cause athénienne jusqu'à ce que l'on puisse parler, peut-être avec quelque exagération, d'une position « française » comme, pour l'autre camp, d'une position « germanique ». Athènes, sa littérature immense, ses monuments inégalables, ses statues d'une perfection absolue, ses hommes d'État prestigieux, de Thémistocle à Démosthène en passant par Périclès ou Alcibiade, est devenue le phare de la pensée, brillant haut et portant loin depuis l'université de la Sorbonne. Et pour cela, je vais prendre l'exemple de Démosthène, sans doute par paresse puisque j'ai publié il y a quelques mois de cela une biographie de l'orateur. C'est donc à partir de l'opposition entre Athènes et la Macédoine au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle que nous allons réfléchir.

On dit souvent – et non sans raison – que la guerre de 1870, la création de l'Empire allemand, en décidant l'unification politique des peuples germaniques sous la bannière prussienne, avait mis en exergue du côté des historiens allemands la Macédoine et son roi, Philippe II, le père d'Alexandre, déclenchant une riposte des historiens français, déniaient au Macédonien le statut de Grec et trouvant en Démosthène un modèle de résistance.

27 H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes. Essai sur l'éducation spartiate et sur les rites d'adolescence dans l'Antiquité hellénique*, Lille, 1939.

28 H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et courètes*, p. 156 : « Le choix d'exemples africains se recommande particulièrement lorsqu'il s'agit d'éclairer le passé éloigné ou la préhistoire des sociétés méditerranéennes ».

29 M. Bloch, *Apologie*, p. 129.

Pourtant, le ministre de l'Instruction Publique de Napoléon III, Victor Duruy, avait, dès 1861, dans son *Histoire grecque*, affirmé les bases déjà solides d'un soutien déclaré à l'orateur athénien. Mais c'est bien la guerre de 1870, la défaite des armées françaises et la perte de l'Alsace-Moselle qui a déclenché une violente riposte de l'historiographie française. En novembre 1870, en plein siège de Paris, paraissait dans la *Revue des Deux Mondes*, traditionnellement peu versée dans l'histoire ancienne, un article concernant la Macédoine de Philippe II au titre évocateur « Une Prusse dans l'Antiquité »<sup>30</sup> et mettant au cœur du conflit franco-allemand la lutte entre la Macédoine et Athènes qui, sur le plan historique, dit plus sur la France que sur le monde antique. D'un point de vue plus profond et moins immédiat, c'est Gustave Glotz (1862-1935) qui est indiscutablement le phare de la réflexion pro-démosthénienne en France. Pour comprendre son œuvre, il faut savoir que Glotz est né à Haguenau et qu'il quitta avec sa famille l'Alsace en 1871 pour rejoindre la « France de l'Intérieur ». Le souvenir de la défaite face aux troupes impériales prussiennes fut à coup sûr un élément constitutif de sa personnalité et de ses analyses historiques. Si ses premiers travaux sur la solidarité de la famille en Grèce, sur le travail, ressortissent surtout à la sociologie historique, ce sont deux œuvres fondamentales qui marquèrent longtemps – et qui marquent encore – les études démosthénienne, *La cité grecque*, parue en 1928, et les tomes trois et quatre de l'*Histoire grecque* (1936 et 1938), deux œuvres posthumes. Dans ces ouvrages et notamment dans les deux derniers, se dessine la figure d'un Démosthène chez qui l'on ne décèle aucune faiblesse : excellence rhétorique, cohérence politique, noblesse des idées. Même partisan en 346 de la paix avec Philippe, il reste « au fond du cœur un adversaire irréconciliable de Philippe » et s'il se résout à la paix, il le fait « avec le sang-froid de l'homme d'État obligé de courber la tête sous une nécessité inéluctable » ; s'il veut l'unité des Grecs, il « espérait y arriver par une évolution conforme au génie grec et en vue de sauver la liberté » ; enfin, dans l'affaire d'Harpale qui détermina sa chute politique, affaire sordide de détournement d'une partie des sommes apportées par le trésorier d'Alexandre, « nul ne le crut vraiment coupable de vénalité » et Démosthène ne se rendit finalement coupable que d'un « prélèvement non autorisé » (*sic*). Enfin, la défaite finale n'est en rien à mettre au compte de la politique de Démosthène, mais du *dèmos* affaibli par « l'affaïssement des caractères, la disparition du patriotisme et la politique du moindre effort » dont le peuple se rendit coupable<sup>31</sup>. Glotz, mort un an avant l'arrivée au pouvoir du Front Populaire, n'aurait pas été un franc partisan des congés payés.

30 A. Maury, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, nov. 1870, p. 405-428. Soulignons que cette identification était parfaitement assumée du côté allemand – on devrait dire du côté prussien – dès 1870 : A. Andurand, *Le mythe grec allemand*, p. 194-197.

31 Ses qualités d'orateur, *Histoire grecque*, III, p. 251-252 ; homme d'État, toujours adversaire de Philippe : p. 292, 299 ; option panhellénique : p. 377 ; l'affaire d'Harpale : *Histoire grecque*, IV, p. 216.

À l'inverse, les adversaires de Démosthène ne trouvent jamais grâce à ses yeux : Gustave Glotz stigmatise « les cantilènes endormantes d'Isocrate » [qui], « après s'être égosillé pendant cinquante ans, finit en Chantecler. Il meurt convaincu qu'il a fait lever le soleil ». Eschine est étrillé : acteur de troisième ordre, orateur quelconque, il « n'a pas l'étoffe d'un homme d'État » et auprès de lui, « on se sent vite en présence d'une intelligence et d'une âme médiocres ». Philippe de Macédoine n'agit que par corruption, sa diplomatie est « cauteleuse », ses ambassadeurs adoptent un « ton papelard ». Les alliés de Philippe sont « asservis au tyran ». Toutes ces citations reprennent en fait mot pour mot, sans aucun recul, les diatribes et anathèmes de Démosthène. Ce manichéisme fut, avec quelques nuances plus ou moins excessives, celui de la quasi-totalité de l'Université française dans l'entre-deux-guerres mais encore bien après, à de rares exceptions près.

Paul Cloché qui, à bien des égards fut le continuateur de la pensée de Gustave Glotz dans la manière de penser la Grèce et Athènes, suivit la même voie dans trois ouvrages importants<sup>32</sup>. Démosthène possède ainsi « un très vif souci de la grandeur et de la sécurité nationales » ; ses accusateurs dans l'affaire d'Harpale ont été « incapables d'apporter une démonstration directe et rigoureuse de la culpabilité de leur ennemi ». Le comportement d'Eschine est vilipendé et, à propos de l'ambassade de 346 qui devait aboutir à la paix de Philocratès, Paul Cloché se sent autorisé à demander : « que valent ces explications d'Eschine en face des allégations si précises de Démosthène » ? Il est d'ailleurs d'une « vanité débordante » et s'il n'est pas forcément corrompu, « il a agi avec une légèreté puérile, indigne d'un homme d'État et singulièrement périlleuse »<sup>33</sup>. Sans poursuivre de trop fastidieuses énumérations, on pourrait encore citer dans cette lignée contemporaine Jean Luccioni, Georges Mathieu, Jean Hatzfeld ou Gaston Colin, ce dernier avouant de façon naïve et touchante rechercher à tout prix l'innocence de Démosthène dans « l'affaire d'Harpale »<sup>34</sup>. Il y a certes des nuances dans les propos des uns et des autres. Mais la « ligne éditoriale » générale ne souffre guère de ces quelques remarques et verse souvent dans une lourde exagération, y compris dans l'étude de son talent oratoire, qu'il serait oiseux et infructueux de rapporter en détail<sup>35</sup>. Tous ont en commun une méthode historique consistant à lire l'histoire grecque des années 355-322 en suivant la

32 *La politique étrangère d'Athènes*, Paris, 1934 ; *Démosthènes et la fin de la démocratie athénienne*, Paris, 1937 (2<sup>e</sup> éd. 1957) ; *Philippe de Macédoine : un fondateur d'empire*, Saint-Étienne, 1955.

33 La grandeur : *Démosthènes*, p. 67 ; l'affaire d'Harpale : p. 287 ; les allégations d'Eschine : p. 114 ; sa vanité : p. 127.

34 G. Cousin, *ibid.*, p. 228 : « S'ensuit-il que nous soyons tenus de considérer Démosthène comme tombé, sur la fin de sa vie comme tombé, sur la fin de sa vie, par amour du lucre, au rang d'un Démade ou d'un Aristogiton ? J'en conviens, cette pensée me serait pénible ; j'ai cherché, je cherche encore le moyen d'y échapper ».

35 Un seul exemple, celui de P. Orsini, éditeur des *Plaidoyers politiques* de Démosthène dans la CUF (t. 1, p. LX) à propos des trois premiers discours de l'orateur : « cette richesse de moyens, mi-étudiés, mi-instinctifs confine, dès le début, au génie ».



chronologie des discours de Démosthène, source essentielle certes, mais très rarement critiquée ou peu mise en concurrence avec des sources rhétoriques adverses ou avec des inscriptions, pourtant nombreuses à avoir été conservées.

Mais ce que Gustave Glotz et ses épigones défendent, au travers de Démosthène, c'est évidemment la démocratie, la République Française, face à l'Empire allemand, aisément reconnaissable derrière le voile transparent qui recouvre le visage de Philippe de Macédoine. Le passage cité plus haut, accusant les Athéniens du temps d'être responsables de « l'affaïssement des caractères, [de] la disparition du patriotisme et [de] la politique du moindre effort » ressemble ainsi trait pour trait à des leitmotiv des années 30 en France. Et Démosthène apparaît comme celui qui avertit ses concitoyens de la menace, nouveau Clemenceau en quelque sorte, Clemenceau qui publia peu avant sa mort, en 1926, une rapide biographie de l'orateur dans laquelle il n'est pas difficile de retrouver les traces de son combat politique<sup>36</sup>.

« En face », de l'autre côté du Rhin, la vision est tout autre comme bien l'on pense : pour Ulrich Kahrstedt, dont la carrière scientifique s'étendit sur plus de 50 années (1910-1962) dans un essai sur la politique extérieure des cités grecques, Démosthène n'est rien d'autre qu'un agent stipendié du roi de Perse, désireux d'empêcher à tout prix l'invasion de ses terres par les Macédoniens<sup>37</sup>. À peu près tous les épisodes de la vie politique de Démosthène, tous les mouvements de troupes athéniennes seraient, selon lui, dictés par cette obsession – laquelle semble être surtout celle de son auteur, lequel ne cache d'ailleurs pas un aspect racial à sa réflexion lorsque, non sans mépris, il parle d'une alliance de fait entre les Athéniens et les « Asiates » (*Asiaten*), terme dont on relèvera aisément le mépris qu'il comporte. Nous ne sommes là qu'en 1910. Et plus généralement, le principe même démocratique est mis en cause par Engelbert Drerup, qui, dans un ouvrage au titre évocateur et publié en pleine Première Guerre Mondiale (*Aus einer Advokatenrepublik* « À propos d'une République d'avocats »), qualifié par lui-même de « livre de guerre » (*Kriegsbuch*), défend en 1916 la thèse d'un Démosthène, tout empli de « fanatisme politique » prêt à tous les moyens pour abattre la Macédoine et pour cela vendu aux intérêts perses, en y ajoutant des réflexions morales hostiles à l'orateur qu'il estimait plein de bassesse, égoïste, sans idéal. Il honnit par la même occasion les principes démocratiques des échanges rhétoriques athéniens (et, par la même occasion, les parlementaires britanniques et français) et vante au contraire les mérites du « militarisme » macédonien (et allemand) en mettant en balance de manière forcée, je traduis, « un souverain qui a converti le monde à la civilisation d'Homère et un parlementaire démocratico-républicain aux vues étroites et égoïstes »<sup>38</sup>.

36 G. Clemenceau, *Démosthène*, Paris, 1926.

37 U. Kahrstedt, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden fünften und des vierten Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1910.

38 E. Drerup, *Aus einer Advokatenrepublik*, Paderborn, 1916, p. 148.

Sont-ce les guerres franco-allemandes qui sont seules à l'origine de ces oppositions intellectuelles très fortes ? Il ne faudrait pas donner une image trop caricaturale et trop « nationale » à cette opposition qui se résumerait à un heurt entre une Allemagne portée à aduler Philippe et une France canonisant Démosthène. En réalité, cette dichotomie dans l'analyse est tout autant idéologique que nationale même si, on en conviendra, entre 1870 et 1939, celle-ci recoupe assez bien les frontières que les Vosges ou le Rhin séparent. Mais la question se pose pour nous en ces termes : où est le « vrai » Démosthène dans ces propos croisés à ce point déformés par l'esprit du temps, si tant est qu'il soit possible de le mettre au jour ?

Sans vouloir ici découvrir la Sparte authentique ni le véritable Démosthène, on doit se poser la question centrale de mon intervention : pourquoi ce lien entre Histoire grecque et histoire contemporaine<sup>39</sup> ? Pourquoi l'Histoire grecque a-t-elle à ce point attisé les convoitises des historiens et des idéologies ? Pourquoi Sparte a-t-elle été utilisée à ce point ? Pourquoi Démosthène et, plus généralement Athènes et ses institutions ont-ils été biaisés par des réflexions très contemporaines ? Et pourquoi ai-je donc donné en titre de cette conférence celui, un brin provocateur, de « braquage » ? C'est sur ce point que je voudrais à présent insister en essayant de comparer la démocratie antique et la démocratie moderne. Car, il faut bien le dire, si Sparte est aujourd'hui l'objet d'études scientifiques apaisées, les errements idéologiques du III<sup>e</sup> Reich l'ont condamnée à ne plus être un modèle.

Sparte et Démosthène. Victimes tous les deux d'un hold-up de leur réalité historique par la postérité. Mais plus généralement, on se rend compte, au fil de l'analyse comparée des textes antiques et des représentations contemporaines, que c'est la Grèce antique, dans sa globalité qui a été annexée par la postérité occidentale. On l'a déjà vu, avec le *mythe grec allemand*, mais l'affaire est plus générale : en 1964, un écrivain français, Thierry Maulnier, qui s'était illustré entre 1932 et 1944 par sa participation à des revues fascisantes et qui termina sa vie comme membre de l'Académie Française, publia un livre de réflexions, *Cette Grèce où nous sommes nés*, dont le titre seul indique l'orientation : nos racines sont moins judéo-chrétiennes que gréco-romaines, et plus grecques que romaines. Et il puise dans l'art, la littérature sous toutes ses formes, du théâtre à l'histoire en passant par la rhétorique, le théâtre et la philosophie de quoi alimenter l'obsession antisémite de ses jeunes années. La Grèce méritait-elle cette nouvelle prise en otage ? Un ouvrage récent, *Le mythe de la Grèce blanche*, signé d'un archéologue, Philippe Jockey, a démonté le fil de cette pensée intrusive à partir de l'exemple artistique : quand on voit la blancheur du Parthénon, de la Vénus de Milo, de la Victoire de Samothrace

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39 Le parcours de Pierre Vidal-Naquet, historien de l'histoire immédiate (*L'affaire Audin*, Paris, 1958) et de l'antiquité grecque symbolise ce rapprochement.

et d'autres merveilles de l'art grec taillés dans le marbre immaculé de Paros ou du Pentélique, on se plaît à imaginer des sculptures d'un albe éclatant de lumière. Cette idée du « blanc absolu » n'est évidemment pas neutre et elle nourrit des fantasmes raciaux moins avoués, mais tout aussi prégnants que ceux qui prévalaient il y a moins d'un siècle. Sauf que... Sauf que les études chimiques les plus récentes montrent que toutes, TOUTES les sculptures, TOUS les temples, en premier lieu le Parthénon, étaient d'une polychromie éclatante, les sculptures, surtout les plus fameuses étant de surcroît dorées à la feuille. Il n'y a pas de Grèce blanche, pas davantage qu'il n'y avait de Spartiate blond ni de Démosthène seul contre tous. Mais que reste-t-il alors de la Grèce antique ? Si le mythe s'effondre, la réalité subsiste, au travers de ce que nous pouvons savoir de la démocratie et j'en terminerai par là, dans une forme de comparaison raisonnée entre le système démocratique antique et le nôtre.

### **Démocratie antique et démocratie moderne**

Lorsque je parle de démocratie moderne, je veux évidemment parler des démocraties d'aujourd'hui dites occidentales et laisserai de côté tant les « démocraties populaires » de l'Europe de l'Est et de son avatar actuel, la si pittoresque République Populaire Démocratique de Corée, que la « démocratie dirigée » chère au général Pinochet. C'est-à-dire que je parle des démocraties que l'on appelle « représentatives » ou « parlementaires », qui désignent sans tricherie organisée des hommes ou des femmes pour représenter l'ensemble de la population civique du pays, population évidemment incapable de prétendre à une forme ou une autre de « démocratie directe ». Et c'est là le premier point que je voudrais développer en attaquant le sujet par rapport à des expériences personnelles.

Il est toujours aisé, lorsque l'on est historien, de décerner bons et mauvais points aux personnages du passé que l'on étudie, d'affirmer qu'ils auraient dû faire ceci et cela ; facile aussi – et je viens de le faire ici – de critiquer les prédécesseurs qui ont tenté de définir ce qu'était Sparte ou d'affiner le portrait de Démosthène. Mais ce n'est pas parce que l'on se croit averti du piège que l'on n'y tombe pas soi-même. Helmut Berve ou Gustave Glotz ont été victimes en grande partie de la période dans laquelle ils ont vécu, de l'atmosphère intellectuelle et politique qui agitait leurs pays respectifs. Qu'aurais-je fait, qu'aurions nous fait en leurs lieux et temps ? Lorsque je me retourne sur moi-même, je ne peux que m'interroger : je n'avais pas quinze ans en mai 68 et toute mon adolescence a baigné dans un débat d'idées tournant autour des figures intellectuelles de Raymond Aron et de Jean-Paul Sartre et des questions autour du sens et du contenu à donner au mot démocratie. Questions qui amenaient à peser les qualités et défauts respectifs de la démocratie directe, de celle des soviets ou de la démocratie représentative. Bien sûr que j'en ai été « victime »

et que des séquelles de ces débats hantent, *volens nolens*, encore mon esprit ! Et d'autre part, je suis issu d'un milieu familial pour qui le grec était une terre totalement inconnue et le latin limité à quelques formules magiques prononcées par le prêtre. Personne ne m'a nourri au lait des textes anciens : si j'ai appris le latin au collège comme tout le monde ou presque le faisait alors, je n'ai commencé à apprendre le grec qu'à l'université, dans l'équivalent de la L3 à présent. C'est dire que je n'ai abordé les textes grecs que bardé d'un esprit critique bien plus avancé que si je n'avais débuté cet enseignement sept ou huit ans avant. Aucun de mes enseignants ne m'a jamais parlé de la beauté de la langue, de la fluidité du style de Démosthène et c'est sans doute cela qui fait que je suis plutôt critique vis-à-vis du personnage historique de Démosthène, parce que je me suis éduqué au grec avec la passion de l'historien du politique bien plus qu'avec celle, tout aussi noble d'ailleurs, du linguiste.

Mais, pour ce qui me concerne, cela va plus loin encore. En tant que Président d'université durant la dernière grande émotion universitaire en 2009, j'ai vécu de très près ces expériences de « démocratie directe » ou prétendues telles que sont les assemblées générales. Présent à toutes, j'ai pris la parole quand je le jugeais nécessaire, mais j'ai surtout observé avec certes un œil de Président, et tout autant avec celui de l'historien de la Grèce ancienne que je suis ou essaie d'être. Et je me disais que, au total, ces assemblées qui offraient en principe *l'isègoria*, l'égalité de la parole à tous – encore qu'il est difficile d'imaginer que trois ou quatre mille étudiants s'expriment successivement – devaient assez ressembler à ce qui se passait à l'assemblée du peuple si l'on en croit les témoignages qui nous restent. Ces assemblées générales duraient toute la journée ou presque et c'étaient toujours les mêmes qui prenaient la parole, affirmant avec autorité parler au nom de tous ou plus exactement pour l'aile marchante de la petite société étudiante. C'est que s'exprimer devant une foule compacte de plusieurs milliers de personnes nécessite un entraînement que des militants formés à la rude école de « l'agit-prop » ont plus de capacité à suivre, à l'image des hommes tels Démosthène, formés à la pratique de la rhétorique par des maîtres grassement payés. Aussi bien, la « démocratie directe » est-elle loin de fournir l'image d'une égalité autre que de façade.

Et c'est souvent le reproche qui a été fait à la démocratie athénienne : une égalité qui n'en était pas une. Ce reproche date de l'Antiquité elle-même, mais elle se situait sur un plan différent, parce que les philosophes qui ont critiqué la démocratie, soit dans ses excès comme Aristote, soit dans sa structure même comme Platon, avaient du mal à accepter que des citoyens sans éducation – ou plus exactement sans l'éducation philosophique à laquelle ils destinaient les hautes sphères de la société – et sans fortune pussent diriger la cité du seul fait de leur nombre par rapport aux « nobles », aux « bien-nés » comme on disait plutôt à l'époque (*eugeneis*). Aujourd'hui, les critiques que des historiens, surtout américains et de conviction *démocrate*, au sens que l'on donne à ce mot aux États-Unis, portent sur la démocratie sont d'un autre type.

Bien entendu, la question de l'esclavage, de la place des femmes, de la non-intégration pour ainsi dire définitive des étrangers, pèse d'un poids très lourd, mais ce sont des thèmes si visibles et connus depuis si longtemps qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'y insister, sauf pour signaler que certains défenseurs à outrance de la démocratie athénienne imaginaient que l'esclavage était, au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, en voie de disparition à Athènes et que seule la défaite face aux Macédoniens a empêché cette libération grandiose. De fait, il est inutile et à coup sûr anachronique d'affirmer en se drapant dans sa dignité que la démocratie athénienne n'en était pas une puisque les femmes n'avaient aucun pouvoir et que l'esclavage était très important. C'est oublier qu'en France, les femmes n'ont accédé au droit de vote qu'en 1946 et les femmes mariées au droit d'ouvrir un compte bancaire à leur nom en 1975 seulement. C'est oublier que la première démocratie moderne, celle des États-Unis, s'accommoda fort bien de la traite jusqu'en 1820 et de l'esclavage lui-même jusqu'à la fin de la guerre de Sécession. Hors sujet, donc.

Mais en réalité, les critiques les plus marquées sont aujourd'hui liées au phénomène de l'impérialisme athénien. Il fallut attendre les années soixante pour que, la décolonisation aidant, certains historiens perçoivent l'impérialisme athénien sur les alliés de la Ligue de Délos à l'aune de la colonisation occidentale en Afrique. Tant que les sociétés occidentales étaient persuadées de la légitimité de la colonisation, l'impérialisme athénien ne posait pas de problème d'ordre éthique. Mais avec le phénomène de décolonisation et surtout avec les guerres coloniales et post-coloniales, la situation a changé. C'est avant tout aux États-Unis, très fortement marqués par la guerre du Viet-Nam que le phénomène a pris le plus d'ampleur. Je m'arrêterai sur deux historiens de l'Antiquité.

Le premier s'appelle Lawrence Tittle. Né en 1946, c'est un vétéran du Viet-Nam, devenu spécialiste de la politique athénienne. En 2000, il a fait paraître un travail tout à fait étonnant, *From Melos to My Lai*<sup>40</sup>. Mélos, île athénienne vaincue, réduite en esclavage et massacrée par les Athéniens en 416. My Lai, village vietnamien, où, en 1968, un corps d'armée américain massacra des centaines de villageois, pour l'essentiel des femmes et des enfants. Au-delà de la quasi-homophonie des mots, Lawrence Tittle, qui n'avait pas pris part à ce massacre, mettait pour la première fois en regard les deux démocraties, l'athénienne et l'américaine, dans ce qu'elles avaient de pire, tout cela au nom même de la démocratie ou de l'idée qu'elles s'en faisaient.

Le second historien est Lorens Jr Samons. Né en 1965, il est de la génération d'après, celle qui n'a connu du Viet-Nam que *Platoon* ou *Rambo*. Mais il est de celle du 11 Septembre, de l'invasion de l'Irak et de l'Afghanistan, au

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40 L. Tittle, *From Melos to My Lai. A Study in Violence, Culture and Social Survival*, Londres-New-York, 2000.

nom des valeurs démocratiques. En 2007, il publia un livre au titre évocateur : *What's Wrong with Democracy? From Athenian Practice to American Worship*<sup>41</sup>, « Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas avec la démocratie ? De la pratique athénienne au culte américain ». Il part de la situation dans son propre pays au début du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle : la démocratie est devenue une icône, elle bénéficie d'un véritable culte et on imagine que, seule, elle peut apporter le bonheur aux peuples. Il faut donc l'imposer, fût-ce par les armes les plus modernes et les plus mortelles. C'est-à-dire imposer des élections, quel que soit le degré de violence qui subsiste, en sortir un gouvernement « représentatif » ou prétendu tel. Et rien d'autre... sauf pour arriver à ce but ultime imposer des humiliations, perpétrer des massacres, emprisonner en masse comme à Guantanamo. Les images de la prison de Bagdad connue sous le nom d'Abou Ghraïb résonnent encore dans la tête de Lorenz Samons. Et lui aussi fait le parallèle avec Mélos, mais aussi d'autres massacres commis par les Athéniens au nom de la « démocratie » et surtout au nom de l'idée qu'ils s'en faisaient.

On le voit avec ces deux exemples, la démocratie athénienne, modèle périmé s'il en est, et l'histoire grecque en général nous parlent encore. Mais à certaines conditions.

Il convient tout d'abord de ne pas idéaliser la démocratie athénienne qui s'est souvent auto-célébrée, que ce soit Périclès dans ce célèbre passage connu sous le nom de « l'oraison funèbre », ou Démosthène dans la plupart de ses discours, lui qui vanta jusqu'à l'infini la douceur du régime démocratique. Les remarques que j'ai faites sur les massacres perpétrés par la démocratie athénienne, en son nom ou plutôt dans l'intérêt des Athéniens eux-mêmes en disent assez sur l'absence nécessaire de toute idéalisation. De la même manière, l'acte de monter sur l'Acropole ne devrait pas être assimilé à une idée de pèlerinage, quand bien même des guides grecs payés pour cela voudraient nous obliger à le croire.

Ensuite, nous devons admettre, ainsi que j'ai essayé de le montrer, que le modèle démocratique athénien n'est pas l'ancêtre de notre système actuel pour une raison simple. Pour les Grecs, les droits et les devoirs d'une personne dépendaient avant toute chose de leur *statut*. Selon que l'on était Grec ou barbare, homme ou femme, enfant ou adulte, Athénien ou Mélien (par exemple), les contours de la liberté individuelle étaient largement modifiés. Notre modèle actuel est tout autre, fondé sur les *Droits de l'Homme* qui ont, entre 1679 et 1791, fourni des principes qui réglementent non pas le système institutionnel, mais la liberté individuelle. En 1679, le Parlement anglais vote un texte intitulé : « Habeas corpus ad subjiciendum », « Que tu aies ton corps à ta disposition (pour le produire devant le tribunal) », plus connu sous le

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41 L. Samons, *What's Wrong with Democracy? From Athenian Practice to American Worship*, Berkeley, 2004.

nom de *Habeas Corpus*, qui énonce une liberté fondamentale, celle de ne pas être emprisonné sans jugement. Dix ans plus tard, en 1689, à l'issue de la *Glorieuse Révolution*, le *Bill of Rights* affirme des droits positifs que les citoyens et/ou les résidents d'un pays en monarchie constitutionnelle devaient avoir et expose également certaines exigences constitutionnelles : toute action de la part du monarque exige l'assentiment du gouvernement tel qu'il est représenté par le Parlement. Un siècle après, en 1789, c'est en France la *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* sur laquelle il n'est pas nécessaire de s'appesantir. Deux ans plus tard, en 1791, le *United States Bill of Rights* limite les pouvoirs du gouvernement fédéral et garantit les libertés de presse, de parole, de religion, de réunion, le droit de porter des armes, et le droit de propriété.

Ce sont ces textes fondateurs qui définissent aujourd'hui notre conception de la démocratie, dans laquelle les libertés individuelles jouent un rôle de premier plan. Ces aspects-là étaient strictement inconnus de la Grèce antique, dans laquelle c'est le groupe auquel appartient l'individu qui définit ses droits ou son absence totale de droits. Et on en revient à cette séparation citoyens / non-citoyens, qui permettait par exemple, en toute légalité, sans loi d'exception aucune, de torturer un esclave pour obtenir en justice un témoignage quelconque ; même s'il n'était accusé de rien, mais qu'il avait été témoin de quelque affaire. Décidément, le monde antique est bien loin de nous et il faut en manier l'exemplarité avec une grande prudence.

Je ne vous ai dit qui était Démosthène ni quelle était Sparte. Ce n'était pas mon but ici. J'ai tenté de démêler les fils de la connaissance pure de ceux de l'apprentissage de cette connaissance. De tenter de montrer, pour autant que notre mémoire personnelle nous soit fidèle, ce qui ressortit à notre vécu, lié à la fois à notre propre intellect qu'à notre environnement proche mais aussi national sinon international. Et, s'agissant au final des exemples extraits de l'Antiquité que j'ai choisis, on peut penser que les historiens du temps avaient pleine conscience qu'en vantant – en les déformant avec brutalité – les mérites de Sparte, en soulignant la grandeur de la démocratie athénienne sous Démosthène – en la présentant sous des jours exagérément roses – ils faisaient en fait de *l'histoire contemporaine*. Et ces déformations volontaires, j'espère vous en avoir convaincus, sont bien un délit intellectuel, un *vol avec effraction* de l'histoire antique, un *braquage* d'une civilisation qui ne le demandait pas.

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**Mots-clés**

Antiquité grecque, Sparte, Athènes, courants historiographiques.

# Comptes rendus





# Comptes rendus

**F. Cammarano**, *Abbasso la guerra! Neutralisti in piazza alla vigilia della prima guerra mondiale in Italia*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015.

**A. Lepre, C. Petraccone**, *Storia d'Italia dall'Unità ad oggi*, Mulino, Bologna, 2003, p. 123-150.

L'historiographie italienne s'étant souvent penchée sur la thématique de l'avant première guerre mondiale, on s'attendrait à un grand nombre d'études sur le mouvement pacifiste. Il faut ajouter également que même les contemporains avaient conscience de la singularité de l'Italie qui, contrairement aux autres puissances européennes, a pu garder une position de neutralité pendant neuf mois, de juillet 1914 à mai 1915. Pourtant, avant la publication de cette œuvre, le mouvement de masse pacifiste a toujours été un objet d'études marginal. Fulvio Cammarano, professeur d'histoire contemporaine auprès de l'Université de Bologne et, depuis septembre 2015, président de la Société Italienne pour l'Étude de l'Histoire Contemporaine, a décidé de pallier à une lacune historiographique et de s'interroger sur la signification de ce mouvement et sur son ampleur effective. Pour ce faire il a rassemblé dans un seul ouvrage « composite et non exhaustif » cinquante essais, qui, s'appuyant sur des recherches inédites, approfondissent l'étude du mouvement neutraliste à la fois dans les villes et dans les campagnes. Publié à l'occasion du centenaire de l'entrée en guerre de l'Italie, cet ouvrage qui tâche de documenter l'histoire de tous ceux qui manifestaient dans les rues en criant « À bas la guerre ! » surgit de l'exigence de s'interroger à nouveau sur la signification du mouvement neutraliste, de ses courants internes et de son ampleur.

Il est intéressant de remarquer la structure du livre, qui est articulée en deux parties. La première est dédiée à une réflexion sur les idéologies et les pratiques différentes qui opposent les courants du mouvement neutraliste pendant ces neuf mois critiques. C'est pourtant la seconde partie qui est la plus engageante, car il s'agit de trente-huit essais qui décrivent le contexte dans lequel agissaient les mouvements neutralistes de Nord à Sud, se penchant sur les pratiques et sur les particularités locales dans le but d'en tirer des éléments de comparaison.

Dans la première partie, une série d'essais analyse les difficultés des mouvements qui se reconnaissent dans l'esprit neutraliste. En premier lieu, ils sont divisés par des différences idéologiques profondes, qui les empêchent de lutter les uns à côté des autres. C'est notamment le cas des socialistes et des catholiques, la violente critique de la presse catholique au manifeste du 21 septembre en étant d'ailleurs la preuve. En second lieu, il y a la puissance des idéaux du *Risorgimento* et de l'*Irredentismo* qui, comme le démontre l'essai sur le neutralisme anarchiste, reste séduisante même au sein du mouvement qui avait été considéré le plus uni par l'historiographie. Les catholiques ne faisaient pas exception non plus. Un essai analysant la position du Pape face au clergé relève qu'il avait dû rappeler maintes fois que le neutralisme était la voie à suivre. De plus, une fois l'Italie entrée en guerre, il avait ordonné aux curés de ne pas se laisser emporter par l'enthousiasme. Pendant les fonctions, par exemple il les avait empêché de bénir les drapeaux de l'Italie. Dans ce contexte, une véritable exception est constituée par le mouvement pour l'émancipation des femmes, qui avait déjà été mis à l'épreuve pendant les contestations à l'heure de la guerre de Lybie où les féministes avaient forgé le slogan « Ni un sou, ni un soldat ». Le mouvement des femmes demeura très actif et démontra une cohésion interne pendant les neuf mois de neutralité, même à l'heure où les affrontements entre les interventistes et les neutralistes s'aiguïsaient. Dans le même essai on rappelle que, pendant cette période, une délégation internationale des femmes fut même créée à la Haye et fut reçue par les gouvernements de Londres, Berlin et Vienne. Elle ne fut pas reçue à Rome avant le mois de juin, quand l'Italie avait déjà fait son entrée en guerre. D'ailleurs, comme le démontre efficacement l'essai sur la politique étrangère italienne, le ministère des affaires étrangères suivait une *realpolitik* qui ne s'inspirait ni des idéaux interventistes, ni de ceux neutralistes.

Dans la seconde partie le but de dresser un bilan de l'impact du phénomène neutraliste est évident. Dans les lignes générales, les clivages retracés par l'historiographie traditionnelle entre Nord et Sud et entre ville et campagne sont confirmés. Pourtant, le travail d'archive a donné quelques résultats qui s'écartent complètement de ce modèle. Les études qui composent cette partie du livre se construisent à partir d'un corpus de sources locales, telles que les communications officielles, les ordonnances promulguées par les institutions et les publications faites par les associations présentes sur le territoire. Elles sont également basées sur les événements parus dans la presse locale concer-

nant les réunions publiques, les manifestations, les affrontements dans les rues, les rassemblements, les processions, les messes, les prédications.

C'est effectivement dans les grandes villes du Nord (Turin, Gênes et Milan) où les chercheurs ont retrouvé des mouvements neutralistes très forts et idéologiquement marqués. En effet, cela a même amené à des émeutes et à des affrontements violents entre neutralistes et interventistes, qui au fur et à mesure que les mois s'écoulaient, préoccupaient de plus en plus les institutions. Un témoignage de ces inquiétudes a été retrouvé dans les lettres que les préfets envoyaient à Rome où la peur de la guerre civile se répandait de plus en plus. Au contraire, la ville de Bari est un cas d'étude surprenant. Si les études sur la Calabre et sur les Abruzzes décrivent des masses lobotomisées, résignées et soumises aux pouvoirs locaux, à Bari on retrouve une forte idéologisation des masses, soutenue par les administrations locales en grande majorité socialistes. Cela se révèle une épée à double tranchant, car le mouvement nationaliste interventiste finit par l'emporter.

Plusieurs études permettent aussi de relire le mythe qui s'est créé autour des régions dites « rouges », c'est-à-dire l'Émilie-Romagne et la Toscane. De fait, les régions où les institutions craignaient le plus une insurrection révolutionnaire, au moment du déclenchement de la guerre ont été maîtrisées et les foules se sont résignées comme dans le reste du pays.

Pour ce qui est du clivage entre ville et campagne, il est possible d'établir une équation qui paraît valable dans toutes les recherches. Si les mouvements neutralistes sont idéologiquement enracinés dans les villes, ils sont souvent en position minoritaire par rapport aux interventistes. Au contraire, c'est à la campagne que le sentiment pacifiste était le plus répandu, mais les chercheurs ont démontré que les protestations dans ces zones n'ont pas de rapport avec les mouvements idéologisés. À ce propos, le cas de la Sardaigne est remarquable car en 1914, il y avait déjà des émeutes dans la région qui versait dans une crise économique qui avait entraîné la population dans une terrible famine, que ni les gouvernements locaux ni le gouvernement central n'avaient les moyens de résoudre.

Le jugement est tranchant : si les mouvements neutralistes avaient su canaliser les besoins des masses dans les campagnes et s'ils avaient réussi à les mobiliser ils auraient peut-être pu changer la donne. L'ouvrage, bien que loin d'être exhaustif, est passionnant. Il démontre non seulement que l'on peut interroger les archives locales pour avoir des réponses à des questions nationales, mais également que ces dernières sont bien loin d'être épuisées.

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*Take Me (I'm Yours)*, Paris, Éditions Dilecta, 2015. Type de l'ouvrage : catalogue d'exposition ; langues : anglais/français ; 64 pages + 7 pages de stickers à coller ; 22 x 30 cm, livre broché. Textes de : Christophe Beaux, Chiara Parisi ainsi qu'une conversation entre Christian Boltanski, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Arnaud Esquerre et Patrice Maniglier.

*Take Me (I'm Yours)* est le titre de l'exposition qui a été présentée à la Monnaie de Paris du 16 septembre au 8 novembre 2015. Elle a été conçue comme la seconde édition de l'exposition homonyme ayant eu lieu à la Serpentine Gallery de Londres en 1995. Tout en s'inscrivant dans le paradigme du *reenactment* (ou reconstitution) d'expositions historiques, *Take Me (I'm Yours)* s'en détache dans la façon de proposer non pas une « réactivation » mais une « réédition » de l'exposition originale. L'idée d'échanger est toujours au cœur du projet mais c'est également un clin d'œil aux activités et aux préoccupations de la Monnaie tout en les questionnant.

Le catalogue de *Take Me (I'm Yours)* constitue un prolongement de l'exposition. Tout comme cette dernière le catalogue se base sur le principe de la participation du public et de la manipulation de l'objet. La nature même de l'exposition résonne dans cet ouvrage, conçu comme un album de stickers – correspondants aux projets des quarante-quatre artistes présents dans l'exposition – que le lecteur est invité à détacher et à replacer dans les cadres prévus à cet usage situés à la fin du catalogue. La publication comporte également et surtout des textes de Christophe Beaux (Président-Directeur Général de la Monnaie de Paris) et de Chiara Parisi (Directrice des Programmes culturels de la Monnaie de Paris) ainsi que d'une conversation entre Christian Boltanski (artiste), Hans Ulrich Obrist (co-directeur de la Serpentine Gallery, Londres), Arnaud Esquerre (sociologue, chargé de recherche au CNRS, LESC, Nanterre) et Patrice Maniglier (philosophe, Maître de Conférences en philosophie et arts du spectacle à l'Université Paris Ouest-Nanterre).

Vingt ans après sa première présentation, l'exposition conçue et organisée par Christian Boltanski et Hans Ulrich Obrist est recréée. Ces derniers s'associent à Chiara Parisi qui renouveau le principe fondateur du projet, en l'inscrivant dans un nouveau contexte qui en secoue les propos originaux. Contrairement à l'exposition du 1995, la version parisienne gagne en ampleur. Le projet initial est revisité par les artistes ayant participé à la première édition (Maria Eichhorn, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Jef Geys, Gilbert & George, Douglas Gordon, Christine Hill, Carsten Höller, Fabrice Hyber, Lawrence Weiner, Franz West), auxquels s'ajoutent de nouvelles collaborations (Etel Adnan & Simone Fattal, Paweł Althamer, Kerstin Brätsch & Sarah Ortmeier, James Lee Byars, Heman Chong, Jeremy Deller, Andrea Fraser, Gloria Friedmann, Felix Gaudlitz & Alexander Nussbaumer, Jonathan Horowitz, Koo Jeong-A, Alison Knowles, Bertrand Lavier,



Charlie Malgat, Angelika Markul, Gustav Metzger, Otobong Nkanga, Roman Ondak, Yoko Ono, Philippe Parreno, point d'ironie – agnès b., Sean Raspet, Ho Rui An, Takako Saito, Daniel Spoerri, Wolfgang Tillmans, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Amalia Ulman, Franco Vaccari, Danh Vo). Ces artistes présentent des œuvres manipulables, des objets commercialisables, des gadgets à ramasser et des instructions à suivre. Entre don et dispersion, échange et participation, de nouvelles formes d'interactions avec le public définissent des formes d'exposer l'art et de le confronter au réel.

En fait *Take Me (I'm Yours)* naît d'abord d'une envie de Boltanski et Obrist de modifier la manière dont on montre l'art. La règle du jeu qu'ils décident d'établir est celle de la dispersion, de la dissémination de l'œuvre. Lieu d'interaction entre les visiteurs et les artistes, cette exposition se caractérise par sa forme ouverte et évolutive avec, au moment du « finissage », la disparition des œuvres due à leur dissémination totale.

L'exposition vise à repenser les modes d'exposition, de circulation et de production de l'art. Toute œuvre d'art est une histoire de consommation et de dispersion, selon Chiara Parisi. « L'énergie déployée par l'artiste lors de la création et les efforts liés à la production auxquels est soumis son travail construisent le geste artistique comme entropie. C'est peut être dans cet abandon progressif de soi – de sa propre pensée, de son propre corps – que se manifeste le principal don de l'artiste à l'égard de qui regarde l'œuvre »<sup>1</sup>. Au-delà des circuits économiques habituels, *Take Me (I'm Yours)* propose un modèle basé sur le partage, et soulève ainsi la question de la valeur d'échange de l'art. L'exposition permet de revenir sur le mythe de l'unicité de l'œuvre d'art et de questionner ses modes de production. Une réflexion y est développée sur les différentes modalités d'interaction socio-économiques : du don à l'échange monétaire en passant par le troc, pour « produire ensemble » avec la participation active du public. L'incontournable questionnement sur le statut de l'œuvre et sa reproduction en série dans la société contemporaine dépend de cet appel à interpréter le rôle d'acteur et non pas de spectateur, de cet encouragement à toucher et transgresser le comportement habituel dans un espace dédié à l'art. L'approche de l'œuvre d'art qui est proposée dans cette exposition peut surprendre effectivement pour les réactions et les gestes qu'elle peut provoquer auprès du visiteur.

Ceci-dit, il est également nécessaire de se demander comment ces démarches ont évolué depuis 1995 et la signification que l'on peut conférer au renouvellement de ces questions aujourd'hui, à l'époque où l'Internet et les nouvelles technologies permettent de s'approprier des contenus du web sans restrictions. L'idée de la chose commune et du partage continu entre les internautes par la mise en réseau et le numérique est davantage présente au temps de

1 Chiara Parisi dans *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, Éditions Dilecta, 2015.

la seconde édition, lorsque en 1995 l'Internet commençait seulement sa diffusion. Les contextes des deux expositions sont pertinemment débattus dans la conversation entre Boltanski, Obrist, Esquerre et Maniglier. Ces derniers interrogent ainsi les enjeux de l'exposition du point de vue philosophique, sociologique, artistique et économique. Leur texte, titré « Le degré zéro de l'objet de valeur », est la reconstitution partiellement fictive d'une conversation qui s'est étalée sur plusieurs jours au mois de juin 2015. Il est composé de 9 parties (0. Les règles du jeu ; 1. L'exposition de 1995 à la Serpentine Gallery, Londres ; 2. Qu'est-ce qui a changé entre l'exposition de 1995 et celle d'aujourd'hui ? 3. Le don ; 4. Les communs ; 5. Reliques ; 6. Échantillons commerciaux ; 7. Ni cadeau, ni déchet, ni marchandise, ni produit dérivé : le degré zéro de la valeur ; 8. Choses ou quasi-objets ?) et il est accompagné de photographies qui ont été réalisées par Armin Linke, lors de l'exposition *Take Me (I'm Yours)* à la Serpentine Gallery. En 1995, les curateurs de l'exposition avouaient avoir regardé surtout vers le monde occidental, lorsque dans l'exposition parisienne figurent quatre générations d'artistes provenant de la planète entière. Cela va sans dire, le contexte économique a également beaucoup évolué. « La réédition se déroule dans un espace particulier, la Monnaie de Paris, et à un moment particulier, celui de la FIAC. (...) Pourtant, c'est une toute autre logique que la FIAC, puisque l'idée est que l'art peut appartenir à tout le monde. (...) Le contexte historique a changé, car la question de la valeur marchande des œuvres d'art est devenue beaucoup plus intense du fait de l'explosion du marché, qui date du début des années 2000. »<sup>2</sup>

Il est évident que la réitération d'un protocole d'exposition amène à des réflexions sur les changements socio-économiques qui ont eu lieu en Europe et dans le monde ces deux dernières décennies – car elle les rend visibles, identifiables. Les questions qui se posent sont donc plusieurs : qu'est-ce qu'on comprend par le biais de ce mécanisme ? Comment peut-on décliner une exposition et pourquoi ? Quelle a été et sera l'influence de cette exposition sur l'histoire de l'art au cours de ses répliques ? Est-ce que la qualité de l'exposition et son originalité peuvent être conservées au fil de ses rééditions ? Et aussi : quelle est la différence entre accueillir le don de l'autre et se servir, dans l'art ?<sup>3</sup> Cette manière ludique d'exposer est-elle une *soft revolution*, comme l'appelle Obrist, ou juste un exercice de forme ? Vers quelle idée du rôle de l'art et de son exposition nous amène-t-elle ?

2 Patrice Maniglier dans *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, Éditions Dilecta, 2015.

3 Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (1950), Paris, PUF, 1973, deuxième partie « Essai sur le don : forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques » (1924).

Il s'agit de questions sur lesquelles il faudra revenir sans doute à l'occasion des éditions futures de *Take Me (I'm Yours)*. Pour l'instant, force est de constater que son dispositif soulève des questions substantielles sur les enjeux éthiques et historiques des pratiques de l'exposition.

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