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Introduction to Homo Duplex: Ford Madox Ford's Experience and Aesthetics of Alterity

Isabelle Brasme

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Homo Duplex

Ford Madox Ford's Experience and Aesthetics of Alterity

Edited by

Isabelle BRASME



Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée

Homo Duplex

*Ford Madox Ford's Experience
and Aesthetics of Alterity*

« Horizons anglophones »

Direction collégiale

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Vincent DUSSOL, Jean-Michel GANTEAU, Judith MISRAHI-BARAK,
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La collection « Horizons anglophones » publie des recueils et des monographies en anglais et en français dans les domaines des littératures, arts, cultures et sociétés des pays anglophones. Elle se décline en quatre séries :

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« Horizons anglophones »

Série Present Perfect

Homo Duplex

Ford Madox Ford's Experience and Aesthetics of Alterity

Edited by

Isabelle BRASME

Ouvrage publié avec le concours de la Ford Madox Ford Society

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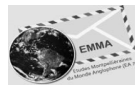


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Ford Madox Ford and student, Olivet College.
Letter from Ford Madox Ford to his wife Elsie, 1904.

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Introduction

Isabelle BRASME

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‘Identity can only occur through alterity’.¹ This statement by Henri Meschonnic, in his work about the ethics and politics of translation practices, seems particularly apt for an author such as Ford Madox Ford, who constantly navigated between England, Germany and France, and thus lived in a perpetual translating mode, poised between languages and cultures. Ford’s duality has been an abiding paradigm in much of the criticism devoted to the author since the publication of Max Saunders’ critical biography, *A Dual Life*, in 1996.² The two-volume monograph reignited scholarly interest in Ford, played an immense role in the vitality of Fordian studies worldwide, and can still be considered today as one of the richest and most informative works on Ford. The notion of duality has thus been at the heart of many studies of Ford, and indeed appears to account in an illuminating and highly functional manner for the singularity and ambivalence of Ford’s place in time: poised between the nineteenth and the early twentieth century; in geography: between the city and the country, between England, France, and Germany; and in aesthetics: between the formidable influence of his grandfather and the Pre-Raphaelites, and the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. The aim of this collective volume is to investigate a specific aspect of duality—that best expressed in the phrase used by Ford himself, *homo duplex*. Max Saunders initially describes it as such:

1. My translation. Original: ‘L’identité n’advient que par l’altérité’. Henri MESCHONNIC, *Éthique et politique du traduire* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2007) 9.

2. Max SAUNDERS, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, vols I and II (Oxford: OUP, 1996, reissued with new preface 2012); subsequently referred to throughout the volume as ‘Saunders I’ and ‘Saunders II’.

It is an idea which informs much in his life and work: the difference between his various selves, especially between his pre-war and post-war incarnations; the similarities he found between himself and others. But it particularly stands for the writer as someone who is, precisely, both a life and its works. (Saunders I 2–3)

The phrase *homo duplex* thus encapsulates the productive tension between identity and difference, and takes on particular significance for Ford as a writer.

In recent years, a renewed emphasis has been put in literary studies on the notion of alterity in literature, following the work of Derek Attridge³ or Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Ronald Shusterman.⁴ It appears this notion may be fecund in approaching Ford Madox Ford's writing, and may help refine the notion of duality to a further degree, focusing on the relationship and the tension between the two terms articulated in this duality. Analysing the notion of duality from the perspective of alterity allows us to explore—yet again—a *double* form of alterity that is at work in Ford's life and writing: the alterity of the outside world, and the alterity from within. Inseparable from the notion of duality, indeed, is the notion that alterity is fundamental to identity; that contact with otherness allows for the emergence and construction of the self. Paul Ricoeur voices this paradox as an 'acquired identification by which some other enters into the composition of the same'.⁵ This definition of the subject via otherness, however, occurs without any blurring of the boundaries between identity and alterity. Central to Emmanuel Lévinas's work on alterity, indeed, is the notion that whilst the subject is dependent on, and in eternal debt to the Other to define itself, the Other remains radically alien, and irreducible to the same.⁶

Going back to the notion of '*homo duplex*', then, Saunders' analysis of the phrase is especially enlightening in his chapter entitled 'Ford's Autobiography', in the second volume of his monograph—the whole chapter is indeed highly relevant to the question here at play:

3. Derek ATTRIDGE, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

4. Jean-Jacques LECERCLE and Ronald SHUSTERMAN, *L'Emprise des signes. Débat sur l'expérience littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

5. My translation. Original: 'Identifications acquises par lesquelles de l'autre entre dans la composition du même'. Paul RICŒUR, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990) 146. English translation: Paul RICŒUR, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen BLAMEY (Chicago: Chicago UP), 1994).

6. Emmanuel LÉVINAS, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS (1969, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1999); *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso LINGIS (1978, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2000).

Published writers are public people, and ‘every public man has a dual personality’, wrote Ford; ‘is, that is to say, *homo duplex*’.⁷ [. . .] Not only are authors particularly subject to what he called ‘the agonies of the duplex personality’, but it makes them particularly sensitive to all human contradictions. (Saunders II 463)

This remark pinpoints the dual source of alterity: from within and from the outside, and its crucial role in Ford’s experience and aesthetics. For if the focus in the aforementioned quotations is on Ford’s own identity as a writer, the paradigm of *homo duplex* and the question of the subject’s relationship with the Other also vastly contribute to shape his fictional writing, characterisation, and aesthetic choices.

Derek Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature* is helpful to negotiate the transition from the role of alterity in the construction of the subject from a philosophical standpoint, to the more specific field of literature. His chapter on ‘Creation and the other’ is especially apt for our purposes. According to Attridge, alterity lies at the core of literature: ‘Verbal creation [...] is a handling of language whereby something we might call “otherness”, or “alterity”, or “the other”, is made, or allowed, to impact upon the existing configurations of an individual’s mental world’ (Attridge 19). Attridge poses the dynamic relation to alterity as a condition for the emergence of literature. Literary creation is possible when the other—from the outside or from within—is accepted and embraced:

Creation is as much a matter of alertness to hints of as yet unexplored possibilities as it is of skillful handling of known materials. By contrast with creation, straightforward *production*, what is often called ‘making’, introduces no alterity and instigates no transformation of the cultural field: it redeploys existing components according to accepted norms. (Attridge 25)

In the same vein, in an interview about *L’Emprise des signes*, a volume he co-authored with Ronald Shusterman, Jean-Jacques Lecercle declared: ‘true literature is not the place where identity is being asserted, but rather the place of auspicious contact with alterity’.⁸ Rather than constructing a fixed representation of identity, literature enacts the very process of self-discovery, through the subject’s interaction with alterity.

7. Ford Madox FORD, *Between St Dennis and St George* (London: Haskell House, 1915) 24.

8. My translation. Original: ‘La vraie littérature n’est pas le lieu de revendication d’identité mais plutôt le lieu de contact faste avec l’altérité’. Jean-Jacques LECERCLE, ‘Littérature et Altérité : Entretien avec Jean-Jacques Lecercle’, *Vox Poetica*, <http://www.vox-poetica.org/entretiens/intLecercle.html> (last accessed 6 Sept. 19).

How does this ‘auspicious contact with alterity’ occur in Ford Madox Ford’s writing? What are the conditions for its success? What exactly is ‘the other’ for Ford as an individual and a writer, and within his literary work? What kind of relationship with alterity is being enacted in his writing, and how does this relationship impact and contribute to shape Ford’s particular—or to use Attridge’s phrasing, *singular*—mode of literary creation?

This volume interrogates the role of alterity in Ford’s self-discovery as a writer, and subsequently, in the elaboration of his fictional writing. It is therefore articulated along two main axes: the first one is biographical, and explores the major role that contact with others, or with alterity, played in Ford’s self-construction, as well as in his reconstruction as someone else: from Ford Hermann Hueffer to Ford Madox Ford. The second perspective is literary, and demonstrates that alterity works as a central paradigm in Ford’s writing.

This collective volume is issued from a conference entitled ‘Ford Madox Ford and the Other’ that was held at the University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 in September, 2017, and in no way means to be exhaustive and conclusive on the topic of alterity in Ford’s life and writing. Rather, it may be regarded as a starting point that may initiate further thought and debate.

The Other in Ford’s Making

The first two chapters were written conjointly and work as a fascinating pair, bringing to the foreground an aspect of Ford’s *Bildung* that has hitherto been vastly overlooked: the influence of his wife, Elsie Martindale, on his emergence as a writer. Both papers stem from a close reading of Ford and Elsie’s correspondence and of some of Ford’s unpublished early manuscripts, and quote letters, diaries, and fiction that have been to this day mostly ignored—or unknown—and unpublished. Some of these documents were only recently made available to Sara Haslam on her visit to the Lamb family in 2019, thanks to Katharine Hueffer Lamb’s grandson (and Ford’s great-grandson) Charles. Haslam’s chapter, ‘Elsie, Fiction, and Collaboration’, examines at close range the relationship between Ford and Elsie such as it transpires from their intensive correspondence and from Elsie’s diaries, and makes the unusual and strongly convincing argument that Elsie was a most significant and stimulating agent in Ford’s emergence as a writer in the mid-1890s. Haslam’s chapter starts by emphasising

the element of alterity inherent in the writer's stance, or 'heterotext',⁹ which she defines as 'Fordian metadrama', and is paramount to Ford's self-construction as a writer. In his letters to Elsie, Ford explicitly mentions their budding relationship as a 'tale'. Yet beyond Ford's paternalistic tone towards Elsie—his reading advice, his rewriting of their relationship as a medieval-inspired romance—, Haslam demonstrates how their ardent, correspondence allowed him to project and construct himself as an artist—and through a dynamics of mutual emulation, had the same effect on Elsie's emergence as a writer. More than that, Haslam's unearthing of Elsie's diaries demonstrates that the pair were, in fact, co-writers.

Helen Chambers starts by highlighting the influence of Ford's family members on his formative reading, as delineated in much of his memoirs and fiction, and investigates its role in his correspondence with Elsie, implying a shared education and cultural background that greatly contributed to strengthening their mutual understanding. As Chambers states, 'the letters reveal a tightly knit intellectual, as well as emotional, dyad', where emotions are fostered by literary influences, and were philosophical ideas—'our philosophy', as Ford often wrote to Elsie—, and even co-writing, are underpinned by passion. The collaboration between Ford and Elsie has been vastly ignored, and this acknowledgement of Elsie as this Other in Ford's early writing paves the way for captivating new research. In Ford and Elsie's writerly relationship, what matters is not the 'I' of each writer, but a 'we', the possibility of a community—where one becomes at turns active and passive, subject and object, writer and reader, in an interdependent relationship of mutual vulnerability and mutual benefit.

Ford's German Period: Becoming Ford as Other

The second pair of chapters centres on another form of otherness—one of a national nature, during Ford's 'German period' from 1903 to 1914. Ford is here placed literally in the position of the other—or *alien*, to use Violet Hunt's phrasing in the title of the book she published in 1913, which was written during Ford and Hunt's stay in Germany, and to which Ford contributed. The full title—*The Desirable Alien: At Home in Germany*—indeed epitomises the tensions inherent in Ford's

9. Marjorie STONE and Judith THOMPSON (eds), *Literary Couplings: Writing Couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 19.

relationship to his father's country. Zineb Berrahou-Anzuini focuses on the complex and fraught relationship between Ford and Germany, and the ways in which it reflects more personal forms of alienation—from his wife Elsie, as he attempted to disengage himself from his marriage by trying to obtain a divorce in Germany, and then from Violet Hunt herself. Berrahou-Anzuini's chapter draws on research that she conducted in Giessen, where she found unpublished archives and letters between Ford and his German relatives that contribute to elucidate his failed attempt at naturalisation. These documents attest to the complexity of Ford's relationship to Germany, at a time of growing antagonism between Britain and Germany. Ford thinks of Germany as his *Heimat*—a word that shares the same root with 'home'—and yet never stops thinking of himself as primarily British, and therefore as an outsider in Germany. Ford's stance as *homo duplex* is here of a national and cultural nature, and resists simple, clear-cut interpretation.

Lucinda Borkett-Jones's chapter investigates the evolution of Ford's relationship to Germany as the First World War broke out, and the shift of his own name from Ford Hermann Hueffer, to Ford Madox Hueffer, to Ford Madox Ford in 1919, thus erasing every German component from his official identity. Borkett-Jones provides us with a nuanced interpretation of Ford's description of Germany in Hunt's *The Desirable Alien* as his 'beloved country', or of Giessen as 'utopia', and argues that Ford's apparently unreserved love for pre-war Germany is in fact mostly staged, and fails to account for the whole of his experience there. This allows for a better understanding of Ford's evolution towards an opposition to Germany as the war broke out. Conversely, Ford's propaganda articles during the war express a more complex and ambivalent criticism of Germany than has usually been perceived. Borkett-Jones thus invites a re-examination of Ford's propaganda articles on Germany among the 'Literary Portraits' that he published in *Outlook* in 1914 and 1915. The identity of his German enemy is shifting, and as a result, Ford's own identity is in flux, both due to his own German paternal heritage, which he never denies, and to his need of reasserting his own British identity at a time of suspicion.

The War as Ford's Radical Experience of Alterity

As Ford arrived at the front in 1916, the war provoked schisms of another form in his identity—moving from a cultural and national

form of alterity, to one of a psychological and ontological nature. In Ford's representation of the war experience, the soldier becomes the quintessential *homo duplex*. Talking about the soldier at the front, Ford describes him as follows: 'He is indeed, then, *homo duplex*: a poor fellow whose body is tied in one place, but whose mind and personality brood eternally over another distant locality'.¹⁰ The experience of the man at war is thus the epitome of what Ford considers human experience to be, and of what he considered behoved modern writers to render, as he described in his 'On Impressionism' essays—essays that were concurrent with the beginning of the war. The war zone thus appears as the very locus of impressionist experience, or as Saunders puts it, and in an echo to 'On Impressionism': 'the soldier, like the impressionist (or a reader), is in one place with his mind somewhere quite other' (Saunders II 197).¹¹ Using Jean-Luc Nancy's and Mark Paterson's analyses of touch and Santanu Das's monograph on *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* as starting points, Robert Hampson's chapter examines the semantics and hermeneutics of touch in *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*. The relationship to alterity explored through this lens takes on an ethical dimension. The chapter also explores alterity of a wholly different order—not that of the other subject, but the radical otherness of the object that impinges on the subject, particularly in the form of mud, and that threatens the subject with dissolution. The very essence of being is jeopardised by the brutal encounter of otherness.

Harry Ricketts' chapter adopts a different perspective to account for Ford's representation of the experience of alterity in wartime. Offering a cross reading of Siegfried Sassoon's *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (1928–1936) and Ford's *Parade's End* (1924–1928), Ricketts points out the autobiographical undertones in both sets of novels. The chapter considers the ways in which the filter of fiction, by othering the authors' selves, allows them to mediate their experience of the war. Beyond the more evident psychological element inherent in this process, Ricketts demonstrates that this strategy allows both authors to navigate their fraught relationship to Englishness, via protagonists that appear at first sight as quintessential embodiments of English values, yet on closer inspection share their creators' deep ambivalence towards Albionism.

10. Ford Madox FORD, *It Was the Nightingale* (London: Heinemann, 1934) 197.

11. 'We are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other', Ford Madox FORD, 'On Impressionism', *Poetry and Drama* 2.6 (June–December 1914) 167–174 (173).

Aesthetics of Alterity in *The Good Soldier*

In the early twentieth century, Saussure foregrounded language as an eminently human and social tool: ‘Language [. . .] is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community’.¹² Following Saussure’s work, the notion of language as a consensual or conventional code shared by members of a community, so that individuals may understand one another, has been uppermost in the minds of thinkers and writers in the early twentieth century—either to support it, or to expose the limits and frequent failures of such a contract. Language is experienced, and experimented with, as an imperfect tool allowing one to bridge the gap with the other. The possible failure of this communication is at the heart of *The Good Soldier*: through a typically Fordian paradox, this very dysfunction constitutes the structural linchpin of the narrative process, in the tentative and questionable relationship between the narrator and the implied reader; it is also one of the major themes of the novel, through the myriad deceptions and misunderstandings that occur between the characters, underlining the impossibility to commune with others.

Both chapters in this section use a close cross-examination of *The Good Soldier* with another text to bring out the irreducible alterity of the narrator in *The Good Soldier*. Seamus O’Malley explores the striking resemblance between the narrative processes in Ford’s novel and in Sigmund Freud’s *Dora: an Analysis of a Case Hysteria* (1905). This has the dual consequence of examining Freud’s text from a literary and narratological standpoint on the one hand, and of considering Dowell’s narrative as therapeutic on the other. While Freud’s text is demonstrated as wholly partaking of modernist technique, the psychoanalytic potential of Dowell’s narrative is analysed in deeper detail than has hitherto been the case in criticism on *The Good Soldier*. Both texts, O’Malley argues, are the result of their authors’ fascination for the subject, and their innovative narrative techniques stem

12. Ferdinand de SAUSSURE, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade BASKIN (New York: the Philosophical Library, 1959) 14. Original phrasing by Saussure: ‘La langue [. . .] est la partie sociale du langage, extérieure à l’individu, qui à lui seul ne peut ni la créer ni la modifier ; elle n’existe qu’en vertu d’une sorte de contrat passé entre les membres de la communauté’. Ferdinand de SAUSSURE, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1931) 31.

from Freud's and Ford's endeavours to render the impervious and unaccountable quality of the other's psyche.

Likewise, Leslie de Bont conducts a joint study of *The Good Soldier* and May Sinclair's *Tasker Jevons: the Real Story* (1916), and confronts Ford's and Sinclair's texts with a view to highlight the ways in which both narratives render the irreducible character of alterity. The impossible representation of the other is revealed as programmatic and structural in both novels. The narrators' 'rhetoric of uncertainty' produces unstable and unreliable accounts not only of others, but also of themselves as alien to themselves. Drawing from Attridge's and Ricœur's work on alterity, de Bont demonstrates that the relation to the other constitutes a mode of investigation of the self in these first-person narratives, since identity relies equally on the alterity of others and on the alterity within the self. The chapter thus demonstrates how both *The Good Soldier* and *Tasker Jevons* offer examples of Ricœur's 'narrative identity', as they 'revolve around multi-layered and unexpected experiences of alterity for the characters, the narrators, the readers and even the authors'.

Historical Alterity in Ford's Fiction

Turning to lesser-known novels from Ford's repertoire, the final two chapters explore alterity through yet another lens: that of historical distance. Laurence Davies analyses Ford's representation of the alterity of the past via the paradigms of allochronism (Johannes Fabian) and nonsynchronism (Ernst Bloch). Starting with Nietzsche's distinction between the antiquarian, the monumental, and the critical types of historical writing, Davies delineates an intricate triangulation of these modes of writing in some of Ford's earlier novels: *The Half Moon* (1909), *The Portrait* (1910) and *The Young Lovell* (1913), through the complex entanglement of fiction and nonfiction, 'nonsynchronous thought and partisanship'. Bergson's distinction between time and duration,¹³ to which Davies appends chronology, or 'itemised time', also proves fruitful to pinpoint the subtle relationship to temporal distance, and more largely, the individual's self-mediation within temporality in these three historical novels. The precision with which temporal alterity is approached produces an enlightening analysis of

13. Henri BERGSON, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889, Paris: PUF, 2013).

these seldom studied novels, and would also constitute helpful tools to examine Ford's better-known historical novel, *The Fifth Queen*.

Georges Letissier's chapter offers a perceptive insight into *A Little Less than Gods*, one of Ford's late fictional works (1928), and highlights the ways in which various modes of alterity intersect and interact in this complex Napoleonic novel. The dissociation provided by historical distance is investigated in terms of 'historical doubling': the author's treatment of the final days of the Napoleonic era mixes the epic and the parodic along a carnivalesque dynamics, never settling on either of these stances. Letissier uses the Fordian trope of the mirror to account for this representative mode: 'not so much wrongly, as with a distortion, as you may see in certain mirrors that broaden you out, diminish you or turn you all askew'.¹⁴ Georg Lukács's analysis of the historical novel is also put forth to pinpoint the combination of historical and fictional elements—the latter often derived from Ford's experience—to generate psychological authenticity in the narrative. Beyond historical distance and doubling, the chapter reveals that *A Little Less than Gods* can be read as a complex exploration of the *homo duplex* paradigm, both at the structural and thematic levels. Letissier demonstrates that Ford's novel may be read as a form of dialogue with Joseph Conrad's own Napoleonic novel, *Suspense*, which was left unfinished when he died in 1924. It may even be regarded as a deferred form of collaboration between the two authors, despite—or perhaps, Letissier argues, thanks to—the radical distance caused by Conrad's death. The incest motif that lies at the heart of both narratives, introducing another form of reflection on questions of identity and alterity, is a solid argument in favour of this deferred tandem writing. The *homo duplex* paradigm, which we have seen to be consistently central to Ford's writing throughout his career, is here prolonged by that of *duplex auctor*—of a writer who thrives and finds his auctorial identity through a sustained, intense and multi-layered interaction with alterity. Reaching the end of this volume, it thus appears that the alterity at the heart of Ford's experience and career, and the alterity at the heart of his aesthetic choices, work in an endless loop of mutual enrichment and development.

14. Ford MADOX FORD, *A Little Less than Gods* (London: Duckworth, 1928) 108.

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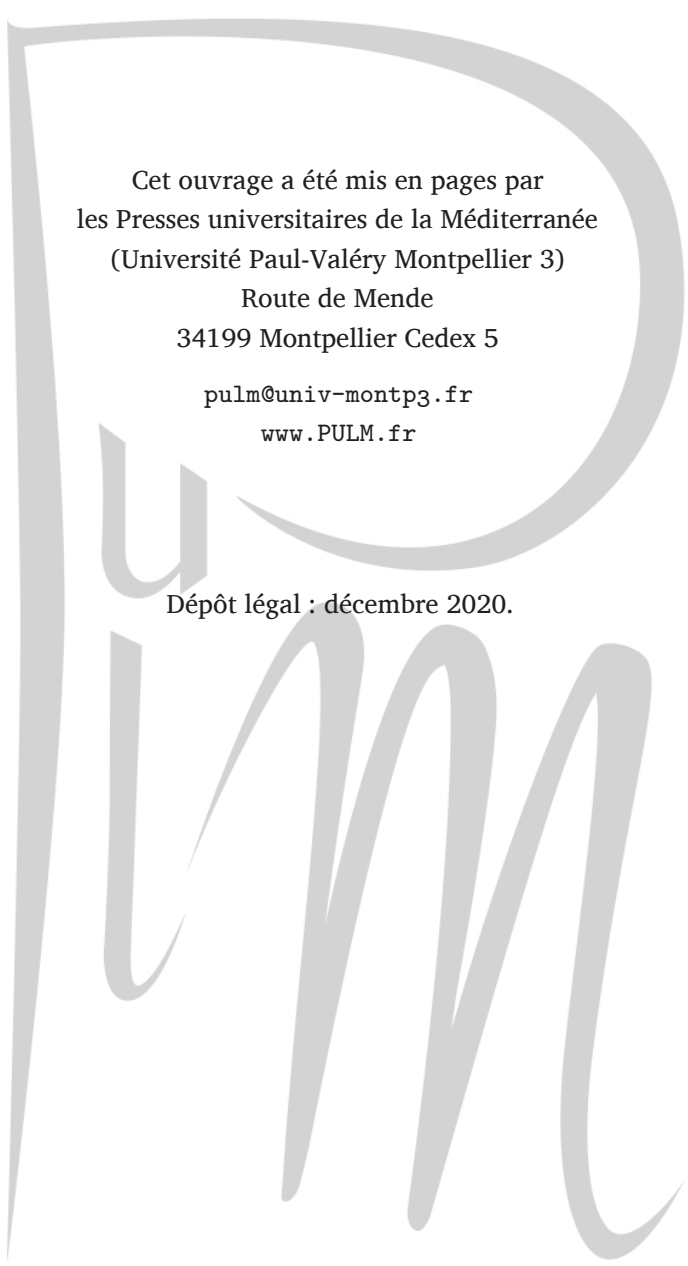
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