

Introduction

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Even before the development of a more international awareness of literature, partly thanks to extensive translation practices, writers have been finding inspiration not only from acknowledged literary traditions, but also in individual works from the past or contemporary times. Reading—writers' initial link with literature—offers material for writing, while fashioning writers' conceptions of literature, as well as their vision of their own work in relation to tradition.

This volume explores various forms of textual influence as manifested in the works of 20th and 21st centuries authors, to both trace continuities and assess said authors' "singularity," in Derek Attridge's terms. The papers gathered in this volume analyse a large variety of forms of influence, be they visible in the chosen topics or objects, in style, manner, or language itself—turns of speech, recurring motifs, or rhythmic patterns. Quotation, unacknowledged borrowing, allusion, imitation, parody, travesty, are but a few examples of the presence—unconscious or not—of another text in a literary work.

An author's writing with a forerunner's work in mind has been seen as part of an education process, as suggested by Walter Benjamin in *Understanding Brecht*.¹ To Howard Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, each writer misreads his forerunners, thus creating his own vision of earlier literature (xxiii), according to selection and distorting processes, often modified by cultural differences between the (mis)read and (mis)reading authors. Paying tribute, or at least attention, to another work when writing; unwittingly prolonging it or reformulating its major tenets in full consciousness, is also commonly viewed as a form of translation, whereby the reader/writer attempts to reproduce the sensations he or she experienced when

¹ "a writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody" (Benjamin, 98).

reading. In his essay *Le Roman multiple*, Adam Thirlwell even argued that literature keeps translating itself, as topics and forms move across continents and centuries.

Ultimately the analysis of the tensions between originality and imitation may offer a vision of literature as a regenerative force whereby previous writers' achievements keep being interpreted anew and thus given a new lease on life, while feeding the expression of new visions of literature and of creation in general. At stake throughout this collection are the complex processes of writing as well as of reading, which increasingly appear to be intricately woven together.

Dan Beachy-Quick opens the volume with a poetic meditation on influence, developing the river metaphor to explore the notion and express his “worry that our sense of influence has diminished”. Indeed Beachy-Quick beautifully twists Bloom’s concept of “anxiety of influence” to reformulate the poet’s relationship to her predecessors, as “the anxiety to enter into those voices as fully as one can, and to sing within another poet’s song.” Such *ars poetica* requires a fusion of the poet’s self into the larger poetic river: “Such is the effort influence might require of us whose dearest wish is to write what already has been written (and, I admit, I’m one of that number): to let the unchangeable attributes of what is not us give to us their shape.” This overture ends with Beachy-Quick’s poetically voicing anew the continuity of the forceful poetic river: “Singing / Removes you from the song, it finds a way / To be sung again, by another mouth, by other / Wings than yours.”

Michael Federspiel, in “Aristote s’invite chez Nabokov: le ressort tragique dans *Lolita*”, focuses on Nabokov’s revisiting Aristotle’s principles in his exploration of contemporary America. Federspiel demonstrates how, together with the beauty of his prose, the tragic mechanisms at work in Nabokov’s novel may largely explain its success despite the reader’s mixed feelings. Indeed “the reader comes to see in the characters’ varying degree of abjection the reflection of essentially human shortcomings,” and thus may be enabled to experience *catharsis*.

Léopold Reigner also chose to explore Nabokov’s work, to trace and analyse the influence of his reading of Flaubert, hence, of an imaginary version of Flaubert’s works. Through minute analyses of thematic and stylistic, even syntactical similitudes between the two bodies of work, Reigner brings to light two “axes of influence,” namely, continuation and deviation, thus emphasizing “the force of individuality” in the appropriation process.

Nabokov's oeuvre remains at the center of interest in **Elsa Court's** paper, entitled "Nabokov, Kerouac, Updike: Exploring the Failed American Road Trip". Again, the interplay of influences is intricate since the paper uses Updike's writing *Rabbit, Run* (1960) "in reaction to the publication of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) as "a background from which to think of an overdue comparison of Nabokov's and Kerouac's respective road epics". The "question of male identity and individualism in the context of the cultural politics of late-capitalism in the United States" is raised, through a minute comparative analysis of the three novels, paying special attention to the landscape of the road "and the way it is pitched as a symbol of social rules against the factitious sovereignty of the male motorist on the highway."

Pierre-Antoine Pellerin also studies the beat generation but through the specific angle of Whitman's ambiguous influence upon Kerouac, torn between conventionally celebrating Whitman as having created "a distinctly American verse that expressed the variety and grandeur of the young republic", and "lament[ing] the lyrical and sentimental outbursts from 'Song of Myself,' which in his eyes, betray a troubled and faltering masculine identity: ..." Pellerin offers a critical reflection upon Bloom's theories of influence, suggesting the need to go beyond his vision of "influence as an Oedipal confrontation for authority" in the hope of "reveal[ing] the vicissitudes of literary masculinity in the postwar period," while providing "a renewed understanding of the relationship many poets had to Whitman and other male poets".

Florian Beauvallet, in his "The Singularity of Reading," tackles the topic of influence through British novelist's Adam Thirlwell's vision of the history of the novel, focusing on his paradoxical concept of "familiar originality." Inspired by Thirlwell's conception of the novel as a process of translation, running across borders and centuries, Beauvallet calls upon Kafka, Roth, and Kundera, to name but a few, to define literary influence as "a two-way phenomenon, where past and present mingle in a reciprocal reinvention of the other through imagination and curiosity."

Sophie Chapuis starts from Jonathan Lethem's provocative statement that "plagiarism has become the twenty-first-century writer's condition," to explore the rich and complex intertextual play upon which Rick Moody builds his "stereophonic" autobiographies, namely *The Ring of Brightest Angels around Heaven* and *The Black Veil: A Memoir with Digressions*, thus revisiting the genre. Chapuis shows how Moody develops "a renewed relationship to the canon that both liberates from literary tradition and subverts the unique source of authority," as in the two considered

books, “[t]he attempt at self-definition morphs into an openly collaborative project relying on intertextual practices and rhizomatic connections with past writers.”

Focusing on Laird Hunt’s *The Exquisite* and its tribute to W.G Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn*, **Anne-Julie Debare** endeavors to analyse the multifarious aspects of the “impression” left by Sebald upon the American novelist. In her paper, entitled “A fellowship of imaginations: Sebald’s aesthetics of chiaroscuro in *The Exquisite* by Laird Hunt,” she shows how Hunt’s novel “becomes the locus of an extensive and fruitful exchange between what Pierre Bayard calls two ‘inner books’”, itself revealing of elective affinities between the two writers. The representation of pain, the criticism of historical discourse and the “aesthetics of indirection and chiaroscuro” are studied in both novels to demonstrate how Hunt’s *The Exquisite* “tentatively prolongs [Sebald’s] exploration of both real and intimate broken landscapes.”

Clint Wilson offers to “rea[d] Mat Johnson’s *Pym* (2011) and its ironic retelling of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) as a postmodern experiment with the now famous Bloomian model,” thus acknowledging the lasting relevance of such model while also revisiting it, “allow[ing] it to evolve alongside postmodern strains of irony, reflexivity, and metanarrative.” The twist suggested by Wilson, who argues that *Pym* “is not anxious about its influences, but rather influenced by its anxieties,” opens out the Bloomian model by challenging the rigidity of its categories, to ultimately “cas[t] new forms of poetic identity and new valences of ‘anxiety’”.

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