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LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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ON ANGLICIZING THE IMAGINATIVE WORLD
OF BORIS VIAN: THE PROBLEM OF WORDPLAY

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the
University of Ottawa in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Applied
Linguistics) (Translation).

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c Jeffrey S. Moore, Ottawa, Canada, 1982.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1) The nature of wordplay

All novelists work in the medium of language but, as Anthony Burgess has remarked, some may be said to work in it more than others. There is one kind of novelist, called «Class 1» by Burgess, «in whose work language is a zero quantity, transparent, unseductive, the overtones of connotation and ambiguity totally damped...; content being more important than style, the referents ache to be free of their words and to be presented directly as sense-data.»¹ Such work is thus closer to film than to poetry, and it usually films better than it reads. To the other kind of novelist (Class 2), it is important that «the capacity of language be exploited, so that ambiguities, puns and centrifugal connotations are to be enjoyed rather than regretted... and whose books, made out of words as much as characters and incidents, lose a great deal when adapted to a visual medium.»¹ Following Burgess' reasoning, we may expect Ian Fleming's Moonraker, for example, to fare better in its transposition to the screen than, say, Raymond Queneau's Chêne et Chien.

Burgess' general distinction, as far as it goes, is

1 This and the preceding quotation are from A. Burgess, Joysprick-
An Introduction to the Language of James Joyce (London: Andre
Deutsch, 1973), p. 15

relevant to our purposes. Where Burgess contends that the Class 1 novel lends itself to film adaptation and that the Class 2 novel does not, we may say the same of adapting Class 1 and 2 novels to other languages. A Class 1 novel, in which the words can be taken largely at face value, would seem to be more amenable to translation than a Class 2 novel, in which the word is important not only for what it signifies, but also for its inherent visual and acoustic properties. A Class 2 novelist purposely exploits the accidental properties of words; these same properties will rarely, if ever, be found in the «corresponding» words in the translator's target language. The demands on the Class 2 translator would thus seem to be considerable. Indeed, in an article entitled «On the Limits of Translatability», Juliane House declares that the «most formidable hindrance to translatability occurs in all cases in which language adopts a different function over and above its 'normal' communicative function...: plays on language, i.e. puns or intentional ambiguities, which are so closely tied to the semantic peculiarities of a particular language that they cannot be translated.»² It is precisely this question, the translation

2 J. House, «On the Limits of Translatability», Babel, Vol. 19, No. 4, (1973), pp. 166-167.

of what Burgess refers to as «ambiguities, puns and centrifugal connotations» and what House variously describes as the «untranslatable», «meta-communicative...puns and plays on language», that is the object of the present study. We shall here refer to it as «wordplay» and look to selected works of French writer Boris Vian, a Class 2 novelist par excellence, to demonstrate the problems it can present to the English translator.

By «wordplay» or «play on language» I intend the standard sense, that is, the use of words mainly for the purpose of producing an equivocal or fantastic effect. This would include such rhetorical devices as puns, portmanteau words, spoonerisms and malapropisms. But I also wish to extend the notion slightly to include the following uses of language, which do not normally fall under the heading of wordplay: neologisms, archaisms, rarities, anglicisms, exoticisms, proper nouns, register mix, and inter-textual references. These thirteen devices, all used for comic effect or for evoking plural associations, are the main ones at play in Boris Vian, as we shall see.

It is perhaps useful at this point to define each of these types of wordplay, starting with the most prevalent, the (in)famous pun.

The pun, known in rhetoric as paranomasia or antanac-
clasis, is a verbal joke created by the conscious use of an
equivocal word to produce an ambiguity. When Hockett
describes a «perfect pun» as one which «involves semantic
and grammatical ambiguity in the face of absolute phonemic
identity with both interpretations sensible in the context
in which it occurs,»³ he is really referring to antana-
clasis. «Absolute phonemic identity» is not necessary in
paranomasia which differs from antanacclasis insofar as the
words punned on are similar but not identical in sound;
Falstaff indulges in paranomasia, when jesting with Prince
Hal: «Were it not here apparent that thou art heir appar-
ent...» (I Henry IV, I, 11). Antanacclasis is a homonymic
pun or, to use another term employed by linguists, pure
«homophonic ambiguity»: «My forces razde, thy banners raisd
within» (Sir Philip Sidney, Astrophel and Stella, XXXVI).

There has been relatively little research done on the
nature of the pun.⁴ Denise François offers a possible
explanation for this: «Il se pourrait pourtant que, précédés

3 C.F. Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics (New York: Macmillan, 1958) p. 45.

4 There are, of course, the contentious analyses of Sigmund Freud (e.g. Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious) and Henri Bergson (Le Rire). See also Luc Etienne, L'Art du contrepét (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1957).

par leur mauvaise réputation, les jeux de mots n'avaient pas toujours suffisamment retenu l'attention des philologues et des linguistes dans l'exercice de leur profession.»⁵

Indeed, the pun has never enjoyed the best of reputations.

The history of letters is full of deprecating remarks:

A pun is a pistol let off at the ear; not a feather to tickle the intellect. (Charles Lamb, 1833)

Le calembour est la forme la plus basse du sentiment des sonorités verbales: voilà pourquoi il lui arrive de rapprocher les grands artistes et les grands imbéciles. (Gustave Lanson, L'Art de la prose (1894)).

Wits both ancient and modern...never received their improvements by employing their time in puns and quibbles. (Eachard, 1662)

In The Merchant of Venice (1596), Shakespeare wrote, «How every fool can play upon the word!» and in Les misérables (1862), Hugo wrote «Le calembour est la fiente de l'esprit qui vole» (I, III, 7). Oliver Wendell Holmes characterized punning as «verbicide» (The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, 1858). And Max Eastman remarked of a laboured pun by Ogden Nash: «It is not a pun but a punitive expedition.»⁶

But despite its frequent derision as an unworthy form of wit, punning has flourished from the days of ancient

5 Denise François, «Le contrepét», La Linguistique, No. 2 (1966), p. 31

6 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1936), p. 120

Greece and is entrenched in the history of literature.⁷ Even its «detractors» cannot resist, as we saw in the ironic quotations from Shakespeare, Holmes and Eastman. This is the paradox of the pun; and its list of defenders is long. James Boswell, for example, in his Life of Johnson (1791), declared, «I think no innocent species of wit or pleasantry should be suppressed; and that a good pun may be admitted among the excellencies of lively conversation.» H.W. Fowler, in Modern English Usage, perhaps best sums up this position:

The assumption that puns are per se contemptible, betrayed by the habit of describing every pun not as a pun, but as a bad pun or a feeble pun, is a sign at once of sheeping docility and desire to seem superior. Puns are good, bad and indifferent, and only those who lack the wit to make them are unaware of

7 Homer records Odysseus' punning use of No-man (Greek Outis) as his name when he was about to attack the Cyclops, who then roared out «No-man is killing-me!» and so failed to attract any help (Odyssey 9: 366-408). Oriental poetry makes frequent use of «pivot words», which have one meaning with the context that precedes them and another with the context that follows. Puns have also been used seriously, as in the Bible, Matt. 16, 18: «Thou art Peter (Gr. Petros), and upon this rock (Gr. petra) I will build my church.» The Talmud and other Jewish writings also use puns. Erasmus punned on the name of his friend, Sir Thomas More, with his In Praise of Folly; its Latin title is Encomium Moriae. More himself gave a punning title to his Utopia: telescoping the Greek particles eu and ou, it means the beautiful place that is no place. Shakespeare wrote two sonnets punning on his name Will. We may add that Jonathan Swift wrote A Modest Defense of Punning and Thomas Sheridan Ars Punica, giving 34 rules for the art of punning; rule 32, «Never speak well of another punster», has become the general practice. There is no history of word and letter games, but the following works contain many examples, including some of the famous ones cited above: Isaac D'Israeli's Curiosities of Literature (1964); J.T. Shipley's Playing With Words (1960); M. Taub's The Lancer Book of Puns and Anagrams Crossword Puzzles (1969).

the fact.⁸

The pun is the most extensive category of wordplay. The other categories can be treated more briefly as their definitions, for the most part, correspond to standard dictionary definitions. Numerous examples of each category follow in Parts II and IV.

Portmanteau words or «blends», our second category of wordplay, are actually a form of neologism and are recognized by linguists as an historically-attested source of word formation. In the words of Eric Partridge,

The earliest blends were, as the latest will doubtless be, the result of confusion: a speaker begins to express an idea before he has formulated it in his mind; he commences a word and immediately continues with another, or the corresponding part of another, word of different yet associated meaning.⁹

The «theory» of portmanteau words is actually found in Lewis Carroll's «Jabberwocky». The analysis is made by Humpty Dumpty:

Well, «slithy» means «lithe and slimy». «Lithe» is the same as «active». You see it's like portmanteau - there are two meanings packed up into one word.¹⁰

8 H.W. Fowler, Modern English Usage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1978), p. 492. Oscar Levant voiced similar sentiments: «A pun is the lowest form of humor - when you don't think of it first.» Max Eastman, like Fowler, sees three types of puns: «pointless» (known in the trade as «atrocious»), «witty», and «poetic» (see M. Eastman, op. cit., pp. 116-127).

9 Eric Partridge, Here, There and Everywhere (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), pp. 178-9. For detailed analyses of the blends of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, see Elizabeth Sewall's The Field of Nonsense (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952).

10 Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass (New York: Random House, 1946) p. 95. French translator Henri Parisot, in De l'Autre Côté du Miroir (Paris: Flammarion, 1969) translates this passage as follows: «Eh bien, slicteux signifie souple, actif, onctueux. C'est comme une valise, voyez-vous bien: il y a trois significations contenues dans un seul mot» (p. 110).

A spoonerism involves an interchange of sounds, usually the initial ones, in two or more words, such as «well-boiled icicle» for «well-oiled bicycle», or Rabelais' famous «femme folle à la messe» for «femme molle à la fesse».

A malapropism is the use of a word sounding somewhat like the one intended but ludicrously wrong in the context. Mrs. Malaprop, a character in Richard Sheridan's The Rivals (1775), provides an example when she utters: «Lead the way and we'll precede.»

A neologism is a word newly introduced into a language. In fiction it is done especially as a means of enhancing literary style and is characteristic of writers as various in method as Rabelais, Lewis Carroll, James Joyce, and Raymond Queneau. A vast number of neologisms, employed by individual authors or by stylistic schools, never gain permanent foothold in a language.

«Archaisms», at least in the context of this study, are old or obsolete words which an author will use facetiously. A similar device is the use of «rarities», or words which are uncommon or esoteric.

An anglicism is a word, idiom or characteristic feature of the English language which occurs in or is borrowed by another language. It is subsumed by the category «exoticism», here referring to the conscious borrowing of foreign words in general.

«Proper noun» needs no definition; what we are referring to here is the distortion or invention of proper nouns to produce humour or multivarious connotations. The device is discussed in greater detail in Part II below.

The notion of «register mix» refers to the deliberate juxtaposition of different levels of language, such as formal next to colloquial or technical beside slang. This technique, incidentally, is examined on its own only in the last two short stories of Boris Vian (Part IV below); elsewhere it is either non-existent or, in the case of L'Ecume des jours, subsumed by other categories.

Finally, the «inter-textual» element refers to any deliberate borrowing of words, phrases or stylistic tendencies from other, usually well-known, authors. It may be used for parody, clash of register or multiplicity of associations.

The boundaries of the above categories, it should be pointed out, are by no means distinct. There is considerable overlap in fact: a proper noun may also be a pun or spoonerism, register mix may involve archaisms, exoticisms or malapropisms, and so on.

Not only have plays on words enjoyed wide currency in the history of letters, as we have seen to some extent from the above examples, but they are believed to exist in one

form or another in most, if not all, languages.¹¹ It is therefore natural to wonder how wordplay fares in translation from one language to another.

ii) Wordplay and Translation

According to many, wordplay is untranslatable. Burton Raffel, for example, holds that the «...association of meanings which depend upon sound, like rhymes and puns, are of course untranslatable.»¹² Lars Hamberg, on dramatic translation, writes: «A great many dramatic personae—not least those of Oscar Wilde—are characterized by their use of plays on words and puns.» These are very often untranslatable.»¹³ Leonard Forster declares that «The resources of the language into which the work is to be rendered seldom allow the translator to reproduce this effect of ambiguity

11 Linguists have observed that «riddles, puns, and spelling games... have been found all over the world», that «punning is widespread, not only in English and other European languages, but in Africa, where it is very popular» (Encyclopedia Britannica Vol. 10; p. 654; Encyclopedia Americana Vol. 23, p. 9). In some languages that make use of lexically distinctive tones, tone puns (words alike save for having different tones) are a form of wordplay.

12 Burton Raffel, «The Forked Tongue,» Delos, No. 5 (1970), p. 59

13 Lars Hamberg, «Some Practical Considerations Concerning Dramatic Translation,» Babel, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1969), p. 94

or multiple meaning in individual cases.»¹⁴ Juliane House, we recall, echoed these sentiments when remarking that «plays on language... are so closely tied to the semantic peculiarities of a particular language that they cannot be translated.»¹⁵ And in a letter dated October 24, 1866, Charles Dodgson (alias Lewis Carroll) wrote: «Friends here seem to think that the book Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is untranslatable into either French or German, the puns and songs being the chief obstacles.»¹⁶ In another letter (February 3, 1871), Dodgson wrote: «...my French translator complained of the difficulty of the task, owing to Alice being so very idiomatic...; Of course, I should select only those portions that would go well into the other language, omitting all poetry and puns.»¹⁷

Why should puns be «omitted»? How is wordplay «untranslatable?» We recall that, for House, the most formidable obstacle to translation occurs when language adopts a

14 Leonard Forster, «Translation: An Introduction,» in Aspects of Translation, ed. A.H. Smith (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), p. 3

15 J. House, op. cit., p. 167

16 Quoted by Warren Weaver, Alice in Many Tongues (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 33

17 Ibid, p. 46

different function over and above its normal communicative function. Translatability is limited, in other words, whenever the form of a linguistic unit takes on special importance. In Nida and Taber's words: «Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message.»¹⁸ Form, of course, plays an important role in literary works and is the matrix of all verbal play. In literary works, meaning and form operate together; they are no longer arbitrarily connected. Therefore, the form cannot be changed without a corresponding change in meaning. Since the meaning cannot be detached from its form, this meaning can never be expressed in other ways: paraphrases, commentary, explanation, the coining or borrowing of new words—all of which render pragmatic translation possible—are not sufficient in literary translation.

Nevertheless, there is a vast body of translated literary works in which wordplay is a pivotal element. Shakespeare's punning sonnets have been rendered in many tongues. Rabelais, Carroll, Queneau and Joyce - including the latter's Finnegans Wake—have all been translated. Empirically at least—though this is a crude proof—transfers of «meta-

18 Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), p. 4

communicative» language occur all the time. What do we mean when we say that plays on language and intentional ambiguities cannot be translated?

Let us take the well-known pun-riddle that G.G. Coulton cites,¹⁹ and its French translation:

Is life worth living? It depends on the liver.
La vie vaut-elle la peine? Question de foie.

Both Forster and House quote this pun in order to show that it is not, strictly speaking, a translation. Forster points out the fine semantic differences and the connotations gained and lost. He concludes: «What has been rendered... is the fact of the pun; not the pun itself, which is probably untranslatable.»²⁰ House claims that this pun

is not translatable because the double reference of liver cannot, in principle, be reproduced in any other language. In Saussurean terms, the ambiguity is due to the fact that the entire value of the sign, i.e. meaning from the point of view of langue, plays a role in the actual use of the sign. Since the values determined by two necessarily incommensurate language systems can never be matched, translation is impossible.²¹

Although House and Forster are correct in saying the pun's ambiguity and connotations have not been exactly transferred, this point is a meagre, academic one.

19 G.G. Coulton, Fourscore Years (Cambridge U. Press, 1943) p. 109n.

20 L. Forster, op. cit., p. 3

21 J. House, op. cit., p. 166

For it is obvious that this translation is superlative, that its «losses» are negligible. The effect of the pun, its double reference and humour, have been retained in whole. What is the point of arguing that this pun cannot be translated when there is concrete proof that it can? If it is the word «translation» that is causing the problems, perhaps it is better to talk instead of what Roman Jakobson refers to as «creative transposition».²²

In «The Mock Turtle's Story» from Alice in Wonderland there is the following conversation:

«And how many hours did you do lessons?» said Alice, in a hurry to change the subject. «Ten hours the first day,» said the Mock Turtle: «nine the next, and so on.» «What a curious plan!» exclaimed Alice. «That's the reason they're called lessons,» the Gryphon remarked: because they lessen from day to day.»

The pun, of course, turns on the different meanings of the homonyms «lesson» and «lessen.» Jacques Papy's translation of this passage very neatly substitutes a different play on words:

- C'est pour cette raison qu'on appelle ça des cours, fit observer le Griffon; parce qu'ils deviennent chaque jour plus courts.²³

Translator Marie-Madeleine Fayet also solves the problem

22 Roman Jakobson, «On Linguistic Aspects of Translation», On Translation, ed. Reuben Brower (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 238

23 Lewis Carroll, Alice au pays des merveilles, tr. Jacques Papy (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), p. 133

creatively:

- C'est pourquoi on les appelle leçons, observe le griffon, parce que nous en «laissons» un peu tous les jours.²⁴

Charles Dodgson, who claimed that puns and poetry were the «untranslatable» elements of Alice, later seems to contradict himself. In Antoine Zimmerman's German translation of Alice (1869) Dodgson wrote a tribute which, in English, reads:

The author wishes to express his indebtedness to the translator, who has replaced certain occasional parodies of English childhood poetry - understandably unfamiliar to German children - by comparable parodies of well-known German poems. Similarly, certain untranslatable English puns have been replaced by suitable material which the book owes solely to the adroitness of the translator.²⁵

If the poetry and puns are «replaced» by «suitable» and «comparable» material and the translator is further acknowledged to show «adroitness», how can this material be considered «untranslatable»?

It is thus hard to avoid the hypothesis, at least from the examples above, that wordplay can indeed be transferred and that the success of such transfer is contingent on the

24 Lewis Carroll, Alice au pays des merveilles, tr. Marie-Madeleine Fayet (Paris: Hachette, 1965) p. 142

25 Quoted by Warren Weaver, op. cit., pp. 97-98

skill of the translator rather than on any inherent properties of the target language. Unfortunately, however, the notion that verbal play is impossible to render in another language appears to be widespread among translators.

When confronted with a foreign play on words, a translator will too often do one of two things: append a footnoted explanation or simply ignore the play altogether. These two practices, which do not involve translation at all, are like throwing up one's hands. By means of the footnote, that unaesthetic shortcut, many literary translators tell rather than show. For example, Bernard Frechtman, in translating Jean Genet's Pompes funèbres, advises us in a footnote that «Staves and orchards, renders an untranslatable play on words: les verges et les vergers. Verge is the zoological (sic) word for penis.» (p. 18). Elsewhere, we are told in footnotes that «The French word âme means both «soul» and «bore» of a gun» (p. 29), that «There is a play on the words scie (saw) and ici (here)» (p. 47), that there is «A play on the words corbillard (hearse) and corbeille (basket)» (p. 95), that Paname is «French

slang for Paris» (p. 128).²⁶ Naturally, this is unsatisfactory for the reader in that he or she does not experience directly the magic of words: instead of enjoying the author's style and wit, the reader is subjected to analytical explanation. In the words of André Lefevere, «the reader is most likely to be bewildered by a translation written in understandable, even enjoyable literary language, in which he encounters, from time to time, names or terms he cannot understand without glancing at the footnotes accompanying the text. If he takes the trouble plodding through the notes, the direct contact with the work is lost.»²⁷ And Aloys Skoumal concludes, «Les annotations des traducteurs semblent ne pas être écrites pour les lecteurs, mais pour les élèves qui

26 J. Genet, Funeral Rite, trans. B. Frechtman (New-York: Grove Press, 1969). Translators Jacques Papy and Marie-Madeleine Fayet mentioned above also make use of footnotes. Fayet, after composing a passage that makes no sense in French, explains that «Les mots anglais 'tale' (histoire) et 'tail' (queue) se prononcent à peu près de la même façon. Alice les confond» (p. 39). Papy, to give but two examples, writes, «Le mot 'knot' (noeud) se prononce exactement comme le mot 'not' (pas, ne...pas): ce qui explique l'erreur d'Alice»; «...il y a un jeu de mots impossible à rendre, car le verbe, 'to draw' signifie à la fois, 'tirer, puiser', et 'dessiner'» (pp. 180-181). Vladimir Nabokov is the most famous apologist of this technique. See «The Servile Path» in R.A. Brower, (ed.) On Translation (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

27 A. Lefevere, «The Translation of Literature: An Approach,» Babel, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1973), p. 79

doivent passer un examen en la matière». ²⁸

Some translators will purposely omit all play on words, though it is difficult to imagine why. Taylor and Schoenfeld, in translating Boris Vian's short story «Le Rappel», for example, have omitted all four instances of wordplay and have not compensated elsewhere in the text (see pages 175ff. below). Other translators will try to confront wordplay head on, or when this appears impossible, will compensate elsewhere. All of these last three procedures are exemplified in the two English translations of Boris Vian's L'Ecume des jours: Froth on the Daydream by Stanley Chapman and Mood Indigo by John Sturrock.

28 A. Skoumal, «Quelques remarques sur l'art de traduire,» Babel, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1970), p. 74

II. THE TRANSLATION OF WORDPLAY IN L'ECUME DES JOURS

Boris Vian's L'Ecume des jours (1946) is a novel of fantasy; with its verbal twists and double entendres, with its naive and lyrical expression, it is in approximately the same line as Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Vian is also in many ways a successor to Rabelais, Jarry and Queneau. At the same time, L'Ecume des jours is a love story, moving and poetic; on the dust jacket of one of its English translations, Mood Indigo, Queneau is quoted as describing it as the «most poignant of contemporary love novels.»

The plot of this love story is quite simple. The jacket of the novel describes it thus:

Colin meets Chloë. They fall in love. They get married. Chloë becomes sick. Colin bankrupts himself to cure her. The doctor cannot cure her. Chloë dies. Colin will not live much longer.²⁹

Freddy de Vrée is even more succinct:

Colin loves Chloë who becomes sick and dies. Colin commits suicide and his rat commits suicide also. As plot, it is, happily, rather thin.³⁰

An intertwining sub-plot traces the adventures of Chick, Colin's best friend, in his fervent attempts to secure every work ever written by Jean Sol Partre.

The setting is far less simple. Certain places and

29 Quoted by Alfred Cismaru, Boris Vian (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974) p. 61

30 Freddy de Vrée, Boris Vian (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1965) p. 21

people look familiar but are strange and distorted, as in a dream. Some objects do not behave as they should; some objects — and colours — we have never seen before. It is a world at once disquieting and funny, in which anything may happen — especially that which is most unexpected. There is certainly no logic in this world, at least not the linear, Aristotelian one to which we are accustomed. Decidedly, L'Ecume des jours is a product of the strange, disorienting aftermath of the German occupation in Paris.

In constructing this singular and haunting world, Vian has employed a variety of techniques. The dream-like setting, the fantastic gadgets and inventions are not unlike those found in science-fiction; when combined with an abundance of eccentric characters and preposterous incidents, the tale becomes imbued with mystery and magic. But perhaps the most important means by which Vian transports us into this other world is his material disposition of the words themselves.

As Jacques Bens remarks:

On aura reconnu que ce monde de Boris Vian est entièrement fondé sur le langage, c'est-à-dire: naît de lui, et trouve en lui chacune de ses justifications.³¹

The principal problems in translating this linguistically-derived world of L'Ecume des jours involve: (1) the

31 Jacques Bens, «Un Langage-univers» (Postface) in Boris Vian's L'Ecume des jours (Paris: UGE (10/18), 1963), p. 176

puns; (ii) neologisms; (iii) portmanteau words; (iv) spoonerisms; (v) archaisms, rarities and exoticisms; (vi) anglicisms; (vii) proper nouns. Once again, these divisions are not mutually exclusive: certain examples will jump from one category to another.

1) Puns

Une équipe de pompiers prenaient ceux-là [les resquilleurs qui veulent assister à la conférence de Partre] pour cible et, au moyen de lances d'incendie, les déviaient vers la scène où ils se noyaient misérablement (p. 72).³²

In this, our first example, the homophonic ambiguity obviously stems from the two homophones, «scène» and «Seine». We may well wonder how it fares in English translation. John Sturrock, in Mood Indigo, renders the passage thus:

A squad of firemen used these planes as targets, and diverted them with their hoses toward the Seine, where they drowned miserably (p. 79).³³

Sturrock has certainly understood the pun but he has not transposed it in English. Only one of the pun's references, the «Seine», has been retained and therefore the ambiguity is lost. (And he has changed the meaning of the sentence by misinterpreting the antecedent of ceux-là: it does not refer

32 Boris Vian, L'Ecume des jours (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions (10/18), 1963). All bracketed page references are to this edition.

33 B. Vian, Mood Indigo, trans. John Sturrock (New York: Grove Press, 1967). All quotations are from this edition.

back to planes, and planes do not usually drown.)

Stanley Chapman, on the other hand, has understood who ceux-là are, but has missed the pun totally:

A team of firemen took them for a practice target and, unlacing ~~their~~ hoses, squirted them straight in the bull's-eye of the battle where everybody was miserably drowned (p. 80).³⁴

When Chick is taken to the police station for having participated in the scene above, the chief agent d'armes (p. 152) (agent + gendarmes, a blend rendered by both Sturrock and Chapman simply as «man-at-arms») pronounces:

Il faut que nous vous passions à tabac de contrebande.
C'est un tabac très fort... (p. 159).

The joke, of course, turns on the expression passer à tabac. The collision is retained by Sturrock, who plays on an equivalent idiom: «We'll have to hand you over to run the leather gauntlet (p. 175). «To run the gauntlet» is to suffer tribulation (as is passer à tabac); but a gauntlet is also a glove. Chapman again misses the play on words in an overly-literal, «We must charge you with contraband tobacco» (p. 173).³⁵

34 B. Vian, Froth on the Daydream, trans. Stanley Chapman (London: Penguin, 1967). All references are to this edition.

35 Vian's wordplay here is not, strictly speaking, an instance of paronomasia (or antanaclassis), but simply a juggling of syntagms. This technique is often found in the poems of Prévert and songs of Ferré; in Vian's Cantilènes en gelée we find: «Défense de cracher du sang, Défense de fumer des harengs» (quoted by M. Gauthier in L'Ecume des jours Boris Vian (Paris: Hatier, 1973), p. 83n.).

Colin's elegant and dapper chef, Nicolas, is on one occasion clad in a «veste de velours marron à côtes d'ivoire» (p. 47). The geographical homophone (Côte d'Ivoire) does not fare well in translation: Sturrock's «brown velvet jacket with ivory sides» (p. 50) is in fact a mistranslation; Chapman also is unable to reproduce the pun, though he does invoke some playful agricultural imagery: «His corduroy jacket was in rich chestnut with ivory furrows» (p. 52).

In an elaborate parody of the language of recipe directions, Nicolas reads out the following: «Poussez le feu, et sur l'espace ainsi gagné, disposez avec goût des rondelles de ris mitonné» (p. 23). The joke, of course, arises from a literal interpretation of «pousser le feu». The phrase is rendered in English by Sturrock and Chapman respectively, as follows:

Turn up the heat and in the space thus provided arrange tastefully some rings of marinated sweetbreads (p. 25).

Heighten the flame and, in the space thereby gained, tastefully arrange little rings of coddled rice (p. 26).

Both translations are less than the original: not only is there no wordplay, but the meaning in both cases is vague.

Similar wordplay occurs in an earlier recipe parody: «aiguiser une pointe d'ail» (p. 10). Sturrock sees nothing strange in this: «sharpen the... small garlic tip» is his word-for-word rendering. Chapman, recognizing the jest,

invents a new pun which plays on the ambiguity of the word «pinch»: «a pinch of salt and pepper. I couldn't pinch as much as I'd have liked, sir, ...the jemmy [burglar's crowbar] is wearing out» (p. 12).

These last two examples illustrate Vian's penchant for questioning fixed figures of speech: his playing often turns on taking them literally, at face value.

At a party Colin is offered «des petits fours sur un plateau hercynien» (p. 34). The geological pun is absent in Sturrock's meaningless «petits fours from a Hercynian tray» (p. 37); Chapman's «refreshments on an onyx platter» (p. 38) likewise misses the pun. Perhaps «marble cake which everyone took for granite» would have been better.

Colin's girlfriend Chloé has «des chaussures de serpent teint» (p. 102), which suggests its homophone «serpentin». Neither Sturrock nor Chapman has transferred the pun into English: «Dyed snakeskin shoes» (p. 111); «Dyed serpent-skin accessories» (p. 112). Among the possibilities here are such fanciful items as «dyed Rumpelstiltskin boots», «Water-moccasin moccasins», or «black and white Pussen boots».

When Colin goes to pick up some medicine for Chloé, who is dying, Vian relates the incident as follows:

- Exécuter cette ordonnance... suggéra Colin.
Le pharmacien saisit le papier, le plia en deux, en fit une bande longue et serrée et l'introduisit dans une petite guillotine de bureau (p. 94).

Sturrock is able to preserve the play on words but violates English to do so:

«Execute this prescription,» suggested Colin. The chemist took the paper, folded it in two, made it into a long, tight roll and inserted it into a little desk guillotine. (p. 105).

One does not «execute» a prescription; «exécuter une ordonnance», is «to fill a prescription». Chapman, on the other hand, retains the wordplay and idiomatic English (even though a doctor makes up a prescription and a chemist fills it):

«Make up this prescription...» suggested Colin. The chemist snatched the sheet of paper, drew a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth on it, and then applied eye-shadow powder and lipstick to them. (pp. 102-103).

Despondent over Chloé's poor health and Colin's sour turn of fortune, Nicholas sighs:

Je voudrais me retirer dans un coing. À cause de l'odeur. Et puis parce que j'y serais tranquille (p. 120).

Where Vian plays on the «coing/coin» homophones, Sturrock plays on the two meanings of «pit»:

I'd like to crawl into a peach pit. Because of the smell. And because it'd be peaceful there too (p. 131).

Chapman does away with the reference to fruit, modulating instead to a metaphoric/literal collision involving the word «shell», i.e. «crawling into one's shell» against hearing the sea in a shell:

I'd like to crawl away inside a shell. Then I'd hear nothing but the sea. And nobody would find me and come and disturb me...» (p. 131).

What can we conclude from these ten examples? John Sturrock, in Mood Indigo, has either missed, been unable to transpose, or not bothered to transpose, all but two of these examples. In Froth on the Daydream, Stanley Chapman has rendered four of the ten puns, which is adequate, considering that the resources of the target language do not allow a translator to reproduce a pun in every case. In any event, a statistical match-up is far less significant than the translator's attempt to capture the over-all spirit of the writer's style. Vian plays with language at every opportunity; his translators must first of all recognize this and then attempt to do the same. Naturally, exact or similar correspondence in each instance of play is unnecessary; any occasion can be utilized for purposes of what is commonly known as compensation.^{35a}

It is in vain that one seeks compensating wordplay in Sturrock's Mood Indigo. Chapman's Froth on the Daydream, conversely, is full of compensatory verbal acrobatics, some of which we shall see later.³⁶ In the context of puns, the following two plays on words, not found in the corresponding Vian passages, are representative:

Il fera beau, dit le Bedon en reniflant l'odeur des nuages. Ils sentent le serpolet (p. 65).

35a For a definition and explanation of compensation, see J.-P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet's Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1977), pp. 6, 188-192.

36 See, for example, page 190n.

It's going to be fine, said the Boodle, sniffing the aroma of the clouds. They smell of wild thyme (Sturrock, p. 55).

It's going to be fine, said the Unisexon Bedull, sniffing at the clouds. «I can smell thyme passing (Chapman, p. 57).

The pun, need we explain, stems from the «time/thyme» collision. In the following example of compensatory punning («Hypocratic oath»), note in passing Chapman's colourful, idiomatic verbs («ducked», «bang») vis-à-vis Sturrock («lowered his head», «strike»):

Il passa, suivi de Colin dans la chambre de Chloé et baissa la tête pour ne pas se heurter au chanbranle, mais celui-ci s'infléchit au même moment et le professeur émit un gros juron (p. 130).

Followed by Colin he went into Chloe's bedroom and lowered his head so as not to strike it on the lintel, but at the same instant the latter sagged and the professor let out a loud oath (Sturrock, p. 142).

Followed by Colin, he went into Chloe's room and ducked so as not to bang his head against the lintel over the door—but this came down at the same moment and the professor let out an enormous and unconventional Hypocratic oath (Chapman, p. 142).

ii) Neologisms

The following is a partial list of Vian's word inventions in L'Ecume des jours.³⁷ Most often the reader can

37 Michel Gauthier, in L'Ecume des jours, Boris Vian (Paris: Hatier, 1977, p. 77) analyzes some of Vian's creations. He sometimes overestimates, however, Vian's powers of invention. «S'insoler» and «s'étriquer», for example, are not neologisms but didactic and regional respectively. «Houdah», which Gauthier was unable to find in any dictionary, is actually a Hindi word, designating the railed seat and canopy on the back of an elephant.

hazard a guess as to the word's origin. Some of the neologisms have a strangely evocative quality, suggesting meanings where none are actually present.

<u>Vian</u>	<u>Sturrock</u>	<u>Chapman</u>	<u>Comments</u>
s'abluter (p. 29)	ablute (p. 28)	wash (p. 30)	Comic compensation in Chapman text.
Cépédéiste (from Cie parisienne d'Eclairage (CPE) (p. 39)	C.P.D. (p. 42)	elebeast (p. 44)	Sturrock's acronym is meaningless; Chapman's creation is presumably a play similar to Vian's.
contisés (p. 12)	————	————	Both translators chose to avoid this word.
députodrome (p. 40)	Deputydrome (p. 43)	Parliadium (p. 44)	Sturrock's choice is not well chosen: «deputy» means something different from its false cognate, «député».
brouzillon (p. 54)	natterfly (p. 59)	flutterwing (p. 60)	From context we gather this is some sort of flying insect. Both translations are suitable creations.
cinématographiste (p. 57)	cameraman (p. 61)	cameraman (p. 63)	A corresponding neologism such as «cinematographist» or «camerator» could have been chosen.
cardioïde (p. 57)	hearth (p. 62)	hearth (p. 63)	«Cardium»? or «cardioid»?
prioir (p. 60)	prayer cushions (p. 65)	inflated prayer cushions (p. 66)	Need corresponding neologism.
se nutritionner (p. 69)	to nourish us (p. 75)	eat (p. 77)	«to nutritionize»?

<u>Vian</u>	<u>Sturrock</u>	<u>Chapman</u>	<u>Comments</u>
zonzonner (p. 70)	buzzing (p. 75)	snoozing (p. 77)	Semantic difference here: what <u>were</u> these animals doing in the sun? Any English onomatopoeia (invented) will do.
gondolance (from slang «gondolant») (p. 93)	amusement (p. 102)	high hilarity (p. 103)	Chapman's alliterative play compensates.
Blocknotez (p. 152)	Notepad this (p. 167)	Shorthandify please (p. 169)	Both translations are apt.
octavon (p. 105)	octoroon (p. 114)	octoroon (p. 115)	Vian's «octavon» is modelled upon «quarteron» on the one hand, and the English «octoroon» on the other.

Of the thirteen neologisms above, Sturrock has really recreated only two: «natterfly» and «Notepad» (vb.); «C.P.D.» and «Deputydrome» are unsuggestive calques from the French. Chapman has done slightly better, recreating four («elebeast», «Parliadium», «flutterwing», «shorthandify»), and compensating on two other occasions. Both translators, needless to say, could have demonstrated more imagination and freedom in their choices.

iii) Portmanteau words (blends)

Lewis Carroll was, of course, the great master of blends and it is beyond doubt that Vian was greatly influenced by him. Gilbert Pestureau tells us that «L'admiration de

Boris Vian pour Lewis Carroll est bien connue...; Boris, grand lecteur du Snark, n'a pas pu ne pas en être frappé.» It is Pestureau's thesis that Carroll's influence actually turned Vian to science fiction, where the possibilities for word creation were rich.³⁸

L'Ecume des jours is certainly a kind of science fiction and some of the curios contained therein have portmanteau names. There is, for example, a mysterious contraption known as a «pianoctail» (p. 18), which concocts drinks according to the notes played on a piano. It is not only a portmanteau—«piano» + «cocktail»—but a visual pun or «trompe l'oeil» as well.³⁹ Sturrock does well to leave it as is in his text, for it works just as nicely in English as it does in French. Chapman is perhaps over-ambitious with his «clavicoctail» (p. 14).

Colin's bed is reached by means of a ladder made of

38 G. Pestureau, Boris Vian, les Amerlauds et les Godons (Paris: UGE, 10/18, 1978) p. 146. Pestureau cites two portmanteau words appearing in Vian's translation of science-fiction writer Lewis Padgett, Tout smouales étaient les borogroves (Paris: Mercure de France, 1953): «mécanhomme» (for «build-a-man No. 3») and «Tractueur» for «Killdozer». A catalogue of portmanteau words («mots-valises») gleaned from the entire oeuvre of Boris Vian has been established by H. Baudin in Boris Vian humoriste (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires, 1973).

39 This device was used by the surrealists and is sometimes found in advertising: in the licence plate message «I LOVERMONT», for example, and in the magazine title «MUSICANADA».

«chêne syracusé» (p. 79), instead of «chêne cêrusé» (?).

Sturrock's translation, «waxworked oak», ignores the verbal play while Chapman creates an English portmanteau: «perfumigated oak» («perfume» + «fumigated» p. 69).⁴⁰

Very often Vian's blends resemble malapropisms. The above example, «chêne syracusé», might be considered one, and so may the following:

- C'est de l'érable mouché [moucheté?], dit Colin (p. 123).

«It's made from snuffed maplewood,» said Colin (Sturrock, p. 134).

«It's made from genuine crow's-foot maple,» said Colin (Chapman, p. 134).

Sturrock has chosen one of the senses of «mouché», namely, «to snuff out» (a candle), which lacks both wordplay and sense. Chapman has opted for pure nonsense, never a mistake in translating Vian.

A similar example, either a blend or a malapropism depending on one's point of view, is Vian's «sandales de cuir de rousette» (p. 8) which suggests «cuir de Russie». Sturrock's «bat's leather» (p. 8) is sufficiently outlandish, but Chapman's «skins of spotted dog-fish» (p. 10) has more of the fantasy and dance of words that is Vian.

⁴⁰ Baudin cites three blends from Vian's L'Herbe rouge: «sarcastifleur» («sarcastique» + «persifleur»); «je blairnifle» (où je renifle le blair); «rabiuxe» («rabiote» + «lux»). The novel has yet to be translated into English.

iv) Spoonerisms

That the French term for spoonerism, «contrepèterie», dates back to at least 1582 (Robert) while the English term owes its name to Dr. W.A. Spooner (1844-1930) of New College, Oxford, may be an indication that the phenomenon is more frequent in French. It certainly appears to be more popular in France where it frequently shows up in newspaper headlines, books and advertising. Le Canard Enchaîné, of course, is inordinately guilty of such transpositions («Pétain mollit trop» for «métropolitain» or «damné succès» for «succédané»⁴¹).

In an article on the «contrepet», Denise François refers indirectly to the problem of translating such plays on words:

Il est certain que, avec son taux élevé de cas d'homonymie, d'ambiguïtés, le français offre un terrain de choix pour les jeux de mots. Les conditions sont tout autre dans une langue qui connaît, par exemple, des neutralisations consonantiques à la finale ou un accent fixe. Non point que dans les langues les jeux de mots soient impossibles, mais ils sont soumis à des limitations, plus ou moins contraignantes, provenant de leur système contrastif.⁴²

41 Quoted By D. François, op. cit., p. 31. She also mentions certain «Série Noire» (Gallimard) titles, though they are not, strictly speaking, spoonerisms: Bal à Bâle, Le rat qui rit, Amis à Miami, Patakès au Pakistan, etc.

42 Ibid, p. 31. Robert de Beaugrande, in Factors in a Theory of Poetic Translating (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978) also comments on the way languages may differ with regard to potential formal equivalence at the level of langue: «...the possibilities of sound correspondences between English and German are more limited than those between Spanish and Italian, but greater than those between English and Japanese. A similar relationship obtains in the area of grammatical/syntactic correspondence» (p. 99).

All translators, then, cannot always be expected to find corresponding spoonerisms, though it must be said that François' comments above do not apply with great force to English translators. Anyone contending that the use of spoonerisms is restricted in English has obviously not read Ogden Nash.

In L'Ecume des jours, when Colin enters the skating rink, he is handed back his season's ticket: «Colin la remit sans scrupule dans son portecuir en feuilles de Russie...» (p. 16). The transposition is obviously from «portefeuille en cuir de Russie». Sturrock renders this as «Colin did not hesitate to put it back in his Russian leather wallet» (p. 17). Though his transposition does not make sense, Chapman at least attempts to give the English reader the impression of the spoonerism: «Colin hurriedly put it back into his walldodile crocket...» (pp. 18-19).

Jean-Paul Sartre becomes Jean-Sol Partre and his L'Être et le néant is travestied by Vian as La lettre et le néon (p. 141). Sturrock does not touch these names, reproducing them verbatim; the allusion and joke are thus lost on most English readers. Chapman is once again more venturesome and his 'creations are ingenious: he transforms Jean-Paul Sartre into Jean-Pulse Heartre—the latter is killed in the end with an «arrache-coeur» or «heartsnatcher»—and L'Être et le néant (in English, Being and Nothingness) becomes the

absurd Breathing and Stuffiness. Chapman has quite rightly chosen the English title to parody.

v) Anglicisms

The French, of course, are notorious for their affection for anglicisms. Boris Vian was the ultimate Anglophile, not only translating several American and British works,⁴³ but filling his own works with American characters, expressions and settings. His interest in American (Dixieland) jazz—he himself was a jazz trumpettist—has been well documented. In G. Pestureau's Boris Vian, les Amerlauds et les Godons, as its title might suggest, Vian's American and British influences are traced in considerable detail. It is interesting to note in this regard that John Sturrock—presumably it was he—chose the excellent title Mood Indigo for L'Ecume des jours, for him a rare instance of free translation. Not only does the colour indigo appear frequently in Vian's works, but the reference to the Duke Ellington tune and to jazz in general is particularly apt. It is surprising, on the other hand, to find Chapman opting for a largely literal, and consequently rather awkward-sounding, Froth on the Daydream.

American jazzmen that are travestied—or rather honoured—

43 Vian translated, for example, such authors as Raymond Chandler, Ray Bradbury, Dorothy Baker, A.E. Van Vogt and General Omar Bradley. Vian's translation of Strindberg's Miss Julie depended heavily on the English translation, according to Pestureau. It was unfavourably reviewed, incidentally, in Anthony Swerling's «Frenchifying Strindberg—A Literary Hoax?», Babel, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1972), pp. 5-6.

appear in the section on proper names below. The four examples that follow are among Vian's direct borrowings of English common nouns.

«Nicolas repose sur la table le grapefruit qu'il avait plumé...» (p. 24).

Would not any English translator, confronted with this sentence, automatically put «grapefruit» back into French?

Sturrock, at any rate, decides not to:

Nicolas put back on the table the grapefruit that he had been plucking...» (p. 26).

And Chapman, unfortunately, follows suit:

Nicholas put the grapefruit that he had been peeling... on to the table...» (p. 27).

An alternative rendering, «Nicholas put the pamplemousse he'd been peeling on to the pine table», reverses Vian's anglicism and throws in some comic /p/ alliteration for good measure.

A similar instance, this time involving a faux ami, occurs when Colin is explaining to Chick and Alise the reason for Chloé's absence: «Elle est partie trois semaines avec des relatifs dans le Midi» (p. 44). While both Sturrock and Chapman use the not totally satisfactory English equivalent «relations» in their translation of this sentence (p. 47; p. 48), it is difficult to suggest anything better.

Vian's «alcools doux» (p. 154) is likely influenced by English usage. We distinguish between «hard» and «soft»

liquor or «stuff» and we also have «soft» drinks. This latter expression, parenthetically, is anglicized in Québec as «liqueurs douces». Sturrock, at any rate, interprets «alcools doux» to mean «sweet liqueurs» (p. 169), and he may be right; absent, though, is the verbal play, which Chapman restores with «High Spirits» (p. 167).

Our final example is the most complicated of Vian's anglicisms, for it involves at once a pun, a faux ami, and an inter-textual reference: «Pour l'Engagement, Colin avait demandé que l'on jouât l'arrangement de Duke Ellington sur un vieil air bien connu, Chloé.» (p. 60). Vian obviously means «fiançailles» here, for «l'engagement» in a false cognate of the English word «engagement». Sturrock translates «l'Engagement» as «marriage promise» (p. 65), which is anodine, and Chapman as «anthem» (p. 67), which is inaccurate.

That Vian is also playing on the Sartrian existentialist concept of the same name is obvious, both because Sartre is parodied throughout and because the pun is reinforced elsewhere. Colin asks Nicolas the topic of the meeting he is about to attend:

Il y sera parlé de l'engagement. Un parallèle est établi entre l'engagement d'après les théories de Jean-Sol Partre, l'engagement ou le rengagement dans les troupes coloniales, et l'engagement ou prises à gages des gens dit de maison par les particuliers (p. 27).

While Sturrock is able to use the manifold meanings of the same word in English, he is unable to match the effect of the French, for the reference to Sartrean philosophy is marred:

We shall discuss engagement. A parallel has been established between engagement according to the theories of Jean-Sol Partre, engagement or re-engagement in the colonial forces, and the engagement or employment of so-called domestic servants by private individuals (pp. 28-29).

Sturrock cannot rightly speak of «engagement according to the theories of Jean-Sol Partre» because it doesn't mean anything. Sartre's concept of «l'engagement» has never been translated as «engagement» in English. Ever since the early fifties and American translator Hazel Barnes, the concept has been known as commitment. Chapman, fortunately, realizes that he will have to change the pivot-word of the pun:

We shall be discussing commitment. One of our members has discovered a connection between the various forms of commitment, beginning with Jean Pulse Heartre's conception and then going on to the commitment of suicides, commitment to total abstinence, commitment to prison, to the flames, to memory, to writing, to a lunatic asylum—or commitment to duty—in particular, by housekeepers (p. 30).

This is a splendid effort; this is Boris Vian.

vi) Archaisms, Exoticisms and Rarities

Like Queneau («Queneau et Vian ont sûrement fait des échanges de mots, surtout autour d'une bouteille! »),⁴⁴ Vian

⁴⁴ G. Pestureau, op. cit., p. 139

has a propensity for using rare or archaic words, usually for purposes of character parody or humorous clash of register. This habit is manifested throughout Vian's work, particularly in L'Arrache Coeur and L'Automne à Pékin, though L'Ecume des jours has its share, as this partial list suggests:

<u>Vian</u>	<u>Sturrock</u>	<u>Chapman</u>
calmande (p. 8)	calamanco (p. 8)	wild taffeta (p. 10)
gavial (p. 46)	crocodile (p. 50)	snakeskin (p. 51)
aubifoin (p. 51)	cornflower (p. 55)	hawthorn and catkin (p. 57) (preceded by «thyme passing»)
icelui (p. 57)	the latter's (p. 62)	its (p. 63)
sapote (p. 63)	sapodilla (p. 68)	sapodilla (p. 70)
septante-trois (p. 58)	seventy-three (p. 62)	three score and thirteen (p. 64)
opoponax (p. 105)	opoponax (p. 114)	opoponax (p. 115)
s'insoler (p. 70)	bathed in sunshine (p. 76)	bathed in the sunshine (p. 77)
radiance (p. 74)	radiance (p. 81)	radiance (p. 82)
verlets-nettoyeurs (p. 18)	rink flunkies (p. 18)	serf-sweepers (p. 20)

«Calmande» (a textile), «aubifoin» (a plant), and «s'insoler» (to sunbathe) are not current enough to be included in Petit Robert; «gavial» is Hindi, «sapote» Aztec; «septante-trois» is archaic or regional, «opoponax» is a south-Mediterranean plant; «icelui», «radiance» and «varlet» are archaic. Both Sturrock and Chapman have ferreted out the meanings of these words and most often their English terms are equally

recondite. Chapman has again shown more imagination, however, with his «wild taffeta», «hawthorn and catkin», «three score and thirteen», and «serf-sweepers». But neither translator has consulted an Old or Middle English dictionary for corresponding archaisms.

vii) Proper nouns

One of the striking aspects of John Stuart Mill's famous treatise on names is his contention that only general names can convey information about the things they represent (his ~~te~~ for this is «connotation»), that individual, or proper, names do not indicate or imply attributes but merely «denote» the individuals who are called by them. Since, for Mill, whatever information is conveyed by names, i.e., whatever meaning they possess, is a product of their connotation and not of their denotation, it is obvious that proper names, which merely identify the thing they symbolize, have «strictly speaking, no signification... A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object.»⁴⁵

45 J.S. Mill, A System of Logic (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1856) Vol. 1, pp. 33-34. For a thorough treatment of the nature of the proper noun, see Alan Gardiner's The Theory of Proper Names (Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1954).

The notion that proper names have merely a designative function, and possess no informative connotation for an interpreter who has no previous acquaintances with the object so named, is apparently denied in Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass:

«Don't stand chattering to yourself like that,» Humpty Dumpty said, looking at her for the first time, «but tell me your name and your business.»

«My name is Alice, but—»

«It's a stupid name enough',» Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently. «What does it mean?»

«Must a name mean something?» Alice asked doubtfully.

«Of course it must,» Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: «my name means the shape I am—and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.»⁴⁶

According to Humpty Dumpty, then, a proper name should convey specific information about the things they label. Peter Alexander has said of this passage: «We are led to see that there is a great deal in a name...; Humpty Dumpty is shocked to learn that Alice's name means nothing...; Proper names, apparently, have to mean something—and what they mean is dictated by what they name.»⁴⁷

Many novelists and dramatists would undoubtedly sympa-

46 L. Carroll, op. cit., p. 209

47 P. Alexander, «Logic and the Humour of Lewis Carroll», Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, VI (May, 1951), p. 558

thize with Humpty Dumpty's expectations. When Charles Dickens gives his characters such names as Murdstone (David Copperfield's brutal stepfather), Skimpole (the impecunious wretch in Bleak House), McChoakumchild (the school-teacher in Hard Times), or Sim Tappertit (the half-fool, half-knave in Barnaby Rudge), the reader is provided with information about those characters before having met them. We should perhaps specify that the English reader will find the names evocative, for when they are transferred to another language they presumably become the «unmeaning marks» with «no signification» described by John Stuart Mill.

The problem of transplanting the names of fictional characters has been touched upon by Juliane House, who goes so far as to say: «Another instance of play on language which is invariably lost in translation is the case of evocative names used frequently in literary works.»⁴⁸ Similarly, Leonard Forster contends that:

They [problems for translation] arise acutely in one field in which no real solution has been found; I mean the evocative names used by many novelists and dramatists. A name is a linguistic element like any other; and the author is entitled to use it for its associative value... But the use of names of this kind is one of the means [a writer] employs, and that, and what

48 J. House, op. cit., p. 167

he expresses by it, is lost in translation.⁴⁹

Forster goes on to recount how a character named Egbert in a German novel is often referred to as «Eg». As this name has connotations in English that are unintended in German—«he is not a comic character and it is a very serious novel», explains Forster—there would appear to be a dilemma for the translator. But Forster, after deep reflexion, stumbles upon an ingenious way out: «Fortunately, the author is still alive, so the translator... may be able to persuade him to allow another name to be used in the English version; this seems to be the only solution.»⁵⁰

That this solution is so obvious, that evocative names must be evocative when translated and changed when no evocation is intended, has simply not occurred to Forster. The «sanctity» of the text has limits, and whether or not the

49 L. Forster, op. cit., p. 26. The evocative power of names is well recognized outside the literary field: in advertising, where the name of the product is vital, and among actors and actresses who change their names to «match» the image they wish to project. The «meaning» of a name, its connotations and associations—sometimes, subliminal—are also exploited in politics, as Leonard Forster somewhat facetiously illustrates: «It has been said that Hitler's career would have been different if he had used his parental name of Schicklgruber, and it may well be true; I must say I would feel unhappy entrusting this country's destinies to a Prime Minister called Shufflebottom. It is not without significance that Joseph Djughashvili, whose name is either unintelligible or comic outside his native Georgia, found it advisable, on joining an international political party, to call himself by the internationally more pronounceable name of Stalin» (Ibid, p. 27).

50 Ibid., p. 26.

author is dead or alive has no bearing on the translator's choice of names, providing, of course, he can justify it, if only to himself. The problem of «Eg» is a pseudo-problem and both Forster and Juliane House, who also cited this example, need not have dwelt upon it. For evocative names are not «invariably» lost in translation; the history of literary translation is strewn with works in which correspondingly connotative names have been invented by the translator. Not all is «lost» in all cases. We have seen evidence of this—«Jean-Pulse Heartre», for example—in Chapman's Froth on the Daydream.

Our analysis of the proper noun games in L'Ecume des jours will begin with its toponymy. The reversal of conventions governing the functions of place-names is one of the methods Vian uses to contrast the two worlds of reality and fiction. The reality of Paris, or at least the recognizable names of some of its landmarks, is part of the world of L'Ecume des jours: Molitor (p. 16), Neuilly (p. 24), Auteuil (p. 29), l'hôpital Saint-Louis (p. 42), le Louvre (p. 51). It is Paris, certainly, but a surrealist Paris, what Gauthier terms «une ville fantôme», «un Paris onirisé»:

[Ce n'est pas la grande ville]... que les surréalistes ont poussé, avec un brin d'exaltation, à la magie. C'est dans une ville dure et en même temps absente, diaphane, fragmentaire, que demeurent Colin et les siens. Les orchidées d'hiver y fleurissent les trottoirs comme les roses de certains dallages froids de

Delvaux. Delvaux, oui, plutôt que Chirico.⁵¹

In constructing this oneiric city, Vian has invented place-names to stand beside the real ones. Some of these inventions are dedicated to American jazzmen. There is, for example, «avenue Armstrong», and scenes such as the following in which Chick, searching for more books by Partre to add to his burgeoning collection, spots a bookshop: «c'était la rue Jimmy-Noone et l'enseigne était peinte à l'imitation du Mahogany Hall de Lulu White» (p. 113). Both Sturrock and Chapman reinstate these jazz references verbatim in their translations, which leads to the proverbial kettle of fish. Some may want to argue, in Sturrock's defense, that the latter continually transfers Vian's proper names exactly so as to attain a certain «exoticness», or an evocation of the «Frenchness» of the novel. The problem with this argument, however, is that Sturrock's attempts are continually being undermined by Vian's own «exoticness», by his desire to Americanize the world of L'Ecume des jours. In transposing verbatim Vian's American references, Sturrock's «exoticness», intended for the American reader, is muddy and inconsistent. On the other hand, Chapman's attempts to anglicize the setting of Vian's novel by shifting it to a fantasized London avoids the problem of dealing with Vian's exotic, i.e. American,

51 M. Gauthier, op. cit., pp. 60-61

names of people and places. For in London, Dixieland has presumably as much exotic appeal as it does in Paris.

When Colin tries to decide where to take Chloé on their first date, his options seem to be in Paris. But the «députodrome», a portmanteau, and the «course de veaux» make it a special Paris:

Pas au cinéma, elle n'acceptera pas. Pas au députodrome, elle n'aimera pas ça. Pas aux course de veaux, elle aura peur. Pas à l'Hôpital Saint-Louis, c'est défendu. Pas au musée du Louvre, il y a des satyres derrière les chérubins assyriens. Pas à la gare Saint-Lazare, il n'y a plus que des brouettes et pas un seul train (p. 51).

Sturrock translates this world literally:

Not to a movie, she won't go. Not to the Deputydrome, she won't like that. Not to the cow races, she'll be frightened. Not to the St. Louis Hospital, that's not allowed. Not to the Louvre, there are satyrs behind the Assyrian cherubs. Not to the Gare St. Lazare, there are only trolleys there now and no trains at all (p. 43).

The English reader may well wonder what a «Deputydrome» could be, for the French «député» in this context is not «deputy» in English but rather «member of Parliament» or «representative». The play should have been adapted in English. In addition, if the «Gare St. Lazare» is retained verbatim, why is the «Hôpital Saint-Louis» change to «St. Louis Hospital»? The translator must choose one procedure and then be consistent.

Chapman changes the setting to a fantasized London,

which the English reader nonetheless recognizes through the veil of puns and spoonerisms:

He could't take Chloe to the pictures—she would never agree to that. Nor to the Parlardium—she'd be bored. Nor to the human races—she'd be scared. Nor to the Cobblered Vic or the Old Witch—there's Noh playing there. Nor to the Mittish Bruiseum⁵²—there are wolves in their Assyrian folds. Nor to the Whiskeyloo—there's not a single train there... only Pullman hearses (p. 44).

Chapman's rendering is obviously the more satisfactory of the two. Not only is the strangeness, the surreality, of the city evoked, but the comic verbal deformations are very much in keeping with the spirit of L'Ecume des jours.

The characters who frequent these strange places have names to match: «le professeur Mangemanche» (p. 106), «les Ponteauzanne» (p. 37), «E. Judo» (p. 50), «l'infirmière Carogne» (p. 107). The technique employed here, which is the most frequent and simple one, lies in using or combining common names that are rarely, if ever, used as proper names. It is a time-honoured method in fiction and we saw examples from Dickens earlier.⁵³

«Mangemanche» is French nonsense, a kind of portmanteau

52 Compare Vian's «Britiche Muséomme» in Automne à Pékin (Paris: Minuit, UGE 10/18, 1974), p. 114.

53 There are further examples in the annotated translations which follow. See in particular pages 181 and 184 for a discussion of the proper names «Dumou» and «Sansonnet».

(«manger» + «manche»)⁵⁴ The English translator has to adapt this name to the English language, otherwise the comic overtones are lost. Sturrock's literal transposition, «Professor Mangemanche» (p. 115), may leave the English reader with the impression that this is a standard French name. It is, in any event, unfunny. Chapman rightly changes the name to a farcical English portmanteau, «Professor Gnawknuckle» (p. 116).

The surname of the nurse attending Chloé is Carogne, inspired no doubt from the dialectal French common noun of the same name whose rough equivalent in English is «bitch».⁵⁵ Once again, Sturrock is either oblivious to the name's connotations or indifferent: he renders it as «Nurse Carogne» (p. 117). Chapman wisely opts for an appropriate adaptation with his unsavoury-sounding «Nurse Scratch» (p. 117).

Obviously, Mr. «Judo» can be left as is in translation, for the same word exists in English and is about as unlikely a surname. Sturrock does just this (p. 54), while Chapman's «Adam Browbeadle but he was really called Jeremiah Jingo»

54 This blend, and its variations, is a favourite of Vian's. See pages 180 and 180n. below.

55 J.E. Mansion, R. Ledésert, and M. Ledésert (ed.), Harrap's New Standard French and English Dictionary (London: Harrap, 1972), Vol. 1, p. C:16.

(p. 56), is perhaps overambitious. He redeems himself, however, in the example that follows with an imaginative orthographic pun:

Chez les Ponteauzanne mon vieil ami Chose (p. 37).

My old friend Whatsisname at the Ponteauzanne's
(Sturrock, p. 30).

My old friend Whatsisname at the High Pottinuice's
(Chapman, p. 32).

Chapman's comic orthographic deformation is based, of course, on «hypotenuse», and is a much more spirited attempt than Sturrock's literal «Ponteauzanne's».

A similar example is found in the translations of «les frères Desmaret» (p. 49), who appear as «the Desmaret brothers» (p. 52) in Sturrock's text, and as «the Kissitwell brothers» (p. 54) in Chapman's. The latter rendering is apropos, for the brothers have been invited to participate in the wedding of Chloé and Colin as «pédérastes d'honneur» (p. 49) («fairies of honour» (p. 52) or «pansy page-boys» (p. 54)).

The world of religion in L'Ecume des jours, a target of unremitting caricature, is subverted time and time again by verbal play. The deformations of the religious proper names that follow are mostly comical, but they are also profane, inasmuch as they take their lead from some of the linguistic

processes involved in «foul» language.⁵⁶ Both translators have recognized the importance of devising parallel verbal deformations:

Oui, dit le Religieux, parce que le Chevêche vient pour le Béniction (p. 50).

«Yes,» said the Religious, «because the Boshup is coming for the Blissing» (Sturrock, p. 54).

'Yes,' said Father Phigga, 'because the Hamarishi Pibosh is coming on later in his caravanthem to give the blessing (p. 56).

Sturrock's «Religious» is perhaps ill-chosen as it seems to suggest the plural form. Vian's «Chevêche» would appear to be a composite of «évêque», «archevêque» and «revêche»; his «béniction» is obviously modelled on «bénédiction».

The catalogue of religious names continues with such inventions as «le Bedon» (p. 50), from «bedeau» and, in Gauthier's estimation, «la plus belle de ces trouvailles: l'Eglise comme ventre»,⁵⁷ «le Chuiche» (p. 50), from «la

56 In Québec, for example, we find such series of curses as the following:
 CHRIST - cric - clis - christie - saint-sicrisse - chris...tophe;
 CALICE - câlasse - câlique - câlif - câline;
 TABERNACLE - barnak - tabarnache - tabaslak;
 CIBOIRE - lîboire - ciboite - cibole, etc.
 See Gilles Charest's Le livre des sacres et blasphèmes québécois (Montréal: L'Aurore, 1974), pp. 39-43. In France, there are such examples as DIEU - nom de dieu - tudieu - morbleu - parbleu - palsambleu - ventrebleu, etc.

57 M. Gauthier, op. cit., p. 76

Suisse» according to Rybalka and Gauthier;⁵⁸ and «Sacristoche» (p. 50) instead of «sacristie».

Sturrock transforms the first of these, «Bedon» into «Boodle» (p. 50), which is based on «beadle», and Chapman into «Unisex-ton Bedull» (p. 50), thus combining a portmanteau («unisex» + «sexton») with a deformation of «bedell». Vian's Chuiche becomes «Verjum» (p. 54) in Sturrock's text (presumably from «verger») and «Husher» (p. 56) in Chapman's (from, of course, «hush» + «usher»). Lastly, «Sacristoche» becomes «sacristoop» (p. 54) and the punning «undervestry» (p. 56) in Mood Indigo and Froth on the Daydream respectively. Both translators have performed their tasks well in conveying the thrust of Vian's religious parodies.

It is normally considered common practice for the translator to retain the names of the source-text characters. Unless, that is, conflicts occur in the target language, as we saw with «Eg», for example. Sturrock adheres to this principle; Chapman violates it:

Colin, Nicolas, Chick,⁵⁹ Chloë, Alise (Vian)

58 M. Rybalka, Boris Vian (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1969), p. 161, and Gauthier, op. cit., p. 76: «Chuiche, prononciation «auvergnate» de Suisse (l'Eglise comme avidité, il lui en faut des doublezons [de l'argent], et 'chuiche' est très proche de 'chiche')».

59 Pestureau hypothesizes that Chick is named after «Chick Morrison et surtout le célèbre batteur Chick Webb, mort jeune en 1939» (Pestureau, op. cit., p. 62). Chloë is likely derived from the Duke Ellington tune of the same name.

Colin, Nicolas, Chick, Chloe, Alise (Sturrock)

Colin, Nicholas, Chick, Chloe, Alyssum (Chapman)

Thus, in Froth of the Daydream Chapman wants to adapt all people, places and situations to the frame of reference and expectations of the English reader. We saw this not only in his topsy-turvy London, but in the sort of puns he chose for Sartre and Being and Nothingness. Sturrock, on the other hand, preserves each proper noun and each cultural allusion contained in Vian. The two procedures reflect two divergent points of view. Does one try to conserve the particular world of the author, the 'exoticness' that some readers cherish? Or does one rearrange that world, adapting it to the culture of the target audience? It would seem to depend on the nature of the novel: a 'realistic' one demands literal retention of all proper nouns; a 'fantasy' has more room for play. Oftentimes arcane allusions are lost on a foreign culture and would benefit from adaptation. In any event, the fantasy world of L'Ecume des Jours and the humour of some of the cultural references demand adaptation. Vian's 'baise-bol' is left as 'baseball' in Sturrock, which is fine, but will an American tolerate 'Don Evany-Marqué' as a famous baseball player?:

...Don Evany Marqué, le joueur de baise-bol célèbre...
(p. 154).

...Don Evany-Marqué, the famous baseball player...
(p. 169).

...Randy Man-O'Queue, the New Zaziland Screwball champ, whose English promotions by Rabbi Raqwrath always have such excellent posters by H.H. Welnit-Joy (p. 167).

Chapman's characters, although unknown to me, are undoubtedly recognizable British caricatures from the sport of cricket.

When the references are retained, as in the following passage from Sturrock, the effect is complete unintelligibility where humour is intended:

- Et, pendant que j'y suis, savez-vous comment on danse le biglemoi?

- J'en suis resté au déboîté style Boissière et à la tramontane, créée le semestre dernier à Neuilly, dit Nicolas, et je ne possède pas à fond le biglemoi, dont je ne connais que les rudiments (p. 32).

«And while I'm at it, do you know how to dance the ogle-me?»

«I've got as far as the uncoupling, Boissière-style and the Transmontane, created last semester at Neuilly, said Nicolas «but I have not mastered the ogle-me properly, I only know the rudiments» (p. 25).

«Oh, and while I'm on the subject, do you know how to do the Squint?»

«My technical development hasn't advanced much beyond the Disraeli Dislocation and the Aurora Borealis which were still the rage last week in Swingingville, said Nicholas, «so I haven't perfected all the refinements of the Squint, but I certainly know the rudiments of the dance» (p. 27).⁶⁰

60 Another fine example of humour lost in Mood Indigo due to the cultural allusions, but too long to be quoted here, is the Jules Gouffé (French chef) passage, changed to 'ffroyde' by Chapman with hilarious results (pp. 16-17; 11-12; 13). See also the 'Je, tu, nous, vous...' passages changed nicely to 'I, the butcher boy, baker boy...' in Chapman (pp. 37-38; 30-31; 31-32).

Adaptation is obviously necessary in a passage such as this. Sturrock's rendering is opaque and humourless; Chapman's just the reverse.

Similarly, novelist Jules Romain (p. 123) becomes «John Galsworthy» (p. 123) in Chapman's translation so that the sense of the passage be clear. The name of the French author was retained in Sturrock's rendering (p. 123). And Nicolas Calas (a writer of «romans policiers») undergoes the following change of identity under the hands of Chapman:

[Elle] précipita dans les flammes une douzaine de Nicolas Calas qu'elle pris sur le rayon le plus proche... (p. 157).

...then she hurled a dozen Nicolas Calas which she taken from the nearest shelf... (p. 172).

...piling into the flames a dozen James Bond from the nearest shelf (p. 171).⁶¹

It is clear from the wealth of examples above that each translator was working with very different notions of the nature of literary translation. John Sturrock would seem to represent the school of thought that cherishes word-for-word fidelity above all else, whereas Stanley Chapman appears to be in the other camp, where liberal adaptation holds sway. Sturrock is perhaps the quintessential dry scholar attempting to write creatively; Chapman would appear to be a

⁶¹ See p. 200 above for similar examples.

creative author in his own right. The former is intelligent enough for the task but is like someone tone-deaf trying to conduct an orchestra; the latter is the musician who interprets and recreates, who is sensitive to rhythm and sound. Where Sturrock shys from adding any personal, inventive touches, Chapman seizes such occasions with relish. For a fantasy novel such as L'Ecume des jours, created out of verbal sorcery and symphony, it is not too rash to contend that only Chapman's approach can succeed.

III. FOUR VIAN SHORT STORIES AND
THEIR ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

LE RAPPEL

Il faisait beau. Il traversa la trente-et-unième rue, longea deux blocks, dépassa le magasin rouge et, vingt mètres plus loin, pénétra au rez-de-chaussée de l'Empire State par une porte secondaire.

Il prit l'ascenseur direct jusqu'au cent dixième étage et termina la montée à pied au moyen de l'échelle extérieure en fer, ça lui donnerait le temps de réfléchir un peu.

Il fallait faire attention de sauter assez loin pour ne pas être rabattu sur la façade par le vent. Tout de même, s'il ne sautait pas trop loin, il pourrait en profiter pour jeter au passage un coup d'oeil chez les gens, c'est amusant. À partir du quatre-vingtième, le temps de prendre un bon élan.

Il tira de sa poche un paquet de cigarettes, vida

l'une d'elles de son tabac, lança le léger papier. Le vent était bon, il longeait la façade. Son corps dévierait tout au plus de deux mètres de largeur. Il sauta.

L'air chanta dans ses oreilles et il se rappela le bistro près de Long Island, à l'endroit où la route fait un coude près d'une maison de style virginal. Il buvait un pétrouscola avec Winnie au moment où le gosse était entré, des habits un peu lâches autour de son petit corps musclé, des cheveux de paille et des yeux clairs, hâlé, sain, pas très hardi. Il s'était assis devant une crème glacée plus haute que lui et il avait mangé sa crème. À la fin, il était sorti de son verre un oiseau comme on en trouve rarement dans cet endroit-là, un oiseau jaune avec un gros bec bossué, des yeux rouges fardés de noir et les plumes des ailes plus foncées que le reste du corps.

Il revit les pattes de l'oiseau annelées de jaune et de brun. Tout le monde dans le bistro avait donné de l'argent pour le cercueil du gosse. Un gentil gosse. Mais le quatre-vingtième étage approchait et il ouvrit les yeux.

Toutes les fenêtres restaient ouvertes par ce jour d'été, le soleil éclairait de plein fouet la valise ouverte, l'armoire ouverte, les piles de linge que l'on s'appêtait à transmettre de la seconde à la première. Un départ: les meubles brillaient. À cette saison, les gens quittaient la

ville. Sur la plage de Sacramento, Winnie en maillot noir, mordait un citron doux. À l'horizon, un petit yacht à voiles se rapprocha, il tranchait sur les autres par sa blancheur éclatante. On commençait à percevoir la musique du bar de l'hôtel. Winnie ne voulait pas danser, elle attendait d'être complètement bronzée. Son dos brillait, lisse d'huile, sous le soleil, il aimait à voir son cou découvert. D'habitude, elle laissait ses cheveux sur ses épaules. Son cou était très ferme. Ses doigts se rappelaient la sensation des légers cheveux que l'on ne coupe jamais, fins comme les poils à l'intérieur des oreilles d'un chat. Quand on frotte lentement ses cheveux de soi derrière ses oreilles à soi, on a dans la tête le bruit des vagues sur des petits graviers pas encore tout à fait sable. Winnie aimait qu'on lui prît le cou entre le pouce et l'index par-derrière. Elle redressait la tête en fronçant la peau de ses épaules, et les muscles de ses fesses et de ses cuisses se durcissaient. Le petit yacht blanc se rapprochait toujours, puis il quitta la surface de la mer, monta en pente douce vers le ciel et disparut derrière un nuage juste de la même couleur.

Le soixante-dixième étage bourdonnait de conversations dans des fauteuils en cuir. La fumée des cigarettes l'entoura d'une odeur complexe. Le bureau du père de Winnie

sentait la même odeur. Il ne le laisserait donc pas placer un mot. Son fils à lui n'était pas un de ces garçons qui vont danser le soir au lieu de fréquenter les clubs de l'Y.M.C.A. Son fils travaillait, il avait fait ses études d'ingénieur et il débutait en ce moment comme ajusteur, et il le ferait passer dans tous les ateliers pour apprendre et commander les hommes. Winnie, malheureusement, un père ne peut pas s'occuper comme il l'entend de l'éducation de sa fille, et sa mère était trop jeune, mais ce n'est pas une raison parce qu'elle aime le flirt comme toutes les filles de son âge pour... Vous avez de l'argent? Vous vivez déjà ensemble... Ça m'est égal, ça n'a que trop duré déjà. La loi américaine punit heureusement ces sortes de choses et Dieu merci j'avais suffisamment d'appuis politiques pour mettre fin à... Comprenez-vous, je ne sais pas d'où vous sortez, moi!...

La fumée de son cigare posé sur le cendrier montait comme il parlait, et prenait dans l'air des formes capricieuses. Elle se rapprochait de son cou, l'entourait, se resserrait, et le père de Winnie ne semblait pas la voir; et quand la figure bleue toucha la glace du grand bureau, il s'enfuit car on l'accuserait sûrement de l'avoir tué. Et voilà qu'il descendait maintenant; le soixantième n'offrait rien d'intéressant à l'oeil... un chambre de bébé crème et

rose. Quand sa mère le punissait, c'est là qu'il se réfugiait, il entrouvrait la porte de l'armoire et se glissait à l'intérieur dans les vêtements. Une vieille boîte à chocolats en métal lui servait à cacher ses trésors. Il se rappelait la couleur orange et noire avec un cochon orange qui dansait en soufflant dans une flûte. Dans l'armoire on était bien, sauf vers le haut, entre les vêtements pendus, on ne savait pas ce qui pouvait vivre dans ce noir, mais au moindre signe, il suffisait de pousser la porte. Il se rappelait une bille de verre dans la boîte, une bille avec trois spirales orange et trois spirales bleues alternées, le reste, il ne se souvenait plus quoi. Une fois, il était très en colère, il avait déchiré une robe à sa mère, elle les mettait chez lui parce qu'elle en avait trop dans son placard, et elle n'avait jamais pu la reporter. Winnie riait tant, leur première soirée de danse ensemble, il croyait que sa robe était déchirée. Elle était fendue du genou à la cheville et du côté gauche seulement. Chaque fois qu'elle avançait cette jambe, la tête des autres types tournait pour suivre le mouvement. Comme d'habitude on venait l'inviter toutes les fois qu'il partait au buffet lui chercher un verre de quelque chose de fort, et la dernière fois son pantalon s'était mis à rétrécir jusqu'à s'évaporer, et il se trouvait les jambes nues en caleçon,

avec son smoking court et le rire atroce de tous ces gens, et il s'était enfoncé dans la muraille à la recherche de sa voiture. Et seule Winnie n'avait pas ri.

Au cinquantième, la main de la femme aux ongles laqués reposait sur le col du veston au dos gris et sa tête se renversait à droite sur le bras blanc que terminait la main. Elle était brune. On ne voyait rien de son corps, dissimulé par celui de l'homme, qu'une ligne de couleur, la robe en imprimé de soie, claire sur fond bleu. La main crispée contrastait avec l'abandon de la tête, de la masse des cheveux étalés sur le bras rond. Ses mains se crispaient sur les seins de Winnie, petits, peu saillants, charnus, gonflés d'un fluide vivant, à quoi comparer cette sensation, aucun fruit ne peut la donner, les fruits n'ont pas cette absence de température propre, un fruit est froid, cette adaptation parfaite à la main, leur pointe un peu plus dure s'encastrait exactement à la base de l'index et du médius, dans le petit creux de sa chair. Il aimait qu'ils vivent sous sa main, exercer une douce pression de droite à gauche, du bout des doigts à la paume, et incruster étroitement ses phalanges écartées dans la chair de Winnie jusqu'à sentir les tubes transversaux des côtés, jusqu'à lui faire mordre en représailles la première épaule

la droite, la gauche, il ne gardait pas de cicatrices, elle arrêta toujours le jeu pour des caresses plus apaisantes, qui ne laissaient pas aux mains cette indispensable envie d'êtreindre, de faire disparaître dans les paumes refermées ces absurdes avancées de chair, et aux dents ce désir amer de mâcher sans fin cette souplesse jamais entamée, comme on mâcherait une orchidée.

Quarante. Deux hommes debout devant un bureau. Derrière, un autre, il le voyait de dos, assis. Ils étaient tous trois habillés de serge bleue, chemises blanches, ils étaient massifs, enracinés sur la moquette beige, issus du sol, devant ce bureau d'acajou, aussi indifférents que devant une porte fermée... la sienne... On l'attendait peut-être en ce moment, il les voyait monter par l'ascenseur, deux hommes vêtus de serge bleue, coiffés de feutre noir, indifférents, peut-être une cigarette aux lèvres. Ils frapperaient, et lui, dans la salle de bains, poserait le verre et la bouteille, renverserait, nerveux, le verre sur la tablette de glace — et se dirait que ce n'est pas possible, ils ne savent pas déjà — est-ce qu'on l'avait vu — et il tournerait dans la chambre sans savoir quoi faire, ouvrir aux hommes en costume foncé derrière la porte ou chercher à s'en aller — et il tournait autour de la table et voyait d'un seul coup, inutile de s'en aller, il

restait Winnie sur tous les murs, sur les meubles, on comprendrait sûrement, il y avait la grande photo dans le cadre d'argent au-dessus de la radio, Winnie, les cheveux flous, un sourire aux yeux — sa lèvre inférieure était un peu plus forte que l'autre, elle avait des lèvres rondes, saillantes et lisses, elle les mouillait du bout de sa langue pointue avant d'être photographiée pour donner l'éclat brillant des photos de vedettes — elle se maquillait, passait le rouge sur la lèvre supérieure, beaucoup de rouge, soigneusement, sans toucher l'autre lèvre, et puis pinçait sa bouche en la rentrant un peu et la lèvre supérieure se décalquait sur l'autre, sa bouche vernie de frais comme une baie de houx, et ses lèvres résultaient l'une de l'autre, se complétaient parfaitement, on avait à la fois envie de ses lèvres et peur de rayer leur surface, unie avec un point brillant. Se contenter à ce moment-là de baisers légers, une mousse de baisers à peine effleurés, savourer ensuite le goût fugitif et délicieux du rouge parfumé — Après tout, c'était l'heure de se lever, tout de même, il l'embrasserait de nouveau plus tard — les deux hommes qui l'attendaient à la porte... et par la fenêtre du trentième, il vit sur la table une statuette de cheval, un joli petit cheval blanc en plâtre sur un socle, si blanc qu'il paraissait tout nu. Un cheval blanc. Lui préférerait

le Paul Jones, il le sentait battre sourdement au creux de son ventre, envoyer ses ondes bienfaisantes — juste le temps de vider la bouteille avant de filer par l'autre escalier. Les deux types — au fait, étaient-ils venus, ces deux types? — devaient l'attendre-devant la porte. Lui, tout bien rempli de Paul Jones — la bonne blague. Frapper? C'était peut-être la négresse qui nettoyait la chambre... Deux types? drôle d'idée. Les nerfs, il suffit de les calmer avec un peu d'alcool — Agréable promenade, arrivée à l'Empire State — Se jeter d'en haut. Mais ne pas perdre son temps — Le temps, c'est précieux. Winnie était arrivée en retard au début, c'était seulement des baisers, des caresses sans importance. Mais le quatrième jour, elle attendait la première, il avait demandé pourquoi, narquoisement, elle rougissait, ça non plus, ça n'avait pas duré, et c'est lui qui rougissait de sa réponse une semaine plus tard. Et pourquoi ne pas continuer comme ça, elle voulait l'épouser, il voulait bien aussi, leurs parents pourraient s'entendre? Sûrement non, quand il était entré dans le bureau du père de Winnie, la fumée de la cigarette avait étranglé le père de Winnie — mais la police ne voudrait pas le croire, était-ce la négresse ou bien les deux types en costumes foncés, fumant peut-être une cigarette, après avoir bu du Cheval Blanc en tirant en l'air pour

effrayer les boeufs, et ensuite les rattraper avec un lasso à bout doré.

Il oublia d'ouvrir les yeux au vingtième et s'en aperçut trois étages plus bas. Il y avait un plateau sur une table et la fumée coulait verticalement dans le bec de la cafetière; alors, il s'arrêta, remit de l'ordre dans sa toilette, car sa veste était toute retournée et remontée par trois cent mètres de chute; et il entra par la fenêtre ouverte.

Il se laissa choir dans un gélatineux fauteuil de cuir vert, et attendit.

II

La radio fredonnait en sourdine un programme de variétés. La voix contenue et infléchie de la femme réussit à renouveler un vieux thème. C'étaient les mêmes chansons qu'avant, et la porte s'ouvrit. Une jeune fille entra.

Elle ne parut pas surprise de le voir. Elle portait de simples pyjamas de soie jaune, avec une grande robe de la même soie, ouverte devant. Elle était un peu hâlée, pas maquillée, pas spécialement jolie, mais tellement bien faite.

Elle s'assit à la table et se versa du café, du

lait, puis elle prit un gâteau.

— Vous en voulez? proposa-t-elle.

— Volontiers.

Il se leva à demi pour prendre la tasse pleine qu'elle lui tendait, de légère porcelaine chinoise, mal équilibrée sous la masse du liquide.

— Un gâteau?

Il accepta, se mit à boire à gorgées lentes, en mâchant les raisins du gâteau.

— D'où venez-vous, au fait?

Il reposa sa tasse vide sur le plateau.

— De là-haut.

Il montrait la fenêtre d'un geste vague.

— C'est la cafetière qui m'a arrêté, elle fumait.

La fille approuva.

Toute jaune, cette fille. Des yeux jaunes aussi, des yeux bien fendus, un peu étirés aux tempes, peut-être simplement sa façon d'épiler ses sourcils. Probablement. Bouche un peu grande, figure triangulaire. Mais une taille merveilleuse bâtie comme un dessin de magazine, les épaules larges et les seins hauts, avec des hanches — à profiter de suite — et des jambes longues.

Le Paul Jones, pensa-t-il. Elle n'est pas réellement comme ça. Ça n'existe pas.

— Vous ne vous êtes pas embêté pendant tout le temps que vous avez mis à venir? demanda-t-elle.

— Non... J'ai vu des tas de choses.

— Vous avez vu des tas de choses de quel ordre?...

— Des souvenirs... dit-il. Dans les chambres, par les fenêtres ouvertes.

— Il fait très chaud, toutes les fenêtres sont ouvertes, dit-elle avec un soupir.

— Je n'ai regardé que tous les dix étages, mais je n'ai pas pu voir au vingtième. Je préfère cela.

— C'est un pasteur... jeune, très grand et très fort... Vous voyez le genre?...

— Comment pouvez-vous le savoir?...

Elle mit un temps à lui répondre. Ses doigts aux ongles dorés enroulaient machinalement la cordelière de soie de son ample robe jaune.

— Vous auriez vu, continua-t-elle, en passant devant la fenêtre ouverte, une grande croix de bois foncé sur le mur du fond. Sur son bureau il y a une grosse Bible et son chapeau noir est accroché dans l'angle.

— Est-ce tout, demanda-t-il?

— Vous auriez vu sans doute aussi autre chose...

Quand venait Noël, il y avait des fêtes chez ses grands-parents à la campagne. On garait la voiture dans

la remise à côté de celle de ses grands-parents, une vieille voiture confortable et solide, à côté de deux tracteurs aux chenilles hérissées, encroûtées de terre brune sèche et de tiges d'herbes fanées, coincées dans les articulations des plaquettes d'acier. Pour ces occasions-là, grand-mère faisait toujours des gâteaux de maïs, des gâteaux de riz, toutes sortes de gâteaux, des beignets, il y avait aussi du sirop d'or, limpide et un peu visqueux, que l'on versait sur les gâteaux, et des animaux rôtis, mais il se réservait pour les sucreries. On chantait ensemble devant la cheminée à la fin de la soirée.

— Vous auriez peut-être entendu le pasteur faire répéter sa chorale, dit-elle.

Il se rappelait bien l'air.

— Sans doute, approuva la fille. C'est un air très connu. Ni meilleur ni pire que les autres. Comme le pasteur.

— Je préfère que la fenêtre du vingtième ait été fermée, dit-il.

— Pourtant, d'habitude...

Elle s'arrêta.

— On voit le pasteur avant de mourir? compléta-t-il.

— Oh, dit la fille, cela ne sert à rien. Moi je ne le ferais pas.

— À quoi servent les pasteurs?

Il posait la question à mi-voix pour lui-même; peut-être à vous faire penser à Dieu. Dieu n'a d'intérêt que pour les pasteurs et pour les gens qui ont peur de mourir, pas pour ceux qui ont peur de vivre, pas pour ceux qui ont peur d'autres hommes en costumes foncés, qui viennent frapper à votre porte et vous faire croire que c'est la négresse ou vous empêchent de terminer une bouteille de Paul Jones entamée. Dieu ne sert plus à rien quand c'est des hommes que l'on a peur.

— Je suppose, dit la fille, que certaines personnes ne peuvent s'en passer. Ils sont commodes pour les gens religieux, en tout cas.

— Il doit être inutile de voir un pasteur si l'on veut mourir volontairement, dit-il.

— Personne ne veut mourir volontairement, conclut la fille. Il y a toujours un vivant et un mort qui vous y poussent. C'est pour cela qu'on a besoin des morts et qu'on les garde dans des boîtes.

— Ce n'est pas évident, protesta-t-il.

— Est-ce que cela ne vous apparaît pas clairement?
demanda-t-elle doucement.

Il s'enfonça un peu plus profondément dans le fauteuil vert.

— J'aimerais une autre tasse de café, dit-il.

Il sentait sa gorge un peu sèche. Pas envie de pleurer, quelque chose de différent, mais avec des larmes aussi.

— Voulez-vous quelque chose d'un peu plus fort? demanda la fille jaune.

— Oui. Cela me ferait plaisir.

Elle se levait, sa robe jaune-luisait dans le soleil et entra dans l'ombre. Elle tira d'un bar d'acajou une bouteille de Paul Jones.

— Arrêtez-moi, dit-elle...

— Comme ça!...

Il la stoppa d'un geste impératif. Elle lui tendit le verre.

— Vous, dit-il, est-ce que vous regarderiez par les fenêtres en descendant?

— Je n'aurai pas besoin de regarder, dit la fille, il y a la même chose à chaque étage et je vis dans la maison.

— Il n'y a pas la même chose à chaque étage, protesta-il, j'ai vu des pièces différentes toutes les fois que j'ouvrais les yeux.

— C'est le soleil qui vous trompait.

Elle s'assit près de lui sur le fauteuil de cuir et le regarda.

— Les étages sont tous pareils, dit-elle.

— Jusqu'en bas c'est la même chose?

— Jusqu'en bas.

— Voulez-vous dire que si je m'étais arrêté à un autre étage, je vous aurais trouvée?

— Oui.

— Mais ce n'était pas du tout pareil... Il y avait des choses agréables, mais d'autre abominables... Ici c'est différent.

— C'est la même chose. Il fallait s'y arrêter.

— C'est peut-être le soleil qui me trompe aussi à cet étage, dit-il.

— Il ne peut pas vous tromper puisque je suis de la même couleur que lui.

— Dans ce cas, dit-il, je ne devrais pas vous voir...

— Vous ne me verriez pas si j'étais plate comme une feuille de papier, dit-elle, mais...

Elle ne termina pas sa phrase et elle avait un léger sourire. Elle était très près de lui et il pouvait sentir son parfum, vert sur ses bras et son corps, un parfum de prairie et de foin, plus mauve près des cheveux, plus sucré et plus bizarre aussi, moins naturel.

Il pensait à Winnie. Winnie était plus plate mais il la connaissait mieux. Même il l'aimait.

— Le soleil, au fond, c'est la vie, conclut-il après

un moment.

— N'est-ce pas que je ressemble au soleil avec cette robe?

— Si je restais, murmura-t-il?

— Ici?

Elle haussa les sourcils.

— Ici.

— Vous ne pouvez pas rester, dit-elle simplement. Il est trop tard.

À grand-peine, il s'arracha du fauteuil. Elle posa la main sur son bras.

— Une seconde, dit-elle.

Il sentit le contact de deux bras frais. De près, cette fois, il vit les yeux dorés, piquetés de lueurs, les joues triangulaires, les dents luisantes. Une seconde, il goûta la pression tendre des lèvres entrouvertes, une seconde il eut tout contre lui le corps drapé de soie resplendissante et déjà il était seul, déjà il s'éloignait, elle souriait de loin, un peu triste, elle se consolait vite, on le voyait aux coins déjà relevés de ses yeux jaunes. — il quittait la pièce, rester était impossible — Il fallait tout reprendre au début et cette fois, ne plus s'arrêter en route. Il remonta au sommet de l'immense bâtiment, se jeta dans le vide, et sa tête fit une méduse rouge sur l'asphalte de la cinquième avenue.

FLASHBACK

It was a fine day. He crossed 31st Street, walked two blocks, continued past the red store and twenty yards beyond, then slipped through the side door of the ground floor of the Empire State Building. He took the elevator straight to the 102nd floor and completed the climb on foot via the metal ladder outside. This would give him time to think. His leap would have to be just right: far enough out to prevent the air currents from slapping him against the face of the building but not so far as to prevent him from observing, en route, the building's tenants — an amusing pastime. His tour wouldn't begin until the 80th floor, time enough to build up a good momentum. He took a package out of his pocket, emptied the tobacco out of one of the cigarettes inside, and tossed the light paper into the air. The wind was just right — the paper fluttered down the side of the building. His body would be deflected by two yards at the very most. He jumped..

The wind sang in his ears and he remembered the soda shop near Long Island where the street bends by the Virginal-style house. He was sipping a Petrocola with Winnie when a shy little boy walked in, his clothes loosely envelopping his small, muscular body, his hair the colour of straw, his eyes clear, his body tanned and healthy. He was sitting down at the counter eating an ice-cream sundae from a glass he could barely reach. With the last spoonful a bird flew out of the glass, of a species rarely found in that area: yellow with a large battered beak, it had scarlet eyes rimmed with black, and dark-coloured wings. He could still see the bird's webbed feet ringed with yellow and brown. Everyone there had given money for the little boy's funeral. He was a good kid. But the 80th floor was approaching and he opened his eyes.

All the windows were open on this summer day; the sun's bright beams illuminated the open suitcase, the open drawers, the piles of clothes that were about to be transferred from the drawers to the suitcase. Time to leave: the furniture shone. It was that season when everyone fled the city. On the beach at Sacramento, in a black bathing suit, Winnie bit into a sweet lime. On the horizon a small sail boat was approaching: its stark whiteness made it stand out from the others. The music from the hotel bar now drifted down to

the beach. But Winnie didn't feel like dancing, she preferred basking in the sun until her whole body became a golden brown. Her back glistened in the sun, polished smooth with oil. He loved to see her bare neck. She usually let her hair fall to her shoulders. Her neck was very firm. He could remember the sensation of softness when his fingers touched those feathery hairs that are never cut, fine as the soft down inside the ear of a kitten. Slowly stroke these silken hairs behind your own ears and you will hear the sound of waves upon tiny granules not yet sand. Winnie liked to feel the gentle clasp of his thumb and forefinger against the back of her neck. She would raise her head up, wrinkling her smooth shoulders, and the muscles of her buttocks and thighs would tighten. The tiny white yacht was still approaching shore when it left the surface of the sea, rose on a gentle slope towards the sky and vanished behind a cloud as white as itself.

The 70th floor was buzzing with conversations between leather armchairs. Cigarette smoke wrapped a curious smell around him. The office of Winnie's father had the same peculiar odour. He wouldn't let him get in a word. His son was not one of those young men who spent his evenings dancing instead of getting involved in Y.M.C.A. activities. His son worked; he had a degree in engineering and was now starting out

as a fitter, and he'd make sure his son did a stint in every one of his shops to learn every trick of the trade, learn to understand men, learn to command. As for Winnie... a father can't always see to his daughter's upbringing as well as he'd like, and her mother was too young for the responsibility — but just because Winnie likes to flirt like all girls her age doesn't mean... Do you have any money? You're already living together?... I don't care — this has simply gone on too long! It's a good thing the law punishes this kind of thing and thank god I have enough political leverage to stop... Surely you understand — I don't know a thing about you!... Your background...

The smoke from his cigar resting in the ashtray curled upwards as he spoke and formed random patterns in the air. It made its way toward his neck, encircled it and then tightened, and Winnie's father seemed almost oblivious; and when his bluish face struck the glass top of the great desk he fled, for he would surely be accused of having murdered him. He was falling again; the 60th floor offered nothing of interest to the eye... just a baby's nursery in cream and pink. When his mother punished him, it was there he sought refuge; he would half-open the closet door and slip inside among the clothes. An old chocolate tin served to hide his treasures. He recalled the colours orange and black and the orange pig

dancing a jig to the tune of his own flute. In the closet everything was fine, except near the top, between the hanging clothes: all manner of strange beings could be harboured in such darkness, but at the least sign of danger he had just to push open the door. He remembered a glass marble in the tin, a marble with three orange and three blue alternating spirals; he recalled little else. Once, in a fit of anger, he'd torn one of his mother's dresses — she kept them in his room because she had too many in her closet — and she'd never been able to wear it again. Winnie had burst out laughing that first evening they went out dancing because he'd thought her dress was torn. It was slashed from thigh to ankle; and on the left side only. Every time she put her left foot forward, all the guys' heads would turn to watch. And like clockwork, every time he went to the bar to get her a glass of something strong, someone would come and ask her to dance. The last time this happened his trousers began to shrink until they finally disappeared altogether and he found himself barelegged, his undershorts protruding past his dinner-jacket, and everyone laughed hideously and he plunged through the wall looking for his car. And Winnie was the only one who hadn't laughed.

At the 50th floor, the woman's hand with painted nails rested on the collar of the grey flannel jacket and her head,

gently tilted to the right, rested upon her arm white as milk. Her hair was dark. Of her body, concealed as it was by the man's, nothing could be seen save a stroke of colour, her printed silk dress of white on blue. Her tensed hand contrasted with the languid abandon of her head, with the mass of hair scattered over her rounded arm. His hands were clutching Winnie's breasts: small, fleshy, swollen with a living fluid. An indescribable sensation (no fruit can give it, fruit doesn't take on your temperature that way, a fruit is cold): the perfect conformity to the hand, the nipple, slightly harder, embedded between the index and middle finger, in the little fold of flesh at the base. He liked to feel them alive beneath his hands, liked to rub them back and forth from his fingertips to his palms, to sink his splayed fingers deep into Winnie's flesh until he felt the transversal bars of her ribs, until he was bitten in retaliation first on the left shoulder, then the right... but her teeth never left scars, she would always stop the game for softer, more pacifying, caresses... which appeased both that terrible need to squeeze tightly, to make those absurd mounds of flesh disappear within his closed palms, and the harsh desire to bite endlessly into this untasted suppleness, as one might bite into a fresh orchid.

Fortieth. Two men standing in front of a desk, the

back of another sitting behind it. All three wearing blue serge suits and white shirts. They were massive, rooted in the beige broadloom, growing out of the ground, in front of the mahogany desk, their faces expressionless as if standing before a closed door... his own... Perhaps they were waiting for him at this very moment; he could see them riding up the elevator, two men in blue serge suits and black felt hats, indifferent, each perhaps with a cigarette dangling from his lips. They would knock and he, in the bathroom, would set down the glass and bottle, nervously knock over the bottle on the glass shelf — and say to himself that it was impossible, they can't know already — had he been seen? — and he would pace about the bedroom without knowing what to do, open the door to the men in dark suits or try to escape? — and he walked round the table and knew at once it was pointless to flee — Winnie was everywhere, on the walls, on the furniture — they couldn't fail to catch on — there was the big, silver-framed photograph above the radio, Winnie, hair floating, eyes smiling — her lower lip a little fleshier than the other — round, prominent, silken lips which she moistened with the tip of her tongue before getting her picture taken, the better to give herself the gloss of a movie star — when she put on her make-up, she ran the lipstick along her upper lip, lots of red, carefully,

without touching the other lip, then pursed her lips, drawing them in slightly, the upper lip leaving its patterned trace on the lower — her mouth was freshly waxed like a holly-berry, one lip born of and completing the other, and he was filled with both the desire to kiss her mouth and the fear of marring its perfect surface. So he would but lightly caress her lips with his, softly, light as froth; later to savour the sweet fleeting taste of scented crimson. But it was time to get up, he'd kiss her later — the two men were waiting for him at the door... and through the 30th floor window he saw, on the table, a statuette of a horse, a pretty little white horse in plaster on a pedestal, so white it seemed naked. A white horse. He preferred John Dewar — he could feel it dully churning in his empty stomach, sending out its salutary waves — he had just enough time to empty the bottle before dashing for the stairwell. The two men — had they really come? — must still be waiting at the door. And he, full of John Dewar — what a joke! Knocking? Maybe it was the black lady come to clean... Two men? Strange idea. All it takes is a little alcohol to calm frayed nerves — a pleasant stroll, arriving at the Empire State Building — jumping off the top. But not to waste time — time is precious. The first time Winnie was late and her kisses and caresses were mechanical. But the fourth day, she arrived

before him — he teasingly asked her why. She blushed brightly but that didn't last long either and it was his turn to blush after hearing her reply a week later. But why not continue like this — she wanted to marry him, and he her; their parents could come to an agreement, surely? Surely not, when he'd walked into Winnie's father's office the cigarette smoke strangled Winnie's father — but the police wouldn't believe it. Was it the black cleaning lady or the two men in dark suits, probably smoking and drinking White Horse, shooting into the air to stampede the cattle and then roping them in with gold-tipped lassos.

At the 20th floor he forgot to open his eyes, realizing it three floors later. There was a tray on a table and vapour flowing vertically into the coffee-pot spout; so he stopped in mid-air, straightened out his clothes — his jacket was upside down and turned around from three hundred yards of free fall down — and walked through the open window.

He plumped himself down into a marshmallowy chair of green leather, and waited.

II

The soft monotony of cocktail music was coming from a

radio. The female singer's restrained, modulated voice succeeded in renewing an old theme. They were the same sounds as before, and the door opened. A woman entered.

She didn't seem surprised to see him. She was wearing simple pyjamas of yellow silk with a large matching robe, open in front. She had the hint of a tan, no makeup, and though not particularly pretty, had a great figure.

She sat down at the table and poured herself a coffee, added some milk and then reached for a piece of cake.

«Cup of coffee?» she asked.

«Thanks.»

He half raised himself to take the full cup that she held out to him, the light Chinese porcelain tottering under the weight of the liquid.

«Cake?»

He again accepted and began to slowly sip his coffee while chewing the raisins from the cake.

«Where are you from?» He placed his empty glass on the tray.

«Up above.» He gestured vaguely toward the window.

«The coffee pot caught my eye — it was steaming.»

The girl nodded.

She was pure yellow. Yellow eyes, too, large, wide-open eyes that stretched to her temples — or so it seemed, though it

was perhaps only the way she plucked her eyebrows. Probably. Her mouth was a bit large, her face triangular. But a marvelous figure, right out of a fashion magazine: wide shoulders, erect breasts, hips too good to be passed up and long, long legs.

It was the Dewar, he thought. She's not really like that. No one is.

«You weren't bored during your long trip?» she inquired.

«No, not really... I saw all kinds of things.»

«Such as...?»

«Memories...» he replied, «in the rooms — through the open windows.»

«Yes, they're all open, it's so hot.»

«I only looked every ten floors, except I missed the twentieth. Though it's just as well.»

«There's a minister living there... young, very tall and strong... you know the type?»

«How do you know...?»

She paused before answering, mechanically winding the silk string of her yellow robe round her golden fingernails.

«When you passed by the open window, she continued, you would've seen a dark wooden crucifix on the end wall. And on his desk there's a big bible and his black hat is hanging in the corner.»

«Anything else?» he asked.

«Yes, you would certainly have seen something else...»

When Christmas came there were family gatherings at his grand parents' home in the country. They would park their car in the barn alongside his grandfather's sturdy old car. On the other side were two tractors with heavy caterpillar treads ~~soaked~~ with dried earth and broken bits of grass lodged between the crevices of the metal. On such occasions, grandmother would always make buckwheat pancakes, muffins, cakes, doughnuts... there was golden syrup too, thick and clear, that they would pour over their pancakes, and there were roasts of meat... but he saved himself for the desserts. And at the end of the evening they would sing songs by the light and warmth of the fire.

«You might have heard the minister rehearsing his choir,» she said.

He did indeed remember the tune.

«I wouldn't doubt it,» she nodded. «It's very well known. Neither better nor worse than any other. Like the minister.»

«I'm glad the window was closed,» he said.

«Normally, however...» She paused.

«Normally one sees a minister before dying?» He completed her sentence for her.

«Oh, she replied, there's not much point to that. I wouldn't do it.»

«Then what are ministers for?»

The question was rhetorical and scarcely audible; maybe they were to make you think of God. God is a subject which only interests priests and those who are afraid of dying, not those who are afraid of living, not those who are afraid of men in dark suits who come knocking at your door and make you believe that it's the cleaning lady, or won't let you finish a bottle of John Dewar. God is of no use when it's people you fear.

«I guess,» said the girl, «that some people can't do without them. They're awfully convenient for the devout, in any case.»

«But if somebody wants to die, then there's no reason to see a priest,» he said.

«No one really wants to die,» she concluded. «There's always someone living and someone dead pushing and pulling you into the grave. That's why we need the dead, in fact, and why we keep them in boxes.»

«I don't quite follow...» he protested. |

«Isn't it obvious?» she asked softly.

He sank a little deeper into the green chair.

«I'd like another cup of coffee,» he said.

His throat felt a little dry. It wasn't that he felt like crying: it was something else, but with tears too.

«Would you care for something a bit stronger?» asked the yellow girl.

«Please, I'd like that.»

She got up, her robe gleaming in the sun, and almost disappeared into the shadow. From the mahogany bar she pulled out a bottle of John Dewar.

«Say when...»

«That's enough!...» He gestured abruptly with his hand. She held out the glass to him.

«Would you look into the windows as you went down?» he asked.

«I won't have to,» she replied, «every floor's the same and I live here.»

«But every floor is not the same,» he protested, «I saw something different every time I opened my eyes.»

«The sun was playing tricks on you.» She sat next to him on the leather sofa and looked at him.

«All the floors are the same,» she said.

«Right down to the bottom floor?... the same thing?»

«Right down to the bottom floor.»

«Do you mean if I'd stopped at another floor, I would've found you?»

«That's right.»

«But it wasn't at all the same... Some things were nice,

other things were horrible... and it's different here.»

«It was all the same. You just had to stop.»

«Maybe the sun's deceiving me on this floor, too,» he said.

«It can't because the sun's the same colour as I am.»

«In that case, he said, I shouldn't be able to see you...»

«You wouldn't see me if I were thinner, but...»

She left her sentence unfinished and the hint of a smile appeared. She was but inches away and he could not escape her perfume, green on her arms and body, a scent of grass and grove, mauve by her hair and shoulders, sweeter, stranger, cold.

He thought of Winnie. Winnie was not as voluptuous but he knew her better. He even loved her.

«The sun is actually life itself,» he thought to himself.

«Don't I look like the sun with this robe on?»

«Could I stay here?» he whispered.

«Here?» she raised her eyebrows.

«Here.»

«No you can't,» she said simply. «It's too late.»

Reluctantly, he lifted himself out of the chair. She put her hand on his arm.

«Wait,» she said.

He felt the embrace of two fresh arms. Again, though now from up close, he saw her golden eyes studded with stars, her triangular cheeks, her sparkling teeth. For one second — he tasted the soft pressure of half-opened lips, felt her whole body, draped in shining silk, against his own. And already he felt alone, already he backed away from her... he saw her far-away smile, somewhat sad... she'd soon console herself... the corners of her golden eyes were already rising — he walked away, out of the room; it was impossible to stay — he had to start all over again and this time there'd be no stopping along the way. He went back up to the top and threw himself into the emptiness below. His head made a red splotch, like a jellyfish, on the asphalt of Fifth Avenue.

LE RETRAITE

Pour sortir, on passait entre les bâtiments du petit Lycée et un grand mur gris qui ceignait la cour du grand. Devant le mur poussaient des arbres. Le sol était couvert de mâchefer, qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec du mangetout, et sur lequel les chaussures à clous font un beau bruit crissant.

Lagrige, Robert et Turpin (qu'on appelait hardiment Peinture) cavalaient ferme vers la sortie. La haute grille du petit Lycée s'ouvrait sur une des ruelles aux pavés moussus qu'un terre-plein, planté de platanes, sépare du boulevard de l'Impératrice. C'était l'heure du retraité et il ne fallait pas le rater.

Des élèves moins blasés trouvaient le terre-plein particulièrement adapté à la pratique du triangle, du pot, et autres exercices en honneur chez les adeptes

du noble sport des billes. Mais Lagrige, Robert et Peinture préféraient à tout, leur retraite.

Le retraits avait une canne sculptée, un feutre verdi et un vieux manteau noir; il marchait tout courbé et portait été comme hiver, un affreux cache-tronche pisseux.

Homme d'habitudes régulières, l'objet de leur ferveur passait devant le petit lycée à midi moins dix pile. Lagrige, le premier, avait fait remarquer aux autres l'analogie de sa démarche avec celle d'un Indien sur le sentier de la guerre. On lui laissait donc trois mètres d'avance, et on lui emboîtait le pas à la queue leu leu. Il suivait le boulevard de l'Impératrice jusqu'à l'endroit où le croise l'avenue du Maréchal Dumou. Là, les trois filaient tout de même à droite pour ne pas rater le train de midi vingt-cinq, et lui tournait à gauche vers une destination inconnue.

Suivre le retraits, c'était vivre; d'autant que l'homme, un peu sourdine, ne s'alarmait pas des imprécations choisies et des quolibets que lui répartissaient généreusement Robert, Lagrige et Peinture, dont le vrai nom était Turpin.

II

Les grandes découvertes étant souvent le fruit du hasard, c'est par hasard que Lagrige tomba, le jeudi, de tout son long, sur le mâchefer. Il s'arracha un peu la peau des genoux, chose sans importance, et se releva en tenant un remarquable silex rond, déterré par sa chute, et qui faisait presque la pige à un calot; mais que l'on pouvait traiter comme une pierre. Il le garda soigneusement serré dans sa paume. Le même jour, Robert eut l'idée plaisante d'imaginer que la bosse du retraitsé était en caoutchouc et rebondissait comme un ballon. Avant que Lagrige ait mentalement formulé la connexion qui s'établit, le silex quittait sa main, frappant la bosse en plein avec un joli choc mat.

Il fallut au retraitsé plus de temps pour se retourner qu'aux trois sioux pour se dissimuler derrière les platanes, et ce fut un ravissant spectacle que de le voir invoquer les cieux d'une voix cassée pour les prendre à témoin de sa misère.

— Quand même, souffla Robert ému, tu charries.

— Penses-tu, dit Peinture, il croit que c'est tombé d'un arbre.

Lagrige se rengorgea.

— Ben quoi, dit-il, c'est rien... pisque sa bosse est en caoutchouc.

Les deux autres le regardèrent avec admiration et le retraité reprit sa route en grommelant et en se retournant de temps à autre. Ça corsait le plaisir parce que, maintenant, ils étaient obligés de le suivre en progressant de platane en platane.

III

Le jeu se perfectionnait de jour en jour. Peinture, Lagrige et Robert rivalisaient d'ingéniosité. Pendant le cours de dessin du père Michou, ils confectionnaient avec amour des projectiles perfectionnés comportant des réservoirs internes remplis de liquides variés: encre, salive mélangée de poudre de crayolor, raclures de pupitres délayées dans de l'eau. La mardi suivant, Robert alla jusqu'à faire pipi dans une bombe extra-forte qui fut dénommée bombe atomique aussitôt qu'inventée. Le mercredi, ne voulant pas être en reste, Peinture apporta une fléchette qu'on empoisonna soigneusement en l'enduisant d'une décoction de cloportes pilés dans l'adhésine.

Quand la fléchette l'atteignit en plein dos, le retraitsé s'arrêta tout net et se redressa presque. On s'attendait à la voir faire face comme un vieux sanglier, mais il ne dit rien et au bout d'un instant, il se courba plus bas, hocha la tête et partit sans se retourner. Les plumes de la flèche faisaient une petite tâche bleue au milieu de sa bosse.

IV

Le lendemain, Robert et Lagrige se sentaient déprimés, car, pour mieux faire que Peinture, cela devenait du sport. Lagrige avait, cependant, une bonne idée en réserve. Au milieu de la poursuite quotidienne, il quitta le couvert des arbres et commença à emboîter le pas au retraitsé, de si près qu'il paraissait collé contre. Puis, il s'arrêta net, lui laissant prendre quelques pas d'avance et fit signe aux copains de regarder.

— Quand même, dit Robert éperdu d'envie, il charrie...

Peinture ne répondit rien. Il était jaloux.

Lagrige prit son élan, courut et, comme à sautemouton, s'installa à califourchon, d'un bond, sur la

bosse. Le vieux trébucha et se redressa.

— Hue!... cria Lagrige. Vas-y, vieux cheval!...

Le vieux se retourna si brusquement que Lagrige lâcha prise et roula par terre. Tandis qu'il se relevait, le vieux sortit sa main de sa poche. Il tenait un revolver à cinq coups de modèle ancien, lentement, avec soin, il tira les cinq balles sur Lagrige à bout portant. À la troisième, Lagrige remuait encore, puis il retomba et resta tout à fait calme, curieusement contorsionné.

Et puis le vieux retraité souffla dans le canon de son revolver et le remit dans sa poche. Robert et Peinture, étonnés, regardaient Lagrige et une drôle de mare toute noire qui se formait sous lui, à la hauteur des reins. Le retraité continuait son chemin; au croisement, il tourna à gauche dans l'avenue du Maréchal Dumou.

THE OLD MAN

The path out of the schoolyard cut between the buildings of the Lower School and the high grey wall that girded the courtyard of the Upper School. Trees lined the front of the wall. The ground was covered with tiny cinders, not to be confused with Tony Saunders, and upon which—not whom—cleated shoes made a lovely crunching sound. Larson, Saunders and Nevols (alias Sloven) hightailed it for the exit. The Lower School's wrought-iron gate opened on to a mossy, cobblestoned lane that was separated from Empress Boulevard by long narrow islands stocked with sycamore trees. Students with less jaded natures than the above three found the islands particularly suited to the practice of «Ringers,» «Knuckles-down» and other tests of skill then in favour among aficionados of the noble sport of marbles. But for Larson, Saunders and Sloven there was only one sport: the pursuit of the old man. And it was

now time to practise it.

A creature of unalterable habit, the old man passed by the school every day at ten before noon sharp. He wore an old black coat, a faded green hat and, summer or winter, a hideous yellowed scarf. He was hunchbacked and carried a sculpted cane. Larson was first to remark how much the old man's gait resembled that of an Indian on the warpath. They therefore followed him step for step, about three yards back, in Indian file. He walked along Empress Boulevard to where it intersects Field-Marshal Mallow Avenue. At that point, however, the trio darted right so as not to miss the 12:25 train, and he turned left toward an unknown destination. Shadowing the old man had become the biggest event in their lives; and it was all the more pleasurable since the old man, being rather deaf, didn't get upset at the jeers and taunts lavished on him by Larson, Saunders and Sloven, whose real name was Nevols.

II

Great discoveries are often the fruit of chance and it was by chance that Saunders on Thursday fell flat on his face in the cinders. He scraped his knees somewhat but this was furthest from his mind. His fall had unearthed a

remarkable, circular piece of flint—as perfect as a prize aggie and which could be used as a stone. He guarded it jealously within his palm. Larson, the same day, had the funny idea that the old man's hump was rubber and bounced like a ball. Even before Saunders had made the connection in his mind, the round piece of flint left his hand, hitting the hump bull's-eye with a nice dull thud.

It took more time for the old man to turn around than it did for the three little Indians to nip behind the sycamore trees; and it was a splendid spectacle watching him invoke the heavens with his croaking voice, that they might testify to his misery.

«D'ya think,» said Larson, excited, «that you mighta overdid it?»

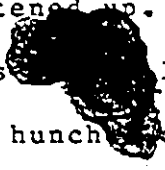
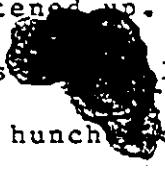
«Go on!,» said Sloven, «he thinks it fell out a tree.»

«Yeah, it's nothin...,» said Saunders, swaggering, «cause his hump's made of rubber!»

Larson and Sloven gazed at their cohort admiringly as the old man continued on his way, muttering to himself and glancing back over his shoulder from time to time. That made it all the more fun, for to follow him unobserved they now had to dash stealthily from tree to tree.

III

The game was progressing from day to day with more and more refinement. Sloven, Larson and Saunders were trying to surpass each other in ingenuity. In Father Fornick's art class they would lovingly construct customized missiles carrying liquid payloads: ink, saliva mixed with paint powder, desk shavings mixed in water. The following Tuesday, Larson went so far as to urinate in an extra-strong bomb which, upon its invention, was called the pistin-bomb. Not wanting to be outdone, Sloven brought on Wednesday a dart painstakingly poisoned with a decoction of pulverized wood-louse and turpentine.

When the dart hit him in the back dead center, the old man stopped sharp and almost straightened up. They expected him to turn around and stand his  like a cornered wild boar, but he said nothing, hunch  over again, shook his head and continued on his way without looking back. The feathers of the dart formed a small patch of blue in the middle of his hump.

IV

The next day Saunders and Larson were crestfallen, for

to surpass Sloven would be no easy task. Saunders, however, had a clever idea in reserve. At the midway point in their daily pursuit, he emerged from the cover of the trees and began to follow the old man so closely that he seemed glued to him. He then stopped abruptly, letting the old man advance a few steps, and gestured to his pals to watch.

«I dunno,» whispered Larson, overcome with envy, «he's goin' a bit to far...»

Sloven was silent. He was jealous.

Saunders took his mark, got set, and then dashed head-long toward the old man, jumped up as in leapfrog, and landed legs straddling the hump. The old man stumbled and then righted himself.

«Gidde up!... Let's go, you old nag!...»

The old man bucked so suddenly that Saunders lost his mount and tumbled on to the ground. As he was getting up, the old man withdrew his hand from his pocket. He was holding an antique five-shell revolver. Slowly, deliberately, he emptied the five shells into Saunders' body, point blank. After the third, Saunders was still staggering. He then buckled over and remained quite still, strangely contorted.

The old man blew into the barrel of the revolver before returning it to his pocket. Larson and Sloven, stunned,

looked at Saunders and the strange black puddle that was forming beneath his back. The old man continued on his way; at the intersection he turned left on to Field-Marshal Mallow Avenue.

SURPRISE-PARTIE CHEZ LEOBILLE

Les paupières de Folubert Sansonnet, frappées directement par le rayon de soleil ondulé qui franchissait la grille des persiennes, avaient, de l'intérieur, une jolie couleur rouge orangé, et Folubert souriait dans son sommeil. Il s'avancait d'un pas léger sur le gravier blanc, doux et chaud, du jardin des Hespérides, et de jolis animaux soyeux lui léchaient les doigts de pied. À ce moment, il se réveilla; il cueillit délicatement, sur son gros orteil, Frédéric, l'escargot apprivoisé, et le remit en position pour le matin suivant. Frédéric renâcla, mais ne dit rien.

Folubert s'assit sur son lit. Il prenait le temps de réfléchir, dès le matin, pour toute la journée, et s'épar-
gnait ainsi les multiples désagréments dont s'embarassent ces êtres mal ordonnés, scrupuleux et inquiets, à qui leur moindre action semble le prétexte de divagations sans nombre (pardonnez-moi la longueur de cette phrase) et bien souvent sans objet, car ils l'oublient.

Il avait à réfléchir à :

1. Comment il allait s'harnacher;
2. Comment il allait se sustenter;
3. Comment il allait se distraire.

Et c'est tout, car c'était dimanche, et trouver l'argent constituait un problème déjà résolu.

Folubert réfléchit donc, et dans l'ordre, à ces trois questions.

Il fit avec soin sa toilette, en se brossant les dents vigoureusement et en se mouchant dans ses doigts; puis il s'habilla. Le dimanche, il commençait par la cravate et terminait par les souliers, c'était un excellent exercice. Il prit dans son tiroir une paire de chaussettes à la mode, formées de bandes alternées: une bande bleue, pas de bande, une bande bleue, pas de bande, et caetera. Avec ce modèle de chaussettes, on pouvait se peindre les pieds de la couleur qu'on voulait, qui apparaissait entre les bandes bleues. Il se sentait timide et choisit donc un pot de couleur vert pomme.

Pour le reste, il mit ses habits de tous les jours, une chemise bleue et du linge propre, car il pensait au troisième.

Il déjeuna d'un hareng en civière, arrosé d'huile douce et d'un morceau de pain, frais comme l'oeil et, comme l'oeil, frangé de longs cils roses.

Il se permit enfin de penser à son dimanche..

C'était aujourd'hui l'anniversaire de son ami Léobille et il y avait, en l'honneur de Léobille, une belle surprise-partie.

À la pensée des surprises-parties, Folubert se perdit dans une longue rêverie. Il souffrait, en effet, d'un complexe de timidité et il enviait en cachette la hardiesse des pratiquants du jour: il aurait voulu posséder la souplesse de Grouznié, alliée à la fougue de Doddy, l'élégance smart et charmante de Rémonfol, la rigidité attirante du chef Abadibaba ou la piraterie éblouissante de n'importe lequel des membres du Club des Lorientais.

Pourtant, Folubert avait de jolis yeux marron d'Inde, des cheveux doucement flous et un gracieux sourire, à l'aide duquel il conquérait tous les coeurs, sans s'en douter. Mais il n'osait jamais tirer parti de son physique avantageux et restait toujours seul pendant que ses camarades dansaient élégamment le swing, le jitterburg et la barbette gauloise avec les jolies filles.

Ceci le rendait souvent mélancolique, mais, la nuit, des rêves venaient le consoler. Il s'y retrouvait plein d'audace et les belles jeunes filles l'entouraient, suppliantes, afin qu'il leur accordât la faveur d'une danse.

Folubert se rappela le rêve de cette nuit. C'était une

très jolie personne en robe de crêpe mousse bleu lavande, et ses cheveux blonds lui couvraient les épaules. Elle avait de petits souliers de serpent bleu et un bracelet curieux qu'il ne pouvait plus décrire exactement. Dans le rêve, elle l'aimait beaucoup et, à la fin, ils étaient partis ensemble.

Sûrement, il l'avait embrassée, et peut-être même qu'elle s'était laissé faire pour lui accorder quelques faveurs supplémentaires.

Folubert rougit. Il aurait bien le temps de penser à ça en se rendant chez Léobille. Il fouilla dans sa poche, vérifia qu'elle contenait assez d'argent et sortit pour acheter une bouteille d'apéritif au venin, la marque la moins chère, car il ne buvait jamais.

Au même instant que Folubert s'éveillait, le Major, tiré de son sommeil par la voix rauque de sa conscience troublée, atterri sur le parquet gluant de sa chambre avec un goût de méchant jaja ordinaire dans la bouche.

Son oeil de verre brillait d'une lueur sinistre dans la pénombre et éclairait d'un jour abject le foulard qu'il était en train de peindre; le dessin, représentant, à l'origine, un anicroche paissant au milieu des frères présvert, prit l'aspect d'une tête de mort vénitienne, et le Major sut que, ce jour-ci, il avait une mauvaise action à commettre.

Il se rappela la surprise-partie chez Léobille, et

ricana sauvagement et ré dièse, avec une fausse note, ce qui prouvait surabondamment ses déplorables dispositions. Avisant une bouteille de gros rouge, il étancha d'une lampée le flux tiède qui en empâtait le fond et se sentit mieux. Puis, debout devant la glace, il s'efforça de ressembler à Sergei Andréjev Papanine, dans Yvan le Terrible. Il n'y arriva pas, car il lui manquait la barbe. Néanmoins, c'était un assez bon résultat.

Le Major ricana de nouveau et se retira dans son cabinet de travail pour préparer le sabotage de la surprise-partie de Léobille, dont il désirait tirer vengeance. En effet, Léobille faisait courir, depuis quelques semaines, les bruits les plus tendancieux sur le Major, allant jusqu'à prétendre que ce dernier devenait honnête.

Et ceci valait une bonne punition.

Le Major s'entendait fort bien à réduire à merci tous les ennemis qu'il lui arrivait de rencontrer sur sa route; ceci, d'une part, grâce à sa fort mauvaise éducation, d'autre part, en raison de ses dispositions naturelles surnoises et de sa malignité bien supérieure à la normale.

(Sans oublier l'horrible petite moustache qu'il cultivait vicieusement sur sa lèvre supérieure, empêchant les insectes de s'y attaquer et la couvrant d'un filet, le jour, pour que les oiseaux n'y touchent point.)



Folubert Sansonnet s'arrêta, ému, devant la porte de Léobille et plongea l'index de la main droite dans le petit trou de la sonnette, tapie au fond car elle dormait.

Le geste de Folubert la réveilla en sursaut. Elle se retourna sur elle-même et mordit cruellement le doigt de Folubert, qui se mit à glapir sur le mode aigu.

Aussitôt, la soeur de Léobille, qui guettait dans l'entrée, vint ouvrir et Folubert entra. Au passage, la soeur de Léobille colla un petit morceau de sparadrap sur la plaie et le débarassa de sa bouteille.

Les accords de pick-up résonnaient joyeusement sous les plafonds de l'appartement et cernaient les meubles d'une légère couche de musique, plus claire et qui les protégeait.

Léobille était devant la cheminée et il parlait avec deux filles. En voyant la seconde, Folubert se troubla et, comme Léobille s'avancait vers lui la main tendue, il dut dissimuler son émoi.

— Bonjour, dit Léobille.

— Bonjour, dit Folubert.

— Je te présente, dit Léobille, Azyme (c'était la première fille), voici Folubert, voilà Jennifer.

Folubert s'inclina devant Azyme et baissa les yeux en tendant la main à Jennifer. Cette dernière portait une robe de crêpe mousse rouge glauque, des souliers de serpent rouge

et un bracelet très extraordinaire qu'il reconnut immédiatement. Ses cheveux roux lui couvraient les épaules et elle était, en tous points, semblable à la fille de son rêve; naturellement, les couleurs étaient plus vives, mais c'est normal, car un rêve ça se passe la nuit, après tout.

Léobille semblait fort occupé d'Azyme, aussi Folubert, sans plus tarder, invita Jennifer. Il continuait à baisser les yeux car, devant lui, deux objets, fort intéressants, sollicitaient ses regards sous un décolleté carré qui les laissait respirer à l'aise.

— Vous êtes un vieux copain de Léobille? dit Jennifer.

— Je le connais depuis trois ans, précisa Folubert. Nous nous sommes rencontrés au judo.

— Vous faites du judo? Est-ce que vous avez déjà lutté pour défendre votre vie?

— Heu... dit Folubert embarrassé. Je n'ai pas eu l'occasion... Je ne me bats que rarement.

— Vous avez peur? demanda Jennifer ironiquement.

Folubert détestait la tournure de cette conversation. Il tenta de reconquérir son assurance de cette nuit.

— Je vous ai vue en rêve... hasarda-t-il.

— Je ne rêve jamais, dit Jennifer. Ça me paraît peu probable. Vous avez dû confondre.

— Vous étiez blonde... dit Folubert au bord du désespoir.

Elle avait la taille mince et, de près, ses yeux riaient gaielement.

— Vous voyez, dit Jennifer, ce n'était pas moi... je suis rousse...

— C'était vous... murmura Folubert.

— Je ne crois pas, dit Jennifer. Je n'aime pas les rêves. J'aime mieux la réalité.

Elle le regarda bien en face, mais il baissait les yeux de nouveau et ne s'en rendit pas compte. Il ne la serrait pas trop contre lui, parce qu'il n'aurait plus rien vu.

Jennifer haussa les épaules. Elle aimait le sport et les garçons hardis et vigoureux.

— J'aime le sport, dit-elle, et j'aime les garçons hardis et vigoureux. Je n'aime pas les rêves et je suis aussi vivante qu'on peut l'être.

Elle se dégagea, car le disque s'arrêtait dans un horrible grincement de freins, vu que l'ami Léobille venait de fermer, sans prévenir, le passage à niveau. Folubert dit merci et il aurait voulu la retenir par une conversation habile et ensorceleuse mais, au moment précis où il était sur le point de trouver une formule véritablement ensorceleuse, un grand et horrible flandrin se faufila devant lui et enlaça brutalement Jennifer.

Horrifié, Folubert recula d'un pas, mais Jennifer

souriait, et il s'abattit, effondré, dans un profond fauteuil de cuir d'outre.

Il était très triste et se rendait compte qu'après tout ç'allait être une surprise-partie comme les autres, brillante et pleine de jolies filles... mais pas pour lui.

La soeur de Léobille s'apprêtait à ouvrir la porte, mais elle s'arrêta, stupéfaite, en entendant une détonation. Elle comprima d'une main les battements de son coeur, et l'huis céda sous le coup de pied féroce du Major.

Celui-ci tenait à la main un pistolet fumant, avec lequel il venait de tuer la sonnette. Ses chaussettes moultarde insultaient au monde entier.

— J'ai tué cette sale bête, dit-il. Vous jetterez la charogne.

— Mais, dit la soeur de Léobille.

Puis elle fondit en larmes, car la sonnette était avec eux depuis si longtemps qu'elle faisait partie de la famille. Elle s'enfuit en pleurant dans sa chambre, et le Major, ravi, esquissa un entre-chien-et-loup, puis remit son pistolet dans sa poche.

Léobille arrivait. Plein d'innocence, il tendit la main au Major.

Le Major y déposa un énorme cochonnerie, qu'il venait de ramasser devant la porte de l'immeuble.

— Pousse-toi, mec, dit-il à Léobille d'une voix tremblante.

— Dis-moi... Tu ne vas rien casser...

— Je vais tout casser, dit le Major froidement en montrant les dents.

Il s'approcha de Léobille et lui vrilla les orbites d'un regard insoutenable de son oeil de verre.

— Alors, tu racontes que je travaille, mec? dit-il. Tu dis que je deviens honnête? Tu te permets des trucs comme ça?

Il respira profondément et rugit.

— Mec, ta surprise-partie, tu peux dire qu'elle va être un tout petit peu fumante!...

Léobille pâlit. Il tenait toujours la chose que le Major avait mis dans sa main et n'osait pas bouger.

— Je... Je ne voulais pas te vexer... dit-il.

— Ferme ça, mec, dit le Major. Pour chaque parole de trop, il y aura une majoration.

Puis il glissa son pied droit derrière les jambes de Léobille, lui donna une poussée brutale et Léobille s'effondra.

Les invités n'avaient pas remarqué grand-chose. Ils dansaient, et buvaient, et bavardaient, et disparaissaient par couples dans les pièces libres, comme dans toute

surprise-partie réussie.

Le Major se dirigea vers le buffet. Non loin de là, Folubert, toujours désespéré, se rongea dans le fauteuil. Au passage, le Major le souleva par le col de son veston et le mit sur ses pieds.

— Viens boire, lui dit-il, je ne bois jamais seul.

— Mais... Je ne bois jamais... moi, répondit Folubert.

Il connaissait un peu le Major et n'osait pas protester.

— Allez, dit le Major, pas de salade!

Folubert regarda Jennifer. Par bonheur, elle tournait la tête d'un autre côté et discutait avec animation. Par malheur, il est vrai, trois garçons l'entouraient et deux autres étaient à ses pieds, tandis qu'une sixième la contemplait du haut d'une armoire.

Léobille s'était relevé discrètement et s'apprêtait à filer sans bruit pour alerter les forces gardiennes de l'ordre, mais il réfléchit que, si les forces en question se donnaient la peine de regarder dans les chambres, il risquait lui, Léobille, de passer la nuit au poste.

En outre, il connaissait le Major et pensait bien que ce dernier ne le laisserait pas partir.

En effet, Le Major surveillait Léobille et lui lança un coup d'oeil qui l'immobilisa.

Puis, tenant toujours Folubert par le col, il tira son

pistolet et, sans viser, fit sauter le goulot d'une bouteille. Tous les invités se retournèrent stupéfaits.

— Barrez-vous, dit le Major. Barrez-vous, les mecs; les gonzesses, elles peuvent rester.

Il tendit un verre à Folubert.

— Buvons!

Les garçons quittèrent les filles et commencèrent à s'en aller. On ne résistait pas au Major.

— Je ne veux pas boire, dit Folubert.

Il regarda la figure du Major et but précipitamment.

— À ta santé, mec, dit le Major.

Les yeux de Folubert tombèrent soudain sur le visage de Jennifer. Elle était avec les autres filles, dans un coin, et le considérait avec mépris. Folubert sentit ses jambes se dérober sous lui.

Le Major vida son verre d'un trait.

Presque tous les garçons avaient maintenant quitté la pièce. Le dernier (il s'appelait Jean Berdindin, et c'était un brave) saisit un lourd cendrier et visa le Major à la tête. Le Major attrapa l'engin au vol et, en deux bonds, fut sur Berdindin.

— Toi... amène-toi, dit-il.

Il le traîna au centre de la salle.

— Tu vas prendre une des filles, celle que tu voudras,

tu vas la déshabiller (les filles rougirent d'horreur).

— Je refuse, dit Berdindin.

— Mec, fais gaffe, dit le Major.

— Tout, mais pas ça, dit Berdindin.

Folubert, épouvanté, se versa machinalement un second verre et le but d'un trait.

Le Major ne dit rien. Il s'approcha de Berdindin et lui saisit un bras. Puis, il le tourna très vite, et Berdindin vola en l'air. Le Major, profitant de cette position, lui déroba son pantalon pendant qu'il retombait.

— Allez, mec, dit-il, prépare-toi.

Il regarda les filles.

— Il y a une volontaire? dit-il en ricanant.

— Assez, dit Berdindin qui titubait, étourdi, et tenta de s'accrocher au Major. Mal lui en prit. Le Major le souleva et le projeta sur le sol. Berdindin fit: «vlouf!» et resta là à se frotter les côtes.

— La rouquine, dit le Major. Amène-toi.

— Laissez-moi tranquille, dit Jennifer très pâle.

Folubert vidait son quatrième verre et la voix de Jennifer lui fit l'effet de la foudre. Il pivota lentement sur ses talons et la regarda.

Le Major s'approchait d'elle, et d'un geste sec, arracha l'épaulette de sa robe glauque. (La vérité m'oblige

à dire que les spectacles ainsi découverts étaient plaisants.)

— Laissez-moi, dit Jennifer, une seconde fois.

Folubert se passa la main sur les yeux.

— C'est un rêve! murmura-t-il d'une voix pâteuse.

— Amène-toi, lui dit le Major. Tu vas la tenir pendant que le mec va opérer.

— Non! hurla Berdindin. Je ne veux pas!... Tout, mais pas ça... Pas une femme!

— Bon, dit le Major, je suis bon Major.

Il revint à Folubert sans lâcher Jennifer.

— Déshabille-toi, dit-il, et occupe-toi du mec. Je m'occupe d'elle.

— Je refuse, dit Folubert. Et tu peux aller te faire voir chez Alfred. Tu nous les casses.

Le Major lâcha Jennifer. Il avala une longue lampée d'air et sa poitrine se dilata d'au moins un mètre vingt-cinq. Jennifer regardait Folubert avec surprise, ne sachant si elle devait remonter le devant de sa robe ou s'il était plus sage de laisser Folubert prendre des forces en contemplant ce spectacle. Elle se décida pour la seconde solution.

Folubert regarda Jennifer et hennit. Il piétina rapidement sur place et chargea le Major. Ce dernier, atteint au plexus solaire, au moment où il finissait de dilater son

thorax, se plia en deux avec un bruit horrible. Il se redressa presque aussitôt, et Folubert en profita pour lui faire un coup de judo absolument classique, celui qui consiste à rabattre les oreilles sur les yeux du patient pendant qu'on lui souffle dans les trous de nez.

Le Major devint bleu clair et suffoqua. À ce moment, Folubert, dont l'amour et l'apéritif décuplaient les forces, introduisit sa tête entre des jambes du Major, le souleva et le précipita dans la rue, à travers les vitres du salon, par-dessus la table abondamment garnie.

Dans le salon, redevenu calme, de Léobille, il y eut un grand silence et Jennifer, sans remonter sa robe, tomba dans les bras de Folubert, qui s'écroula, car elle pesait dans les soixante kilos. Par bonheur, le fauteuil de cuir d'outre était derrière lui.

Quant au Major, son corps ondula rapidement dans l'air et, grâce à quelques rotations judicieuses, il parvint à se remettre d'aplomb; mais il eut la malchance de tomber dans un taxi rouge et noir, à toit ouvrant qui l'emporta au loin avant qu'il ait le temps de s'en rendre compte.

Quand il s'en rendit compte, il fit sortir le chauffeur en le menaçant avec la dernière méchanceté et dirigea le taxi vers sa demeure, villa Coeur-de-Lion.

Et puis, sur la route, comme il ne voulait pas se tenir

pour battu, il assassina, par écrasement, un vieux marchand de quatre-saisons, dont trois à la sauvette, heureusement.

Et, pendant tout le reste de la soirée, Folubert et Jennifer s'employèrent à recoudre la robe de cette dernière. Elle l'avait enlevée pour que ce soit plus commode, et Léobille, reconnaissant, leur prêta, pour l'occasion, sa propre chambre et le fer à repasser électrique en cloisonné chinois, qu'il tenait de sa mère, laquelle le tenait de sa grand-mère, et que, dans sa famille, on se repassait de génération depuis la première Croisade.

LEOBALD'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

A ray of sun shot through the slats of the shutters and focused directly on the closed eyelids of Faramond Finch. A pretty orange-red colour lit up the inside of his lids and he smiled in his sleep. He was stepping lightly on the white soil, so soft and warm, of the Garden of the Hesperides while lovely silken animals licked the toes of his feet. He awoke and sat up in bed.

Faramond was in the habit of planning his day in the morning first thing, so as to spare himself the many annoyances which plague those over-cautions, over-anxious and under-organized creatures whose least act seems to provide a pretext for countless digressions and delays (my apologies for the length of this sentence), the object of which is too often forgotten or not there to begin with.

He had to decide upon:

- 1) the apparel he would don;

2) the sustenance he would ingest;

3) how he'd get his kicks.

That was it, for it was Sunday, and finding money was a problem already resolved. So Faramond pondered, in order, these three questions.

He washed himself with great care, vigorously brushing his teeth and blowing his nose in his hands; he then got dressed. On Sunday Faramond would always put his tie on first and his shoes last; it was an excellent exercise. He chose a pair of fashionable socks with alternate stripes: a blue stripe, then no stripe, a blue stripe, no stripe, and so on. With this type of sock you could paint your feet any colour you wanted: the colour would appear between the blue stripes. As he was in a rather conservative mood, he selected a jar of apple-green paint. To complete the ensemble, he put on his everyday clothes: a blue shirt and clean underwear, for he was thinking of the third item on his list. He then lunched on dead herrings in fine oil with a piece of bread, fresh as the eye and, like the eye, fringed with long pink cilia. He could now think of his Sunday. It was his friend Leobald's birthday today and in his honour there was to be a gala party.

At the thought of parties, Faramond fell into reverie. He suffered from acute shyness and secretly admired the

boldness of the Don Juans in his circle: he would well have liked to possess the grace of Swann, the fire of Waters, the chic of de Breynne, the Shiek of Abadibaba's silent strength or the flamboyance of any member of the Whoriental Club.

And yet Faramond had lovely Chinese-chestnut brown eyes, soft wavy hair and a smile that conquered hearts without his realizing it. But he never managed to take advantage of his physique's advantages and would always remain alone while his friends elegantly danced the swing, jitterbug and Monte Carlo gambol with the pretty girls. A feeling of melancholy would sweep over him whenever he thought of this but his dreams during the night would console him. There he was full of boldness and surrounded by beautiful young women begging for the favour of a dance.

Faramond remembered his dream of the night before: a lovely girl in a lavender-blue crêpe dress with long blonde hair covering her shoulders. She had tiny shoes of blue snake-skin and a strange bracelet that he could no longer describe. In the dream she liked him a lot and in the end they left together. He had certainly kissed her and perhaps she had even surrendered additional favours.

Faramond blushed. He would have ample time to think of all this while on his way to Leobald's. He rummaged through his pockets to make sure he had enough money to buy a bottle

of Venom liqueur—the least expensive brand, for he never drank.

At the precise instant that Faramond awoke, the Major, wrenched from his sleep by the strident voice of his troubled conscience, landed flat on his face on the sticky wooden floor of his bedroom, the vile taste of cheap vino in his mouth.

His glass eye shone in the semi-darkness with a sinister glare and luridly lit up the silk scarf he was in the process of painting; the sketch, a cityscape in which it was not raining rain but hailing taxicabs, took on the look of a Venetian skull and crossbones, and the Major knew he had a nasty deed to commit.

He remembered Leobald's birthday party and laughed demoniacally in D sharp, but went out of key, which was more than enough proof of his evil intentions. Spotting a bottle of cheap red, he absorbed with one gulp the warm liquid that coated the bottom.

He felt much better. Then, standing in front of the mirror, he did his best to look like Sergei Andrejev Popinov in Ivan the Terrible. He didn't quite manage it because the beard was missing. It was, nevertheless, a fair resemblance.

The Major once again laughed hideously and withdrew into his study to plan the sabotage of Leobald's party. Leobald

had for several weeks been spreading the most tendentious rumours about the Major, going so far as to allege that he had become honest and upstanding. For this insult the Major vowed revenge.

The Major was an expert at crushing any enemies that chanced to cross his path; this was owing partly to his abysmal upbringing and partly to his naturally conniving nature and unnaturally high degree of malice.

Faramond Finch was apprehensive as he stopped in front of Leobald's door and prepared to ring; he placed his right index finger in the small hole where the doberbell was lying snug in the corner, fast asleep. Wakened by the intrusion, the doberbell sprung round and savagely snapped at Faramond's finger. Faramond squealed out in his best soprano voice. Leobald's sister, who was listening for the arrival of the guests, came to let Faramond in. She immediately applied a small bandage to the wound and took his bottle.

The strains of a record player ricocheted merrily from wall to wall and covered the furniture with a thin layer of music which polished and protected it. Leobald was by the fireplace talking to two girls. When Faramond saw the second one, he became flustered but seeing Leobald coming toward him with outstretched hand, he had to hide his trepidation.

«Hello», said Leobald.

«Hello», said Faramond.

«Have you met Azime?» said Leobald (indicating the first girl), «and this is Geneviève.»

Faramond nodded to Azime and lowered his eyes as he shook Geneviève's hand. She was wearing a red crêpe dress the colour of the sea, red snake-skin shoes and a bracelet which he recognized immediately. Her auburn hair covered her shoulders. She was in all points of comparison the girl in his dream; naturally, the colours were more vivid but that's to be expected, for dreams happen in the dark.

Leobald seemed to be very interested in Azime so Faramond, without wasting time, invited Geneviève to dance. He continued to lower his eyes because there were two interesting objects, breathing easily under a low-cut square-neck dress, that solicited his attention.

«Are you an old friend of Leobald's?» Geneviève asked.

«I've known him for three years,» replied Faramond. «We met at judo class.»

«You know judo? Have you ever used it to defend yourself?»

«Uh...», started Faramond, embarrassed. «I've never really had the occasion... I rarely fight.»

«Are you afraid?» asked Geneviève, teasingly.

Faramond hated the turn the conversation had taken. He

tried to recover the self-assurance he had had during the night.

«I saw you in a dream...», he ventured.

«I never dream», said Geneviève, «and it's very unlikely you saw me. You must be confusing with someone else.»

«You were blonde...», said Faramond, at the edge of despair.

Her waist was slender and her eyes, so close to his, laughed gayly.

«You see,» said Geneviève, «I told you it wasn't me... I'm a redhead...»

«It was you», murmured Faramond.

«I doubt it», said Geneviève. «Anyway, I don't like dreams. I like reality better.»

She gazed straight into his eyes, but since he had lowered his again, he was oblivious. He was careful not to press her body too closely to his, the better to keep his view unimpaired.

Geneviève shrugged her shoulders. She liked sports and bold, vigorous men.

«I like sports,» she said, «and bold, vigorous men. I don't like dreams and I'm as alive as one can possibly be.»

She freed herself from his embrace because the machine stopped with a terrible squealing of disc brakes, Leobald having pushed, accidentally, the level arm across the

track. Faramond thanked her for the dance and would loved to have held her by clever and enchanting conversation but at the very moment he was about to find a truly enchanting turn of phrase, a horrible, gangling fellow stepped in front of him and coarsely wrapped his arms around Geneviève. Horrified, Faramond shrank back. Geneviève was smiling and he collapsed, crushed, into the depths of a goatskin chair. He was very sad and realized that, in the end, it would be a party like all others: full of life and pretty girls... but not for him.

Leobald's sister was about to let in another guest but stopped, stupefied, upon hearing a shot. With her hand, she could feel her heart beating furiously as the Major savagely kicked down the portal. He held a smoking pistol in his hand with which he had just killed the doberbell. And his mustard socks were an affront to the world at large.

«I shot that filthy beast,» he said, «now get rid of the carcass.»

«But...», started Leobald's sister.

She then broke into tears, for the doberbell had been with them for so long that it was part of the family. She ran off sobbing into her room and the Major, delighted, executed an entre-chien, and then put his pistol back in his pocket.

Leobald arrived. Full of innocence, he offered his hand to the Major. The Major took it and deposited therein an enormous piece of filth that he had just gathered in front of the house.

«Out of the way, fellah,» he said to Leobald.

«Say there.... You're not going to break up the party, are you?....»

«I'm going to break everything,» said the Major coldly, baring his teeth.

He walked up to Leobald and with the baleful glare of his glass eye bore straight through Leobald's eyeballs.

«So, you're spouting off to everybody that I'm working? That I'm going straight? You think you can get away with that?»

He took a deep breath and roared: «Your surprise party is going to be a real blast....»

Leobald grew pale. He was still holding the substance the Major had deposited in his hand and he dared not move.

«I... I didn't mean to offend you...» he stammered.

«Shut your trap!» replied the Major. «Every time you open it, you'll pay double!»

He then hooked his right foot around Leobald's legs, gave him a push and watched as Leobald collapsed.

The guests had not noticed much. They were dancing,

drinking, chatting and disappearing in pairs into any rooms that were vacant—as in any successful party.

The Major strode over to the buffet. Not far from there, Faramond, still in a state of despair, was quivering in his chair. On his way over, the Major picked him up by his collar and stood him up on his feet.

«Have a drink,» he said, «I never drink alone.»

«But... I don't drink... ever,» replied Faramond.

He knew the Major somewhat and dared not protest too much.

«Come on, let's go,» said the Major, «cut the clowning.»

Faramond looked at Geneviève. Fortunately, she was facing the other direction and talking excitedly. Unfortunately, however, three boys surrounded her and two others were at her feet, while a sixth contemplated her from atop a china cabinet.

Leobald had by now got back on his feet and was preparing to slip out quietly to alert the guardians of law and order. But he thought that if these guardians of law and order were perchance to look in the bedrooms, it was he who risked a night at the station. Moreover, he knew the Major well enough to know he would never allow him to slip out.

The Major was in fact keeping a close eye on Leobald and shot him a paralyzing glance. Then, still holding

Faramond by the collar, the Major fired his pistol and without even aiming blew the neck off a bottle. All the guests now turned round in amazement.

«Clear out,» said the Major. «All the guys get the hell out of here; dames stick around!»

He held out a glass to Faramond.

«Bottoms up!»

The boys separated from the girls and began to file out. It was unwise to resist the Major.

«I don't wish to drink,» said Faramond.

He looked at the Major's expression and drank forthwith.

«Cheers,» said the Major.

Faramond suddenly spotted Geneviève's face. She was with the other girls in a corner of the room and she eyed him contemptuously. He felt his knees give way.

The Major emptied his glass in one gulp. Almost all the boys had by now left the room. The last one (his name was Ben Dover and he was a brave one) grabbed a heavy ashtray and threw it at the Major's head. The Major caught the missile in mid-air and in two bounds was upon Dover.

«You... get your butt over here!»

He dragged him over to the middle of the room.

«You're gonna pick one of the girls, anyone you want, and you're gonna strip her clothes off (the girls went red

with horror).

«I refuse,» said Ben Dover.

«Careful what you say, buster,» said the Major.

«Anything, but not that.»

Faramond, terrified, mechanically poured himself a second glass and downed it in one shot. The Major said nothing. He walked up to Ben Dover and grabbed his arm. He then gave it a quick twist and Ben Dover went flying into the air. The Major, taking advantage of this position, pulled off Ben Dover's pants as he was falling.

«Come on,» said the Major, «get ready.»

He looked at the girls.

«Any volunteers?» he sneered.

«That's enough,» said Ben Dover who was tottering and dizzy and tried to grab on to the Major. He had cause to regret this. The Major lifted him up and threw him on to the floor. In the throws of agony, Ben Dover sat there rubbing his ribs.

«Hey you, red,» said the Major, «get over here.»

«Leave me alone,» said Geneviève, whose face was very pale.

Faramond downed his fourth glass and Geneviève's voice hit him like a thunderbolt. He spun round quietly on his heels and watched her.

The Major walked over to her and with a sharp tug ripped off the shoulder strap of her dress. (Truth behoves me to confess that the sights thus revealed were not unpleasant).

«Leave me alone,» said Geneviève a second time.

Faramond passed his hand in front of his eyes.

«It's got to be a dream!» he murmured with a voice dry and hoarse.

«Get over here,» said the Major to Faramond. «You're gonna hold her while this guy does his stuff.»

«No!» shrieked Ben Dover. «I won't... anything except that... not with a woman!»

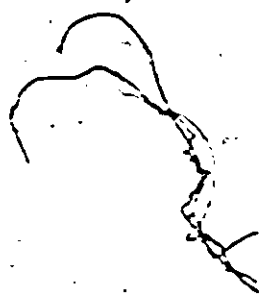
«O.K.,» said the Major, «I'm a kindhearted Major.»

He walked back over to Faramond without letting go of Geneviève.

«Take off her clothes,» he said to Faramond, «and get it on with junior.» «I'll take of her.»

«I refuse,» said Faramond, «And you can go screw yourself. You're getting to be a royal pain in the ass.»

The Major released his grip on Geneviève. He swallowed a huge breath of air and his chest expanded to at least forty-nine inches. Geneviève looked at Faramond with astonishment, not knowing whether she should pull the front of her dress back up or whether she'd be wiser to let Faramond draw strength from the spectacle. She opted for the second solution.



Faramond looked at Geneviève and snorted like a bull. He dug his feet slantwise into the carpet and then charged at the Major. The latter, hit in the solar plexus just as he finished dilating his thorax, folded in two with a horrible sound. He straightened up almost immediately and was met with a perfectly standard judo hold, the one where you pull the victim's ears over his eyes while blowing into his nostrils.

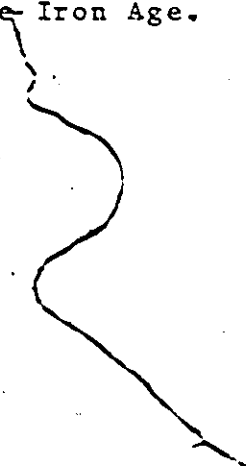
The Major turned light blue and started to choke. At this moment Faramond, whose strength had been increased tenfold by liquor and love, placed his head between the Major's legs, lifted him up and catapulted him over the heavily laden table, through the living-room windows and out on to the street.

Inside, there was calm and silence as Geneviève, without pulling up her dress, fell into Faramond's arms. Faramond toppled over under her weight, for she weighed easily one hundred and thirty pounds. Luckily, the goatskin chair was behind him.

As for the Major, his body was spinning rapidly in the air but thanks to a few judicious rotations, he managed to right himself. He had, however, the misfortune to land in a black and red convertible taxi cab which carried him far away before he realized what was happening. When he came to his senses,

he made the driver get out by threatening him with consummate wickedness and then drove the cab home to Lionheart Villa. Not wanting to admit defeat, he then ran over a millionaire's son, making him a compressed heir.

Meanwhile, Faramond and Geneviève were spending the rest of their evening sewing Geneviève's dress. She had taken it off to facilitate matters. For the occasion, the grateful Leobald had lent them his own bedroom and the electric iron with Chinese cloisonné that he'd inherited from his mother and she from her grandmother, a family heirloom that had been passed on from generation to generation since the Iron Age.



LE LOUP-GAROU

Il habitait dans le bois de Fausses-Reposes, en bas de la côte de Picardie, un très joli loup adulte au poil noir et aux grands yeux rouges. Il se nommait Denis et sa distraction favorite consistait à regarder les voitures, venues de Ville-d'Avray, mettre plein gaz pour aborder la pente luisante sur laquelle une ondée plaquée parfois le reflet olive des grands arbres. Il aimait aussi, par les soirs d'été, rôder dans les taillis pour y surprendre les amoureux impatients dans leur lutte avec la complication des garnitures élastiques dont s'encombre malheureusement de nos jours l'essentiel de la lingerie. Il observait avec philosophie le résultat de ces efforts parfois couronnés de succès et s'éloignait pudiquement en hochant la tête.

lorsqu'il arrivait qu'une victime consentante passât, comme on dit, à la casserole. Héritier d'une longue lignée de loups civilisés, Denis se nourrissait d'herbe et de jacinthes bleues, corsées en automne de quelques champignons choisis et en hiver, bien contre son gré, de bouteilles de lait chipées au gros camion jaune de la Société; il avait le lait en horreur, à cause de son goût de bête, et maudissait de novembre à février, l'inclémence d'une saison qui l'obligeait de se gâter l'estomac.

Denis vivait en bonne intelligence avec ses voisins, car ils ignoraient, vu sa discrétion, qu'il existât. Il s'abritait dans une petite caverne creusée, bien des années plus tôt, par un chercheur d'or sans espoir qui, assuré, ayant connu la mauvaise chance tout sa vie, de ne jamais rencontrer le «Panier d'Oranges» (c'est dans Louis Boussenard), avait décidé sur sa fin de pratiquer au moins ses excavations aussi infructueuses que maniaques sous un climat tempéré. Denis s'était aménagé là une retraite confortable, garnie, au fil des années, d'enjoliveurs de roues, d'écrous et de pièces automobiles ramassés par lui sur la route, où survenaient des accidents fréquents. Passionné de mécanique, il aimait à contempler ses trophées et rêvait à l'atelier qu'il

qu'il monterait certainement un jour. Quatre bielles d'alliage léger soutenaient un couvercle de malle utilisée en guise de table; le lit se composait des sièges de cuir d'une vieille Amilcar éprise passagèrement d'un gros platane costaud, et deux pneus constituaient des cadres luxueux pour le portrait de parents longtemps chéris; le tout se mariait avec goût aux pièces plus banales rassemblées jadis par le prospecteur.

Par une belle soirée d'août, Denis faisait à petits pas sa promenade de digestion quotidienne. La pleine lune travaillait les feuilles en dentelle d'ombre et, sous la lumière nette, les yeux de Denis prenaient les suaves reflets rubis du vin d'Arbois. Denis approchait du chêne, terminus ordinaire de sa marche lorsque la fatalité mit sur son chemin le Mage du Siam, dont le vrai nom s'écrivait Etienne Pample, et la petite Lisette Cachou, brune serveuse du restaurant Groneil entraînée à Fausses-Reposes par le Mage sous un fallacieux prétexte. Lisette étrennait une gaine «Obsession» flambant neuve, et c'est à ce détail, dont la destruction avait coûté six heures d'efforts au Mage du Siam, que Denis devait cette tardive rencontre.

Par malheur pour Denis, les circonstances se trouvaient extrêmement défavorables. Il était minuit juste;

le Mage du Siam avait les nerfs en pelote; et il crois-
sait alentour, en abondance, l'oreille d'âne, le pied
de loup et le lapin blanc qui, depuis peu, accompa-
gnent obligatoirement les phénomènes de lycanthropie —
ou plutôt d'anthropolycie, comme nous allons le lire à
l'instant. Rendu furieux par l'apparition de Denis,
pourtant discret et qui déjà s'éloignait en marmottant
une excuse, le Mage du Siam, déçu par Lisette et dont
l'excès d'énergie demandait à se décharger d'une façon
ou de l'autre, se jeta sur l'innocente bête et la mordit
cruellement au défaut de l'épaule. Avec un glapisse-
ment d'angoisse, Denis s'enfuit au galop. Rentré chez
lui, il fut terrassé par une fatigue anormale et s'en-
dormit d'un sommeil pesant, entrecoupé de rêves trou-
blés.

Il oublia peu à peu l'incident et les jours se
remirent à passer, identiques et divers. L'automne
approchait, et les marées de septembre, qui ont sur les
arbres le curieux effet de rougir les feuilles. Denis
se gavait de mousserons et de bolets, happant parfois
quelque pezize à peu près invisible sur son socle
d'écorce, et fuyait comme peste l'indigeste langue de
boeuf. Les bois, maintenant, se vidaient rapidement
le soir de leurs promoneurs et Denis se couchait plus

tôt. Cependant, il semblait que cela ne le reposât guère, et au sortir de nuits entrelardées de cauchemars, il s'éveillait la gueule pâteuse et les membres rompus. Même, il perdait de sa passion pour la mécanique, et midi le surprenait parfois dans un songe, étreignant d'une patte inerte le chiffon dont il devait lustrer une pièce de laiton vert-de-grise. Son repos se faisait de plus en plus troublé et il s'étonnait de n'en pas découvrir la raison.

La nuit de la pleine lune, il émergea brutalement de son sommeil grelottant de fièvre, saisi par une intense impression de froid. Se frottant les yeux, il fut surpris de l'effet étrange qu'il ressentait et chercha une lumière. Il eut tôt fait de brancher le superbe phare hérité quelques mois auparavant d'une Mercédès affolée, et la lueur éblouissante de l'appareil illumina les recoins de sa caverne. Titubant, il s'avança vers le rétroviseur fixé au-dessus de sa table de toilettes. Il s'étonnait de se trouver debout sur ses pattes de derrière — mais il fut encore bien plus surpris lorsque ses yeux tombèrent sur son image: dans le petit miroir rond, une figure étrange lui faisait face, blanchâtre, dépourvue de poils, où seuls deux beaux yeux de rubis rappelaient son ancien aspect.

Poussant un cri inarticulé, il regarda son corps et comprit l'origine de ce froid de glace qui l'étreignait de toutes parts. Son riche pelage noir avait disparu et sous ses yeux se dressait le corps malformé d'un de ces hommes dont il raillait d'ordinaire la maladresse amoureuse.

Il fallait courir au plus pressé. Denis s'élança vers la malle bourrée de défroques diverses glanées au hasard des accidents. L'instinct lui fit choisir un complet gris rayé de blanc, d'aspect distingué, auquel il assortit une chemise unie, de teinte bois de rose et une cravate bordeaux. Dès qu'il eut revêtu ces vêtements, surpris de garder un équilibre qu'il ne comprenait pas, il se sentit mieux et ses dents cessèrent de claquer. C'est alors que son regard éperdu se posa sur le petit tas de fourrure noire épars alentour de sa couche, et il pleura son aspect disparu.

Il se ressaisit néanmoins grâce à un violent effort de volonté et tenta de faire le point. Ses lectures lui avaient enseigné bien des choses, et l'affaire semblait claire: le Mage du Siam était un loup-garou et lui, Denis, mordu par l'animal, venait réciproquement de se changer en homme.

À la pensée qu'il allait devoir vivre dans un

monde inconnu, d'abord il fut saisi d'une grande terreur. Homme parmi les hommes, quels dangers ne courrait-il point! L'évocation des luttes stériles que se livraient, jour et nuit, les conducteurs de la Côte de Picardie lui donnait un avant-goût symbolique de l'existence atroce à laquelle, bon gré mal gré, il faudrait se plier. Puis il réfléchit. Sa transformation, selon toute vraisemblance et si les livres ne mentaient point, serait de brève durée. Pourquoi donc ne pas en profiter et faire une incursion dans les villes? Là, il faut avouer que certaines scènes entrevues dans le bois revinrent à l'esprit du loup sans provoquer en lui les mêmes réactions qu'auparavant, et il se surprit à se passer la langue sur les lèvres, ce qui lui permit de constater qu'elle était, malgré tout, aussi pointue qu'auparavant. Il alla au rétroviseur, se regarda de plus près. Ses traits ne lui déplurent pas tant qu'il le craignait. En ouvrant la bouche, il constata que son palais restait d'un beau noir et qu'il gardait le contrôle intact de ses oreilles peut-être un soupçon trop longues et velues. Mais le visage qu'il contemplait dans le petit miroir sphérique, avec son ovale allongé, son teint mat et ses dents blanches, semblait devoir faire figure honorable parmi ceux

qu'il connaissait. Après tout, autant tirer parti de l'inévitable et s'instruire utilement pour l'avenir.

Un retour de prudence lui fit pourtant chercher, avant de sortir, des lunettes noires dont il pourrait éteindre en cas de besoin l'éclat rubescent de ses chasses. Il se munit également d'un imperméable qu'il jeta sur son bras et il gagna la porte d'un pas décidé. Quelques instants plus tard, muni d'une valise légère et humant l'air matinal qui semblait s'être singulièrement dépeuplé d'odeurs, il se trouva sur le bord de la route et braqua son pouce d'un air décidé à la première voiture qu'il aperçut. Il avait choisi la direction de Paris, instruit par l'expérience quotidienne de ce que les autos s'arrêtent rarement en abordant la côte, et plus volontiers dans la descente, car la gravité permet alors un redémarrage facile.

Son élégance lui valut d'être rapidement pris en charge par une personne peu pressée et, confortablement casé à la droite du conducteur, il ouvrit ses yeux ardents sur l'inconnu du vaste monde. Vingt minutes plus tard, il débarquait place de l'Opéra. Il faisait un temps clair et frais et la circulation restait dans les limites de la décence. Denis s'élança hardiment entre les clous et prit le boulevard en direction de

l'hôtel Scribe, où il se fit donner une chambre avec salle de bains et salon. Laissant sa valise à la domesticité, il ressortit aussitôt pour acheter une bicyclette.

La matinée passa comme un rêve; ébloui, Denis ne savait où donner de la pédale. Il éprouvait bien, cachée au creux de son moi, l'envie intime de chercher un loup pour le mordre, mais il pensait qu'il ne serait point facile de découvrir une victime et voulait éviter de se laisser trop influencer par ce que racontent les traités. Il n'ignorait pas qu'avec un peu de chance, il arriverait à s'approcher des animaux du Jardin des Plantes, mais réservait cette possibilité pour un tiraillement plus puissant. La bicyclette neuve attirait toute son attention. Cette chose nickelée le fascinait, et, de plus, lui serait bien utile pour regagner sa caverne.

À midi, Denis gara sa machine devant l'hôtel, sous le regard un peu étonné du portier; mais l'élégance de Denis et surtout ses yeux rubis semblaient priver les gens de la faculté d'émettre la moindre remarque. Le coeur allègre, il se mit en quête d'un restaurant. Il en choisit un de bonne apparence, et discret; trop de foule l'impressionnait encore un peu et, malgré

l'étendue de sa culture générale, il craignait que ses manières ne témoignassent d'un léger provincialisme. Il demanda qu'on l'installât un peu à l'écart, et le service de s'empresse.

Mais Denis ignorait qu'en ce lieu si calme d'apparence se tenait justement ce jour-là la réunion mensuelle des Dilettantes du Chevesne Rambolitain, et il arriva qu'il vit, au milieu de son repas, déferler soudain une théorie de gentilshommes de teint frais, aux manières joviales et qui occupèrent d'un coup sept tables de quatre couverts. Denis se renfroigna devant cet afflux subit; et comme il s'y attendait, le maître d'hôtel vint poliment à sa table:

— Je m'excuse beaucoup, monsieur, dit cet homme glabre et causegraisé, mais pourriez-vous nous rendre le service de partager votre table avec mademoiselle?

Denis jeta un coup d'oeil à la pisseuse et se défroigna du même.

— J'en serai ravi, dit-il en se levant à demi.

— Merci, monsieur, dit la créature d'une voix musicale. Scie musicale pour être exact.

Si vous me remerciez, vous, poursuivit Denis, que dois-je, moi? Sous-entendu remercier.

— La providence classique, sans doute, opina

l'exquise.

Et elle laissa aussitôt choir son sac à main, que Denis cueillit au vol.

— Oh! s'exclama-t-elle. Mais vous avez d'extraordinaires réflexes!

— Voui, confirma Denis.

— Vos yeux sont assez étranges aussi, ajouta-t-elle cinq minutes plus tard. Ils font penser à... à...

— Ah! commenta Denis.

— À des grenats, conclut-elle.

— C'est la guerre, dit Denis.

— Je ne vous suis pas...

— Je voulais dire, spécifia Denis, que je m'attendais que vous évoquiez le rubis et ne voyant venir que le grenat, je conclus aux restrictions, lesquelles entraînent immédiatement la guerre par une relation d'effet à cause.

— Et vous sortez des Sciences politiques? demanda la brune biche.

— Pour n'y plus jamais revenir.

— Je vous trouve assez fascinant, assura plate-ment la demoiselle qui, entre nous, l'avait perdu plus souvent, son pucelage, qu'à son tour.

— Je vous réciproquerais volontiers la chose, en

là mettant au féminin, madrigala Denis. ~

Ils quittèrent ensemble le restaurant, et la coquine confia au loup fait homme qu'elle occupait, non loin de là, une chambre ravissante à l'hôtel du Presse-Purée d'Argent.

— Venez voir mes estampilles japonaises, sussura-t-elle à l'oreille de Denis.

— Est-ce prudent? s'enquit Denis. Votre mari, votre frère, ou bien quelqu'un des vôtres ne va-t-il point s'inquiéter?

— Je suis un peu orpheline, gémit la petite en chatouillant une larme du bout de son index fuselé.

— Quel dommage! commenta poliment son élégant compagnon.

Il crut bien remarquer en la suivant à l'hôtel que l'employé paraissait curieusement absent, et que tant de peluche rouge assoupie faisait différer fortement l'endroit de son hôtel à lui Denis, mais l'escalier lui révélait les bas, puis les mollets immédiatement adjacents de la belle, à qui il laissa, voulant s'instruire, prendre six marches d'avance. Instruit, il pressa l'allure.

L'idée de forniquer en compagnie d'une femme le rebutait bien un peu par son comique, mais l'évocation

de Fausses-Reposes fit disparaître cet élément retardateur et il se trouva bientôt à même de mettre en pratique par le geste les connaissances acquises par l'oeil. La belle voulut bien se crier comblée, et l'artifice de ces affirmations par lesquelles elle assurait s'élever à la verticale échappa à l'entendement peu exercé en cette matière du bon Denis.

Il sortait à peine d'une espèce de coma assez différent de tout ce qu'il avait éprouvé jusqu'ici lorsqu'il entendit sonner l'heure. Tout suffoquant et blêmequant, il se redressa et demeura stupide en apercevant sa compagne, le cul à l'air sauf votre respect, et qui fourrageait avec diligence dans la poche de son veston.

— Vous voulez ma photo! dit-il soudain, croyant avoir saisi.

Il se sentait flatté mais comprit, au soubresaut qui anima l'hémisphère bipartite, l'erreur de cette supposition.

— Mais... euh... oui, mon chérie, dit la douce, sans bien savoir s'il se moquait ou niet.

Denis se renfrogna. Il se leva, alla, et vérifia son portefeuille.

— Ainsi, vous êtes une de ces femmes dont on peut

lire les turpides dans la littérature de monsieur Mauriac! conclut Denis. Une putain en quelque sorte.

Elle allait répliquer, et comment, qu'il la faisait chier et qu'elle s'en cognait de sa viande, et qu'elle n'allait pas se farcir un mec pour le plaisir, mais une lueur dans l'oeil du loup anthropisé la fit muette au lieu de. Il émanait des orbites à Denis deux petits pinceaux rouges qui se fixèrent sur les globes oculaires de la brune et la plongèrent dans un curieux désarroi.

— Veuillez vous couvrir et décamper dans l'instant! suggéra Denis.

Il eut l'idée inattendue, pour augmenter l'effet, de pousser un hurlement. Jamais encore pareille inspiration n'était venue le taquiner, mais malgré son manque d'expérience, cela résonna de façon épouvantable.

La demoiselle, terrorisée, s'habilla sans mot dire, en moins de temps qu'il n'en faut à une pendule pour sonner douze coups. Lorsqu'il fut seul, Denis se mit à rire. Il éprouvait une sensation vicieuse, assez excitante.

— C'est le goût de la vengeance, supposa-t-il tout haut.

Il remit de l'ordre dans ses ajustements, se nettoya où il fallait, et sortit. Il faisait nuit et le boulevard scintillait de façon merveilleuse.

Il n'avait pas fait deux mètres que trois hommes s'approchèrent de lui. Vêtus un peu voyants, avec des complets trop clairs, des chapeaux trop neufs et des chaussures trop cirées, ils l'encadrèrent.

— Peut-on vous causer? dit le plus mince des trois, un olivâtre à fine moustache.

— De quoi? s'étonna Denis.

— Fais pas le con, articula l'un des deux autres, rouge et cubique.

— Entrez donc par ici... proposa l'olivâtre comme ils passaient devant un bar.

Denis entra, assez curieux. Il trouvait, jusqu'ici, l'aventure plaisante.

— Vous jouez au bridge? demanda-t-il aux trois hommes.

— Tu vas en avoir besoin d'un, remarqua le rouge cubique de façon obscure. Il semblait courroucé.

— Mon cher, dit l'olivâtre une fois qu'ils furent entrés, vous venez d'agir avec une jeune fille de façon assez peu correcte.

Denis s'esclaffa.

— Il se marre, l'empaffé! observa le rouge. Il va moins se marrer.

— Il se trouve, poursuivit l'olivâtre, qu'on s'y intéresse à cette même.

Denis compris soudain.

— Je vois, dit-il. Vous êtes des maquereaux.

Tous trois se levèrent d'un coup.

— Nous cherche pas! menaça le cubique.

Denis les regarda.

— Je vais me mettre en colère, dit-il posément. C'est la première fois de ma vie, mais je reconnais la sensation. Comme dans les livres.

Les trois hommes semblaient déroutés.

— Tu pensés pas que tu nous fais peur, bille! dit le rouge.

Le troisième causait peu. Il ferma un poing et prit un élan. Comme le poing arrivait au menton de Denis, ce dernier se déroba, happa le poignet, et serra. Cela fit du bruit.

Une bouteille atêtit sur le crâne de Denis, qui cilla et recula.

— On va te mettre en l'air, dit l'olivâtre.

Le bar s'était vidé. Denis bondit par-dessus la table et le cubique. Eberlué, celui-ci bœa, mais

il eut le réflexe d'empoigner le pied chaussé de daim du solitaire de Fausses-Reposes.

Il s'ensuivit une brève mêlée à l'issue de laquelle Denis, le col déchiré, se contempla dans la glace. Une estafilade lui barrait la joue, et un de ses yeux virait à l'indigo. Prestement, il rangea les trois corps inertes sous les banquettes. Son cœur grondait furieusement sous ses côtes. Il s'arrangea un peu. Et soudain, ses yeux tombèrent sur une pendule. Onze heures.

— Par ma barbe, pensa-t-il. Il faut que je file!

Vite, il mit ses lunettes noires et courut vers son hôtel. Il avait l'âme pleine de haine, mais l'urgence de son départ lui apparaissait.

Il paya sa chambre, prit sa valise, sauta sur sa bicyclette, et partit comme un vrai Coppi.

*
* *

Il arrivait au pont de Saint-Cloud lorsqu'un agent l'arrêta.

— N'avez donc pas de lumière? dit cet homme semblable à d'autres.

— Hein? demanda Denis. Pourquoi? J'y vois!

— C'est pas pour y voir, dit l'agent. C'est pour

qu'on vous voie. Si vous arrive un accident? hein?

— Ah? dit Denis. Oui, c'est vrai. Mais comment ça marche, cette lumière?

— Foutez de moi? demanda la vache.

— Ecoutez, dit Denis, je suis vraiment très urgé. Je n'ai pas le temps de me foutre.

— Vous la voulez, votre contredanse? dit le flicard infect.

— Vous êtes excessivement ennuyeux, répondit le loup à pédales.

— Bon! dit l'ignoble pied plat, vous l'avez.

Il commença de sortir un carnet de bal et un stylobic et baissa le nez un instant.

— Votre nom? dit-il en relevant le nez.

Puis il siffla dans son tube à sons car il apercevait au loin la rapide bicyclette de Denis qui se lançait à l'assaut de la côte.

Denis en mit un coup. L'asphalte ébahi cédait devant sa furieuse progression. La côte de Saint-Cloud fut avalée en un rien de temps. Il traversa la portion de ville qui longe Montretout — fine allusion aux satyres errants du parc de Saint-Cloud, et tourna à gauche vers le Pont Noir et Ville-d'Avray. Comme il émergeait de cette noble cité devant le restaurant

Cabassud, il prit conscience d'une agitation derrière lui. Il força l'allure, et, soudain, s'élança dans un chemin forestier. Le temps pressait. Au loin, soudain, une horloge annonça minuit.

Dès le premier coup, Denis constata que ça allait mal. Il avait peine à attraper les pédales; ses jambes lui paraissaient se raccourcir. Au clair de lune, il escaladait pourtant, sur sa lancée, les cailloux du chemin de terre — lorsqu'il aperçut son ombre — un long museau, des oreilles droites — et du coup, il prit la bûche, car un loup à bicyclette, ça n'a pas de stabilité.

Heureusement pour lui. Il avait à peine touché terre que d'un bond, il jaillit dans un fourré; et la moto de la police s'écrasa bruyamment sur la bicyclette affalée. Le motard y perdit un testicule et son acuité auditive, par la suite, diminua de trente-neuf pour cent.

Denis était à peine redevenu loup qu'il s'interrogea, tout en trottant vers sa demeure, sur l'étrange frénésie qui l'avait saisi sous sa défroque d'homme. Lui si doux, si calme, avait vu s'envoler par-dessus le toit ses bons principes et sa mansuétude. La rage vengeresse dont les effets s'étaient manifestés sur

les trois maquereaux de la Madeleine — dont l'un, hâtons-nous de le dire à la décharge des vrais maquereaux, émargeait à la Préfecture, service de la Mondaine — lui paraissait à la fois impensable et fascinante. Il hocha la tête. Quel grand malheur que cette morsure du Mage du Siam. Heureusement, pensa-t-il, cette pénible transformation va se limiter aux jours de pleine lune. Mais il lui en restait quelque chose — et cette vague colère latente, ce désir de revanche ne laissaient pas que de l'inquiéter.

THE WEREWOLF

There once lived in the forest of Falslumber, at the foot of the Picardian hills, a fine full-grown wolf with black fur and large red eyes. His name was Dennis and he loved to watch the passing cars as they charged up the shiny black hill. Sometimes when it rained hard the pavement would become a watery mirror for the green branches overhead. On summer nights Dennis would roam about the woods, hoping to find impatient lovers struggling with those elastic fasteners that nowadays unhappily encumber most items of lingerie. He would observe philosophically their occasionally fruitful efforts and then discretely edge away, shaking his head, whenever a consenting victim "got it." Heir to a long line of civilized wolves, Dennis lived on grass and blue hyacinth, seasoned in autumn with a few choice mushrooms and in winter, against his better judgement, with bottles of milk swiped from the big yellow milk

truck; he abhorred milk because of its animal taste and from November to February cursed the inclemence of a season which made him thus poison his stomach.

Dennis was on good terms with his neighbours; for, owing to his reclusiveness, they were unaware of his existence. He lived in a small cave which had been dug out many years before by a forlorn fortune hunter who, dogged by bad luck all his life, had become resigned to the fact that he would never find the «Yellow Lady» (as Jack London would say) and so had decided in old age to at least continue his fruitless and maniacal excavations under more temperate climes. Dennis had converted the cave into a comfortable enough abode, decorating it over the years with hubcaps, screws and other automobile parts scavenged from the many accidents that occurred on the highway nearby. He had a passion for mechanics and loved to gaze upon his trophies, dreaming of the garage he would open one day. Four light-alloy connecting rods supporting trunk door formed his table; leather seats from a 1921 Kissel that had had a passing liaison with a sturdy sycamore served as a bed and two tires formed luxurious frames for portraits of his dearly-beloved parents; everything was tastefully arranged to complement the less ornate objects inherited from the prospector.

It was a beautiful night in August when Dennis set out

on his leisurely after-dinner constitutional. The full moon played with the leaves on the trees and lace shadows danced in front of him. His eyes, by the clear light of the moon, shone ruby-red like a glass of Burgundy against the sun. He had almost reached the oak tree, normally the point of return, when fate placed in his path the Magus of Siam, whose real name was Ernest Dimple, and little Blanche Almond, a walnut-haired waitress whom the Magus had lured into Falslumber with malice prepense. Blanche was wearing a spanking-new Obsession girdle, the demolition of which had cost the Magus of Siam six hours of effort and thanks to which Dennis made this late encounter.

The circumstances, unfortunately for Dennis, were most unfavourable. It was exactly midnight; the Magus of Siam was a bundle of nerves and all around him grew, in profusion, the donkey ear, wolf's foot and white rabbit that have recently come to be the mandatory backdrop to manifestations of lycanthropy — or rather of anthropolýcia, as the reader will shortly see. Although Dennis was already backpedalling discretely and mumbling words of apology, the Magus was incensed at the intrusion. The excess energy from his unsuccessful advances toward Blanche sought an outlet: he therefore leapt upon the innocent wolf and bit him savagely on the shoulder. With an anguished yelp Dennis scurried away. Back home, overcome with

extraordinary fatigue, he fell into a deep sleep invaded by the most harrowing dreams.

The incident faded slowly from his memory and the days unfolded as before, identical and different. Autumn was approaching with September's tides that turn, curiously, the trees' leaves red. Dennis gorged himself on fairy-ring and penny-bun mushrooms, and occasionally found some peziza, well camouflaged, on an old stump. He avoided like the plague the indigestible ox tongue mushroom. There were fewer and fewer night strollers now and Dennis retired at an earlier hour. He was no more rested for this, however, and at the end of his long nights fraught with nightmares, he would awake with parched mouth and weary limbs. He even lost his passion for mechanics and many an afternoon found him lost in reverie, his paw loosely gripping a rag that would normally be fast at work on a piece of verdigras-encrusted brass. His sleep was becoming more and more troubled and he was at a loss to know the cause.

The night of the full moon he awoke suddenly from his sleep, shivering with fever and shaken by cold flashes. Rubbing his eyes, he was puzzled by the strange sensation he felt and groped for the light. He quickly plugged in the splendid headlight he'd salvaged from a runaway Mercedes, and a dazzling beam illuminated the innermost crannies

of the cave. Reeling, he made his way over to the rearview mirror fastened above his dressing table. He was surprised to find himself standing on his hindlegs but even more surprised when he saw his reflection in the tiny rectangular glass: a strange face confronted him — pale, hairless, only his beautiful ruby eyes suggesting his former appearance. When he saw his body he gasped, finally understanding the cause of the icy coldness that gripped him all over. His rich black fur was no more and before his eyes stood the misshapen body of one those humans whose clumsiness in love-making he so often ridiculed.

Dennis attended to the most urgent matter first. He dashed for his chest full of sundry items of apparel scavenged from automobile accidents. He instinctively chose a dove-grey double-breasted waistcoat, a plain rose-wood dress-shirt and a claret-coloured tie. As soon as he got into these clothes — amazed at his sense of balance — he felt better and his teeth stopped chattering. It was then that his distraught gaze fell upon the tufts of black fur scattered about his bed and he mourned his former self.

With a heroic effort, however, he managed to compose himself and tried to think things out. He had learned a lot reading books and the situation seemed clear enough: the Magus of Siam was a werewolf and he, Dennis, bitten by the animal, had turned into a man.

At the thought of being forced to live in a strange world, he was immediately seized with terror. A man among men, what dangers awaited him! The thought of the futile struggles that the motorists on the hill of Picardy engaged in day and night gave him a symbolic foretaste of the atrocious existence that he, like it or not, would have to endure. And then he stopped to think. In all likelihood, and if his readings were correct, his transformation would be brief. Why not put the situation to advantage and take a trip into town? To be honest, some of the scenes he had glimpsed in the woods flashed through his mind without provoking the same feeling as before and he even found himself licking his lips, which allowed him to observe that in spite of everything his tongue was as pointed as before. He went over to the rear-view mirror to get a better look at himself. His features were less disappointing than he had feared. Opening his mouth, he noticed that his palate was still a nice black colour and that he could still control his ears, which were perhaps a trifle long and hairy. But the face that was reflected, with its oblong shape, pale complexion and white teeth, compared favourably with those he'd seen. He might as well cast his lot to fate and learn something by it. Before departing, however, he prudently took along a pair of dark glasses should he need to shade the rubescent

glare of his lamps. He also folded a raincoat over his arm before resolutely stepping toward the door. A few minutes later he was standing by the side of the road, holding a light suitcase and breathing in the morning air, which seemed remarkably free of odour. Confidently, he stuck his thumb out at the first car to come his way. He had chosen the direction to Paris, knowing from daily experience that automobiles are loathe to stop as they approach the hill and more willing during their descent, counting on gravity to help them start up again. Thanks to his elegant attire, Dennis was soon picked up by a gentleman in no apparent hurry. Comfortably sitting to the driver's right, he opened his fiery eyes to the vast unknown. Twenty minutes later he got off at Place de l'Opéra. It was bright and cool and traffic remained within the limits of decency. Dennis bounded boldly across the pedestrian crossing and walked along the boulevard to the Hôtel Scribe where he got a room with bathroom and lounge. After checking his bag with the hotel staff, he went directly to purchase a bicycle.

The morning passed as in a dream; his head wheeling, he rode off on his bicycle in all directions at once. He felt the urgent, albeit repressed, need to bite a wolf but he knew it would be difficult finding a victim and in any case he

wanted to avoid being too influenced by the literature on the subject. He knew that with a little luck he could reach the animals of the Jardin des Plantes but reserved this possibility for a more insistent urge. All his attention was directed to his new bicycle. This chrome thing fascinated him and would be very useful for getting back to his cave.

At noon, under the puzzled stare of the porter, Dennis leaned his bicycle against the front of the hotel; his elegance — and even more so, his ruby-red eyes — seemed to disarm everyone for he heard not the slightest objection. Cheerfully, he went about looking for a restaurant. He chose one of respectable, and subdued, appearance; crowds still upset him somewhat and despite the extent of his education, he feared his manners might betray a slight provincialism. He requested a seat in the corner, and prompt service.

But Dennis was unaware that on this very day and at this very establishment, so calm in appearance, the monthly reunion of the Holstein and Mallard Society, better known as «Milk and Quackers», was about to begin. A procession of fresh-faced revillers filed past his half-eaten dinner and proceeded to occupy seven tables set for four. Dennis looked gloomily at this sudden influx; as he expected, the maître d'hotel came politely to his table.

«I'm awfully sorry, sir,» said this clean-shaven and gusholeic man, «but could you do us the favour of sharing your table with this young lady?»

Dennis glanced at the tramp and his scowl quickly disappeared.

«I'd be delighted,» said he, rising half-way.

«Thank you so much,» she said in a musical voice. It was more like a musical saw, to be somewhat cutting.

«If you thank me,» said Dennis, «to whom might I give thanks?»

«Providence, no doubt,» averred the exquisite creature. She immediately dropped her hand-bag, which Dennis seized in mid-air.

«My!» she exclaimed, «what extraordinary reflexes you have!»

«Indeed,» Dennis replied.

«And what strange eyes you have,» she added five minutes later. «They're like...»

«...Oh, I see,» commented Dennis.

«Like garnets,» she concluded.

«That's war for you,» said Denis.

«I don't quite follow...»

«I meant,» Dennis clarified, «that I expected you to compare them to rubies, and when you only came up with

garnets, I assumed it was because of restrictions, which automatically made me think of war, through an effect-and-cause relationship.»

«And you graduated in Political Science?» asked the doe-eyed beauty.

«Yes, never to return.»

«I find you quite fascinating,» confided the girl who, between you and me, had lost her virginity more than once.

«And I can only return the compliment,» oozed Dennis.

Together they left the restaurant and the trollop confided to the wolf made man that she had, not far from there, a lovely little room at the famous Silver Seive.

«Come up and see my etchings,» she whispered in Dennis' ear.

«Is that prudent?» Dennis inquired. «Your husband, or brother or family shan't be discommoded?»

«I'm pretty much an orphin,» moaned the poor little thing as she wiped away a tear with her slender finger.

«What a pity!» politely commented her elegant companion.

Once at her hotel he noticed that the staff, curiously enough, was nowhere to be found and that with an abundance of red plush everywhere the hotel looked vastly different from his own. The climb up the staircase gave him a nice view of her legs and the stockings that enwrapped them.

Eager to learn, he let her climb six steps ahead of him.

Thus instructed, he quickened his pace.

The idea of fornicating with a woman was so ludicrous as to be more than a little repellent, but his memories of Falslumber got the better of his inhibitions and he was soon putting into practice what he had learned by observation. She was polite enough to cry out, in ecstasy, so she said, and our Dennis, inexperienced in such matters, failed to remark how contrived were her protestations of having been sent up to heaven. He had barely come out of a kind of coma unlike anything he'd ever experienced when he heard the ringing of the clock tower. «Time to go,» he told himself after the sexton tolled the bell. Short of breath and white as the sheet, he sat up and watched, dumbfounded, as his bare-assed female companion (with all due respect to the reader) rummaged through his coat pockets.

«You want my photograph!» he said suddenly, thinking he'd understood. He felt flattered but realized, on seeing her bipartite hemispheres quiver, the error of his supposition.

«Ah, well... yes!... sweetheart,» stammered the lovebird, without really knowing if he was pulling her leg or niet.

Dennis's look was icy. He got up and checked his wallet.

«So, you're one of those females whose depravities are

described in the pages of Mr. Mauriac!» concluded Dennis. «A prostitute, so to speak.»

She was about to reply, in spades, that he made her puke, that she didn't give a shit about his goddam carcass, and that she wasn't going to fuck some jerk just for the fun of it, but a gleam in the eye of the anthropized Wolf rendered her silent instead. There emanated from Dennis's eyes two beams of red light that transfixed the brunette's optic organs and plunged her into a state of strange confusion.

«Would you kindly dress and get the hell out of here!» Dennis suggested.

He had the unexpected idea, to enhance the effect, of unleashing a howl. Never before had such an urge prodded him. Despite his lack of experience, it resounded dreadfully.

The girl, terror-stricken, dressed without saying a word, quicker than twelve strokes of a chime. When he was finally alone, Dennis began to laugh. He felt a perverse sensation, something rather exciting.

«It must be the taste of revenge,» he conjectured aloud.

He tidied up his apparel, cleaning where necessary, and went out into the street. It was night and the boulevard sparkled magnificently.

He hadn't gone two yards when three men approached him.

Gaudily dressed in suits that were a bit too light, hats that were a bit too new and shoes a bit too shiny, they formed a wall around him.

«Can we have a chat?» said the slimmest of the three, an olive-coloured man with a thin moustache.

«What about?» said Dennis, surprised.

«Don't play stupid,» articulated one of the others, a red man with a square shape.

«Let's go in here...» proposed the olive man, as they passed in front of a bar.

Dennis stepped in, still rather curious. So far he was finding this interesting.

«You play bridge?» inquired one of the three.

«Cause you're gonna need one,» remarked obscurely the red square one. He seemed upset.

«My dear boy,» said the olive-faced one once inside, «I hear you've been givin' a certain young lady a hard time?»

Dennis burst out laughing.

«He thinks it's a big joke, the little faggot!» observed the round one. «He won't be laughin' for long.»

«It just so happens,» continued the olive-faced one, «that we've got a stake in this broad.»

Suddenly Dennis understood.

«I see,» he said. «You're pimps.»

All three stood up.

«You lookin' for trouble, buddy?» said the square one menacingly.

Dennis looked at them.

«I'm about to get angry,» he said calmly. «It's the first time this has happened to me but I recognize the sensation. I've read about it in books.»

The three men seemed confused.

«You don't think you scare us do you, fathead?» said the red one.

The third one spoke little. He formed a fist and let it fly. But just before it caught Dennis's chin, the latter slipped the punch, grabbed the wrist and squeezed as hard as he could. It made a loud crunching sound.

A bottle was christened over Dennis's head which left him blinking and staggering backwards.

«We're gonna knock your brains out, fellah,» said the olive man.

The bar emptied. Dennis leapt over the table and over the square man. The latter gaped in amazement but his reflexes were quick enough to grab on to one of the suede-shoed feet of the hermit of Falslumber.

There followed a brief melée at the end of which Dennis, his collar torn, studied his face in the mirror. His cheek

was gashed and one of his eyes was turning indigo. He quickly arranged the three motionless bodies in a row under the seats. His heart rumbled furiously under his ribs. He tidied himself up a little. And suddenly, his eyes fell on the clock: eleven.

«My gosh! I've got to run!»

Quickly, he put on his glasses and ran toward his hotel. His heart was full of hate but the urgency of the situation pressed upon him. He paid for his room, grabbed his bag, hopped on his bike and pedalled away like Fausto Coppi.

When he arrived at the Saint-Cloud bridge a policeman stopped him.

«Where's your light?» asked this nondescript man.

«What?» asked Dennis. «What for? I can see.»

«It's not to see,» said the policeman. «It's so that others can see you. To prevent accidents, see?»

«Huh? Oh, yes, I suppose that's true. But tell me, how does it work, this light you're talking about?»

«You puttin' me on?» asked the cop.

«Listen,» said Dennis, «I'm really quite pressed. I don't have time to screw around.»

«You lookin' for a ticket?» said the repulsive man in blue.

«You're beginning to bore me», replied the wolf with

wheels.

«OK. You got it!» exclaimed the ignoble flatfoot.

He started to take out a notebook and pen and lowered his head an instant.

«Name?» he inquired as he raised his head back up.

Frantically, he blew into his copper penny-whistle for he saw in the distance Dennis's quickly receding bicycle which was now attacking the hillside.

Dennis was putting his heart and soul into it. The incredulous asphalt gave way to his furious assault. The Saint-Cloud hill was swallowed up in no time. He crossed that portion of the city which borders Exhibition Park — a subtle allusion to the wandering satyrs there — and turned left toward Pont Noir and Ville-d'Avray. As he left this noble town, just past the Cabassud restaurant, he became aware of the commotion that was forming behind him. He pedalled harder and harder and suddenly veered off on to a forest path. Time was of the essence. Suddenly from afar, a clock struck midnight.

From the very first stroke Dennis felt things going awry. He had trouble reaching the pedals; his legs seemed to be shrinking. He managed on nonetheless, up the moonlit path until he saw his shadow — with long snout and pointed ears — and suddenly he went flying, for a wolf on a bicycle

has very little stability.

Fortunately for him. He had scarcely touched the ground when, with one bound, he disappeared into the bushes; the police motorcycle in pursuit crashed noisily into the fallen bike.

Trotting back to his home, now completely wolf again, Dennis began to think about the strange frenzy that had seized him while a wolf in man's clothing. He, who was so gentle, so calm, had seen his principles fly out the window, along with his goodness of heart. The vengeful rage directed at the three pimps (one of whom, let us hasten to add, was on the Vice Squad payroll) seemed both unthinkable and fascinating. He shook his head. What misfortune to be bitten by the Magus of Siam. Fortunately, he thought, this painful transformation would be limited to days of the full moon. But something remained within him: a vague, latent anger and a desire for revenge that he found a little disquieting.

IV. COMMENTS ON TRANSLATING WORDPLAY IN «LE RAPPEL»,
«LE RETRAITE», «SURPRISE-PARTIE CHEZ LEOBILLE»
AND «LE LOUP-GAROU»

The four stories above are representative of Boris Vian's virtuosity, just as his short story oeuvre as a whole displays the range of his imagination. In the words of Herbert Dickhoff, «les nouvelles contiennent tous les thèmes, ainsi que le style et la technique du langage propres à Vian et c'est pourquoi l'univers des nouvelles est l'univers de Boris Vian tout simplement.»⁶² For our purposes, only one realm of this «universe» will retain our attention: the realm of verbal play. In the comments that follow, I shall limit myself to this central theme.

1) «Le Rappel»/«Flashback»

This short story, written in 1949,⁶³ has been previously translated into English by Simon Watson-Taylor and Howard Schoenfeld under the title «Recall».⁶⁴ It warrants re-translation, however, not because it reads poorly—quite the reverse is true, in fact—but because Taylor and Schoenfeld have taken unusual liberties with the text.

62 Herbert Dickhoff, «Approche discrète des nouvelles de Boris Vian» in Boris Vian: Colloque de Cerisy, Vol. 1, ed. N. Armand (Paris: UGE 10/18, 1977); p. 343

63 Boris Vian, «Le Rappel» in Les lorettes fourées, in L'Herbe rouge (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1969). All references are to this edition.

64 Boris Vian, «Recall» in French Writing Today, ed. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1968). All references to «Recall» are from this edition.

To be exact, forty sentences and nine phrases from Vian's text have been left out altogether, seven passages have been altered semantically, and eight new sentences have been added. Worse, there is one critical mistranslation which distorts the story's plot line considerably.⁶⁵ More relevant to our purposes, however, is the fact that the four instances of wordplay have all been omitted.

The first instance, Vian's «une maison de style virginal» (p. 61) is a pun—or even a malapropism—which turns on the French words «virginien» (i.e. style of architecture) and «vierge.» Both Alfred Cismaru and H. Baudin have remarked upon it.⁶⁶ Translators Taylor and Schoenfeld, in «Recall», have simply eliminated the phrase entirely (p. 176). Though not a particularly brilliant pun, it is easily retained in English: «Virginal», with a capital «V», conveys the double reference to Virginia and virginity.

65 The French text reads «Elle se rapprochait de son cou, l'entourait, se resserrait...» (p. 63 above). The antecedent of «Elle» is clearly «la fumée» of the previous sentence. Taylor and Schoenfeld, however, seem to have been confused, taking «Elle» for Winnie. Winnie has thus strangled her father. That Vian did not intend this is evident from a line which occurs later in the text: «...la fumée de la cigarette avait étranglé le père de Winnie» (p. 200). Winnie may, of course, have killed her father, though it is much more likely that the protagonist was responsible. In any event, the important point is that the identity of the murderer—if indeed, there is one—is a mystery and that the smoke has become the imagined villain. The mistranslation is thus a serious one, distorting not only the plot line but the motivations of the protagonist as well.

66 A. Cismaru, op. cit., p. 97; H. Baudin, op. cit., p. 36

The second of Vian's play on words involves a portmanteau or blend. The protagonist's first flashback is of he and Winnie sipping drinks in a Long Island bar: «Il buvait un pétrouscola avec Winnie...» (p. 61). Both Pestureau and Cismaru have found «pétrouscola» to be a blend which combines Stravinsky's Petroushka with «cola». ⁶⁷ I am less sure. My «Petrocola» (petrol + cola) at any rate, suggests something black and vile that only New York could produce and is less arcane than the Stravinsky allusion. Taylor and Schoenfeld, in «Recall», have not worried about the word's intentional ambiguity: it becomes simply «cokes» (p. 76).

In Vian's «Quand on frotte lentement ses cheveux à soi derrière ses oreilles à soi...» (p. 62), there is likely a pun-association for «soie». By spelling out this reference to silk in my translation (p. 79), I have obviously not retained the equivocal. In this case the resources of the English language are not conducive to producing similar homophonic ambiguity. It is difficult, in fact, to pun on «silk» without producing a «pointless» pun; and creating a substitute pun in the same sentence runs the risk of trivializing a lyrical passage. In the Taylor-Schoenfeld translation, the problem was obviated by

67 G. Pestureau, op. cit., p. 152; A. Cismaru, op. cit., p. 97

eliminating the sentence altogether (p. 177).

The final instance of wordplay involves proper names. The French text reads: «...il vit sur la table une statuette de cheval, un joli petit cheval blanc en plâtre sur un socle, si blanc qu'il paraissait tout nu. Un cheval blanc. Lui préférait le Paul Jones...» (pp. 67-68). The image of the «cheval blanc» obviously provokes its written form, which reminds the protagonist of the label of the scotch whiskey, «Cheval blanc» (White Horse).⁶⁸ «Paul Jones», used metonymically, is the brand he prefers. It would seem important to keep the proper noun form, for Vian repeats it four more times in the story. Taylor and Schoenfeld, however, do not use this proper noun, or any other adapted one: «He saw a small statue of a horse, a pretty white horse, plaster, on a base: so white that it seemed naked. He himself preferred bourbon...» (p. 179). «Paul Jones» thus becomes «bourbon», and «cheval blanc» is not repeated between the two sentences as it is in Vian. The pun is not lost, of course, but the proper noun «Paul Jones» is lost for the four other occasions it appears in the story. The most important of these is the play on paragraph II, where Vian capitalizes «Cheval Blanc», evoking

⁶⁸ Cf. Vian's play on words, «Buvez Dublin's Special... qui vous remplira de Joyce» (quoted by N. Arnaud, Boris Vian en verve (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1970)).

«White Horse» scotch on the one hand and «white horse» in its literal sense on the other:

...les deux types en costumes foncés [...] après avoir bu du Cheval Blanc en tirant en l'air pour effrayer les boeufs, et ensuite les rattrapper avec un lasso à bout doré (pp. 68-69).

By rendering Cheval Blanc as «whiskey» (p. 180), the Taylor and Schoenfeld text omits this dual association and thus the matrix of Vian's otherwise senseless «cowboy» digression.

«Paul Jones» would appear to be pure invention. It does not appear in the list of foreign and domestic whiskies of the Société des alcools du Québec, and if it does exist, it would not likely be a favourite of a New Yorker. I am almost sure Vian is bluffing here: he never set foot in the United States, let alone New York. Since White Horse is the name of a scotch, and since my English translation is intended for an audience more sophisticated in its knowledge of British or American whiskies, I have replaced «Paul Jones» with «John Dewar». It is tempting, given the popularity of bourbon in the United States, to use a name such as «Jack Daniels». However, it would seem more reasonable to prefer a particular brand of scotch (John Dewar) to another brand of scotch (White Horse), not to another brand of bourbon, or to bourbon in general, which is how Taylor and Schoenfeld rendered the passage. An alternate strategy is to retain «Paul Jones» as is, letting the reader grapple on his own with the pun-

association of the white plaster horse and allowing for the remote possibility that «Paul Jones» is a whisky or some other American liquor.

There are certain rhetorical embellishments in «Flashback», consistent with Vian's stylistic tendencies, which serve, among other things, to compensate for the one pun left untranslated. The first two involve rhyme, or slant rhyme:

...his jacket was upside down and turned around
from three hundred yards of free fall down (p. 85).

...the orange pig dancing a jig
to the tune of his own flute (pp. 80-81).

The embellishments in the latter example, «jig» and «tune», by «rhyming» with «pig» and «flute» respectively, serve to imitate a nursery rhyme and thus render this flashback more childlike. Vian's writings provide many precedents for such rhyme within prose.⁶⁹

The last embellishment does not, strictly speaking, involve wordplay; it involves a deliberate /sibilant/-/f/ interplay where none is present in the Vian text:

She usually let her hair fall to her shoulders. Her neck was very firm. He could remember the sensation of softness when his fingers touched those feathery hairs... fine as the soft down inside the ear of a kitten... (p. 79).

69 In Vian's short story «Les Pas vernis», for example, we find «Dodiléon trouvait le temps léong» (in anthology Le Loup-Garou (Paris: 10/18, 1970) p. 155).

The whispery sibilants (/ʃ/, /ʒ/, /s/, /z/, /tʃ/) and /f/ spirants were chosen to evoke softness through sound.

ii) «Le Retraité»/«The Old Man»

Our second story, «Le Retraité» (1949), is another «conte noire» with a brutal climax. Like «Le Rappel», the instances of wordplay are few, but they do contribute to the story's overall structure. As is the case with the following stories, «Surprise-partie chez Léobille» and «Le Loup-garou», no other English translations were in print as of November, 1982.

The first instance of wordplay in «Le Retraité» appears in the third sentence:

Le sol était couvert de mâchefer, qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec du mangetout.⁷⁰

Vian directs our attention to the similarity of the signifiers in alluding to the phonetic properties of the two words and also perhaps to the semantic parallel between «mâche» and «mange». The translation also turns on phonetic, though not semantic, similarity:

The ground was covered with tiny cinders, not to be confused with Tony Saunders...

The choice of the name of one of the characters in «The

70 Cf. Vian's «Mangemanche» in L'automne à Pékin (p. 87) and L'Écume des jours (p. 115; p. 51 above).

Old Man» is thus motivated by sound. «Tony Saunders,» moreover, is in keeping with Stanley Chapman's practice of anglicizing all French proper names, a practice I have employed throughout. Vian's «Lagrige» (a hard-sounding name suggesting perhaps «gruge» (dupe) and «gris») becomes «Larson» in English (recalling perhaps «larcency») and the spooneristic «Turpin (qu'on appelait hardiment Peinture)» becomes the palindromic «Nevols (alias Sloven)».⁷¹ «Père Michon» is likely sacrilegious, a blend of «miche» (cul/testicules/seins) and «miche-ton» (client d'une prostituée).⁷² «Father Fornick» retains the spirit of Vian's religious harpoons. «Maréchal DuMou» is also likely meant to be evocative: either emasculating the military—a 'soft' Field Marshal—or an allusion to «rentrer dans le mou» (frapper quelqu'un).⁷³ The Anglicized «Field Marshal Mallow» (marshmallow) is obviously a play on the first of these.

71 Coincidentally perhaps, «Turpin» is similar to «turlepin» (farceur). With «Sloven» I have committed a «turlupinade» («un jeu de mots, plaisanterie de mauvais goût»). Anglophile Vian may also have wanted to evoke «turpentine» with «Turpin/Peinture», who, we recall, concocts a poisonous mixture from artist's materials.

72 Dictionnaire argotique (Paris: Larousse, 1977) p. 163

73 DuMou appears in H. Baudin's long list of characters who partake in «le procédé le plus fréquent, parce que le plus simple: ...l'utilisation en nom propre d'un nom commun rarement utilisé à cette fin.» (Baudin, op. cit., p. 37). Also appearing are E. Judo (see pp. 50-51 above) and F. Sansonnet (see p. 184 below).

As he did with «Turpin» and «mâchefer», Vian again directs our attention to the phonetic properties of the words with this /p/-/t/ tongue twister:

...un terre-plein, planté de platanes, séparé du boulevard de l'Impératrice (p. 93).

I have filled this sentence with /s/-/z/ sibilants:

...mossy, cobblestoned lane that was separated from Empress Boulevard by long narrow islands stocked with sycamore trees (p. 99).

Following Chapman, and in conformity with Vian's stylistic flourishes, I have embellished on occasion. The first sentence of Part II, for example, contains a playful /s/-/z/-/d/-/f/ interplay with a slant-rhyme ending not present in the Vian text:

...it was by chance that Sanders, on Thursday, fell flat on his face in the cinders (p. 100).

And I have added a couple of puns in the first paragraph of Part III:

...a dart painstakingly poisoned... (p. 102).
...Larson went so far as to urinate in an extra-strong bomb, which, upon its invention, was called the 'pistin-bomb' (p. 102).

It is significant—and perhaps portentous—that Vian abruptly stops all wordplay after the first paragraph of Part III (Section IV contains none). It is at this point that violence erupts and where wordplay would be most out of place. Verbal play thus contributes to the story's structure: what started out as play ends in deadly earnest.

The reader is lulled and amused by wordplay in the first two-thirds of the story and is therefore all the more shocked by the climax. Any translation of «Le Retraité» that does not reproduce this pattern of wordplay will upset the story's balance.⁷⁴

iii) «Surprise-partie chez Léobille»/«Leobald's Birthday Party

«Surprise-partie chez Léobille» (1947), a happily-ending «love-story» with black touches of adolescent humour, depends very much for its effect on wordplay. The onslaught of puns, deformations and word games is very likely the most unrelenting to be found in all Vian's short stories.

The play is perhaps most evident in the proper nouns. The title of the story itself contains a distorted, invented Christian name, «Léobille», which evokes a host of other names (Léon, Léonard, Léonore, Léopold, etc.) as well as the word «bille», both in its strict sense and particularly its slang senses of «mug» (i.e. face) and «stupid» or «drunk.»⁷⁵ In the English text, Léobille becomes «Leobald»,

74 It is interesting to note that Shakespeare's characters do on occasion engage in wordplay at what seems most unsuitable moments, as Macbeth does just before the murder of Duncan, and Lady Macbeth just after it: «If the assassination could... catch with his surcease success» (I, vii, 2-4)/«If he do bleed, I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal; for it must seem their guilt» (II, ii, 56-7). And in Romeo and Juliet, when Mercutio is stabbed, he utters, «Ask for me to-morrow and you shall find me a grave man» (III, i, 100).

75 «Bille» occurs in this sense in Vian's «Le loup-garou» (p. 51 above).

which meshes an actual name, «Leopold», with «bald»; with its unusualness and similar reference to the head, it is about as comical.

The name of the protagonist, «Folubert Sansonnet», would seem to connote, first, the French name «Hubert» (or «fou» + «Hubert») and then of course, the name of the bird (starling, in English).⁷⁶ He becomes Faramond Finch in English. «Faramond», while not an invention, is sufficiently rare a Christian name to seem like one. It has, in addition, a similar syllabic pattern vis-à-vis «Folubert». The surname Finch (instead of starling) was chosen both for the

76 Vian wrote the following «poème-calembour» for the magazine Oblique:

Le temps passa sans m'apporter sur l'union
Qui marie les destins de l'Inde et d'Albion
Le moindre enseignement. Je posai le problème:
Communauté d'esprit? de race? d'intérêt?
Et la lumière fut — la simplicité même:
LIVRE STARLING = ROUPIE DE SANSONNET!

He concludes with this footnote: «Ajoutons pour les innocents, que «starling» veut dire «sansonnet» (en anglais naturellement)» (Obliques: Boris Vian de A à Z, ed. Noel Arnaud, numéro spécial de la revue Obliques, 1976, p. 229). Vian seemed fascinated by birds, or rather the names of birds. In addition to the strange bird described in his short story «Le Rappel» (p. 61 above), there appears the following catalogue in Vian's novel L'Automne à Pékin (op. cit., p. 95):

...la pie, la fanfremouche et l'écubier, et la caillebotis, et puis la mouture, l'épervuche et l'amillequin, la bêtarde et le cantrope, et le verduron des plages, le marche-à-l'oeil et le coquillet; en dehors de ça, on peut citer la mouette et la poule vulgaire qu'ils appellent en latin cocota deconans.

alliteration it adds and for the image of the finch's bright colours. Faramond, we recall, dresses in apple-green socks with blue stripes.

The other guests at Léobille's party have similarly flamboyant names:

...il [Folubert] aurait voulu posséder la souplesse de Grouznié, alliée à la fougue de Doddy, l'élégance smart et charmante de Rémonfol, la rigidité attirante du chef Abadibaba ou la piraterie éblouissante de n'importe lequel des membres du Club des Lorientais (p. 107).

The English version attempts to retain the playfulness:

...he would well have liked to possess the grace of Swann, the fire of Waters, the chic of de Breyné, the Shiek of Abadibaba's silent strength, or the flamboyance of any member of the Whoriental Club (p. 123).

«Swann», of course, connotes its waterfowl homophone and semantically reinforces «grace», the «fire of Waters» is an oxymoronic pun, de Breyné aristocratic or exotic-sounding and «Shiek» a homophonic echo of the preceding «chic».

We have seen, in L'Ecume des jours, ample evidence of Vian's fondness for Anglo-American words and culture. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the apple of Folubert's eye is named «Jennifer.» It would seem logical to reverse this process in translation, so in English she becomes the equally exotic «Geneviève.»

«Jean Berdindin» is a nonsensical sort of name whose

repeating last syllable imitates a popular practice among children. In English, anything playful will do; in this case, the punning «Ben Dover» was chosen, not only because of the thrashing the latter takes from the major,⁷⁷ but because of his probable sexual proclivities («Tout, mais pas ça... Pas une femme!» he cries, to which the Major replies, «Bon, [...] déshabille-toi et occupe-toi du mec» (p. 118).

The first two puns of the story are difficult to render in English:

Il d  jeuna d'un hareng en civi  re... (p. 106).
He then lunched on dead herrings... (p. 122).

Vian's «hareng en civi  re» is presumably modelled on «li  vre en civet» («jugged hare»). The next play is rather complex, turning on a series of isolated senses:

...le dessin, repr  sentant,    l'origine, un anicroche paissant au milieu des fr  res pr  verts» (p. 108).

Baudin has commented on this: «[Le jeu de mots] amorce le th  me pastoral, glisse de: pr  vert   : Jacques et Pierre Pr  vert, mais avec une orthographe au pluriel qui ne peut s'appliquer qu'au sens pastoral.»⁷⁸

77 The «Major», a recurring character in the works of Vian, was actually a personal friend of Boris Vian who died falling out a window on January 7, 1948. He is, interestingly, defenestrated in «Suprise-partie.»

78 H. Baudin, op. cit., p. 39

My original translation, «an animal grazing in green pastures», misses completely these allusions, representing a part of the semantic content but totally missing the invariant abstract concept, «play on words». Any extended play on words capable of being visualized will do, such as: «a surrealist painting in which it was not raining rain but hailing taxicabs.» I mention «surrealist» to evoke the images of René Magritte.

The next play on words turns on an analogy between stopping a vehicle and stopping a record:

...le disque s'arrêtait dans un horrible grincement de freins, vu que l'ami Léobille venait de fermer, sans prévenir, le passage à niveau (p. 112).

In English we can employ a similar parallel, between a train stopping and stopping a record-player, by exploiting the various senses of the words «disc» and «track»:

...the machine stopped with a terrible squealing of disc brakes, Leobald having pushed, accidentally, the level arm across the track (pp. 127-128).

Yet another play on words occurs after the Major has shot the «sonnette», a mysterious beast that sleeps by the door and bites all those who poke their finger into it (in English, it becomes a «doberbell»):

«...le Major, ravi, esquisa un entre-chien-et-loup...» (p. 113).

The play, of course, is on the dance term «entrechat» and

«entre-chien-et-loup» (dusk). As the term «entrechat» exists in English and as most English readers know what «chat» and «chien» mean, we may translate this phrase as follows: «...the Major, delighted, executed an ~~entre~~ chien» (p. 128). We have, of course, missed the reference to «entre-chien-et-loup» but this is unimportant as we have gained other allusions: the «chien» refers back to the «doberbell» which the Major «executed».

The Major is eventually overcome but he does manage some «consolation»:

Et puis, sur la route, comme il ne voulait pas se tenir pour battu, il assassina, par écrasement, un vieux marchand de quatre saisons, dont trois à la sauvette, heureusement (pp. 119-120).

Vian's strange equation combines «marchand à quatre saisons» (hawker of fruit, vegetables, fish, etc.) with «marchand à la sauvette» (illegal street vendor) to get a three-quarters illegal «marchand à quatre saisons, dont trois à la sauvette.» In English, once again, the fact of the wordplay is important, not the words themselves:

Not wanting to admit defeat, he then ran over a millionnaire's son, making him a compressed heir (p. 135).

The avalanche of puns comes to an end only because the story ends. In the final sentence Vian plays with the isotopy of the (anachronistic) electric iron:

...le fer à repasser électrique en cloisonné chinois, qu'il tenait de sa mère, laquelle le tenait de sa grand-mère, et que, dans sa famille, on se repassait de génération en génération depuis la première Croisade.

In English, a similar pun can be made by effecting a slight semantic change at the very end; the result is a periodic sentence, the preferred type for accentuation and humour:

...the electric iron with Chinese cloisonné that he'd inherited from his mother and she from her grandmother, a family heirloom that had been passed on from generation to generation since the Iron Age.

«Leobald's Birthday Party» contains instances of verbal play which do not correspond directly with the French text. We recall many such freedoms in Froth on the Daydream, where translator Stanley Chapman gives free reign to his powers of creation. In «Leobald's Birthday Party», the additions or embellishments are intended once again not only to reinforce the spirit of Vian's style, but to compensate for certain plays left out of the English. Apart from the «hareng en civière» mentioned above, there is the play on «casser (p. 114 above) and «bon Majeur» (i.e. «bon Seigneur», p. 118) omitted in the English, as well as the effect of the archaic «huis» (p. 113).

As general compensation, I have used five techniques: the creation of new puns, repetition of like words, repetition of phonemes, abrupt mix of register, and inter-textual allusion. The «Monte Carlo gambol» for Vian's dance

«la barbette gauloise» (p. 107)⁷⁹ is an example of the first of these techniques, as is the following passage:

The Major lifted him up and threw him on the floor. In the throws of agony, Dover remained there rubbing his ribs... (p. 132).

The second technique is based on the repetition of words having the same roots or similar construction, hopefully for humorous effect:

...his naturally conniving nature and unnaturally high degree of malice (p. 125).

But he never managed to take advantage of his physique's advantages... (p. 123).

...those over-cautious, over-anxious and under-organized creatures... (p. 121).

Stanley Chapman would often cram his sentences with words with identical initial phonemes.⁸⁰ The sibilant tongue-twister⁸¹ below was motivated partly by Chapman and partly by the memory of Vian's tongue-twister in «Le Retraité»

79 We recall that Chapman freely translated Vian's «Boissière» and «tramontane» as the «Disraeli Dislocation» and «Aurora Borealis» and that Sturrock left them verbatim (p. 56 above).

80 Note, for example, Chapman's «They were carrying colossal corrugated cardboard cartons crammed with candles, coloured crepe and carnival decorations» (p. 56) («ils portaient de grandes boîtes de carton ondulé pleines d'éléments décoratifs» (p. 50)). And Vian's «Nicolas coupa le courant du four» (p. 9), which Sturrock renders as «Nicolas switched off the oven (p. 9), Chapman playfully translates as «Nicholas clicked off the current to the cooker...» (p. 11).

81 Vian would often play on /z/, usually by means of false elisions. In L'Herbe rouge, for example, we find «des étuis à zongles» (p. 41) and Baudin cites these three: «Et il y a z aussi», «À voir et à z-entendre», «une corne-z-au-pluriel» (op. cit., p. 33).

(page 93 above). It appears in the very first sentence:

A ray of sun shot through the slats of the shutters
and focused directly on the closed eyelids of Faramond
Finch.

Phonetics also plays a role in my translation of Vian's
«Il se rappela la surprise-partie chez Léobille, et ricana
sauvageusement en ré dièse...» (pp. 108-109): «He remembered
Leobald's birthday party [American /d/] and laughed demoni-
cally in D-sharp...» (p. 124). «Surprise-partie» (a faux
ami in French) thus becomes, with slight semantic distortion,
«birthday party» here and in the story's title because it
sounds better and contributes to the plosive /b/-/d/ inter-
play. Without even thinking of the English equivalent to
«ré dièse,» I instinctively chose «D-sharp» («B-sharp»
would also work) again for purposes of alliteration: the
hard /d/-/b/ thus plays a relevant role in a passage about
(strident) sound.

The fourth technique, mix of register, is common in
Vian and is examined again in the next story, «Le loup-
garou.» It may involve the clash produced by using «refined»
language to describe a «vulgar» situation or the use of
technical terminology in a context in which it does not
belong. As an example of the former, we find:

Le Major... arracha l'épaulette de sa robe rouge
glauque (La vérité m'oblige à dire que les spectacles
ainsi découverts étaient plaisants)... (pp. 117-118).

... (Truth behoves me to confess that what was thus revealed was not unpleasant)... (p. 133).

And of the latter:

Ce dernier, atteint au plexus solaire, au moment où il finissait de dilater son thorax, se plia en deux avec un bruit horrible (pp. 118-119).

The latter, hit in the solar plexus just as he finished dilatating his thorax, folded in two with a dreadful sound» (p. 134).

With these examples in mind, I translated Folubert's agenda as follows:

He had to decide upon:

- 1) the apparel he would don;
- 2) the sustenance he would ingest;
- 3) how he'd get his kicks (pp. 121-122).

The level of speech drops from refined in the first two clauses to slang in the last. Although the corresponding sentence in the Vian text does not have the same periodicity and mix, it does contain a clash of register (↓)-(↑) worth preserving:

Il y avait à réfléchir à:

1. Comment il allait s'harnacher; (↓)
2. Comment il allait se sustenter; (↑)
3. Comment il allait se distraire (p. 106).

Finally, I have restructured the paragraph in which the Major plots his revenge so as to admit an inter-textual allusion. The paragraph's final sentence reads: «For this insult the Major vowed revenge» (p. 125), a reference to Poe's famous introductory sentence to «A Cask of Amontillado»:

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge.

iv) «Le Loup-garou»/«The Werewolf»

Of the four stories translated above, «Le Loup-garou» (1947) is the closest to L'Écume des jours. Both are fantasy worlds whose laws of nature have been turned upside down. Both are dark fairy tales full of black humour and seeming frivolity on the one hand, and poignancy and deadly seriousness on the other. And like L'Écume des jours, «Le Loup-garou» depends strongly on wordplay for its mood and structure and contains a wide variety of verbal games. There are, for example, instances of proper noun deformation, portmanteau words and expressions, puns, neologisms, archaisms, exoticisms, inter-textual allusions, and register clashes. Very often one passage will combine several of these.

With respect to the translation of proper nouns, «The Werewolf» may appear inconsistent. We recall that Chapman, in Froth of the Daydream, anglicized all proper names in order to evoke the same sort of impressions—laughter and surprise—that the French reader would have in reading L'Écume des jours. In many cases, «The Werewolf» follows this practice of anglicizing proper nouns; in other cases, it does not.

Like Chapman, I have anglicized all names of people. For example, Denis becomes «Dennis,» Etienne Pample is

«Ernest Dimple», Lisette Cachou becomes «Blanche Almond» and author Louis Boussenard becomes «Jack London.»

Place-names, however, are generally not anglicized. Vian does not play with the toponymy here, using actual place-names, with two exceptions. «Le bois de Fausses-Reposes» is invention; in translation it becomes «the forest of Falslumber.» The English name plays on the «false slumber»/«false lumber» homophones à propos to forests (lumber) and fairy tales (Sleeping Beauty) and is modelled on Falstaff and Falmouth (in Cornwall). The second exception, the suggestive «Montretout» («fine allusion aux satyres errants du parc») should be similarly evocative in English: «Exhibition Park», the name of a real park, incidentally, would appear to accommodate wandering perverts. The other place-names (e.g. Ville d'Avray, Pont Noir, Saint-Cloud, Place de l'Opéra, Jardin des plantes) have been left in French deliberately, as a fantastic tale such as this may benefit from a foreign locale, exotic to most English readers. Another reason not to alter the setting is that this region (Ville d'Avray, Paris) is where Vian was born and raised.

The name of the automobile, «Amilcar» (p. 138), has been changed to the antique «Kissel,» to complement the pun that follows it:

a 1921 Kissel that had suffered a passing liaison with a

sturdy sycamore...» (p. 157).

The «hôtel Scribe» was retained since it has approximately the same associations—or lack thereof—in French and English. Conversely, the bordello «hôtel Presse-Purée d'Argent,» obviously extra-referential, was changed to the «Silver Seive,» perhaps a metaphor for being fleeced, for being separated from one's money. In that a «presse-purée» is a (vegetable) masher and that a «masher» is also a womanizer, the «Silver Masher» (a greying lecher?) is another possibility.

The «Dilettantes du Chevesne Rambolitain» (p. 145) who come to interrupt Dennis' meal present obvious problems to translation. Who exactly are these people? A chevesne is a fish and it may be the object of an elaborate pun. It would not be the first time that Vian has played on the names of fish.⁸² Another interpretation presents itself,

82 The following extract is testimony:

L'Ablette, ennemi du petit lapin [...]
 Le brochet craignant avant tout le relieur
 La carpe, célébrée par Horace; oublieur
 Le remora, cherchant un mé problématique.

Et l'avare gardon, maquereau l'Ecoissais,
 Mais au pisciculteur, géomètre français,
 Je conseille de cultiver la raie tonique.

(Inédit, quoted by Michel Rybalka, Boris Vian: Essai d'interprétation et de documentation, Ph.D. 1966, UCLA (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm, Inc., 1966)).

though it may be slightly far-fetched: Chevesne Ramboliteain as a play on Château de Rambouillet, which is served by the extension of the Sceaux line of the Chemin de fer métropolitain. In any case, these revilers will have to undergo a change of identity in translation. The «monthly reunion of the Holstein and Mallard Society, better known as 'Milk and Quackers'» (p. 163), models itself on the «animal» lodges (eg. Elks, Moose, etc.) or animal conservation societies which Vian's «Dilettantes du Chevesne» suggests to me, and of course is a set-up for a rather extravagant play on words.

Our next category, portmanteau constructions, may also involve puns or neologisms. The following example turns on the double meaning of «pédale»:

...il ressortit aussitôt pour acheter une bicyclette.
La matinée passa comme un rêve; ébloui, Denis ne savait
où donner de la pédale. (p. 144).

Apart from the bicycle pun, there is also a telescoping of two standard expressions, «ne savoir où donner de la tête» and «perdre les pédales», i.e., «la tête». In English, it has been rendered by another (and feebler) play, on «reel» and «wheel»: «... his head wheeling, he rode off on his bike in all directions at once» (p. 162).

Another portmanteau is at the same time a homophonic pun: the policeman's «tube à son» (p. 153) combines «tuba»

with «basson.»⁸³ The English translation, «copper penny-whistle» (p. 171), while not as happy, does retain the spirit of the play. It associates «copper penny» with «penny-whistle» and «copper» (i.e. policeman).

The last of Vian's portmanteau words is also a neologism. Its meaning is anyone's guess. It is used to describe the waiter: «cet homme glabre et causegraisé» (p. 145). Obviously combining «cause» with «graisser», it may refer to the expression «graisser la patte à quelqu'un» (to bribe) or to «une graisse» in the sense of «boniment» (quack's patter, sales talk, etc.) which would fit with «causer». My portmanteau, «gusholeic» (p. 164) combines «gush» (effusive talk or enthusiasm) with «oleic» (oily) and also evokes «to gush oil», and so would seem to touch most of the bases.

There are four other neologisms to mention. Vian's «loup anthropisé» (p. 149) is easily rendered by a similar construction in English: «anthropized», which adventitiously rhymes with the preceding «eyes». The other three do not fare as well in translation, where there is a loss in each case. Vian's «se défroгна» (p. 145) is evidently the reverse process of «se renfrogner»: «his scowl quickly disappeared»;

83 Vian's Chroniques de jazz contains many such instruments, including the «corniflupet» (p. 363), which blends «flûte» + «cornet» (+ «clapet?»), and the «Claribole» («clarinet» + «timbale?»).

«madrigaler» (p. 147) becomes «oozed» in English; «atêtit» (p. 151) is simply «christened» and the policeman's «carnet de bal et un stylobic» (p. 153) are the prosaic «notebook and pen.»

To compensate for these and one other example of word-play—«...en la mettant au féminin» (p. 147)/«...I find you quite fascinating» misses the masculine-feminine grammatical ambiguity which the English language does not possess—there are certain added puns and embellishments in «The Werewolf»:

Dennis lived on grass and blue hyacinth, seasoned in autumn with a few choice mushrooms and in winter... (p. 156);

spanking-new Obsession girdle (p. 158)

a 1921 Kissel that had had a passing liaison with a sturby sycamore (p. 157);

Blanche Almond, a walnut-haired waitress (p. 158)

«Thank you so much», she said in a musical voice. It was more like a musical saw, to be somewhat cutting (p. 164).

The final instance of compensation, with its staccato compound nouns, takes its lead from Stanley Chapman:

He instinctively chose a dove-grey, double-breasted waistcoat, a plain rose-wood dress-shirt and a claret-coloured tie (p. 160).

The «dove-grey, double-breasted waistcoat», incidentally, is borrowed from Somerset Maugham's Of Human Bondage.

«Le Loup-garou» contains a couple of «exoticisms» that

are worth preserving. Vian's «loup fait homme» (p. 147) invokes the Latin verbum caro factum est; in English, it is perhaps best rendered by «the wolf made man» (which would also playfully evoke «self-made man»). The Russian «niet» should also be retained in English:

...sans bien savoir s'il se moquait ou niet (p. 148).

...without really knowing whether he was pulling her leg or niet (p. 166).

There are three inter-textual allusions in «Le Loup-garou.» The first is recognizable from the opening sentence on («Il habitait dans le bois...»/«There once lived in the forest...»): the narrative is of the fairy-tale genre in the manner of Le Petit Chaperon rouge or Pierre et le loup. The genre is, of course, subverted by the clashes of register and subject matter which follow, but the story does proceed with a naive simplicity. When naive Dennis first meets the prostitute, the latter's exclamations call to mind those of Little Red Riding Hood before her impending danger vis-à-vis the wolf: «My, what big eyes you have, grandma!» etc. Vian turns the tables here by creating a wolf who is in danger and heedless thereof. The prostitute exclaims: «Oh! Mais vous avez d'extraordinaires réflexes!... Vos yeux sont assez étranges...» (p. 146). The allusion is unmistakable in English: «'My', she exclaimed, 'what

extraordinary reflexes you have!'... 'And what strange eyes you have'...» (p. 164).

The second inter-textual allusion is much more specific. The former tenant of Dennis' cave was a gold digger who never managed to find «'le Panier d'Oranges'» '(c'est dans Louis Boussenard)' (p. 137). In English, it is easily adapted: «he would never find the «Yellow Lady» (as Jack London would say)» (p. 157).

The third and final inter-textual allusion poses much thornier problems to the translator. Vian's «...sonner l'heure. Tout suffoquant et blêmequant» (p. 148) is a take-off on a poem of Verlaine.⁸⁴ Retaining this reference would tenuously assume that the English reader is familiar with this poem; if the reader is familiar with it, however, he or she would likely be reading Vian in French. I have therefore decided on a different strategy—to replace this play on words with a different one, while retaining the 19th-20th century inter-textual element as well as the «clock» reference, since it is repeated twice more in the story:

...the ringing of the clock tower. 'Time to go,' he told himself after the sexton told the bell.

This pun is borrowed from a poem by English poet Thomas

84 «La Chanson de l'automne» (1866): «Tout suffocant/Et blême, quand/ Sonne l'heure,/Je me souviens/Des jours anciens/Et je pleure...»

Hood.⁸⁵

The mixing of registers is a device which pervades Boris Vian's writings. We saw examples of it above in «Surprise-partie» and there are numerous examples in «Le Loup-garou.» The technique, employed for comic effect, usually juxtaposes «le style recherché» and «le style familier»:

l'éclat rubescent de ses châsses (p. 143)
the rubescent glare of his lamps (p. 162)

le cul à l'air... l'hémisphère bipartite (p. 148)
bare-assed... hèr bipartite hemispheres (p. 166).

The precious dialogue between the werewolf and the prostitute («'Si vous me remerciez, vous,' poursuivit Denis, 'que dois-je, moi? Sous-entendu remercier.' 'La providence classique, sans doute,' opina l'exquise.» (pp. 145-146)) is later shattered by profanity:

Elle allait répliquer, et comment, qu'il la faisait chier et qu'elle s'en cognait de sa viande, et qu'elle n'allait pas se farcir un mec pour le plaisir... (p. 149).

The English version, of course, has to fully reflect this clash:

She was about to reply, in spades, that he made her puké, that she didn't give a shit about his goddamn carcass, and that she wasn't going to fuck some jerk just for the fun of it... (p. 167).

85 «Faithless Sally Brown» (1826): «His death, which happened in his berth,/At forty-odd befell:/They went and told the sexton, and/The sexton tolled the bell...»

Henri Baudin has written of this process:

À ce stade, nous sommes tout près de l'invention poétique d'un H. Michaux ou d'un A. Frédérique, et à la jonction des deux aspects, familier et recherché, de l'expressivité; ...Vian s'inscrit dans la lignée de Céline et de Queneau avec le renouvellement du style littéraire par l'introduction de la langue familièrement parlée.⁸⁶

* * *

⁸⁶ H. Baudin, op. cit., pp. 28-29

V. CONCLUSION

Three inter-related questions, broached above but not formally answered, will form the framework of these final pages. The questions are: «Is it possible to translate wordplay?»; «How does one translate wordplay?»; «Why translate wordplay?»

The first of these, we recall, was touched upon in the introduction, the tentative conclusion there being that wordplay could indeed be translated if by translation we mean creative transposition or adaptation. If, that is, we mean the transfer of the abstract concept «wordplay» rather than the specific semantic and acoustic constituents thereof. But after all is said and done, this is the standard sense of «translation»; no translation can reproduce the exact semantic and acoustic properties of any type of text. Consequently, to contend, as House, Raffel, Hamberg, Forster, and Dodgson are wont to do, that wordplay is strictly speaking, untranslatable, is saying very little: one might as well claim that all translation is impossible. Such a claim has been made before and is eminently tenable; like solipsism, it cannot be logically refuted. It is, however, futile academicism, contradicted at least empirically by the massive corpus of effective translations. It is hoped that, with regard to the translatability of wordplay, the four English stories above will form a part of this testimonial corpus.

* * *

Whoever has no understanding of the subject,⁸⁷
writes about the method.—Gottfried Hermann

It may seem logical to look for principles and procedures involved in wordplay translation by examining each of the twelve «types» of wordplay, establishing a success ratio for each type for Sturrock, Chapman and Moore. We might then conclude what types were easy, difficult or impossible to render and perhaps suggest why. Finally, the amount and nature of compensation — an important element in translating wordplay — could be analysed with a view to suggesting how and when to compensate. Sturrock, for example, has translated approximately one-sixth of the plays on words examined above in L'Ecume des jours and has not compensated elsewhere. Chapman has rendered just over three-fifths of these same plays and has compensated throughout. Moore has translated about nine-tenths of the wordplay in four Vian short stories and has also compensated. For all three translators, no one category was omitted markedly more often than another. What can we conclude from this data?

The answer is obvious: nothing. Any statistical count will be flawed or falsified by those instances in which the

⁸⁷ Quoted by Jost Hermand, Interpretative Synthesis (New York: Frederick Unger, 1975)

play was simply undetected, ignored or purposely eliminated by the translator. The fact that Sturrock misses the vast majority of wordplay and does not compensate elsewhere relates less to the inherent difficulty of the task than to factors such as lack of creativity, initiative or awareness of wordplay.

Statistical analyses are also misleading in that they do not measure the quality of puns and compensation, largely because wordplay's typical effect is humour and humour is so very subjective. Nor do they measure such intangibles as over-all mood and tone. As John Frederick Nims stresses in an article on literary translation, «One cannot say too often that it is not correspondence of detail that matters; it is correspondence of feeling and movement and tonality.»⁸⁸

There are really only two «procedures» to follow in translating wordplay: «il faut d'abord le saisir; il ne suffit pas de le saisir: il faut le recréer.»⁸⁹ Valéry Larbaud, of course, was here not speaking specifically of wordplay, but the same principles apply. Because exact transposition of plays on words is impossible, it is incumbent on the translator to recreate in order to produce the

88 J.F. Nims, «Poetry: Lost in Translation?», Delos, No. 5 (1970), p. 126

89 Valérie Larbaud, Sous l'invocation de saint Jérôme (Paris: Gallimard, 1946) p. 70

effect—humour, parody, shock—that wordplay typically produces. The quality of the recreation, as in creative writing in general, depends not on following procedures or rules or even less on understanding what processes are involved; it depends instead, need I insist, on the natural instincts and gifts of the translator. My intent in the section on L'Ecume des jours and in the four short-story translations was to show by example, to show what is possible, without footnotes, not to tell by principles and precepts.

* * *

The answer to the third and last question, «Why translate wordplay?», at first appeared so obvious to me that I scarcely felt the need to elaborate it here or elsewhere. But in reading various translations of well- and lesser-known «Class 2» writers, I began to realize that the answer is perhaps not as obvious as I imagined. We recall that Bernard Frechtman left untranslated the wordplay in Jean Genet's Pompes funèbres, acknowledging it instead in footnotes. We further recall that Taylor and Schoenfeld, in translating Boris Vian's «Le Rappel», avoided all instances of wordplay and that John Sturrock rendered but a fraction of the plays in Vian's L'Ecume des jours, with neither footnotes nor compensation. For these four translators at least, the reasons for translating wordplay are perhaps not obvious.

The most compelling reason involves the notion of style. It is a commonplace to say that a literary translator must attempt to convey the thrust of the style of the original author. Tytler, in 1791, wrote:

A good translator must be able to discover at once the true character of his author's style. He must ascertain with precision to what class it belongs... and have the capacity of rendering [this class] equally conspicuous in the translation...⁹⁰

Ascertaining and rendering the class of style is particularly important in the case of a «Class 2» novel, since style and subject, form and content are inextricably intertwined: the «meaning» of the words are a function of their form. Wordplay is an example par excellence of this marriage of form and content. To translate the content only à la Sturrock is to destroy the marriage; to omit the wordplay entirely is to omit an important stylistic device; to explain it in footnotes, while making the reader conscious of the wordplay, does not make him feel it: the effects of rhythm, sound and humour are lost.

Connected to this notion of style is the personality of the author. It is another truism of literary translation that one must «know» the author before attempting to translate him or her. One should be familiar, in other words,

⁹⁰ Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee, Essay on the Principles of Translation. Quoted by L. Bonnerot, Chemins de la traduction (Paris: Didier, 1963), p. 17.

with the author's life and works and try to convey something of the spirit thereof in translation. Tytler warns of presenting the author «through a distorting medium, of exhibiting him in a garb that is unsuitable to his character.»⁹¹

When Stanley Chapman undertook to translate L'Ecume des jours, he evidently knew much of Boris Vian. In fact, he knew him personally. Their correspondence of 1956-1957, rife with puns and jests in French and English, seems to have stood Chapman in good stead for his translation of L'Ecume des jours ten years later. He obviously knew Vian's passions, knew that he was a fun-loving musician, singer and lyricist, playwright, screen-writer and poet, foreign-language aficionado and translator for whom the sound and shape of words were almost as important as their signification. Chapman's verbal gymnastics and embellishments in Froth on the Daydream thus reinforce our image of the original author. Conversely, Sturrock's Mood Indigo, in which wordplay is largely absent, imparts only the faintest echo of the voice behind the work.

Another part of the answer to «Why translate wordplay?» involves the relationship between wordplay and a work's structure, i.e. the arrangement and interrelation of its parts. That such a relationship exists is evidenced in the

91 Ibid, p. 133.

raft of studies analyzing the structural role of plays on words in the works of James Joyce. In Finnegans Wake, where wordplay reaches its apogee, structure and play can no longer be separated.

Wordplay may contribute, for example, to the building of such elements as comic relief, plot and mood. Vian's L'Ecume des jours, «*Surprise-partie*» and «*Le Loup-garou*», for instance, are so fraught with comical equivocations and transfigurations that to ignore them is not only to deflate these works, but to change them into something else. In works containing relatively fewer occurrences of wordplay, such as Vian's «*Le Retraité*» and «*Le Rappel*», there is still sufficient cause to translate plays on words for they may have strategic placement. The verbal jests in «*Le Retraité*», we recall, stop when the jesting in the plot stops and may thus be a foreshadowing device. Similarly, the few instances of wordplay in «*Le Rappel*», omitted by translators Taylor and Schoenfeld, do contribute to the total effect and overall mood of the story. In the words of Alfred Cismaru,

These comic interplays lard through the gravity of the main character's suicidal act. Not only do they provide a necessary humorous relief, but they point to a singular ability on the part of the author to combine the lightest fantasies with the most profound pathos emerging from the threat of death. This ability... prevents him from falling into the trap of

trite sentimentality. On the contrary, like the procedures used by Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Raymond Queneau, his verbal fireworks deepen the underlying fabric of the story, while at the same time imparting a feeling of consolation and catharsis.⁹²

Cismaru's comments above, on «Le Rappel», apply with equal force to L'Ecume des jours.

«Why translate wordplay?» must also be answered in terms of the author's motives for using it. Class 2 writers in general, and Boris Vian in particular, are likely using wordplay for at least three reasons: (a) to oppose the normal conventions of language and literature; (b) to explore the relationship between language and reality, between word and thought; and (c) to startle and amuse.

The first of these objectives was a prime preoccupation of the Dadaists and Surrealists between the wars. For André Breton, fantasies and random associations of the mind represent a higher reality than the realistic, deliberately manipulated world of practical life and ordinary literature. Vian almost certainly subscribed to Bretonian surrealism. An «écrivain réformateur»⁹³, his use of language, his transpositions and literary parodies continued the surrealist

92 A. Cismaru, op. cit., p. 97

93 Jacques Bens, op. cit., p. 179

effort to oppose the established order and undermine existing values, be they literary; moral or concerning language itself. Proverbs, idiomatic expressions, clichés form the framework of language; to put them continually to the test of reality is to begin to challenge that framework. Not to put them to the test in translation is, needless to say, at cross-purposes to such intentions.

The second objective in playing with words, to explore the relation between word and object, word and thought (or the real functioning of thought), has been the goal not only of the Surrealists, but also of many contemporary French authors. Vian seemed particularly attracted to this question:

Les gens qui devraient savoir... ne renouvellent jamais leur fond de choses à triturer... on ne peut rien apprendre avec eux parce qu'ils se contentent de mots: [ils] ont étudié si longuement et si à fond les formes de la pensée que les formes leur masquent la pensée elle-même... Ils ont enrichi la forme elle-même d'un grand nombre de pièces et de dispositifs mécaniques ingénieux et s'efforcent de la confondre avec la pensée en question, dont la nature purement physique, d'ordre reflexe, émotionnel et sensoriel, leur échappa en totalité.⁹⁴

In Vian's L'Herbe rouge, we are again reminded how words are too often used to camouflage thought, to mystify and undermine real communication:

Ce n'est pas du sang, dit Lazuli, c'est probablement une

⁹⁴ Quoted by G. Pestureau, op. cit., p. 160

condensation... -C'est remplacer un mystère par un mot, dit Wolf. Ça fait un autre mystère, c'est tout. On commence comme ça et on finit par faire de la magie.⁹⁵

The dangerous spell of chants and incantations is all too present in our exchange of words:

Wolf s'étonnait maintenant de voir à quel point tous ces mots d'amour et d'adoration pouvaient rester dénués de signification, se limiter à leur fonction sonore dans la bouche des enfants qui l'entouraient comme dans la sienne même.⁹⁶

That the functioning of thought is often impeded by a confusion of word and object is a theme stressed in Korzybski's Science and Sanity (which Vian translated into French):

«A word is not the object it represents»; «A language is like a map: it is not the territory represented, but it may be a good map or a bad map».⁹⁷ Vian was evidently influenced by Korzybski, for we find in Vian's writings the following:

Il faut que les critiques... cessent de proférer de l'abstraction au kilomètre. Le mot chien ne mord pas; la carte n'est pas le territoire; le communisme n'est pas un homme.⁹⁸

It may be that wordplay, and the distortion of language that is frequently involved, is a means whereby

95 B. Vian, L'Herbe rouge (Paris: J.-J. Pauvert, Livre de poche, 1962), pp. 106-107.

96 Ibid, p. 125

97 Quoted by G. Pestureau, op. cit., p. 165

98 Ibid, p. 165. Note also the following example from L'Arrache-Coeur: «À quoi bon connaître le nom si l'on ne sait pas ce qu'est la chose? - C'est utile pour la conversation.» (p. 218).

individuality is expressed, due order and the rational are subverted, and personal independence asserted, while at the same time—in the response it evokes—a sense of community is shared. This sense of community is often provoked by the humour that frequently accompanies wordplay.

The «philosophical» reasons for playing with language should not be overemphasized; if Vian, for example, were asked about it, he would very likely reply that it was primarily as a humorist that he approached the linguistic matter that went into his literary works. The verbal shocks, gags and conundrums were a product of his peculiar cast of mind which saw in the operations of language a rich field for humorous cultivation.

The humour that wordplay typically elicits is something the translator must continually bear in mind. For we often hear of the «humour lost in translation», whether in novels or films. Indeed, a major reason the Marx Brothers are not as popular in France as they are in North America lies with the difficulty of translating their arsenal of verbal gags. When Groucho Marx, for example, says of a safari in Africa, «We shot two bucks, but that was all the money we had,» the subtitles I saw in Paris read, «On a chassé des cerfs, faute d'argent.»

In short, one must translate wordplay not only for the

underlying philosophical motivations, intended or not, but also because, if one does not, the work will simply not be as funny.

To ignore or vitiate the use of wordplay in writers such as Boris Vian is thus to take much of the pith out of their works. Appending footnotes or invoking the pretext of «untranslability» is unjustifiable in literary translations that are to be read not as foreign language teaching aids but as literature. Being a reflection of an author's style, personality and intentions, wordplay must not perish in translation; if it does, not only is the reader's view grotesquely distorted but the consequences are grave for comparative literature as a whole.

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