PARACANONIC ACTIVITIES:
A PRAGMATICS AND A POETICS

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Abstract

Overview: This dissertation proposes that certain texts, positioned para-canonically at ambiguous thresholds of valuation, insistently infract on what Roland Barthes would term the “mythologies” of literary canons. While functioning as paracanonic, texts are anti-emblems of privileged aesthetic certainty, metonymic of the wide range of exclusions (literary and historical) that are the actual social cost of canonic value. Rooted in Dialogism (the Marxist “philosophy of language” of the Bakhtin circle) and materialist assumptions about literary value as a contingent social process and function, Paracanonic Activities draws extensively on findings in current linguistics research centred on of the production, reception and interpretation of speech. This area of empirical inquiry extends, substantiates, and often vindicates, concepts that remain notional in Dialogism; together they provide productive means (concepts and concrete findings) for a fresh investigation into the conditions of literary discourse and the social production of aesthetic value.

Method, Outline and Primary Texts: Chapter One: Introduction revisits canon debates since the 1960s, to trace the contour of canon mythology. It then brings forward a pair of contrasting paracanonic case-histories – William Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus and Aimé Césaire’s Soleil cou coupé – to inventory some of the necessary-but-insufficient conditions (including social-historical contexts and textual features) that contribute to a text’s positioning as paracanonic. Each substantive chapter applies a frame crucial to both Dialogism and the linguistics of interaction, in order to sift a wide range of intertextually related texts for discourse-effects that are signatures of paracanonic activity. Chapter Two, “Anti-languages,” is a dual-language paracanonic case-history of François Villon, traced through literary responses to his core work, and to the attributed poems composed in criminal argot – themselves paracanonic to Villon. Chapter Three, “Ambivalence and Reported Speech,” reads through Titus Andronicus, Ovid, Kathy Acker and Antonin Artaud. Chapter Four, “Unhappy Laughter,” reads through Petronius Arbiter’s Satyricon, C.R. Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer, H.P. Lovecraft’s “In the Walls of Eryx” and Aimé Césaire’s verse-drama Et les chiens se taisaient.

Contribution: Paracanonicity, as a value-function, has been attested in various terms before, yet remains otherwise undescribed in its specificity as an “indivisible remainder” of all processes of canon-formation.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Donato Mancini.
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Chapter 1: Introduction: Myth Canon and its Afterimage

(Long) Sunset Over the Literary Field

Is it not late in the day to be writing about canons and canonicity? Have the reading, writing and study of literature not shifted, massively, into a phase that could be historically distinguished as post-canonic? Over ten years ago, Alan Wald already proposed that it had long been “time to move more positively toward the reconstitution of new [canonic] methods, not to continue primarily to bury the old” (292). Yet, if Raymond Williams could write even earlier, in 1977, that “it is relatively difficult to see ‘literature’ as a concept,” (Marxism 45) it is arguably no easier to see it in 2016. Here Williams was setting the scene for cultural studies. Today, the interdisciplinarity of cultural studies has dropped away, while the category of literature has once again strengthened. In spite of the accelerated vanishing, since the 1960s, of untroubled belief in a unified, stable, permanent and universally valid literary canon, the social practices and institutions and texts that together constitute “literature” can still only be seen against, or through, an ideological afterimage of such a canon. For too long, participants in the literary field have been compelled to look toward the same bright point on the horizon. Canonic time – which Jed Rasula characterises as the “historical durée of the museum” (22) – passes slowly. What Jane Tomkins wrote in 1985 remains predominantly true: “the idea of the classic is virtually inseparable from the idea of literature itself” (5). Questions of canons and canonicity remain pertinent today because the bundle of social practices that assemble as “literature” remain oriented towards a conceptual horizon in which the dominant (although dimmed) ideological landmark is an imago of a literary canon.\footnote{These claims may appear overdrawn, but consider the evidence that could be compiled from discourse generated in those spheres of activity where an idealised concept of literature is nourished and maintained. At the sites of such}
The principles of canonicity can appear to operate at peak efficiency in mainstream cases like the centrality of William Shakespeare, but the best illustrations of its force may in fact be with authors whose canonic status is less established. Among these, the most revealing instances are where there has been a sharp upward shift in an author’s reputation, and further evidence that said author has been set on a trajectory towards canonicity. With this in view, I turn to briefly consider the reception history of USAmerican novelist Kathy Acker. Her case provides a strong starting point for a functional introduction to the paracanonic. Although today Acker is being summoned towards canonicity, through the 1980s and 1990s Acker’s function in USAmerican fiction was itchingly paracanonic, a function exacerbated by the many cautionary gestures within her writing against the lethal qualities of canon.

Kathy Acker’s fiction was welcomed quickly by academic cultural theorists of the postmodern2, while, in direct antagonism, for two decades it was singled out in militantly middlebrow (which is to say anti-postmodernist) organs such as the New York Times as exemplary of social and literary decadence. For example, James R. Frakes writes in his review of Kathy Goes to Haiti: “I usually admire risk-taking and convention-flouting in fiction – when the rebellious gestures work. Not many work here” (Frakes). Acker’s troublesome fiction became a token in the “competition for legitimacy” (Bourdieu Rules 214) between sub-regions of the literary field: a middlebrow literary culture (within and without the university), the field of contemporary visual arts (where Acker was also welcomed), the threatening “heteronomy” of dispositions and practices emergent from a nothing-to-lose pop/punk culture, those “producers

activity – laudatory book reviews, prize juries’ citations, book jacket “paratexts” (Genette) – participants in the field are still engaged in an idealising mode of canon talk. If canon-making used to go on primarily in institutions and through anthologies, prizes and other forms of laudation have arguably become more important in that process.

2 As early as 1990, Martina Sciolino published a scholarly article that explicitly grasped Acker as “exemplary for postmodern feminism” (437).
who are least capable of succeeding according to the norms [the cultural field] imposes” (Bourdieu *Rules* 215).

In his review for the *Times* of Acker’s *Portrait of an Eye* (1992), James Polk, for example, presents a false evaluative dichotomy that explicitly puts the question of literary afterlife – of canonicity – at stake, even though Acker’s “punk” work might be read as explicitly flouting or antagonising concerns of posterity. The first-place-or-nothing, canonicity-or-bust logic in Polk’s evaluation bears the signature of canon ideology. Polk writes that “Kathy Acker is either hugely talented, taking fiction to new and undreamed of places, or hugely self-indulgent, spinning out empty punk fantasies to nowhere. Which? Eventually there may be a consensus” (BR18). By 2002, with the publication of *Essential Acker: The Selected Writings of Kathy Acker* (2002), following Acker’s death in 1997, the tenor of evaluations broadly changed. Donna Seaman contributes a publication notice of *Essential Acker* to the librarians’ resource *Booklist*, one which signals a drastic mainstream reappraisal. For 20 years Acker’s work had been described as “devoid of imagination” (Day 1976), “without persuasive courage” (Harris 1984), “abusive towards women” (Hoffman 1984), “nihilistic” (Kakutani 1987), “stunningly dull” (Frakes 1988), “drier than the driest” (Schiff 1990). In Seaman’s review an entirely new colour of adjectives erupts. Acker becomes forcefully reassessed as an

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3 Closing the review, Polk quotes Acker to make her answer his question: rhetorical: “‘I’m a ghost wandering about in a ghost land,’ she writes, ‘that’s made up of all my own garbage.’”

4 To better convey the hostility of these evaluations, here are key lines from those same reviews: “Acker is too conscious of her context, literary, psychological, and cultural, to transcend it” (Day); “Kathy Acker’s writing is limp and glassy-eyed, without the persuasive courage of conviction this kind of outlaw fiction requires” (Harris); “there’s a deep moral dislocation ... not so much harrowing as pathetic” (Hoffman); “simply seems like a hodgepodge of verbal and metaphysical riffs ... pretentious, poorly written and grossly sensationalistic in an adolescent sort of way” (Kakutani); “what distinguished punk musicians from their mainstream coevals was chiefly their inability to play their instruments. Likewise Ms. Acker, whose erudition is incontestable, whose ferocity is unmistakable and whose prose, I’m afraid, is unreadable” (Schiff).
audacious innovator ... bisexual bandit ... keen-witted, outrageous, disaffected, and whip-smart ... high-octane ... assaults ... challenging ... caustic ... torrential yet finely composed ... [She was a] profound influence... [The book is a] vital and tantalizing montage ... resounding ... rigorous and playful, sexy and repelling, inventive and proverbial ... powerhouse volume ... a boon ... freaky, apocalyptic.

(385)

The hesitancy, apology and tentativeness found even in positive reviews of Acker before 1997 is gone. If Seaman’s (and other reviews) are any indication, the prior antagonisms and disaffections around her work are unremembered. This shift is part of the process of canonical recruitment.Canonical figures tend to shed any aura of uncertainty. Wherever Seaman is in the “now” of 2002, the confidence of the descriptions displays the certainty of the canonizing gesture. She “knows” Acker’s importance as a novelist has never really been in doubt.

What remains constant across the shift is an orientation towards canonicity as the key stake in the production of literature. Acker’s fiction directly raises the problem of canonicity and the canonic in ambiguous, unresolved ways. She raises it as a problem, rather than exactly as a stake or an aim. In its technical means, Acker’s work sets out, as I might voice it, to “set a bad example,” explicitly against the imagining of literary canons as repositories of model texts. Acker crosses canonic works by men (Don Quixote; Great Expectations; Huckleberry Finn; The Scarlet Letter) with material drawn from “paraliterature” (Delany 366) or non-literary (which is to say, non-canonisable) sources: pornography, science fiction, horror, detective fiction, romance novels, candid diaries. Acker’s texts may be read as doing precisely what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identified as the most urgent work of the literary critic in the late twentieth century.
Concentrating on the desire for the canon, on the complicity with old standards, and on epistemic violence, the practical perspective of the discipline of literary studies in the narrow sense need do no more than persistently clean up (or muddy) the idealist field as it nourishes the question of value. ("Scattered" 110)

The risks, to creative practice, of canonisation and classification are explicitly marked by Acker as “the cloturing dialectic of recognition” (Empire 12). For Acker, as Jerome McGann writes “A poisoned ecology infects this cultural scene at all its levels” (495). “Cloturing” is a term Acker uses to describe canonic enshrinement. For Acker, cloturing is figured as a capture, a fencing-in, an enclosure that functions as a strategy for managing the social and affective force of the writing. Such control, containment or sterilisation Acker sees as a cost of canonic value, a cost not worth the debt incurred. To Acker, the mortal debt of canon is the effective destruction of the artwork. Advising resistance, Acker writes:

Well before Bataille, Kleist, Hoffman [sic] etc., made trial of Hegelian idealism, of the cloturing dialectic of recognition: the German Romantics sung brazenly in brass of spending and waste. They cut through conservative narcissism with bloody razor blades. They tore the subject away from her subjugation to her self [sic], the proper; dislocated you the puppet; cut the threads of meaning; spit at all mirrors which control. (Empire 12)

Acker’s texts aren’t the kind where a phrase like “cloturing dialectic of recognition” is illustrated with a concrete example⁵. I will risk suggesting that “cloturing” might concretely be

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⁵ Although not cited, Acker’s phrase appears be taken from Jacques Derrida’s essay on Antonin Artaud “Le théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation.” [The Theatre of Cruelty and the Clôture [Fence] of Representation] The “cruelty” of Artaud’s projected theatre, as Derrida understands, is in synch with Acker’s textually performed critique of canonicity, even in the slippage she introduces between mimesis/representation (Derrida/Artaud) and canonic “recognition” (Acker). Derrida writes: “Le théâtre de la cruauté n’est pas une représentation. C’est la vie elle-même en ce qu’elle a d’irreprésentable. La vie est l’origine non représentable de la
the mode of canonic recognition Michael Bérubé finds in a certain strain of Thomas Pynchon
criticism “which has so depoliticized Gravity’s Rainbow as to have made it an exercise in
narrative technique” (267), taking the actual political arguments Pynchon’s novel sets forth as
(mere) tropes for the “politics of literary form” (ibid.). Such success, to Acker, kills. It kills
insofar as it neutralises the real politics of artworks.

Another cloturing mode of recognition could involve reading the least problematic texts
of an author’s attributed output – say the most apparently nationalist, the most politically
reducible, and least socially stigmatised in content or reception – as if they are either a fair
representation of the whole, or represent the actual essence of the whole not discernible in its
weirder parts. The Parisian medieval poet François Villon (1431-1463), for example, has been
constructed as a French patriot based on a single poem, “Ballade contre les ennemis de la
France” [Ballad Against the Enemies of France] against the internal evidence of the poem (that it
is satire), and evidence the rest of the attributed writings. Everything so culturally alien and
puzzling in Villon can, in selective extrapolation, be simplified and tamed. He can be, as he often
has been, reconstructed as a poet of ebullient joie de vivre, happy vagabond (“freedom of the
road”) and a charming rake. Jed Rasula, in The American Poetry Wax Museum, invokes this

représentation” (343). [“The theatre of cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is
unrepresentable. Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation” (8).] Cruelty is not in the order of the
mimetic, it is in a “necessité et rieur” [necessity and rigor] of practice that draws all agents in such exchanges
(reader, writer; actor, spectator) towards a state in which all “cesseraient d’être les instruments et les organes de la
représentation” (348) [“would cease to be the instruments or organs of representation” (10)] – or (for Acker) could
not become fenced-in canonic exempla. Derrida finds Artaud asking the very questions Acker asks with each slash
her writing makes into recuperative literary discourse: “Rompre cette appartenance, qu’est-ce que cela veut dire? Et
est-ce possible?” (344-5) [“What does it mean to break this structure of belonging? Is it possible to do so?” (8).]

6 In the works of writers such as D.B. Wyndham Lewis (see his François Villon: A Documented Survey (1945)),
Sergiu Nicolaescu’s film François Villon - Poetul vagabond (1987) [Poet Vagabond], or in pop-culture iterations
like Alan Crosland 1927 film The Beloved Rogue, and satirically so by François Rabelais (see Urquhart 679).

Villon, by a comparable process, is made falsely intelligible as a proto-romantic lyric poet, rather than an irreducible, shifty *bricoleur*.

In *Marginal Forces / Cultural Centers* (1992), Michael Bérubé contributes what Alan Wald describes as “perhaps the most searching interrogation to date of the contradictions of canon formation in the mid-late twentieth century United states” (292), through a comparative reception history of the African American modernist poet Melvin B. Tolson, against the reception of Thomas Pynchon. Early in the book, Bérubé addresses a question that is habitual in writing about canonicity: Is it enough to “merely [change] the content … without challenging the structures of thinking that produce the system” (Chambers qtd. in Bérubé 33)? Paul de Medeiros, in an article from 2003, articulates this question differently: Is canon critique a politically ineffectual tokenism that “merely plays at adding or subtracting a few names, without actually changing anything at all [?]” (de Medeiros 281). In 1993 John Guillory had answered that question in the institutional affirmative, writing that changes to “the syllabus cannot mean in any historical context overthrowing the canon, because every construction of a syllabus *institutes* once again the process of canon-formation” (Guillory 31). Bérubé’s anticipatory rejoinder: I don’t want to argue the contrary position that ‘merely changing the content’ [of the canon] is enough; rather, my point is that the contrary position is not even available, that the dichotomy between changing texts and changing ‘structures of
‘thinking’ is not comprehensible as a dichotomy. For where did our newly canonical works come from if not from revised structures of thinking or, to use the term I prefer, revised reading practices? (33)

Indeed, as Bérubé grasps, the mainstream acceptance of a writer as challenging as Acker, or the increased (though still inadequate) canonic inclusion of non-white, non-male, non-bourgeois writers and writings, is a sign that cultural practices have, to considerable extent, already been revised. At the sites of the most comprehensive revision, there is even evidence of a shift into what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “a postfractural plurality of canons” (1483) – possibly at the brink of tipping over into a wholly post-canonic literary field.

Today, reading practices still need a lot of revision, along multiple lines of ethics and equality of representation, and the antagonism between aesthetics and experience (or aesthetics and politics), before literary practice will cease being oriented towards a canonic imago, with everything that orientation requires and entails. Bérubé’s pointedly rhetorical question can be answered, now, with a bluntly non-rhetorical question.

However, before I answer that question, it is necessary to make explicit something left implicit in my opening paragraph: the Canon remains the centrepiece of a mythology of the literary. “Mythology” here is used in the sense established by Roland Barthes in his 1957 text Mythologies. Barthes’ model is productive here for several reasons, most specifically because Canon myth includes, in its own particular inflections, all the basic features of Barthesian myth: naturalisation as fact, confusion of subject and object, the projection of permanence and transcendence, tautological reasoning, coercive universalisation of a dominant subject position, quantifications of quality, the privation of history, forced identification, and exnomination (264-71). Other commentators have recognised this. As Guillory notes, even for graduate students in
the jaws of a hefty curriculum – “in the canon’s mouth” (gun and/or body) as Lillian S. Robinson has it – the canon-as-such nowhere appears: it is never the actual object of study. Therefore, as Guillory writes, it “would be better to say that the canon is an imaginary totality of works. … it never appears as a complete and uncontested list in any particular time and place” (30). Instead, in the mode of Barthesian myth, the Canon materialises in sweeping metonymies. The “whole of Molière is seen in a doctor’s ruff” (Barthes 238) – like the whole of the Cultural Revolution in Mao’s facial mole, or all of English Literature in Shakespeare’s earring. Part to whole is cohered through a moment of hegemony.

Sustained, ongoing critiques and historical studies since the 1960s, like Bérubé’s, have eroded the mystificatory power of an idealised Canon in many areas. My answering question for Bérubé is therefore: What signs, traces, signatures or vestiges of Canon myth appear to survive its critiques? What parts of Canon myth persist through the fracture and fraying, the unravelling and pluralisation? Together, these traces or signatures constitute that so far indelible canonic afterimage, still visible whenever one tries to see literature – either in my 2015 or in Raymond Williams’ 1977 – as practice or concept.

The subject of this study – what I call paracanonic activities – are themselves visible precisely where Canon myth is problematized, interrupted, irritated, roughened up, or, to use Viktor Shklovsky’s term (in Benjamin Sher’s translation) “enstranged”: “expanding and complicating the perceptual process” (xix) engendered in the “type of speech” (Barthes 217) that is canon myth. As I hope to demonstrate, something resembling the paracanonic, as a value-

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7 To his can be added a whole host of names: Houston Baker, Amiri Baraka, Nina Baym, Tony Bennett, Frank Davey, Anthony Easthope, Margaret J. M. Ezell, Christin Froula, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Alan Golding, John Guillory, Annette Kolodny, Paul Lauter, Ross Leckie, Kate Millet, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Barbara Smith, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Jed Rasula, Lillian S. Robinson, Trevor Ross, Alan Wald, Cornell West, among many others.
function, has been attested in various terms in the past, yet it remains undescribed in its specificity as an “indivisible remainder” (Žižek) of all processes of canon-formation.

What the Para is Doing to the Canon

In English usage, the prefix *para* is freely appended to a large number of roots, including: *paramedic, paramilitary, parallel, parallax, paranormal*. Each of these (and other) agglutinations accentuates different potentials in the meaning of *para* as: *beside, alongside, by the side of, attached to*. The inflection of *para* I wish to mark in *paracanonic*, originates specifically in a common analogy to a mythic Canon as an ideal or idealised body, an assembly of (monumental) parts which form “an ideal order among themselves … complete before the new work arrives” (Eliot “Tradition” 499) A canon is encountered first as a list: mysterious, reified, gnomic in its parts and colossal in its totality. Such lists are held together by the most arbitrary of syntaxes … Because they bring together any number of items without making clear their interrelations, lists can bespeak a levelling syntax, and the longer the list, the more likely its items will be treated as an amorphous, potentially uniform mass. (24)

Canon-as-list here is congruent with the canon-body analogy (as a Frankensteinian assemblage of beautiful parts), the latter of which may originate in the representational forms of canon found in martial and religious settings: friezes, statues, luminous images. A frieze is a frozen parade: a list. I first encountered an explicit use of the canon-as-body analogy in Robert Graves and Laura (Riding) Jackson’s *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927). Here Graves and Jackson write that: “the poetry of e.e. cummings is clearly more important as a sign of local irritation in the poetic body than as the model for a new tradition” (20). The implications here are that the “tradition”
has an ideal historical trajectory, with certain predictable-in-hindsight and therefore “correct” outcomes in poetic composition. The “poetic body” is organic, natural like the body in its elegant coherence. In this teleology, errant modernisms like cummings’ concrete poetry are presented as an insoluble dilemma for a preferred historical narrative. In other words, the canonic “poetic body” itself has an ideal form, but it also has an actual infection. Whether that body is imagined to be of marble, bronze, muscular flesh, or of a more angelic substance, this canon body is, let’s say, bedevilled with tough little infections of worry or doubt that I call paracanonic activity. During the 18th century through the 19th century (the very period when the practice of a literary field dependent on a Canon cohered, out of tendencies traceable back to the 4th century (see Ross 23)), para was used in medical terminology in this precise way. Inflammation around a joint was parasynovitis. Inflammation around or beside the bladder was paracystitis. At this stage, para had also already been used to imply an indigestibility, an irreducibility. Chemistry had the term in paramenispermine, to denote an “insoluble residue” resulting from the extraction of menispermine.

The paracanonic then, like these, inherits some qualities of its host (or semantic root), but does so only partially – unsuccessfully as it were, incompletely. It is also, as in parasite, attached and/or related to its host, yet ungovernable by that host. Sometimes it is a danger. In several of the instances of the paracanonic considered in this study, this ambivalent relation to the host (dependent and co-substantial, yet aberrant) engenders an insistent, unignorable lapse or flaw. To revisit the former analogy: such an infection has to be treated or it risks spreading to more of the body; it risks becoming a “model for a new tradition.” Similarly an error, left unattended, may multiply, or the effects of an untreated injury can compound. So Aimé Césaire’s

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8 Menispermine is a colourless crystalline alkaloid obtained – poetically? – from moonseed.
paracanonic “corps perdu” (479) would reclaim the African Black, open-ended and “collective ancestral body of all the people” (*Rabelais* 19) that Mikhail Bakhtin discovers in the popular medieval world, in delirious expectation of the marked but restored “whole and promised body” (354) evoked by Houston Baker. As Baker writes:

> What occurs, with the appearance of the African body as canonical promise, as I stated earlier, is neither a dismantling nor a replacement. What occurs is rather an emergence through suppressing forms and exclusive rhetorics of that which is, in the truest possible sense, ‘emergent’: Viz. ‘demanding immediate action’. (ibid.)

Paracanonic activity is distinguished from other marginalities or problematics or alterities precisely by this itching demand, the “rire de paille dans leur acier” (Césaire 834) [laugh of straw in their steel]. During episodes of paracanonic activity, texts function as anti-emblems of privileged aesthetic certainty, metonymic of “the great unread” (Cohen 59) or the wide range of exclusions (literary and historical) that are the actual social cost of canonic value. The more mystified the canon in question, the more susceptible it will be to paracanonic perturbation. In a fully post-canonic literary field, the effect of paracanonicity will only persist as a trace of the past.

Of canons, and the social effects embedded in them, Spivak asks: “What subject-effects were systematically effaced and trained to efface themselves so that a canonic norm might emerge? ... literary canon-formation is seen to work within a much broader network of successful epistemic violence” (“Scattered”110). Epistemic violence is a symbolic dimension of corporal systemic violence. So, in defensive cloaking of the historical constitution of literary value, the Canon is made to speak, in such a way that it appears to answer its critiques. The (white, heterosexual, bourgeois) Canon answers: there isn’t enough existing “excellent” literature
written by X group, or of course it would be canonic, because a canon represents trans-historical aesthetic excellence. By no means are the Canon’s gates locked, it says, the right sort of newcomers are always welcome. Myth shrugs. Myth grins. This is precisely the answer given, in the form of the programmatically obtuse question, to Jane Tomkins, when she works to bring forward uncanonised texts by women: “But is it any good?” (186). What Tomkins reports is an inverted version of what can be called the “Third World Proust question,” asked by Saul Bellow. Bellow (inadvertently) voices myth Canon’s segregationist norm: “Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I’d be glad to read them” (qtd. in Phillis 330).

However, contra the myth (or afterimage) of Canon as an ideal order shaped but unblemished by history, canons are always (and have always been) haunted, at one stage or another, by their hidden costs. As Houston Baker writes: “the marked or inscribed African body is a trace, a figure in the weave, that always haunts a European system of the natural” (349). To the extent that a Canon appears as “a system of the natural” and as an emblem that “encodes a set of social norms and values” (Lauter 23), paracanonic activity, at what Gerard Genette calls the “thresholds of interpretation,” undermines such historically, politically evacuated implicit value-claims. Paracanonic activity interrupts, delays, or makes painful, the appropriation of refractory texts for the explicit formulation of such “norms and values.”

**Social Objects and Political Wagers**

Attempts to think critically about canons have failed to produce an accepted definition of what a canon is. Samuel R. Delany and Trevor Ross, for example, diverge on canons’ most concrete manifestation: as rosters. Delany insists “[The] canon is not a list” (Delany 338). Ross insists that a canon is, first of all, precisely that: “It may be useful to consider canons as lists as
much as standards of excellence” (23). Reading across such basic disagreements, and others much more categorically antagonistic, Spivak concludes that “there can be no general theory of canons” (Outside 305). This is in part because they are, as Delany writes, “social objects” and “social objects do not lend themselves to rigorous definitions … At best, social objects can be functionally described” (337-8). With “no general theory” Spivak means something more particular than Delany, something which can help trace out a functional description: canons are essentially a political practice, in the literary and educational fields, of securing definitions, authority and value. There can be no general theory because, as Spivak quotes from Marx’s Capital III,

*there can be no ‘knowledge’ in political practice … Political practice involves the calculation of effect, of the possibilities and results of political action, and that calculation rests on political relations which condition the degrees of certainty of calculation and the range of the calculable.* (qtd. in Outside 306)

Canons can be observed at work, their social effects can be described. What canons do in the world, how they are used to act on and in the world, can be witnessed. Struggles over the contents of canons are political struggles, which is to say calculated risks in the sense Marx intends: informed wagers about possible effects. Canons convene, contingently, as a product of a series – long or short – of these wagers and struggles. Such a “functionalist” or “pragmatic” approach to the problem of canons and canonicity is summed up by Robert Weimann in “Shakespeare (De)Canonized.” Weimann asks what canons *do* as a way of determining what they *are*:

As I understand it, a literary canon implicates some socially operative authority in selecting, appropriating, and delegating certain privileged forms, energies, and
effects of discourse. … For what else is the projection of a canon, if not … the attempt to homogenize discursive space, to suppress discontinuity in favour of some stabilizing hierarchy, to assert some transcendental signified, some unexamined authority such as ‘order’ or, as obvious alternatives, ‘experience,’ or ‘human nature’? (68-9)

A similar stance, one that almost entirely dematerialises canons, is found in Wendell V. Harris, who argues that “although a canon is nominally made up of texts, it is actually made up not of texts but of texts as read” (117).

Although I partly agree with Harris, arguments like his are still susceptible to a vital deficiency, insofar as they remain consensus and consent models of canon-formation. From whatever social positions, within whatever communities (imagined or actual), such canons are made, they would resolve towards a group of “revered masterpieces” (Krieger qtd. in Harris 118) that must be something “more” than a trail of “broken dishes [after] … a tawdry [historical] melodrama of interests and ideologies” (Altieri qtd. in Harris 118). The problem with consensus models is that it can be impossible to locate exactly where the consenting is being done and exactly who is doing the consenting. As Guillory writes: “The scene in which a group of readers, defined by a common social identity and common values, confronts a group of texts with the intention of making a judgement as to canonicity, is an imaginary scene” (28). In any so-called community\(^9\) few of these anticipated readers are either asked for, or socially positioned to meaningfully give, consent as to which books are passed down to them as canonic. To most readers, canons are handed down and received as already made. The literary field itself is made

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\(^9\) This holds whether it is one of Stanley Fish’s “interpretative communities” (14) or Jonathan Culler’s networks of readers possessing “literary competence” (854), the anticipated “audience of intelligent non-experts” (qtd. in Rasula 199), or Ezra Pound’s sodden “masses” (*Letters* 172).
up of sites that are “complex hierarchies in which the position and privilege of judgement are objects of competitive struggles” (Guillory 27). It is not structured, in other words, to operate by consensus.

But if it is unclear who exactly is doing the consenting, there is an even more peculiar lack: it is no more clear, especially where myth Canon is figured as “that which we know” (Eliot 500), who is even doing the reading. In his 1995 interview cited above, for the magazine Para•doxa, Samuel R. Delany concludes his (implicitly) cultural materialist reflections on the function of literary canons as “social objects” (338) with a reference to reading, and what might be called the known unknowns of canons. Like other critics who work towards a pluralisation and complication of the literary field, Delany nevertheless still refers to canon in the mythical singular; “the canon” rather than “canons.” Yet Delany is cognisant of how myth Canon operates as “internally persuasive discourse” (Bakhtin) based on one of its objective attributes: that it is more unread than read. For most of the readers who supposedly inherit this “vast treasure of knowledge” (Foote 215), the Canon is more of a lost continent (or a deep-fathomed Disneyland) they are made to feel they are supposed to have already visited. Delany asserts, as few have dared in the debates on canon, that

no one knows the canon. And the assumption that other people do … is to grant power to an Other (and to put into circulation a value) – a power and a value that the canon might be seen as exploiting. At best, we can know something about some of the works (and their markers) that make up the canon. (358)

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10 “Internally persuasive discourse – as opposed to one that is externally authoritative – is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’ In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half ours and half someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organises masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition” (Bakhtin Dialogic 345).
In various interconnected and real ways, the Canon is unread, unknown, and finally unknowable, even for a specialist like Delany. John Guillory is among those who agrees with Delany, but he develops Delany’s observation in perhaps a way that takes the historical mutability of canons better into account. Canons, it must be understood, seem permanent, stable, unchanging, only in myth. Practically, this means that any canon is unread/unreadable because it is never a self-identical object; it is never the same event for two different witnesses. Whoever tells you where the canon is, it is never quite where, nor what, you were told: “No one has access to the canon as a totality. … no one can [read every canonical work] because the works evoked as canonical change continually according to many different occasions of judgement or contestation” (Guillory 30). As social totality is rendered opaque, so too is myth Canon.

For Roland Barthes, the emptinesses, lacunae or blanks Delany and Guillory find are hospitable to a range of discourse-effects and reader-effects. They form what he calls “the mythical hollow which espouses” (257). In *European Literature and the Middle Ages* Ernst Robert Curtius finds Dante Alighieri, near the start of the process of secular literary canon-formation, already writing little resonating chambers – mythically hospitable gaps – into his list of illustrious names. Dante includes names of authors he could not have read, because their texts were inaccessible to him. Curtius writes that

> In Dante’s selection of approved theological and literary, Christian and pagan classics, together with the Romans we find Arabs and Greeks. Of course he could no more read these [Arabs and Greeks] than could his contemporaries. But their names were handed down by tradition. (262)

Observations like those of Delany, Guillory and Barthes, then, are not eccentric but axial: the secular literary canon has never been something actually *read* by a concrete reader; it has been
an *ideal* dependent on the “authority fetish of an invisible power” (Froula 329) partly manifest as a list-body of enchanted names. In the twentieth century, when the number of canonised texts – and now the number of canons (plural) – becomes so impractically large, the “invisible power” is nourished by readers’ apperceptive awareness of each *actually read* canonic text (which might be many) as metonymic of every canonic text *not read*. Like compound interest, or an exponential fever, the authority is centred in the sense a reader has of the colossal weight of “The Archive of Literature” (Margaret Cohen).

Extending an analogy from the domains of travel, tourism and mapping, from the work of Dean McCannell, Delany’s main argument in the *Para•doxa* interview is for a functional, pragmatic view of canons and literature, as determined sets of “sites” and “markers.” Delany concludes that

> What makes a [feature in a landscape a] tourist site is the ‘markers’ scattered about the landscape pointing it out … until someone thinks to emit, erect, and/or stabilise a marker indicating it, no tourist site comes into being … [Therefore] the material from which the canon is made is *not* works of literature (and/or art); rather it is made from works-of-literature-and/or-art-and-their-markers. (341)

Such features of a marked landscape are accessible in the sense of being *available*, yet impossible to reach (except desultorily) in the sense of the time, investment and guidance necessary to actually do the reading. Myth Canon thus becomes at once a territory, a place, and, as such, a destination, appointment (or even a *destiny*) that cannot be fulfilled. The Canon is the Great Task, the Lifelong Homework few hand in before deadline. Consider the trope of someone

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11 It is all made far more bewildering by the uncertainty as to what will *happen* at the appointment, if it is ever met. As Eagleton writes: “The task of the moral technology of Literature is to produce an historically peculiar form of subject who is sensitive, receptive, imaginative and so on … *about nothing in particular*” (qtd. in Ross 14).
obligingly reading all of Proust or all of *La Comédie humaine*, or all of the Man Booker Prize longlists – for eternity. In the vernacular, the trace of this concept is legible in “Bucket Lists” or lists of “100 Books to Read Before You Die.” Those who finish even a sizeable part of the task return like mountaineers who have climbed Kilimanjaro – perhaps bearing a PhD or other psychic scars. Reports about those who have made the claim/climb are crucial to the operation of myth Canon as a spiritual burden, one imposed on the many who know (shamefully) they never will complete that climb. Hence the rumours that a specific celebrity reader – say John Berryman or Harold Bloom or Jorge Luis Borges\(^\text{12}\) – has “read everything” contributes to their legendary status. In this kind of mythical economy, Having Read Everything is as close as anyone can get to possessing the canon-as-commodity-and-totality. Having Read Everything becomes “the nirvana of culture” (Lauter 265).

Critiques of canonicity have exposed, re-exposed and over-exposed the basic features of its myths. To reiterate: its naturalisation, exnomination, subject-object conflation, false permanence, tautology, universalization of a particular, erasure of politics and history, quality measured as quantity, culture as obligation. Before I turn to examine a set of paracacanonic case histories, I will first consider some of those trace figures and fading signatures that make up the still indelible afterimage of myth Canon on the conceptual horizon of the literary field.

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\(^{12}\) The preface to the most popular English-language edition of Borges’ stories includes this claim: “Borges has read everything, and especially what nobody reads any more” (Maurois ix). In “Tales out of (the Yale) School,” Joseph Hillis Miller keeps the legend alive about Harold Bloom, attesting that: “Bloom has read everything and has more or less total recall of everything he has read” (Miller 124). John Berryman is self-mystifying, telling his readers, in faux-Ebonics or verbal blackface, what his friends say: “Mr Bones, you has read everything” (386).
Lose Yourself In Me, Find Yourself In Me

In his lecture “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet,*” Jacques Lacan uses Shakespeare’s play to theorise the “object of desire” (28). The Lacanian object of desire is both an idealised object of loss, and an actual lost object (here: Hamlet’s father) on which the desiring subject (here: Hamlet) fixates to compensate for a lack in the self. Myth similarly constitutes the Canon as what might be called (to slightly reposition Lacan’s term) an object of belief. As Jed Rasula writes, the canonising and canonic space of the (literary) museum “declares a nomenclature of appraisal that places an obligation on the viewer to undertake a corresponding journey of rehabilitation” (20). Standing before myth Canon, as before the law, actual readers are made to know themselves as necessarily inadequate; the reader him/herself is the lost object. Myth Canon, as object of belief, then offers *itself* as compensatory substitute for the very lack it has incised. Barthes observes similar effects at work in the myths of mass culture: “the moment when a typist recognises herself in the big wedding of the bourgeoisie that bourgeois exnomination achieves its full effect” (253).

In the final section of “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, Louis Althusser declares his intention to “voice” ideology: “I shall use a rhetorical figure and ‘make it speak,’ i.e. collect into a fictional discourse what it ‘says’” (51). Voicings of canons, heard so often in canonic talk, always reveal something about their operation as objects of belief. As it was for Althusser, voicing the rhetorical unsaid is an important technique for Barthes. It is notable here that wherever in *Mythologies* Barthes considers myths of the literary field, those fictive voices tend to inundate his prose. In “Novels and Children,” Barthes hears in an *Elle* photo-spread depicting 70 women novelists the voice of a patriarchal literary canon that convenes categories, in whatever configuration necessary, to arrive at one of three predictable results: the exclusion of
women, the tokenistic inclusion of women, or the conditional inclusion of women. In spite of their critical mass (70 is a lot of novelists to put in one room), Barthes shows that Elle presents these women as mere participants in a “male sexist competition for [the title of] Miss Universe” (Robinson 78), to be a matronly queen, as it were, of myth Canon. The Canon whispers, through Elle:

compensate for your novels by your children; enjoy your freedom, but be sure to come back to your condition. … Elle says to women: you’re worth just as much as men; and to men: your wives will never be anything but women. … Write if you like…but don’t forget, on the other hand, to produce children, for that is your destiny. (56-8)

Voice and belief converge where Paul Lauter finds the Canon, in his essay on canons and inclusivity “Whose Culture? Whose Literacy?” (1991), drawing its persuasive allure from a disingenuous denial of biological or social destiny. Instead, it holds out the bait of an (actually unachievable) equality: “I have knowledge, and power; you do not. To make it as an individual in my world, you need to accumulate enough of the tokens I call culture to buy in. You can do so, of course, even if you are ‘culturally deprived’ to begin with” (267). A sotto voce reproachful invitation such as this is laced into every formulation of canonicity in the mode of the indiscriminate commonplaces like “Our Common Heritage”13. As Lillian S. Robinson argues, this an operation of subjective erasure cloaked in a hypocritical offer of access or inclusion. Here a monoculture is presented as broadly shared in advance. Myth Canon says: everyone who matters has read this, everyone of substance knows this except you. Robinson writes that such “monoculturalists promote a version of American culture that reflects only a piece of this larger

13 Or as: National Treasure, Cultural Tradition, Traditional Values, Shared Values, School of the Ages, Our Collective Memory, What Every Citizen Needs to Know, Required Reading List. (Etcetera.)
definition [of culture, as used by anthropologists], the piece accepted by those who hold economic and political power and who essentially are saying, ‘My identity is ‘our’ identity’” (145). This ersatz wholeness (or subtractive totality) simultaneously erases its own edges and bears down on the excluded/invited reader, as Sedgwick writes (voicing Emily Dickinson): “with the implied insolent salutation, ‘I’m nobody. Who are you?’” (1483).

In Certain Permanent Present

One of the effects that arises to compensate for these gaps and lacunae (gaps between canonic mythologies and textual substance, between the debased self and exalted object of belief) is the implicitly “presentist” (Ross 10) certainty about the literary value and/or canonic status of texts. As Jane Tomkins writes: “These authors, texts, and issues are now regarded as permanent features of the literary landscape, and seem, like Perry Miller’s ‘mountain peaks [of literary excellence],’ to have been there always” (199). Tomkins argues that the imagined transhistorical constancy of “aesthetic standards” itself comes from a conflation of signifier with signified: “[The] term ‘literary excellence’ or ‘literary value’ remains constant over time, its meaning [its content] … does not” (192). Wherever “we” are now, we know, with confidence, which texts stand out as excellent. Diachronically, it means that one state of certainty is succeeded by another state of certainty. Terry Eagleton provides an analogy for the transference of certainty across generations of readers, potential readers, and literary critics. The process is rather like the Vatican official [Monsignor Fausto Vallaine] who remarked that whether the Pope’s imminent pronouncement on the question of birth control turned out to uphold the previous teaching or not, the Church would nevertheless have moved from one state of certainty to another state of certainty. (96)
Whatever is considered the “summit” of excellence at any particular moment takes on an aura of permanence. The “old master-canon” (1483), as Sedgwick names it, is usually believed to provide a set of texts selected by consensus as examples of compositional (read: human) excellence. The selection of exempla – handed down through generations “like family silver” (Lauter 264) – thereby come to encode “a set of social norms and values” (ibid. 23). Editors of poetry anthologies still assert the validity of their selections (and exclusions) with a peculiar overconfidence. In England’s Helicon (1600) John Flasket gathers those poets whose names are with the “greatest Princes of the world, by the most autentique and worthiest judgements, without disparagement to their soveraigne titles” (qtd in Ross). Over two centuries later, Ralph Waldo Emerson, presiding over an entirely different canonic personnel, still claims that “The world ‘selects the ‘best’ poems, ‘and we select from these our best’” (qtd in Golding 17). Jane Tomkins cites anthology editors in the 1930s who “can imagine little dispute” (qtd in Tomkins) with their extremely limited selections, or who assert more absolutely that “there can be no question” (qtd in Tomkins 188) about their choices. She reports that these questions imply that the standards of judgment to which they refer are not themselves challengeable, but are taken for granted among qualified readers. ‘You and I know what a good novel is,’ the objection implies, ‘and we both know that these novels fall outside that category.’ (187)

Where it is possible to agree with (those less alarmist) defences of canonic method is this: The actual centuries-spanning contents of the many texts called canonic don’t add up, together, to any very good model of composition or citizen behaviour. The “standards” supposedly borne are little more than an hallucination. Whatever texts in the canons, broadly defined, might be selected as exempla “There are [just] too many counterexamples” (Delany 339). Without the active intercession of various voices or institutions, explicating, speaking on behalf of these silent exempla, they can never provide plausible illustrations or instruments of “prevailing ideologies of the dominant groups” (van Peer 98).
It is as if what is good, or best, is known to be so in-advance of having read it. As late as the 1990s, anthology editors project certainty by obfuscating the question of value entirely. J.D. McClatchy, in the *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, argues that “There is no need for any anthology to choose sides” (qtd in Rasula 449-50), saying, in effect, that literary value is apolitical, because the *best* is radiantly obvious\(^{15}\) as *that which transcends politics*.\(^{15}\)

The signature of certainty is not usually this bold; it is more often seen in the negative. One negative trace of the “certainty effect” (if I may call it that) is the commonsense (or spontaneous) experience of puzzlement in seeing names in an older canonic roster that are not – to voice this experience – what “one would expect.” For this reason, Alistair Fowler is compelled to account for his reader’s anticipated surprise at the “absence of expected names” (113) – and at the inclusion of unfamiliar or de-valued ones – when comparing current lists of renaissance poets to those compiled in the 17\(^{th}\) century. In myth, current lists represent the end of a long historical process of trans-generational consent building that has produced the current certainty (whatever it happens to be). The actual changeability of names in the Canon, and the fact that the ultra-canonising and radically canon-narrowing New Criticism “often presented in histories of criticism as all-pervasive and relatively uncontested, was in fact strongly contested even at its peak” (Golding 83) further historicises the certainty effect. McClatchy’s anthology provides one among any number of places to track these diachronic drifts which have, so far, failed to wash-out the afterimage of myth Canon\(^{16}\).

\(^{15}\) Not political, and yet, as Rasula underlines, McClatchy characterises the sides he might have chosen in the most political way possible, as “Paleface and Redskin,” (taking this trope from a 1939 *Kenyon Review* essay by Phillip Rahv). As Rasula asks: “Are ‘redskins’ so beneath consideration as poets that they can be summoned for the menial task of playing editorial straw dogs?” (Rasula 450).

\(^{16}\) If it seems facile to identify biases in antique anthologies, note how “unexpected” McClatchy’s confident over-privileging of Robert Lowell looks only 25 years after the first edition of his anthology, and only 12 years after the second edition. Reviews of books about, and posthumously by, Lowell since the early 2000s often refer to the poet’s
X Many Monuments

The distal persuasiveness of the “crowning monument[s] of English literature” (Gardiner qtd. in Norton 403), depends on their difficulties – of comprehension, interpretation or sheer length. Difficulties pose a barrier that is part of the texts’ charisma. The influence of the “Great Unreadables” (Robinson) not only extends beyond their negotiated readerships, but fully depends on their being more worried about than actually read. As Michael Bérubé writes: “The number [of Americans who have read The Waste Land] is exceeded by the number of Americans who know, in a general way, that The Waste Land is considered Great Literature” (15; Bérubé’s italics). To know “The Waste Land” is Great Literature is to feel commanded to read it. Whether or not he/she obeys the command, a reader feels the command. “The Waste Land” is in a way the mini-golf version of the modernist literary monument: short enough that it could appear widely in anthologies as avatar of an elitist literary field, but allusively dense enough to be deigned to have the hermeneutic depthlessness or unfathomability of the encyclopaedic Great Text. That is, it could be marked as somehow manifestly available (“Read the damn thing,” as Ezra Pound might write (Letters 337)) yet incomsumable. As Trevor Ross documents, in The Making of the English Literary Canon, the text most central to myth Canon, William Shakespeare, was articulated into its role through exegetical practices emphasizing its inexhaustibility17. Ross

sunken reputation. Charles McGrath, for example, takes Lowell as an exemplary case of reputation attrition. He reports the lightning-stroke of certainty he felt on first encountering Lowell’s work in the 1960s: “Even the dullest among us knew that this was the genuine article” (McGrath). In 2003, by contrast “[Elizabeth Bishop] is indisputably part of the canon, while [Lowell’s] ultimate ranking is still uncertain” (McGrath). Indeed, Lowell’s prominence (30 pages, to other poets’ maximum 10) in the widely-read and widely taught anthology looks puzzling in precisely the same way that it might have seemed obvious in 1960, a year after the publication of Lowell’s Life Studies.

17 Pragmatic linguistics, Bakhtinian dialogism, and Raymond Williams’ cultural materialism, agree that meaning in language, always in a ceaseless historical and local process of becoming, is necessarily inexhaustible: as it continually “becomes” new meanings are endlessly generated, at every instant of interaction. This is the general import of a familiar passage from Voloshinov’s Marxism and the Philosophy of Language: “language presents the
quotes Martin Sherlock addressing Shakespeare in these terms in 1792: “thy variety is inexhaustible” (qtd. in Ross 244). In 1983, even as Shakespeare has begun to disintegrate into “whole series of alternative Shakespeares” (Weimann 65), Alvin C. Kibel has only barely updated this position: “A canonical text is one whose meaning is seemingly inexhaustible, it is a text,” Kibel argues, “whose importance we recognize, although in some radical sense we are not able to understand it” (qtd. in Ross 243). An inexhaustible text is (non-paradoxically) always an un-read text, precisely because the task of reading it can never end. The Crowning Monument is then “unfathomable – [a] site for an endless practice of rereading which can never be wrong yet never be right” (Bennett qtd. in Ross 245).

**Centre in One**

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, many of those who have been engaged in the struggle to change reading practices have done so with in hopeful anticipation of “an explod[ed] master-canon whose fracture would produce, or at least leave room for, a potentially infinite plurality of picture of a ceaseless flow of becoming. From the standpoint of observing a language objectively, from above, there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed” (56). Canon myth claims this linguistically universal potential as a special property of Great Literature, explicitly or implicitly denying it to other texts and discourses.

18 Away from Shakespeare, it is easy to populate a list of those Canon monuments whose renown, recognisability and influence extend far beyond their actual negotiated readerships. Samuel R. Delany’s own Dahlgren, for example, is considered a canonic work of science fiction, and often cited as *that book* which an unspecified “everyone” knows they should read but still haven’t got around to reading. A shortlist of the current Famous Unread might include (in no particular order): À la recherche du temps perdu; Ulysses; Finnegans Wake; Don Quixote; Moby Dick; War and Peace; The Brothers Karamazov; The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy; Gargantua et Pantagruel; *The Tale of Genji*; The Complete Works of William Blake. Relatively new candidate monuments (of the USAmerican fiction canon, at least) include the encyclopaedically capacious *Gravity’s Rainbow* and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest.* Note how Wallace’s literary compass points toward canonic North, straight at *Hamlet:* “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow / of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy” (*Hamlet* 5.1.156-7).

19 If Shakespeare is one of the monuments that many, many readers have actually touched, their encounter – to switch the analogy – is like rather like shaking hands with a populist Sovereign: you have not really met the King of Literature but have encountered his aura, power, eminence.
minicanons, each specified as to its thematic or structural or authorial coverage” (1483). Yet, as Ernst Robert Curtius’ own work shows, the very unity of the Canon has never been anything but mythical. Curtius’ project, in fact, is to contribute to the coherence of some kind of global canon, precisely because, in whatever form such a canon does exist, it has none of the claimed, or fervently believed-in, unity. As Paul De Medeiros notes, “European literature never was the monolith that some would like it to be” (283-4). Curtius shows the impact of different organising principles of national canons along distinct lines. In each context, the extent to which the body of works becomes mystified (and brittle) – as unitary, whole, select, exclusive yet complete – depends on ethnic prejudices that keep other, excluded literatures from view. In France, as Curtius writes, the “concept of a world literature could not but shatter the French canon” (271).

Among the persistent traces of this “national universal” (Baym 1545) totalisation is what Bérubé calls the “margin-centre dialectic,” which is renewed in canonic talk from virtually every position in the field. This dialectic spatialises the Canon as the luminous focal-point on most literary horizons. Recall that Michael Bérubé, as he “excavates,” “uncovers,” or “recovers” (to use other key terms found in canonic talk) the history of the exclusion of African American poet Melvin B. Tolson from the official histories of modernism, frames his entire study between these rest-points: Marginal Forces / Cultural Centers. He problematises but does not abandon the dialectic that makes its own margins – rather than “a state of becoming and devolving in constant

20 The “old master canon” has been unified in the sense that it closed ranks to systematically exclude texts by women writers, non-white writers, and working-class writers, almost without exception. But even this extreme social narrowness does not equal homogeneity of content or unity of intent.

21 According to Curtius (“Modern Canon Formation” 264-72) European canons diverged, primarily along these lines: whether or not the modern literary canon breaks with the medieval; whether the canon’s articulation or self-imagining is plural or singular; whether its inclusions imply a claim to either breadth, complexity, contradiction or to an ideal harmony; whether or not the national canon posits a literary Golden Age followed with decadence; whether or not the canon is classicist and how classicism and romanticism interact with or define each other.
flux” (Damon qtd. in Rasula 413) – static, stable and sterile. Delany similarly uses an architectural conception of canon as edifice, in naming the interview cited above “Inside and Outside the Canon.” In the language of hierarchical registers, this dialectic operates in rankings of writers as “great,” “major,” or “important”, against many shades of minority. Similarly, lists or curricula have a “core”, be it the “core curriculum” or a “core group” of poets defining a particular movement or school. The so-called “New York School” of poets are tiered outwards from the “core group” of John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, James Schuyler and Kenneth Koch; or the McGill Movement by A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein and Leo Kennedy.

The centre-margin dialectic always includes an omitted third term that is only recorded, in a sense, on the dark side of the eye. This third term has the function of remaining invisible – ideological – thereby contributing to the totalisation of the selective “everything worth saving” assembled in a canon as the representative absolute “everything entire” of myth Canon. That is, in Canon mythology beyond the centre, margin, inside, outside, etc., is only oblivion – nothingness. An author may be major or might be minor; most are less than either. They are nothing at all, nonexistent. The myth here says: be canonic (whether majorly or minorly) or be naught. Even if there is a miserable second place of the margin, the logic admits no possible third place. Everything beyond myth Canon’s purview is a vacuum, the existentialist void of non-history.

22 Reviewing T.S. Eliot’s Collected Poems, Louis Untermeyer relishes an opportunity to use these categories against Eliot, who used them with such aggressive, canonising intent: “In spite of major sonorities and an often exalted pitch, Eliot is not a major poet, but a new kind of minor poet – a minor poet in the grand manner” (374).
Desert Island Librarian

One signature of this totalising “trialectic” is often seen, again, in the negative: in the discourses of “recovery” and “rescue” of “lost” or “forgotten” texts. Its cutest iteration is perhaps the “desert island problem,” when the Canon asks: Which books would you choose to take to a desert island? (Readers get to choose which books, but not which island. And why is it desert?) Satisfying and expiatory as it can be for the privileged to fantasise about privation (cf. the “instant classic” status of Cormack McCarthy’s *The Road*), the game itself expresses canonic ideology: that all of literary production, past and contemporary, is only competition to reach the desert island of myth Canon. In “Treason Our Text,” Lillian S. Robinson figures the old master (white) canon in this way, even while building her important Marxist-Feminist bridges to get readers out of that isle of malnourishment: “the Great Books, the traditional desert island ones, the foundation of courses in the Western humanistic tradition” (4). In Robinson, this signature, this fading trace, slips by as a joke. Paul de Medeiros cites a less innocuous instance:

Even though he praises Portuguese literature, all eight centuries of it, in the highest terms, at one point [Oxford scholar Aubrey] Bell … curiously asserts, ‘Had one to choose between the loss of the works of Homer, or Dante, or Shakespeare, and the whole of Portuguese literature, the whole of Portuguese literature must go.’ (281)

Rather than Bell’s hostage-taking scenario, Franco Moretti imagines a scene of mass murder: “The history of the world is the slaughterhouse of the world … and of literature … The majority of books disappear forever” (207-8). Canon myth elicits fantasies of righteous violence. For a writer to be widely read in their own moment, but not brought forward into the purview of myth Canon, is to be massacred. The scripts of race, gender and class motivating social exclusion are
revealed in this analogy: What is it for an Indigenous writer, an Armenian writer, or a striking labourer to be “massacred” in this way? As Rasula writes, the result is that texts “appear like migrants or survivors of natural catastrophe. Their neighbours didn’t survive the flood – such is the implication” (23). But as Neil Smith argues, the natural catastrophe of (canonic) natural selection is always, in fact, an ideological massacre. There is no such thing as a natural disaster: “In every phase and aspect of a disaster … the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus” (n.p.).

**Paracanonic Episodes: Case Histories**

Something resembling *paracanonic activity* has been often intuited, and sometimes attested, in various terms in the past, yet it remains undescribed as such. The following set of contrasting case histories will therefore demonstrate my methods for identifying and – in Samuel R. Delany’s sense – *marking* these episodes. Together, they should provide shared ground adequate for a reader to witness my own judgements (and judge them, if need be) of this historically decisive socio-literary phenomenon. Here and ahead, I will consider various histories of reputation, of disregard, and of successive evaluations, before approaching the ambivalent, derisory poetics of the specific zones of paracanonic activity I have myself actually visited.

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23 Pertinent terms include: *alternate traditions* (John Ashbery); *art brut* (Jean Dubuffet); *black humour* (André Breton); *carnival, dialogisation and grotesque* (Mikhail Bakhtin); the *illegible* (Craig Dworkin); *limit-texts* (Barthes; Julia Kristeva; Phillipe Sollers); *minority* (Artaud; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari); the *parapoetic and anomaly* (Steve McCaffery); the *Satanic* (Charles Baudelaire; Georges Bataille; Maurice Blanchot; Jerome McGann); *slipstream* (Bruce Sterling); *ugly feelings* (Sianne Ngai). Note also that my use of *paracanonic* diverges from that of Catherine R. Stimpson’s in “Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March,” where she argues that “Texts are paracanonical if some people have loved and do love them” (958). The relationship Stimpson describes is, I think, more successfully captured with Alistair Fowler’s individuated, but more open-ended, vernacular term *personal canon*, which are simply “works he [sic] happens to know and value” (98).
Individual authors often publish at least one text that “goes too far” (to voice the complaint) or which otherwise becomes a paracanonic problem of assimilation to the author’s canon-body. Some of the items to be isolated are full works; others are attributes, attitudes, behaviours or tendencies. These isolations often operate through disavowal. Pablo Neruda’s ode to Stalin, “Let the Woodcutter Awaken” (255), for example, makes it more difficult to construct him as the generous, benevolent literary uncle of Latin America. That ode has to be isolated from his other odes (like his “Ode to my Socks”), explained away as an aesthetic, political error arising from his enormous nonpartisan passion for humanity. César Vallejo’s communist novel *El Tungsteno* [*Tungsten*] similarly returns to taint readings of his canonic *Poemas humanos* [*Human Poems*] that would find in them only a non-aligned altruism, rather than a specifically Marxist humanism. Attempts to construct Vallejo as absorptively liberal in this way must somehow contend with the strong counter-evidence of *El Tungsteno*, and the strategy never varies: to frame his novel as wooden, artless propaganda. As Joseph W. Mulligan writes in his introduction to Vallejo’s *Selected Writings*: “We now turn to *Tungsten* … Demonstrative of his political commitment … *Tungsten* reveals Vallejo submitting his literary writing to the service of ideological propaganda in support of the Communist Party” (liv). Rather than a droll-yet-politically-radical, atmospheric novel (as I read *El Tungsteno*) Vallejo can only be *excused for* – it is implied – prostituting his otherwise transcendent art to politics because of his “financial hardship” (lv).

The “famously difficult and unreadable text” (Mahon 800) *Finnegans Wake* is the book-too-far for many specialist and non-specialist readers of James Joyce. This is not because of any particularly embarrassing politics, but for its formal, linguistic drasticness. *Ulysses* marks (and eventually extends) the limits of the acceptable; *Finnegans Wake* still exceeds those limits. In
“Buying and Selling Finnegans Wake,” Peter Mahon documents the process of searching for a contract for his book on Derrida’s Glas and Joyce’s Wake:

I asked some of my non-Joycean colleagues why they thought I was having no luck in getting a press to invite me to submit my manuscript. Several of them made sympathetic noises but noted they no longer saw literature students carrying copies of the Wake around campus with them. Others agreed with the acquisition editors in that they did not think anybody really read the Wake anyway. (800)

If few people read Joyce’s last book, the question to ask is: Why does Finnegans Wake nevertheless end up on so many bookshelves24 still in its cellophane wrapper, spine un-cracked, literally para-canonic (snuggled alongside) a coffee-stained, dog-eared, hand-annotated copy of Ulysses? As the “limit-text” (Barthes) of Joyce, and possibly of modernism itself, what social histories and forces array to create the sense of exigency that makes this book so much more bought than read? Yet many people do read Finnegans Wake, difficult as that task is rumoured to be. To understand the book’s paracanonic position, the next question to ask would therefore be ethnographic: What strategies do people develop – such as reading groups, page-a-day, John Cage’s “writing through,” or oracular/aleatoric reading – in order to accomplish the reading of Finnegans Wake?

In other cases, an author’s entire oeuvre (and the author-function of the name) becomes paracanonically active. Horror, science fiction and “weird tales” writer H.P. Lovecraft, for example, is now becoming part of the canon of USAmerican fiction, after having long been a

24 Mahon concludes from his researches that a minimum of 510,700 new copies of Wake have been sold since its publication in 1939 (see Mahon 806).
heteronomous problem-site for curricular and middlebrow literary canons. In the very process of his summoning towards canonicity, the oeuvre of this ghost-story author has itself become haunted by the many signs of its constitutively racist outlook. It is exactly at this historical juncture, where pressures from the heteronomy of popular culture, and the openings provided through cultural studies, make canonicity possible for Lovecraft that anecdotes of Lovecraft’s active racism make it impossible to treat his misanthropic horror-fantasias as not rooted in the psychology of racial segregation. New critical writings on Lovecraft are currently obliged to signal awareness of, and either disavowal of – or to propose some strategy for the management of – this condition. One story in particular, “The Horror at Red Hook” (1925) has been the most paracanonically active problem-text. A story in which “the monster is the immigrant population of Red Hook, Brooklyn” (Kneale 501), “Red Hook” functions emblematically as the key “overtly racist” (Miéville) story in Lovecraft. Before Lovecraft’s summoning towards canonicity (where he is expected to stand alongside Edgar Allan Poe), and before writers began to explicitly challenge literary segregation evidenced in myth Canon, “Red Hook” was only a “hackneyed,” unoriginal, poorly plotted story (see de Camp 241-2). Now, as Leif Sorensen writes, it is “a tale destined to disappoint … intolerable as a result of its frank and unrepentant racism” (22). James Kneale, by contrast, manages the story, and ones like it, with the argument that reading

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25 After decades of vast non-academic, even lowbrow, popularity, widely published in young adult markets by houses like Del Rey, there are now editions of Lovecraft’s stories by Library of America, Modern Library and Penguin. Meanwhile, the prestigious World Fantasy Award, whose annual trophy since 1975 had been a bust of Lovecraft, announced in 2015 that they would be changing the trophy’s design in response to anti-racist petitions and complaints by award holders such as Nnedi Okorafor and Sofia Samatar.

26 That he wrote eugenicist editorials such as “The Crime of the Century” for Aryan newspapers such as The Conservative (see de Camp 89), and other evidence. See the material gathered by L. Sprague De Camp in Lovecraft: A Biography (1975).
“Lovecraft for several things at once – horror and race and space and so on – keeps our critical engagement with him open and alive rather than closed and dead” (120).

Alan Golding’s *From Outlaw to Classic* documents the terms in which Walt Whitman’s poetry became a problem for the new, radically narrowed poetry canon constructed by the New Critics. As Golding shows, they were careful to be publicly seen stigmatising Whitman27 as sentimental, windy, vague, artless, effeminate. They showed themselves agreeing with H.P. Lovecraft, that Whitman’s “licentious line / Delights the rake, and warms the souls of swine / Whose fevered fancy shuns the measured pace, / And copies Ovid’s filth without his grace” (qtd. in de Camp). More than any other single USAmerican poet, Whitman is a problem the New Critics try to manage and contain, through coordinated displays of rejection, as well as rejection of a younger gay poet considered derivative of Whitman: Hart Crane. As Golding writes, they used the Whitman-Crane succession as a warning: “the [new] critics’ views of Crane and Whitman shape each other, in mutually reinforcing fashion: if you follow Whitman, you end up like Crane, and if you end up like Crane, then Whitman must have been a bad place to start” (101-2). After the implicitly homophobic activity around Whitman subsided, Crane seems to have carried his stigma for many more years. Samuel R. Delany later comes very close to describing Crane as specifically paracanonic, when he reflects on the fact that positions in the canon do change: we are currently seeing an attempt at a major re-evaluation of Hart Crane – though one could easily argue that Crane has been undergoing ‘a major re-evaluation’ at least since 1937 when the first biography by

27 Who, Golding reports, was widely taught throughout that period: “An NCTE committee studying American literature in the college curriculum found that among ninety syllabi for American literature survey courses offered in 1945-46, Whitman was the second most frequently taught author, in seventy-three courses” (111).
Philip Horton appeared... and that to be majorly revaluated is finally Crane’s function, persistent and unchanging, within the canon. (342)

Crane’s long poem *The Bridge* includes a horrifying passage in which he points directly to the persistence of the paracanonic revenant or remnant. In his poem, decomposing indigenous bodies, black bodies, gay bodies, working class, disabled bodies, lumpenproletariat and homeless bodies pollute the idealist stream that nourishes myth Canon. The bitterness of Crane’s diction conveys the social stakes involved, which are no less than the power of internally persuasive canonising discourses to define which subjects may count themselves as human:

The River, spreading, flows – and spends your dream.

What are you, lost within this tideless spell?

You are your father’s father, and the stream –

A liquid theme that floating niggers swell. (61)

Although this may be read as a “sorry if typical early-century use of ‘niggers’ to describe the vital undercurrent of American life” (Nealon 51), it seems to me that Crane is using Blackness as a trope through which to imagine a general, non-racial “fraternity of the oppressed.” If it chafes today, as late as 1987, addressing a colloquium in his honour in Miami, Aimé Césaire endorsed the practice, with reference to *négritude*. As Césaire recalled:

Je me souviens encore de mon ahurissement lorsque, pour la première fois au Québec, j’ai vu à une vitrine un livre dont le titre m’a paru sur le coup ahurissant.

Le titre, c’était: *Nous autres nègres blancs d’Amérique*28. Bien entendu, j’ai souri de l’exagération, mais je me suis dit: ‘Eh bien, cet auteur, même s’il exagère, a

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The title was We the White Niggers of America. Of course, I smiled at the exaggeration, but I said to myself ‘Ah well, this author, even if he exaggerates, at least has understood Négritude.’ Yes, we are truly a community but a community of a very particular type … a community made by profound discrimination. … That is to say that Négritude in the first degree can be defined as the consciousness of difference, as memory, as loyalty, and as solidarity.

With this in mind, I can hear in Crane’s image of an acidic, swollen river an outraged answer to Saul Bellow’s “Third World Proust?” question, or to “Founding Father” Thomas Jefferson’s voicing of the same prejudice: “never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never saw even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture” (Jefferson qtd. in Phillips 330).

Yet the paracanonic remains undescribed and un-theorised in its specificity as an indivisible remainder of all processes of canon-formation. Paracanonically active texts are not merely marginal or obscure or canonically non-existent, they are structurally affiliated with canons. The closest to discover the paracanonic as such may have been Antonin Artaud.

Although Artaud does not use the term, the practice outlined for his Theatre de la Cruauté
includes a staging of many texts that have been loci of intense paracanonic activity. These include plays composed from stories by the Marquis de Sade. Other texts Artaud would stage include the Early Modern black farce Arden of Faversham (the most paracanonic of the Shakespeare “apocrypha,” as subject of a long controversy of attribution), and Georg Büchner’s indigestible fragment Woyzeck. Artaud wishes to set these texts into a paracanonic frenzy, with momentum enough to break through the delineations, discriminations, and cloturing conspiracy of categories: “On doit en finir avec cette idée des chefs-d’œuvre réservés a une soi-disant élite et que la foule ne comprend pas ; et se dire qu’il n’y a pas dans l’esprit de quartier réservé comme il y en a pour les rapprochements sexuels clandestins” (558). [“We must put an end to this idea of masterpieces reserved for a so-called elite, and which the mass of people do not understand; we must realise that the mind has no restricted districts like those set apart for clandestine sexual encounters” (Selected 252).]

Whitman, Sade, Artaud and the Joyce of Finnegans Wake have each represented, in different senses, and to different readers, limit-texts that demarcate not only the limits of the acceptable, but the defining limits of the possible, or recognisable, in literature. It is important to stress, again, that such limits are mutable: the paracanonic cannot be a permanent position alongside or with respect to, a literary canon, because such canons (as an effect of “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin), the simultaneous synchronic and diachronic conflictual development of language) are in a constant state of change and re-definition. I presume that every text I might nominate for investigation as an episode or locus of paracanonic activity has not always, and

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29 Sade’s own text is, in fact, an extraordinary episode of paracanonic activity, one that has not yet ended. Banned for centuries, Sade’s was a text readers could not openly admit having familiarity with, much less teach or even admit as part of the literary field as such. Yet, in spite of his banishment to secrecy, Sade cast an immense, saturnine shadow over, and demonic influence throughout, French and English literatures. As Philippe Sollers writes in 1968: “For us, Sade is still the fire most novels can be tossed into” (192).
may no longer, act paracanonically. Any nomination also presumes that the text will change status again in the future, as canons change. Only myth Canon is eternal, permanent, changeless, or singular.

In a “post-fractural” (Sedgwick), pluralised literary field, some texts are also shared by multiple canons, and rank differently, playing different roles, in each. Tom Phillips’ multi-volume book-length visual poem *A Humument* (1966) and Emmett Williams’ *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967) remain the most prominent books of visual/concrete poetry in print. In that position, they are at the top of whatever hierarchical canon of visual/concrete poetry exists. Concrete poetry, however, has been, as a whole, a paracanonic limit-text for the greater, more broadly defined field of poetry-at-large. Responses to visual/concrete poetry demonstrate that it still specifically poses a persistent problem to regulatory, canonically minded delimitations of poetry. It is variously treated as criminal, disposable, a dead-end, or dead. As a R.J. Cirasa writes in a review of Willard Bohn’s *Reading Visual Poetry*, concrete is “a poetry that many still consider, even after more than a generation of serious scholarly attention, little more than gimmickry” (104). Without the institutional and ideological force of myth Canon pressing behind such utterances, there would be no need to make them. Cirasa’s assessment-by-hearsay is corroborated by the almost total exclusion of concrete/visual poetry from otherwise broadly canonising omnibus poetry anthologies. Yet visual poetry continues to be produced and circulated, returning cyclically with its own rounds of anthologies, and, recently, increasing numbers of single-author integrated collections. *A Humument* and *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* constitute a paracanonic “local irritation” (Graves and Riding) on the body of poetry-at-large by being canonic to visual/concrete poetry that has yet to be find balm.
Solar Throat Slashed

Martiniquais poet and politician Aimé Césaire is canonic. He has a plaque in the French Panthéon, and the airport of Fort-de-France is named after him. At least 30 books have been published about both the “biologie et [la] poétique” (Hénane) of Césaire. His life and work have been the subject of numerous dissertations, conferences, and many scholarly and vernacular articles. In certain constructions, Césaire is even a saint-like figure with apocryphal legends. M. Ngal has claimed that “Depuis l'enfance, en effet, une certaine timidité accompagnée de bégaïement le tenaillait” (117) [From his childhood, in effect, a certain timidity accompanied with a stutter tormented him]. Césaire’s stutter was, so the legend goes, miraculously cured by a visit to the island of Haiti: “Upon encountering an unself-conscious awareness of being Creole, Césaire ceased to stutter and … [became] a formidable orator in French” (Arnold Modernism 254). But a dilemma haunts much of this commentary, regarding the “traversée paradoxale” (Blaise) between Césaire’s “double life” (Murdoch) as a poet and as statesman and political theorist.

Soleil coupé (1948) [Solar Throat Slashed], Aimé Césaire’s third book of poetry, follows immediately on another collection that evokes violent revolutionary struggle in its title: Les Armes miraculeuses (1947) [The Miraculous Weapons]. Until recently, Soleil has been most often read in the form of its extensively revised second edition, re-titled Cadastre (1961) [Register]. In Cadastre:

Vingt-neuf poèmes sur soixante-douze [de Soleil] sont supprimés, parmi ceux qui sont conservés de changements aussi les affectent: suppression jusqu’à deux tiers des vers, changement de titre, etc. De toute évidence c’est un nouveau texte qui résulte de ces modifications. (Laforgue 376) [Twenty-nine out of seventy-two
poems are suppressed. Those retained are edited: suppression of as many as two thirds of their lines, title changes, etc. Clearly, a new text results from these modifications.]

To account for Césaire’s compulsive revisions to Soleil and other texts, such as Et les chiens se taisaient (2 published versions) and Cahier d’un retour au pays natale (4 published versions), A. James Arnold, Pierre Laforgue, Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith point to misalignments between Césaire’s poetics of committedly excessive, grotesque, neo-gothic and anti-rational marronage (the ecstatic flight of the escaped slave), his practical commitments as mayor of Fort-de-France (in office 1945-2001), and his role as a theorist of négritude and of decolonisation.

Although Césaire would claim that his writings and political work are dialectically related as “merely two levels of action” (qtd. in Arnold Modernism 180), his canonisation as a political figure and as a “Peléan” (volcanic) poet indeed progress along different, separate trajectories, to the extent that the interval, the gap, becomes problematic. Césaire’s gothic or “necropastoral” (McSweeney)30, poetry of “revelation of we know not what, unknown and perhaps unknowable” (Arnold Solar xvii), does not in any obvious way meet the needs of the diasporic African and Black readership of his essays and plays for greater clarity in concrete political struggles. Indeed, as Arnold writes, “When black African writers comment on the political import of Césaire’s work, his plays and the Discourse on Colonialism are most frequently cited” (Arnold Modernism 172) – not his deliriously laughing poetry.

30 Joyelle McSweeney arrived at her term partly through her reading of Césaire: “I give the name ‘necropastoral’ to the manifestation of the infectiousness, anxiety, and contagion occultly present in the hygienic borders of the classical pastoral. ... Art lays its eggs in Césaire’s eyes, and in this state of possession he conjures a spectral, counterfeit Martinique, enacts a strange meeting, has aesthetic intercourse with the spectre of his nativity, a sort of selfincestualization sic to produce … occult Art-material” (3-14).
Césaire’s case, like each of those visited in this study, exhibits a mass of necessary-but-insufficient features, amounting to a precariously contingent whole. Although in some senses a limit-case, Césaire’s compares with others via certain discourse effects that recur across the (non-exhaustive) paracanonic archive here studied. Because these apparent patterns necessarily reflect the limits of my interests and of my reading, I must also (for now) resist articulating them into an axial order. However, I will risk the following broad proposal: every paracanonic episode depends on unusually brittle alignments of specific features, factors, conditions and events, without all of which there would have been no paracanonic episode. The texts would instead have been set on trajectories towards more familiar positions and functions, in the realms of stable marginality, of mere obscurity or of canoncic non-events (the historically non-phenomenal).

The original Soleil, in particular, contains Césaire’s most formally drastic writing. Clayton Eshleman tries to meet the extremity of its “fulgurating” style when he characterises it as “a crisscrossing intersection in which metaphoric traceries create historically aware nexuses of thought and experience, jagged solidarity, apocalyptic surgery, and solar dynamite” (Eshleman Solar 175). In revising Soleil, Césaire massively “eliminated [its] dense, animistic fervour” (Eshleman Solar 178), as well as the heat of its ambivalences about reason, discourse and his own privileged social position. These had been manifest in excessively violent (sometimes misogynist) imagery and mutilated métaphore-filée or métaphores médusantes31.

31 In “Écrire/récrire,” Daniel Delas summarises the changes the poet made: “Césaire pourchasse les absurdités, les complications grammaticales inutiles, sans céder certes sur les exigences d’une écriture purificatrice mais en se gardant de l’excès …Césaire coupe les enchaînements automatiques et faciles, à base de paronomase et de jeu de mots. … Césaire supprime souvent les allusions jugées trop crudes à la sexualité et à la femme, ainsi que d’une façon générale les mots vulgaires. …. la poésie de Césaire contient fort peu d’allusions personnelles et l’auteur, lors du travail de réécriture, semble avoir pourchassé comme des grossièretés celles qui subsistaient en même temps qu’il effaçait les mots vulgaires” (Delas 43-4).
To dialectical thought, there is no necessary contradiction between such a poetics and Césaire’s practices as public servant, postcolonial theorist and playwright. As David Harvey writes, in dialectical thinking “subject and object are not regarded as independent entities but as relationships one to the other … acting on the external world and changing it, [humanity] at the same time changes its own nature … ideas are therefore regarded as social relations through which society can be structured and restructured” (Harvey 54). But Canons, mythical ones, are anti-dialectical. Césaire’s new public role, already tending towards “monumentalisation” (Arnold “Forty”) as “Le nègre universel” (Alliot) long before his death in 2008, demanded a unity and clarity of means (if not purpose) that are metabolically hostile to the kind of poetry in Soleil. In this view, Césaire’s edits of Soleil might be seen as a paracanonic instance of certain “subject-effects … [being] effaced and trained to efface themselves so that a canonic norm might emerge” (Spivak “Scattered” 110). The edits to Soleil (and to Cahier and Chiens) are signatures of a kind of paracanonic activity that most often flares up late in the life of poets, who, like Walt Whitman or Earle Birney (or even Rimbaud, in his silence and exile) revise their earlier oeuvre/corpora/selves in anticipation of posterity. If the “irreducible strangeness” (Arnold Modernism 210) of Soleil is initially the sign of its political and poetic rigour, “au contact de la totalité intérieure et de la totalité extérieure perçues imaginativement” (Césaire 1389) [“contact of inner and outer totality perceived imaginatively” (Lyric lv)], to the later Césaire the real risk of compromise to his practical political efficacy becomes far too great. In the interval: paracanonic activity. As Pierre Laforgue writes:

Une certitude assurément: la poésie de Césaire, qui dans ce recueil s’efforçait d’être si profondément anachronique, en débordant l’histoire dans son présent, s’ancrait dans son temps, au risqué de mettre en porte-à-faux l’esthétique de son
auteur et ses convictions politiques. Elle portrait en elle-même de multiples possibilités de malentendus. (376) [One thing is certain: the poetry of Césaire, that in this collection strived to be so profoundly anachronic, in saturating history in its present, was of its time, threatening to “cantilever” the aesthetic of its author from his political convictions. It was rife with potential for misunderstandings.]

Between the various ways of appropriating Césaire, each of which minimises a different dimension of his work rather than accepting its “internally dynamic” (Harvey 58) totality, and with the re-publication (in 2011 and 2013) of the restored versions of his revised texts, “Aimé Césaire” might in the future split, like François Villon, into two or more irreconcilable author-functions, sharing a name but orbiting each other on a wide, eccentric ellipsis.

A Most Lamentable Tragedy

Perhaps the best-known paracanonic episode of the English literary canon involves a work by myth Canon’s own president or hero god: William Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s first popular tragedy, The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus has haunted the later, mythic Shakespeare. The generally “abominable” (Moncle in Vickers 6:404) critical reputation of Titus has been thoroughly documented32. What emerges as unique about the case of Titus is that, unlike other outlying or unloved plays in the Shakespeare corpus, as Rebecca Ann Bach writes, something about Titus has apparently been “contrary to the project of producing a transcendent Shakespeare who lived not in early seventeenth-century England but in an autonomous sphere of Art” (Bach 2).

Contrary to, therefore unwanted: early in the process of Shakespeare’s canonisation, George Steevens indeed figures Titus as the unwanted guest at the canonic banquet, provoking the question: Who invited him? Steevens argues that the only destiny of Titus is “to be delivered down to posterity with repeated remarks of contempt; – a Thersites babbling among heroes, and introduced only to be derided” (Steevens 196). As the Thersites, whose “obscene snigger” (Graves 209) at the dinner party can draw down punitive violence, (or as the “black sheep” (Sullivan qtd. in Kolin 4), Titus has been a kind of counter-evidence against myth Shakespeare.

As Gary Taylor summarises, Shakespeare’s many errors, obscurities, lacunae, joyful nonsense (or his “unevenness,” a pressing problem for early commentators, before the exalted, inexhaustible and seamless Shakespeare emerges in the 19th century) have required explaining away. Taylor writes that “Once Shakespeare was enthroned as an infallible genius, it became almost impossible to believe that he revised his work. God doesn’t make mistakes, and God doesn’t change his mind” (410). Neither does “God” write “horrid” (Moncle in Vickers 6:404) “unpleasing” (Craig in Metz 52) “burlesque” (Wilson qtd. in Metz 52) plays, as Titus has been described. Yet, after a centuries-long campaign of dis-attribution, there it is: Titus Andronicus. The play has been not merely unloved, but hyperbolically disdained, as if nothing in the history of cultural endeavour is as badly made. J.M. Robertson called it: “the most coarsely repulsive play in the entire Elizabethan drama” (Did 239).

The assumption that Titus is a “dreadful work, sloppily written and silly” (Gottfried 411) has functioned as one of the literary field’s self-sufficient idées reçues, like those gathered by Gustave Flaubert. Recall some of the idées about writers: “SENEQUE. Écrivait sur un pupitre d’or” (n.p.) [“SENECA. Wrote on a golden desk” (80)] “Hugo (Victor). À eu bien tort vraiment de s’occuper de politique” (n.p.) [“HUGO, VICTOR. ‘Made a sad mistake, really, when he entered
politics’” (49).] Until recently, it has been received knowledge that Titus is “the worst play of the man usually thought to be the great dramatic genius of Western civilization” (Simon). When T.S. Eliot, astonishingly, presents Seneca as a counter-model of restrained good taste against Titus, arguing that “there is nothing really Senecan at all … a wantonness, an irrelevance, about the crimes of which Seneca would never have been guilty” (in Metz 47), he was only parroting Edward Ravenscroft writing in 1678 that Titus is: “rather a heap of Rubbish than a structure” (in Vickers 1:239). Mention of the play has been a prompt to produce the correct display of opinion. As Desmond Pratt reports: “In the past as much as whisper the name of Titus and theatrical managers would hold up their hands in horror and close their ears to all appeals” (Pratt 389). Like Flaubert’s idées recues, mention of Titus has been a question with an accepted answer. “RACINE. Polisson!” (n.p.) [“RACINE. Naughty boy!” (76)]. Titus Andronicus? Ghastly!

Although Shakespeare’s apotheosis is achieved gradually, the paracanonic episode of Titus can be periodised as starting around 1678, marking its beginning with Ravenscroft’s rewrite of the play, and extending up to around 1999, with the international release of Julie Taymor’s blockbuster film adaptation. Altogether that is: 321 years. The effect of Taymor’s film, which was to significantly accelerate a process of normalisation beginning in the 1940s, demonstrates that the stability of its role, and its signature in commonsense about Shakespeare, has depended precisely on the rarity of performances of Titus and its comparatively low circulation in print. It has depended, equally, on protection from exposure to “growing body of literary apology” (Hughes 32) for the play. The text of Titus was inversely as remote as the

33 See G. Harold Metz’s survey “Twentieth Century Criticism” (Metz 45-109).

34 The trend of re-evaluation perhaps climaxes in Jonathan Bate’s claim, in his introduction to the Arden edition, that Titus is a masterpiece: “one of the dramatist’s most inventive plays, a complex and self-conscious improvisation upon classical sources … an important play and a living one” (Bate 3).
received opinion about it was ready-to-hand – the play text was mostly out of circulation, but the opinion about it was mass-distributed. It is informative, in connection, to see unconnected reviewers, after productions of the play in 1923 and 24, recommend it on the grounds that “You may never have a chance of seeing it again if you live to be a hundred years of age!” (Carados 383). “The Monday evening production [at Yale] was the first performance of the play ever seen by an American audience, and that of the last evening probably the last” (Witherspoon 385-6). Their concern that *Titus* will likely sink once again into the lightless deep around Canon Island shows the virulence of its infamy. Out of this virulence, it is a text that has generated an unusual amount of rumour and speculation. One anecdote reported by Alan Dent evinces something of how poorly *Titus* fit in among the safer Shakespeare plays integral to curricula: “Some of us knew that a schoolmaster’s reading aloud of this lurid piece of early Shakespeare frightened Robert Burns in his infancy almost into convulsions” (qtd. in Kolin 4-5).

Broader familiarity with the play (in print and on stage) would have interfered with the kind of rumour- and tale-spinning which the paracanonically active *Titus* has elicited so abundantly. As Peter Brook relates, referring to his 1955-7 production of *Titus*, which is considered the turning point in the play’s “rehabilitation,” until he was reminded by reviewers of the production he hadn’t noticed that it was so “rudimentary” (Charlton in Metz 51). When the reviews began to be published, Brooks experienced the enforcement, by a collective aesthetic conscience, of the *idée reçue* of the play, against his experience as its reader and director: “When the notices of *Titus Andronicus* came out, giving us full marks for saving your dreadful play, I

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35 Rather than just an unwanted guest, perhaps *Titus* has functioned more like the creature in John Carpenter’s *The Thing*: a monstrous im/perfect replica of the real Shakespeare, sowing paranoiac doubt about the entire project of myth Canon.
could not help feeling a twinge of guilt. For to tell the truth it had not occurred to any of us in rehearsal that the play was so bad” (qtd. in Bate 1).

Brook’s anecdote shows the contradiction that has aggravated paracanonic activity around Titus. The contradiction has been between what has been received-as-known about the quality of the play, and the fact that it has always (from its popularity in Shakespeare’s lifetime onwards) been judged effective in performance. This factor has helped keep the play from settling into a stable position on the fringes of Shakespeare’s banquet. As Stanavage and Hehmeyer write in 2013, it is still “customary to open a collection on Titus Andronicus by remarking that despite the play’s ‘dismal’ critical reception, it has had an unexpected stage success” (1). Producing the correct opinion about the play has served as a means of displaying membership in the field and cultural sophistication. Having a developed opinion about a fringe canonic work is a sign of acculturation; calling one of Shakespeare’s works “a singularly faulty ... product of a playwright who was never again to write so badly” (Rackitt qtd. in. Kolin 4) shows a sophisticated degree of critical distance from the Shakespeare mythos while actively nourishing that mythos. Titus’ function, as “a great genius’ most wretched work” (Simon), is thus to minimally humanise Shakespeare. Unlike the other unloved plays of Shakespeare (Pericles; Henry VIII; Midsummer Night’s Dream; Two Gentlemen of Verona), or even the “problem plays,” (Troilus and Cressida; All’s Well That Ends Well; Measure for Measure), which humanise him in a way that ultimately “make[s] even more miraculous, of diviner essence, the [great] products of his art” (Barthes 25), the long sustained campaign for Titus’ dis-attribution is a sign that the play has been a hotter kind of problem – even a threat.

Early on, Samuel Johnson sees “no reason for believing” (in Vickers 5:142) it is by Shakespeare, because he doesn’t find “Shakespeare’s touches very discernible” (ibid.). Johnson
was only repeating a rumour started (without any evidence) by Ravenscroft, who wrote in the preface to his violence-, racism- and cannibalism-enriched rewrite:

\[
\text{I have been told by some ancienly conversant with the Stage, that it was not}
\]

\[
\text{Originally his, but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave}
\]

\[
\text{some Master-touches to one or two of the principal Parts or Characters; this I am}
\]

\[
\text{apt to believe, because ‘tis the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works. (in Vickers 1:239)}
\]

Besides introducing doubt about attribution, Ravenscroft’s rumour aggravates another problem for the Shakespeare myth: collaboration. Collaboration was normal among Elizabethan playwrights, but Shakespeare’s anachronistic, mythic individuality has to be preserved: “The spectre of collaboration somehow drives critics to deny artistry to the finished product” (Long qtd. in Kolin 8). The attribution controversy was still alive, if residually, in the 1990s. G. Harold Metz, in 1996, chooses to open his book on *Shakespeare’s Earliest Tragedy* with a review of this controversy. He concludes by asserting that: “We are then left with the conclusion so unambiguously stated by Schlösser: Shakespeare is the author” (43). Here Metz is offering a retort, 90 years later, to J.M. Robertson’s 1905 book *Did Shakespeare Write* “Titus Andronicus”?, which concluded just as emphatically: “all these circumstances combined, prove with irresistible force that the play of Titus Andronicus has been erroneously ascribed to Shakespeare” (qtd. in Kolin).

Yet, even for those who accepted the attribution of the play in spite of Ravenscroft’s rumour, *Titus* has usually still been unwanted in the literary field or at the Shakespearean table. When disavowals of the play’s quality are not hyperbolically vehement – “one of the most ridiculous plays ever written” (Williams qtd. in Kolin 5) – they rely on a mode of othering built
from the logic of exclusion that nourishes canonic value. *Titus* may have been Shakespeare’s, but in the play he is being, as they say, “of his time” rather than transcending it. Edmond Malone launched this trope in the reception of *Titus* in 1790: “Let the reader only peruse a few lines of … any other pieces that were exhibited before the time of Shakespeare, and he will at once perceive that *Titus Andronicus* was coined in the same mint” (in Vickers 6:555). More grievous than spoiling his genius by “copying too closely his predecessors” (qtd. in Metz 47), Shakespeare was succumbing to an unacceptable, vulgar populism. Like Vallejo writing *El Tungsteno*, Shakespeare was writing for money and playing to the crowd. Consequently a reviewer could, as late as 1956, present it as generally accepted that *Titus* “has a closer kinship to a bullfight than to legitimate theatre” (A.G. qtd. in Kolin 4). In Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, the play has been believed to show signs of insufficient economic disinterest. Again, the impossible burden of the Canon is imposed on the products of actual human socio-linguistic life: “The burden turns out to be double, and insoluble: the typical, the representative must somehow exemplify the exceptional. The normal must be abnormally fine. How did we come to this impasse, this impossible dream?” (Rasula 477).

So *Titus* is “unpleasing” (Craig qtd. in Metz 52) because it “can be scarcely conceived tolerable to any audience” (Johnson in Vickers 5:142). Its dense classical allusions are mere

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36 In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu observes that, for myth Canon “[I]mmediate success [like that *Titus Andronicus* enjoyed during Shakespeare’s life] has something suspect about it, as if it reduced the symbolic offering of a priceless work to the simple ‘give and take’ of a commercial exchange. The vision that makes of asceticism in this world the condition of health in the hereafter finds its principle in the specific logic of symbolic alchemy that maintains that investments will not be recouped unless they are (or seem to be) operating at a loss, in the manner of a gift, which cannot assure itself of the most precious countergift, ‘recognition’, unless it sees itself as without return; and – as with the gift that it converts into pure generosity by occulting the countergift to come – it is the *interposed time interval* which forms a screen and which obscures the profit promised to the most disinterested investments” (148). Note here the temporality of the myth: Shakespeare’s most canonically valued plays are those whose value is “discovered” by readers a century or more after his death. Canonisers thus are believed to effectively “rescue” Shakespeare from his contemporaries, as if righting an injustice.
“caviare [sic] for the bear-baiting crowd” (Waith 99)\textsuperscript{37}. It panders to the tastes of mere children and mere women, as “just the kind of three-piled hyperbole which the prentice boys and citizens’ wives could never have enough of” (Wilson in Bach 20). The implicit hatreds at work here, constructing value out of distancing, othering and exclusion, comes to the surface elsewhere in uncensored fantasies of destroying the play. Protecting Shakespeare’s mystification is urgent enough that John Pinkerton begs for its burning: “Why not … in the name of God, throw it into the fire? Will no editor shew [sic] taste enough to deliver us from nonsense that would disgrace a bedlamite to write or read?” (in Vickers 6:397). George Steevens, in a more sinister turn, actually imagines torturing the play, like the body of a failed playwright or one of the sodden masses whose tastes it supposedly served: “I know not that this piece stands in need of much emendation; though it might be treated as condemned criminals are in some countries, - any experiments might justifiably be made on it” (in Vickers 5:532). Nothing in the corpus of Shakespeare produced discourse anything like this: \textit{Titus} has been the paracanonic revenant of his myth Canon, the plague of his sublime corpus.

\textsuperscript{37} Here Waith makes myth Shakespeare of \textit{Hamlet}, testify as it were, against the vulgar Shakespeare of \textit{Titus}. His comment paraphrases Hamlet: “I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was / never acted; or, if it was, not above once; for the / play, I remember, pleased not the million; ‘twas / caviare to the general” (Hamlet 2.2.397).
Chapter 2: The Paracanonic Case History of François Villon, Poète et Argotier

The Wrong Sort of People

In 1966, Glen Omans published a brief critical overview of the English-language cultural afterlife of the Parisian medieval poet François Villon. Omans’ polemic was “a warning to literary scholars ... and historians of public taste” (16). All his arguments are foreshadowed in the title: “The Villon Cult in England,” wherein the term “cult” already constructs others’ interest in Villon as threateningly anti-social, and Villon as threateningly foreign. English readers of Villon are, to Omans, a professor of English and American studies at Temple, dupes of the charismatic legend of Villon’s life. Outrageously, “Villon has actually received more adulation in England and America than his place in French literature warrants. He has become as well known ... as Racine and Molière, perhaps even as Victor Hugo” (35). To Omans, Villon is a suspect interloper to the canon, whose renown is built on “a personality cult rather than a purely aesthetic interest” (19). Omans considers, case by case, each of the most publicly visible 19th century English readers of Villon, those originally behind the poet’s perplexing fame in England. For each of these readers, Omans provides lurid evidence they read Villon for the aesthetically impure reasons of subjective “identification rather than critical and aesthetic admiration” (29). Their interest is based in various pathological “character defects” (20) including “sexual irregularity” (28) and childish “rebelliousness” (27). As a poet who is famous for the wrong reasons, made famous by the wrong sort of people, Villon worries Omans’ canon. If a poet can become canonised for the wrong reasons, canons must be aesthetically fallible, which means socially determined and, therefore, historically relative – or even arbitrary.
Omans furthermore, as many critics have, shows how far the renown of Villon’s name among English readers has stretched beyond knowledge of his attributed poetry. Among the examples given, Omans mentions the considerable body of pop-cultural representations of Villon in the 20th century, such as the MGM film *The Beloved Rogue*. *Beloved Rogue*, starring John Barrymore, is perhaps the peak of pop culture reception of Villon. By limiting his survey to the English language, Omans misses something other critics often point out: Villon had this kind of dual life from very early on. The Villon legend seems to have started while the person who bore the name was still alive.

As Jelle Koopmans writes, in 1463 Villon “disparaît de l’histoire” (7) [*disappears from history*]. Koopmans here iterates a statement that echoes through Villon criticism; Galway Kinnell writes similarly that “François Villon now [in 1463] vanishes from history” (xii). By 1480, a text called the *Recueil des repues franches de maistre François Villon et de ses compagnons* [*Free Meals of Master François Villon and His Companions*] is published. It is the first of many apocryphal re-imaginings of Villon as a fictional (legendary) character. As Koopmans writes, in the *Repues franches* Villon appears “comme un pique-assiette facétieux, situé à la tête d’une série d’épigones dans le domaine de la truanderie polissonne” (ibid.) By 1532, Clément Marot is able to include in his edition of the complete works many more such texts (later judged apocryphal): *Le dialogue de Mallepaye et Baillevent* and *Le Monologue du Franc Archier de Bagnolet*, along with the *Repues franches*. That year, a proto-novel is also published featuring a main character based on Villon: *La Légende joyeuse ou Faitz et Dictz joyeulx de Pierre Faifeu* [*The Joyous Legend or Sayings and Deeds of the Joyous Pierre Faifeu*] by Charles de Bourdigné. All this is to emphasize that the legend of Villon’s life and the attributed texts have been inextricable. Villon’s poetry has never been read except in light of
what was rumoured about the person, a situation maintained by the heavily insinuatory and (seemingly) cryptic, allusive, putatively autobiographical content of the writing. This interaction becomes only more knotted as, in subsequent centuries, modern definitions of the author and of the literary field emerge, hand-in-hand with language standardisation. In this process, author-functions become standard-bearers.

The term *paracanonicity* has been proposed to facilitate approaches to the problem of texts like Villon’s that have had such singular cultural functions and afterlives. Although often famous, and in the case of Villon much-studied, these have never been comfortably canonised in a way that makes them easy additions to the lexicon of object-terms defining literary practice. The readerly and critical behaviours observable around paracanonically active texts are seen, to a lesser extent, around most canonic texts. Texts which function as paracanonic are either eventually neutralised (becoming stably marginal), are canonised (as reading strategies develop for managing their difficulties), or the texts fade entirely from canonic view. Used as an inductive, the paracanonic can be a way of studying the social history of a text and texts. As a deductive it can also be considered a way of reading; many canonised and uncanonised texts can be read (by champions of the text or detractors) in ways that muddy the streams of canonic idealism. What I’m thinking of as “paracanonic reading” covers both defensive reactions to a perceived “threat” to canonic ideology, and active uptake of texts to stage such threats. In this sense, Omans reads Villon paracanonically insofar as he sees Villon’s renown as a threat to an aesthetic-moral value system, one which treats myth Canon as an infallibly meritocratic. The playwright and poet Bertold Brecht also reads Villon paracanonically, in that he actively uses Villon (in *Baal* and in *The Threepenny Opera*) to antagonise the German bourgeois literary field, as a challenge to the class system it maintains. What is perhaps surprising is that Villon can still
be read paracanonically today. In 2009, the critic translator Justin Clemens calls his book of Villon translations and related pieces *Villain*, a move which assumes that Villon’s name still has talismanic power as a limit-text. As recently as 2014, Michael Barnholden in Vancouver, BC, Canada, summons Villon for paracanonic service in his chapbook of Poundian “villonauds”: *The Pursuit of the Thief François Villon Through the Streets of the Walled City of Paris on behalf of the Bourgeoisie*. Barnholden has his Villon (in a language something like Guy LaFleur in Vancouver’s Downtown East Side) ask the Bakhtinian question: “isn’t language a dialect with an army and a navy?” His Villon represents an oppressed class, not the culturally privileged: “i get what i deserve whether i deserve it or not / the door mat is out and i’ll be under it.” These texts come almost two centuries years after Théophile Gautier first did the same (within a different social context) in his essay (1833) on Villon, constructing the poet as one of his paracanonic *grotesques*.

Although Villon studies have been increasingly open to readings of Villon that allow his difficulties to stay difficult,\(^\text{38}\) the mainstream of Villon criticism\(^\text{39}\) was for a long time preoccupied with making the text presentable and legitimate. In practice, that has meant constructing two dominant methods of reading Villon. One is archival research that treats the text mainly as an assemblage of clues for reconstructing the biography of the man. Read this way, the difficulties are rendered into safe archaeological and biographical problems. The other is a set of heuristic approaches that take morally and/or aesthetically redeeming passages as reductive shortcuts through the twisted forest of these poems. The critically hegemonic question

\(^{38}\) Such critics as Jean Dufournet, Michael Freeman, Christine Martineau-Génieys, Robert Peckham, Jane H.M. Taylor and others.

\(^{39}\) Which I associate with such critics as Auguste Longnon, David A. Fein, John Fox, Italo Siciliano, Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur, Leo Spitzer and others.
Who was François Villon? – is made methodologically central by a set of deeply problematic poems. As Daniel Heller-Roazen writes: “Already … in the first printed edition of the poet’s works, Pierre Levet had separated these texts from the others, dubbing them ‘Ballades en jargon et jobelin’” (26). *Le iargon et iobellin dudit Villon* [*The Jargon and Jobelin of Villon*] are a set of poems, 6, or 9, or 11 (or even 0) poems of still-disputed attribution and origin. They are composed in – or in an imitation of – the “strange and apparently hermetic tongue of malefactors” (Heller-Roazen). That is, they are composed in the *jargon*, or, more technically, the *argot*, of a medieval association of criminals known as *Les Compagnons de la Coquille* [*The Brotherhood of the Shell*]. Everything about these poems, beyond the brute fact of their existence, remains in debate. Barbara Sargent-Baur summarises some of the issues:

These poems are notoriously resistant to decipherment (and some readers may think, scarcely worth the effort required); the combination of *hapax legomenon*, topical allusions, punning, missing lines, irregularities of metre and rhyme, and no doubt deliberate secretiveness, makes these two sets of ballades a perennial challenge to interpreters. (299)

To readers motivated to find a prototype of a post-romantic lyric poet of expressive selfhood in Villon, the *jobelin* ballades are aggravatingly paracanonic to Villon’s own corpus.

Since the publications of Auguste Vitu (in 1884), Lucien Schöne (in 1888), Marcel Schwob (in 1889), Lazare Sainéan (in 1912), Pierre Guiraud (in 1968) and André Lanly (1971), the vocabulary of these poems has been sufficiently (and repeatedly) uncloaked to venture

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40 Although these poems are usually referred to as the “jargon ballades,” I prefer in this chapter to call them the “jobelin ballades” to avoid confusion with the specific connotations of that term in the humanities. “Jobelin,” further, has connotations that better characterise this language, these poems and their function in Villon. *Jobelin* implies: slang, gift of the gab, fast-talking, bullshitting, twittering, gibberish, birdsong. For overviews of the uses and histories of these terms and their usage, see Heller-Roazen (24) and Becker-Ho (63).
conjectural translations of them – translations no more or less conjectural than of the more bizarre, fragmentary or polysemic passages in Le Testament. Even so, many editors and translators have refused to include them in their editions. In spite of David Georgi’s claim that “careful analysis of these poems since the mid-1970s has led most scholars to agree that they were not written by Villon” (xvii), many scholars continue to treat them as part of the Villon text because of the important role they play there. Even for those readers who question their attribution, intelligibility or literary quality, the jobelin ballades have been crucial evidence of the authentic criminality of Villon, a factor of major importance in constructing Villon’s legend. Scholars and creative writers who would normalise and simplify Villon – who would groom Villon to make him presentable on the modern (that is: the post-medieval) scene – need every clue they can find of historical authenticity. In this, even the most cautious depend on the jobelin ballades, with all their direct intertextual links to other parts of Villon. Yet the jobelin ballades can pose a threat, insofar as canonic constructions of literariness rely on social exclusions, moral principles (that exclude criminal activity), and aesthetic values overdetermined by class interests. Somehow these poems have to be admitted, while the ramifications they might have for reading the rest of Villon must be carefully managed, if not quarantined. As Bertrand Degott writes of the problem, arguing (finally) for their inclusion: “Les exclure de son corpus, c’est refuser la parole au coquillard, c’est donc renoncer à une bonne part du mythe, à la légende du poète-truand … ‘Il faut rendre à Villon son bien, même s’il ne lui appartient pas’” (92). [To exclude them from his corpus is to deny the Coquillard a language, it is therefore to renounce a large part of the [Villon] myth, that of the truant-poet ... We must render to Villon what is his, even if it does not belong to him].

41 Including Galway Kinnell, David Georgi and Louis Simpson, among others.
The historical context this reception extends back to the lifetime of whoever really bore the name François Villon, whether or not the criminal and the poet really were the same person. In the 60 or so years after Villon’s disappearance from history, 9 separate editions of the works are published. Until the 19th century, as Jean Dufournet’s *Villon et sa fortune littéraire* shows, little interest in Villon is traceable in the archives of French or English literature. Then, in the 19th century, as Nathan Edelman writes, a new “vogue” for Villon spreads in France, almost immediately infecting England. In 1832 the abbot J.H.R. Prompsault edits and publishes the first new edition of Villon since 1542. Prompsault’s edition is quickly translated into English. Some French writers of the period, including Théophile Gautier, Sainte-Beuve, Theodore de Banville and Jean Richepin, soon publicly take up Villon as a kind of emblem with which they can (ambivalently) challenge the ideologies of the now well-established bourgeois cultural sphere, seeking to accumulate negative credit within that sphere by extending its social and aesthetic radius. That is: Villon is used to do paracanonic work, specifically at the point of vulnerability where myth Canon imagines its assembly of texts as providing a coherent set of norms and standards for the model bourgeois citizen-consumer. Interest in Villon remains esoteric, however, until Auguste Longnon’s *Étude biographique sur François Villon* (1877) [Biographical Study of François Villon].

By this time, Villon’s “gossip biography” was already well established among his critics and readers and beyond, elaborated from the scant information available, and – with what seems

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42 Daniel Heller-Roazen cites various rumours of identity: that François Villon was the name of a famous criminal appropriated by the polyglot legal clerk and poet Jean Rabustel (26), which is sometimes invoked to explain Villon’s disappearance from the archival record. Alternately, he cites the legends that that François Villon may have ghost-written the poems of both Jean Vaillant and the poet-Duke Charles d’Orléans (175).

43 “Gossip biography” is a productive but underappreciated technical term from Brown and Levinson’s *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*, referring to the informal but materially consequential biographies of individuals
in hindsight like an astonishing credulity – details given in *Les Lais* and *Le Testament*, cross-fertilised with the pranks depicted in the *Repues franches*. Longnon’s biographical revelations, as Jean Dufournet writes, “ont fait sortir de l’ombre sa figure” (*Fortune* 50) [brought his face out of the shadows]. Villon turns out to be more troubling, textually difficult, unstable, and more comic, than he already was. The figure/form that emerges is more fully grotesque, in a Bakhtinian sense, than Gautier ever imagined.

The kind of critical habitus around Villon that I begin sketching above emerged in the 35 years following Prompsault’s edition. As Edelman writes, “le poète a été l’objet d’une admiration parfois réelle ... presque toujours embarrassée de scrupules moraux pesant sur les critiques” (339) [the poet was the object of a sometimes genuine admiration ... [yet] almost always compromised by the heavy moral scruples weighing on his critics]. To continue with my sketch: canon-oriented Villon critics and commentators had developed heuristic strategies for easing the weight of their moral scruples. Certain key passages in Villon are isolated to use as evidence that, however criminal his behaviour might have been at times he was, after all, filially pious, sincere, repentant and religious – even pious. Evidence of these qualities is read into the text to make up for the other, less polite, qualities in evidence, to produce a safer (or forgivable) Villon.

For example, a famous passage in *Les Lais* bequeaths money and goods “A troyz petis enffans tous nudz ... Povres orphelins inpourveuz ... desnuez comme le ver” (32) [To three small youngsters, naked all / ... Poor orphan boys without support / ... naked as a worm, every one (33)]. These poor orphans, naked as worms, reappear in *Le Testament*. Against textual evidence that are maintained in the networks of gossip and rumour in which they participate (Brown and Levinson 71). Every person alive has such a “gossip biography,” to which they are largely denied access by various social mechanisms.

44 All passages and translations of Villon, including the jobelin ballades, are from Barbara Sargent-Baur’s edition, unless otherwise indicated. All other translations of French-language writing throughout this thesis are my own, except where citations are given in standard MLA format.
of sarcastic displacement and indirection – Villon leaves the three of them four low-value coins called *blancs*, which is to say he leaves them practically nothing – 19th century readers before Longnon took this as evidence of Villon’s compassion for needy children. Auguste Profillet is touched by Villon’s remorseful moral custodianship of the orphans when they return in *Le Testament*. Against the example of the poet’s own legendarily dissolute, debauched life, Villon gives them “de si bonnes lecons de travail” [*such admirable lessons of hard work*] (Profillet 75).

Even Gautier seeks (and finds) reassurance here that “il avait une belle âme” (11) [*he had a beautiful soul*].

Longnon’s discoveries destroy the canonically and morally redemptive value of the “naked orphans” passage. Longnon reveals that the names refer to three of the richest men in Villon’s Paris, barons of salt speculation and predatory lending. With this crucial testimony of Villon’s basic goodness lost, the refrations of ironic displacement begin to shimmer over every utterance in Villon. What seemed a relatively stable, personality-driven proto-lyric poetry is set into “acute dialogisation, there is literally not a single monologically firm, undissociated word” (Bakhtin *Dostoyevsky* 227). One of the implicit effects is that the social orientation, attitude to language, society and morality implied by the jobelin ballades suddenly inflicts/infests Villon’s other works. Among Longnon’s revelations were Villon’s involvement in robbery and murder, raising the question again, now in a high-stakes way, of exactly who the author of these texts was. (Could a professional criminal have really written canonic texts? With rare exceptions, myth Canon would preclude that possibility.) The heuristic strategies themselves, however, aren’t abandoned. Instead, other parts of the texts become their loci. In a rallying of Christian charity, Pierre Champion can still ask in 1913, credulous about the ballade “Belle lecon de Villon aux enfans perduz”: “devons-nous pas lui pardonner pour toutes ses misères, pour tant de
fatigues, de chemin sans but, de faim et de soif, pour les admirable vers qu’il adressa lui, le clerc dévoyé, aux autres fils perdu?” (79) [must we not forgive him, with all his miseries, with all his hard trials, and his endless journey, with his hunger and thirst, for the admirable verses that he, this delinquent cleric, addressed to the other lost boys?].

Other, more agonising doubts about Villon are stoked by Longnon’s revelation that several of Villon’s legatees were persons who were known coquillards. Indeed, much of the moral excitement (both anxiety and titillation) around Villon centres on the question of his association with this criminal network. Individual readers, differently motivated, place him in a different relation to the “brotherhood of the shell.” Michael Freeman puts him on the periphery, among “mad-caps who played at being real ‘coquillards’ … [who] appropriated the world of crime for his own literary … uses” (Freeman 195). Others, like Ionела Manolesco, place him deep in the group, where he “joua le rôle de l’intellectuel, moraliste, mémorialiste, chroniqueur, créateur de langue secrète parlée et littéraire, avocat, défenseur, accusateur, professeur des ‘manières élégantes’ des Coquillards; encyclopédiste de leurs métiers, tactiques et techniques” (Manolesco XII) [played the role of intellectual, moralist, historian, chronicler, creator of a literary and spoken secret language, arbiter, defender, accuser, professor of the ‘refined ways’ of the Coquillards; encyclopaedist of their trades, tactics and techniques]. The positioning strongly affects how Villon is read. Can the other writings, Les Lais, Le Testament, and the Poèmes variés, of a criminal, opportunist argotier be honest and straightforward, as they have been so often read? Michael Freeman notes “‘Jobellin’ … could mean either ‘slang’ or ‘gift of the gab’” (189) which is to say fast-talking, or, in a crisper phrase: bullshitting.

Marcel Schwob was among the first prominent Villon critics to assume that Villon was deep in the Coquille. It’s not incidental that Schwob desires a perverse, lying Villon. Schwob
values Villon for these qualities: “S'il fut subtil par perversité, c'est de sa perversité même que sont nés ses plus beaux vers. … Dans un siècle où la force, le pouvoir et le courage avaient seuls quelque valeur, il fut petit, faible, lâche, il eut l'art du mensonge” (“Perversité” 127) [If he was subtle/devious, out of perversity, it is from this very perversity that his best writing sprang ... In the century when strength, power and courage alone had value, he was small, weak, cowardly, and had a knack for lying]. H. De Vere Stacpoole, writing in 1931 of the Villon’s “sane and superb mind” laments instead that when “Auguste Longnon ... discovered that Villon had many friends who were thieves, he did a great disservice to literature ... How so great a man could have put his hand to so mean a work must remain one of the mysteries of life” (Stacpoole 12). In pursuit of a paracanonic Villon, Schwob follows up Longnon’s research, to uncover courtroom transcripts of the trials of two members of la Coquille named Dimanche le Loup and Jehan Vole. What the famous procès de Dijon [Dijon Trial] proves is that at least part of the lexicon of Villon’s jobelin ballades is indeed part of the Coquillard argot. As Schwob writes: “Le glossaire de la Coquille doit aussi nous obliger à renoncer aux théories qui considéraient le jargon de Villon comme ‘une fantaisie du poète plutôt que comme le monument unique d’un idiome disparu’ ... Le fait qu’un aussi grand nombre de mots sont communs à la langue de Villon et à celle des Coquillards suffit à montrer que ces pièces ont été réellement écrites en jargon de malfaiteurs” (“Compagnons” 31) [The glossary of the Coquille obliges us to renounce any theories that consider Villon’s jargon ‘a fantasy of the poet more than a unique monument of a vanished idiom’ ... The fact that Villon’s and the Coquillard language share such a large number of words suffices to show that these pieces were actually written in the jargon of criminals]. This much is granted – that the lexicon is shared – even where attribution is disputed. Schwob’s weightier conclusion is that “Le fait que la ballade II est précisément adressée aux Coquillards
montre que, même après les supplices de Colin de Cayeux et de Regnier de Montigny, Villon n’avait pas renoncé à toutes relations avec les debris de la bande de la Coquille” (ibid.) [The fact that [jobelin] ballade II is directly addressed to the Coquillards shows that, even after the torture of Colin de Cayeux and Regnier de Montigny, Villon had not broken off relations with what remained of the Coquille].

For a critical practice that aims, mainly, to reconstruct, through a mix of archival research, inference and imputation, the historical person who wrote the poems, the jobelin ballades had been opaque but curiously promising. The successive disclosures of their vocabulary has made the poems both recede in interest and, at the same time, has made them more actively paracanonic. All of them seem, infuriatingly, to have the same vapid message: “Hey Coquillards, avoid police capture or you’ll regret it!” After labouring through the severe difficulties of decoding this secret tongue, it is as if their cryptological strongbox turns out to contain only vapours. So, while their sheer existence bears weightily on how Villon is read, their content does little to serve either poetic or biographic research. Pierre Guiraud’s later translations/decodings of the first six known jobelin ballades, collected and elaborately glossed in *Le Jargon de Villon ou le gai savoir de la Coquille* (1968) [Villon’s Jargon or the Gay Knowledge/Science of the Coquille], enter canonic purview at this exact point of vulnerability. Rather than settling the issues, Guiraud triples them. If scholars were to accept Guiraud’s claims, the impact on how Villon is read would be even mightier than that of Longnon’s biography.

Approaching Villon mainly as a lexicographer and cryptologist, Guiraud claims to discover in the jobelin ballades a system of triple encryption – a concurrent triple code. As it says in jobelin ballade V, when confronted by authority “chanter leur trois sans point songer” (Guiraud 308-9) [sing them a three part song, without day-dreaming] – and so Guiraud claims
these ballades sing polyphonically, in threes. Code A, is the level of the literal denotative meanings of the Coquillard argot lexicon, as in the refrain of jobelin ballade I: “Eschec eschec pour le fardis” [“Watch out, watch out for the rope’s end!” (300-1)]. Guiraud renders this as: “Gare gare au collier de chanvre” (49): beware the hemp necklace, the hangman’s noose. Code B, is the level of the network of professional card sharps that, Guiraud claims, was a dimension of membership in the Coquille. The refrain of the same jobelin ballad quoted above, now means “Gare gare au jabot bourré” (in Guiraud 141), which is to say something like beware of playing cards against a player whose shirt-front is loaded with good aces. Code C is the most problematizing of the three. It is the level of homosexual pornography, in reference to a specific competitive, hierarchical form of sex play. The goal in this erotic sport, according to Guiraud, was to anally penetrate your opponent without being penetrated yourself. Codes A and B mainly fit into the limits of the (albeit disputed) biographical picture of Villon. Code C is a bomb. Building on his work with erotic dictionaries, and on the scholarship of Christine Martineau-Gnieys on the evidence Villon’s homosexuality, Guiraud adds to Villon’s profile the paracanonic threat of a queer sexuality.

Inferences regarding paracanonic activity that can be drawn here were brought forward by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in Epistemology of the Closet (1990). Retreading the “Where’s the African Proust?” question noted in my introduction, Sedgwick gives this “flat insolent” question a queer voicing, from the perspective of the gay studies movement: Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare? French literati might ask: Has there ever been a gay Villon? The threat in Guiraud’s work is that it (elaborately) answers the question as Sedgwick does. To paraphrase Sedgwick: the short answer, Guiraud asserts, is yes: There has been a gay Villon, and his name is François Villon. Paracanonic activity here heats up around the broader implication that, if
Guiraud’s argument is accepted, beyond the gay Villon, and Socrates, Shakespeare, Proust, there is a vast gay etcetera: “dozens or hundreds of the most centrally canon figures in what the monoculturalists are pleased to consider ‘our’ culture, as indeed, always in different forms and senses, in every other” (1484). For a homophobic and/or closeted myth Canon, this is vexing.

In another sense, however, Guiraud’s reading can function as canonically compensatory. By unveiling the jobelin ballades as such virtuosic form-poems, he replenishes, in an unexpected way, their value as Villon’s. Rather than authenticating Villon’s criminality, however, if Guiraud is right, they validate his talent. To Guiraud, their complexity means that whoever wrote them had to have been “un homme de genie.” Later scholars such as Paul Barrette, who would, in “Les Ballades en jargon de François Villon ou la poétique de la criminalité,” [François Villon’s Ballades in Jargon or the Poetics of Criminality] dis-attribute the jobelin ballades on the basis of their stylistic deviations from the rest of Villon, are pre-emptively retorted. If Guiraud is correct, the deviations are adequately accounted for by the extreme compositional constraints on the jobelin ballades; no writer’s style could have come through such filters unaffected. Several new problems arise, however, not entirely compensated for by the implications Guiraud invites that Villon was a cryptological genius of millennial proportions. The connotative meaning of the poems turns out to be a tripling of the “Don’t get caught!” message, now staged concurrently, repetitively, in three social codes. Rather than revealing new subjective (that is: literary) depths, they reveal a writer who is a serious joker, perhaps delirious with his own ingenuity, while adding homosexuality and card-sharpening to his résumé. If this is the case, the language they are written in also has a different social function. Rather than being designed to hide secrets, the argot of these poems comes into line with Georgette Bensimon-Choukroun’s argument that argots “se caractérisent moins par une volonté cryptomanique que par un goût prononcé pour la
fantaisie” (80) [*are less characterised by cryptomania will than by a pronounced taste for the fantastical*].

But Guiraud’s challenge extends to the entire Villon text, he argues that “Le Testament tout entier repose sur la situation des ballades en jargon” (284) [*The entirety of the Testament is based in the situation of the jargon ballades*]. Guiraud thus recreates (or decreates), in a paracanonic mode, the heuristic strategy of other critics. He proposes a reprioritisation of the jobelin ballades, setting them at the centre of Villon rather than at the outer limits. To read Villon in this grain would make every difficulty in and around Villon the core experience of reading Villon. Rather than something to be overcome by critical ingenuity or archival diligence, Villon’s difficulty would be a condition to be ever negotiated. The very negotiation of intractable barriers would be the power, pleasure, and positive meaning, of reading Villon.

Two critic-translators have attempted to work forward from where Guiraud leaves off, using translation to build a case for the priority of the jobelin ballades. Ionela Manolesco provides a vernacular translation of the jobelin ballades into a contemporary French, joual-tinted slang. Following the schema of Guiraud’s Code A, she pleads for their centrality: “Les ballades en jargon m’ont révélé la vision nouvelle qui explique l’œuvre tout entier de Villon” (XIII) [*The jargon ballades have revealed to me a new vision that explains the entire oeuvre of Villon*]. Another translator-critic, Thierry Martin, stays in closer parallel with Guiraud. Martin completes, as it were, Guiraud’s work on Code C. Martin re-translates, in Code C, all eleven of the jobelin ballades, rendering them more playfully and poetically, rather than in the matter-of-fact manner of Guiraud. He then takes Guiraud’s broader suggestion head on, and translates large passages from the rest of Villon, the *Lais*, the *Testament* and *Poèmes variés*, into/from Code C. Reading the three translations together has an immediate effect on how implicatures are drawn from
Villon’s many ambiguities: every line of Villon, not only the jobelin poems, takes on a cast of seething criminality and deceit, and (simultaneously) of pornographic euphemism. Although sexual innuendos are accepted as present at many points in Villon, Martin makes all of Villon read as a gay pornographic double-entendre.

It is significant, then, that even in the very small, highly regulatory scene of Villon studies, not a single review has been published of either Manolesco’s or Martin’s work, while the little reception of Guiraud’s has treated it as an absurdist’s elaborate prank, on the order of Tristan Tzara’s *Le Secret de François Villon*. Martin and Manolesco each promise, moreover, that “l’édition critique de celle-là est en cours” (Manolesco XIII) [*the critical edition is forthcoming*] in which, presumably, their positions on the centrality of the jobelin ballades would be more fully explained and accounted. The lack of public reception, and the failure of these translator-scholars to follow up with the promised critical writings, leave those promises echoing as a challenge to all readers of Villon: How different does Villon look when read predominantly in the grain of the jobelin ballades? What if the heuristic strategy that dominates both scholarly and amateur readings of Villon is hijacked and redirected – *détournée* – so that it magnifies, amplifies and re-activates the text’s problems rather than resolving them? Daniel Heller-Roazen asks, in *Dark Tongues: The Art of Rogues and Riddlers* (2013) the pertinent question: “Could there be some hidden link between the two hermetic kinds of speech, which makes of verse a kind of idler’s talk, or jargon [and jobelin] some variety of poetry?” (29). As I hope to demonstrate, many linguists and inventive poets have answered, indeed, that the link is not only possible – it is integral.
Language-Differentiation and Social Refusal

USAmerican poet Galway Kinnell has translated (nearly) all of Villon twice: once in 1965 and then, dissatisfied, again in 1975. His latter version has had a consistent reputation as the most enjoyably readable translation into English. To my ear, Kinnell manages to convey, in idiomatically American English, a good impersonation of what readers have described as Villon’s queerly sour, rhythmically tart vernacular. Nor, for the most part, does he hide Villon’s bizarre, nightmarishly comic or sexual imagery, nor hide his splenic, chromatic humours and petty jibes. Unlike literally all the translations (into English) before his, Kinnell’s does not not quietly censor or bowdlerise Villon. Yet the very title of Kinnell’s edition, The Poems of François Villon, reveals that something is missing: the complete poems of François Villon. Kinnell did not translate the jobelin ballades. In spite of all the precedent work of uncloaking their lexicon, and in spite of precedent English translations of those poems from which he could have worked, Kinnell claims: “I have not included the poems in jargon, which are unintelligible” (xxiii). The facileness of this dismissal, by such a devoted translator, is evidence that what Kinnell treats as a problem of vocabulary is actually a social disavowal. As Marot wrote centuries earlier: “Touchant le jargon, je le laisse à corriger et exposer aux successeurs de Villon en l’art de la pinse et du croq” (qtd. in Freeman 5) [Concerning the jargon [poems], I leave it to Villon’s successors in the arts of theft and lock-picking to correct and edit them]. Both poets’ claims, centuries apart, serve mainly to locate the jobelin in a social field other than their own.

An early review by R.W. Flint, for example, praises Kinnell’s translation as “a most friendly achievement, equally respectful of text and reader, well in tune with the substrate of matter-of-factness and plain speaking that supports the great Gothic, eternal edifice we know as Francois Villon” (10). In a later review, of another translation by Louis Simpson, Richard Howard perpetuates this reputation even as he denigrates Kinnell’s handling of Villon’s stanza-forms. Howard appreciates “this ventriloquial quality [as] Kinnell’s virtue, even if his literalism affords what Henry James would call ’loose baggy monsters’ pretending to be stanzas” (58). Kinnell is singled out for being “so good at catching” (ibid.) Villon’s tone.
Their editorial decisions literally quarantine the jobelin from the rest of Villon, while nevertheless accepting their attribution.

To work in the opposite grain, to actively use these disquieting “vers ... d’aucuns dit sont piteux ou bien miteux … mauvaise poésie” (Degott Morte 93) [verses ... considered pitiful and shabby ... bad poetry] as an un-heuristic (that is: an heuristic which aggressively exacerbates Villon’s complexities and problems rather than clarifying them) through which to read the rest of Villon, it is first necessary to establish a working, pragmatic definition of argot. In lexicography, the term “jargon” usually designates the technical vocabulary, and associated speech-style, of a profession or trade. A technical jargon becomes an “argot” when it is associated with marginal, unofficial, or illegal forms of social and economic life. That is: while English professors speak jargon, thieves speak argot. Scholars of these “social languages” (Bakhtin) also often have only an intermittent interest, and imperfect access to their habitat milieus. Argots are therefore variously treated by scholars as: 1) (mere) lexical parasites or aberrations of dominant languages46, 2) as actual dialects with marked syntactic deviations from the dominant47, or 3) as

46 This is the ultimately normative, socially conservative position that conceptualises dialect as a deviation from the standard language, as if the institutional standard manifests an ideal form of the language. As Daniel Heller-Roazen characterises them: “From a linguistic point of view, they may be dubbed ‘parasite languages,’ as Marcel Cohen long ago maintained. ... Such idioms may be ‘incomprehensible to the noninitiate,’ being conceived as the instruments of defense or attack” (38). Such a top-down concept of the relation of dialect with standard speech has a history, as all epistemologies do. As Anthony R. Lodge writes: “With the spread of literacy, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, written language came to be regarded as the quintessential form of the language, from which other varieties (notably speech) were perverse and regrettable deviations. This primacy accorded to formal, planned, essentially written language is a central feature of standard ideology in French (and indeed European) culture. The ‘real French language’ is the written language, and other varieties (e.g. those used in informal, unplanned, face-to-face interaction) being regarded as unnatural corruptions of it” (Dialect 181). Let me say that, from a dialogic perspective, Cohen and Heller-Roazen’s point that the “uninitiated” cannot understand the “dark tongue” or parasite of a jargon is only to say, rather tautologically, that someone who has not learned a language cannot understand it.

47 This is the middle position that allows argots a wider creative range, while still assuming the ideality (rather than arbitrariness) of national standard language – a standard-and-deviation model. Jean-Paul Colin proposes one of the better, least prejudicial iterations of this model: the “standard” for Colin only has relative – not ideal – value.
the integrated social languages of a fully developed way of life and struggle⁴⁸. Scholars work from contradictory evidence of speaker practice, and contradictory first-hand accounts from argot speakers. Even without consensus in their definition, the term remains current due to a strong intuitive consensus that any dominant social practice is necessarily shadowed or haunted by a paracanonic other, remnants of the exclusions, omissions and categorical violence that maintain its dominance. Argot itself is, in this way, paracanonic to standardised, centralised, official language. Practiced in service of a distinct social structure, “‘this social structure is, in turn, the bearer of an alternative social reality.’ … As such, [argots] are ‘the means of realization of a [counter-reality]: not merely expressing it, but actively creating and maintaining it’” (Halliday in Farr 24).

In *Argot et Poésie: essais sur la déviance lexicale* [*Argot and Poetry: Essays on Lexical Deviance*], Jean-Paul Colin studies argots along four principal pragmatic axes. Argots cohere, as distinct from other social languages, by a special, variable admixture of, 1: social refusal, 2: technological or professional language specialisation, 3: a generalised rejection of or ambivalence towards “square” or “straight” society, 4: a ludic creative impulse (Colin 47). Colin’s model is preferable to others for its de-emphasis of the cryptological, instrumental and utilitarian function of argots. Argots, to Colin, are more phatic, poetic and metalinguistic than they are instrumental.

The model nevertheless shares at least one flaw with those it integrates: the reliance on a definition making reference to linguistic norms, dominants, standards, of which the argot is understood as a negation, or artificial (which here only means *deliberate*, not historically

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⁴⁸ This is the more fully dialogic view of writers such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Alice Becker-Ho, Roger Farr, Charles Green, M.A.K. Halliday, Henri Lefebvre, Bryan Reynolds, Marcel Schwob, Raymond Williams and Valentin Voloshinov.
spontaneous) alternative. Note that the existence of the jobelin ballades guarantees a certain kind of permanent fame for Villon: there exist no comparable documents of the speech of that period. Those ballades are a crucial piece of documentary evidence informing all scholarly definitions and historical study of argot. Yet when the Coquillard speech emerged, clear linguistic norms, dominants, and standards had not yet been institutionally established. As Anthony R. Lodge writes in *A Sociolinguistic History of Parisian French*: “standardisation of speech belongs to a much later period ... the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (75). Moreover, “before the onset of standardisation, dialectical speech tends not to have been heavily stigmatised” (101). When Villon, or whoever it was, wrote these poems language-differentiation still functioned on a far more lateral plane, with far less class-marking value than it was to accumulate. Class stratification had not yet been as rigidly fixed in linguistic practices as it would be in later centuries, by the standardisation of language through print media and schooling⁴⁹. In affective terms, as Raymond Williams writes in *The Long Revolution*, people had not “become tense and anxious about the way in which they speak their own language” (215) – it took a long time and a large-scale, concerted effort to bring that about. Tongues like Coquillard argot would have been nourished laterally by multiple sources, in a model Alice Becker-Ho calls “deltaic” (94). In its cacophonous heteroglossia, Villon’s marginal Paris was not yet Baudelaire’s marginal Paris. If, in Walter Benjamin’s terms, Baudelaire was the urban “lyric poet in the era of high capitalism,” Villon was the heteroglossic poet in the era of incipient capitalism. Villon disappears from the

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⁴⁹ A process which found its major theoretical and literary champions in the group of poets known as *La Pléiade* (principally: Pierre de Ronsard, Joachim du Bellay, Jean-Antoine de Baïf, Etienne Jodelle and Pontus de Tyard). Among the aims of *La Pléiade* was the elevation of a high-literary French language. As François Rigolot writes: “Du Bellay blames the alleged poverty of the Fr. lang. of his time on the unwillingness of earlier generations of Frenchmen to devote their energies to its cultivation. Intrinsically, he says, it is capable of the highest reaches of poetic and philosophic expression and need not bow in these respects before any of the langs. of antiquity or mod. Times” (Rigolot 1042). Dufournet notes that these poets showed no interest in heteroglossic (thus paracanonic) Villon: “*La Pléiade* néglige Villon aussi bien que le ‘bien buvant’ Rabelais” (*Fortunes* 19).
record in 1463. Historians such as Michael Perelman, Michel Beaud, Jürgen Kocka, Ferdinand Braudel and Bronislaw Geremek set the beginning of modern capitalism right around 1500. At its base, this is what is called “primitive accumulation”: the violent process of forcing a self-provisioning peasantry into the dependent servitude of waged labour (see Perelman 92-124). As this process required large-scale resettlement into urban centres, the social effects were most concentrated in sites like Paris. The languages, poverty and the city as represented in Villon can be understood as effects of this novel mode of displacement and appropriation.

Imagine the linguistic scene of Villon’s Paris. At the time “cities with populations of over fifty thousand were few in medieval Europe” (Geremek Poverty 62). Paris was “the largest city of Medieval Europe” (Geremek Poverty 62), with about a 150,000 + higher stable population than Rome. More importantly “what distinguishes most conspicuously the social structure of medieval and proto-industrial cities in Europe ... was the presence at the bottom of society of a large but unknowable number of paupers, marginals and transients” (111). The “unknowable” bottom layer of the city’s population surged whenever “harvest failures or warfare led inhabitants from the surrounding countryside to seek refuge or charity behind city walls” (107). It also grew as people like Villon, and those others who populated the Coquille, chose criminality as their chief economic means – whether forced there by circumstance, or in active social refusal. Indeed, at this stage, as Bronislaw Geremek illustrates, in The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris, boundaries of social identity, borders between the straight / square world and the criminal world, now taken for granted as hard boundaries in definitions of argot, were astonishingly porous.

The linguistic soundscape of the Paris where Coquillard argot sounded was a more lateral than hierarchical “motley collection of [French] dialects spoken by those entering the city”
(Lodge 99), a collection that included variant speech types of Jews, Italians, Anglo-Normans, formal Latin, vernacular Latin, the beginnings of Bourgeois French, and the resultant Parisian French \textit{koiné}. What remains surprising is the evidence that, in such a linguistically super-diverse, super-saturated, and permissive context, Coquillard argot somehow still stood out. The distinctness of Coquillard argot seems to reveal something. I believe it may demonstrate that its \textit{artificiality}, its voluntariness, was perceptible – just as voluntary laughter is distinguishable from spontaneous laughter. Considering the many dialects spoken there, it is not safe to assume that the lexicon was sufficient to distinguish Coquillard argot. Regardless, that it was noticed reveals that it was perceptibly not just another among the many variations from the common pool of French. And it seems to indicate that the perceptibility of its difference was part of its social meaning and function.

A crucial detail in the transcripts of the \textit{procès de Dijon} also shows that, for at least some users, Coquillard argot had become the language of their internal discourse. Jehan Vole was unable (or unwilling) to switch dialects when the speech genre, the situation he was in, demanded he orient to authority by changing register. On trial in a system that used torture universally, as Schwob writes: “Il était déjà bien répandu; car un témoin du procès ... Jehan Vole, dit ... âgé de trente-six ans, entremêle curieusement sa déposition de termes de jargon” (\textit{Rédactions 68-69}) [It [Coquillard argot] was already widespread; one witness in the trial ... Jehan Vole ... thirty-six years old, used a curious mix of jargon terms in his deposition]. This suggests that argot was not spoken only in secret, or Vole would, presumably, would have switched dialects – Vole’s life was at stake. It seems that the argot had become Vole’s the language of his inner speech, so he did not hide Coquillard language from public hearing. Other
evidence from disparate places and centuries\textsuperscript{50} indeed suggest that argots can become core languages, and therefore it can be expected that they would be spoken within range of out-groupers and overhearers, rather than only, or mainly, in secret or coterie contexts\textsuperscript{51}. There are better ways of keeping secrets. Jobelin ballade X refers to this issue specifically, with the comedic image of “belistriens perpetuelz des piez / qui sur la roue auez lardons clamez / en iobelin” [“beggars perpetually on foot / who on the road have demanded hand-outs of food / in jobelin’”] (313-4). The comedy here is the Coquillard’s failure to meet the exigency of the situation, the failure to use a dialect that could mark them as a member of the worthy poor, rather than the argot which marks them as an active criminal, possibly using a counterfeit disability to earn sympathy\textsuperscript{52}. Asking for handouts in jobelin is to invite censure. What I believe this evidence points to is that the social function of argot actually depends on it being heard and overheard by outsiders. Michael Freeman’s belief about Villon’s peripheral position in \textit{La Coquille} would

\textsuperscript{50} Studies of various argots by Tomer Einat, Wang Di, Catherine S. Ramírez, Bryan Reynolds; incidents in Jean Genet’s \textit{Notre-Dame-Des-Fleurs}, N. Scott Momaday’s \textit{House Made of Dawn} and Francis Ford Coppola’s \textit{Godfather II}.

\textsuperscript{51} Heller-Roazen cites counter evidence that when Coquillards caught their fellows speaking argot too freely in public, they were admonished (Heller-Roazen 22). However, all such contemporary evidence, including sources citing the impenetrability of this language, comes from court records and “policemen and para-police elements” (Becker-Ho 68). It is testimony from the mortal enemies of the Coquille that tells us theirs was “an exquisite language, which other people cannot understand” (Heller-Roazen 180). In such uneven interactions, out of a criminal milieu where “silence is the number one rule, whoever breaks it deserves to die” (Becker-Ho 80) the principle of mandatory lying-to-the-anthropologist remains in play. If “squares” and authorities are “mere fools to be abused with every illusion-generating device” (Becker-Ho 75), “beau debourdes blandy” [\textit{full of fine lies}] (in Sargent-Baur 318) how much did Coquillards really fink [inform] (Becker-Ho 130) of their secrets? Perhaps only enough to relieve the pressure, yet not enough to get them assassinated. Tales like the rumoured existence of a “Roi de la Coquille” are as likely to be decoys, or fabulations, as not. There were no witness protection programs in the middle ages – although there was a ubiquitous carceral use of torture. Certainly, along with the evidence I have cited, and with the evidence of the \textit{jobelin ballades} themselves, a participant design that included overhearers is highly plausible. In spite of the assumption that the \textit{jobelin ballades} were “all addressed to criminals,” (Heller-Roazen 22) it is impossible to know \textit{how} they designed their first audience, nor if they in fact addressed literati with a taste for underworld \textit{frisson}. As Becker-Ho writes, argot “links up with art solely as a \textit{stratagem}” (92).

\textsuperscript{52} A practice well-documented in Bronislaw Geremek’s books \textit{Poverty: A History} (1994) and \textit{The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris} (1987).
require that Villon learned the jobelin he knew through eavesdropping. If Freeman is correct, the 
jobelin ballades must have been comic parodies for Villon’s contemporaries, long before they 
became loci of paracanonic anxiety for would-be canonisers of Villon.

The topic of overhearing is taken up in Herbert C. Clark’s theorisation of “audience 
design” in Arenas of Language Use. Clark’s concept of audience design is part of his broader 
theory of “participation frameworks.” Both terms point to how utterances are designed in such a 
way as to distribute differentiated roles to different recipients. Clark breaks down the positions of 
hearers / readers / receivers in a communicative exchange into three basic roles, set in a 
concentric arrangement vis-a-vis the speaker: first, direct participants, then direct addressees, 
then overhearers (218). In all cases, “Speakers must get listeners to recognise their assigned 
roles” (250). The outliers in this schema “are not intended ... to ‘take part in’ the illocutionary act 
... but ... are nevertheless [assumed to be] listening in” (218-9). In ordinary speech situations, 
Clark argues that overhearers are “dealt with” in one of four ways. Each of these four ways of 
“dealing with overhearers” (218-9) concerns how access is either permitted to or withheld from 
the overhearer: indifference, disclosure, concealment or disguise (256). The third, 
concealment, characterises what is special about the audience design of argots.

In Clark’s presentation of ordinary speech situations, overhearing is normally a 
temporary, fleeting role. Among the ways of dealing for overhearers, in concealment “speakers 
... design their utterances so that the overhearers cannot grasp it and will recognise that they 
cannot do so” (256). What distinguishes an argot is that it assumes a constant – rather than 
fleeting – presence of overhearers. Argots are precisely a limit-case of the kind that Clark 
facetiously imagines: “It is always possible that the CIA or your boss or a blackmailer has 
bugged the room and is recording every word we say. ... Should we moderate our talk just
because of this remote possibility? … To worry about eavesdroppers everywhere is to become a certified paranoid” (256). It is precisely the “paranoid” assumption of a constant eavesdropper that distinguishes the design of argots. Alice Becker-Ho quotes Charles d’Orléans on this principle that argot pushes to the maximum: “Ever tailor your words accordingly in situations where danger stalks anything you may say” (85 n32). Argot, then, does not need a dominant, standardised language to subvert; it only needs a self-recognising, excluded overhearer. Overhearers do not need to wield an especially privileged discourse, they only have to understand some version of the common language to which the argot is related. Evidence of practice in the jobelin ballades (this is one way of interpreting the banal repetitiveness of their messages, for example) suggest that the function of the concealment is only partly to conceal denotative content. Instead the concealment mainly functions to make the overhearer recognise themselves as excluded. In forcing such recognition, argot performatively signifies social refusal. (So, rather than paranoid, argots are perhaps aggressively extrovert, or performative. This is one way of interpreting the fact that they often conceal by “overlexicalisation”: the ludic, poetic invention of a surplus of synonyms.) Argots also assume the likely superior listening or imitation skills, not easily acquired: the argotier is someone with a para-literary gift for tongues. Along with the Coquillards’ other signifying practices, this must be the basis of what made their argot distinct, amidst a tumult of lateral differentiation.

To summarise: in the way they orient to a constant overhearer, argots are designed to simultaneously: conceal, display, beacon, and intimate. Argots conceal, from out-groupers, the denotative content of the speech. This concealment, however, does not function mainly to encrypt important messages; their real “content” (which is to say “meaning”) is their pragmatic function. Argots concurrently beacon overhearers who might be in-group strangers; strangers
who know the argot are implicitly invited to recognise (if not to accost) their yet-unknown colleagues. Argots also beacon outsiders who might be potential new recruits. Often logophilic in their taste for fantastic, rare, archaic or new and strange words, they are a poetic lure. Argots also intimate, between direct in-group participants. The special quality of argoting intimation – the in-group intimacy and, indeed, sense of collective identity they construct – requires the participants’ mutual assumption of a hypothetical eavesdropper who is being denied access.

To read Villon in the grain of the jobelin ballades, assuming the model of argot just proposed, is to read these texts within the socially contested territory of what Mikhail Bakhtin called heteroglossia. Heteroglossia is, first of all, “speech diversity” (Dialogic 272). More pointedly, this diversity is both an effect and engine of the differentiation, and later stratification, of language, processes observable at the macro (national and global) scales of diachronic language change, and on scales as local as variant spellings of words. In every case, language functions both as a sign of and a means of social struggle, within classes and across classes. Language differentiation is where those struggles in language are best materially observable, insofar as words, when dialogised as they are in Villon, “[register] with extreme subtlety the tiniest shifts and oscillations of the social atmosphere” (Bakhtin Dialogic 337).

Heteroglossia refers, more importantly, to how the meeting of centrifugal (differentiating) and centripetal (normalising) forces within the utterance mark and shape its design. Concordant with Colin’s schema for studying argots, Bakhtin emphasizes antagonism and creativity, the tendency to ab-normativity, as language’s main engines. These energies are constrained by the need for social cohesion “guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity” (Discourse 270). Artificial tongues like argots, and especially in formalised utterances in those languages such as the jobelin ballades,
are theoretically and socially and historically significant limit-cases of the ordinary processes of heteroglossia.

As a final step, a number of scholars of argot (Jean-Paul Colin, Georgette Bensimon-Choukroun, Béatrice Turpin) make strong claims about a connection not so specifically to criminality but more broadly to artistic practices that are “anticonventionnelle” [anti-conventional]. With this, and the antagonism of social refusal, argot or jobelin enters into the paracanonic. Bensimon-Choukroun in particular appears to be working from the myth that canonic texts are supreme exempla of the over-fulfilment of literary convention (rules of appropriate style, form, and manner). Convention in this sense is largely a hallucination produced by the veneration myth Canon, not an actual set of principles or patterns discoverable in the texts presumed to embody these conventions. Being anti-conventional, in Bensimon-Choukroun’s sense, is a baseline feature shared by texts that have been sites of paracanonic activity: although often highly visible, for a time they not only pose problems for their own classification, but pose a threat to the entire classificatory system of literature. To Bensimon-Choukroun, there are “ubuesque” argots (like Coquillard), her term referring to the lead character, King Ubu, in the famous cycle of absurdist plays by Alfred Jarry. I can agree with Bensimon-Choukroun to the extent that in cases such as Coquillard argot, argot produces a space where, comparatively less burdened with ordinary centripetal pressures, speakers use language in a more phatic, joyful, poetic way. To outsiders, this divergent prioritisation (of phatic and poetic over the instrumental functions) makes a charismatic display of secretiveness. For these scholars, argot is more playful than instrumental, not mainly cryptomanic. Here, I agree: denying the poetry of argot, that criminals can take poetic pleasure in language, is to deny its speakers humanity, as myth Canon would. Argots are indeed built with a mixture of ephemeral and stable
terms, privileging innovation but flirting with archaism, fantastical and playful. Argot demonstrates:

1) *Le désir, à peine voilé, de transgression et son corollaire le sentiment d'affranchissement*, 2) *L'expression de la jouissance de la magie verbale, dont ils ont l'intime sentiment de partager l'invention*, 3) *Le bonheur de la connivence qui se traduit par le sentiment d'une identité commune*, 4) *Le jugement péjoratif et négativant qui est malgré tout attaché au parler, mais on l'a interprété comme une manifestation d'ordre apotropaïque. .... On peut dire que tous ces traits réunis recoupent les caractéristiques de toute création artistique anticonventionnelle.* (93-94)

[1] *A barely concealed desire for transgression and a corollary sense of empowerment, 2) The expression of delight in the magic of words, and the sense of participating in the creation of this magic, 3) The joy of collusion, experienced as a sense of communal identity, 4) A pejorative and negative attitude associated with the language, but which we consider apotropaic ... We can say that these features, taken together, are exactly those of all anti-conventional artistic production.]*

That argot or jobelin like Villon’s is believed to be anti-conventional in this way is a sign of its paracanonic activation, which may help account for the sustained interest by the poetic “avant-garde” in Villon. When read in this grain, the writing attributed to Villon doesn’t disappear, but Villon’s “work” indeed unspools to become a “text”, in the Barthesian sense. It becomes more open than closed, radically inconclusive and actively self-unravelling. Villon’s startling “je” no longer seems proto-individualist so much as a grammatical point of focalisation around which an array of social languages is dialogically set into motion and hybridized, towards creating an
image of the irreducible linguistic multiplicity of proto-capitalist Paris. *Le Testament* is more concerned with the city of language, and as language, than an emergent lyrical subject. Of changes during this period of capitalist incipience, Henri Lefebvre writes

> The merchant city succeeded the political city. At this time (approximately the fourteenth century in western Europe), commercial exchange became an urban function, which was embodied in a form (or forms, both architectural and urban). This in turn gave urban space a new structure. The changes that took place in Paris illustrate this complex interaction among the three essential aspects of function, form, and structure. (10-11)

Reading Villon as the key poet of this new urbanisation foregrounds how his attributed writings are open to and shaped by “exploitation of actual available social dialects ... social languages filled with specific objects, typical, socially localized and limited” (Bakhtin 287). A kind of aural data collector, Villon listened to the murmur of the urban more than he visioned it: *Le Testament* is a delirious, even giddy image of Parisian language multiplicity in concert and in conflict. Starting with the conceit that the whole of *Le Testament* is being dictated (in present tense) to the fictive, incompetent clerk Fremin l’Éstourdis [*Fremin the Confused/Dimwit*], to be later edited by the drunken Jean Calais, the “fictional universe of the Testament is designed so as to push François as far away as possible from the centre of the poem, to obscure the presence of the central narrator, to multiply voices and lose that narrator amid numerous surrogate narrators” (Lacy 9). Read in the grain of the jobelin ballades, the Villon poems open away from the often myopic individualism of myth Canon, outwards to the plural sound of the city.
Villon’s Evidence

Having “already gained legendary status for his exploits at the time of his disappearance in 1463” (619), writes Margaret Harp, Villon was popular enough in legend, and as a literary leitmotif, that Marot could muse on the cover of his 1532 edition, of “Peu de Villons en bon savoir / Trop de Villons pour décevoir” [Few Villons well-understood / Too many Villons to disappoint]. When the individual who bore (or borrowed) the name disappeared from history, it seems his ghost began immediately leaving footprints of paracanonic activity. Some of these traces are already visible in Marot’s preface to his edition of Villon. I have mentioned Marot’s telling disavowal of the jobelin poems, but there are other marks in that same text: Marot’s claim to have made corrections to the poems “partie avec l’ayde des bons vieillards qui en savent par cuer” (111) [partly with the help of good oldsters who know the poems by heart]. This claim must be apocryphal; the old men in question, in 1532, to have heard Villon from Villon, or his contemporaries, would have to have been about 90 years old in a time when European lives were brief. Marot’s claim may conceal an in-joke about the pervasive facetiousness of Le Testament, or may imply a belief that Villon the criminal and Villon the poet were not the same man.

Regardless, it situates the Villon poems at the triple juncture between the medial exigencies of the oral, the manuscript and print. As Fernand Braudel writes: “Paris saw its first printed book in 1470” (400) – 7 years after Villon suddenly fades from view. Editions of Villon were an important part of the first generation French printed books. Marot also thus situates the Villon texts in the heteroglossic clamour of Paris streets – plucking Villon’s lines from the tongues of speakers on the margins of the new urban life, to set them down in writing to be pressed between the pages of books. Marot advises readers to “cueillent ses sentences comme belles fleurs” (111) [pluck his lines like beautiful flowers], last blossoms of the pre-Gutenberg literary world.
In the same year François Rabelais publishes *Pantagruel*, a text both deeply engaged in a paracanonic reading of Villon and an early blockbuster success of print media. Villon is the basis of two characters in the book. Under his own name, François Villon is present in a form like the renardine con-artist of the *Repues franches*, although with homicidal outcomes. More significantly, however, as Théophile Gautier, noticed, Villon: “semble avoir inspiré à Rabelais le type délicieux de Panurge” (31) [*seems to have been the model for Rabelais’ delectable Panurge*]. Other critics, such as Harp, Pierre Lafitte and Marcel Schwob, have made the same observation. I want to make a stronger claim: Panurge can be read as a full paracanonic reading and reinvention of Villon in the grain of the jobelin ballades. Panurge is a textual resurrection of Villon, one that turns him from hungry prankster into full trickster: the paracanonic Villon is ingloriously born.

At Panurge’s entry in chapter 9, Pantagruel expresses his sympathy for the tattered figure in precisely the terms Villon demands in *Le Testament*. In chapter 16, Rabelais elaborates on Panurge’s disposition, appearance, behaviour and attitudes, with a sum of details dense with direct echoes and refractions from Villon’s attributed writings and his gossip biography. Panurge is virtually everything Villon is (contradictorily) supposed by critics to have been: “a wicked lewd rogue, a cozener, drinker, roister, rover, and a very dissolute and debauched fellow, if there were any in Paris; otherwise, and in all matters else, the best and most virtuous man in the world” (in Urquhart 227). (As Gautier later says, despite all Villon has a beautiful soul.) Besides this, Panurge is an emblematic figure of the new urban heteroglossia, with a large repertoire of languages that includes a devilish array of artificial tongues. A polyglot argotier, Panurge takes

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53 In Book 4, Villon leads a noisy troupe of faux devils to frighten the horse of Friar Tickletoby which drags him through the street and stomps him, with his foot caught in a single stirrup, until “his cockle brains were dashed out ... his arms fell to pieces ... made a bloody havoc with his puddings ... [and] brought back only his right foot and twisted sandal, leaving them to guess what was become of the rest” (in Urquhart 559).
pleasure in aggressive, multilingual beguilement. Recall Panurge’s glorious entry in chapter 9. He greets, threatens and insults Pantagruel and Epistemon in 14 different languages, several of them imaginary or parodically stylised, before coming around, at length, to cozying up to them in French. Panurge thus mimics the extraordinary range of differentiated speech types that criss-cross and inter-breed and struggle for differentiation in the jobelin-inclusive Villon. Rabelais, furthermore, specifically frames this as a question of discourse repertoire. Its breadth, like Villon’s, is his power. An analogy is made with Panurge’s (Villon’s) knowledge of the streets. After arriving in Paris, Panurge: “in less than two days he knew all the streets, lanes, and turnings in Paris as well as his Deus det” (ibid.). Panurge also, like a competent Coquillard, carries in his 26 pockets a fabulous array of tools for pranks, fraud and larceny. In one of these: “he had a picklock, a pelican, a crampiron, a crook, and some other iron tools, wherewith there was no door nor coffer which he would not pick open” (231). These instruments, along with Panurge’s knowledge of the streets, emblematise his interloping access to diverse social spaces – just as Villon had access to both Charles D’Orléans and to the Coquille – figuring this broad linguistic repertoire as a form of embezzled social capital. The paracanonic text is only canonic “for the wrong reasons,” and Panurge/Villon give both the sense that they may squander what they’ve amassed, and their linguistic wealth implies a strength dangerous in the hands of such pranksters, criminals, interlopers: the wrong sort of people. The confounding encounter with heteroglossia that Panurge presents to Pantagruel is a reformulation of the very problem confronted by readers of Villon from the beginning. Following each outburst, Epistemon and Pantagruel explicitly recognise their excluded position in the participation framework. For example: “My friend ... I have no skill in that gibberish of yours [...]” And: “Then, Gossip, I know not if the walls do comprehend the meaning of your words, but none of us here doth so
Romeo Villon

As I have said, heuristic reading strategies have generally been used to navigate Villon’s difficulties, taking passages that can be read as aesthetically or morally redemptive of Villon to impose compensatory resolutions of the text’s unusually tangled difficulties. The unusually strong reliance on such heuristics is best marked by drawing attention to how consensus been made to appear to pool around the few Villon ballades often reproduced and read independently of the rest of Villon. The two most prominent are the “Ballade des dames du temps jadis” [Ballade of the Ladies of Times Past] and the “Ballade pour prier Nostre Dame” [Ballade for Praying to Notre Dame]. Literally or provisionally removed from their dialogic context, it has been possible to read these pieces as redeeming expressions of canonic affects such as: romantic love, regret, faith, sincerity and poetic melancholy. Yet all the invocations of such affects in these poems – as elsewhere in Villon – are subject to strong parodic diversion and displacement, both by their greater context and internal cues. When read in the grain of the jobelin, no statement anywhere in Villon can be taken at face value, to the extent that there is little of the normal accumulation of common inferential ground between text and reader. If every narrative begins on shaky ground, with Villon the uncertainties persist rather than gradually resolve. An 1882 poem by Le Sire de Chambley dramatises exactly this process of anxious heuristic decision-making that readers of Villon have used. Chambley focuses on the “Ballade des dames du temps jadis,” which he transforms into his “Ballade des Malseans Pucelaiges” [Ballade of The Unclean Women]. Dedicated “À Maistre François Villon, souteneur et poète” [To Master
François Villon, Pimp and Poet], “Pucelaiges,” is written, as Degott explains, in a “pastiche de la langue du XVe siècle” (Ballade 292) [a pastiche the language of the 16th century]. In stanza 3 he explicitly chooses between two of the many women represented in Le Testament:

Mieulz vault Margot que Kathe de Vausselle:
Sade à chascun, hobe soubz tout passant.
Tousiours à dos pour qu’on lui grimpe en selle,
Huche au second quand le premier descend.
Sans cryz, sans plours, et ses cottes troussant,
Elle vous doint son oyster sans coquille
Et doulz, très-doulz, d’un fin det caressant
Ouvre son caz et boute la cheville. (in Degott Ballade 293)

[Rather Margot than Kathe de Vauselle / Sade for all, welcomes all comers. /
Always on her back, so you can climb into the saddle / Turns to the next when the first climbs down. / Without regrets, tears, with petticoats untucked, / She gives you her oyster out of its shell / And softly, very softly, with fine caressing skill / Opens her “caz” and spreads her ankles]

Margot is the prostitute of “Ballade de Villon et de la Grosse Margot” [Ballade of Villon and Fat Margot] while Katherine de Vauselles, as her name is normally spelled, is the woman who Auguste Longnon believed was Villon’s true, unrequited virtuous love. Vauselles (like the other women represented in Villon) is often contrasted with Margot in an explicitly moralising way.

Indeed, although many of Auguste Longnon’s biographical revelations newly problematised Villon, in certain areas they could serve to “de-louse” Villon. As J.K. Huysmans writes, they try to distance Villon (and, by association, his readers) from this low social context
emblematised by “Margot” and the jobelin ballades. In his 1891 novel Là-Bas, Huysmans
describes this kind of selective, recuperative reading of Villon. He complains that

Un autre [Auguste Longnon] a épucé Villon, s'est efforcé de démontrer que la
grosse Margot de la ballade n'était pas une femme mais bien l'enseigne d'un
cabaret; pour un peu, il représentait le poète ainsi qu'un homme bégueule et
continent, judicieux et probe. On eût dit qu'en écrivant leurs monographies, ces
historiens appréhendaient de se déshonorer en touchant à des écrivains ou à des
peintres dont la vie avait été cahotée par des bourrasques. Ils eussent sans doute
désiré qu'ils fussent des bourgeois comme eux; le tout équipé d'ailleurs à l'aide de
ces fameuses pièces que l'on épluche, que l'on détroque, que l'on trie. (33)

[Another had deloused Villon, and attempted to prove that the 'Fat Meg' of the
ballad is not a woman but the name of an inn. If he'd gone any further, he'd have
represented the poet as a celibate prude, a sensible and honest man. It's as if in
writing their monographs these historians were afraid to dishonour themselves by
touching writers or painters whose lives had been marked by scandal. They
would, no doubt, prefer their subjects to be respectably bourgeois like themselves,
though they're all happy to benefit from these infamous works, which they sift,
distort and pick apart. (trans. King 23)]

In Chambley’s poem, a link is drawn instead with the uniquely paracanonic writings of Marquis
de Sade (illegal to own in France until 1957), and the narrator explicitly chooses Margot over
Vauselles. Where Longnon, and many others, treat the “Grosse Margot” ballade either as an
unserious *sotte chanson*\(^{54}\), or a morally redemptive spasm of self-loathing, Chambley finds amorous relations mobilised in the poem as a trope. “Marriage” in Coquillard argot refers polysemically to: unfreedom, to the “wedding” of bodies chained together in a dungeon or hanged in a row on the gibbet, to torture, and to anal rape. In jobelin ballade VII, the poet writes: “car coquillart ny remaint grant espace / Que vueille ou non ne soit fait des sieurs” [*For the Coquillard doesn’t stay there long / without willy-nilly becoming an idiot*] (312-3). The refrain is one of the most lucid among the jobelin ballades: “Mais le pis est mariage m’en passe”; [*But the worst thing is marriage, enough!*] (ibid.).

While aligning his poem with the jobelin, Chambley’s decision to use an archaic pseudo-slang demonstrates, also, a grasp that the social struggles in Villon are meaningfully encoded in heteroglossia, as dialect form. Each of the social speech types in Villon stands in for a world view, set in dialogical, antagonistic motion against the others. As Chambley grasps, each of those women also represents a discourse type – which means also an ideology and a lifeworld. Discourse is thus itself emblematic of the very forms amorous and sexual relations can take within the limits of reigning social conditions. Specifically, Chambley considers how Bourgeois social practices curtail sexuality. More fully even than his identification with Margot, Chambley’s decision to write the poem as if in an extra-literary language of the margins situates Villon’s milieu there.

\(^{54}\) Arthur Långfors in 1945 defined the genre of the *sotte chanson*, or foolish/silly song, thus: “Quelque jeune homme en gaîté, pour amuser ses amis et manifester son affranchissement des conventions mondaines, se livre à un langage qui offense la pudeur: ce sera une sotte chanson” (22).
**Heartbroken Villon**

In England about the same time, W.E. Henley reads Villon in a comparable way. While many translations into English of Villon work to diminish the sense of temporal and social distance, mitigating the heteroglossia that drives the Panurgian text, Henley singles out two of the ballades in *Le Testament* that are most like the jobelin ballades in language and content. The inclusion of these ballades, “Ballade de bonne doctrine a ceux de mauvaise vie” [*Ballad of Good Doctrine to Those Leading Dissolute Lives*] and “Ballade par laquelle Villon crye mercy a chacun” [*Ballad in which Villon Begs for Everyone’s Forgiveness*], in *Le Testament* provide circumstantial evidence that the same person authored the jobelin ballades. Henley translates these into an overripe, literary image of 19th century Cockney. Although Cockney is not an argot, because its sphere of activity is too broad, it is comparable in terms of social positioning, concealment, and display. Like the jobelin ballades, these are warnings and call-outs to fellow marginals and criminals, and include terms from the Coquillard lexicon. Notably, the first is framed as reported speech: Villon amusingly claims to be reading a lesson from a textbook. In the set-up, he names Colin de Cayeux (also mentioned in jobelin ballade II). The ballade opens with a flurry of terms for Coquillard specialities, the first of which refers explicitly to the re-appropriation of authoritative discourse, in the form of fraudulent papal bulls. This is what is found in Villon:

‘Car ou soies porteur de bulles,
Pipeur ou hasardeur de dez
Tailleur de faulx coings (et te brusles
Comme ceulx qui sont eschaudez
Traicstres parjurs de foy vuidez),
Soies laron, raviz ou pilles -
Ou en va l’acquest, que cuidez?
Tout au tavernes et aux filles.

[‘For, whether you’re a pedlar of Bulls, / A sharper or mere player at dice, / A counterfeiter (and get burnt / Like those ones who are boiled in oil, / Faithless man whose word’s no bond), / Or be a robber, snatch or steal - / Where do you think the profit goes? / All to the taverns and the girls.] (168-170)

By comparison, John Payne’s 1878 translation of this poem is in an open literary vernacular, spiced with slang terms. Rather than reproducing the stunning Panurgian encounter for an Anglophone reader, Payne gives English readers a pop-simulacra taste and feel of the original – a Disneyland Coquillard. Payne’s translation begins: “Peddle indulgences, as you may: / Cog the dice for your cheating throws” (177). By contrast, Henley’s is almost as inscrutable to a hegemonic hearing as the jobelin ballades themselves:

Suppose you screeve? or go cheap-jack?
Or fake the broads? Or fig a nag?
Or thimble-rig? Or knap a yack?
Or pitch a snide? or smash a rag?
Suppose you duff? or nose and lag?
Or get the straight, and land your pot?
How do you melt the multy swag?
Booze and the blowens cop the lot. (web; no pagination)

Parisian heteroglossia is figured in Villon in multiple ways, often by the shifts between languages and registers, the social bifurcation of utterances, or the introduction of new distancing
devices. It is also figured, however, as content. Sometimes this is in representations of groups of noisy talkers, or heaps of malicious tongues. Pictures of such crowds are found in the jobelin ballades IX and XI. They are also found in the “Ballade par laquelle Villon crye mercy a chacun” [Ballade in which Villon Asks Forgiveness of Everyone], which summons a noisy crowd of marginals to Villon’s funeral:

A Chartreux et a Celestins,
A Mendians et a Devoctes,
A musars et claquepatins,
A servans et filles mignoctes
Portans surcotz et justes cotes,
A cuidereaux d’amours transsis
Chauçans sans mehain fauves boctes
Je crye a toutes gens mercys.

[Of Chartreux and of Celestines, / Of Mendicants and Filles-Dieu, / Of idlers and of fashion plates, / Of servants and of prostitutes / With jackets and form-fitting gowns, / Of vain young men dying of love, / At ease in their fawn-coloured boots - / I ask pardon of everyone.] (188)

If this poem is a sincere cry of remorse, as “de-lousing” readings make it out to be, this is an amusingly verminous crowd – including prostitutes like Margot, jugglers, fake nuns, amorous poseurs, thieves, monkeys, whistlers (which is to say, argotiers or bullshitters) – from whom to be imploring mercy. As at so many points in Villon, the narrator explicitly identifies with the marginal world. (Later in the poem, he attempts to leave the official world only “pez et roctes” [farts and belches] (190), only prevented from doing so because he is writing seated. Canonic
cloturing stifles voice.) When Payne translates this poem, he makes multiple social-linguistic corrections, censoring and grooming Villon: “Frères, be they white or be they grey; / Nuns, mumpers, chanters awry that tread / And clink their pattens on each highway” (189). Henley does not try to rescue Villon the lost child from himself:

You bible-sharps that thump on tubs,
You lurkers on the Abram-sham,
You sponges miking round the pubs,
You flymy titters fond of flam,
You judes that clobber for the stramm,
You ponces good at talking tall,
With fawneys on your dexter famm –

A mot's good-night to one and all! (web; no pagination)

Read in an argot grain, the comical insincerity of the request for forgiveness, which Henley conveys fully by translating it as he does, casts its queering light on other, similar cries in Villon. Especially those that have also been taken credulously, like the “Ballade des pendus” [Ballad of the Hanged] (written in the united voice of six corpses hanging from the gibbet), or like line 208 of Le Testament, where the narrator claims his heart is breaking with remorse over his squandered youth. Thierry Martin indeed translates the line about the broken heart as: “Peu s'en faut que mon cul ne se fende” (Poèmes 29) [I can barely keep my asshole from splitting]. The envoy of the “Ballade par laquelle Villon crye mercy a chacun,” in Martin’s translation, instead of remorse, ends in penetrative triumph: “Aux enculeurs et aux emprozeurs, / Aux mendieux d’anus et aux travioques, / … J’enfonce mon braque à tous les mignons!” (75) [To the ass-
fuckers and cock-suckers / To the ass-beggars and cock-receivers / I stick my ‘sword’ into each and every last cutie!]

A Unique Jewel

As has been often remarked, Villon’s name is generally known more widely than the poetry circulated under that name is read. Yet, also often remarked, one line from Villon is known even more widely than the poet’s name. Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation of the “Ballade des dames du temps jadis” [Ballade of the Ladies of Time Past] has rendered the refrain of that poem – “Mais où sont les neiges d’antien?” (74) – into a English cliché: “But where are the snows of yester-year?” (in Payne 225). Rossetti’s neologism “yester-year”, coined for this translation lives in English separate from its host poem: it has its own entry in the Oxford English Dictionary. Historically this is even richer: the term “antan/anten” was already exotically archaic for Clément Marot. Rossetti’s often anthologised translation has been important in heuristic strategies for reading Villon, in pre-disposing readers to hear, here and throughout Villon, poetic melancholy and romantic nostalgia. Robert Peckham brings forward a document telling of the popular notion of Villon that Rossetti’s translation helped establish. An 1889 speech by James Russell Lowell projects, through Rossetti’s translation, a Villon “a poet who had written at least one immortal poem which still touches us with that painless sense of the lachrymae rerum so consoling in poetry and the burthen of which ... falters and fades away in the ear like the last stroke of Beauty’s passing bell” (qtd. in Peckham 336).

As Justin Clemens writes while “exegeses of the Testament’s black comedy are a staple of scholarship, almost all interpretations and translations of this poem are keen to underline its searing enigmatic melancholy – and not its biting wit and compressed, compounded academic
jokes” (17). Such heuristics don’t necessarily get a reader out of the forest of Villon, but they do provide reassurance that a way out is possible. He cites a well-known example of the special heuristic uses made of the “Ballade des dames du temps jadis.” The archival Villon scholar Leo Spitzer, in 1940, published an apologetically “ahistorical” – by which he meant “purely aesthetic” in the most mystifying sense – rhapsodic appreciation of the poem. It seemed to Spitzer that, if Villon is to be canonically legitimate, it must be possible to appreciate some of his poems “comme des incarnations éternelles de la beauté” (7) [as eternal incarnations of beauty]—even if that requires surgically removing them from the very corpus they are being used to sublime. Somehow, in spite of every evidence to the contrary, Villon must be discovered to be “bien galand homme de sa personne”, as Rabelais writes of Panurge – a criminal psychopath, perhaps, but nevertheless the “nicest guy around,” and as the unlikely proto-romantic.

As recently as 2011, Philippe Ménard, defends a Spitzerian reading (“ce que l’on croit communément” [what is commonly believed] about the poem), against such critics as Clemens, David Kuhn and Don A. Monson who find in the poem an “ironie globale … [une] ironie structural [qui] intègre et soutient tous les éléments de la ballade” (qtd. in Ménard 109-10) [a global irony ... a structural irony [that] penetrates and interlinks all the elements of the ballad]. The evidence in Rabelais is, at least, that Villon’s near-contemporaries did not hear in this ballade the “douce rêverie mélancolique” (110) [sweet melancholic reverie] Spitzer heard. As early as 1611, the line, separated from Villon’s name, had already become emblematic of triviality and futility. In chapter 14 of Pantagruel, Rabelais is already found making light of the question: “But where is the last year's snow? This was the greatest care that Villon the Parisian poet took” (in Urquhart 221). From such evidence, and from the cues in and around the poem in
*Le Testament*, it seems most street-smart to read the poem as an unfriendly satire of the *ubi sunt* genre rather than as one of its “joyaux unique[s]” (7) *unique jewels*.

So what happens to this slice of “lachrymœ rerum” when read in the grain of the jobelin ballades? Reflecting while resisting its unmatched prominence in Villon, many poets have read this ballade in the argot grain – and they paracanonically reassemble it, to make it live an alternate life. Alfred Marquiset writes his own response to the poem in 1893. For his version, Marquiset invents a fictional Montmartrian slang of the future. “Ballade des Dames du Temps Jadis (An 2,000)” *Ballade of the Ladies of Long Past (Year 2000)* substitutes the names in Villon’s poem – Villon’s unique jewel is mainly a list of unrelated names – with those of cabaret stars of the 1890s. The (in)famous line is stripped even of its snows, the language of the whole made corrosively ironic, as if cut with pure absinthe.

As David Kuhn has pointed out, snow to French medievals was more likely an image of dread than of Victorian beauty (280). The population of Villon’s Paris quadrupled during the winter, when famine drove throngs of the starving into city. Furthermore, every other reference to winter in Villon associates the season with misery and death, not with a post-card Victorian picturesque: “Sur le Noël, morte saison, / Que les loups se vivent du vent” *Towards Christmas, that dead time of year / When wolves live on the wind* (18). The allusion sometimes overlooked here, in the opening of *Les Laiz*, is to Coquillards. While literal wolves sometimes walked down the frozen Seine into the city, where they fed on human prey, predatory Coquillards also wintered in Paris. As Bronislaw Geremek writes: “For the criminal bands, Paris was less a field of operation than a haunt of pleasure, a place to visit, somewhere to spend the winter. It was the culmination of their success, it attracted them with the prospect of a life of merriment, streets
teeming with life, and meetings in taverns and brothels" (*Margins* 130). And so Marquiset strips the snows out of the poem entirely, leaving only their bitter aftertaste:

Yvette Guilbert, la sereine

Qui cinquante ans de la chanson

Tint le sceptre sans perdre haleine

Ousqu’à sont, malheur, ousqu’à sont?

[Yvette Guilbert, the siren / Who for fifty years of song / Held the sceptre without running out of breath / Where’ve they gone, goddamn, where’ve they gone?]

A much later translation of the poem by Tom Scott reads the poem in a similar way, within the framework of the distribution of linguistic privilege across the UK. Scott translates the ballade into Shetland dialect, a non-standard and geopolitically marginalised English. Like speakers of argot, speakers of Shetland perform a complex mode of group-protective self-othering55. Consider the canonic rendering of the first stanza by Rossetti:

Tell me now in what hidden way is

Lady Flora the lovely Roman?

Where ’s Hipparchia, and where is Thais,

Neither of them the fairer woman

Where is Echo, beheld of no man,

Only heard on river and mere,—

She whose beauty was more than human?…

But where are the snows of yester-year? (in Payne 225)

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55 See especially John E. Joseph’s “Alien Species: The Discursive Othering of Grey Squirrels, Glasgow Gaelic, Shetland Scots and the Gay Guys in the Shag Pad,” or David Kinloch’s “Questions of Status: Macbeth in Québécois and Scots.”
And now consider the translation by Scott:

Tell me whaur, in whit countrie
Bides Flora nou, you Roman belle?
Whaur Thais, Alcibiades be,
Thon sibbit cousins. Can ye tell
Whaur cletteran echo draws pell-mell
Abuin some burn owrehung wi bine
Her beautie’s mair nor human spell –
Ay, whaur’s the snaus o langsyne?

Justin Clemens remarks that the “cryptographical endeavours” into the Villon texts are “paranoid defences against the impossibility of translation, insofar as they presume, one, that the text itself provides the code that will decipher it; two, that this code is a master-code, the final secret of Villon’s work; and three, that the code-breaker is the hero who has seen the truth, against all other interpreters” (“Testimony” 8). Similarly, the fixation on the secrecy of argots, the over-emphasis of the cryptological/instrumental, seems to be a defensive response by readers accustomed to high degree of linguistic access. The erudite reader, like a judge of the courts, demands, and expects, that the text “speak” in an appropriate literary register. Because these erudite readers are yet unadmitted or oblivious to the argotier’s sphere of activity, they are excited, even panicked, by the drama of exclusion. Scott’s translation uses the same strategy as the jobelin ballades. (This “paranoia” is observable in the textbook and amateur recitations of the collocation “criminal argot” rather than just “argot.”) Scott constructs a phantasmal, ideal interlocutor and forces a non-Shetland or non-Scottish reader to recognise that it is not themselves. The normal, ideologically affirming experience of linguistic privilege – that of
hearing the subaltern speaker correct or hypercorrect their language in recognition of the hierarchy – is bluntly denied, as Jehan Vole denied it to the court at Dijon.

In constructing their imaginary addressee, the jobelin ballades are more actively hostile to “straight” or “square” readers than Scott’s translation: they name names. The poems are addressed to, among others: “Coquillars” [Coquillards], “gailleurs” [cheaters], “spelicans” [picklocks], “saupicquez fronans” [shrewd people], “bevards” [bullshitters], “prince de gayeuls” [prince of cheaters], “ioncheurs ionchans en ioncherie” [tricksters tricking in trickery]. The names sharpen the self-recognition of exclusion, while the wily charisma, high spirits of the text, and their conceit of providing advice, together conceal, display, and intimate. Some readers might be motivated to recognise themselves as beaconed – as indeed did Alice Becker-Ho and Guy Debord. Others may discover themselves as overhearers, and may find their own position in the participation framework named with predatory hostility. From the perspective of these poems, academic readers are the: “duppez” [dupes, fools], “anges”; “angelz” [angels = police], “sires” [idiots], “pouures nyais” [poor naives] – which is to say potential victims and or class enemies. Reading Scott’s translation of this ballade, the very ballade that has been so crucial to heuristic recuperative readings of Villon, is as shocking, in its way, as reading the jobelin ballades, in which “all the stranger, the enemy, the Other can hear are empty words, mere sounds, incoherent images or catch phrases” (Becker-Ho 77). To encounter a poem so well-known now made strange is to experience the most chafing social textures of heteroglossia, which rub paracanonically against the normalising grain of myth Canon.
Bites, Biting, Bitten

The chafing here arises partly from a medial matter, related both to the standardization of French and to the transposition of oral dialects (Argot; Scots) into written manuscript and print. Villon’s texts were written at the very end of manuscript and oral culture – while editions of Villon formed an important part of the bridge into print culture. In France as elsewhere, orthography did not begin to be standardised until print culture had been strongly established. This means that across the early manuscript copies and the early print editions of Villon, the spellings of words shift dramatically, as different conventions are assumed, different local decisions are made, or changes creep in through transcribers’ or printers’ amendments, errors and erroneous corrections (although without a standard in place, a change is not actually a correction, and a variation is not in the same sense an error). On the Villon page this means that, beyond the semantic noise of archaic syntax, obsolete vocabulary, and the most inscrutable of the jobelin terms, throughout all Villon there is a constant paracanonic distortion of recognisable words. The distortions arise particularly in unexpected placements of ç, f, g, h, ï, l, s, v, x, y, z, within word-forms that are otherwise close to the current standard. The instability introduced remains the case across competing editions of the poems, in French or in translation, because they are themselves drawn from comparisons between inconsistent 15th and 16th century editions – claims about the correct or best forms remains an actual stake in struggle for distinction between scholar-editors and translators of Villon56. The textual noise is intensified by a range of other decisions editors must make, regarding the use of diacritics and punctuation.

56 Most of the variations are a matter of one or two letters misplaced, displaced or replaced per line, along with different punctuations and decisions about diacritics. For a brief comparison that can convey the effect, consider some variants of the same passage from the “Ballade par laquelle Villon crye mercy a chacun,” verses 1980-83 of Le Testament. In Prompsault’s 1835 French edition a reader encounters: “A folz et folles, sotz et sottes, / Qui s’en vont sifflant cinq et six; / A marmousetz et mariottes; / Je crye à toutes gens merciz” (247). Kimell’s 1977 bi-lingual edition presents: “A folz, folles, a sotz et sotes / Qui s'en vont sifflant six a six / A marmosetz et mariotes / Je crie a
Although only ever acknowledged in editors’ and translators’ notes (with regards to the conventions adopted in any particular edition), this instability of word-form is one of the most important features in the experience of reading Villon. For readers lacking specialised training in middle-French or medieval literature (that is: almost all readers), the unpredictably variant spellings give Villon his joual-like “accent” on the page, affecting the tone the writing is internally heard to sound. Massive energy is spent in Villon criticism pretending to ignore these effects, perhaps for reasons related to silent assumptions about meaning as a function of authorial intention. However, it is also possibly ignored because the overarching (mystified, unstated) exigency is to demonstrate an untroubled mastery of Villon’s archaic French precisely by being seen to not notice the remarkable orthographic noise that swarms into his every utterance. As McCaffery and Jed Rasula write, drawing from Lucretius’ notion of letters as swerving atomic clinamen, “this charged space summons a sensual manifold and a disturbing static ... an insect proliferation” (*Imagining* 536).

In speech pathology, the type of recurrent error this mimics is known as *paralalia*, a rare condition that involves distortions of sounds or substitutions of letters. Gail Jefferson, in “On the Poetics of Ordinary Talk” (1996) and “What’s in a ‘Nyem’?” (1978) provides a set of observations of such phenomena in quotidian (be it pathological or nonpathological) speech. Her conclusions, from extensive analysis of speech transcripts, is that speech is so dense with “poetic” features that recipients orient to an assumed coherence. That orientation is visible toutes gens mercies” (152). Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur, in 1996, reads: “A folz, folles, a soz, a soctes, / Qui s'en vont cyfflant six a six / A vecyes et marïoctes, - / Je crye a toutes gens mercys” (in Sergant-Baur 190). (To highlight the clinamen effect, I will refrain from providing a translation here.)

57 The “poetics” of ordinary talk presented in Jefferson’s articles include a remarkable (and convincing) density of: puns; sound-patterning; topic selections triggered by sounds; cross-speaker rhyme and sound-play; “flurries” of
insofar as errors of the kind crowding Villon’s pages perform as strong triggers to make participants initiate “repair” activities that discover or cooperatively achieve the missing relevance. Psychoanalysis, noting many of the same phenomena, provided the category of the “Freudian slip.” Identifying a Freudian Slip is precisely that kind of conversational repair activity triggered by these clinamen errata: locating the hidden relevance of a misplaced sound. The error is taken as meaningful whenever possible. As Jefferson writes: “if, in the first place, they qualify as candidate Freudian slips, [they] are duly noted as Freudian Slips. [If] it can be a Freudian slip, see a Freudian slip” (“Poetics” 9). This is the heuristic bias: there is a strong compulsion to cooperatively provide for the relevance of any such “noise” introduced into the stream of talk. The blend of now standardised spellings and strangely misplaced letters is thus, for readers of Villon today, deeply triggering of ingrained habits towards repair. Every stray ç, f, g, h, ï, l, s, v, x, y, or z silently provokes a searching that it costs cognitive resources to ignore or suppress.

Like the extended, (de)risory encounter at the conclusion of Eugene Ionesco’s The Killer, this dangerous character François Villon (murderer, Coquillard, pimp, thief) in the very particles constituting his words, seems to be giggling at something to which the reader has no access58.

In the jobelin ballades, the minute distortions in the rest of Villon become extreme.

Villon appears – if Villon is doing the spelling – at times, to take advantage of unstandardized

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58 Lucretius had warned against the paranoiac risk in over-extrapolating from such phenomena: “There is no point at which you may call a halt, but I will follow you there with your argument that whatever speaks or laughs or thinks is composed of particles that do the same. Let us acknowledge that this is stark madness and lunacy: one can laugh without being composed of laughing particles” (trans R.E. Latham 61-2). Comparably, Jefferson warns of the clinamen contagion, which is like the contagiousness not of disease but of group laughter: “If you ever start lecturing on this stuff you have to be very careful, because you start doing it. And worst of all, you begin to get a sensitized audience. You catch them whispering 'There's one! There's one!'” (Jefferson 'Poetics' 15). Tristan Tzara caught this paranoiac alphabet itch from Villon: his Le Secret de François Villon systematically proposes that every line in Villon anagramises names of people in the poet’s life. Followed through, the logic of Tzara’s system would reveal, minimum, 3,359 names hidden in Villon (see Heller-Roazen 153-183).
spelling into order to produce greater polysemy. When writing poems in the oral Coquillard argot, Villon is actually tasked with inventing his own spellings for terms, and the decisions made look like they are meant to serve the (polysemic, phonic, syllabic) moment. That is: there is a distinct poetics of mutable orthography in Villon. It creates a constant play of stability and compromise, refusal and recognition – gnawingly paracanonic, with respect to stable messages or intelligible intentions. Jobelin ballade IV begins with the line: “Saupicquez fronans des gours arques,” which I leave untranslated so its effect can register. The immediate habitat in which this is read – an edition of Villon and the ur-context of the French language, perhaps with a version of *Le Testament* in modern spelling – allows the recognisability of “des” to function as an anchor, so that the rest, differentially, reads as an inscrutable, grotesque re-arrangement of recognisable material.

Unlike text-stabilising translators, poet Maurice Lemaître accepts the agitated *clinamen* as a pragmatic factor in reading Villon, and draws on it as compositional principle in his Villon poem “Ballade des mordus” [*Ballad of the Bitten*]. (Is this bite like the bite of rabies?) As Bertrand Degott shows (*Ballade* 262-3), “Ballade des mordus” scrambles phonetic and alphabetic elements of Villon’s “Ballade des pendus.” from the *Poèmes varies* outside *Le Testament*. Like the jobelin ballades, “Ballade des pendus” appears to implicate Villon deeply in the world of Coquillards. Lemaître uses the following lines from the second stanza (here numbered for reference):

12 Avoir desdaing, quoy que fusmes occis

.............................................................

.............................................................

15 Excusez nous puis que sommes transsis
16 Envers le fils de la Vierge Marite
17 Que sa grace ne soit pour nous tarie

... ..............................................................

19 Nous sommes mors, ame ne nous harie (qtd. in Degott 262)

[Offence at that, even though we were killed / ... Make intercession, since we
ourselves are dead, / On our behalf before the Virgin’s Son, / That His grace
toward us may not be dried up, / ... We are dead men; let us not be harassed]

As Degott demonstrates, from these lines Lemaître builds a basic fund of syllabic materials for
his transformation of the poem. Correspondingly:

12 avor dédi, kokéfamü zaksi
15 akskizonà, poska same troksi
16 avirlofas dolavirjü mori
17 kèsôgris nazôparni tori
19 nazomarmor, oma nanu lari

From the basic set, Lemaître spins out a full length, recombinatory ballade, as alien to any reader
as Panurge’s fantastical tongues, or as alien as the Ballades en jargon et jobelin. Here is the first
stanza of “Ballade des mordus”, of which no translation is possible:

frarô zalû kéapri norévé
nayakoler [k]oramin atürsi
karsôpëti dani povra züvé
tieu soraya lilô koramési.
klaroid éponèm lorûmési
kotaléchir ora barû jéri
In a poem with no “real” words, the letters do more signifying work than they are normally called to do: the accents, diacritics, the word forms and syllable forms and preponderance of the consonants z, k, j, s, so that these non-words trigger responses of near-recognition. (They are possibly suggestive of languages such as Polish, Hungarian or Czech, while k is the rarest letter in French). In spite of the multiple elucidations of the jobelin ballades, many critics have pretended to find them no more legible than Lemaître’s poem.

**Fugitive Villon**

The stubborn insistence on the jobelin ballades’ impenetrability by critics such as David Mus – “ces répertoires monstrueux dont le sens et la fonction sont d’être impénétrable” (450) [these monstrous catalogues/songs the meaning and function of which are their very impenetrability] – is an alibi for their social distancing and quarantine. It is also, at the same time, a recognition of the “square” reader’s participant role. As stated in jobelin ballade I, the poet’s advice is to “babignes toujours aux ys” [always befuddle them] (300-1). Mus would push these poems outside the bounds of the literary – even outside the margins of the literary, but they stubbornly remain paracanonically attached to the Villon he would protect. He does not question their attribution; they cannot just be deep-sixed off the shore of Canon Island. In *La poétique de François Villon*, he makes an unusually frank admission of the anxiety produced by the jobelin ballades:
Le « jargon et jobelin » de Villon est une démonstration diabolique. Il y a, dans la « leçon » de Villon aux enfants perdus, juste assez de cette atmosphère pour que Villon puisse en faire une « leçon » linguistique. … ceux-là [les ballades en ‘jargon et jobelin’] démontraient sans doute la décomposition terrifiante de la clarté et de la raison qui devaient être le propre de l’homme et de son langage. Le jargon, dans ces vers, est le signe linguistique de la condition criminelle de l’homme. (450) [The ‘jargon and jobelin’ of Villon is a diabolical display. There is, in the ‘lesson’ of Villon to the lost children, just enough of that atmosphere [of jobelin] for Villon to make a linguistic lesson with it … the jobelin ballades demonstrate no doubt the terrifying breakdown of the clarity and reason that should be the natural right of the man and his language. Jargon, in these poems, is the linguistic sign of the criminal condition of mankind.]

Read in the grain of the argot, the extremeness of Villon, the text’s extra-literary qualities, have been for many poets an enticement towards artistic risk – beacons, lures. The criminal condition of humanity is, for such readers, not a terrifying decay of the known, but in an actively conspiratorial alterity, the freedom asserted by social refusal. Villon becomes a figure through whom they can construct a culturally ambivalent aesthetic identity, always with a tentacle or two in paracanonic/para-literary – or even anti-literary – (muddy) streams. Among many who took up Villon in this way was the French surrealist poet and novelist Blaise Cendrars. In 1921 he gathered three coming-of-age autobiographical texts under the title: Sous le signe de François Villon [Under the Sign of François Villon]. In a Panurgian spirit, refusing the work on Villon of les érudits and spécialistes like Pierre Champion, Sous le signe is a book about
Villon that never mentions the poet, except in an introductory essay in the form of an open letter to his editor.

In *Vol à voile* (1932), the first book of the trilogy, Cendrars invents an escape scene partly as an analogy for the sense of enticement, the lure through the canonic loophole, that Villon has held out to so many writers. Recall first of all that Villon is a prison poet: the defining experience cited by the narrator of *Le Testament* is his imprisonment and torture in Meung-sur-Loire. Jobelin IV has the warning refrain: “Et gardez des coffres massis” [*keep clear of thick-walled cells*] (306-7). Literally: keep out of prison. Figuratively: outwit your own social determination by structures of authority. To put it in yet another social language: resist the cloturing of representation. So, when the teenage Cendrars stages a comically tense escape from literal imprisonment in his bedroom in the household of his Swiss bourgeois parents, it is as if he has been recruited through his companion poet, his demonic familiar, for the social otherness of an artistic life. Locked up by his parents for incurring debts, he climbs out his bedroom window, escaping into the street by weaving in and out of the house, lowering himself down from each successive balcony. Having nicked a few hundred francs on the way out

j’enjambai sans aucune hésitation la balustrade du balcon, me suspendis dans le vide et me lassai tomber sur le balcon d’en dessous sans avoir alerté les voisins.

Ayant répété plusieurs fois et avec la même chance cette manœuvre, j’arrivai lestement en bas, sur la terrasse, d’où je me laissai choir dans la ruelle et je ramassai valise et manteau pour m’acheminer tranquillement vers la gare. (67) [I climbed over the balustrade without hesitation, suspended myself in the air and let myself drop onto the balcony below, without being seen by the neighbours.]

*Repeating this manoeuvre several times, with the same good luck, I arrived at last*
on the ground floor terrace, from where I slipped into the alley, picked up my suitcase and coat, then walked calmly to the train station.

The life of the streets, Villon’s milieu, opens to Cendrars. Within the already strange social and linguistic space of Villon, the jobelin ballades promise an even more radical alterity by example, as a language-form that emblematically insists on the radical unfinishedness of the world.

Reading Cendrars’ Villonian escape, it’s possible to see how for readers like Cendrars the jobelin word is an extreme example of what Bakhtin called the “word with a loophole” (Dostoyevsky 233). That is to say: “the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one’s own words ... This potential other meaning ... the loophole left open, accompanies the word like a shadow” (ibid.). Read as an argotier, Villon is “ever taking into account internally the responsive, contrary evaluation of [himself] made by another ... the loophole makes the hero ambiguous and elusive even for himself” (ibid.).

A Good Catholic

In the 19th century, Charles Algernon Swinburne was the most prominent English poet to act under the sign of Villon in a comparable way. Although personally close to Rossetti, his documented response to Villon was quite different – even opposite. As Jane M. Taylor writes, “Le Villon de Swinburne, par contre [de celui de Rossetti], n’avait rien de rassurant” (325) [Swinburne’s Villon, by contrast [with Rossetti’s], was in no way reassuring]. Where Rossetti – intentionally or not – helps groom the canting picklock and cardsharp for introduction to Victorian society (and gives him a princely seat in Victorian ficto-medievalism), Swinburne singles out what in Villon was considered unprintable, even unsayable. (In other Victorian translations, the problematic passages in Villon are bluntly replaced with lines of censoring...
Although Swinburne’s two most dangerous Villon poems, his translation of the “Ballade de Villon et de la Grosse Margot,” as “Ballad of Villon and Fat Madge” and his “Ballad of Dead Creeds” were not publishable while he lived, writing them was not essentially a private act. Instead, they enact the argotier’s sense that, as David A. Fein writes, Villon’s readers “by the very act of reading [are] drawn into not only literary collusion but also political conspiracy” (21). Swinburne’s is an argoting Villon. Sexually queer and militantly atheist, reading Villon in the grain of the argot, Swinburne finds evidence of a little documented human history more capacious than his contemporaries’ limited moral/religious vision. Echoing Baudelaire’s call to his reader (“mon semblable, - mon frère!”), Swinburne calls to “Villon, our sad bad glad mad brother’s name!” (Major 171).

As Jane M. Taylor again writes, Villon for Swinburne “était ouvertement hétérogène et iconoclaste ... s’attaquait aux doctrines de l’Église et de la prêtrise, lançait un défi à la moralité, représentait la voix du peuple” (328) [was openly heterogeneous and iconoclast ... attacking the doctrines of the Church and priesthood, challenging morality and embodying the voice of the common people]. However, Swinburne’s reading of Villon was religiously even more radical than Taylor allows: he read Villon not only as sceptical but as atheist. Catholic culture is strongly present in Villon, but always in suspect forms, undermined by the displacement, or indirectness, of dialogisation. In a poetry almost without metaphysics, symbolism, or lofty poetic affect, readers like Swinburne therefore take the appearances of Christianity in Villon as hostile invocations, and Villon’s text as evidence of a trans-historical fraternity of atheists. Le Testament begins, recall, with a damning disavowal of the Bishop Thibault d’Aussigny, including the strong insinuation that Aussigny raped Villon while he held him imprisoned in Meung-sur-Loire.

Working from Guiraud, Thierry Martin argues that serf and biche in the line “Je ne suis son serf
ne sa biche” [I am neither his slave/bitch nor doe] refer to the “bottom,” or passive role, in homosexual anal intercourse.

Reading Villon in the grain of jobelin, the question must be asked: How do lexical items drawn from authoritative discourse function in argots? Usually they function as curse terms – jurons, like the famous sacrés of Québécois joual. Villon’s ballade “Requête au Prince,” of the Poèmes variés, in which (a forgivably naughty) Villon is supposedly grovelling for money, in fact seems to have many impious, sarcastic insinuations against religion. It contains an expression that Lucien Schöne identified as an argot juron: “Biau Sire Dieux” (248) [Dear God! or Beautiful Sir God]. Jobelin ballade IV also includes the figure of speech: “Pour desbouses beaus sire dieux (306-7), which compounds as meaning: Do go steal, dear God!, what holds the image of our Dear God (=coins). Other translators than Swinburne have treated Villon’s pious appeals as insincere in this way. That is how Stephen Rodefer renders a line evoking the Virgin in the “Ballade des dames de temps jadis”: “Où sont ilz, où, Vierge souveraine?” [Where are they, where, sovereign Virgin?] (76). The impatient, haranguing insistence in the line, as well as the violence in the poem (including both burning and drowning), support Rodefer’s transmission of the line as an explosive exclamation: “Holy Jesus mother of God where did they go?” (21).

While Rodefer’s translation of the poem bundles Mary off with the other dead ladies, Swinburne, in the “Ballad of Dead Creeds,” under the sign of Villon, bundles away Christianity entire. As an epigraph, Swinburne uses part of the “Ballade en viel langage français” [Ballad in Old French] which is the third of three ubi sunt poems in Le Testament. Barbara Sargent-Baur describes this as: “Villon’s impressionistic and unsystematic attempt to write in ‘Old French’” (201). A humorous faux antiquity again makes heteroglossia an overt concern, and again, there is

59 Becker-Ho also singles out this passage for its implications within underworld norms of sexual behaviour and hierarchical symbolism. In this sense, the terms serf and biche are slang imprinted with argot.
the comic show of hypercorrection, and misalignment of speech genre, seen so often in Villon.

Swinburne adopts this poem for ruthless mockery of religion and church, erasing enough to bring up its atheist undercurrent:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Car ou sont ly sain l’apostoles,}
\textit{D’albes vestur, d’amys coeffen}
\textit{Ui ne song ceinets fors que d’estoles}
\textit{...}
\textit{Autant en emorte ly vens.}
\end{quote}

Villon

Where are God’s holy men of old

With alb & stole & amice clad?

The saints who cast out devils bold

In faith more foul than filth, more mad

Than madness? All the hope they had

In God, who bade them curse and pray,

Where is it? Where is he who bade?

Borne down the wind & blown away. (412)

\begin{quote}
[\textit{For whether it be the Holy Father, / Clothed with the alb, with amice decked, /}
\textit{Girded with naught but holy stoles / ... All such, the wind carries away} (in
\textit{Sargent-Baur 79-81})]
\end{quote}

Long after the fading of Victorian morality, redemptive readings of Villon have continued nevertheless to ascribe Villon, poet and text, a sincere faith. While a certain hostility to
Church authority is not denied (as conventional enough in medieval literature) the “Ballade pour prier Nostre Dame” is often put forward as evidence that the piety of the poet survived his most oppressive encounters with the clergy. John Fox in fact claims: “Villon’s sincerity has been called into doubt on a variety of subjects, but no critic has ever denied the depth of feeling of [this] poem” (120). Yet, among others, poets like Swinburne, Rodefer, and John M. Synge have doubted it. Synge, indeed, finds there a humorous, sarcastic critique of Church-mandated, fear-driven everyday hypocrisy, extending the familiar complaints about the clergy to the layperson.

“Ballade pour prier Nostre Dame” is written in the point of view of a narrator who is supposedly Villon’s illiterate mother. As Michael Freeman points out “the ballade which Villon writes for his mother to recite is deliberately leaden in its opening strophe and envoi” (224). The peculiar style of the first stanza are Villon’s satire of an illiterate person addressing authority, trying to speak in a discourse out of grasp. Most tellingly, like a Jehan Vole before the court of Dijon, in line 9 the struggling narrator slips register – into argot. She entreats, as mythomaniacs will, that she is no liar, saying “je n’en suis jengleresse / En ceste foy je vueil vivre et mourir” [I am not a juggler / In this faith I want to live and die]. Jangleresse means “juggler,” a trope for entertainer, story-teller and con-artist, evoking the opportunist, criminal world of Paris streets. She could have chosen the word “menteuse” [liar]. Jobelin ballade V opens with a string of variants of the same noun, spelled differently: “Joncheurs jonchans en joncherie / Rebignez bien ou joncherez” [Tricksters tricking in trickery, / Take a good look at where you play your tricks] (308-9). A jangleresse is a member of the marginal, dangerous classes, along with Coquillard joncheurs. The true “mother” of François Villon speaking in this ballade is, I believe, Villon’s adopted mother tongue: jobelin.
Other contextual markers displace the poem towards sarcasm, in a way supporting an argot reading of Villon. In sequence, the poem is immediately preceded by Villon’s legacy, to his father, of his lost work “Le Rommant du Pet au Deable” [*Tale of the Devil’s Fart*] (112). He loves his “plus que père” [*more than father*] dearly enough to leave him a non-existent tome of satanic flatulence. How terrible does a devil’s fart smell? That question is answered a few lines later, by Villon’s mother. In her attempt at pedantic flattery, she honours the Virgin by complimenting her as the “Emperiere des infernaux palus” [*Empress of the reeking swamps of Hell*] (113-4). Mary also reigns over her own unbroken hymen: “Vierge portant sans romptrue encourir / La sacrament qu’on celebre a la messe” [*O Virgin bearing while still intact / The sacrament that’s solemnized at Mass*] (115-6). Villon’s blasphemous pattern here is to draw attention to the vagina of the virgin, to make misogynist insinuations about its odour, and then to poetically conflate menstrual blood with that of the Eucharist wine. As if to confirm that reading, the ballade is immediately followed by Villon’s bequest of his penis and testicles to “ma chiere Rose” [*my dear Rose*] – the rose being another Catholic symbol for the Virgin.

So in John M. Synge’s translation of the poem into an Irish slang, all the sense of non-comical piety is gone. Villon’s critique of clerical hypocrisy is a prominent strain in his work, and Synge’s translation finds Villon also critiquing the ordinary, everyday hypocrisy of the lay-person. Rather than expressing deep faith, Villon’s Irish mother is frightened by the painted pictures of Hell where people, like the counterfeiters of jobelin ballade VI, “en arderie” [*in the hot tub [of boiling oil]]* (310-1) are boiled alive. She therefore makes the lopsided bargain that the Catholic church psychologically coerces all of its flock into making. Humans are given free will, and given the false choice to be repentant or to burn for all eternity. A good *jangleresse*, mother of a Coquillard, she recognises an opportunity to make a deal:
Let you say to your own Son that He’d have a right to forgive my share of his sins, when it’s the like He’s done, many’s the day, with big and famous sinners. I’m a poor aged woman, was never at school, and is no scholar with letters, but I’ve seen pictures in the chapel with paradise on one side, and harps and pipes in it, and the place on the other side, where sinners do be boiled in torment; the one gave me great joy, the other a great fright and scare; let me have the good place, Mother of God, and it’s in your faith I’ll live always. (305)

Villonards Villonans Villonauds et Villoneries

Readers’ difficult negotiations with the Villon text gave rise, early in the 20th century, to a strain of radical translation practices that remain a prominent part of contemporary poetry in English today. The first book published by Ezra Pound, *A Lume Spento* (1908), includes two wildly unliteral translations of Villon: “A Villonaud for This Yule” and “A Villonaud: Ballad of the Gibbet.” Like Swinburne’s term “Villoneries,” Pound called these poems *Villonauds* “to describe the blend of pastiche and translation by which he hoped to evoke the unique atmosphere of Villon's poems” (Ruthven 244). Judging by how Pound used technical terms in the titles of other short poems – “Sestina: Alaforte” and “Villanelle: The Psychological Hour” – he must have initially intended *villonaud* as a technical term for the mode of paracanonic translation that they founded. Rather than the weak concept of “atmosphere,” what Pound zeroed in on in Villon was the tussle of heteroglossia.

A PhD drop-out, who later wrote manuals such as *The ABC of Reading* and the *Guide to Kulchur*, who joked of being the rector of “Ez-University,” who attacked the mainstream, as he imagined it, with his kinetic “vorticism,” and yet became a devotee of Mussolini, Pound’s
relation to social and textual authority (of the kind represented or emblematised in canons) was extremely ambivalent to the point of stark contradiction. At this early stage in his work, a number of triggers in Villon (legend and corpus) seem to have given Pound a sense of adventurer’s license to make translations that were creative: instead of being deferentially faithful, they take the source texts as starting-points and competitive challenges. Pound’s infidelity to Villon is not, however, like the distortions of Payne’s. Pound is in fact loyal to the pragmatic parameters of Villon, if read in the grain of argot. The relation of the villonauds to their sources is, variously, opportunistic pillage, negotiation, misprision and homage. It is as if Pound takes Villon’s difficulties as a challenge to enter a canting competition against Villon, and so win admission to his imaginary trans-historical underground.

Like Panurgian blotting-papers, the villonauds register dirty traces of multiple languages, some historical, some imagined by Pound, all co-present in noisy contest. As K.K. Ruthven points out, these mix contemporary English, archaic Englishes (“brenn”; “moiety”), bits of French (“poignard”), Middle French with variant spelling (“En cest bourdel ou tenoms nostre stat”) [In this bordello where we hold our state], Latin (“Signum Nativitatis”), French-English hybrid inventions (“faibleness”), words spelled with spurious clinamen swerves (“makyth”; “everychone”), non-standard word-forms (“magians”) and coinages (“wineing” for “pouring wine over”, like a drunk’s libations). This is densely heteroglossic: the form of the words

60 Pound’s ambivalence is evident in his own canonisation practices. While he was eager to establish his own canon in texts such as “How to Read” (1929), ABC of Reading (1934) and Guide to Kulchur (1938) the canon he proposed, as Humphrey Carpenter writes in A Serious Character, was “chiefly remarkable for what it omitted” (468) – it lacked the expected names. Even Shakespeare was unimportant in Pound’s revisionist and “idiosyncratic” estimation. Pound preferred François Villon to William Shakespeare or Dante Alighieri. Furthermore, for all its extreme mystifications of literary history as a succession of singular discoveries, triumphs and technical advances, Pound’s canon is of a readable scale. It a practical curriculum rather than the “imaginary totality” (Guillory) of myth Canon. Carpenter explains that “The idea … was inspired by ‘Doctor Eliot’s Five-Foot Shelf of Books,’ the popular name for the fifty-volume Harvard Classics series of world literature selected by Charles W. Eliot … [Archibald] MacLeish observed that Ezra’s enterprise was ‘Eliot’s Five Foot Shelf cut down to Five Inches’” (ibid.).
themselves are hybrid, Pound rowdily indulges the argotier’s compulsion to coinage and overlexicalisation.

In content, they revive several of Villon’s characters, but add Pound-Villon chimeras, including “Fat Pierre with the hook gauche-main” and “Thomas Larron ‘Ear-the-less’.” Both of these grafted inventions suggest that Pound had grappled with the jobelin. The hook-hand seems to invert the refrain of jobelin V, and “la poe du marieux” [the hangman’s paw] (308); figuratively the hook of he who “marries” Coquillards. The latter refers to a term for thief, a “larron,” and a punishment for thieves explicitly named in jobelin ballade I: “Car vendengeurs des ances circuncis.” [For ‘harvesters’ [larrons, thieves] circumcised of their ears] (300-1).

The poems are some of the strangest of Pound’s (and Pound’s strength is always his strangeness). A teetotaller, Pound compounds variations of “Ballade des femmes du temps jadis,” “Ballade de la Grosse Margot” and the “Ballade des pendus” into socially atonal drinking songs, raising glasses to the gibbet and to Death. “A Villonaud for This Yule” begins:

Towards the Noel that morte saison
(Christ make the shepherds’ homage dear!)
Then when the grey wolves everychone
Drink of the winds their chill small-beer
And lap o’ the snows food’s gueredon
Then makyth my heart his yule-tide cheer
(Skoal! with the dregs if the clear be gone!)
Wineing the ghosts of yester-year. (10)

The second, “A Villonaud: Ballad of the Gibbet”:

Drink ye a skoal for the gallows tree!
Francois and Margot and thee and me,

Drink we the comrades merrily

That said us, “Till then” for the gallows tree! (11)

Although the term villonaud never caught on, the capaciously negotiative approaches to translation that it names did catch on. For Pound himself, the villonauds opened the way for more influential works of this type – Cathay (1915) and Homage to Sextus Propertius (1919) – and were developed by other poets, such as Louis Zukofsky in his Catullus (1969). A factor influencing the technique was certainly Pound’s disfluency in the source languages, yet no one is fluent in Villonois. There is something enablingly punk in Pound’s decision to translate anyways, and this has been a liberatory example of practice for many subsequent poets. In spite of Pound’s tendency towards authoritarianism in other areas of his practice, his approach to translation is paracanonically active: its promise is of the myth Canon reclaimed as a living archive, something with which writers can dialogically negotiate. Canon is no longer either a marble frieze or freeze-dried list; it becomes a place, a resource – not an oeuvre but a corpus. The difference is important: a corpus is a means of inquiry, a means of posing questions unconceived by the original writers. In a poetic argotier’s terms, the now corporalised canon becomes an arena of opportunity – a Rabelaisian marketplace of language – for the textual vengendeur, the deft shoplifter.

A younger colleague of Pound’s, Basil Bunting, found something similarly enabling in Villon, as well as in Pound’s appropriative, abnormative, scandalous approach to translation. The first poem in Bunting’s Collected Poems is a villonaud of his own, simply called “Villon” (1925). As Richard Burton writes, after destroying all he’d written to that point Bunting “emerges with a fully developed, mature voice in 'Villon” (120). Bunting seems also to be
competing with his mentor Pound, to write a better villonaud. The canting competition continues. As Burton further explains, in line 5 of “Villon” there is a triple pun: “hatching marrow” puns on the name of Clément Marot (quoted in lines 2-3), and on the North Umbrian pronunciation of marrow, which is “marra”, meaning friend, or companion. In “Villon”, Bunting (like so many other poets would) thus claims François Villon as his poetic double, to construct an ambivalent poetic identity.

Bunting identifies with Villon in the poem on a personal, autobiographical level. “Villon” is in some senses, a prison poem. Bunting implicitly claims, like Villon, that the misery of jail transformed him. But like Pound’s poems, Bunting’s also abstracts certain formal, pragmatic features of the source and writes around and towards these. “Villon” is modelled like a 4 page compression of Le Testament, without erasing any of the difficulty. Bunting indeed finds personal affirmation in Villon’s allusions to incarceration, but also in the heteroglossia of Villon. He hears the multitude of speech types, its resultantly ambivalent social registration, and the argotier’s “distrust and lucidity” (Becker-Ho qtd. in Farr 15).

Near the conclusion of Bunting’s poem, there is a passage that figures, specifically, the ambivalence of a poet of heteroglossia, who can only respond to the world and the word with a principled relativism.

- precision clarifying vagueness
- boundary to a wilderness
- of detail; chisel voice
- smoothing the flanks of noise;
- catalytic making whisper and whisper

---

61 By contrast with, for example, Robert Lowell’s elegant but smothering compressions of Villon.
run together like two drops of quicksilver;
factor that resolves
unnoted harmonies;
name of the nameless;
stuff that clings
to frigid limbs
more marble hard
than girls imagined by Mantegna... (28)

Bunting’s poem is difficult in ways comparable to Villon. Consequently, this passage has often been isolated from its context, like one of Villon’s ballades, as a critical heuristic. It is often misread (by critics like Victor Howes, Carol Johnson, and Peter Makin) as a confident, instrumental statement of a poetics of “lean hard verse in praise of lean hard virtues” (Howes), a formula then applied to Bunting’s work as a whole. Yet Bunting here actually asks a question about poetic making that his poem does not finally answer. Villon, through the unpredictability of the clinamen, within the cacophony of voices, the extreme formal parataxis, is explicitly and implicitly approving of disorder and indiscipline: pro-noise and anti-heuristic. Recall the scene of Villon’s Paris, and the loud characters summoned to his funeral:

A batelleurs, traynans mermoctes,
A folz, folles, a sotz, a soctes,
Qui s’en vont cyfflant six à siz
A vecyes et marioctes, -
A page earlier in “Villon,” Bunting laments the disciplining effects of science and capitalism that have arisen since the 15th century: “They have melted the snows of Erebus, weighed the clouds” (27). The precision and smoothing that capital enacts on wilderness and noise (the stifling of noise is the smothering of social texture) is presented as an historical evil. In the later section, Bunting brings the two kinds of activities – poetic making and “weighing the clouds” – into parallel, to enquire as to whether poetry similarly represses wildness. What does it mean, Bunting asks, to set a “boundary to a wilderness / of detail?” What does it mean to smooth the noise of many voices, or voices of the many, by hammering them into a poem? Two turns in the poem move against the simply positive valuation of poetry that, I think, is misread from the prettiness – even preciousness – of the “quicksilver” line. But Bunting shoves that image with “stuff that clings” (quicksilver is stuff that does not cling), casting the value and function of the painter Mantegna, in the following lines, into doubt. Is Mantegna’s hardness a deadness? If so, does the aesthete maker-poet risk being a murderer, and perhaps a necrophile? These are the questions Bunting asks, without providing a definitive answer. “Villon” is a poem as uncertain of its “self” as everywhere in Villon. The Basil Bunting constructed here is not a man of muscular pride, but one painfully ambivalent he eludes even himself. The poem then ends in noisy surprise, on an agonising question. Against the centripetal pull of syntax, and the desire to argue, weigh, reason, to find certainty, the centrifugal push of Bunting’s perverse keenness for the

62 The scene is reminiscent of a Roma procession entering the city limits: “roving pageants of up to 1,200 bright and motley travelers, led by Dukes on magnificent horses, hawks on their wrists, surrounded by music and animals” (Lee qtd. in Farr 12). Becker-Ho’s theory of how Coquillard argot is formed depends strongly on borrowings from Roma, and from the statelessness of the Roma to provide means by which the languages of the underworld could cross fertilize: “We must never lose sight of the fact that, in slang, loan words are above all borrowings of one dangerous class from another” (Becker-Ho 94).
sound-flavours of words bends the utterance, and it breaks open: “How can I sing with love in my bosom? / Unclean, immature and unseasonable salmon” (28).

**Urbane Villon, in the City as Language**

In the argoting Villon, liveliness, clamour, noise and wildness are aggressively performed, and ironically praised. In contrast to his disfluent mother, the women in “Ballade des femmes de Paris” are organic intellectuals, the best talkers in the world. Following his judgement that “Il n’est bon bec que de Paris” [*There is no good mouth/tongue/talk but in Paris*] (158-9), he advises eavesdropping. Rather than smoothing or measuring, he tells the reader to be inundated:

Regards m’en deux, trios, assises

Sur le bas du ply de leurs robes

En ces moustiers, en ces eglises

Tire toy pres et ne te hobes

Tu trouveras la que Macrobes

Oncques ne fist tels jugemens

Entens, quelque chose en desrobes

Ce sont tous beaulx enseignements.

[Look at them [women] sitting, two or three, / On the turn-ups of their gowns, / In those chapels, in those churches. / Draw close to them, and then don’t budge; / There you’ll find that Macrobius / Never made judgements such as these. / Listen; pick up a thing or two; / It’s the best teaching, every word.] (158-9)

Stephen Rodefer’s later book of villonauds, *Villon*, engages and reimagines Villon’s corpus in way that uses the fact of diachronic language change to draw the medieval poet into a
conspiracy with the present. As Giorgio Agamben writes: “Contemporariness inscribes itself in
the present by marking it above all as archaic. Only those who perceive the indices and
signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary” (10). In this sense,
Rodefer’s transposition of Villon into a culturally whitened and boozy jive-talk, with much
anachronistic content (the new setting of the poems appears to be Oakland, California), makes
Villon an historical prefiguration of 1970s punk, through the heteroglossic textures of a
“relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism” (11;
Agamben’s emphasis). Rodefer is like other poets in using Villon to construct an ambivalent
identity within/out of the literary field – determined by his own time yet standing apart from it,
as did the historically anomalous Coquillard-and-university-graduate Villon. Every poet named
in the current chapter reads Villon as an emblem of an active, even empowered, cultural
ambivalence. Branded with criminality, Villon was published under the phony imprint “Pick
Pocket Series”, with a false date of publication (1968, though it was written in 1976). It was
designed to resemble a book by City Lights, the imprint that worked to canonise the Beat poets.
The author name given is not Rodefer’s, but the drunken Jean Calais; the legatee granted by
Villon the right to edit, transform, change and interpret the Testament “a son plaisir” [at his
pleasure]. The complementary side of the “fraternal”, conspiratorial Villon of Swinburne and
Pound is indeed the mine-and-mine-only Villon of writers like Rodefer, Bunting, and Cendrars.
By taking the penname of Jean Calais, Rodefer claims to be Villon’s only true reader.

Like Pound, Rodefer plays “on rope supplied by Villon” taking license, at his pleasure, to
fragment Le Testament even further, writing short poems based on individual legacies, and doing
sometimes plausible, sometimes extremely variant translations of well-known passages and
ballades. Rodefer’s villonauds are accompanied by long footnotes in the voice of Calais. These
footnotes at once mimic *Le Testament*’s internal dialogisation (its constant change of discourse register, shifts of voice and deixis, its use of argument, retort, interruption, digression). The footnotes also parody high modernist (Pound and Eliot) self-canonising displays of erudition. Rodefer thus constructs through *Villon* and Villon a cultural position as consummate poetry insider with an open return-ticket to the outside.

In much of the book, Rodefer hovers near something like what Villon wrote, then as unexpectedly as a salmon out of season, jumps future-sideways from a verbal suggestion in the original. For example, in the section based on the lament of the Haulmïere [helmet maker or helmet seller], Villon’s word “detrayner” seems to have suggested “train wreck”, and so Rodefer writes “just totally wrecked.” Villon’s “feisse,” past tense for “did,” resembles the modern French word “fesse.” From this, Rodefer leaps to “I hustled my ass.” All this is an active, conscious performance of heteroglossia, across the space-time of diachronic language change.

As David Georgi demonstrates, the passage from where Rodefer draws his pseudonym, where Calais is given license, is treated most exhaustively in this way. The technique he uses is known as “homophonic” translation: sound-alike translation, a technique first published in Pound’s villonauds. In homophonic translation the source text is transposed into words of the target language that sound like those of the original. Rodefer/Calais listens in on the “beaulx enseignements” [good teachings] of Villon. The adventurous translation method, the mysterious strangeness of the result, operates like argot, in its mix of lures, warnings, and display. Among other functions, it functions to imply that Rodefer/Calais is “tight” (close) with Villon, like a member of the same gang, and that the two share a secret sign system of their own. Villon’s first stanza of this three-stanza passage is this (with lines numbered for reference):

1 Pour ce que scet bien mon entente
2 Jehan de Calaiz, honnorable homme,
3 Qui ne me vist des ans a trente
4 Et ne scet comment on me nomme –
5 De tout ce testament, en somme,
6 S’aucun’ y a difficulté
7 L’oster jusques au rez d’une pomme
8 Je lui en donne faculté.

Because he knows well my intent, / To Jean de Calais, worthy man, / Who’s not seen me for thirty years / And doesn’t know what I’m called / In all this testament, in sum, / If some objection should arise, / I give him full authority / To reduce it to an apple peel. ] (180-1)

The last line becomes Rodefer’s first line, while the rest follows Villon’s order.

1 For a sixth sense as boon of my intent
8 I lie in dawn’s great faculty,
2 Jean Calais, an honourable home,
3 queen of my with with arms atremble,
4 indecent comment startling no one,
5 detoured in this testament in sum
6 so you can know the difficulty
7 of other’s just quarrelling with my poem.

Villon was one of two short books Rodefer published that same year in the Pick Pocket Series. The other book, “One or Two Love Poems from the White World,” was in a personal mode heavily marked by another, less formally radical, poet of urban (New York) heteroglossia:
Frank O’Hara. Like Villon, O’Hara is a poet often claimed in an emblematic way (although his writing has proven more readily absorbable and canonisable than Villon’s.) The simultaneous appearance of these two books, therefore, seems to denote a poetic crossroads for Rodefer. As it happens, Rodefer takes the (Paris) road into extreme dialogisation: his subsequent books – especially *Four Lectures* (1982) – are written in Panurgian loops and threads of discontinuous sentences, utterances and voices. Unsmoothed textures of heteroglossia, “with every jarring colour and juxtaposition, every simultaneous order and disorder, every deliberate working, every movement toward one thing deformed into another” (*Four* 8). Even more like *Le Testament* than his *Villon*, Rodefer’s *Four Lectures* is written in an endless gradation of speech types, parading through the urban scene. Finding in Villon “the beginning of modern times … nothing in Baudelaire that's not in Villon (2:10),” Rodefer becomes the listener in the city’s soundscape, as advised to be after the “Ballade des femmes de Paris.” In the preface to *Four Lectures* he sums up his poetics of heteroglossia and eavesdropping. It is the poetics of the Villonian argotier, what might be called a *Villonard*:

> My program is simple: to surrender to the city and survive its inundation. To read it and in reading, order it to read itself. ... A district, or a ghetto, is a segmentation, an alternative version which both resists and embodies in a different fashion, that is with an opposing ideology, the original model. Hence, dialect and civil strife are alternating codes of the same phenomenon: the city does not hold together.

Language, which also binds together and extends, including as it isolates, is a city also. (7)
Chapter 3: “I Am a Human Being Like Yourself, Even Though I Am Not a Human Being”:
(Hot) Ambivalence and Reported Speech, Reading Across Ovid, Titus Andronicus, Kathy Acker and Antonin Artaud

A Nest of Tongues

Aimé Césaire’s most widely read poem, Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (1939), where he launched the term négritude for international reception: “la négritude, non plus un indice céphalique, ou un plasma, ou un soma, mais mesurée au compas de la souffrance” [“negritude, no longer a cephalic index, or plasma, or soma, but measured by the compass of suffering”] (Collected 76-7). The first, and every subsequent, edition of the poem ends with a dreamlike image of a detached human tongue. The narrator imagines himself fishing, line-and-hook, the detached speech organ out of a liquid dark cavity, so that it can be set into linguistic service anew:

monte
monte
monte
Je te suis, imprimée en mon ancestral cornée blanche.
monte lécheur de ciel
et le grand trou noir où je voulais me noyer l’autre lune c’est là que je veux pêcher maintenant la langue maléfique de la nuit en son immobile verrition!

[rise / rise / rise / I follow you who are imprinted on my ancestral white cornea. / rise sky licker / and the great black hole where a moon ago I wanted to drown it is
there I will now fish the malevolent tongue of the night in its motionless veerition!\(^\text{[Collected 83-4]}\)

*Cahier* is often a poem about language. Specifically, it is about the coming-into-speech of its sometimes irreal, sometimes bitterly historical, poet-narrator. The “grand trou noir” here evokes what Frantz Fanon referred to as the “darkness of the absolute” in his reproach of Jean-Paul Sartre’s essay “L’Orphée noir” [*Black Orpheus*]:

> Pour une fois, cet hégélien-né [Sartre] avait oublié que la conscience a besoin de se perdre dans la nuit de l’absolu, seule condition pour parvenir à la conscience de soi. Contre le rationalisme, il rappelait le côté négatif, mais en oubliant que cette négativité tire sa valeur d’une absolutité quasi substantielle. La conscience engagée dans l’expérience ignore, doit ignorer, les essences et les déterminations de son être (108) [For once, this born-Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness needs to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition for achieving self-consciousness. Against rationalism, he recalled its negative side, while forgetting that that negativity draws its value from a quasi-substantial absoluteness. Consciousness engaged in experience ignores, must ignore, the essences and determinants of its being.]

By the terminal point in Césaire’s poem, readers have encountered numerous invocations of the idea of language, in a language (French) in which “tongue” and “language” are the homonymous *langue*. Earlier in the poem, a suicide uses his own *langue* to choke himself: “le morne famélique et nul ne sait mieux que ce morne bâtard pourquoi le suicidé s’est étouffé avec complicité de son hypoglosse en retournant sa langue pour l’avaler” [“no one knows better than this bastard morne why the suicide choked with a little help from his hypoglossal jamming his tongue backward to
swallow it.”] (Collected 36-7). In contrast to this suicide, the final tongue imagery actively gestures towards an empowered linguistic future, that engaged consciousness of Fanon. Césaire’s narrator commands himself (and his hearers throughout the Afro-French diaspora) to rise and become a mythic “sky-licker,” before, in the final moment, finding in the very place where he had wanted to commit suicide by drowning, the “malevolent tongue of the night” that promises to endow him with a revolutionary linguistic weapon. This is a living tongue, as Antonin Artaud later writes, “grosse de toute l’ancestrale salacité” (Œuvres 1362) [“pregnant with all her ancestral sagacity” (Watchfiends 243)].

The dynamic use Césaire makes here of the trope of the tongue is found in a comparable form throughout the writings of Antonin Artaud. Working, it seems to me, from a memory of the pasta-like heaps of severed tongues in Villon’s “Ballade des langues envieuses” [Ballade of the Envious Tongues], and of the lashing, weapon-like tongues of Villon’s “Ballade des femmes de Paris” [Ballade of the Women of Paris], Artaud re-uses the trope so often throughout his work it becomes layered with interrelated, yet divergent, valences. Every social function and social action of which language is capable is, at one juncture or another, figured in Artaud with an image of a tongue. Readers find: Arrow tongues, weapon tongues, whip-tongues, restorative tongues, light-emitting tongues, divine tongues, plague tongues, vibrating tongues, forked tongues, tired tongues, sore tongues, perforated tongues, wounded tongues, stupefied and paralysed tongues, black tongues, icy tongues, rotting tongues, meat tongues, swallowed tongues, phallic tongues, erotic tongues, esophagal tongues, tongues protruding from mouth-like orifices in human hearts.

When tongues are detached from host bodies in Artaud, as in Césaire, the implied wound of silence marks a stage of an anguished coming-into-language. In an important early work,
L’Ombilic des limbes [The Umbilicus of Limbo], Artaud commits an action similar to Césaire’s self-fishing. In Artaud, however, the darkness of the absolute he fishes from is more explicitly his own being. To extricate himself from the network of hostile determinations, canonic, authoritative orders of category and language that Artaud screams against throughout his life, he is forced *in extremis* to wound himself. For both, the *langue* represents a collective, ancestral fund of speech to which they have been denied access, and the ordeal each faces is a condition of eventual emergence into an ontologically adequate speech. Artaud addresses the Florentine Renaissance painter Uccello, instructing him that to learn to speak requires that he give up his *langue*, before ripping out his own:

> Quitte ta langue, Paolo Uccello, quitte ta langue, ma langue, ma langue, merde, qui est-ce
> qui parle, où es-tu? Outre, outre, Esprit, Esprit, jeu, langue de feu, feu, feu,
> mange ta langue, vieux chien, mange sa langue, etc. J’arrache ma langue
> (*Oeuvres* 107).

*[Leave your tongue, Paolo Uccello, leave your tongue, my tongue, my tongue, shit, who is speaking, where are you? Beyond, beyond, Mind, Mind, fire, tongues of fire, fire, fire, eat your tongue old dog, eat his tongue, eat, etc. I tear out my tongue. (*Writings* 61)]*

The act of removing his own tongue, rather than silencing Artaud, leads him to make a powerful affirmative assertion. He next writes, in all caps: “OUI.”

While comparable tongue imagery can be found in many modern and pre-modern texts, William Shakespeare’s “bloody juvenile delinquent of the canon” (*Titus Andronicus*) revolves around central incidents that include the mutilation of a tongue, incidents
themselves drawn directly from, and functioning as conservative revision of, episodes in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The story of Philomela, Procne and Tereus (in Book VI) has a unique position in Ovid: it is the only myth that does not hinge on a disastrous interaction between gods and humans. Philomela and Procne’s tormentor, Tereus, is only a man. Unlike any of the other appalling injuries served in Ovid, the basis of Tereus’ actions – both their motivations and the social relations that make him assume his own immunity – are entirely human and social.

Jonathan Bate has demonstrated, in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play, how closely *Titus* is patterned on Ovid. The incidents most relevant to this discussion are the two pivotal moments: the (offstage) rape and mutilation of Titus’ daughter Lavinia, and her subsequent revelation of the guilty through an extraordinarily rendered act of what is called “reported speech.” Let me summarise in brief the relevant plot-points and relationships, before returning to them below.

Before retelling, however, I first want to comment on the story’s astonishing brutality. While Ovid, who depicts a world where rape and victim culpability are cosmologically normalised, has been central to the Western canon, for centuries critics treated Shakespeare’s re-presentation of the same material as gratuitous. Perhaps for this very reason, Philomela’s and Lavinia’s stories have together become a fund of metaphors and analogies for contemporary stories of trauma, resistance and transformation in and through language. Most famous is Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*, but also stories and novels by Kate Chopin, Susan Glaspell, Zora Neale Hurston, Harriet Jacobs and Maxine Hong Kingston. In particular, these are stories by and about women – but they find a politically legitimate resonance Césaire and Artaud, where

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63 See the doctoral dissertations on this subject by Chelte (1994) and Michalos (1996).
injuries related to race, poverty, servitude, disability and incarceration, rather than gender, are the sources of trauma.

To summarise Titus: Lavinia is the daughter of Titus Andronicus, a general who has just returned from a victorious campaign against the Goths. Declining his subsequent nomination to the imperial throne is Titus’ major tragic error. His own nominee, Saturninus, subsequently conspires with Titus’ enemies, the powerful moor Aaron, and the former Goth queen Tamora, to enact a sequence of cruel revenges upon the Andronici family. Lavinia, and her betrothed Bassianus, are among the victims. Urged by Aaron – or commanded by him, it is unclear which – Tamora’s sons Chiron and Demetrius murder Bassianus before Lavinia’s and Tamora’s eyes. As they are about to rape Lavinia, using Bassianus’ “dead trunk [as] pillow to our lust,” Lavinia pleads with Tamora to call them off. At Tamora’s spiteful refusal, Lavinia launches into a malediction that is interrupted by a silencing patriarchal hand. To flaunt their crime while also hiding their guilt, rather than kill Lavinia her rapists afterwards amputate her tongue and hands, an idea suggested by Aaron with reference to the canonic ur-text of Titus, Ovid: “This is the day of doom for Bassianus: / His Philomel must lose her tongue to-day.” Tongue lost, hands lost, but not without language, Lavinia later uses her stumps to point to the pertinent passages in Ovid, and thereby reveal the nature of her violation. With this extraordinary act of reported speech she completes her interrupted curse, setting the violent dénouement of the play into motion. Like the sky-licking Aimé Césaire, she thereby recovers her dispossessed langue.

Having already been assimilated into a linguistic order that determines them in hostile categories (i.e. nègre), or discovering themselves as only an absence in their given language (i.e. Lavinia, or the “Jane Doe” name of Janey Smith in Acker’s Blood and Guts in High School), a subject bumps against the upper limit of a hostile, reductive determination, or swims (or flails) in
the empty air of social erasure. In a well-known passage from *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), Charles W. Chestnutt introduces the term “odd quantity,” later brought forward by James Baldwin, to characterise this ambivalent subject-position. Chestnutt writes:

> There was something melancholy, to a cultivated mind, about a sensitive, educated man who happened to be off colour. Such a person was a sort of social misfit, an odd quantity, educated out of his own class, with no possible hope of entrance into that above it. (75)

Persons of “odd quantity” are left as the inevitable remnants of the dominant representational order, an order of motivated ranking and exclusions. In specific cases, texts, or specific features of texts, can be the that “odd quantity” or become evidence of that situation.

In “The Location of Culture, of Mimicry and Man,” Homi Bhabha writes of the odd quantity explicitly as a positional ambivalence in relation to the colonial state: the subject becomes a kind of left-over or hybrid, an imperfect mirroring of the “neat” quantity of the dominant subject. The effect is that “the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (129). If, as Bhabha argues, the colonial apparatus depended on such ambivalent subject-hybrids for its self-affirmation, when and where the odd quantity begins to crack through the relation of reciprocal necessity, the cracks can become loci of paracanonic infection. Among the signs of the shift towards the paracanonic is a rising pitch of anguish within the formerly equivocal, or dampening, ambivalence.

For a writer of colour, or a woman in the world of *Titus* (that is: our world), the aggravating dilemma is that the price of the “certificate of humanity” (Gates Jr. 65) that may be achieved through a coming-into-language is always, to a greater or lesser extent, acceptance of
the terms of the very discourse that withholds the certificate. When such an ardent political and cultural project is not only undertaken in spite of just resentment, but is in fact motivated by a just resentment of the very power that can grant the certification, the conundrum may be torturous. Césaire can only utter this hot ambivalence as “Taillés à meme la lumière de fulgurants nopals” [“Carved out of light itself fulgurating nopals”] (Collected 90-1). Hot ambivalence is characterised by Richard Noll, commenting on case-histories of Eugen Bleuler:

One of Eugen Bleuler's higher-functioning patients once told him that, ‘When one expresses a thought, one always sees the counter thought. This intensifies itself and becomes so rapid that one doesn't really know which was the first.’ Another of his patients expressed the ambivalence so characteristic of schizophrenia by telling Bleuler: ‘I am a human being like yourself, even though I am not a human being.’ (15)

If Bleuler’s example is most pertinent to Artaud, it should be noted that such hot ambivalence erupts in the work of many poets at various points. What is particular to the writers gathered in the present chapter is that hot ambivalence is the dominant affective register across their writings. It affects their work at every scale – micro to macro – absolutely pervasive. To Frantz Fanon, Césaire’s fellow founder of négritude, these writers’ very utterances dramatize the dilemma of being ambivalently poised between the “void” of social erasure in an endless present/past and the unreachable infinity of a better future: “Irresponsible, à cheval entre le Néant et l’Infini, je me mis à pleurer” (114) [Irresponsible, on horseback between the Void and the Infinite, I wept]. As I hope to demonstrate, the resource of reported speech provide Kathy Acker and Antonin Artaud – and their literary forebears Philomela and Lavinia – with a

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64 For other examples, I might have turned to texts by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Marie Annharte Baker, Tchikaya U Tam’si, Jean Genet, Leland Hickman and Alice Notley.
linguistic site especially suited to registering the hot ambivalence of the paracanonic odd quantity. Césaire’s particular ambivalence will be taken up in greater detail in the following chapter, with respect to the ambivalences of “unhappy laughter.” Presently he is included as part of the paracanonic sorority of hot ambivalence, and for his many flashes of theoretical lucidity about this excruciating position.

**Potassium Nitrate**

*Reported speech* is, in Mikhail Bakhtin’s formulation, the evaluative “transmission and assessment of the speech of others, [of] the discourse of another” (“Discourse” 337). It is, simply, talk about talk, or discourse about discourse. Rather than being a specialised interest of linguists, the discourse of others remains “one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech” … [In] all areas of ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words” (ibid.). The ubiquitous interlacing of discourse-strands relativizes comparatively weak claims to linguistic originality or ownership of voice/utterance, while rendering actually absurd stronger versions of such claims. The present relevance to the politics of canon is articulated by Janet Giltrow: “The contract for the individual voice (guarantor of the belief in unique expression) is cancelled in this bazaar of used words, marked by the wear-and-tear of their previous uses, and their services to other speaker’s purposes” (367). That is to say that the ubiquity of reported speech necessarily undermines ways in which literary authorship is still predominantly constructed, with reference to origin in a single consciousness rather than in the heteroglossic tensions between/across overlapping spheres of social activity (such as the literary field), and the (only sometimes voluntary) collaboration of speakers. As seen in the

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65 Un-original authors remain special cases for myth Canon. See, for example, texts such as Marjorie Perloff’s *Unoriginal Geniuses* (2010).
introductory chapter of this study, doubt was created about the quality of *Titus* merely by speculating that it was written in collaboration, even though collaboration was the norm for Elizabethan playwrights. This specific way of disavowing *Titus* shows reported speech – if not the dialogic generative conditions of language as such – in antagonism with myth Canon, and with the anachronistic construction of Shakespeare as the single-origin genius.

The interlacing of discourses is a basic linguistic mechanism of social life. An often quoted passage in Bakhtin’s “Discourse in the Novel” characterises this process in a way that remains broadly true:

> The ideological becoming of a human being ... is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others … consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development. … Our ideological development is … an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. (341-6)

Selves are constituted in, and so are conditioned and limited by what those specific “alien discourses” assimilated allow them to know, see, describe – or understand. Even after the ideological process of becoming/emergence has passed into a mature phase (say, in advanced schooling or when someone becomes a playwright), claims to ownership of any utterance can only be partial and relative. Scholarly discourse is, indeed, exactly such a process of self-situating in a forest of others’ utterances, and so the texture of scholarly prose is often that of a
patchwork of reported utterances. All utterances are always subject to multiple claims. As Bakhtin asserts

any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already ... overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents ... [It] cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance. (276)

The three major modes of reported speech have been termed direct speech, indirect speech and free indirect speech. These can be basically differentiated along a continuum from the greatest to least pretence of verbatim. Along with these three, Myers, Buttny and Semino et al. identify another ubiquitous type: hypothetical reported speech. Hypothetical reported speech is the representation of imaginary, possible, impossible or conditional speech: words that have not, were not, might not be, or could not be, spoken or thought (see Myers 572). The kinds of voicing of myth Canon heard in the introduction of this study – choosing a rhetorical figure and making it speak, as Althusser and Barthes do – are examples of hypothetical reported speech.

When brought into conscious poetic scrutiny reported speech lends itself to the paracanonic because, as Kathy Mezei writes (specifically of free indirect speech) it “is not merely an oppositional site of binary polarization but also a place and moment in which uncertainty is validated and in which oppositions are foregrounded and transgressed” (70). Rather than a site of mythic certainty, myopic presentism or imagined stability, then, the ubiquity of reported speech makes language an activity based always in compounded ambivalences. Janet
Maybin finds that speakers take advantage of the special ambivalence of reported speech in their processes of ideological becoming. Even among school children (who may one day be scholars): “the ambivalence in the relationship between the reporting and the reported voice is itself used … as a rhetorical resource in [the] negotiation of knowledge and relationships” (Maybin 461).

Reported speech is, first of all, functionally ambivalent. The ostensibly “same” literary texts might function in Martiniquan schools, for example, to teach the colonised of their “necessary” or “natural” subjugation, while in Paris lycées that text may function to reify white, French power. Across gender lines, Ovid might function to naturalise women’s erasure as subjects in the language of literature, through their presence there as mere objects. In the same pedagogic context – indeed in the same classroom – it could function to turn male dominance into a religious principle, as it does in the world of Titus Andronicus. Lavinia’s lesson is, in part, the lesson of reported speech: because language can be owned by none, it is impossible to fully dispossess her of language. Language is the what Césaire called the “trésor de salpêtre” [salt petre treasure] that can always be smuggled in behind the oppressor’s back.

Reported speech is also structurally ambivalent. While the claims to ownership of any utterance are always multiple, the pronounced authorial bifurcation of a reported utterance means that it strongly carries the intentions and contexts of at least two speakers. For the recipient, at least two minds register as marking (or even owning, or authoring) the reported utterance. As Voloshinov writes: “The outcome is a constant struggle of accents in each semantic sector of existence” (106).

Structural ambivalence is also a temporal ambivalence, especially in direct reported speech. The temporal deixis of the originating context is still present, re-conveyed, in the proximal framing context. Indeed it is the “retention of the ‘original’s’ deixis and intonation
[that] distinguish direct reported speech from both indirect reported speech and other types of utterances” (Voloshinov 224). Multiple contesting social contexts become overlain in reported speech. And these “contexts do not stand side by side in a row, as if unaware of one another, but are in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict” (Voloshinov 80).

With structural ambivalence comes, therefore, an affective ambivalence. The intentions of competing speakers mark the utterance by its evaluative accentuation. Such accentuation is partly accomplished by the manner of the utterance’s delivery, as realised in a specific interactive context. It is also, however, often evident in the formal design of the utterance itself. Together these dispose recipients towards a preferred range of affective receptions of the utterance, and the dispositions essayed in the prior context will compete with those nurtured in the new context. For example: what was perhaps oriented to as tragic in the previous context can easily be treated as funny in another, yet without the prior inflections being entirely abolished.

A voluntary/conative ambivalence further splits the reported utterance. When smuggled into a new context, the utterance is usually made to point at a new object: often at itself, or at its prior speaker. Thus Lavinia makes Ovid point accusingly back at Ovid, and also at herself. (By making her family read her own story in Philomela’s, Lavinia makes Ovid “about” her.) Yet, like the competing evaluative accentuations that cling to every word (traces of the history of its uses), the former denotative target of the utterance cannot be entirely erased.

60 Direct reported speech is reported as if it is verbatim, with a marked level of commitment to the verbal form of the original. Tracy and Robles provide a succinct example “Direct reported speech enacts what the other actually said. We see an instance of it at the conclusion of Jimmy's story, where he voices Connie's supposed words: 'And the next thing I hear is, what he doesn't know doesn't hurt him.' ‘(226). Other modes of reported speech are less “direct”; the pretence of verbatim is less, or none, as there is less or no commitment to the form of the original. In effect, rather than the words of the original utterance, either some part of its propositional content is reported, or some non-semantic feature such as: manner, style, or even its placement in an interactive sequence. Examples of indirect reported speech abound in everyday interaction and in literature. Usually, the reports are introduced with a quotative such as “tell” “go” or “like,” followed by a paraphrase of something previously said (see Holt and Clift 5).
In most circumstances, speech reports are made for their evidentiary value\textsuperscript{67}. The samples are brought forward to launch a sequence of actions (conversational or otherwise) that involve co-evaluating the reported utterance, in order to test, consolidate or reorganise group affiliations\textsuperscript{68}. Direct reported speech, with its pretence of verbatim, is often used when the stakes are especially high. Direct reported speech has the strongest “evidentiary” weight (Holt “Reporting” 226). It is oriented to by interlocutors in a way demonstrating that it “provides … evidence effectively and more economically than simply telling about the matter” (Ibid. 241). As Yanay writes, in such uses of reported speech: “The speaker renews the linguistic tokens of a community, reissuing and reinvigorating such speech. … speech can be cited against its originary purpose, and perform a reversal of effects … to form ‘a scene of agency from ambivalence’” (Yanay 74).

\textsuperscript{67} As Renata Galatolo demonstrates, through an analysis of courtroom transcripts, reported speech has heavy evidentiary weight in interactions – heavy enough that it is a key resource in witness testimony. Galatolo writes “The evidential function of [direct reported speech] is linked to the fact that the ability to recall the exact proffered words is generally interpreted as being evidence of having directly and effectively heard those words … [Direct reported speech serves] to demonstrate that they have first-hand knowledge of the facts” (207-8). The principle Galatolo illustrates at work in the courtroom depends entirely on reported speech having high evidential value in all linguistic interactions.

\textsuperscript{68} Greg Myers writes that “almost all reported speech serves to provide evidence” (387). As evidentiary, reported speech samples serve as focal points through which contingent group affiliations are tested, affirmed, forged, or broken. Many researchers explicitly link the affiliative function of reported speech with the evidentiary-evaluative place it has in conversational sequences. Vološinov initially stressed “the value judgement inherent in every living word” and of the “evaluative orientation” of speech (155). Pragmatic research on speech-reporting suggests that it is never a neutral, disinterested activity. Echoing Vološinov, Buttney and Williams insist on the core principle that “the speaker is not merely reporting speech, but also assessing speech … Reported speech is relevantly tied to assessment. Assessment reveals the reporting speaker’ positioning towards the quoted words … [on a spectrum including] criticizing [or] valorizing … Invoking others’ words can yield conversational power in ascribing meanings to the reported event and building … alliances (113).” Linguistic practice is suffused with evaluation. Recipients of reported speech in particular, are always implicitly or explicitly invited to evaluate the reported speech sample. Just as “every word [in language] is directed toward an answer” (Bahktin 280), reported speech, always solicit an evaluation from recipients. Based on the judgements made (laughing at the anecdote, conspiring against a distal subject, agreeing with an argumentative assertion, storming away in outrage, etcetera) the terms of social affiliation are confirmed, forged or broken.
Invisible, in Speech

Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* is a black comedy, or tragic farce, worth crying about. Good students of Ovid, Lavinia’s rapists Chiron and Demetrius try to improve on Tereus’ (ultimately failed) attempt to silence Philomela. Where Tereus only cuts off Philomela’s tongue, Lavinia is also deprived of both her hands, in order to leave Lavinia without the means of speech or writing in which she might disclose their guilt. By not killing her, they also force her to live on as the odd quantity, the present-absence that is a mute sign of their swaggering power: “leave her to her silent walks.”

One detail Shakespeare carries forward from Ovid is the curse Lavinia is in the midst of formulating at the moment of her subdual. In Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid (the one Shakespeare knew) Philomela promises Tereus her vengeance:

> As prisoner in these woods, my voyce the verie woods shall fill,
> And make the stones to understand. Let Heaven to this give eare
> And all the Gods and powers therein if any God be there. (Arden ed. *Titus* 280)

Unlike Philomela, who manages to complete her (ultimately) prophetic curse (his mutilation of her is partly a response to her threat), Lavinia is caught mid-speech-act. She has just begged Tamora, explicitly in the name of a last-instance gender solidarity, to mercifully stab her rather than allow her sons Chiron and Demetrius to commit the intended injury. Tamora scoffs: “So should I rob my sweet sons of their fee? (178).” One of Shakespeare’s conservative revisions here is to smash the powerful gender bond between Procne, Philomela and the Bacchante women who help secure Philomela’s rescue. Lavinia suffers alone in a world of violent men and “unsexed” women like Tamora. Tamora’s callousness spurs Lavinia to a level of hostility

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69 See Act 3, Scene 1, lines 265-267: “TITUS. Ha, ha, ha! / MARCUS. Why dost thou laugh? It fits not with this hour. / TITUS. Why? I have not another tear to shed.” (204).
unprecedented for “sweet Lavinia.” First, excoriating: “No grace? no womanhood? Ah, beastly creature! / The blot and enemy to our [womankind’s] general name” (179). Finished naming, Lavinia then starts her curse: “Confusion fall–” Interrupted by Chiron: “Nay, then I'll stop your mouth” (ibid.).

Lavinia’s next speech act comes in the following act of the play, as a completion of the curse by other means. Discovered after the attack by her uncle Marcus, she has been made in many productions of Titus since early 1970s to wander the stage as a stylised, zombie-like revenant. I underline it here because the effect is crucial to the meaning of Lavinia, but is relatively inaccessible without seeing the play staged. This Lavinia is silent, trapped in herself, alone in the trauma of an experience that seems incommunicable – and always inconveniently, oddly in view on the margins of the action. During this interval, Marcus warns: “Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped, / Doth burn the heart to cinders” (189) – urging her back towards language. Lavinia hasn’t even means to use suicide as a kind of speech act. As Chiron and Demetrius mock:

CHIRON. An 'twere my case, I should go hang myself.

DEMETRIUS. If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord. (187)

Without the resources of reported speech her trap would seem absolute. In contrast to Tereus, who hides the mutilated Philomela in a guarded cabin, Lavinia’s violators intend for her to live on as a sign, an object in their linguistic order but no subject. As Fanon wrote of such hostile

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70 In his introduction to the Arden edition of Titus, Jonathan Bate surveys a number of productions, citing Peter Brook’s 1972 Stratford production as especially influential in how Lavinia is made to haunt the stage a revenant or remnant of a brutal social order. In Brook’s production, Bate writes, Lavinia “entered with scarlet ribbons trailing from her wrists and mouth. The achievement of a visual stylisation was brilliant – it shaped the predominant theatrical approach to the play for thirty years. … The long red ribbons serve as a translation of the language of the text in that they stand in the same evocative but oblique relation to blood as do such similes as that of the bubbling fountain [in Marcus’ speech at 2.3.22]” (60).
external determination: “Je suis surdéterminé de l’extérieur. Je ne suis pas l’esclave de ‘l’idée’ que les autres ont de moi, mais de mon apparaître” (93) [I am over-determined from outside. I am not the slave of the ‘idea’ others have of me, but of my appearance].

All movement in the narrative now stalls. After a spiralling series of disasters, capped by Lavinia’s return to her father Titus’ home, the Andronici are left unable to act. Titus gropes in the air for “Revenge's cave,” but before Lavinia’s next major speech-act he cannot move forward. Although Titus promises to learn to “wrest an alphabet” from her gestures “And by still practice learn to know thy meaning” (208), he makes no concrete effort. The person who helps her is Marcus. Titus, former chief general of “warlike” Rome, makes a comedic show of his racist ardour by stabbing a black fly in his dinner plate: “There's for thyself, and that's for Tamora. / Ah, sirrah! / … I think we are not brought so low / But that between us we can kill a fly / That comes in a likeness of a coal-black Moor” (210).

The inaction following this seated dinner scene is broken when only the frightened Young Lucius enters, later, bearing an anachronistic stack of books, pursued by an agitated Lavinia. With gestures, she persuades him to dump the tomes on the ground. What follows is a transformatively effective act of reported speech, specifically of the type called (roughly synonymous terms): direct discourse, direct speech or direct reported speech71. As Lillian S. Robinson summarises: “Shakespeare has Lavinia ... point with her stumps to the passage in the Metamorphoses that describes the rape of Philomel” (90). That is: the canon is paracanonically (and literally) dumped into the dust. Within the world of Titus, this is the action of the paracanonic, in its typical brevity and virulence. The effect is that Ovid temporarily sheds its mythic status, becoming again active, negotiable; a corpus rather than a sublimed body.

71 In the direct mode “the writer/speaker claims to produce an authentic version of the prior [talk]” (Holt “Reported Speech” 192-3), a claim that becomes far more tenable when quoting written discourse.
Lavinia’s citation of Ovid – for it is exactly that, a citation – is immediately recognised by the other characters as reported speech. Marcus confirms “See, brother [Titus], see: note how she quotes the leaves” (214). It is intuitively difficult to accept, for many reasons, that Shakespeare’s characters at this turn act so surprised by Lavinia’s revelation. Indeed, they behave as if her rape is a “previously unimagined horror” (Well qtd. in Bate 62). How is it possible that the characters act so surprised? Aaron put the ideas into Chiron and Demetrius’ heads by alluding to the very story Lavinia now quotes with gestures. Marcus also refers to the correct passage in Ovid when he discovers her brutalisation: “But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee / And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue” (188). Characters and audience alike have been made explicitly aware of Ovid as the ur-text of the play and the life-world represented in it; the audience overhears the characters speaking to each other in Ovidian mannerisms and about Ovid. Their surprise at what Lavinia’s quotations reveal are almost incomprehensible in this context; there are dozens of rapes in Ovid.

It may be that Shakespeare wished to set up a Sophoclean peripeteia (a revelation or discovery that is a dramatic turning point), but did not work through the narrative arithmetic: a plot hole. In any case, the lapse and surprise function as the sign an ideological disavowal, one suddenly made impossible to sustain. It enters therefore into the paracanonic, insofar as it evinces a patriarchal self-mystification (that theirs is a system not based in the domination and subordination of women) “surprised with an uncouth fear” (181) by the experience of self-consciousness. One plausible reading of Titus is that the revenge which follows serves more to quell this irritation more than to serve justice. This is one way, for example, of reading Titus’ killing of Lavinia in the final scene – the paracanonic infection has to be contained. It may be that their apparent over-performance of disbelief and outrage is self-protective, false moral
expiation designed to mitigate an agonising awareness of systemic culpability. *Titus*, indeed, eventually resolves in the restoration of the old Roman order: it is a malevolently resilient patriarchal social body what can outlive localised strife.

The apparent forgetting signals Lavinia’s actual subjective erasure in this linguistic order. Discovering her after the assault, Marcus can see Ovid, but he cannot really see Lavinia. The eulogic aspects of his speech, following the discovery, only compiles clichés of Petrarchan love poetry. In Petrarch’s language, woman is a present absence. Until she “quotes the leaves” of Ovid, her violation has only been possible to register as a wound to the beefy torso of Rome. The “surprise” is actually that Lavinia exists independently of the role constructed for her in the opening scene of the play: as economic token in the patriarchal system of property and title inheritance. In that first scene, the surprise is when Lavinia refuses to marry the new emperor Saturninus, choosing instead her betrothed Bassianus: “*Titus*: Traitors, avaunt! … Treason, my lord – Lavinia is surprised” (145). As Bate notes “surprised” here means “suddenly and unexpectedly assaulted” (145).

Another absence is massively present in this scene: Lavinia “quotes the leaves” without hands. With what, then, and how, is she quoting? Her hands had been, Marcus reveals, as virtuosic as those of Philomela, who weaves the revealing message on a crude loom. Lavinia could make “the silken strings [of a lute] delight to kiss them” (189). Now she hasn’t even fingers. That absence symbolises the representational gap Lavinia herself now fills with the direct quote from Ovid. Into that emptiness flows new meaning, a new meaning of a canonic passage borne by the “evaluative accent” (Voloshinov 103) she and the narrative context bring. Rather than a playful or reverent quotation of the master, this is hostile appropriation. Where the “master” text would usually be cited reverently or playfully, as Lavinia paraphrases Ovid early in
act 2 right before her danger is apparent, it is here cited to speak against the revered order. Ovid is made to speak against Ovid, Ovid who provides the canonic pattern of the entire drama. It is possible to make Ovid condemn Ovid only because of the mystification of Ovid, which makes it impossible to address directly how it normalises patriarchal dominance by elegising rape as tragic rather than systemic.

What Lavinia does now is crucial to realising her interrupted curse. Reported speech relies on the iterability of an utterance, its availability for re-iteration and (therefore) re-accentuation in, and as, a new utterance. With Ovid’s own words Lavinia curses the social order Ovid represents. Where she once made a game of showing familiarity with this text, having been transformed into that ambivalent “odd quantity” (who has a command of the master’s language but is oppressed within it), she draws lines of internal bifurcation, the agonistic self-split hot ambivalence. She accomplishes this by distancing herself from the very language that has, so far, determined her in erasure as present-absence. Taking the walking stick of Marcus in her mouth – disregarding his instruction to use her feet – she scratches in the sand: “Stuprum - Chiron - Demetrius” (215). The form of the first word reveals the transformed Lavinia. While typical of the “indecorous and banal” (Craig and Case 40) puns throughout the play, stuprum makes a sinister cross-lingual pun on strumpet and stump, echoing her violators’ taunts: “Write down thy
mind ... if thy stumps will let thee, play the scribe” (187). However, as Emily L. King writes: “Had she written [raptus], the Latin would have stressed the theft inherent in the etymology of ‘rape’ or ‘ravish’ – both words … derive from the Latin ‘rapere’. ‘Stuprum,’ … showcases her violation, a violation that is most explicitly against her rather than a patriarchal protector” (135). Lillian S. Robinson asserts that Lavinia is “using the means available to [her], speech denied, to tell of the brutal violation visited upon one of their number and on the sex as a whole” (Robinson 32-3). A fleshy chunk torn from the canonic body of Ovid becomes, for the duration of a single reported utterance, a prosthetic tongue and a weapon to paracanonically wound that very body.

In this active use reported speech, language becomes for Lavinia a “privileged domain in which to interrogate the cause and effects of social injury” (Butler 71). Lavinia takes the subjugating discourse and uses that discourse itself to bring about opposite effects. That is: Lavinia resists her own erasure in Ovid, by paracanonically inserting herself back into Ovid. As Peter Wollen writes of Kathy Acker: “her plagiarism was a way of reading, or re-reading, appropriating and customising what she read, writing herself, so to speak, into the fabric of the original text” (2). In Titus, Lavinia specifically produces an affiliative rallying around her person that launches the action of the rest the play, a whole cycle of revenge written “in bloody lines” after 500 lines of stasis. The rest of the play is a realisation of Lavinia’s interrupted curse, which might well have been Kathy Acker’s later call: “Let our madness turn from insanity into anger” (Empire 169).

**Outstay the Host**

As Nadia Bashai argues, the “final stage in the revelation of Lavinia’s truths is striking, accentuating the need for somatic meaning to be supplemented by linguistic meanings while
simultaneously demonstrating just how dependent the linguistic is on the somatic. The production of language and linguistic meaning requires a body” (46). Titus’ promises in the previous scene indicate that when Lavinia enters in pursuit of Young Lucius she communicates with para-linguistic signals: facial expressions, handless gestures and sounds. Titus had promised that:

Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
But I of these will wrest an alphabet. (208)

When it comes to her explosive revelation, however, she turns to written discourse: using printed books and scratching letters in the dirt. In the context of her enforced silence, these motifs raise questions about the relationship of writing and speech, particularly as this concerns reported speech. The canon is dumped on the ground, cited with stumps and grunts. But what might seem like a blasphemy may instead be a resurrection, of a kind only possible because of the technology of writing.

The invention of writing systems permanently changes the (potential) relations of the utterance and the body of the utterer, a development which is dramatized in Ovid’s version of Philomela’s story. As Derrida writes in Limited, Inc.:

A written sign, in the current meaning of this word, is a mark that subsists, one which does not exhaust itself in the moment of its inscription and which can give rise to an iteration in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it. ... At the same time, a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organising the moment of its inscription. This
breaking force is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text. (9)

The production of linguistic meaning indeed requires a body, but with writing it no longer requires the co-presence of interlocutor nor the co-presence of utterance and utterer and receiver. With the development of writing systems, a strong trace of the actual verbal form of the utterance becomes (potentially endlessly) iterable. The trace of the utterance’s form implied in direct reported speech is given a material embodiment more stable than is possible before, or outside of, writing. What Derrida notes is that this, in some sense, constitutes a wound to the somatic integrity of oral speech. The utterance appears to now become repeatable without a speaker; it breaks the necessary mouth-ear-mouth-ear circuit of the oral. An utterance now can seem to outlive both addressee and addressee, constituting “an absence [that] is not a continuous modification of presence, [but] a rupture in presence, the ‘death’ or possibility of the ‘death’ of the receiver inscribed in the structure of the mark” (Derrida 8). It is the utterance lopped off, cut off, from the uttering body and which can yet “live on” without that originating body.

In Ovid this wounding rupture is figured, as in Artaud and Césaire above, in the image of a tongue that outstays its host body. Shakespeare does not describe what Chiron and Demetrius do with Lavinia’s tongue. Although the act is anticipated in Aaron’s command to Tamora: “[Titus’] Philomel must lose her tongue today” (170), the violence happens off-stage. Ovid is gorier. In Golding’s translation:

The tip fell downe, and quivering on the ground.

As though it had murmured it made a certaine sound,

And as an Adders tayle cut off doth skip a while: even so

The tip of Philomelaas tongue did wriggle to and fro,
And nearer to hir mistresseward in dying still did go.

To recap Philomela’s story: after this violation, Tereus keeps her imprisoned as a sexual slave while the sun – that is, the determinist cycle of the zodiac – “Past through the twelve celestiall signes, and finisht full a yeare.” At this point in her ordeal, some kind of extraordinary creative spark leaps into Philomela’s eyes:

Great is the wit of pensivenesse, and when the head is ract

With hard misfortune, sharpe forecast of practise entereth in.

She now takes up her famous work on a Thracian loom (Tereus’ barbarian, illiterate tribe) and weaves “purple letters which bewraide / The wicked deede.” Like the 500 lines of paralysed inaction in Titus that precede Lavinia’s revelation, Ovid sets the imprisoned Philomela at the still point in the cosmic wheel, inactive explicitly against the background of the moving zodiac/sun of destiny. The action only begins to move again as Philomela realises how she can come back into language through the loom, as an extension of her own body.

Between Philomela and Lavinia there is a shift in discourse style. Lavinia’s quotations are direct reported speech, while Philomela writes in a hypothetical speech style. It is implied that what Philomela weaves is an entirely idiomatic, original alphabet, legible only to her sister Procne. Theirs is, then a new, militantly feminine (if not feminist) idiom inaccessible to the illiterate, male Tereus. In effect it is a secret language, a potential language. Philomela’s stroke of linguistic genius is, then, not the scene of the invention of writing as such, but that of the emergence of a distinct women’s subjectivity, behoved by the ontological conundrum of irreducible traumas sustained under patriarchal rule, ultimately made possible by the long-distance, restricted bond of writing. It registers the psychic wounding Derrida describes, the wounding in every act of inscription that shows the writer a piece of linguistic “self” severed.
This psychic wound, Ovid argues, of knowing the utterance can now “outlive” even the utterer’s death, is humanly foundational. Artaud’s descriptions of the “fecal agony” of writing analogise precisely this. As Kiyoshi Arai writes: “C’est donc la douleur corporelle de la perte d’âme qui distingue les vrais poèmes des faux. Cette douleur, source même de la ‘poésie fécale’, il l’appelle justement la ‘douleur fécale absolue’” (178) [It is therefore the corporal pain of the loss of soul that distinguishes real poem from false ones. This pain, the very source of ‘fecal poetry,’ he therefore correctly calls ‘absolute fecal anguish’]. Philomela’s tongue, after it falls, attempts to make a “certaine sound,” one usually translated as a “murmur”74. It continues to “speak” like the written utterance, while its writhing at her feet describes the agonising ambivalence of her subjective birth.

**Great Gallimaufries**

Recalling Philomela’s emprisonment in Tereus’ cabin, Kathy Acker writes in *Blood and Guts in High School* (1984): “Living locked up in a slave trader’s room is easy. I mean you have the same emotions over and over and over again, the same thoughts, the same body, and after a while you see it’s all in your mind: you’re stuck to your mind: SLAVESLAVESLAVE” (112). Her practice at this stage of her work often involved directly copying out other writers’ texts, often canonic texts, to fold them into her own books as Lavinian acts of incriminatory quotation. Her practice has stirred a cloud of terms, a cloud that remains unsettled. Writing about the emergence of kitsch pirate tropes and imagery in Acker’s *Empire of the Senseless* (1988), Peter Wollen compiles most of the terms into a single statement:

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74 It is translated that way by Humphries, Mandelbaum, Lombardo and Martin.
Parrot of course goes with pirate – parroting texts, pirating texts, two ways of speaking about plagiarism, or appropriation, as it is more discreetly known.

Détournement, perhaps, to use the situationist term, or re-functioning, to use Brecht's, re-functioning by re-contextualizing, by making strange. (2)

Add to these the names for modernist strategies for re-ordering extant texts: collage (Dada), cut-up (Burroughs), montage (Eisenstein). Or their digital successors with analog origins: copy-and-paste, cut-and-paste, remix, mashup. Literary criticism has its own armature: allusion, quotation, citation, paraphrase, pastiche. Analogies to speech suggest: ventriloquism, speaking in (others’) tongues. Frameworks of property, originality and authorship generate still another set: disguise, smuggling, theft and, most importantly: appropriation and plagiarism.

The last of these, plagiarism, is the term most often used – as variously encouraged and resisted by Acker. The first chapter of Great Expectations (1983), one of her two books that, along with Don Quixote (1986), unambiguously steals its title from a currently canonic work, is entitled, in all caps: “PLAGIARISM.” Yet, as Wollen reports: “she always argued, [what she was doing] wasn't really plagiarism because she was quite open about what she did” (Wollen 4).

Wollen is correct, as far as legal definitions of plagiarism go: “The action or practice of taking someone else's work, idea, etc., and passing it off as one's own” (OED). If the reader can be expected to know that the text has been copied, as Acker’s readers are expected to know, it is not plagiarism. Copyright law defines plagiarism a little differently, as drawing financial profit from someone else’s product (intellectual or otherwise), irrespective of claims to authorship. For capitalism, claims to ownership matter most.

Plagiarism is the wrong term for what Acker does. But plagiarism remains valuable to keep in the orbit of terms around Acker for the connotations it brings of a critique of property
relations, especially such relations as they are reproduced in individualist constructions of originality and authorship in patriarchal myth Canon. The persistence of the term plagiarism to characterise Acker’s practice, in spite of the many available terms that better describe the technique, has been a key sign of its paracanonic virulence. Thinking of Acker as a plagiarist, rather than a *bricoleur* (like, say, Thomas Nashe or François Villon or Comte de Lautréamont), contributes punk-value to Acker’s authorial persona as literary rogue, as an implicitly criminal outsider. Furthermore, plagiarism suggests a disavowal of normative writerly skills: 3-chord postmodern fiction, like 3-chord punk rock, flouts demands of skill and propriety. Kathy the plagiarist is Kathy the bad student, dangerous, dishonest, larcenous. All of this better predisposes readers to receive her formal techniques as critical of patriarchal capitalism and of the property relations that sustain it.

So, without discarding “plagiarism,” or any other of this constellation of useful terms, I want to propose that the most accurate (and so far unused) terms for Acker’s practice can be drawn from theory of reported speech. Reported speech is speech about speech, especially about others’ speech. The manner, framing and “hybridization” (Bakhtin) of Acker’s appropriations always works as meta-commentary on the quoted discourse. Acker’s are quotations about quoting. Across her body of work, her work emphasises different styles of reported speech, starting with a discourse style much closer to direct reported speech, then moving increasingly towards free-indirect and hypothetical reported speech styles in later texts like *Empire of the Senseless*. Reported speech theory preserves the implicit critique of property relations at the very level of how language is understood to be practised and produced as a shared, communal accomplishment. Even in ordinary talk, reported speech deeply problematizes property-based
assumptions about individual voice and ownership claims to any utterance. As Maybin summarises:

The interweaving of voices across dialogues suggests that meaning is not located within an independent speaker’s intentions, but is more a social accomplishment. In this sense, the notion of individual voice becomes problematical, and it is perhaps more useful to view speakers as drawing on a range of dialogic strategies to negotiate propositional and interpersonal relationships with a variety of other voices. (461)

The role of sexuality and violence in Acker’s texts then become newly legible in relation this collective conception of language, as troping the grotesque, porous, radically unfinished “ancestral body of all the people” (Bakhtin Rabelais 19).

Acker’s Great Expectations opens with direct reported speech: a quote from the namesake book by Charles Dickens. Acker appropriates Dickens here, as a figure of myth Canon, in a Lavinian act of quotation and accusation. The opening of Acker’s book is nearly word-for-word the opening of Dickens’ novel:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip [Peter]. So, I called myself Pip [Peter], and came to be called Pip [Peter]. (5)

Where Dickens had Pip, Acker has Peter. It starts, then, with a Freudian slip of the tongue that scrambles the genders of character and author. Acker then quickly cuts-into Dickens with discourse from her own life: the story of her mother’s suicide. As Lavinia did, Acker literally writes herself (back) into the canonic text. The section then becomes manically unreasonable, running off into a peal of horrors. The pseudo-story becomes a grotesque “gallimaufry”
(heterogeneous mixture, confused jumble, ridiculous medley) of information about murders and gang rapes by a group of soldiers. In Acker’s gallimaufry “the limits between the devouring and the devoured body are erased … [as if] [a]nimal and human organs [were] interwoven into one indissoluble grotesque whole” (Bakhtin Rabelais 223). She ends the chapter then by reiterating the aggressively spurious claim that readers have been, all along, reading a direct quotation of the canonic text by Dickens: “Thus ends the first segment of my life. I am a person of GREAT EXPECTATIONS” (16).

As Katie Muth underlines, Blood and Guts in High School draws material directly from a number of sources, including Acker’s own diaries, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, Jean Genet’s The Screens, the folk-tale Snow-White and Rose-Red, Catullus, Stephane Mallarmé, John Keats, Deleuze and Guattari and the elegies of Sextus Propertius (89-91). Acker’s copying in these cases is less direct, more stylised than the opening of Great Expectations – yet in most cases it is announced as direct quotation. Acker plays on the presumption that verbatim reported speech is possible, and then provides delinquent, distorting reports. The main character, Janey Smith, writes a “book report” on Hawthorne. Janey then (Blood is in the third person, but Janey is the novel’s narrator) announces that she will, like Lavinia, carve herself a nook in the corpus of a Roman poet: “Since she had no idea how to write poetry, she copied down all she could remember every pukey bit by the Latin poet Sextus Propertius which she had been forced to translate in High School” (101).

Announcing the translations this way, Janey frames them as direct reported speech. As in other reportings, the recipient cannot necessarily have access to the mythical “original.” The recipient is at the mercy of the claim to accurate transmission and that claim still carries its evidentiary rhetorical force. Irrespective of the question of fidelity, any reported utterance is
marked with a new set of evaluative inflections, those of the reporting speaker, while still carrying those of the prior speaker. In face-to-face talk, the pretence of fidelity is bolstered by speakers’ use of resources such as vocal inflection, gestures and facial expression to strengthen the force of their evaluation and claim. In written discourse such effects have to be realised primarily with changes in form. The result, even when the utterance is claimed as direct reported speech is a hybridization of the utterance that formally inscribes the evaluative re-accentuation by the new utterer. As Bakhtin writes, such hybridization is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (“Discourse” 358)

The encounter Bakhtin names, in the writings of a speech-reporting collagist (or plagiarist) like Acker, or a Lavinia, is a conflictual encounter. Acker preserves the outward form, the meatless shell of Propertius’ poems, by following closely the plots and image-patterns. Janey Smith has already told readers she was an indifferent student, uninterested in this “pukey” poet, and the first lines of the translations show how she has discarded of Propertius’ “grace”, retaining his “filth” (as Lovecraft said of Whitman’s relation to Ovid), adding her own evaluative mutilation:

“Slave Trader first with his lousy me imprisoned eyes” (101).

In her version of Elegy I.8a she works from the pretence of verbatim fidelity, writing in the kind of syntax that results from translations that are made too literally, too directly, as if word-by-word without translating the grammar. Propertius, in the original Latin:

TVNE igitur demens, nec te mea cura moratur?
an tibi sum gelida uilior Illyria?

Propertius, hybridised with Acker’s deliberately faulty, truant student syntax:

Are you really crazy, doesn't you my love mean anything to?

Do you think I'm than icy more frigid Illyria? (105)  

Acker writes herself into Elegy I.3 more fully. The poem is in fact already an ugly date-rape comedy, before Acker goes to work with her hyper-sexualising revisions. Propertius’ scenario might be paraphrased: Ha ha ha I was going to screw Cynthia in her sleep, but she woke up before I could: isn’t that hilarious? Propertius’ narrator comes home from a long night out to find Cynthia sleeping. [Two] warring gods of “Love and Drink” are at tug of war within him, yet both agree he should “kiss her.” As he “insinuates” (Slavitt’s translation) his arm beneath “her unconscious body,” his fantasies are triggered:

Was it me you dreamed of?

Or some other phantom lover, some stranger from whom you recoiled

but who forced you nonetheless to yield to his ardor? (in Slavitt 45)

As he moves in towards his goal, the moonlight awakens Cynthia. She immediately launches into a diatribe against his debauchery and infidelity. The comedy is both that this “tomcat” (Slavitt’s translation) gets an earful from his “shrewish” wife, and more so that her comically angry speech smothers his sexual ardour.

Acker both makes this little poem accuse itself and makes it point at the greater issues of gender injustice with respect to myth Canon, first of all, by changing the gender distribution. Janey Smith is now doing the tomcatting, coming home after a long debauch to the sleeping Slave Trader. Inverting the roles, the rapist is now asleep. The social ubiquity of rape (in the life-

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75 Compare this to a faithful literary translation of the same, by David R. Slavitt: “Are you out of your mind, woman? / … / How can you / Think that I am somehow less attractive than ice / in Illyria’s wasteland?” (54)
worlds of Ovid, Propertius – and Acker) is now acknowledged as the hypocontext of the poem. Janey also unsuccessfully attempts sexual contact. Acker’s further transformations seem also to interrogate Ezra Pound’s comparably unfaithful translations in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius*. Starting with deliberate mistranslations of Villon, which he called “villonauds,” Pound made an entire techne of this kind of (mis)translation, one that demonstrates his ambivalence about canonic authority. Acker is critiquing or dialoguing with Pound here fully as much as she is with Propertius. Like Pound, with his “frigidaire patent” (92) and “expensive pyramids,” (ibid.), Acker comically (the poem becomes blackly humorous, where it was a comedy-of-errors before) shifts the idiom into a lowbrow contemporary idiom.

Drawing directly from images in Propertius, Acker has Janey stumbling in after “endless drinking, drugs, sex,” (104) feeling like a Bacchante who might “drop dead” (ibid). Janey is nevertheless “not yet completely gaga” and later attempts contact with “the apples I’ve ripped off” (Ibid). Everything erotically suggestive and rapishly insinuating in Propertius becomes pornographic in Acker. She preserves Propertius’ allusions to two different rape myths. Andromeda gently

loosed from her cliff

resting, exhausted (44)
in Propertius. In Acker, she has

just gotten away from a horrible green sea-monster

sleeps on the sharp spikes of rocks (104)

The “the beautiful suffering Io” in Propertius becomes the “horny cow” in Acker. Acker further smuggles the poem into the local context of the novel. Of the sleeper’s anger, she notes with

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76 Note that, deprived of language by being turned into a cow, Io had used her hoof, like Lavinia’s staff, to scratch the name of her rapist, Zeus, into the dirt.
casual bigotry that he is: “Temperamental and raging like all the Arabs” (104). Where Cynthia complains, on awakening, that she “was up all hours weaving until I was weary,” the Slave Trader yells: “JUST A FEW MINUTES AGO I WAS TRYING TO WAIT UP FOR YOU BY WATCHING TV” (105). Acker also uses Pound’s technique of homophonic (sound-alike) misreadings, allowing the ways that the original is suggestive of English to dictate certain poetic decisions. Pound famously (mis) translated “nocturnaeque canes ebria signa fugae” into “Night dogs, the marks of a drunken scurry” (94). Acker takes

\[
\text{donec diuersas praecurrents luna fenestras,} \\
\text{luna moraturis sedula luminibus,} \\
\text{compositos leuibus radiis patefecit ocellos.}
\]

And renders as an squirmingly purple, Poundian villonaud:

The windows turned-different-ways the moon running before
the moon flickering light delaying the world
(here unreality):
long beams your eyes revealed

Most importantly, in hybridizing this Propertius poem, the well-known conclusion of the elegy – “Sleep came / in mercy” – gets shifted into another key, an Ackerian key of anguished, even paralytic ambivalence: “OBLIVION IS THE ONLY CURE FOR AGONY” (102-3). What Philomela, Lavinia, Artaud and Acker discover, unlike Janey Smith, is what Aimé Césaire discovered, that the flicker of written discourse is a possible cure for this darkness: “ces mots

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77 An accurate translation would read: “you will sing of the tokens of drunken flight through the dark” (Sieburth in Pound 299).

78 David R Slavitt translates the passage as: “through the shutter, the light of the moon, that friend / to lovers,/ penetrated to open Cynthia's eyes” (45).
discordants écrits par l’incendie des bûchers / sur les oriflammes sublimes de ta révolte” [“these discordant words written by the flames of pyres / over the sublime oriflammes of your revolt”]

(Collected 180-1)

Giver of Purple Forms

As has been remarked, the only choice Shakespeare gives Lavinia involves an impossible, compromise: she can only make her denunciation in “the language of the fathers, the cultural dominators” (qtd in Kingsley-Smith 111). Philomela, by contrast, lives in a less determinate linguistic order. For Philomela and Procne (and their Bacchante co-conspirators), writing their way through trauma into a fully realised subjectivity, the potential remains for a dangerous solidarity of women. This is something Shakespeare explicitly denies Lavinia in her confrontation with Tamora.

Like the unsettled terminology around Kathy Acker’s practice, a controversy has survived as to whether Philomela weaves words or pictures into her tapestry. Philomela’s weavings are variously translated as purple or red designs, signs, alphabet, notes, letters, threads or story. What doesn’t change however, is that these are rendered “on a white background” (Mandelbaum), or, in Golding’s translation, a “warpe of white” (Golding). A possible route for settling this problem is to consider Ovid’s sources for the Philomela story. One of these survives in fragmentary form: Sophocles’ lost play Tereus. In an extraordinary example of the efficacy of a single reported utterance, one that has gained an extended afterlife through writing, one of the only surviving lines from Sophocles’ play has not only been passed down has itself become a trope for relationships of language, technology and gender. It is a trope well known by feminists and classicists: Sophocles’ “voice of the shuttle.” The shuttle of Philomela’s Thracian loom here,
winding back and forth as Philomela inscribes herself into being, might remind readers now of the carriage of a typewriter, or the cursor on a computer screen. This line is reported in the archive of literature only once, in Aristotle’s Poetics, outliving its host body. Gregory Doborov, among others, believes Philomela wove letters, and that the story is about the new, ambivalent status of the voice in written language. Dobrov writes:

The passage in Poetics mentioned above (16.1454b30-37), set alongside the peculiar, doubly determined suppression of Philomela (incarceration and mutilation), strongly suggests that Sophokles invented the tongue-cutting to set up another dramatic innovation: the destruction of Tereus by an act of writing (the recognition scene involving Philomela's textum). Occurring nowhere else in Greek legend as a means of preventing communication, this “lingual castration” is highly marked and serves to emphasize Tereus’ singular savagery. His role as violent suppressor of language is thereby also specified. (122)

Another apparent source for Ovid, Achilles Tatius, indeed recognised that: “Philomela's art provided her with a silent voice” (245).

Building on interpretations like Dobrov’s, it is possible to see in Philomela’s loom-writing, her speaking with “the voice of the shuttle” a highly original communicative act. Philomela may in fact be inventing an alphabet or an idiom that is specific to the communicative needs of the moment. Ovid implies that whatever she weaves is militantly particular to her needs, for communicating with her own sister Procne. To anyone else – be it the servingwoman who carries it “ignorant of what the message is”, or the illiterate, Thracian, Tereus – it would read as clink-clink, unintelligible like a pseudo-language or even as glossolalia. As Lisa Kiser writes,
Philomela is not limited to the language of the fathers, she “enacts the role of the giver of forms” (112).

Among competing definitions of glossolalia, Roman Jakobson’s emphasises their strongly communicative function. He does not regard the evacuation of ordinary semantic freight from words as also an evacuation of meaning. Glossolalia is the use of linguistic forms “totally deprived of a sense-discriminative role throughout an entire pronouncement, but nonetheless destined for a certain kind of communication and aimed at an actual human audience” (214). In Michel de Certeau’s “Vocal Utopias: Glossolalias” he identifies glossolalia as: “a class of related deviant linguistic behaviors characterized by discourse that is fluid and mobile, divisible into phonemic units, and entirely or almost entirely constituted by neologisms” (29). Steve McCaffery’s essay “Voice in Extremis” provides a broad range of examples of glossolalia in historical and contemporary poetics, while researchers like Jakobson and Certeau provide examples from religious worship. To McCaffery’s already abundant set, one might add the pseudo-language passages of medieval farces such as Pathelin, and the jobelin ballades of François Villon. As McCaffery writes, these, together with the many examples of “speaking in tongues” in religious contexts, are “convincing proof of the continuous presence of a sound-poetry tradition throughout the history of Western literature” (163) 80. Anne Tomiche, following

79 McCaffery cites a wide range of writers of the twentieth century and before, including Futurists such as Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksei Kruchenikh and F.T. Marinetti, Dadaists such as Hans Arp, Hugo Ball, Raoul Hausmann, Kurt Schwitters, and Tristan Tzara, and precursors such as Lewis Carroll and François Rabelais.

80 It should suffice to make glossolalia recognisable by merely quoting an example from Pantagruel’s first encounter with Panurge: ‘Agonou dont oussys vous desdagnez algorou: nou den farou zamist vous mariston ulbrou, fousques voubrrol tant bredaguez moupreton dengoulhoust, daguez daguez non cropys fost pardonoflist nougrou. Agou paston tol nalprissys hourtou los echatonous, prou dhouquys brol pany gou den bascrou noudous caguons goulfren goul oustaroppassou.’ Methinks I understand him, said Pantagruel; for either it is the language of my country of Utopia, or sounds very like it” (in Urquhart 201).
novelist John Barth, explicitly names Philomela a *glossolalist*. Their ascription is indirectly confirmed by Dobrov:

The immediate result [of Philomela’s message] is the victory of the Athenian women's literate cunning over their oppressive and crude Thracian environment. An irony implicit in the sophisticated strategy surfaces: Philomela becomes a swallow capable only of ... ‘swallow twittering’ she is deprived of intelligible (Greek) speech, and her song becomes proverbial for unintelligible foreign chatter. (Dobrov 122-3)

It is significant, then, that when Procne receives the message, although she understands it instantly, her tongue is momentarily paralysed:

and then – a fact that cannot be believed –

she does not speak: her mouth is blocked by grief.

Her tongue seeks words of scorn to match her wrath

but does not find them. Nor does Procne weep:

she sinks into herself, imagining (in Mandelbaum 200)

In the immediate instant, this underscores the unspeakability of extreme violence: she joins her sister in speechlessness. However, this silence can also be read like the “gap” left by Lavinia’s absent hands while she “quotes the leaves” of Ovid. The gap represents the other side of the utterance. As a presentation of evidentiary material, an utterance is often reported to launch other conversational – or non-linguistic – actions. The gap is that yet unmaterialised action, the action that the utterance launches or prepares the way for. As Medvedev indeed writes:

The historical reality of the utterance may be subordinate to the reality of the act or the object, and so become a mere preparatory stage for the action. Such an
utterance is not complete in itself. Social evaluation leads beyond its borders to another reality. The presence of the word is only an accessory to another presence. (126)

Tortures of Speech

As Adrian Morfee writes, in the late writings of Antonin Artaud: “There is a grandeur of vision … as Artaud’s contradictory and extravagant ideas fuse with enormous uplifting energy … gesturing towards the unwriteable identity and affirming the superiority of life to language” (205). Artaud himself described this writing as the “récit fabuleux de sa vie réinventée à la lumière des mythes et des prophéties” (Grossman in Œuvres 957) [fabulous story of his life, reinvented in the light of myth and prophecy]. The anguish of earlier texts like Le pèse-nerfs [The Nerve Meter] remains, but transmuted. One of the features of Artaud’s work in this final period (from about 1945 until his early death in 1948) is the constant presence of glossolalia.

Hypothetical reported speech, as outlined above, is “imaginary … possible or conditional in relation to some other event, or that is impossible or contrary to fact” (Myers “Unspoken” 575). Glossolalia, then, is hypothetical reported speech. Certeau calls glossolalia a “fiction of speech” or a “fiction of discourse.” The purpose of hypothetical reported speech, in writing as in everyday talk, is speculative and philosophical. Glossolalia in particular represents a form of what has been called paragnosis (or, in French, paragnosie). Simply: modes of knowledge and of knowing beyond that which can be obtained by normal means. Hypothetical reported speech makes “the speaker … a kind of writer” (Myers “Unspoken” 575), in a process of dialogically working out ideas, to the extent that “awareness of multiple views is essential to thought itself’
(Myers “Unspoken” 574). As Certeau and others record, in religious and spiritualist contexts glossolalia is explicitly presented as hypothetical reported speech. The pretence in religious glossolalia is of is that of verbatim, direct reporting of the (garbled, fantastical) speech of supernatural, unreal, absent or future beings.

The program of electroshock treatments Artaud received preceding this turn in his work, with the emergence of his glossolalia, have been a source of outrage for many of his readers. Prescribed by his main doctor at the Rodez asylum, Gaston Ferdière, Artaud writes of the experience as nothing less than a hellish torture. Artaud’s doctors nevertheless maintained that the treatments saved Artaud from deeper psychotic disintegration. Jacques Latrémolière (responsible for administering the shocks) defended the practice, even claiming to have restored Artaud’s creativity:

He was no longer capable of having a proper relationship with anyone. He was no longer sociable. And if we treated him … it was to protect him from himself. And we saw him come round. Eventually he could write and draw and talk with us again. It was us who gave him that (in Lotringer “Interview” 24).

Artaud indeed wrote at the time that: “Après six ans d’interruption de travail je me suis remis à écrire” (Œuvres 1758) [After a six year interruption I started to write again]. Artaud’s testimony

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81 Buttny and Williams’ study “Demanding Respect: The Uses of Reported Speech in Discursive Constructions of Interracial Contact” includes examples of hypothetical reported speech in high-stakes political discussions. For the study, college student volunteers were enlisted to discuss race, racism and interracial contact after viewing the documentary film Racism 101. Their discussions were recorded and afterwards transcribed. Buttny and Williams found that reported speech was a key resource to “justify, frame or account for” or construct arguments. The speakers turn easily from indirect reported speech to hypothetical reported speech when imagining fictive scenarios. A particularly striking example occurs in Extract 13 (note, for clarity I have discarded the transcription conventions and added punctuation): “If Blacks were the majority … it would be much different, because right now [White people are] at a the point like ‘Well why do I have to respect you?’ You know what I'm saying? ‘You go your way and I'll go mine.’ But if the tables were completely turned the White people would be like ‘Well we have to respect each other we gotta do this we gotta do that.’ And that's the way it would be. (121)”
that the treatments were nightmarish does not necessarily contradict Latrémolière claim that they were effective. Artaud’s renewed creativity is, at least, concrete evidence of a transformation in his state of mind during the period when the terrifying and painful shocks were administered.

Like François Villon, one of the poets Artaud names as a fellow among the “suppliciés de langage,” Artaud thus testifies that for him traumas incurred during periods of incarceration eventually brought out a painfully ambivalent new creativity, altering the grain of a poet’s voice. Villon figured the effect that the tortures in the prison of Meung had on his voice with reference to “Mengier d’angoisse mainte poire” (72) [eating those many anguish-pears]. The “anguish pear” was an adjustable metal tripod that was inserted in a “closed” position into a victim’s mouth, then slowly unscrewed to an agonisingly wide “open” position. As a result of such tortures of speech

De viel porte voix et le ton

Et ne suys qu’ung jeune coquart.

[My voice has the tone and rasp of old age

And I’m still just a young guy.] (72-3)

Artaud’s comparably transformative ordeal by electroshock – echoing those of Philomela, Lavinia and Janey Smith – is figured in a few different ways. As figures of a discursive authority – whose utterances can have transformative material effects, changing the course of individuals’ lives – Artaud’s doctors become to him succubi, evil angels, harpies, demons, vampires, spirits and malevolent humans who nightly gang-rape the delectable body of the sleeping poet. In a key poem of this period, “Artaud le Mômo”, he writes of his body as “drainage” or a “semen-dump” for angels: “Et [mon corps] ce fut toujours vidange pour ange” (Watchfiends 138). So Artaud wakes up
tous les matins avec autour de moi

Cette épouvantable odeur de foutre,

Ce n’est pas que j’ai été succubé par les esprits de

l’au-delà, -

mais que les hommes de ce monde-ci

se passent le mot dans leur ‘périsprit’:

...

afin de me pomper la vie

[If I wake up every morning surrounded by / this appalling odor of jism, /
it is not because I have been succubussed by the spirits of / the beyond, ---
// but because the men of this world here / pass the word around in their
‘perisprit’: ... in order to pump out my life (Watchfiends 149-50)]

Elsewhere in the same poem, electroshock is interlaced with suggestions of sexual violation:

Le bardo est l’affre de mort dans lequel le moi tombe en flaque,

et il y a dans l’électro-choc un état flaque

par lequel passe tout traumatisé

et qui lui donne, non plus à cet instant de connaître, mais d’affreusement
et désespérément méconnaître ce qu’il fut, quand il était soi, quoi, loi, moi,
roi, zut, et ÇA.

[Bardo is the death throes in which the ego falls in a puddle, / and there is
in electroshock a puddle state / through which everyone traumatized
passes, / and which causes him, no longer at this moment to know, but to
dreadfully and desperately misjudge what he was, when he was himself,
his own elf, his fief, wife, life, tripe, dammit and THAT. (Watchfiends 162)

Artaud’s rape is not Lavinia’s nor Philomela’s rape, nor Janey Smith’s – nor even Villon’s, at the hands of Bishop Thibault d’Aussigny. While indexing actions that are both tropological and literal in Shakespeare and in Ovid, rape is in Artaud is a trope for a brutal violation and an unspeakable mental suffering – irreducible trauma. It indicates an absolute personal limit of a suffering that is ultimately incommunicable: the invasion of a vulnerable, incarcerated body by a malevolent alien (simultaneously discursive, material and electrical) force. Generally, it incriminates the “monde de viol où la victime est par ta grâce une brute et un impie” (Césaire 788) [“world of rape in which the victim, thanks to you, is an unbaptised brute” (Lyric 4)]

Cold Ashes, Mummy Powder

After a period of signing his letters “Antonin Nalpas,” Artaud invents a second new name for himself, with the poem “Artaud le Mômo,” subtitled “Le retour de Artaud le Mômo”. As Eshleman and Bador write: “‘Mômo’ is Marseilles slang for simpleton, or village idiot, and as we understand it, ‘Artaud the Mômo’ is the pheonix-like figure which rose from the ashes of the death of ‘the old Artaud’ probably in electroshock in Rodez” (Watchfiends 336). “Mômo” is something like “soft-head”, “idiot”, or “lunatic.” “Momus,” as Eshleman and Bador point out is also “the Greek god of mockery and raillery, the nocturnal voice of Hermes” (ibid.). Sleep and trauma here affect a (mercifully) productive re-derangement. Artaud’s alter-ego is like that of Villon’s, Frémin L’Éstourdis: Frémin the dimwit, or addle-brain, to whom the Testament is supposedly dictated82. Making himself his own “stupid” and or “shell-shocked” interlocutor,

82 The entirety of Le Testament is thus framed as inaccurate direct reported speech, reported by an incompetent, that is then itself bequeathed to Jean Calais who may “L’oster jusques au rez d’une pomme” [“reduce it to an apple
Artaud provides a kind of internal, causal rationalisation for the glossolalia that now become a constant presence in his work. “Mômo” notably ends by asking itself a question that it answers in fantastical speech:

Mais quelle garantie des aliénés évidents de ce monde ont-ils d’être soignés par d’authentiques vivants?

[But what guarantee do the obvious madmen of this world have of being nursed by the authentically living? ... (Watchfiends 166-7)]

In readings of Artaud, these glossolalia are received as a hard distillation, an indivisible remainder within a body of work that itself already poses major challenges to its canonic assimilation. They are on the fringes of Artaud, like Villon’s jobelin poems. Susan Sontag’s essay on Artaud concludes by positioning him as “relevant and understandable, as cultural monument, as long as one mainly refers to his ideas without reading much of his work. For anyone who reads Artaud through, he remains fiercely out of reach, an unassimilable voice and presence” (Sontag lixiv). Artaud’s most influential ideas have been those about the theatre, set out
in his Theatre of Cruelty – but as Artaud himself failed to realise this theatre “a constituent part of the authority of these ideas being precisely his inability to put them into practice” (Sontag xliii), entering thus by urgency and impossibility into the paracanonic. Artaud himself returns frequently to themes of myth and judgement, relevant to questions of canon. His most fully realised enactments of the Theatre of Cruelty were the production of his adaptation of Shelley’s *The Cenci* and his radio production of *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* [*To Be Done with the Judgement of God*]. Against the ground of his constant, pointed address to the cultural field (Artaud’s many letters are predominantly to writers, editors, critics, and artists, not to imaginary beings) his judging God emerges as a potential trope of myth Canon itself. His protest against judgement is against the death-cult of myth Canon. That is: in his striving for life against the cloturing of representation, against, repetition and mimesis, Artaud writes against the totalising dialectic of centre-margin-void that makes some writers live, and write, in permanent preparation for their own deaths83. Many of Artaud’s readers have recognised the vexed relationship to canonicity in his writings. Among the signs of this recognition was the formation, in 1998, of a Committee for the Beatification of Antonin Artaud. In a partly parodic, partly sincere gesture, akin to Sartre’s naming of his book on Jean Genet *Saint Genet*, the Committee petitioned the Vatican to make Artaud “one of the blessed” (Scheer “Introduction” 1)84.

83 The marks of this death-worship are found in both canonic and “minor” writers. For example, there is Yeats’ “To A Young Beauty,” which concludes: “Yet praise the winters gone: / There is not a fool can call me friend, / And I may dine at journey's end / With Landor and with Donne” (140). More poignant (and less repugnant, perhaps) are literary suicides like Thomas Chatterton (in 1770) or the USAmerican beat poet d.a. levy [sic] in 1968. During his life, his friends remember levy often associated poetry and posterity with suicide: “I remember he always used to say ‘When I finish writing this poem I'm gonna kill myself’” (*Third Class* 35).

84 Edward Scheer provides an account: “In Rome, on 15 January 1998, the ‘Committee for the Beatification of Antonin Artaud’ began collecting signatures. They were demanding, not unreasonably, that Antonin be made not a saint, but one of the blessed. They chose this day to make their first public appearance to take advantage of the occasion of a meeting between the Mayor of Rome, Francesco Rutelli, and Pope John Paul II. They took photographs of nuns and priests with their banner, images which later circulated widely on CH99 (independent
As Gail Jefferson observed\textsuperscript{85}, when quasi-glossolalic nonce-words erupt\textsuperscript{86} into speech, in certain positions, there is a relatively narrow range of ways recipients tend to orient to such word-objects. When positioned where yes/no responses are relevant, Jefferson calls these garbled terms “lax tokens” ( “Nyem” 135): mispronounced near-words that can function ambivalently, with valences dependent on the interplay between a recipient’s preferred interpretation of the object and subsequent development of the interaction. In less definite positions, proto-semantic noises like these tend to be treated as particles of laughter, or as failed starts of new topics, or as unachieved words. Even when a guttural sound is truly only “a frog in your throat,” and not laugh-implicative, there is a marked preference to orient to the noise as incipiently semantic, until that orientation is definitely shut down by the interactants in subsequent turns. Readers encountering Artaud’s glossolalia do not have the abundant paralinguistic cues (gaze, gesture, body language, intonation) that help speakers interpret such noises. What they do have is the orgy of tonalities in Artaud. Like many tendentiously comic texts, Artaud’s antics on the page, and beyond the page, put at stake the question of whether or not the reader is ever being invited to laugh. Georges Bataille identified a passage (see Bataille 20) in which this constitutive tension bursts spectacularly in a spray of feces and garlic mayonnaise: “Il vit et c’est tout. / La musique ne lui tourne pas de chair. / (et l’aïoli te contemple, esprit, et tu contemples ton aïoli. Et merde à la fin avec l’infini!)” (Oeuvres 1101) [“He lives that’s it. / Music does not stir his flesh / (and the television of the future) and on local TV broadcasts. Media activists Candida TV joined the movement and helped promote the Committee’s cause through installations, happenings and video-performances. The petition was later presented to the Church but the request was denied. Remembering Artaud’s 1925 letter to the Pope on behalf of the surrealists, which includes references to the Pope as a ‘dog’ and his ‘Roman masquerade’, this is perhaps unsurprising” (1).

\textsuperscript{85} In studies such as: “What’s in a ‘Nyem’?” (1978), “The Poetics of Ordinary Talk” (1996) and “Sometimes a frog in your throat is just a frog in your throat: Gutturals as (sometimes) laughter-implicative” (2010).

\textsuperscript{86} As they do in a letter to Peter Watson on July 27 1946: “arganuf\textsuperscript{a} / daponsida / parganuf\textsuperscript{t} / / ebanuf\textsuperscript{t} / parganupt / ebanupte / pezozipter / / palon / petonme / omne / niza” (ibid.).
aioli contemplates you, and you contemplate your aioli. At last shit to the infinite!)”

(Watchfiends 88)]. Consequently, the glossolalia in Artaud may appear like mis-placed, ambiguous, perhaps cool, laughter – as if the writer is sarcastically deflecting the reader’s judging gaze.

To grasp how these glossolalia function in Artaud, then, it is important to observe carefully when, where, how they appear in a sequential context. Although sometimes cut-in aggressively across Artaud’s line of pseudo-argument, most of the time they are carefully placed, and deliberately inserted as part of a rational discourse strategy. From their first appearances, around 1943, the glossolalia in Artaud are inserted as hypothetical reported speech. In the earlier texts, they represent the speech of supernatural beings (God, angels, demons or saints). After 1945, they serve as hypothetical exempla of the discourse of a future, healed, whole Artaud. It is a dreamed-of discourse. Artaud declares in this period that he no longer believes himself tormented by “démons de l’occulte” but by real people, “des hommes très mauvais qui veulent le règne du mal” (Œuvres 963) [very evil men who want evil to reign]. Greg Meyers writes that hypothetical speech reports are “common in both written and spoken texts,” often being used to dramatize “possible worlds: knowledge worlds, intention worlds, obligation worlds, wish worlds, and fantasy universes” (“Unspoken” 573). Although Artaud’s commentary on his writing is wildly self-contradictory, in several points he does argue that the glossolalia represent the linguistic face of an inwardly mended, rejuvenated Artaud, rather than a vocalisation of his inner chaos.

Ce qui va se passer est que les hommes vont montrer leurs instincts refoulés depuis si longtemps,

et moi mon langage vrai;
a ta aishena
shoma
shora
borozì
bare

une canne d’ulcère rouge
avec une verge de fibres pets. (Œuvres 1367)

[What will happen is that men will show those instincts they have repressed for so long / and me my true language; ... / a red ulcer cane / with a stiff rod of fart-fibres.]

As Myers notes, any reported speech entails a deictic shift. Here, the frame of utterance (“Ce qui va se passer”) anchors it in a present time in which the type of speech represented by the glossolalia does not yet exist. This temporal ambivalence is exaggerated by the textual form of the glossolalia, which, while attesting to a future discourse, forcefully manifest on the printed page the visceral now of massed errors, a clinamen swarm.

One of the many (contradictory) ways Artaud imagines this linguistic future is as a place where the unthinkable ideas that the glossolalia represent, become an evident norm: “Et l’impensable est aussi un être qui un jour replacera la pensée. – Et vous y serez la toute première du côté où l’on enterre la pensée elle-même sous la matière de la pensée” (Œuvres 1305). [And the unthinkable is also a being who one day will replace thought. – And you will be first on the side where thought herself is buried beneath the matter of thought.] One means for deflecting the sensation of being mocked by these eruptions may be to join Artaud, as it were, by echoing his own (early) hyperboles about this language. Thinking of such futurity in terms of utopian
promise, Certeau appears to do just this, amplifying Artaud’s claims that glossolalia represent a total escape from mimesis: “[Glossolalia] is located beyond the reach of truth or of error, outside the walls of any language” (30). From a dialogic perspective, this is strictly a nonsensical claim. From the incipience of communicative gestures – response cries, facial expressions, gestures – animals have already entered the broad territory of language. Language’s boundaries are a gradual shading into silence, or muteness, through various communicative phenomena of lower semantic value. At no point are there delineated boundaries that could constitute “walls” of language. As Medvedev writes: “Even the transrational word is spoken with some kind of intonation. Consequently, some value orientation can be observed in it, some evaluative gesture” (123). Even the nonce word is fully social.

Artaud in fact consistently introduces the glossolalia using very conventional practices for framing the passages as reported speech. Elisabeth Holt observes that “Reported speech is generally preceded by a pronoun, such as I/he/she/they, plus a speech verb which is usually ‘said’ but can be ‘says,’ ‘goes,’ ‘thought,’ etc. ‘Said’ is by far the most common” (224). This basic pattern of “pronoun-plus-speech-verb” (225) introductions or cues for reported speech often precedes Artaud’s glossolalia. In the example below, Artaud reports, comically, the sound of a paranormal fart, followed with another speech report that includes the reporting verb:

âme aum khaum de cet homme qui sur le dos l’arcane de son entre-cuisse

akhurkhur akhurkhur khurkhuna

ici l’arcane s’arrête et dit

Tomar Tobi (Œuvres 1003)

More frequently, Artaud uses punctuation to turn the usually brief passage of glossolalia into a sub-clause of a complex sentence. He inserts the passages following an un-stopped linebreak, or
after a colon or semicolon, or after a connective comma. In this way, the glossolalia are recovered for the sliding grammar of Artaud’s often curiously polite French. There is decorum, too in the modest brevity of these passages. Artaud is even apologetic for the glossolalia. As he writes to Peter Watson: “excusez-moi d’employer des mots bizarres, et un peu pédants” (Œuvres 1099) [pardon me for using words that are bizarre, and a little pedantic].

Bakhtin argues that an utterance involves a kind of collaboration with its imagined or actual recipient, a wager about what the recipient knows and believes: “The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, on his, the listener’s, apperceptive background” (“Discourse” 282). Artaud’s orientation towards a listener is discernible in several ways in the sound design of the glossolalia. As Tsvetan Todorov and Ferdinand Saussure observed, to different conclusions, the pseudonymous glossolalist Saussure worked with, “Mlle Smith,” designed her utterances partly around the avoidance of the letter /f/, as a way of estranging her vocalisations from the sound of spoken French. Alan Weiss detects a parallel design feature in Artaud: the predominance of /k/. As Allan S. Weiss writes: “We should note that the letter /k/ is one of the least frequent in the French language, yet one of the most frequent consonants in Artaud’s glossolalia” (“K” 153). While the letter draws in semantic associations of various kinds (especially with Artaud’s notion of an agonising, fecal poetry, conflating the /k/ of “caca” and of “ka,” (soul)) it also serves the same recipient design function as Smith’s avoidance of /f/. Both Smith and Artaud show, in the design of their glossolalic utterances, awareness of the sound-sensing “apperceptive background” of a Francophone listener. This is the addressivity – the sociality – of glossolalia, which, after all, still design an active recipient. In a letter to art critic Jean Paulhan, Artaud writes of “des actions internes du souffle semblables à celles que j’ai essayé de décrire ou d’exprimer dans l’athlétisme
affectif,” [the internal actions of the breath similar to those I tried to describe or express with my affective athleticism] which he follows with a typically brief, and typically k-heavy passage of glossolalia:

\[
\text{kalam nimkopf polipta} \\
\text{polipta akaripta}
\]

Artaud’s anticipation of his recipient extends even to providing (sometimes incomprehensible) explications for these passages. Immediately following the above, he provides a garbled, or equally poetic, explanation: “ce qui veut dire: si bien que vous vous sentier être à vivre malheur au beaucoup de bien de votre âme si vous voulez être sans le beaucoup total de toute la charité” (Œuvres 989-90). [which means: as much as you feel yourself born to suffer in much of the goodness of your soul if you want to be without the great wholeness of all charity].

At moments Artaud constructs this language as one that, rather than cryptic, primitive or regressive, could be universally understood. He started a rumour that he had written and lost a book entirely in this language, called Lettura d’Eprahi Falli Tetar fendi Photia o fotre Indi. The character of the language was its universal intelligibility: “Et j’ai, en 1934, écrit tout un livre dans ce sens, dans une langue qui n’était pas le français, mais que tout le monde pouvait lire, à quelque nationalité qu’il appartînt” (Œuvres 1015). [And I, in 1934, wrote an entire book in this way, in a language that was not French, but which everyone could read, no matter to which nationality they belonged]. Glossolalia’s sociality is generally evident in its teachability, as Artaud intuits. As Nicholas P. Spanos et al. have demonstrated, speaking-in-tongues can easily

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87 This book may or may not have existed. If recovered, it might enter a relationship with Artaud’s work somewhat like the jobelin of Villon, or the limit-text of Joyce Finnegans Wake. Note that Villon also names a possibly imaginary, possibly lost, book the Roman du pet-au-deable. Scholars of Villon until the 1960s often assumed that the book was lost rather than imaginary, in spite of the evidence contained in the title itself that it is more of Villon’s hot air: Romance of the Devil’s Fart.
be taught to others who are neither Mômo, étourdis, nor derange. Spanos concludes that people “can exhibit glossolalia in the absence of any indexes of trance, support the hypothesis that glossolalic utterances are goal-directed actions rather than involuntary happenings” (23). It becomes an enticing possibility to imagine Lettura d’Eprahi Falli Tetar fendi Photia o fotre Indi as a hypothetical pedagogical text: Artaud the Mômo as ignorant schoolmaster, complimenting the smooth-talking multi-dialect Villon, the virtuosic Philomela, the bad student Kathy Acker/Janey Smith, or the saltpetre linguist Aimé Césaire.

Artaud’s word-forms don’t differ from other eruptions of glossolalia in their palimpsestuous compounding of (mostly recognisable) language sources. As Jakobson observes, readers can witness:

the dependence of glossolalic texts on the sound pattern of the emitter's native language as well as on individual variations in the makeup and distribution of repetitive sound groups concurs with the common ubiquitous principles of structuring a half-improvised and half-traditional esoteric composition of quasi-words. (217)

Artaud’s apparent crossings of French, Latin, Italian, Assyrian and Egyptian, these “sottes incantations de faux sabir, bonnes à rappeler de faux morts” (Œuvres 1099) [foolish incantations of fake sabir, good for remembering the false dead] are sometimes the most orderly dimension of the texts. Unlike the rest they seem, on the page, as comparative islands of calm, places from where a way out the ambivalence-producing conundrums might begin to open. Politely brief, they are formally regular, repetitious, even consoling. Unlike the surrounding action their form is easily observable: visible variations of existing words, and/ or incremental permutations. They show a visible anagrammatical development of their resources (phoneme, grapheme and
morpheme), often towards palindromic near-symmetries. Significantly cooler than the heat surrounding, they are the cold, fertilising ashes of Artaud’s language, supernaturally resilient pieces of ice in the fire:

ge reghi
reghena
gheghena
e regehna
a gegha
riri  (Œuvres 1126)

Spoken aloud, the strict, concentrated formality of these utterances would probably not be as apparent to a hearer. For the most part, however, the glossolalia is encountered in print. Their main life will always be as part of the published œuvre. The core tension they register is Artaud’s stated ambivalence about the status of the written utterance in relation to his own self and body. As Derrida writes: “ce qui est en jeu dans ces glossopoïèses est le statut de la voix et du son dans l’écrit” [what’s at stake in these glossopoieses is the status of the voice and of sound in writing]. Pained as he claims to have been by each act of inscription, as a severing of a part of his body, Artaud’s collected works cover more than 16,000 pages. The survival of Philomela’s tongue dramatizes “The principle according to which we can wean a written text from its origin is simply that the text has a permanence that enables it to survive the death of its author, receiver, and context of production” (Limited 54) – the site of Artaud’s horror at writing. Artaud asks: “Devant tout ceci que reste-t-il de l’ancien Artaud? / Des notes” (Œuvres 1346) [Before all of this what remains of the old Artaud? / Notes]. While writing gives him some command of his unruly self, it seems to cost his self-pulverisation: “pas le concassement du langage mais la
pulvérisation hasardeuse du corps pars des ignares” (Œuvres 1335) [not the fragmentation of language but the hazardous pulverisation of the body by ignorami]. In that line, these written glossolalia are pathetic traces of what they ideally mean or could be: “écrit ici cela ne dit rien et n’est plus que de la cendre” (Œuvres 1016) [written here this says nothing and is no more than ashes].

After their inscription as writing, the task of reanimating the glossolalic ashes necessarily falls out of Artaud’s control. It becomes a task for his anticipated but unknowable reader. He therefore leaves instructions: “Mais on ne peut les lire que scandés, sur un rythme que le lecteur lui-même doit trouver pour comprendre et pour penser” (Œuvres 1015) [But we can only scan them, with a rhythm the reader must find for understanding and for thinking]. The same readers are elsewhere figured as a ghoulish bourgeoisie, who, in reading Artaud, keep young by devouring the mummy-powder of his corpse:

Je suis ce mort dont on mange la poudre: extrait thyroïdique or ovarien de fini, d’à la fin de quand c’est fini

et je le sais (Œuvres 1102)

[I am that dead man whose powder is eaten: thyroidal or ovarian extract of caput, of the end when of when it’s over / and I know it. (Watchfiends 89).]
Chapter 4: “Against My Eroded Face, Press Your Cold Face of Ravaged Laughter”: A Pragmatics of Unhappy Laughter, read through Petronius Arbiter, C.R. Maturin, H.P. Lovecraft and Aimé Césaire

Laugh or Scream Out Loud

In his government commissioned Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department (1991), investigator Warren Christopher reveals an unhappy truth: the brutal beating of Rodney King by members of the LAPD was carried out in a jocular, joking mood. His evidence is drawn from transcripts of messages sent through the “Mobile Digital Terminal” (MDT) system of text-messaging the LAPD were using at that time. The MDT functioned in several ways that are significant here. First, they recorded all the joshing messages officers sent after the attack, as well as others of similar character around the time of what is called “the King incident.” The automatic archiving of these messages had not yet brought about much self-consciousness or restraint in how officers used the MDT. In spite of the fact the messages were monitored and archived, messages sent on the MDT reveal an utterance design that assumes a closed, private participant framework. The officers treated the MDT as a medially transparent extension of private face-to-face talk. As Christopher emphasises, this was part of its function: “The MDT network offers the advantage that it cannot be monitored by civilians as can police radio communications” (48; my emphasis). Anyone who received the messages within the MDT system was considered part of an “in-group.” What Christopher found in those transcripts substantiated abundant eyewitness and victim reports – often dismissed as paranoia or urban myth, if not as “reverse racism” – about the playful frame in which police brutality is often exercised. At the scene on March 3, 1991, Ronald Jacobs writes: “Accounts from witnesses
reported that the officers were “‘laughing and chuckling [after the beating], like they had just had a party.’” (84).

Some of the police’s jokey MDT communications sent after “the King incident” were leaked to the public, a leak engineered by the mayor of Los Angeles Tom Bradley. Bradley was a former police officer, and LA’s first black mayor. The evidence of the joking, and the group laughter it implied, provided Bradley a platform from which to argue that the assault was not an “aberration” (qtd. in Jacobs 82), as then Police Chief Daryl Gates had called it. Bradley could now argue confidently: “It is no longer possible for any objective person to regard the King beating as an ‘aberration.’ We must face the fact that there appears to be a dangerous trend of racially motivated incidents running through at least some segments of our Police Department” (qtd. in Lawrence Politics of Force 74). Responding to public expressions outrage that ensued, Christopher’s research team included in the Report a review of a 6-month sample of MDT messages circulated within the LAPD. Christopher coolly that

Although the vast majority of messages reviewed appeared to be routine police communications, there were a number of messages, similar to those publicised after the King incident, in which officers from all geographical areas of the City talked about beating suspects and other members of the public. (48-9).

In the “number of messages” in Christopher refers to the officers joked about rather than neutrally “talked about” beating suspects. Reading these MDT transcripts in the report is a little like reading Sigmund Freud’s Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious (1916), insofar as they are taxonomically organised, according to exemplariness of content, form and humoristic device. It should be a stark reminder that the form of the joke, as such, reveals little about its social function or meaning.
I do not find the transcripts I’m about to quote to you in any way funny. I find them almost unbearable to read. Yet it is important not to take my own disgust as a reason to de-define them as jokes. Someone found them funny; therefore they are, socially, and in an interactive sense, real jokes. To quote Michael Billig, “A social constructionist position is taken here. ‘Humour’ and ‘jokes’ are indicated by the claims of participants, not the preferences of the analyst” (“Hatred” 272). The repartee in the MDT transcripts is about police adventures in pursuing, capturing, and assaulting racialized suspects. In most cases, they frame violent incidents as comic adventure or play, transforming the incidents – for those inside the circle of the joke’s addressees – into slapstick.

One officer names himself, jokingly, “Sgt Brutality” (49). Another sends a one-liner: “Hi . . . just got mexercise for the night” (72). Their humour is sometimes built with extended analogy or metaphor: “I would just beat and release that fat slob in the red suit named ... Homey Claus ... and I heard reindeers real good eating ... hohoho mofo ...” (50). There is coy antiphrase: “Smile. I'm against viol[ence]” (50). And there is hypothetical reported speech: “Don't cry Buckwheat, or is it Willie Lunch Meat” (72). Sometimes two officers collaborate in the shared task of building a joke: “[Officer A:] ‘Everybody you kill in the line of duty becomes a slave in the afterlife’ ‘[Officer B:] Then U will have a lot of slaves’” (52). One of the exchanges published through the news media on March 19, 1991 referred specifically to the beating of King. Structured like a knock-knock joke, it was sent while King was bleeding a few feet away. Calling for medical assistance, one of the perpetrators types: “[A:] oops’ ‘[B:] Oops, what?’ ‘[A:] I haven't beaten anyone this bad in a long time’ (15). On numerous occasions, the officers type out onomatopoeic representations of laughter, to perform laughter and invite others’

88 In case it is not clear, this officer is punning “Mexican” with “exercise.” Chasing Mexican-American suspects, presumably on foot, is his “mexercise.”
laughter. In response to the above another officer answered: “Oh well ... I'm sure the lizard didn't deserve it ... HAHA I'll let them know OK” (14). Earlier on the same night that King was beaten, another incident had been framed thus: “[A: It was] right out of Gorillas in the Mist” ‘[B:] hahaha ... let me guess who be the parties’ (71). If Freud were compiling the report, he might have remarked, after quenching his laughter, that the “Gorillas” joke is “an excellent example of a comic degrading comparison” (785).

If one assumes that the form of the joke is less important than the activity of joking itself, as evidence such as this insists, the guiding research questions necessarily change. As Phillip Glenn writes, “The fundamental question shifts from ‘Why do people laugh?’ to ‘What are people doing when they laugh?’” (Laughter 33). In his study, “Humour and Hatred: the Racist Jokes of the Ku, Klux, Klan” Michael Billig performs a perhaps grimmer investigation than Warren Christopher's, that of sifting through numerous KKK-associated, white power humour websites. Billig is mainly concerned with the relationship between hatred and humour, group identity and joking, and how “the pleasures of hatred” (267) contribute to the constitution of such groups. As Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain write: “Laughing with can simultaneously be laughing at by establishing nonalliances leaving out those who are not involved in the laughter. This results in the simultaneous evocation of different membership categories for different participants” (253). Jokes invite laughter, but they with strong social differentials – in this case with extreme prejudice.

In Billig’s study, he takes special note of the discursive practices used to mark and define in-group and out-group boundaries. With racist jokes like the ones on these sites, he finds a recurrent technique, imported to the online environment from face-to-face speech situations, of disavowing the “seriousness” of their representations by aggressively re-framing them as
“nonserious” by calling them jokes. Billig quotes here from two different websites): “‘The site is meant as a Joke’” and “‘YOU MUST HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR’” (274). These utterances design a highly differentiated reception framework. The courts, it is supposed, are legally compelled to read the disclaimers literally. White power insiders are expected to detect that discourse condition and enjoy further amusement at the ironic bifurcation of the utterance. Read in this antiphrasal mode, they also embed incitements to violence. As Billig writes: “Thus NJ, having declared that the site is ‘for humor sake’ [sic] follows this with the sentence that ‘No one is condoning violence against anyone’” (275).

The shock Billig expresses at these patterns is perhaps disingenuous, in light of his total findings. He reports surprise at discovering that real violence is constituted, in such interactions, as laughable. Billig writes that

The disclaimer, by its contrast between humour and actual violence, portrays the idea of shooting, maiming and killing black people as only a joke. The apparent legal defence is that the very idea of such extreme racist violence is a matter for laughter. Perhaps even more shocking than any actual call to violence is the claim that imagining racist violence – whether firing a gun at a defenceless figure or training a dog to savage a black man – is understood to be funny. (“Hatred” 283)

Billig, who would later write the book *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* (2005), is very aware of how cruel the group-binding functions of laughter can be to those excluded from the bond. Another early twentieth century text on humour, often read in relation to Freud’s passages on joking as sublimated aggression, is Henri Bergson’s *Le Rire* (1900). If the examples of Freud presents have, as they say, aged poorly, Bergson’s have not.

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89 Here is a joke that Freud uses as an example that blends witticism with “sophistic faulty thinking”: “*The marriage broker* is defending the girl he has proposed against the attacks of her prospective fiancée. *The mother-
Early in *Le Rire* Bergson provides two examples, each centering on physical injury to the butt of the laughter. Bergson writes: “Un homme, qui courait dans la rue, trébuche et tombe: les passants rient” (9) *[A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by laugh].* It is interesting here to note that one could not tell Bergson’s anecdote as a joke: “A man is running in the street, and then… falls!” And what is it about these passers-by that makes them laugh rather than catching their breath with concern? On the following page Bergson provides another example, involving another fall:

Voici maintenant une personne qui vaque à ses petites occupations avec une régularité mathématique. Seulement, les objets qui l’entourent ont été truqués par un mauvais plaisant. Elle trempe sa plume dans l’encrier et en retire de la boue, croit s’asseoir sur une chaise solide et s’étend sur le parquet. (10)

*[Now, take the case of a person who attends to the petty occupations of his everyday life with mathematical precision. The objects around him, however, have all been tampered with by a mischievous wag, the result being that when he dips his pen into the inkstand he draws it out all covered with mud, when he fancies he is sitting down on a solid chair he finds himself sprawling on the floor* (9).*

Bergson’s examples remain current; consider the popular compilations of candid video footage on such as *Fail Army* or the early television series *Jackass* that ran on MTV from 2000 to 2002. The accidents these present as laughable are not pratfalls by stunt performers, they are real

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*in-law does not suit me,’ the latter remarks. ‘She is a crabbed, foolish person.’ ‘That’s true,’ replies the agent, ‘but you are not going to marry the mother-in-law, but the daughter.’ ‘Yes, but she is no longer young, and she is not pretty either.’ ‘That’s nothing: if she is not young or pretty, you can trust her all the more.’ ‘But she hasn’t much money.’ ‘Why talk of money? Are you going to marry money? You want a wife, don’t you?’ ‘But she is a hunchback.’ ‘Well, what of that? Do you expect her to have no blemishes at all?’’* (635) Perfect comic form – and perfectly misogynist.
accidents. Laughing at such “raideur de mécanique” (10) [rigidity of the mechanical] – whether misfortunes or pranks – can only ever be an increment away from laughing at deliberate acts of violence.

Freud regarded much joking as sublimated aggression or a symbolic form of violence: “Whoever laughs at a smutty joke does the same as the spectator who laughs at sexual aggression” (693). In line with Freud, Bergson’s laughter is often read as being an example of a “superiority theory” of humour. Phillip Glenn summarises superiority theory as the theory that “people laugh when comparing themselves to others and finding themselves … at an advantage” (Laughter 19). In group settings, shared laughter – for which jokes provide lures and invitations – functions to draw, redraw and maintain group membership boundaries. As Glenn writes, laughter “provides ... a group unity or awareness … a means of displaying ... group togetherness. Laughing at people or things external to the group can strengthen boundaries, solidifying members in their group identity against outsiders” (Laughter 30). One factor, socially, that provides the further increment separating Bergson’s bourgeois chuckle from the hateful sneer of the LAPD is the organisation and boundary of the social group. In this case, the group thus constituted is also a group of ideological racists using laughter that follows upon violence as a means of bonding. To draw out this function is, let me be clear, does not naturalise racism. Membership categorisation mechanisms are insufficient to produce racism. Constructing racism – which is a set of discursive, institutional and economic practices that developed principally to serve capitalism, in the specific forms of colonialism and chattel slavery – required a long, determined effort. Racism does not come naturally: it required strong economic incentives, and concerted effort. However, once racism has been socially and institutionally established, membership categorisation is one of the many socio-linguistic resources that racists and racism
can draw on for reaffirmation. The MDT transcripts show the LAPD’s identity as a racist group in the process of being promoted and maintained by making jokes at the expense of their acutely racialized victims. And as Bergson admits, his *raideur de mécanique* merely euphemises a process of de-humanising re-categorisation in the moment of comic recognition: “Nous rions toutes les fois qu'une personne nous donne l'impression d'une chose” [We laugh whenever a person gives us the impression of being a thing]. Such processes come nakedly to the foreground in all-too-ubiquitous practices such as racist joke-telling.

**Celebration and Trouble**

In 2004, a research team of psychologists working under Michael J. Platow published a study of membership self-categorisation in relation to subjects’ responses to canned (pre-recorded) laughter. Their findings build on the claims made above. The very definition and collective ratification of the *laughable* – the thing that is nominated to be laughed at, such as an incongruity, a witticism or a punchline – depends on the self-definition of the group. Platow’s team report that

> Participants’ overt smiling and laughter, as well as their ratings of humorous material, were greater only in response to hearing in-group laughter. Hearing out-group laughter did not increase overall mirth relative to when canned laughter was absent altogether. … our results suggest that people actively attend to who is laughing, and laugh a lot themselves only when they have heard fellow in-group members laughing. … [It is] in-group rather than outgroup laughter that makes people think something is funny. (548).
Another means by which laughter can contribute to group sodality is, more simply, by focalising attention. As Glenn writes: “Individual speakers do not laugh continuously, but collectively, the participants provide for the relevance of, and produce, continuing shared laughter orienting to a single laughable” (Laughter 78). The laughable is an object of common attention that becomes the focal point for a process of evaluation that, itself, tests, redraws, and reorganises affiliations and alignments within the group. Together we laugh.

Researchers in fields of social psychology and evolutionary psychology⁹⁰ are moving towards consensus that laughter is a pre-linguistic (in evolutionary terms) communicative behaviour, one that is primarily oriented towards group solidarity, which becomes grafted to verbal language. As Robert R. Provine writes, laughter appears to be “a unique and ancient mode of prelinguistic auditory communication that is now performed in parallel with modern speech and language” (“Contagious” 1). Provine speculates usefully that: “The traditional difficulty in discussing the nature of laughter and related matters such as humour is the likely consequence of attempting to reason about a prelinguistic, largely unconscious process” (“Contagious” 3).

Laughter appears to be part of the evolutionary root system of language. Laughter first nourished language, later densely entwines language, but never becomes part of language. Glenn and Holt write that laughter: “is not linguistic but it accompanies language, often intertwined with speech, shaped by and shaping speech sounds” (“Introduction” 1). Transcripts of conversation that include laughter reveal consistent patterns of laugh-sequences that start with minor laugh-relevant sounds, such as in-breaths or shards of laughter referred to as “interpolated laugh particles” (Potter and Hepburn 2010), inside or adjacent to key words like clinamen. These might

then be picked up and echoed by other interlocutors, depending on what kind of interactive work the laughter is doing. Sometimes echoing and mimicry develop into an episode of shared laughter – “flooding out” (Jefferson “Exercise” 31) until the whole group laughs together. In certain cases, the laughter floods out so much that there is a complete, temporary suspension of other interactive activities. Observing these patterns, laughter begins to reveal itself as an uneasy companion to speech – sometimes it works in close coordination with speech; sometimes in uneven parallel; sometimes in competition.

Although below I will consider some cases and representations of laughter that appear uncontrollable, I will do so explicitly against the backdrop of recent findings about the skilful rhetorical control with which speakers use laughter. In spite of ascriptions to laughter of an “uncontrollable” character, most laughter is in fact precisely coordinated with speech. Predominantly, it is used as an accentuating device for marking ambiguities, and various other interactional difficulties. It most often marks potential trouble, emerging trouble or, indeed, makes trouble by introducing volatile ambiguities, or creating opportunities of ambivalence. Laughter is, more often than not, an unhappy event, when interactants slip out of synch. Typically, laughter is used with observable precision to signal such things as “contrast or an emerging conflict” (Ticca 107), or other misalignments. It is used at points of tension or outright rupture. From this point of view, unhappy laughter “is regarded not as an involuntary reflex or instinct but rather as controllable, systematic and precisely placed” (Glenn Laughter 32).

Evolutionary biologists Gregory A. Bryant and Athena Aktipis’ work on the “animal nature” of laughter (2014) further contributes to this picture. Replaying recordings of laughter to volunteer test subjects, Bryant and Aktipis’ find that hearers can distinguish laughter produced “spontaneously” (in response to stimuli) from laughter produced “deliberately” (334). They
argue that their “results suggest that spontaneous and volitional laughter are produced by different underlying neural control systems, with spontaneous laughter generated by phylogenetically older vocal production mechanisms” (334). This may help to account for the fact that, although laughter often floods into or bleeds out during ordinary conversation, such incidents tend to be quickly terminated. To terminate the relevance of laughter, talkers may cease laughing along, they may continue non-laughing talk about the topic prior to the laughter (or about the laughable itself), or they may change the topic altogether. Normally, to sustain shared laughter, beyond a short sequence of conversational “turns” (Sacks et al. 1974) requires that new laughables be nominated at regular intervals (see Glenn and Holt 15). Massively flooding-out laughter episodes, those that seem to burst the ordinary framework of coordination, cooperation and turn-taking in talk, are rare enough that people find the events memorable. This memorableness stands in contrast with most laughter, which makes its worrying contributions without a strong appeal to independent attention.

The broader literature on laughter includes a few often-reported, legendary examples of long episodes of group laughter that became difficult to quell. The mistaken belief in the uncontrollableness of laughter might arise from its observed contagiousness. Provine argues, from the foundation of studies using so-called laugh tracks or “canned laughter” (Provine 1992) laughter can be sufficient, by itself, to simulate other laughter – without the contribution of anything “funny.” Laughter isn’t alone in possessing this quality: “It shares this distinction with [other nonverbal vocalisations] crying, humming, roaring (such as a crowd at a sports event), keening, screaming, moaning, and sounds of sexual passion” (Fry and Allen 141). An important point to observe, in laughter’s divergence from talk, is that while overlapping talk is dispreferred (treated as competitive and therefore quickly terminated) all the vocalisations in the above group
recurrently overlap. Once someone is laughing, “others can join in at any point without being heard as asynchronous or competing” (Glenn *Laughter* 54). Laughter appears to spread like a contagion, versus the organisational preference in talk for one speaker at a time. When laughter spreads to large groups, and is sustained far beyond limits of normal interactive form, beyond the typical turn or unit, it is often read as pathological.

Provine opens the laughter chapter of his book, *Curious Behaviour*, with reference to what is probably the best known historical “laugh epidemic.” But as Christian F. Hempelmann concludes, against the way the episode is usually narrated, there was much more to this incident than happy laughter. Provine writes about the “Tanganyika Laugh Epidemic” in a typically restricted frame, with many of the conventional elisions and omissions:

Consider the bizarre events of the [January 30] 1962 outbreak of contagious laughter in Tanganyika (now Tanzania). What began as an isolated fit of laughter in a group of twelve- to eighteen- year-old schoolgirls rapidly rose to epidemic proportions. Contagious laughter propagated from one individual to the next, eventually infecting adjacent communities. Like an influenza outbreak, the laughter epidemic was so severe that it required the closing of at least fourteen schools and afflicted about a thousand people. Fluctuating in intensity, it lasted for around two and a half years. (*Curious* 39)

Hempelmann complicates this account by restoring lost details, present in the first report of the incident made by Phillip and Rankin, but quietly dropped from nearly all subsequent tellings. The symptoms, Hempelmann reminds readers, included crying, yelling, agitation – and perhaps even violence. Moreover, while this episode is often reconstructed as “merry”, “joyful”,

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“delightful”, Hempelmann observes that “delight is far from the feeling of despair and confusion. Rankin and Philip report the victims of the epidemic to have experienced” (51).

If the episode in Tanganyika is to be understood as the social – not strictly medical – episode it was, it has to be taken out of its exquisite isolation as anomalous and set back into its historical context. Philip and Rankine allow that it was “a culturally determined disease” (Phillip and Rankin qtd. in Hempelmann 55). The ambivalent mix of display behaviours Phillip and Rankin report, including crying, fainting, screams, along with a great deal of laughter, converging into what is clinically referred to as “mass psychogenic illness”, was a painful, complex demonstration that marked the passing of a profoundly traumatic period of African history. After 450 years of colonisation and subjection to slavery, the region was emerging into a difficult, uncertain independence. Only six weeks before the laughter episode, on December 9, 1961, Tanganyika became independent of colonial rule. If the “laughter” was epidemic, it was as part of a chain of similar outbreaks during a “bizarre, scary, exhilarating, and dramatic time” (Nasser 2014). There were “running manias … characterized by aimless running, general hyperactivity, as well as violence” (Hempelmann 56). There were also attacks of a kind of mass Tourette’s: “in July 1971. Fifty of the 287 students of a Rugarama male primary school show grimacing, vulgar language, and aimless walking, as well as laughing” (ibid.). One significant correlate Hempelmann fails to include occurred in Zanzibar less than a year before91. In June 1961 in Zanzibar there were outbreaks of “race riots” known as “The War of the Stones”. The War of the Stones had deep impact on the region. As Glassman writes: “In the months following June 1961, rumors and political speech from all sides transformed the riots into a ‘chosen trauma,’ an event invested with mythic meanings of victimization, dogged survival, and deferred

91 To the east of Tanganyika, Zanzibar was, through much of the area’s history, part of the same territory as Tanganyika; the regions reunited to form Tanzania in 1964.
revenge” (264). If the crying, screaming and violence is left out of accounts of the “laugh epidemic”, I propose that accounts of riots also redact a great deal of laughter.

As Holt and Glenn observe “laughter shows up time and time again in two kinds of environments: celebrations and trouble” (“Introduction” 2). Riots are, massively, social environments in which trouble and celebration often become indistinguishable. Some reports of the Rodney King riots include reports of laughter. As anarchist commentator Adam Bregman writes: “Reporters on the scene were alarmed to see looters smiling and laughing. … The crowd turning over and setting on fire the police car downtown was laughing, cheering and howling because they were having a blast and it was a crowd of mothers and their children, every race and age and every kind of folk you’d meet in this diverse city” (Bregman n.p.). Laughter is normally left out of accounts of riots for several reasons, one being its often unexamined association with humour. Thinking of laughter as something done mainly to show appreciation of humour restricts how its complex social functions can be observed and understood. Images like Aimé Césaire’s aptly apocalyptic “rire de vertige où s’abîmeront fascinées les villes” (832) [vertiginous laughter into which mesmerised cities will sink], recalling the laughter Bregman cites as well as the 3,600 fires set, the 1,100 buildings destroyed and the 53 people killed (see Avila 106) in the 1992 LA riots, will seem anomalous, surreal or hyperbolic.

What Hempelmann says about the laughter during the Tanganyika episode can be said of the laughter that abounds during riots (and most laughter in general): “it had nothing to do with humour” (50). The observation, however, has much broader ramifications. Very little of the

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92 A compilation of news footage produced during the Rodney King riots is available on YouTube. In much of this footage, rioters, interviewees and anchor persons make frequent reference to the celebratory tone of the riots, and the abundance of laughter. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gCHS7CsjsE
laughing people do, in fact, is in response to humour. Indeed, much “laughter occurs without anything noticeably humorous nearby, and much that people think of as humorous occurs without laughter” (Glenn and Holt 2). Laughter and humour orbit each other, but on very wide ellipses. As Glenn notes, laughter “is so inconsistently associated with humour that experimental psychologists have abandoned using it as a reliable indicator that the subject perceives something as funny” (Glenn Laughter 24).

What effect does this knowledge have on the status of the joke as such, like those cited at the opening of this chapter? Social psychologist Lawrence La Fave proposes that what is normally thought of as a joke does not, in fact, exist: “There’s no such thing as a joke. Nor am I joking when I say this. In fact, it would be impossible for me to make a joke since there are no jokes. … [S]timuli do not have absolute stimulating value. Therefore a joke as humorous stimulus nonexists” (“Ethnic Humour” 238). La Fave is far from the only person to make this argument, and it is not an argument only found in psychology or in social sciences. Baudelaire, in “L’Essence du rire” asserts that “Le comique, la puissance du rire est dans le rieur et nullement dans l’objet du rire” (8) [The comic, the power of laughter is in the laugher and not at all in the thing laughed at]. Gerard Genette similarly agrees with La Fave’s position, in a way consistent with pragmatic linguistics: “Il n’est aucun objet qui soit comique en lui-même et qui fasse rire par essence: ce n’est pas l’objet comique qui fait rire, c’est le rire qui fait qualifier de comique l’objet qui semble en être la cause” (“Morts de rire”169) [There is no object that is comic in-of-itself and which is laughable in essence: it is not the laughable that makes people laugh, it is the laughter itself that constitutes the object, which only seems to be the cause of the laughter, as comical]. Laughter itself becomes the frame for the object, for the laughable.

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93 Following Provine, O’Connell and Kowal estimate that the percentage of humour-relevant laughter, among all laughter, is “only 10% to 15%” (“Bill Clinton” 276).
Laughter functions as both context and inference, nudging it away from its assumed proximity to humour.

The argument for the nonexistence of jokes provokes the question: ‘What is it, then, that people laugh at?’ The answer is simple, but consequential: anything. Just as people laugh in almost any situation, anything can be (and probably has been, at one turn or another) successfully nominated as a laughable. In reported speech, for example, an utterance that was non-laughable in its prior context is often made laughable in a new context. Glenn and Holt summarise that the “range of possible referents [of laughter] is wide, perhaps as wide as communication itself, for laughter is omnirelevant” (Glenn and Holt 8). The laughableness of something is an interactional achievement, not a property inherent in the thing being laughed at. Recognisable joke structures and forms – like those Freud gathers, like several of those in the Report of the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department – when cued, by means of smiles, pre-laughs, or other signals, do the interactive work of signalling that the teller desires a laughing response. To put it in other terms: the recognisable forms work to provide for the relevance of laughter as a response. Standard joke forms are not “inherently” funny; a punchline joke has exactly the same form as a riddle, and similarly functions as a test of recipients’ understanding. As Harvey Sacks argued: “Jokes … are constructed as ‘understanding tests’. Not everyone supposedly ‘gets’ each joke, the getting involving achievement of its understanding, a failure to get being supposable as involving a failure to understand” (“An Analysis” 346). The presence of joke/riddle forms, when successfully cued, tells the hearer that the activity of joke-telling is underway, and invites the hearer to ratify the nomination by laughing. To approach laughter in this way changes the understanding of the social basis of humour. As Philip Glenn continues:
In such a conception we move away from the simple assumption that laughter follows humour, to a mutual constitution model that suggests that the occurrence of laughter marks its referent (usually recognised retrospectively) as laughable – and, potentially, as humorous. Funniness becomes understood not as an inherent property of a message, or the internal state of a social being, but rather as a jointly negotiated communicative accomplishment. (*Laughter* 33)

My concern for the rest of this chapter, then, is not with humour as such, nor with defining what makes a certain textual event funny or not. What I will consider are representations of laughter. Borrowing something from the methodology of conversation analysis, I start with the assumption that “What something *means* is what it *does*, in its sequential location, in interaction” (Glenn and Holt 3). As I move through a number of texts disparate in time and place, but in which laughter is a massively recurrent motif, I will continue to develop the concept of laughter as communicative behaviour, and to look at representations of laughter with attention to what the laughter seems to *do*, communicatively. Together these texts provide mutually supporting, yet contrastive constructions of laughter as a communicative resource, relevant to the broader activities of the paracanonic. The speculation I wish to make is that paracanonic activity is homologous with the relation of unhappy laughter to semantic speech. A paracanonically active text may probe, problematize, ambiguate the relationships constructed in myth Canon in much the same way that unhappy laughter marks discourse. Anca Parvulescu suggests that this might be because of how laughter’s spastic particularity in the body is resistant to hegemony: “The body in laughter is a convulsive assemblage, whose parts shake and dance about, refusing to form a totality” (28). This would help explain another underlying mystery: why so many texts that have stirred paracanonic activity are so dense with representations of
laughter. The texts considered in this chapter are: the proto-novel by Nero’s courtier and “judge of elegance” Petronius Arbiter, the Satyrica (65 A.D.); C.R. Maturin’s late-addition gothic novel Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), which was a model text for French romanticism and surrealism; a presciently (inter-planetary) colonial science fiction story by USAmerican writer H.P. Lovecraft, “In the Walls of Eryx” (1936); the first complete theatrical version of the verse drama by Aimé Césaire Et les chiens se taisaient (1956) [And the Dogs Were Silent] that compiles an ambivalent, indefinite working-through of problems related to capitalism, colonial history, pre-Christian African religion and Césaire’s resounding summons to négritude. As I move in a loosely chronological direction through these texts, my main questions will be: What does laughter do in these texts? What is laughter represented as doing? What theory of the social function of laughter is implicit in these representations? All of these questions link to the paracanonic position, which seems to be a privileged perspective on laughter. The paracanonically active text is an object of suspicion because it is marked with a Bergsonian aloofness (possibly disinterest) about the life-and-death struggles of the canon-oriented literary field. One possibilities is that they are distinctively paracanonic precisely because they expose the often unhappy work of exclusive group-constitution accomplished in laughter – and in canon-making.

Who Laughs When

Pursuing his suggestion above, regarding the nonexistence of jokes, Lawrence La Fave goes on to ask: “[W]hat might be done to redefine them into existence?” (238). In conversation and interaction, jokes do have a contingent existence. Jokes exist as invitations to laugh. At their most concrete, in the sense that Voloshinov uses that term, jokes exist as what has been referred to as an “adjacency pair” (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Glenn and Holt summarise (more
succinctly than Schegloff and Sacks) that an adjacency pair is a “sequential relationship in which occurrence of the first item makes the second relevant, and, if not provided, noticeably absent” (12). The standard examples of adjacency pairs include: a greeting followed by a return greeting; a request followed by grant or denial; a question followed by an answer. In any of these cases, if the hearer of the first part of the pair does not produce the relevant second part, the first speaker often treats the dispreferred move as a signal of trouble, sometimes even as a conscious attempt to escalate the interaction towards conflict. In practice, conversational sequences are often made up of multiple, interlaced adjacency pairs – and something like three-part adjacency trios or “three-part exchange” (Tsui 1989) – are common. A familiar example of the three-part exchange is in fact the punchline joke or riddle. As Sacks argued, these function as tests of an understanding, a shared knowledge that is group-constitutive. The understanding displayed positions hearers relatively in- or out-side the group. As Sacks continues, the range of appropriate responses is socially regulated and stringently limited: “[There] is available a general way to appropriately respond which can be used whether one understands or not, i.e. laughter produced at the recognised completion” (“An Analysis” 346). Laughter (or other related appreciative displays, like smiling) is usually the preferred second or third part of the joke, when produced as the first part of an adjacency pair. Not laughing, whether in the form of deliberately withholding laughter, or unlaughter (Smith 2009) – from not “getting” the joke, or perhaps from being its butt – always has interactive consequences. Not laughing reveals or produces a misalignment between speaker and hearer, one that may have to be repaired during subsequent turns. Doing so, unlaughter can signal or trigger a change in the participation framework of the interaction.
Among the richest texts in the archive of literature for tracking the pragmatics of group laughter is the *Satyrica* (Rome, circa 65 C.E.) of Petronius Arbiter. It can be argued that paracanonic episode of the *Satyrica* lasted until the 1970s – if not later, when from paracanonic its status shifts to something more like an underground classic, or cult book. As with *Titus*, a prominent film both marks and accelerates a process already underway, Federico Fellini’s *Fellini Satyricon* (1969). The 141 surviving fragments of the *Satyrica* mainly depict the financial and sexual adventures of a group of actively bi-sexual slaves and former slaves in the southern regions of the Italian peninsula. The first-person narrator Encolpius (“in the crotch”) leads a small gang, including his boy sex-slave Giton (“neighbour”), his sexual rival and sometimes partner Ascyltos (“[sexually] indefatigable”), and, later, the poet and con-artist Eumolpus (“sweet singer”). After centuries of transmission in fragmentary manuscript form (through monasteries), the first print edition to contain everything now extant of the *Satyrica* is printed in Amsterdam in 1669 (see Severy-Hoven 5).

Introducing the text in her translation published in 2000, Sarah Ruden describes it as “a bawdy, fragmentary later Latin work, not taught as classical literature until a few decades ago … this is not your usual textbook” (Ruden vii). As recently as 2014, Beth Severy-Hoven is compelled to issue a warning similar to the reviewers of productions of *Titus* seen in the introductory chapter. She quotes Amy Richlin advising that

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94 Note that I follow current scholarly practice in referring to this text as the *Satyrica* rather than (as formerly) the *Satyricon*. As Beth Severy-Hoven gives the rationale for this recent shift: “Similar ancient works ... tend to have titles in the neuter nominative plural (*Aethiopica*, *Ephesiaca*, *Milesiaca*, *Sybaritica*), so scholars have recently but broadly started using the title *Satyrica* for the whole work [rather than *Satyricon*]. ... [The title] puns on two terms (1) ‘satyr,’ ... and (2) the Latin word *satura*, ‘medley,’ a Roman literary genre ... which commented satirically on society, literature, and people and their foibles. Thus the name *Satyrica* denotes a tale about raunchy satyr stuff variously and satirically treated, which describes what we can see of Petronius’ story fairly well (8 - 9).”
Students reading this book for a course should realise that they are part of a brief moment in history when it has been possible for a lot of people to read this text, and a much briefer moment when it has been possible for it to be taught to students. Ask yourself why that has been so, and whether this book might not be lost again. (in Severy-Hoven 51)

Certainly, there has been a massive shift in the reputation of the *Satyricon*. It was long treated by those who knew it as para-literary, if not outright non-literary. Even Ruden, who admits to being “crazy about Petronius” (vii) positions it as “subliterary” (135). Ruden iterates an old idée reçue (now fading) that Petronius’ text is uncanonisable because “it belonged to the large class of popular literature – farce, short stories, light verse, other novels – not taught in schools or discussed by critics” (135-6). Furthermore, its interest to scholars is incidental to its cultural afterlife: “the most intense attraction of the [Satyricon] for professional classicists lies in the fact that this was a slighted and abused work” (Ruden 136). *Satyricon* is now, unblushingly, described as a “masterpiece of Latin prose” (Briggs 1999), a “masterpiece of penetrating social analysis” (Allan 2014) and, most of all, a “comic masterpiece” (Branham 1997), in a formulation that once would have been considered oxymoronic. R.J. Schork, in fact, manoeuvres the *Satyricon* onto the path towards canonicity by arguing that it “would appear to be the obvious model for parts of [James Joyce’s] *Ulysses* and all of *Finnegans Wake*” (203).

The *Satyricon* seems to have always been popular. As Ruden writes, throughout the last centuries of Roman society “People must have been reading it … or no copies would have survived so long” (135). In his 1910 bibliography of Petronius, Stephen Gaselee records 86 Latin editions between 1482 and1909, and 73 translations (into English, Italian, Spanish, French and German) during the same period (see Gaselee 77-85). My own suspicion that the *Satyricon* has
secretly been every classicist’s favourite book is somewhat corroborated by Gilbert Lawall’s late admission, in 1995, that it is “one of the few works of ancient Roman literature that one reads simply for pleasure” (Lawall iv). Gaselee, who values Petronius partly because he “is almost the only Latin writer who is not serious,” (6) provides rich anecdotal evidence to support my hunch about the closeted reception of the Satyrica. Especially pointed perhaps is Louis II of Bourbon’s (Prince de Condé)’s rumoured obsession with Petronius. As Gaselee recounts, the most complete chapter of the Satyrica, the so-called Cena Trimalchionis, was discovered in Dalmatia in about 1650. Until then the text was known by the other surviving fragments. No other complete chapter survives. Gaselee writes that

It so happened that the manuscript [of Cena Trimalchionis] was intercepted on its journey, and fell into the hands of the Prince de Condè, who received it with the greatest delight, being a great admirer of Petronius – in fact, he kept a special reader, whose sole duty it was to read aloud the [Satyrica] to his master – and he showed it to all his friends in Paris. (Gaselee 60)

The brief but fierce controversy of attribution over the Cena dies in about 1685 (see Gaselee 37), after complete editions begin to appear.

Although not actually a pornographic book (or no more so than Catullus, Juvenal, Martial, Propertius or Suetonius)95 it nevertheless mainly circulated in England as pornography, where it found its most bashful reception. By 1909 it had already been the subject of “an extraordinary number of pamphlets, doctoral theses, programmes, magazine articles, and books in all countries except England” (Gaselee 58-9). As Beth Severy-Hoven attests, “English

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95 The abundant sex in the Satyricon is not explicitly nor anatomically described, with the exception of one instance: when Encolpius turns to the witch Oenothea to find a cure for his impotence. The fragment in question, c.138 (in Ruden 123), is only 2 sentences long, but I will refrain from quoting it here.
translations were available [in the 19th century and earlier]—with lavish illustrations and printed by private presses that specialized in pornography” (Beth Severy-Hoven). One of these, in 1902, was published in Paris by Charles Carrington, who mailed out copies in which “he enclosed a loose printed slip with the words ‘This translation was made by Sebastian Melmoth’” (Gaselee 66). Stephen Melmoth was one of the pseudonyms of Oscar Wilde, drawn from C.R. Maturin’s novel _Melmoth the Wanderer._

Another idée recue about the _Satyricon_ in the Anglophone world was indeed that it is a model not of canonic goodness, but moral depravity: “it was not a book for scholars, but for the idle men and women whose vices and idleness finally brought down upon themselves the disaster of the Revolution” (Gaselee 44). The names of Petronius and his character Trimalchio thus circulated, like the name of Sade, as terms denoting immorality, cruelty and excess. H.P. Lovecraft uses Trimalchio’s name for this purpose in his horror story “Rats in the Walls.” Describing a cannibal banquet, he writes: “There was a vision of a Roman feast like that of Trimalchio, with a horror in a covered platter” (103). George Orwell similarly evokes Petronius in “Bookshop Memories,” as a limit-case of sexual immorality: “Modern books for children are rather horrible things, especially when you see them in the mass. Personally I would sooner give a child a copy of Petronius Arbiter than Peter Pan” (244). The fragmentary condition of the text has generated rumours of its own, which braid with its reputation as licentious. Namely, it was assumed that the book was only read by the original transcribing monks for their titillation. Gaselee writes that “speaking of the fact that many portions of the _Satyricon_ as we now possess them are obscene, or rather, that we seem to possess a larger proportion of obscene passages that existed, in proportion to the whole, in the original work, [Pieter Burmann the Elder] accounts for this fact by saying that they were the passages which the monks of the Middle Ages were most
likely to have preserved” (51). In the United States in 1863, Charles Beck can be found quietly sustaining the rumour in his facsimile edition of the Satyricon: “It is to be noticed that the filthiest passages ... are most correctly and carefully copied” (5). While Gaselee regrets seeing this “curious little piece of sectarian prejudice ... partly revived by the great [Johann Caspar von] Orelli, in his Zurich dissertation of 1836” (ibid.), it continues to survive its critique.

In these, and several other senses, it is the Satyricon is comparable to Villon: an edgy foreign, or alien, paracanonic interloper in English Literature. Like Villon, the Satyricon holds an important place in history, if only because it is an incomparable document of the everyday, non-official, non-literary language of its time. Other than graffiti in Pompeii the Satyricon is the only extant document of the social heteroglossia of 1st century Roman life. As Brent Boyce writes:

> Petronius is the first extant author fully to attempt ‘to imitate a random, everyday, contemporary milieu with its sociological background, and to have his characters speak their jargon without recourse to any form of stylization’ ... In the language of Trimalchio and his freedman guests ... we note numerous lexical and morphological features which serve to distinguish sharply their language not only from the literary norms of silver Latin, but also from the cultivated colloquial Umgangssprache of the narrator Encolpius and the other educated characters of the novel. (Boyce 1)

Whoever Petronius was (rumoured to have been Nero’s Arbiter Elegantiae, his pleasure Don) he had as much interest in the real textures of everyday speech as Villon had, and as strong an urge to record and deploy these in writing. Gaselee in fact compares Orelli’s slangy translation to Henley’s “Villon's Straight Tip to all Cross Coves” (Gaselee 60). Entwined with the delicately differentiated speech of Petronius’ characters is the tremendous profusion of their laughter.
To me the *Satyricon* is often a deliriously funny book, in many ways and many places, but just as often one that is profoundly uncomfortable to read. Some of Petronius’ jokes, are as hard to take as Freud’s, if not as hard to take as anything exhumed by Michael Billig or Warren Christopher. Written and set during the reign of Nero, the social world of the *Satyricon* is one economically based on, and culturally articulated atop, slavery. Although, in Ancient Rome, the institutions and ideologies of slavery had not yet taken on the overwhelmingly racist frames acquired during the colonisation of Africa, every other constitutive piece of this dehumanising ideology and socio-economic practice was in place. Henrik Mourtisen’s *The Freedman in the Roman World* provides a detailed overview of the culture of Roman slavery. Roman slaves, like their later counterparts, did not own their own bodies, nor their children’s bodies. As Mourtisen writes

> The slave’s body did not enjoy any protection from violence or other kinds of physical abuse, which might also include sexual exploitation. The Roman sources reveal a general expectation that slaves might be abused sexually by their masters. This is illustrated, for example, by the legal principle that freedwomen [freed former slaves] could not be victims of *stuprum* [rape] committed by their patron, suggesting that even former slaves did not regain full physical integrity … The violability of the slave’s body was central to the creation of the servile person.

(Mourtisen 27)

Written for the eyes of the imperial aristocracy, many of the jokes in the *Satyricon*, and the humour-relevant laughter of the characters, are about the sexual use of slave children. The
laughter they invite reaches out, across time, to implicate the reader in a group they may not wish to join.\footnote{As an example of the kind of jokes produced in ancient slave societies, Jan Bremmer collects the following from ancient Greece. The collection this is found in “was probably put together in the third century” (17) – considerably later than the Satyricon. As Bremmer writes, many of them illustrate “the gruesome realities of ancient slave society: ‘When a scholastikos had a child by a slave girl, his father advised him to kill it. But he replied, ‘First, you bury your own children, then advise me to kill mine!’’” (ibid.)}

The Satyricon may be a “comic masterpiece,” but all of the laughter represented in the book depends on complex negotiations of freedom and power among, and between, economic classes and social castes. Yet it is never unproblematic, nor victimless. As Maria Plaza writes: “Laughter and derision, which may … be said to be obliquely present even in the title of the Satyricon, form a conspicuous and essential motif, which can be traced by looking at the many explicit references to laughter” (2). With the possible exception of three incidents late in the book, all of this laughter is unhappy.\footnote{Plaza narrows this to a single instance. The words for smile and laugh are cognates in 1\textsuperscript{st} century Latin: smiles are treated as laughter. Pragmatically this is appropriate, as smiles are one of the main ways, aside from interpolated laugh particles, that talkers cue the relevance of laughter. The French word for smile, sourire means literally: sub-laugh: sous (under) rire (laugh). Plaza writes that the “only instance of a decidedly friendly smile in the extant text of the Satyricon, denoted by arridere constructed with the dative, is found in Encolpius’ votive prayer to Priapus, wherein he promises that if luck will smile upon him … he will immediately honour the god with gifts” (Plaza 202).} Satyricon recurrently forces characters with widely differential material or symbolic fulcrums of leverage in the Roman world – beauty, wealth, cultural capital, dramatic ironies, intelligence, and differentiated caste positions – into high stakes negotiations. All of the characters exercise subtle rhetorical control in their displays of laughter. As Maria Plaza documents, the laughter in Satyricon is almost all volitional laughter. No one ever loses control of their laughter: “it is significant that the onomatopoeic words cachinnus and cachinno, which stand for a longer, louder and coarser laugh, are lacking in the extant parts of the Satyricon” (2).
As I have said, only one chapter survives in what appears to be its complete state, the *Cena Trimalchionis* (“Trimalchio’s Dinner Party”), comprising fragments 26.5-78 (spanning 43 pages in the Sarah Ruden translation.) At Trimalchio’s, the so-called fourth wall comes down dramatically; Petronius regularly designs the reader a place at the feast, alongside Encolpius’ randy, laughy gang. The domineering host Trimalchio is a former slave who shrewdly turned his large inheritance – he was a favourite of his master – into vast wealth. Without any sense of caste solidarity, Trimalchio spends his life imperfectly emulating the lifestyle and imperious manners of an imperial aristocracy that will never accept him. He might be considered a distinctly Roman instantiation of the ambivalent mimicry Homi Bhabha theorises in relation to later British colonial subjecthood. Trimalchio must be laughed at, as a kind of representational mutant or hybrid whose inevitable failure to correctly mimic the culture of his former masters shores up and threatens the slave-based imperial Roman social order: “The success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha 127). Encolpius’ informant at the party does a little bragging on Trimalchio’s behalf, counting the host’s wealth by reference to the number of slaves he holds: “His slaves – hell's bells – I don't think a tenth of ’em know their master by sight. He could toss any of these rich bastards into a pan and braise ’em” (26). Yet a freed person in Roman society, no matter how successful, could never free themselves of the moral “taint” the imperial classes hypocritically believed them to carry “against which free people, and particularly those of the higher orders, had to guard themselves” (Mouritsen 22). The taint was associated specifically with the sexual services slaves were expected by their masters, and other free persons, to provide on demand.
Trimalchio’s party is generally read as a mind-bendingly “extravagant attempt to emulate the lifestyle of the elite … undermined by his lack of taste and breeding, which exposes his social pretensions” (Mouritsen 115). These occasions, which apparently happen every night of the week, allow Trimalchio to display not only his wealth but his culturedness. To realise such a display, some of his guests must function as the judging eyes and ears of the imperial classes who Trimalchio wants, variously, to emulate, impress, outdo, or dominate. Encolpius’ gang therefore dine disguised as freeborn scholars (except for Giton), so that multi-millionaire Trimalchio can feel he acquires cultural capital by impressing them. In practice, Encolpius frequently admits to making dire interpretative errors that reveal (to readers) the depth of the fraud in both directions. The Cena Trimalchionis can be analysed as a scene in which the characters negotiate and try to leverage positionings of “epistemic authority” (in Jacknick 186), and other claims of symbolic rank, against brute material power. Christine Jacknick found in interactions between an ESL instructor and his pupils, laughter is a key resource for every party in these negotiations. As Arie E. Kruglanski writes, “epistemic authority refers to the degree to which a given source is likely to be considered authoritative on a given topic” (54). Epistemic authority therefore concerns the rights granted to individuals or institutional bodies to act as, or be consulted as, authorities. Such authority challenging laughter links directly into the paracanonic, which relativises the implicit or explicit authority, security and value claims in, or surrounding, myth Canon. Throughout the Satyricon, in fact, even the most materially and hierarchically powerful characters fear the deriding laughter of persons otherwise at their mercy.

98 In a pattern visible across all the texts under consideration here, even the characters in positions of nearly absolute strength display fear of laughter – which may be fear of ridicule, derision, or the contagion of madness. In Satyricon fragment 100, the character Lichas, a slave master and galley captain, is introduced with reference to this fear of laughter. Lichas has absolute power of life, death and body over hundreds of people, yet, on board his own ship, he
The laughter in *Satyricon* is also dynamic and changeable, performing delicately levered social and representation actions that develop quickly, even as the laughter acts on the interactions to affect and transform their interactive dynamics. With the limited space I have, I want to consider two instances of *unlaughter* pertaining to one of Trimalchio’s many “trick” foods. Many of Trimalchio’s lavish dishes involve an illusionistic surprise, or a trompe-l’oeil of some kind, often expressing the host’s unreconstructed “plebeian” poetic wit. Derisory laughter from Encolpius’ gang often follows the surprise reveal, apparently making Trimalchio’s ineptitude the laughable. Trimalchio’s witty dishes inadvertently expose his low tastes, and low origins. Even if the dishes are witty, the wit itself is a laughable exposé visible to his guests who are, in turn, off-kilter.

In two instances, this laughter provided for doesn’t appear. Moira Smith writes, in a paper on unlaughter and group boundary maintenance, about how jokes can invite highly differentiated laughter from the variety of the joke’s hearers. In particular, when “jokes are aimed at outsiders or marginal group members, shared laughter is not always expected; instead, the unlaughter of these salient individuals, contrasted with the shared laughter of the rest of the group, heightens group boundaries by mocking and ostracising the outsiders” (Smith 166).

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99 The chapter before *Cena Trimalchionis*, called “Quartilla’s Orgy,” for example, begins with an extended sequence in which the laughter of Quartilla’s maid evolves, in rapid but documentable increments, from a (deceptively) affiliating troubles-related chuckle towards a domineering, farcical roar that deeply frightens Encolpius’ gang.

100 A choice example of differentiated group laughter is found in fragments 112-3. Aboard the ship of the slavemaster Lichas, Eumolpus tells the story of the Widow of Ephesus. At its termination: “The sailors burst out in laughter at the end. Tryphaena blushed bright red and buried her face sweetly in Giton’s neck. But Lichas didn’t laugh. He shook his head angrily” (91).
Encolpius’ gang often laugh together at Trimalchio. What the instances of their unlaughter demonstrate is that this deriding laughter at Trimalchio is also partly for Trimalchio. The laughter at his poeticisms displays them as members of the hard-to-please elite whose attention he covets as the final, symbolic mode of wealth/capital he does not yet possess. In that respect, their laughter at him raises the cultural value of the appreciative, affiliative laughter with him that they do, in fact, provide several times. That is: the gang laughs at Trimalchio’s shortfalls, but that laughter is not strictly alienating because it re-encloses him in the group, the echelon from which he has ascended. It also articulates the power differentials in play. Underlying Trimalchio’s performance of good cheer and largesse is his dangerous impulsiveness. At one of the servants’ gaffes, Trimalchio’s rage flares up: “Go kill yourself, you useless piece of trash” (37). Without the subsequent intervention of the guests, the slave would have been obliged to carry out this suicidal order, only for having dropped a cup owned by a man of vast wealth. In this hostile cena of traps, tricks, surprises, illusions, deception – under the weight of a coercive largesse – nervous about their position, Encolpius’ gang’s mocking laughter is vital for maintaining their togetherness as a group. Made vulnerable by their actual hunger, with no other resources than their cunning, their bond, regularly reaffirmed with laughter, is all they have to make them feel (relatively) protected.

The meaning of laughter in the Satyricon also often depends on how the text designs the reader’s participant role, shifting which character, and whose laughter, the reader is compelled to align with. Twice in the Cena Trimalchionis, Trimalchio’s trick foods are presented in such a way so as to design a space for the relevance of the actual reader’s laughter. They do so by setting up a joke as adjacency trio but leave out – withholding – the expected diegetic laughter. These sequences start with references to laughter or smiling. Note, again, that the words for
smiling and laughing are cognates in Latin. In French, too, the cognate is present. As Dominique Noguez writes: “Image classique de l’humour, moins riant que souriant (sous-riant, écrirait un lacanien)” (L’Homme 72) [Classic image of humour, less laughing than smiling (sub-laughing, a Lacanian would write)]. These direct associations of laughter with smiling, less clear in English, have been observed in research on how group laughter is accomplished. As Haakana notes:

“Smiling can be used as a pre-laughing device: laughing together can be entered step-wise, and smiling is a common device for paving the way to the laughter” (1499). Smiling is often part of the interactive sequence that cues the desirability and relevance of laughter, and it is regularly used that way in the Satyrica. In these cases, at the “laugh specific recognition point” (Jefferson “A Technique” 82) – which in some circumstances is just the punchline – exactly where, structurally, the characters should laugh, no laughter appears.

The gap and the cueing alone would be insufficient to design these as places for reader laughter, but another shift is made in both cases. The reader’s identification with the perspective of the unreliable narrator Encolpius is briefly suspended by Encolpius’ admission of a severe interpretative error. Encolpius is a doubled narrator in the Satyrica. As Beck and Jensson argue, there is the older, wiser “crotch” looking back on his youth, and the one experiencing these adventures in the diegetic, narrative present (see Slater 18). Naïve and wise Encolpius, as they might be called, move in and out of convergence with each other. In the interstices of splits between naïve and wise Encolpius, with the adjacency pair of a joke already opened, and the laughter already cued, the unlaughter of the characters explicitly makes room for reader laughter. This reader laughter now aligns the reader, temporarily, with either Trimalchio, or with another, absent imperial reader-position that is implicit throughout the Satyrica in its sneering bigotry towards slaves.
As Moira Smith writes: “The question always arises whether the laughter is sympathetic or mocking, inclusive or alienating. The butt must ask, ‘are they laughing with me or at me?’” (160). The first example of sequences mentioned above occurs near the start of the Cena, when the host enters in fragment 32: “The host had on a tightly clasped scarlet cloak that squished his closely shaven head out the top and weighed on his neck in massive folds” (22). Trimalchio’s egglike head here is presented in a way that levels it with the zany magic-trick foods to follow. Encolpius reports that: “Those of us who hadn’t known what to expect burst out laughing” (22). Positioned where it is, about a page before the food joke to follow, their derisory laughter (among other functions) cues the relevance of laughter. It is important here that the muddling of sartorial code in Trimalchio’s “napkin, with a senatorial stripe” and “big gilded ring,” which the gang laugh at, is left unexplained. Here a knowing reader can laugh with the gang at Trimalchio. Laughing at Trimalchio, at this point, is consistent with social regulatory meanings of Roman upper class comedy: “upper-class wit has as its function to preserve the rules of the class – and urbanely to remind those who overstepped them of its limits” (Graf 32). Some large egg-shaped pastries are then brought in, hiding a surprise (as usual). Before the reveal, the reader’s perspectival alignment with Encolpius’ position is suspended with two nudges. Encolpius first admits to incompetence in the interpretative role he is there to fulfil: “I almost threw away my egg, because it looked as if the chick was already formed” (23). Nervous, scanning all the time for information and cues, as he does throughout the Cena, Encolpius goes on: “But then I heard a veteran guest of Trimalchio’s say ‘This ought to be something good’” (23). The reader’s alignment is still in suspension when Encolpius says: “I broke the shell with my hand and found a fat fig-pecker bird cooked in a peppered yolk” (23). However, the laughter that should follow here does not: so the reader is given space to supply that laughter.
Another example follows in fragment 60, involving another trick pastry. This one is a representation of the Roman god of gardens, livestock, produce, lust and of rape: Priapus. The chapter before the Cena, note, took place at the orgy hosted by a priestess of the cult of Priapus, Quartilla (“fourth in line”), in which Encolpius’ gang were forced to participate, or be murdered by a throng of her followers. In a missing fragment, they appear to have unintentionally witnessed, and laughed at, some secret Priapic rite. Participation in the all-night orgy, on pain of death, is their punishment for that mistake. Having themselves been raped at Quartilla’s orgy, and having witnessed the forced marriage of a 7-year old slave girl, all in the name of Priapic worship, Encolpius’ gang at Trimalchio’s now look up to see: “ceiling tiles … swung aside … a giant hoop was lowered down into the room. All around it hung gold garlands and alabaster bottles of unguent …. In the middle [of this tray] stood a pastry Priapus, and from his ample appendage hung a sling full of different fruits, in the usual way it’s pictured” (45).

Prior to this, the relevance of laughter has been cued in two ways. First, there was a long speech by a character named Hermeros, defending Trimalchio from the deriding laughter of Encolpius’ gang. In Hermeros’ speech, laughter is explicitly mentioned nine times, and it ends in a sequence of joke-like riddles, or riddle-like jokes. Following the speech, Trimalchio’s “Homer reciters” enter with a clatter, providing the host an opportunity to recite a “massive garbling of myth” (Ruden 44). Like the earlier garbling of sartorial codes, the ridiculousness of Trimalchio’s version of myth is again left implicit, which can make the element function better to align the knowing reader with Encolpius at Trimalchio. Now another interpretative error of Encolpius’ again nudges the participation framework, reorienting it to change the reader’s alignment. Encolpius says that
We laid our greedy hands on this new display and found – imagine! – that it was another joke. At the slightest touch, every single cake and piece of fruit spewed out saffron – damp, messy stuff all over our faces, quite disgusting. We thought that a dish perfumed with this ritual substance was probably part of some important rite, so we jumped up and yelled, ‘Hail, Augustus, father of our country!’ But we noticed that other people were grabbing fruit during our display of reverence; so we went ahead and got as much as we could tie up in our handkerchiefs. (45)

Trimalchio does not laugh – although he’s figuratively getting “the last laugh” against his guests. Nor do the other characters laugh; they jump straight to pillage. Encolpius’ inability to laugh here, the whole gang’s unlaughter, in a position where laughter is relevant, opens a space for reader laughter in alignment either with Trimalchio or the implied imperial reader. Such ambivalences of identification have contributed to making the Satyricon a site of hot contestation, its “elusiveness and originality have defied description for centuries” (Lawall iv), a world-famous literary text resisting its own assimilation into myth Canon.

Who Laughs Alone

In all of these very disparate texts – Petronius, Maturin, Lovecraft, Césaire – laughing is not represented as static thing, nor as a unitary object, nor as mainly expressive of an affective state. For all these writers, disparate as they are in other ways, what laughter “means is what it does, in its sequential location, in interaction” (Glenn and Holt “Introduction” 3). Laughter is not an uncontrollable eruption, it is “a systematically produced, socially organised activity” (Jefferson et al. “Pursuit” 152). What laughter does in interaction remains always “emergent and
subject to redefinition” (Glenn Laughter 5). As Glenn writes, the “alignments displayed [in laughter]… are not static but changeable, dependent on moment-to-moment ratification or re-negotiation” (ibid. 117). As a sometimes cooperative, sometimes competitive, companion to language, laughter stays in motion. What I’ve shown in only a few of many potential examples from the Satyrca are how uses of laughter accomplish complex, rapid shifts in character and reader alignment. Chapter 7 of Glenn’s Laughter in Interaction is specifically about contexts where laughing at gets interactively re-aligned into a laughing with, and vice versa. He writes that in “attempting to shift the participant alignment to a laughing with via subsequent activities …. participants may accomplish a micro-transformation of social structure” (119-20).

Jefferson’s term “socially organised”, however, does not mean that laughing itself is most often group laughter or co-laughter. A great deal of laughter is what is referred in the vernacular to as “nervous” laughter. As Phillip Glenn writes: “the term ‘nervous laughter’ may be … a layperson’s gloss of … laughs that work on one’s own actions in delicate [interactional] environments” (“Nervous” 274). Such laughter is done in the presence of others, to serve an interaction, as communicative display – but it is usually treated as non-invitational. It is therefore normally solo laughter, not usually answered with co-laughter. Instead, “nervous” laughter works to mark something in the interaction as ambiguous or problematic. C.R. Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) resonates with such problematic and problematizing laughter. Unlike the often intricately differentiated group laughter in the Satyrca, almost all laughter in Melmoth is non-solitary solo laughter101.

101 The only instance of solitary laughter is internal, silent laughter: “Doors were clapped to wherever I was heard to approach; and three or four would stand whispering near where I walked, and clear their throats, and exchange signs and pass audibly to the most trifling topics in my hearing, as if to intimate, while they affected to conceal it, that their last topic had been me. I laughed at this internally.” (101)
Maxime Prévost writes in *Rictus Romantiques*: “Il est remarquable que dans *Melmoth the Wanderer* toute la gamme des souffrances humaines, qu’il s’agisse d’agonie, de peur, de folie, de famine, de dégradation sociale ou morale, s’exprime par le rire; dans cette symphonie fantastique, toutes les nuances de la perfidie sont modulées par lui. … le rire effroyable s’impose comme la principale cellule mélodique” (70) [It is remarkable that in *Melmoth the Wanderer* that the entire scale of human suffering, be it agony, fear, madness, famine, social or moral degradation, are all expressed in laughter; in this fantastical symphony, all the nuances of perfidy are modulated by laughter. … terrifying laughter is the unifying melodic motif of the whole]. *Melmoth* is structured as a set of stories within stories, within stories, within stories, carried with the through-line of the supernaturally damned Wanderer. The Wanderer is an ancestor of the younger Melmoth (in the present-time frame of the story) who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for 150 years of unbounded life. The Wanderer can travel across the world instantly; he can walk through walls. But he is weary of his demonic life, and the only way to break his contract (and therefore die) is to convince a living human to willingly, and consciously, take his place in the contract. Each of the many stories-within-stories involves some far-flung appearance of the Wanderer, in which he unsuccessfully tries to exploit someone’s vulnerability to convince them to take on his contract. The other through-line across the frames is the Wanderer’s characteristically frightening laughter. As Prévost writes: “Ce rire noir noue des récits de ce roman à tiroirs, complexe enchevêtrement de pseudo-manuscrits à demi illisibles” (73) [This black laughter ties together the stories in this novel of trick doors, complex tangle of half-illegible pseudo-manuscripts].
Melmoth, note, was a strong influence on two of the poets who Aimé Césaire recurrently cites as models: Baudelaire and, especially, Isidore Ducasse aka the Comte de Lautréamont. In the 19th century, Melmoth had a greater impact on French literature than English. Balzac actually wrote a sequel to the novel (Melmoth réconcilié 1835). Melmoth was a site of paracanonic activity, as a representative of the heteronomous threat posed to the highbrow by the popularity of “gothic” fiction. It is only since the openings made possible by cultural studies that Melmoth can be studied as part of a “canon” of gothic literature. It remains established as a major fertiliser for both romanticism and surrealism. It was the direct source of Baudelaire’s underappreciated theory of laughter, articulated in “L’Essence du rire.” Many gothic tones resound throughout the works of H.P. Lovecraft and of Aimé Césaire. Césaire’s complex laughter is in part an inheritance from Melmoth, as obtained through Lautréamont and Baudelaire. Although, like most humour theorists, Baudelaire succumbs to the temptation of conflating the comic itself with the exhibition of laughter, in the early part of the essay he contributes an original, enriching iteration of what is generally known in humour studies as “superiority theory” of laughter. Henri Bergson’s Le rire is also considered superiorist, and Freud’s is relevant where he takes up the

102 Laughter is also an important motif in Lautréamont’s Maldoror. There are passages plagiarised from Melmoth, and the titular character is based on the Wanderer. If the Wanderer is characterised by his demonic laugh, however, Maldoror is deemed inhuman by his inability to laugh. In Canto 1, Maldoror makes a disastrous attempt to learn to laugh. Note that he (mis)laughs as display, not as expression of an inner state “[J’ai] voulu rire comme les autres … J’ai pris un canif dont la lame avait un tranchant acéré, et me suis fendu les chairs aux endroits où se réunissent les lèvres. Un instant je crus mon but atteint. Je regardai dans un miroir cette bouche meurtrie par ma propre volonté ! C’était une erreur ! Le sang qui coulait avec abondance des deux blessures empêchait d’ailleurs de distinguer si c’était là vraiment le rire des autres. Mais, après quelques instants de comparaison, je vis bien que mon rire ne ressemblait pas à celui des humains, c’est-à-dire que je riais pas.” (14) [I’ve longed to laugh, with the rest … Taking a penknife with a sharp-edged blade, I slit the flesh at the points joining the lips. For an instant I believed my aim was achieved. I saw in a mirror the mouth ruined at my own will! An error! Besides, the blood gushing freely from the two wounds prevented my distinguishing whether this really was the grin of others. But after some moments of comparison I saw quite clearly that my smile did not resemble that of humans: the fact is, I was not laughing. (30)]
problem of laughter as sublimated aggression. In English, a single short paragraph in Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* encapsulates this approach.

*Sudden Glory,* is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. (46; his emphasis)

Like other theories of this type, Baudelaire’s is most pertinent to a social, interactive approach to laughter when he writes about various positionings and actions that can be achieved with laughter. Laughter, in general

*est satanique, il est donc profondément humain. Il est dans l’homme la conséquence de l’idée de sa propre supériorité … il est essentiellement contradictoire … [il] est à la fois signe d’une grandeur infinie et d’une misère infinie, misère infinie relativement à l’Être absolu dont il possède la conception, grandeur infinie relativement aux animaux. C’est du choc perpétuel de ces deux infinitudes que se dégage le rire. (8) [is satanic, it is therefore profoundly human. Laughter is in man the consequence of the notion of his own superiority. … it is essentially contradictory … it is at the same time the sign of an infinite grandeur and of an infinite misery, a misery relative to the Supreme Being he imagines, a grandeur that is infinite relative to animals. It is from the perpetual shock of these two infinitudes that laughter emerges.]*

Basing this conception in the solo-laughter of *Melmoth,* group laughter or shared laughter is outside Baudelaire’s frame. He nevertheless usefully locates laughter in the *laughers,* as quoted above, rather than in the comic device: this move already allows for laughter’s dominant
function as communicative display in the service of interaction. Baudelaire is particularly interested in how the Wanderer’s laughter acts on, and marks his own speech with a frightening ambivalence: “Et ainsi le rire de Melmoth [the Wanderer], qui est l’expression la plus haute de l’orgueil, accomplit perpétuellement sa fonction, en déchirant et en brûlant les lèvres du rieur irrémissible” (ibid.) [And so the laughter of Melmoth, which is the highest expression of pride, always fulfils its function, while tearing off and burning the very lips of this irremissible laugh].

People in *Melmoth* laugh strictly solo, but rarely in solitude. While humour-relevant laughter serves as an invitation to co-laughter, there are various ways of doing non-invitational solo laughter. One of these is doing “mad” laughter – but in spite of Maturin’s frequent use of that word, the laughter people do in Melmoth is much more like what has been called “troubles-laughter.” Gail Jefferson sketches out some of the ways troubles-laughter can be performed. In Jefferson’s examples, when a speaker is telling another person about life troubles, that teller may laugh to mark certain key points in their telling. When the speaker laughs at such points (“I have prostate cancer, ha ha”) the speaker is rarely nominating the terrible thing (“cancer”) as something to be laughed at. Gail Jefferson’s hypothesis is that the laughter shows “troubles-resistance”. She elaborates that in laughing in such environments, the teller “is exhibiting that, although there is trouble, it is not getting the better of him; he is managing; he is in good spirits and in a position to take the troubles lightly” (“Troubles” 351). I am convinced this is accurate, but only in a very limited social bandwidth. In the social contexts I know, these paraphrases would not work. A more generally promising suggestion, building on Jefferson’s work, was recently made by Keyton and Beck. They propose that ambiguity is often the main resource that such laughter mobilises. The intended rhetorical effect on the speaker’s talk is often to render
that talk more ambiguous, which itself can serve a range of interactive goals. Marking the telling as ambiguous, among other goals, is a way of using laughter to ask for alignment and help. In this way, rather than showing the implicitly apologetic troubles-resistance that Jefferson hears, the ambivalence can subtly or dramatically amplify the affiliative appeal, while, in practice, buying everyone a little more time. As Keyton and Beck write: “laughter holds the floor so other group members can respond positively or negatively or maintain the ambiguity. Interactively, laughter gives group members time and space to figure out how to deal with its conversation (and the conclusion drawn from it)” (403). Although it doesn’t invite co-laughter, troubles laughter is deeply affiliative laughter: it asks for alignment, sympathy – and possibly for help. Unhappy laughter can be like another interactant in the conversation, like the haunting paracanonic revenant. It is almost independent, another interlocutor intruding on the main body of the conversation. Standards of fortune, roles of interaction, and questions of value are all in suspension, up in the air, while laughter paracanonically holds the floor.

This may be the ambivalent secret of the Wanderer’s fearsome laughter, in particular when he’s interacting with his romantic interest Immalee/Isadora – she goes by two names, an “Indian” name and a Spanish one – in “The Tale of the Indians.” The Wanderer displays his ambivalent desire for love, help and death, mortality and heaven, his vestigial empathy for mortals and disdain for their vanities. The laughter is frightening. To the more general question ‘What does laughter do in Melmoth?’ Maturin gives a direct answer, often confirmed in the reactions of the characters: “Oh! it silences in a second all the feeble sophistry of conventional life and ascititious passion” (213). Hence the image of the Wanderer’s laughter as a grievous

103 With people other than Immalee, the Wanderer sometimes uses his laughter more bluntly, merely to frighten and/or to announce himself. The reader is told that young Melmoth “first recognised [The Wanderer’s] supposed demoniac character by the laugh with which he hailed the spectacle of the [lightning-] blasted lovers.” (66).
self-wounding in Baudelaire, which gets reimagined in Maldoror’s brutal mishap of self-interpellation with the penknife. In Maturin, the pain of the Wanderer is constantly underscored: “A mirth which is not gayety is often the mask which hides the convulsed and distorted features of agony — and laughter, which never yet was the expression of rapture, has often been the only intelligible language of madness and misery. Ecstasy only smiles, — despair laughs” (Maturin 352).

As the novel progresses, several things reveal this laughter as troubles-laughter of the ambiguous, yet affiliating kind. First, it is the way Maturin marks the episodes with references to tender feelings, always in immediate proximity of laughter: “he cried in tones that seemed alternately tremulous with malignity and compassion, with habitual hostility and involuntary softness” (319). More important, however, is how Immalee/Isadora, supposedly as different from the satanic Wanderer as could possibly be, ultimately mimics his laughter. The ways the Wanderer’s laughter with Immalee/Isadora is affiliative is harshly ambivalent, and sometimes subtle. People bring their laughing bodies into rhythmic coordination with others’ when they want to display alignment and achieve a greater (if temporary) group sodality. The degree of rhythmic convergence between parties can even predict their cooperation on shared tasks (Manson et al. 2013). Immalee/Isadora’s mimicry of the Wanderer’s laughter therefore shows her laughing with, and like, the demon she loves. Their romance – their coupledom as it were – takes several hundred pages to develop. In the early stages Immalee/Isadora shows direct resistance. She looks away, or falls silent: “The wild and discordant laugh of her companion, startled and silenced her” (310). As they draw closer, she is emboldened to challenge the laughter directly: “If you would not terrify me to madness, laugh no more — no more, at least, in that fearful way!” (347). Soon after, the Wanderer explicitly invites her to laugh with him:
“[Vive] la bagatelle! Let us laugh forever [in Hell]! … There will be all that ever have dared to laugh on earth … all who have ever dared to mistake their destiny, so far as to imagine that enjoyment was not a crime, or that a smile was not an infringement of their duty as sufferers” (351-2).

Eventually, Immalee/Isadora herself laughs in this fearful way, admitting the contagion of love. Some of the very last laughs in the novel are her echoes of the Wanderer. First, under examination by church and family, she reveals that she is already married – to the Wanderer. In effect this means she is married to Satan, an unhappy secret for a Catholic, living in the Spain of the Inquisition, to reveal: “‘I am married!’ she added, glancing a look at her splendid habit, and displaying it with a frantic laugh” (523). Soon after, more gruesomely, when Immalee/Isadora has been imprisoned with her unnatural, demonic baby sired by the Wanderer she laughs again: “When [the search of her cell] was concluded, however, the prisoner, bursting into a wild laugh, exclaimed, ‘Where would you search for a child but in its mother's bosom? Here—here it is—take it—take it!’ And she put it into their hands” (530). As Baudelaire registers, Maturin’s novel embeds an iteration of a superiorist theory of laughter that substitutes superiority for an absolute alienation: “Smiles are the legitimate offspring of happiness, but laughter is often the misbegotten child of madness, that mocks its parent to her face” (Maturin 309). With grim, satanic irony, just when the couple are forever parted, sweet innocent Immalee/Isadora produces the demonic laughter that displays her acceptance of their spiritual, physical, psychic bond. In a temporally delayed way, she’s taken what should normally not be invitational laughter as exactly that.

To say that the Wanderer’s laughter is not simply villainous bravado laughter, but instead troubles-laughter, is also to point to how Maturin uses it bring a complex ambiguity into the
Wanderer’s speech. The Wanderer tries to stay cruel with Immalee/Isadora, but he’s not capable of maintaining his distance; his wavering, his ambivalence, is performed for Immalee/Isadora in his laughter. For contrast, consider some laughter produced by one of the true villains of *Melmoth*. Although Baudelaire writes of the Wanderer’s laughter as a sound that “glace et tord les entrailles” (Baudelaire 8) [*freezes and twists your entrails*], Maturin carefully sets this off in contrast with an actually cruel, sadistic use of laughter. In “The Story of the Spaniard”, the protagonist Alonzo Monçada is led by a companion in (an ultimately treacherous, false) attempt to escape the monastery in which he has been imprisoned by church and family. Opening another story frame, Monçada’s companion – unnamed, yet known for his crime of parricide – tells him a long tale about a heterosexual couple who had infiltrated the monastery, the woman disguised as male, and had finally been caught out. As punishment, they are lured into a cell whose door is then nailed shut. While they slowly starve to death, Monçada’s companion waits outside the door, listening to their conversations and agonies

[The] groan, the agony I feasted on, were real. I took my station at *the door* – that door which, like that of Dante’s hell, might have borne the inscription, ‘Here is no hope,’ … I would not have quitted my place for worlds … I was hungry now, but I reserved the appetite of my soul for richer luxuries. I heard them talking within. … I actually lived on the famine that was devouring them, but of which they did not dare to say a word to each other. They debated, deliberated, and, as misery grows ingenious in its own defence, they at last assured each other that it was impossible the Superior had locked them in there to perish by hunger. At these words I could not help laughing. This laugh reached their ears, and they became silent in a moment. (211)
This laughter is not the mix of despair and hope, love and hatred, and hot ambivalence of worlds that tears the Wanderer’s laughter from within, nor is it Immalee/Isadora’s echoing laughter of reckless sympathy. It is “le sadisme du maître” (*Chiens* 805) [the sadism of the master], the laughter of the torturer, used to such effect on prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Yet Monçada’s companion wants no information, not even submission – nothing except his cruel delectation. Laughter in Sade’s *120 journées de sodome*, by comparison, is no less vicious, acting no less to multiply the victims’ suffering.

**Tentacular Mirth**

H.P. Lovecraft’s science fiction novella, “In the Walls of Eryx” (written in collaboration with Kenneth Sterling in 1936), brings together themes of colonialism, racism and servitude with representations of vengeful laughter. Representations of laughter are recur in Lovecraft’s fiction in two main modes. First, as “mad” or “insane” laughter. The ending of some Lovecraft stories are announced by the eruption of insane laughter by the protagonist. These leisure-class aesthetes, comparable to Huysmans’ character Jean des Esseintes or Wilde’s Dorian Grey, but connoisseurs instead of the secrets of the occult, learn some shockingly bleak truth about humanity’s place in the cosmos. The revelation, the tear in protective filters of consciousness, is too much: their reason is snapped by this encounter with an “unnameable,” “indescribable” abomination, that, terribly, proves to be closer to the universal median than humanity. Towards the conclusion of “The Call of the Cthulhu,” for example

Briden looked back [to see the giant squid-like god Cthulhu rising from the ocean] and went mad, laughing shrilly as he kept on laughing at intervals until death found him one night in the cabin whilst Johansen was wandering
deliriously. ... That was all. After that Johansen only ... attended to a few matters of food for himself and the laughing maniac [Briden] by his side (168).

In Lovecraft’s imagination, the minds of men like Briden become cracked instruments that can only replay the sound of an even greater, malign cosmic laughter. Insofar as divinity can be made to notice humanity at all in Lovecraft, divinity only laughs in derision. “The Call of the Cthulhu” ends in

dizzying rides through reeling universes on a comet's tail, and of hysterical plunges from the pit to the moon and from the moon back again to the pit, all livened by a cachinnating chorus of the distorted, hilarious elder gods and the green, bat-winged mocking imps of Tartarus. (169)

The implications, in terms of humour theory, are again superiorist. What’s laughable to the “mocking imps” is humanity’s delusion of any shred of efficacy or cosmic importance. Comparable laughter is used as a divine threat in the Old Testament, when Yaweh announces: “I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (King James Version, Prov.1:26).

Lovecraft’s work is not only nihilist, but often indefensibly racist. It is hard to read, in Lovecraft’s biography, that “He … had a black cat, Nigger-Man, to whom he was devoted” (de Camp 36). It is even harder to read early poems of Lovecraft’s, such as “On the Creation of Niggers” (1913), which ends: “A beast they wrought, in semi-human figure, / Filled it with vice, and called the thing a NIGGER” (qtd. in de Camp 95). Much of Lovecraft’s fiction is indeed a fantastical allegory of the xenophobia and misanthropy of a disappointed, white, would-be aristocrat after the abolition of slavery. The legal equality of races, to such a mind, is a horror. When describing the fish-people of the imaginary town of Innsmouth, in “The Shadow Over
Innsmouth” (1931), Lovecraft draws them partly by mixing and exaggerating black African and Mediterranean racial caricatures: “Some of ‘em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starry eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain’t quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of the necks are all shrivelled or creased up. Get bald, too, very young” (273). Any language that does not resemble English is a thing of terror in Lovecraft: “The paintings were appalling—hideous monsters of every shape and size, and parodies on human outlines which cannot be described. The writing was in red, and varied from Arabic to Greek, Roman, and Hebrew letters” (“Red Hook” n.p.). In a hearing of urban heteroglossia that is diametrically opposite to Petronius’, Césaire’s or Villon’s, in “The Horror at Red Hook” (1927) Lovecraft hears the slums of 1920s Brooklyn as a “polyglot abyss,” a hell where “the evil spirit of darkness and squalor broods on among the mongrels in the old brick houses.” Contemplating the scene in the bustling streets, where “visible offences are as varied as the local dialects”, his narrator Thomas Malone pontificates that: “modern people under lawless conditions tend uncannily to repeat the darkest instinctive patterns of primitive half-ape savagery in their daily life and ritual observances; and he had often viewed [the scene] with an anthropologist’s shudder.” Too many of Lovecraft’s stories are constructed this way, building from stylistically cartoonish, but genuinely hateful, racialization, towards the “insane titter of a naked phosphorescent thing.” Otherworldly monstrousness is drawn on a direct continuum (the “slippery slope” of reactionary discourse) with being non-Aryan. But as L. Sprague de Camp documents, mainly through Lovecraft’s letters, by 1936 the writer had started on a path towards recanting his racism. In 1935, he was gripped with a book called The Science of Life\textsuperscript{104}, which programmatically debunks racist social theories of blood purity. The same Lovecraft who had once effused that “To be a

member of a pure-blooded race ought to be the greatest achievement in life!” (qtd. in de Camp 98) now turned against the “crazy scientific fallacies” (378) of the Aryan cult. “In the Walls of Eryx” (1936) draws together all three of these major tendencies in Lovecraft’s creative and intellectual processes, to converge in a kind of colonial settler’s fantasy/nightmare. It is a caricature of caricatures, one irresistibly reminiscent of a passage in Frantz Fanon’s *Damnés de la terre*: “On peut prétendre qu’à l’heure du spoutnik il est ridicule de mourir de faim, mais pour les masses colonisées l’explication est moins lunaire” (Fanon *Damnés* 77) [We can pretend that in the age of Sputnik it is ridiculous to die of hunger, but for the colonised masses the explanation is not so spaced-out].

Blending tropes and motifs from the historical colonisation of (mainly) South America and Africa, “Eryx” takes place on a planet Venus overgrown with damp jungles of carnivorous and or hallucinogenic plants. The fauna have weirding names like: “skorahs,” “ugrats,” and “sificlighs.” A private corporate entity, the Crystal Company, has a base on Venus, from where it sends solitary, but well-armed, leather-suited piece-workers to collect luminescent Venusian crystals that are an unequalled source of energy for cities on Earth. The main obstacle to rapid exploitation of the resource is the race of native “man-lizards” who, inconveniently, happen to worship those same crystals. The alien fauna are given names, note, but not the alien people of Venus. The narrator, Wesley P. Miller, is one of the pieceworkers. Early on, he expresses nakedly genocidal solutions to the company’s problem: “I wish they’d get a new religion, for they have no use for the crystals except to pray to. ... Sometime I’ll urge the wiping out of these scaly beggars by a good stiff army from home” (4). He openly scoffs at theories about the natives’ intelligence: “I doubt if they even have a real language” (5). Soon, baited with a particularly fine crystal, Miller finds himself trapped in an invisible maze on the plateau of Eryx
– the maze is a technological marvel built by the nameless, presumably languageless “damnable man-lizards” (4).

Now his problems compound: the oxygen tank is low; food pellets are running out. A series of recognitions takes place. Already 24 hours into his slow death, Miller realises that “the motions of those [four long, ropy pectoral tentacles] … indicate that the [lizard] things were in animated conversation” (22). This is difficult enough for Miller, but the true moment of horror comes still later. By this time, a sizeable group of the lizard-men have gathered around the invisible walls, apparently to watch the coloniser die in their trap.

The circling watchers were swaying their tentacles in an odd, irregular way suggestive of sly, alien laughter, and I shook my fist savagely at them as I rose. My gesture seemed to increase their hideous mirth – a few of them clumsily imitating it with their greenish upper limbs. (24)

Here he is hesitant to recognise the tentacle-wiggling as derisory laughter, but Miller’s language soon shifts registers, towards certainty. As his doom unfolds

My head is weak from thirst, suffocation, and exhaustion ... Those damnable green things keep staring and laughing with their tentacles, and sometimes they gesticulate in a way that makes me think they share some terrible joke just beyond my perception. ... [The] watchers outside intensified their cryptic gesticulations and sardonic silent laughter. Evidently they [see] something grimly amusing in my progress. (27)

Later “the creatures [mass] around the [labyrinth’s] entrance — gesturing, leaping, and laughing with their tentacles” (28). The recognition that the lizard-men can laugh coincides with the frustrations of Miller’s attempts to escape, and the dawning recognition that he has no hope.
Lovecraft and Sterling here push off from the tenacious Aristotelean belief that humans are the only laughing animal\textsuperscript{105}, into a chain of consequent realisations that, for a eugenicist like Lovecraft, are the true horror behind “The Walls of Eryx.”

As Frantz Fanon writes: “Le colonisé sait tout cela et rit un bon coup chaque fois qu’il se découvre animal dans les paroles de l’autre. Car il sait qu’il n’est pas un animal. Et précisément, dans le même temps qu’il découvre son humanité, il commence à fourbir ses armes pour la faire triompher” (Fanon \textit{Damnés} 52) [The colonised knows all that and has a good laugh every time he discovers himself an animal in the speech of the other. Because he knows he is not an animal. And exactly, at the same time that he discovers his humanity, he starts to fashion weapons to make that humanity triumph]. Césaire explicitly resists such dehumanising discourse in characterisations of a \textit{rire noir}, the laughter of négritude, characterisations that counter-appropriate animalising features in the construction of colonised and enslaved peoples. Césaire reimagines this as a powerful, snarling, voluntary animality: “Je pars. Je n’arriverai point. C’est égal, mais je pars sur la route des arrivées avec mon rire \textit{prognathe}. / Je pars. Le trisme du désespoir ne déforme point ma bouche.” [“I’m leaving. I will not arrive. Never mind, but I’m leaving on the road of arrivals with my prognathous\textsuperscript{106} laughter. / I’m leaving. The trismus of despair does not distort my mouth” (Collected 143-4)].\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} The saying is “\textit{risus proprium hominis}, conveyed in Rabelais as “rire est le propre de l’homme”. John O’Brien translates and explains: “‘laughter is specific to man’ (as, for instance, neighing is specific to the horse)” (\textit{Cambridge Companion to Rabelais} 31). Biologists have repeatedly debunked this old prejudice: “At least three of the higher primates – man, chimpanzees, and gorillas – exhibit laughter.” (Fry and Allen 141). It is probably safe now to add: bonobos, crows, ravens, African grey parrots and dolphins.

\textsuperscript{106} OED: “\textit{Chiefly Physical Anthropol}. Having projecting or forward-pointing jaws, teeth, mandibles, etc.; having a facial angle of less than 90°; having a gnathic index of 103 or more. Of jaws or a lower jaw: prominent, protruding.”

\textsuperscript{107} Elsewhere, Césaire can be found in an animal-vegetal ecstasy like Lovecraft’s tentacular Venusians, summoning all this organic power as his own: “Quelle sottise une paix proliférante / d’obsures puissances. Branchies opacules / palmes syrinx pennes. Il me pousse / invisibles et instants par tout le corps, / secrètement exigés des sens / et nous voici pris dans le sacré / tourbillonnant ruissellement primordial / au recommencement de tout.” [“What nonsense a
That the Venusians in “Eryx” can talk and laugh brings them across a major symbolic threshold – and they come closer to humanness with each of Miller’s diminishing stock of food pellets. Miller’s early genocidal impulses are revised towards colonial guilt, as he realises that he has been killing fully developed persons with his “flame pistol” as if they were weeds. It is the tentacle-laughing – which continues to wiggle (not echo!) recurrently through the last half of the story – that mockingly underscores his errors again and again and again, until the very moment before he shuts his eyes forever: “They are still laughing and leaping around the doorway” (30). He admits his actions have been criminal: “Let us leave to Venus that which belongs only to Venus” (29). This (truly inter-planetary) white supremacy, and the capitalist claim to eminent domain, lies crushed in the mud under derisive, tentacle-laughter. Miller asks himself “In the scale of cosmic entity who can say which species stands higher, or more nearly approaches a space-wide organic norm – theirs or mine?” (30). These invisible walls are a very, very heavy-handed symbol of a barrier of a mutual cultural unintelligibility, here imagined as unbreachable group boundaries. The lizard-men display with their laughter a group consciousness and somatic collectivity Miller, in his corporate human world, does not have; his Crystal Company employers sent him out without means to communicate with their base at Terra Nova, and they make no effort at his rescue. It is Miller’s horror to discover, as he dies, that he has no value to the Company, or humanity, beyond the profit surplus he can generate. He is in fact one of Lovecraft’s only working class protagonists. Not only crushed under the superior laughter of lizard-men, he is at the bottom of an inhumane capitalist hierarchy as well, the same hierarchy he served proudly. But recall that the lizard-men emerge for Miller towards humanness through the

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\begin{align*}
&text{\textit{peace proliferating / with obscure powers. Gills opacules / palm branches syrinx quills. Invisible and instant / secretly required, senses / grow all over me, / and here we are caught in the sacred / whirling primordial streaming / at the second beginning of everything}}} \quad (\text{Collected 101-2}).
\end{align*}
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recognition that they are cruelly laughing at his death. Their transit is perhaps from one kind of monstrousness to another, towards a more human monstrousness. As Miller dies, the invisible walls of Eryx become also a symbolic mirror, just as the tentacle-laughter is a symbolic echo. At the conclusion of another Lovecraft story, “The Outsider”, the same switch is performed literally:

I recognized, most terrible of all, the unholy abomination that stood leering before me as I withdrew my sullied fingers from its own. ... I stretched out my fingers to the abomination within that great gilded frame; stretched out my fingers and touched a cold and unyielding surface of polished glass. (web; no pagination)

Doing Mad Laughter

Early in “The Story of the Spaniard” in Melmoth the Wanderer, Alonzo Monçada is already imprisoned in a monastery cell, and is being subjected to repeat interrogations regarding his announced intention to disavow. Many of the other monks are meanwhile agitating to have him burnt at the stake. Giving up on solely verbal negotiation, he finally defies his captors and interrogators by accenting or amplifying the strength of the position he has already taken – refusal to become a monk – with aggressive laughter. He uses laughter as a way to pretend to strength from a position of total vulnerability, trying, as in ordinary interactions, to buy himself time: “I said to those who attended me that morning, ‘You are arraying me for a victim, but I can turn the executioners into the victims if I please’ — and I laughed. The laugh terrified those who were about me—they retreated” (96). Monçada’s laugh, not his bragging, scares the monks, a fear that then spreads through the whole monastery.
This example opens an opportunity to reconsider a question opened earlier: what are the pragmatics of “mad” laughter? The assumption here is that Monçada is doing “mad laughter” intentionally. Monçada isn’t mentally ill, although he’s been driven by extreme circumstance to adopt an extreme communicative strategy. The descriptor “mad” is really an imputation that glosses the laughter’s unintelligibility. Mad laughter displays a drastic non-alignment between speaker and hearer, even when there’s a kind of conflictual cooperativeness (i.e. cooperating in the activity of having a dispute) still in play. Laughing at too many things, too often, invitationally or not, will often be oriented to as trouble. Laughter has a strong indexicality: “it is heard as referring to something, and hearers will seek out its referent” (Glenn Laughter 48). When someone laughs often, and persistently, but obscures the referent, the laughter will be heard as, at very least, obstructive. With persistence, it can be heard as mad. In a more general way: mad laughter is laughter that is heard to excessively “nonfulfill” (Mooney 2004) the principles that shape and guide interaction. Mad laughter does this so excessively – as per the model of conversational cooperation proposed by Paul Grice – that the very ways in which it is not fulfilling those rules becomes in itself unintelligible.

Unintelligibility, in Grice’s model, means something specific, and it is something relatively hard to achieve. In brief, when interactant bends or “flouts” one of the dominant conversational norms (of appropriateness, manner, quality, quantity, relation and relevance of responses (see Grice 368)), others will treat the flout, if not as consciously intended at least as rhetorically purposeful, and begin (automatically) to draw meaning from the flout itself. As Dynel points out, irrespective of some unfortunate wording in Grice’s written work, Grice’s theory amounts to a theory of meaning in interaction. Rather than an idealist model, Grice’s model presupposes that speakers are almost constantly flouting, and that the work people do to
account for those flouts is one of the key ways that meaning is constructed, through an effect known as “implicature”, abundantly in evidence in those moments when what a speaker implies is observably distinct from what they say in a semantic sense (see Grice 24). A perfectly instrumental language would, specifically, be a flout-free language, without the possibility for implicature. It would be like extremely simple computer code. (George Orwell’s newspeak, with its constantly shrinking vocabulary, is an attempt to imagine that very possibility.) In practice, this means that people have such a generous, innate, flexible capacity to account for flouts that flouting has to be sustained or quite extreme to cross a threshold towards unintelligibility. Most laughter is precisely coordinated with speech but, not being speech, laughter’s introduction into the stream of talk is always a minor flout. For this reason, it takes either considerable persistence and/or the fact of a very significant non-alignment between speaker and listener for laughter to begin to be heard as mad.

As the above suggests, mad laughter is something that can be done inadvertently by someone who is mentally ill. Mad laughter, however, is also something that a speaker can do intentionally (which is not necessarily to say with conscious calculation) to effect the course of an interaction, as Monçada does in Melmoth. By contrast, earlier in the story when Monçada uses a similar tonality of laughter with his father, the elder man successfully draws meaning from it.

[Driven] … by my outrageous conduct, to a pitch of fury, – he drew his sword. I burst into a laugh, that froze his blood as he approached me. I expanded my arms, and presented my breast, exclaiming, ‘Strike!’(126)

The laughter works on Monçada’s verbalised bravado. It may or may not be that he’s fronting, but “froze his blood” indicates that the laughter works to produce the right implicature: the father grasps that, in that moment, Monçada truly is prepared to die. Unlike the father, the Superior in
the monastery is in a position of near-absolute power over many persons’ lives, unused to any limits to the exercise of that power. When being interrogated by the Superior himself, who can order him burnt at the stake, Monçada laughs in a similarly defiant way. From a place of such odious privilege, the Superior is unable to read the defiant laughter of a person whose life is in his hands; he can only hear it as “mad” or even “demonic.” After flapping around Monçada’s cell like a frightened chicken – he “ran in despair around the cell” (96) – the Superior asks: “What demon has taken possession of you, my child?” (98). Unhearable as laughter, instead it is this other thing: mad and demonic. Such has often been the relation of the paracanonic, as both unavoidable (because affiliated with a canon) yet unhearable. It is in this sense that the paracanonically active text is sometimes the bad guest at the banquet of myth Canon – too drunk, too loud, too unpredictable, lacking the right social dispositions or unable, or unwilling, to perform them convincingly.

**Larval, Eggy Laughter**

Throughout the writings of Aimé Césaire, Edouart Morot-Sir hears a constant murmuring undercurrent of bitter laughter, emphasising that “even when the word ‘rire’ is not on the surface of the poem, it is part of a secret ‘dynamic schema’ which is personal and collective” (314-5). Laughter indeed appears abundantly throughout Césaire’s writings, in varied tonalities, and it does so with especial concentration, prominence and variety in *Et les chiens se taisaient*.

Marking the first step in Césaire’s eventual move from lyric poetry into dramatic writing, this seldom written-about “tragédie” first appeared as part of his poetry collection *Les Armes miraculeuses* in 1946, then revised and expanded from closet-drama into a version for the stage in 1956. The changes to the later version include clarifying the political intent of the play with
the addition of a number of didactic passages and with the inflation of its passages of political satire. A. James Arnold finds in *Chiens* “the most complex and the most complete representation of négritude as a cultural project [Césaire] ever undertook” (*Lyric* xix). *Chiens* is a dense, semantically noisy, dream-like succession of spasmodic lyric surges, composed through a combination of furious “écriture automatique” [*automatic writing*] and a scrupulous excavation of African, pre-Christian and African slave-diasporic religious tropes. Its main character, known only as the Rebel, is introduced as doomed in the first line: “Bien sûr qu’il va mourir le Rebelle” (788) [For sure the Rebel is going to die]. Part religious messiah, part charismatic revolutionary leader, part historical cipher, the Rebel undergoes an anguished process of spiritual and political introspection through a linked chain of poetic monologues and oblique exchanges with a variety of typified characters108, until finally he lies, in Act 3, “Mort dans un taillis de clérodendres parfumés” (845) [“Dead in a copse of perfumed clerodendrons” (Lyric 69)] with the revolution he has tried to bring about still imminent.

One of the laughing sounds readers encounter throughout Césaire’s writing is the constant babble (sometimes background, sometimes foreground) of “le mot nègre / comme le dernier rire vêlé de l’innocence” (491) [“the word nigger / the last laugh calved by innocence” (*Collected* 229)]. The silenced dogs of the title of *Chiens* are what are sometimes referred to, in the USAmerican context, as white dogs: dogs trained by slaveholders to guard slaves, and to track and maul escapees109. At a key moment in the first act of *Chiens*, the Rebel reports that

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108 The characters have allegorical names like: Echo, Narrator, Narratress, Chorus, Madwoman, Lover, Bishop, Horseman, Promoter, Administrator, Tempter, Jailer, Messenger, Orator.

109 Testimony of this practice is abundant. For an eye-witness account see *An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (1788) by Dr. Alexander Falconbridge, who saw the African slave trade at its height. I choose this because the pleasure he reports in the dogs is pertinent here: “As [this fleeing slave] was very active, he evaded their design, and got out of their hands. He was, however, prevented from effecting his escape by a large dog, which laid
these creatures of hatred are not silent but laughing: “ca y est... ils ont reniflé la viande du nègre / ils s’arrêtent / ils rient” (804) [That’s it... they have smelled the nigger meat / they’re stopping / they’re laughing]. The Rebel’s other interlocutors at this moment in the play are disembodied voices of temptation: First Tempter’s Voice and Second Tempter’s Voice. These voices would lure him into the collusion of peace and comfort, “à l’oubli de poussières et d’insulte” (804) [“forgetting the dust and the insults” (Lyric 22)]. Just before he mentions the dogs’ laughter, the Rebel cries “arrière bourreaux / ah vous me cligner de l’œil / vous me demandez ma complicité?” (804) [“step back, torturers / ah you wink at me / you insist on my complicity?” (Lyric 22)]. That is: the voices of temptation, the torturers, draw on the resources of laughter in using a laugh-implicative wink. Like a smile, like an interpolated laugh particle, like a “smile voice,” the wink invites the Rebel to affiliate with his oppressors, while also providing for the relevance of the dogs’ shift into a jabbing laughter a moment later. When he resists, crying “au secours au meurtre,” [help me, murder] he is instantly re-categorised, by this change in the participant design, from potential collaborator to prey.

Bernadette Cailler, in her book-chapter “Un humour signé révolte” has noticed how these hotly ambivalent positionings and re-positionings are accomplished with laughter throughout Césaire’s writing. She remarks

S’il est un rire chez Césaire, il est amer: rarement chez le poète, la distance de l’être à l’émotion douloureuse atteint ce point d’où, librement, peut jaillir l’humour. On ne saurait non plus douter que chez lui la satire soit toujours à double tranchant: on ne peut, qui que l’on soit, sortir impunément du drame; les bouffons, chez Césaire, ne sont jamais d’une seule couleur. (Cailler 206) [If there...
is laughter in Césaire, it is bitter: rarely with this poet does the distance of the person from painful emotion reach that point where humour can play freely. It is equally certain that with him satire is always double-edged: we cannot, no matter who we are, remove ourselves from the drama; buffoons, in Césaire, are not of only one colour.]

Laughter in Chiens is encountered predominantly in three forms: either the characters laugh (as conveyed onomatopoeically “Ha, ha”); or a stage direction asks for laughter (“He laughs frenetically”); or one of the characters (most often the Rebel) either mentions, refers to, or reports laughter. The latter, the reported laughter, is usually typified in some marvelous way, as when Rebel lists “un éclat de rire de banquise” (839) [an ice floe’s burst of laughter] among the very few powers left to him in his dying moments. In the Rebel’s key oration, in Act 3, he declaims laughter as one of the revolutionary “armes miraculeuses” [miraculous weapons]

summoning

votre rire indompté / rire de larves / rire d’œuf / votre rire de paille dans leur acier / votre rire de lézarde dans le mur / votre rire d’hérésie dans leurs dogmes / votre rire qui tatoue les monnaies sans qu’il s’en doute / votre rire irrémediable / votre rire de vertige où s’abîment fascinées les villes / votre rire de bombe en retard sous leur pieds de maîtres / … attention à la tache maléfique du soleil / … jusqu’à ce que tombe / rire de vos pieds nus / le monde / grand vol fou de poule écrasée.

(833-4) [your untamed laughers larval laughter eggy laughter your laughter a flaw in their steel your laughter a crack in the wall your laughter a heresy in their dogmas your laughter that tattoos coins behind their backs your incurable laughter your laughter a vertigo into which mesmerised cities will sink your
laughter a time bomb under their masters' feet / ... beware of the malevolent stain
of the sun / ... until - laughter of / your bare feet - the world / falls / the great
crazy flight of a struck hen. (Lyric 56-7]

Like Cailler’s and Morot-Sir’s, most approaches to laughter in Césaire approach through the
problem of humour, exploring it in relation to Breton’s humour noir and Léopold Sédar
Senghor’s humour nègre. Césaire’s laughter, a rire noir which transects the two, “finds its
originality and completion in the rire amer” (Morot-Sir 312)\textsuperscript{110}. In these accounts, Césaire’s
writing conjures laughter against the “stand of narrow common sense, of the sober bourgeois
practical spirit” (Bakhtin 102), in the range of the exquisite “grotesque tradition of laughter”
(Bakhtin 101) and somatic solidarity of “the people’s laughter” (Bakhtin 160).

Without contradicting these accounts, the social dynamism of laughter in Césaire,
particularly in Chiens, can perhaps be more acutely heeded with some scrutiny of its pragmatics.
The rire noir described with such raucous allure by the Rebel, is at least in part a performance of
what I above called mad laughter. As Césaire’ writes elsewhere: “Le vrai idéal: la femme
‘possédée’” (“L’Appel au magicien” 1399). \textit{[The true ideal: the ‘possessed’ woman.]} The
apparent possession, as signalled with his quotation marks, is a performance that elicits, from
those it designs as excluded, an imputation of madness or of possession. At the end of his pivotal
oration on laughter, the Rebel himself bursts into delirious rire amer: “\textit{Il rit frénétiquement}”
(834) \textit{[He laughs frenetically]}. Questions linger about this eruption: Who is this laughter for? If it
is for those he is summoning to reclaim the “trésor volé” of their rire noir, is it provided as an

\textsuperscript{110} René Ménil, in issue 12 of Tropiques (the cultural journal founded by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire with Ménil),
gives the best, most fulsome account: “Le rire amer de l’humour… L’humoriste ricane et ne rit pas… De là une
armature qui perce toujours dans l’humour: notre angoisse devant la vie est dépassée mais non supprimée…
L’humoriste de grincement… le ricanement de l’humour sera irréligieux, satanique, cruel… le rire amer de Socrate
regardant, après sa condamnation, ces juges aux ventres pleins d’olives et de lentilles… Lautréamont et son rire
noir…” (qtd. in Morot-Sir 312)
example so that they can emulate its tonality? Does it itself emulate the crazy flight of the struck hen? Is the Rebel working against his own mystification, to corporalise himself? Has any revolutionary leader in world history ever laughed in a comparable way at the end of a major speech? In the world of Chiens, the cachinnation triggers a series of echoes that culminate, 15 lines later, with the sound of an “Antillaen rum shimmer” (Lyric 57) in the stage direction: “Musique aussi hot que possible: le piano ricane, fuites et zigzags de la clarinette que de temps en temps rattrape, avec une grande tape dans le dos, le rire jovial du trombone” (835). [“Music as hot as possible; the piano sneers: flights and zigzags from the clarinet, overtaken from time to time with the great slap on the back by the jovial laughter of the trombone” (Lyric 57)]. Chiens also opens with mad laughter. The First Madwoman and Second Madwoman, like Alonzo Monçada when confronted in his cell, deflect a threat by doing unintelligible laughter. The sequence unfolds: “Deuxième Folle, riant: Ah, c’est un conte. / Le Chœur, menaçant: L’île raidit ses pattes d’araignée venimeuse sur la gadoue des barracoons. / Première Folle: Hou, hou / Deuxième Folle: Hou, hou” (789) 111. [“Second Madwoman, laughing: Ah, a story. / Chorus, threateningly: The island stiffens its venomous spider legs over the muck of the barracoons. / First Madwoman: Hou, hou. / Second Madwoman: Hou, hou” (Lyric 4).] The intimate treasure here is the treasure of a secret intimacy, laughter’s pragmatic capacity to constitute a group. Césaire’s Rebel proposes laughter as the key means to realise the bond of négritude – the fraternity or sorority of the oppressed – mapped in Chiens. Thus, as the Rebel says, the rire noir is a currency coined out of their own skins, the “laughter that tattoos coins” (Lyric 56). It goes on

111 Femi Ojo-Ade’s reading of comparable laughter finds the resources of timing and delay at work in its performative inscrutability. He writes that characters like the Madwomen use laughter to buy time. It is both a decoy and an emotional ruse: “We know that the slave uses laughter to deceive the unwary master who, in his stupidity, would believe that his victim is happy, like a big, underdeveloped baby, forever laughing out of naïveté in a world beyond his comprehension. The yessah-massa laughter has been known to be a useful weapon as the slaves prepare their getaway from the horrors of the plantation” (Femi 36).
“without their knowing”, or “behind their backs.” To the ear of hegemony, this currency of sound and skin, these coins of leather, can only sound as counterfeit: mad, unintelligible, contraband. In this precise sense, the paracanonic flaw of the “laugh of straw in their steel,” or “laughter-flaw in their steel,” is not induced by the laughter/bond, they are the flaw. Entwined with the “saltpetre treasure” (Césaire) of language, this togetherness, this “unvanquished laughter,” has remained “a free weapon in their hands” (Bakhtin 94) because (like language) it is that very thing of which they can never be fully dispossessed – only alienated from. In that capacity, Césaire’s Rebel figures rire noir as a ticking time-bomb. It may be, then, that the Rebel’s final frenetic laugh should be heard as Bakhtin might have, as a vanquishing: “Victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation. Hell has burst and has poured forth abundance” (91).

Bursting and pouring forth: in Chiens laughter often erupts this way. Throughout the play, Césaire associates laugh sounds with a range of para-linguistic noises, and with the soundscape of the historical and fantastical context of the play’s action. The Rebel in Act 2, a few lines before he “sneers, Ha, ha” (38) claims: “je suis prêt / sonore à tous les bruits et plein de confluences” (817) [“I am ready / resounding with all the noise and filled with confluences” (38)]112. As A. James Arnold notes (Modernism 64), Césaire, following Breton, worked mostly with the Freudian – or the so-called “hydraulic model” (Berger 54) – of laughter as something

112 The term ricaner translates only poorly into English sneer. In French, it denotes a grimacing, animalistic laughter, associated with the laugh-like sounds made by the hyena. Ricaner is the “prognathous laughter” of Césaire. As Hénane writes: “C’est aussi l’humour qui ricane. Si l’on observe que le mot ‘ricané’ vient de la contraction de deux mots latins ‘ridere,’ rire et ‘cahinnus’ rire extrême, excessif, on note combine, dans la vue césairienne, l’excès est la marquée primordial de l’humour lautréamontien” (Hénane 12). In one sequence, the Rebel draws his Mother into somatic and mental synchrony with him through ricanement. She first rejects him as only “black limbs in the fangs of the wind” (38). He challenges her despair, drawing her towards him with laugh-carnality and inserting a barrier against her despair with dry irony: “sneering: Ha, Ha, what a revenge for the whites” (38). In the exchange that follows, Rebel and Mother share the same mind, each finishing the other’s thoughts, until the Rebel tells a long story that again nudges them apart. Mother regrets: “Alas you will die” (39).
that expresses, spills forth, pent-up psychic and/or social tensions. When the Rebel laughs here, it seems that all the noises and historical confluences with which he is internally resounding break back out into the open field of the social, in a Freudian expulsion. In a sequence early in the play, laughter pours forth in a way that directly invokes the mix of celebration and trouble encountered in riots, environments, as I have argued, that include a great deal of laughter.

The riot sequence in *Chiens*, in Act 1, opens with signature sounds, while returning to the image of mythic setting sun with which this study began: “Le Rebelle: Ho, ho, une odeur de cadavre… du sang pétillant comme une grande cuve de vin. / La Récitante: Il n’est que de cogner à la vitre du soleil. Il n’y a qu’à casser la glace du soleil. Il n’y a qu’à découvrir dans la boîte du soleil la houppe rouge des fourmis venimeuses éclatées à tous vents. Ha, Ha.” (797) [“Rebel: … Ho, ho, the smell of cadavers… blood bubbling like a fat barrel of wine. / Narratress: All it takes is a knock on the sun’s windowpane. One only needs to break the sun’s plate glass. One only needs to discover in the sun’s box the red crests of venomous ants bursting in every direction. Ha. Ha” (Lyric 14)].

Objectively, a riot can be said to begin with a celebratory or catastrophic “breakdown of the barrier between public and private property” (Barnholden 17), the signature of which is the sound of glass shattering. As Michael Barnholden witnesses in *Reading the Riot Act*:

[A] lawful assembly can become unlawful when the common purpose becomes unlawful. But [in the eyes of the law] when does the peace begin to be disturbed tumultuously? The answer in almost every case is the sound of broken glass … which moves the police riot squad to action, and signals the change from an unlawful assembly to the beginning of a riot. (Barnholden 17)
Sidney Fine’s conservative *Violence in the Model City*, on the Detroit riot of 1967, depicts riot as racial nightmare (nightmarish for white citizens, I mean) with reference to these sounds: “What Johnson never forgot about the event was ‘the sound of things,’ of glass breaking, fires burning, and excited people, the sound of a riot” (Fine 169). With the strength of this association, the sound becomes pragmatically available to rioters as a communicative resource. Breaking glass is a way to contribute to the flare up of riot. Like laughter and laugh cues, the sound of breaking glass, placed accurately and contextually cued, tells hearers that the activity of rioting is underway, and invites hearers to riot while warning others away. The sound can say: we have entered the space of riot; riot has begun, and it speaks: “The jouissance of windowbreaking is associated with violent, traumatic sound and the insistence on being heard. To be heard in turn is to be redeemed from anonymity” (Armstrong 67). In certain cases, it becomes a rejoicing sound. Isobel Armstrong refers to the “festival of glass-breaking” (Armstrong 57), while Roberta Senechal de la Roche, writing about the anti-African American race riots of Tulsa in 1908 reports such a scene. Encouraged by white police: “With each cascade of broken glass, the crowd applauded and cheered” (Senechal de la Roche 29). The same signal can be heard by police as license to violent repression. As Michael Barnholden writes, of the Gastown riot in Vancouver in 1972: “At the sound of breaking glass, or so he claimed, Inspector Abercrombie ordered [his police] to move in and clear the streets. … the crowd felt the full force of nightsticks, fists, and boots … horses were used to chase people into doorways” (Barnholden 92). In the different responses to the same shattering sound, the signifier is seen as the site of political struggle. Glass-breaking rioters “literally and symbolically [deconstruct] false [social] unity by smashing glass, asserting their own agency and separateness” (Armstrong 62).
One only needs to break the sun’s plate glass. The laughter that pours forth in *Chiens* after the pane is smashed is in the form of onomatopoeic laugh particles “Ha, Ha,” which earlier was cued with “ho, ho.” These particles imply in *Chiens* a paracanonic theory of unhappy laughter gnawing on speech. René Hénane, in his detailed bestiary of Césaire, writes about the special function of biting insects in *Chiens*. Insects “apparaît ainsi comme la bête emblématique de la haine et du ressentiment” (Hénane 208) [*appear in this way as the emblematic creature of hatred and resentment*]. Elsewhere, in *Chiens*, the Rebel associates such antagonising pests with reference to the dyad of laugher and hearer: “des rampements de larves grossiers dans la vallée de mes oreilles… le tafia vous fera naître des termites dans la gorge (821-4). [*fat larvae crawling in the valley of my ears … tafia will make termites hatch in your throats*” (Lyric 42-6)]. The analogy I extrapolate is of *interpellated laugh particles* as moving, swarming, as clinamen-like interlopers into communication that viciously bite into the parts of rational discourse like venomous pests. Hénane finds in this the underlying political tactic assumed in Césaire’s poetry:

L’impréca tion césairienne fait appel à l’agression insidieuse qui fait périr l’ennemi dans les affres de la douleur et dans la sidération progressive des fonctions vitals sous l’effet du venin. L’arme chimique s’insinue dans l’intimité des tissus et bloque progressivement, avec une terrible lenteur, les mécanismes primordiaux de la vie. (Hénane 205) [*Césaire’s imprecation evokes that insidious aggression which kills the enemy in spasms of pain and with the gradual paralysis of vital functions from the effects of venom. The chemical weapon insinuates into the tissues and gradually blocks, with a terrible slowness, those mechanisms fundamental to life.*]
The above sequence explicitly develops the promise of laughter as a riot. After the alarm signal of the broken glass, the Rebel reports that: “le flot noir monte… des vagues de hurlements … dans le rire charbonneux du coutelas et de l’alcool mauvais” (797). [“the black flood rises … waves of howling … in the coal-black laughter of cutlasses and cheap booze” (14)]. Not laughter here as weapon, but laughter of weapons: the slashing, killing cutlasses join the many inanimate things that laugh in Chiens: ice caps, trees, tom toms, pianos, trombones. The Chorus soon after are directed to “mime the scene of a black rebellion” (15). When contested, the Energumen resist by an explicit refusal of silence. Their freedom is the freedom of noisiness, to be heard, they cry: “mort aux Blancs” (798) [death to the whites]. Finally, with jubilant vengefulness: “La Récitante (d’une voix cinglante): À la fin… ce que je vois à la fin… … la culbute de la bête … son insolence triturée de prières, et sur ses blessures, la pimentade de mon rire et le sel de mes pleurs” (798) [“Narratress, in a slashing voice: In the end… what I see in the end … the collapse of the beast … its insolence chewed up with prayers, and on its wounds the pimento sauce of my laughter and the salt of my tears” (15)]. In such interactions, the audacious, pitiless “rire noir incoercible … fait trembler l’opressor” (Fabre 156) [incoercible black laughter … makes the oppressor tremble] because, like the Rebel’s frenetic cachinnation, it nominates the violent fall of colonialism and capitalism – la bête [the beast] – as deliriously laughable rather than lamentable.

Laughter is not functionally unitary, nor static in Chiens. In places, it is a swarm of stinging insects, in others a hyena-like pack-sneer, or the powerful rire noir of Black solidarity. When cast across lines of concrete social antagonism in Chiens, laughter mainly functions as a barbed lure. Note that just before his key oration on laughter, the Rebel is “pretending to rock a child.” The Narrators and Chorus will respond to the speech, and to his frenetic combustion of
laughter, by echoing five times the announcement: “The son is arriving” (Lyric 57). Earlier, in Act 2, the Rebel has told a story to his Mother in which his infant son is being entertained by his “very good master” (Lyric 39). Caressing the child “Ses yeux bleus riaient et sa bouche le taquinait de choses sucrées” (819) [“/The master’s/ blue eyes were laughing and his mouth was teasing him with sugary things” (Lyric 39)]. The laughter in the slavedriver’s eyes is pragmatically for the baby: laughing along, the infant is being socialised. It is cane juice laughter: part of the process of subjective enslavement and learned acceptance of dehumanisation. The very good master’s “sugary things” – laugh-implicative sounds and signals – are gigolo dainties, snare confections. (Killing this slavedriver, while his cutlass “riaient aux étoiles” (819) [“chort[ed] at the stars” (Lyric 40)], Rebel says: “je frappai, le sang gicla: c’est le seul baptême dont je me souvienne” (820) [“I struck, the blood spurted: it is the only baptism I remember” (Lyric 41)].) Later, the First Tempter’s Voice tries to ply the Rebel with laughter and frosted promises: Ha, Ha, Ha, des mots rien que des mots: veux-tu de l’argent? des titres? De la terre? … je jure que tu seras roi” (827). [“Ha, Ha, Ha, words nothing but words: is it money you want? titles? land? … I swear you will be King” (Lyric 49)]. As such a noxious treat, “thrushes laughing in the pod tree” in a nostalgically remembered “succulent morning” can make the vats of boiling cane juice, symbol of brutal forced labour in Césaire113, fond: “le vesou ne sentait pas mauvais” (840). [“the cane juice did not smell bad” (Lyric 63).] Here despair is manifest as passivity. The Chorus have surrendered their “miraculous weapon” to the birds. The Rebel is powerless: “j’enfonce à mi-jambes dans les hautes herbes du sang” (840) [“I sink to my knees in the tall grass of the blood” (Lyric 63)].

113 As it is in “Mémorial de Louis Delgrès” from Ferrements (1960): “O Briseur Déconcerteur Violent / Je chante la main qui dédaigna d’écumer / de la longue cuillère des jours / le bouillonnement de vesou de la grande cuve du temps” (Collected 334) [“O Breaker Confounder Violent / I sing the hand which disdained to skim / with the long spoon of days the cane juice / boiling of the great vat of time” (Collected 335).
Et les chiens se taisaient ends with laughter that recalls the laughter of the LAPD over the shattered body of Rodney King, the laughter with which this chapter began. After his oration on laughter, and following the “jovial laughter of the trombone”, quite a different kind of crowd appears than after breaking the glass of the sun’s vitrine. Now the Rebel is imprisoned, and a lynch mob (not a riot mob) forms outside the jail: “La prison est entourée d’une foule porteuse de flambeaux vociférant des cris, des insultes. Derrière les barreaux le Rebelle. … La Foule-Chœur : À mort, à mort” (835) [“The prison is surrounded by a vociferous mob carrying torches, shouting insults. Behind bars: the Rebel. … Crowd-Chorus: To death with him” (Lyric 57)]. The beatings and humiliation he receives from the Jailer and the Jailer’s Wife trigger his final decline. Following her husband, whom she encouraged, she strikes the Rebel, musing what “une drôle de race ces nègres” (838) “a funny race those niggers” (Lyric 61).] At the sight of his blood, she erupts: “Oh, oh, son sang coule … c’est à mourir de rire… Dis c’est marrant le sang rouge sur la peau noire” (838) [“Oh oh, some blood … I could die laughing … Hey, red blood on black skin is weird” (61)]. What does it mean, here, that the Jailer’s Wife reports her own hypothetical laughter rather than laughing aloud? Does Césaire regard the bourgeois spirit of laughter as too dried out? The aloofness, in any case, dredges the racial boundary with a confident absoluteness. Cailler quotes Henri Bergson on this kind of racist laughter: “Pourquoi le nègre fait-il rire? interroge Bergson. C’est parce qu’à sa personne est ajouté le travesti, le masque: … le client nègre assis dans sa voiture n’est jamais qu’un ‘Blanc mal lavé’” (Cailler 184-5) [“Why does the negro make us laugh?, asks Bergson. It’s because to his humanity is added travesty, the mask: … the negro customer sitting in his car is never anything but a ‘Poorly washed white’”]. This gaiety is the very laughter of nightmare – the nightmare that is racist and colonial oppression. By this, the Rebel is “jolted” into a vision of “des mains coupées… de la
cervelle giclante… de la charogne molle” (839) [severed hands… blood-spurting brain… mushy carrion] until “He collapses moaning” (Lyric 62). In the final lines of the play, the Narratress explicitly sets aside the “ricanement de roucou précieux” (845) [“precious annatto sneer” (Lyric 70)] of rire noir, to mark its distinction from the hellish laughtrack of the everyday. She prays, finally, for its desiccation, its starvation: “Sang nomade en coquetterie de mort et de genèses / gaspille du fond des pierres trouées et de la nuit des âges / le rire mortel des momies caverneuses!” (845) [“Let the nomadic blood flirting with death and genesis / waste the deadly laughter of cavernous mummies at the bottom of pitted stones and the night of centuries!” (Lyric 69)].
Chapter 1: Introduction


Chapter 2: François Villon


---. *Poems by François Villon*. Tr., with Intro., by John Payne. 1918.


**Chapter 3: (Hot) Ambivalence and Reported Speech**


**Chapter 4: Unhappy Laughter**


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