Once Upon A Time: Romance And Ritual In The Works Of Tommaso Landolfi And Andre Pieyre De Mandiargues

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Abstract
This dissertation studies some features of the 20th century return to romance as a possible answer to the crisis of Modernism or, indeed, as an anti-modern stance. I've analyzed Mandiargues's work on the syntagmatic plan of narrative structures and narrative time and Landolfi's work on the paradigmatic plan of literary genres – while showing how both authors resorted to the diegetic staging of magic and religious rituals in order to highlight and develop their narrative engagement with the forms of romance and discussing the implications of this. For this purpose I have also researched unpublished manuscript material at the Centro Studi Landolfiani in Siena, Italy, and at the IMEC in Caen, France. Landolfi’s approach consistently comes to dismiss any possibility for romance, and indeed for literature as a whole, in our day; my research isolates some hypotexts of his fictions so far unacknowledged by scholars and proposes a reading that supports in an original way the critical distinction between two subsequent phases of his production. Mandiargues on the other hand, while granting that narrative can continue to be possible, seems to argue that this can only happen on the condition of a radical renunciation of identity, which I have considered in connection with notions of violence, eroticism, and alchemy.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Romance Languages

First Advisor
Philippe C. Met

Keywords
Andre Pieyre de Mandiargues, Antimodernism, Identity, Literary genres, Narrative time, Tommaso Landolfi

Subject Categories
Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures

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ONCE UPON A TIME: ROMANCE AND RITUAL IN THE WORKS OF TOMMASO LANDOLFI AND ANDRE PIEYRE DE MANDIARGUES

Nicolò Moscatelli

A DISSERTATION

in

Italian Studies

For the Graduate Group in Romance Languages

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2017

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ABSTRACT

ONCE UPON A TIME: ROMANCE AND RITUAL IN THE WORKS OF TOMMASO LANDOLFI AND ANDRE PIERRE DE MANDIARGUES

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This dissertation studies some features of the 20th century return to romance as a possible answer to the crisis of Modernism or, indeed, as an anti-modern stance. I’ve analyzed Mandiargues’s work on the syntagmatic plan of narrative structures and narrative time and Landolfi’s work on the paradigmatic plan of literary genres – while showing how both authors resorted to the diegetic staging of magic and religious rituals in order to highlight and develop their narrative engagement with the forms of romance and discussing the implications of this. For this purpose I have also researched unpublished manuscript material at the Centro Studi Landolfiani in Siena, Italy, and at the IMEC in Caen, France. Landolfi’s approach consistently comes to dismiss any possibility for romance, and indeed for literature as a whole, in our day; my research isolates some hypotexts of his fictions so far unacknowledged by scholars and proposes a reading that supports in an original way the critical distinction between two subsequent phases of his production. Mandiargues on the other hand, while granting that narrative can continue to be possible, seems to argue that this can only happen on the condition of a radical renunciation of identity, which I have considered in connection with notions of violence, eroticism, and alchemy.
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INTRODUCTION

The first decades of the twentieth century changed the face of Europe with a speed and thoroughness the likes of which had never been seen before. What's more, the exceptionality of this process was widely recognized and, indeed, claimed in the self-representation that European culture gave of itself, resorting to an unprecedented degree to notions of novelty and modernity while radically setting itself against the “old” cultural tradition. The incipit of Marinetti's “Fondazione e manifesto del Futurismo”, published in *Le Figaro* on February 20th, 1909, offers perhaps the best portrayal of this perception, describing the author and his coterie in a cozy apartment characterized by a lush, orientalizing late-nineteenth century décor until, all of a sudden, they run out for a crazy car ride and dictate the eleven points of their manifesto, celebrating modernity at its most violent. These were, after all, the decades that brought upon the West two world wars, the Russian Revolution (and its later degeneration into the Stalinist regime), the rise of fascism, the Great Depression, and the Spanish Civil War, at the same time as everyday life was deeply impacted by new means of production, transportation, and destruction, new social rights, the birth of Fordism, and a heretofore unparalleled diffusion of the mass media. Culturally, these radical changes were matched and complemented by a unique ferment, as the fast pace and loud voice of the avant-garde abruptly came to modify, within a few years, aesthetic canons that had only slowly evolved through the past centuries and, indeed, the very concept of art, opening up the space for the flowering of Modernism – which brought all arts to new vertiginous peaks
and perfected the novel into the highest cultural accomplishment, perhaps, of Western civilization so far. And yet, this flowering was as beautiful as it was short-lived; while its efflorescences were still blooming, Modernism was already on the verge of an irremediable crisis. Indeed, it could be argued that some of its highest accomplishments already brought such a crisis with them; Joyce's *Ulysses*, say, may seem to exhaust the possibilities of the novelistic form precisely by the process in which it pushed it and its premises to their logical extremes. In a way, the history of art and literature in the second half of the twentieth century is the history of the different ways in which artists tried to escape such a cumbersome legacy.

In this study, I will consider two authors who confronted this crisis starting from a similar background and working with similar tools. These authors are the Italian Tommaso Landolfi (1908 – 1979) and the Frenchman André Pieyre de Mandiargues (1909 – 1991). Their literary work is characterized, above all, by a distinct feeling of not quite being the product of its times. Indeed, it may be argued that some of the problems they confronted and some of the solutions they proposed could somewhat anticipate paths and discourses that literature would only have engaged with later on, once postmodernism came along; but it is a strong sense of belonging to a past tradition that seems to thoroughly inform their books (and, for that matter, their personae). What I will explore here is their engagement with narrative forms that provided an alternative to the great tradition of realism as well as to its late development into the modernist novel. Such forms have an illustrious tradition of their own; in relatively recent times, this was embodied in turn in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century resurgence of the fairytale, in the keen Romantic interest for folktales and folklore, and in the nineteenth-century
fantastic tales, Gothic novels, and *feuilletons* among others. There are, however, some specifically twentieth-century cultural phenomena that came to play into this tradition, helping to create the kind of sensibility that informed the research carried on by Landolfi and Mandiargues. These include the full development of disciplines such as history of religion and anthropology, with the likes of Malinowski and Mauss, and the related birth and short life, in the late thirties, of the Collège de Sociologie in Paris; the theories of C. G. Jung; a new attention for “primitive” art and culture, such as the *art nègre*, as well as attempts to recover or reconstruct traditions and symbols from a European legendary past, be it real or imagined (we can think of Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*); a deep interest in irrationalism, shared by many avant-garde artists and inherited, in part, by certain lines of the nineteenth-century thought, including a curiosity for magic, occultism, and esotericism that was widespread within artistic and literary milieus¹ and is perhaps best represented by the figures of Aleister Crowley and René Guénon; the Modernist return to myth²; the Formalist researches on folktales and fairytales; and Surrealism. From these seeds a highly original approach to narrative would branch out, some aspects of which I will be analyzing in this study.

Both Tommaso Landolfi and André Pieyre de Mandiargues were born, within a year, into families belonging to the small aristocracy, and grew up in social circles of fellow writers, artists, and intellectuals. Neither ever really seemed to be what is called a man of his times – indeed, both kept one foot well into the nineteenth century, which is where

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¹ A partial list would include the likes of Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Arthur Machen, William Butler Yeats, Rainer Maria Rilke, August Strindberg, Antonin Artaud, Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz-Milosz, Gustav Meyrink, Thomas Mann, Fernando Pessoa...

² A return that was oftentimes parodic in nature, as if following in Heine's footsteps towards a reduction of mythical material to a bourgeois dimension: we can think of Alberto Savinio, of Jean Ray, or even of Eugenio Montale's “Divinità in incognito”.
most of the readings making up their cultural background came from. Somehow, the twentieth century didn't seem to interest them, even as it was developing around them in the most dramatic way, first with the rise of fascism and then with the second World War. Needless to say, politics didn't interest them either. Mandiargues and Landolfi knew and respected each other; they had common friends (such as Leonor Fini, who painted Landolfi's portrait), met in person at least once, in Venice, and kept a correspondence; moreover, Mandiargues had come to know Landolfi's work very early, in 1940 (only three years after the first short story collection, and one year after the first novel by the Italian had been published), and later curated, and partly translated, an anthology of his short stories into French. When this happened, in 1969, he still thought that Landolfi's

“œuvre […] est à mon sentiment la plus originale et la plus séduisante de la littérature narrative italienne de notre époque.”

It should come as little surprise that the two authors felt a certain kinship with each other, and a cursory look at Mandiargues's preface to Landolfi would suffice to highlight a whole array of commonalities – such as the fascination for the “catégorie du 'démoniaque'” and an “érotisme lunaire”, a strong “penchant […] à se mettre en scène”.

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3 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Préface”, in Tommaso Landolfi, La femme de Gogol et autres récits (présentés par A. P. de M.), Paris : Gallimard 1969, p 8

4 One letter Landolfi wrote to Mandiargues, familiarly addressed to “André”, is preserved in the fonds André Pieyre de Mandiargues at the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC) in Caen, where I've had the possibility to conduct some researches. As Landolfi's family hasn't opened his archive collection to scholars yet, we cannot know for certain whether he retained part of their correspondence as well.

5 As late as 1980, a review of the French translation of a 1947 novel by Landolfi (Racconto d'autunno, bizarrely translated in 1979 as La Jeune fille et le fugitif) stated: “Pauvre Landolfi ! Seul Mandiargues le connaît bien ici, et Dieu sait qu'il le place haut...” (Françoise Wagener, “Étrange Landolfi”, in Le Monde, 04/01/1980).

6 Mandiargues, op. cit. p. 7.

7 Ibid., p. 8

8 Ibid., p. 9. Mandiargues is even certain that Landolfi gets quite a kick from doing this: “sans doute il
“l’atmosphère nocturne ou la singularité du décor”⁹, the “goût pour l'atrocité”¹⁰, and perhaps most crucially the necessity, on the critic's part, to employ for a correct reading of the text the categories of “sadisme et […] masochisme”, which indeed “une fois de plus […] se confondent”. A decided taste for violence and eroticism is, indeed, among the defining features of both writers' fictions¹¹, as well as an easily recognizable debt towards the Surrealist tradition which, however, both reinterpret and conjugate in eccentric, highly personal ways (and which, coincidentally, in both cases gets more visible in the short stories)¹². Eccentricity, geometrically intended in relation to the gravitational centers of French and Italian literature, was a quality that both Landolfi and Mandiargues cultivated, even if this meant that they were to remain very little known to the general public. Mandiargues stayed at the margins of the Surrealist group but never quite associated with it and never shared the fame of his Surrealist friends (even though his 1963 novel *La Motocyclette* made him known to a larger public), and Landolfi remained a writer for the happy few as well, much to the chagrin of his bank account.

By the time they engaged with it the fantastic genre had already exhausted its possibilities within the realm of high-brow literature, and was beginning to get pushed

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⁹ Ibid., p. 10
¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14
¹¹ Étienne Boillet has compared their approach to these themes among others, chiefly that of the monstrous, in his article "Le monstrueux dans les nouvelles d'André Pieyre de Mandiargues et de Tommaso Landolfi", *Revue La Licorne, No. 99, 2012*
¹² In 2009, the Université Bordeaux 3 celebrated the centennial of the two writers' birth by holding a symposium in order to investigate possible convergences between them (with a particular eye on their activity as translators) while collocating them on the “margins of Surrealism”: *Marges du surréalisme et traduction: Samuel Beckett, Tommaso Landolfi, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Octavio Paz*, October 15ᵗʰ, 2009
back into that of popular genre fiction. This, of course, created a somewhat paradoxical situation for two authors who shared a Modernist or, rather, a Symbolist belief in the sacrality of literature; both, however, managed to employ the fantastic within a literary production of the highest standards and scopes. The fantastic allowed them to place themselves within a tradition stemming from the nineteenth century, which constituted the core of their literary inspiration – in the same rather outmoded manner that could be found in the old-fashioned, elaborate turns of phrase that earned them both the reputation of stylists in their respective languages. In Landolfi's case in particular, this tradition is also recalled in a rich tangle of intertextual references, as we'll see, other than in the general feeling of _ottocentismo_ in his stories; and yet, this pervading sense of “already told” doesn't subtract from the substantive originality (which in fact, if anything, it contributes to) to be found in his approach, just like in Mandiargues's rarefied atmospheres and bizarre shadow theaters. We'll see, however, how the two authors' take on the fantastic, although rooted in a lofty literariness, was also instrumental in the way they confronted popular fiction and subsumed it into their texts – mostly by means of the gory effects of a narrative reduced to its most basic motifs of sex and blood, on Mandiargues's part, and of a research on literary genres on Landolfi's. The latter, by the way, explicitly declared that he did not identify at all as a writer of the fantastic. In this work, as I'll point out in the first chapter, I will in fact rather resort to the category of romance, by which I mean, with Northrop Frye, a literary mode opposed to that of the

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13 Gianfranco Contini famously defined, and somewhat dismissed, Landolfi as an “_ottocentista eccentrico in ritardo_”.

14 I will hereafter employ the adjective “romantic” in the acception of “pertaining to romance”, as opposed to the capitalized “Romantic” when referring to Romanticism.
novel proper that may include forms as different as the folktale, chivalric poems, Gothic fiction and Jules Verne's stories, fantastic tales and contemporary genre fiction, encompassing all of the three subdivisions Todorov made between étrange, merveilleux and fantastique. I'll try to show how romance is used by both authors in order to build a discourse on narrative as a whole, and, in fact, on the very possibility of making literature.

Indeed, romance seems to be especially apt to this purpose. Already in medieval times, romances – in their attempt to legitimize themselves and their profane stories alongside the 'proper' literature of religious or Classical origin – insisted on the authority of the written (and what's more, written in Latin) tradition their subject matters came from. Claims that the story being told was based on a book were so frequent, in fact, that they quickly became a trope in themselves. In particular, declaring the abbot Turpinus (to whom a Historia Caroli Magni was mistakenly attributed) to be one's source was de rigueur for any self-respecting writer of chivalric poems; so much so, in fact, that performers of popular cantari – oral narratives in ottava rima recited with musical accompaniment in public places all over Italy between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries – systematically declared that they had gotten their facts from Turpinus precisely in order to justify the most implausible narrative inventions. By the time Boiardo, Pulci, and Ariosto wrote their poems, shifting all responsibility for one's claims to Turpinus was such a well-established stereotype that they jokingly pretended to quote

15 “Chrétien rivendicava per i suoi romans un'autorita culturale basata sul fatto che erano basati su un 'livre', cioè su libri latini di una biblioteca ecclesiastica che contenevano materiali tratti dalla tradizione orale, tradotti poi in volgare per renderli accessibili e preservarli” (L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, “Passare il tempo. La storicità del 'romance' medievale”, in Franco Moretti (ed.), Il romanzo, Torino: Einaudi 2001, vol 1, p. 235)
him (and to praise his trustworthiness) whenever they were relating excessively preposterous deeds, thus positively making him into one of the first instances of the unreliable source trope in the history of literature. From a very early stage, then, romance had established both a very high degree of literary self-reflexivity, doing its best to firmly root itself not only in a literary but in a textual tradition, and a parody thereof. We may, then, retroactively extend to romantic literature as a whole what Philippe Met has observed about the narrower category of the fantastic proper:

In Tommaso Landolfi, in particular, irony and even parody – two key features of his work that scholars have extensively studied – will be inseparable from the luxuriant branching of (inter)textuality; as, indeed, should be logically consequent to a similar thickening of textual and linguistic layers between the subject, i.e. the producer of narrative, and his own utterance.

In 1967 another eccentric master of Italian letters, Giorgio Manganelli, will publish a collection of essays titled *La letteratura come menzogna* ('Literature as a Lie'), praising the fictional, fantastic, and ultimately self-contained nature of literature, a merely

16 Cervantes likely had this in mind when he created his Cide Hamete Benengeli, who moreover – being an infidel and an Arab – was also, obviously, a compulsive liar.
linguistic world only subject to its own rules. This feature, common in fact to all literature, becomes theme and structure in the world of romance. It is the form of literature that Manganelli attributes to some kind of demon, the Great Liar, who may be known as 'the Sailor, the Blind, the Guest, Tusitala – the teller of beautiful stories'\(^\text{18}\) (as far as the Blind is concerned, we should probably think about the Odyssey rather than the Iliad). Frye defines the “symbolic spread” of a text as “the sense that a work of literature is expanding into insights and experiences beyond itself”, and observes: “The symbolic spread of a romance tends [...] to go into its literary context, to other romances that are most like it in the conventions adopted. The sense that more is meant than meets the ear in romance comes very largely from the reverberations that its familiar conventions set up within our literary experience”\(^\text{19}\).

Mandiargues and Landolfi felt both the frustration of such a self-encapsulated enclosure and of the vain desire to reach beyond this linguistic layer, on the one hand, and the uterine wish to dig deep into this nest made of words, shielding themselves away from the threats of history and reality, on the other. Their relationship with the mode of romance is strong, but ambiguous, and their experimentation with it seems to become both a theme and a structure for their writing. I will highlight such discourse on romance as it is dramatically represented in the works of the two writers.

Landolfi publishes his *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi* in 1937; Mandiargues publishes his first fictional book, *Le Musée noir*, in 1946; both will have published almost all of

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their fiction by the very beginning of the seventies. It is true – on a strictly biographic note – that around the beginning of their literary activity, both would have had the chance to experience romance, as it were, in their own life: as proved by the examples of Céline, Cendrars, or Malaparte, times were ripe for the writing of great picaresque frescoes (in which it might have been possible to fit very well the raw material of life, or at least its recounting, into the forms of romance, à la Casanova, while engaging first-hand with history in its making). Both chose not to – and both hid away during the war: experimenting with lucid dreams, in Mandiargues' case, as we'll see in our second chapter; and settling with the more comfortable romanticism of the evacuee's routine in Landolfi's, as we'll see in chapter three. Neither, to my knowledge, would ever explicitly regret such a choice; their longing for romance – also given their self-proclaimed ineptitude when it came to real-life matters – had to go through a different path, that of literature. But here, too, there would be issues.

Both authors seem to feel a strong nostalgia for a literary mode that is perhaps simply not feasible anymore. Both attempted rituals of evocation, whose objects looked sometimes similar and sometimes not, but often were just different facets of the same thing – individual literary forms all akin, somehow, to the category of romance. I think we can see a certain kinship in their approach to this attempt at re-evoking these beloved, and possibly dead, forms; and I use the term evocation on purpose. In their fictions, in fact, magic and ritual constantly come into play as both thematic and formal elements of the narrative, working as traditional diegetic ingredients of romantic plots (in the same way as a medieval setting, say, or a journey through distant seas could do) – but, crucially, they also seem to serve a fundamental, meta-literary function. I will argue, in
fact, that the diegetic staging of magical rituals consistently works as a most reliable textual warning light: signaling the loci in which the authors' discourse on, and experimentation with, romance is at its denser, and, to some extent, putting en abyme their attempt at retrieving romance.

In Mandiargues's case, this kind of discourse and experimentation happens especially through an elaborate work on narrative time. In chapter 1 ("Narrative Time in the Fictions of André Pieyre de Mandiargues") I will define the time structure of romance, drawing on the analysis that Bakhtin made of "adventure time", and observe how it plays out in Mandiargues's fictions, particularly through the staging of "narrative bubbles" and through the crucial interaction of violence and eroticism, analyzed in their relationship to the narrative process at large.

Chapter 2 ("Dreams, Imagination, and the Making of Narrative") will be devoted to a study of the role that Mandiargues accorded to dreams and reverie. These perform an important function on a genetic level, being among Mandiargues's favorite tools for the creation and development of his narratives, as I'll show through the example of the short story "L'Archéologue"; but they also appear as central diegetic elements in several of his stories, and provide him with a loose structure that can be profitably opposed to the kind of causal relationship normally presiding over novelistic plots.

I will then move on to Landolfi. What seems to me to be the most striking element of Landolfi's work on the forms of romance is his long, and heretofore unrecognized by scholars, experimentation with literary genres. In chapter 3 ("Tommaso Landolfi: Writing as Necromancy"), I will begin with some remarks about Landolfi's tormented relationship with both fictional and autobiographical writing and then engage in a close reading of his
third novel, *Racconto d'autunno*, exploring its rich hypotextual connections and proposing an interpretative hypothesis about its central episode, the necromantic evocation of a dead woman; I will argue that this is, in fact, a diegetic figure for the very process of reenactment of old literary genres attempted by Landolfi.

I will follow up with this hypothesis in the first part of chapter 4 (“Rituals”), engaging in a diachronic examination of his narrative production that will show how, throughout his works, Landolfi systematically approaches, engages with, deconstructs, and dismisses a number of genres representative of romance – while diegetically staging this process thanks to the plot device provided by ritual. In the second part of the chapter I will turn to Mandiargues again, observing some key features of the rituals he describes in his fictions. I will highlight their initiatory nature, somewhat perverted with regard to the usual kind of folkloric and alchemical initiations in order to stage the sort of Ur-plot constituting Mandiargues's fundamental *mythos*, and their chronotopic function, which allows them to become the ideal textual threshold for his experimentations with narrative time.

A conclusive chapter will sum up the main directions of my research as well as suggest possible paths for further studies.
CHAPTER 1: NARRATIVE TIME IN THE FICTIONS OF ANDRE PIEYRE DE MANDIARGUES

1.1: The Time of Romance

André Pieyre de Mandiargues's 1965 collection of short stories Porte dévergondée\textsuperscript{20} is preceded by an introduction in which an unnamed narrator – somewhat overlapping with the author himself given the textual position of these pages\textsuperscript{21} – guides the reader into a kind of place that is allegedly hidden in, or rather underneath, many contemporary cities.

Past the porte dévergondée of the title, and a spiral staircase reminiscent of others to be found in Mandiargues' elaborate architectures, there are unexpected subterranean rooms – with a dark and lavish décor that our author, according to his taste, describes in some detail –, a charmingly shady atmosphere, and mysterious characters who are somehow “initiated”\textsuperscript{22} to this peculiar sort of club. This smoky place\textsuperscript{23} is a plastic representation of the narrative dimension itself, and especially of the sort of narrativity

\textsuperscript{20} André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Porte dévergondée, Paris: Gallimard 1965
\textsuperscript{21} A narrator serving as a tourist guide is a device often employed by Mandiargues. Elsewhere, as in “Les Monstres de Bomarzo” or in “Petit Ciceron des Pouilles”, the historical author is speaking; this seems to work towards a blurring of the distinctions between historical author and narrator, as well as between the fictional and non-fictional parts of Mandiargues's production.
\textsuperscript{22} Porte dévergondée, cit., p. 10
\textsuperscript{23} Many other shady and more or less theatrical venues are described in Mandiargues's books, such as those of “Les Formes charnelles” and “Le Triangle ambigu” (in Mascarets), “Le Théâtre de Pornopapas” (also in Porte dévergondée), “Mouton noir” (in Musée noir), “L'Opéra des falaises” (in Soleil des loups), “Le Nu parmi les cercueils” (in Feu de braise), “L'Hypnotiseur” (in Sous la lame), “Le Deuil des roses” (in Le Deuil des roses); indeed, the theater is one of the most frequently recurring settings in his fiction. This is in fact one of the several remarkably Sadean features of Mandiargues's fiction; in the third part of this chapter I will mention the giardino dei mostri of Bomarzo, which Mandiargues envisioned as the perfect scene for the Marquis's elaborately staged geometries of pleasure and pain.
which Mandiargues himself is interested in (indeed, it might be seen as some kind of plastic representation of the very idea of a narrative chronotope). The description of the club wouldn't be out of place in a 19th century piece. It is defined as a “boudoir d'hommes”, using a Baudelairian phrase originally to be found in “Portraits de maîtresses”: a poème en prose dealing with narrations about female beauty and (female) murder, as Mandiargues-esque themes as any. Within the premises alcohol and drugs are consumed, stage props repeatedly appearing in his stories as convenient switches meant to transfer characters from the common experience of time (as a sequentiality determined by cause and effect relationships) into the time-out-of-time of narration.

All narrations necessarily take place at the intersection of at least three different time levels. On the first level, there is the actual, external time of normal, extra-narrative life, in which both author and consumer of the narration live: the framing time that is going to be interrupted by the act of the narration. For clarity's sake, we are going to label this as time A. Then, on a second level, we have the time of the recounting, that is, the actual time during which the narration takes place – the “reading time” according to Tomashevsky's terminology (time B): ideally this is a synchronic time for author and consumer, as would be the case for oral narrations in which the singer/storyteller and the listener respectively produce and enjoy the narration at the same time. In written literature, of course, writer and reader cannot produce and enjoy the narration simultaneously, but literary conventions may dictate that one ignores this inevitable

24 “Reading time is the time required for reading the work (or witnessing the spectacle) […] [It] depends on the ‘size’ of the work” (Boris Tomashevsky, “Thematics”, in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds.), Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1965, p. 78)
temporal hiatus – such is the function of literary devices such as the apostrophe to the reader, the construction of a fictive narratee, and other instances in which the narrative act itself is made into the text. Thus, author and consumer are (ideally, at least) sharing a specific kind of suspended time that will only end once the narration is finished or otherwise interrupted (and the singer puts down their lyre, or the reader their book). It is a parenthetical time into which author and consumer of narrative agree to enter, both included in and subtracted from the time A of workaday reality, and it is governed by its own rules – similarly to Huizinga's games, as narration certainly amounts to a ludic activity. Indeed, this time is very different from the external time A: it can be measured by the hands of a clock, like external time of which it still is part, but it already is a compromise formation of sorts between the time A of reality and the third level of time, that is, the time in the recounting that Tomashevsky called “story time”25 (time C). This is clearly foregrounded by the most obvious verbal act through which author and consumer of narrative agree to do, as it were, the time warp: “Once upon a time...”26, the traditional storyteller says, and by this uttering both of them leave, in a way, the level A of external time and find themselves at once in the time B of the recounting, and in the time C in the recounting27. Unlike reading time, story time is of course an entirely ideal, or rather

25 “Story time is the amount of time required by the events that are said to occur” (Boris Tomashevsky, op. cit. pp. 77-78); it is a purely diegetic construct. By “time C” I mean both the amount of time required by the story and the age, that is the temporal frame, in which it is set.

26 At the beginning of Jean Cocteau's La Belle et la Bête (1946), the viewer can read on a title card: “L’enfance croit ce qu’on lui raconte et ne le met pas en doute. Elle croit qu’une rose qu’on cueille peut attirer des drames dans une famille. Elle croit que les mains d’une bête humaine qui tue se mettent à fumer et que cette bête en a honte lorsqu’une jeune fille habite sa maison. Elle croit mille autres choses bien naïves. C’est un peu de cette naïveté que je vous demande et, pour nous porter chance à tous, laissez-moi vous dire quatre mots magiques, véritable ‘sésame ouvre-toi’ de l’enfance: Il était une fois...”

27 This is, of course, the willing suspension of disbelief of Coleridge's famous dictum.
mental and subjective condition; as a matter of fact, the consumer of narrative is now imagining a wholly different time – the time plane in which the story narrated by the storyteller takes place – which, despite being in some way only a virtual construction, does influence the intermediate time B as well. The duration of the recounting, in fact, is both dependent on accidents pertaining to the real time A (if one is reading a book on the subway, they'll have to interrupt the reading once their stop is announced) and on structural properties of the virtual time C, which is not really over until the heroes get married, or die, or what-not. The latter (while being, say, the age of the Trojan War, or a distant future on Solaris, or even a present time in which however something is going on that is quite different from the reader/listener's experience of the present – i.e., their present act of reading or listening) isn't just accidentally different from the first-level external time (and space) A and from reading time B, but is structurally so. Time C cannot be measured by the clock; in the $n$ hours we devote to reading a lengthy narration it may equally happen to us that we just witness a character walking around Dublin for one day, or getting lost in time himself at the taste of some cookie that makes him reminisce about days past, or indeed getting exposed at birth, growing up, falling in love, being kidnapped by pirates, living one adventure after another and finally getting married. This, of course, may have an effect on the length of time author and consumer are to devote to the recounting – but most of all, it marks the radical difference of time C, a difference that is best shown and taken advantage of by the episodic, infinitely expandable time of romance (but also, conversely, by the expanded time of defamiliarizing Modernist narrative strategies such as Joyce's or Proust's, which share with romance an approach to the notion of time that is not unlike that of Zeno of Elea –
making it infinite not by addition but by subdivision *ad libitum*). Time C is thus structurally akin to dreamtime in some way – we know how we may experience hundreds of different things in the five extra minutes of sleep the snooze button gives us, or get trapped into the same haunted house for an entire night(mare).

We may also find these three times playing again at a deeper level when embedded within a narration: time C becomes then the framing 'real' time A' as far as the characters of that particular narration are concerned. For instance, the rather unhappy daily life of king Shahryar in the *Thousand Nights and a Night* would constitute time C for me as a reader, but time A' as far as Shahryar himself is concerned; time B' would then be the night time during which Scheherazade tells him stories, starting at bed-time and interrupted every day at dawn like dreams are (early birds' dreams, at least); and time C' is whatever legendary or historical age the tale of this or that particular night is set in, such as the time of Aladdin or that of Harun al-Rashid. (This time C' would, in turn, become time A" when for instance the vizier, a character in one of Scheherazade's tales – Burton's night 579 – begins telling a story set in a time C").

This notion of a suspended time (of narration, of dreams, and of imagination) is at play in the introduction to *Porte dévergondée* as in much of Mandiargues's fiction, and will be one of the main objects of this study. The characters we'll find in the subterranean club the narrator/tourist guide takes us into are only briefly described, but clearly thematize the narrative act; the very reason why they gather there is, in fact, the telling and unfolding of stories. It is not even clear whether these stories are simply told – or screened, or performed – or if at least some of them are actually taking place on the club's
premises (in other words, there is a possible overlapping between times B and C, and more radically, in a fashion characteristic of Mandiargues's, between narration and extra-linguistic reality). According to the author's own taste, “le propre de ces aventures ou de ces histoires est de choquer le spectateur ou l'auditeur”\(^{28}\). Indeed, one of the only two patrons of the club to be individually described by Mandiargues – “un homme à l'aspect de prêtre ou de prophète, mais il portait une soutane d'un vert aussi vif que celui du feuillage printanier des acacias, et sa barbe et ses longs cheveux étaient d'un bleu vraiment céleste sur la peau blanche”\(^{29}\) – perfectly resonates with the kind of outlandish, unabashedly marvelous narratives that Giorgio Manganelli endorses in *La letteratura come menzogna*. He would fit quite well in the excerpt from Hoffmann's *Golden Pot* reported by Manganelli – and he might as well be one of the many faces of the Great Liar, “bizzarro di gesti e di vesti”\(^{30}\), introduced by Manganelli as some sort of spirit of fantastic literature.

If “narrative has long been a thematic concern of narrative and has even been considered its privileged theme”\(^{31}\), an express staging of the narrative act itself – especially in its original form of the oral recounting – has been observed as a frequent feature of romance in particular: “Il romance non tematizza solo la sua rottura col passato (che è anche un ritorno del passato), ma anche la scena della sua fruizione”\(^{32}\). Ever since the Homeric poems and Beowulf, the *mise-en-scène* of the singer or bard performing in front of a noble audience – reflecting the implied audience for the work

\(^{28}\) *Porte dévergondée*, cit., p. 13
\(^{29}\) Ibid., pp. 13-14
\(^{30}\) Giorgio Manganelli, *op. cit.* p. 54
\(^{31}\) Gerald Prince, “Preface”, in *Id., Narrative as a Theme*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1992, p VII
\(^{32}\) L. O. Aranye Fradenburg, *op. cit.* p. 239, author's emphasis
and an idealized version of the first actual ones – has been a long-lasting trope in narrative. As literacy took on the procedures and the prestige of oral literature, other devices of similar conception (that is, depicting the creation, performance, or transmission of literature) came to flank and complicate the simple recounting of an oral narration within the narration – such is the case of “found manuscripts” (as in Poe's MS. *Found in a Bottle*), at times introduced by a character different from the supposed author (as in Dazai's *Ningen Shikkaku*); of fake editorships, curatorships, and commentaries (as in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*); of excerpts from other fictional narrations, journals, or epistolaries included in the text; and so forth. These devices may serve the purpose of grounding the narrative in reality, by means of highlighting its systems of production and social transmission as well as providing an allegation of its truth (perhaps believable to a naïve audience, just like the omnipresent “based on a true story” labels we see in movies and TV shows of today); or they may conversely stress its constructed, artificial nature, sabotaging the possibility of a naïve fruition of the work and compelling its consumer to reflect on its fictionality:

Dans le temps même où certains exégètes voulaient faire d'une telle inflation scripturale un effet de réel, d'objectivation et d'authentification, d'autres croyaient y voir, à rebours, le symptôme d'une crise de la représentation. On peut estimer que le propre du fantastique serait plutôt d'entretenir l'équivoque en oscillant incessamment entre ces deux pôles. On sait, en outre, que les praticiens de la discipline firent très tôt preuve d'un remarquable penchant pour la sui-référentialité, l'intertexte et l'auto-parodie.

Fantastic fiction already constitutes some kind of “twice-imaginary […] square literature” as Francesco Orlando has it, by virtue of its making the fictional nature of –

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34 Philippe Met, *op. cit.* p. 14
indeed – fiction particularly blatant, asking for a stronger suspension of disbelief and introducing a further compromise formation between real and unreal into the first one\textsuperscript{35}. This is even more obvious in narratives such as the \textit{Thousand Nights and a Night}, again, or in modern works such as Maturin's \textit{Melmoth the Wanderer}, Shelley's \textit{Frankenstein} or Ray's \textit{Malpertuis}, encapsulating narrative levels within narrative levels as in a Matryoshka game – and sinking deeper into narrative time: A-B-C → A'-B'-C' → A''-B''-C''...\textsuperscript{36} In this sort of works, the peculiar time structure of romance is most profitably put to use – with the exception that encapsulated stories are inserted within the frame story in a vertical way, so to speak, as opposed to actually taking place in it and expanding it horizontally.

A mostly horizontal structure is that of the “adventure-time” Mikhail Bakhtin saw as the structuring principle in ancient Greek novels\textsuperscript{37}. I'll briefly recap the main features of adventure time according to Bakhtin, but we must keep in mind, of course, that time is but one of the two inseparable elements joined in his notion of chronotope (the other being, of course, space, which is however of somewhat lesser importance) – a notion that

\textsuperscript{35} Orlando comments as follows on some observations by Sigmund Freud (in \textit{Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious}) about the children's pleasure in nonsensical verbal play: “[Freud] attribuisce come origine lo stesso piacere alla letteratura in generale [...] e alla letteratura con temi soprannaturali in particolare. A un ambito immaginario già una volta, e all'ambito che ho chiamato due volte immaginario. Qualsiasi letteratura richiede la compresenza d'istanze opposte, è in sé una formazione di compromesso: fra reale e irreale. Quei tempi richiedono una qualche sospensione d'incredulità in più, dal massimo al minimo, e nella prima formazione di compromesso ne introducono una seconda. Quasi producessero letteratura al quadrato” (Francesco Orlando, “Statuti del soprannaturale nella narrativa”, in Franco Moretti (ed.), \textit{op. cit.} p. 206).

\textsuperscript{36} The club described in \textit{Porte dévergondée}, moreover, is physically located underneath the street level – that is to say, underneath that of workaday reality (with its time and space A). This feature may allow both for a stronger force of representation, and for the presence of creatures that would appear as monsters in the real world.

Bakhtin considered particularly useful in order to study literary genres, and indeed, a notion supposed to determine and shape genres themselves. Adventure time is whatever “extratemporal hiatus” lies between two “poles of plot movement” (which, in the Greek novels Bakhtin is analyzing, would be the initial falling in love of the two main characters and their final marriage). These poles mark significant moments in the chronology of the characters' life, whereas the space separating them bears no real consequence on it:

These points – the poles of plot movement – are themselves crucial events in the heroes' lives; in and of themselves they have a biographical significance. But it is not around these that the novel is structured; rather, it is around that which lies (that which takes place) between them. But in essence nothing need lie between them […] Two adjacent moments, one of biographical life, one of biographical time, are directly conjoined. The gap, the pause, the hiatus that appears between these two strictly adjacent biographical moments and in which, as it were, the entire novel is constructed is not contained in the biographical time-sequence; it lies outside biographical time; it changes nothing in the life of the heroes, and it introduces nothing into their life. It is, precisely, an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time […] All the events in the novel that fill this hiatus are a pure digression from the normal course of life; they are excluded from the kind of real duration in which additions to a normal biography are made […] Such a form of time, in which they experience a most improbable number of adventures, is not measured off in the novel and does not add up; it is simply days, nights, hours, moments clocked in a technical sense within the limits of each separate adventure.

This extratemporal quality of adventure time allows for a virtually infinite series of adventures to be framed into the narrative space in between the two poles; the insertion is parenthetical and its internal structure is episodic, “composed of a series of short segments that correspond to separate adventures; within each such adventure, time is

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38 “It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category of the chronotope is time” (ibid., p. 85)
39 Ibid., p. 90
40 Ibid., p. 89
41 Ibid, pp. 89-90
42 “The adventures themselves are strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series: this series can be extended as long as one likes; in itself it has no necessary internal limits”, ibid, p. 94
organized from without, technically."^43

This time structure is antithetical to that of realistic narration, which is based on chronological temporality and on the concept of cause and effect that shapes Western rational and scientific thought as well as its highest artistic creation, the modern novel. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, romance will mostly be defined by its approach to time. The “unlikeliness” of romance, or its “antirepresentational” tendency in the words of Northrop Frye^44, can in fact be observed on two major levels: that of the events represented in the narration and that of narrative time. These levels seem to me to be widely interconnected, and to be simultaneously present in most instances of romantic narratives. In this dissertation, I will mostly deal with the level of (“unlikely”) events in chapter 3 and in the first part of chapter 4, devoted to Tommaso Landolfi and romantic literary genres, whereas in the first two chapters I will discuss the (“unlikely”) staging of narrative time. This, in turn, can be distinguished from that of realistic literature because of two main features, themselves tightly connected: the extratemporal, episodic nature typified in Bakhtin's adventure time; and the general lack of cause and effect relationships, which allows for the structure of the former and is in opposition to the realistic causality principle of the novel (following the textbook distinction by Clara Reeve^45). Such a looser structure is embedded and operational in Mandiargues's writings.

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^43 Ibid, p. 91
^44 Northrop Frye, op. cit. p. 38
^45 See Scholes and Kellogg, op. cit. pp. 6-7. The development of such a strict causality system is perhaps to be seen as the equivalent, on the level of time, to what Auerbach has described on the levels of themes and style. Frye remarked how, in the emergence of the bourgeois novel as a genre, the first attempts at it still borrowed the structure of the prose romance they evolved from – still much more episodic and looser in terms of causal relationships: “When the novel was established in the eighteenth century, it came to a reading public familiar with the formulas of prose romance. It is clear that the novel was a realistic displacement of romance, and had few structural features peculiar to itself.
to the point of being directly responsible for a good number of its more specific literary effects and, indeed, philosophical stances.

1.2: Narrative Bubbles

At times, Mandiargues follows the episodic model of adventure time accurately. His first long fiction work, *Marbre* (1953), which is, as we'll see in the next chapter, the most obviously concerned with the thematization of the narrative act, presents a most traditional adventure time of the Bakhtinian type (even though the “poles of the plot movement” among which such time is laid out do show some interesting peculiarities that we'll discuss later on). Between these – which are the focus of the introductory and the conclusive chapter of the novel – the story is composed of four chapters, each one of which recounts a different episode in the protagonist's ramblings through a fantastic Italy. Two of them (“Les corps platoniciens” and “Le théâtre de la mort”) describe rituals taking place in the kind of theatrical, geometrical places normally assigned, as we'll see, to ritualized action in Mandiargues's fiction; one (the first one, “Le Vocabulaire”) doesn't really stage any ritual and only follows the protagonist as a character shows him another of these odd locations; and another (“Petite oniroscopie du témoin”) is partially set aside from the rest, in that it provides a narrative sub-frame mostly in order to present some excerpts from the protagonist's dream journal (as a matter of fact, the back cover

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Robinson Crusoe, Pamela, Tom Jones, use much the same general structure as romance, but adapt that structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience. This displacement gave the novel's relation to romance, as I suggested a moment ago, a strong element of parody” (Frye, *op. cit.* pp. 38-39).
describes these four chapters as “trois scènes principales et une suite de rêves”, even though the latter is not placed last in the text). We don't really know how much time has passed between one episode and another, nor do we really care – each one stands by itself, without building any real or meaningful chronology and without any episode affecting others in meaningful ways.

Some of Mandiargues's short stories are also structured in the same fashion – some of his longer short stories at least, as the limited length of this form would otherwise prompt the author to focus on a single episode instead of linking together two or more. Tales such as “Le tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley” (in Le Musée noir, 1946), “L'Archéologue” (in Soleil des loups, 1951), or “Mil neuf cent trente-trois” (in Sous la lame, 1976) all combine several episodes that may strike the reader as being somewhat randomly put together – even though they do not always constitute a simple string of juxtaposed events, as they do in Marbre. As a matter of fact, Mandiargues's compositional technique – as it can be inferred by the materials preserved in his notebooks – may play a role in this: the impression being that the author would note down isolated scenes coming to his mind and striking him for their vivid imagery, and only in a later phase would he try to put them together with others. Some of these scenes, taken by themselves, would in fact seem closer to the transcriptions of dreams he published in Dans les années sordides (1943), brief poèmes en prose characterized by exquisiteness of style and visual flamboyance; by assembling them together, the scenes would lose their static quality and fit into a narrative structure of sorts, avoiding the risk of overindulgence in ornamental description that Mandiargues seems at times to run. Indeed, sometimes these scenes are transcriptions of dreams that get worked into a
narrative or even constitute its original compositional core, a feature that is of some interest to us given the analogy we have proposed between dream time and the adventure time of romance narrative. I will expand at some length on Mandiargues's preoccupation with dreams, and provide some examples of his compositional technique, in the next chapter. *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé* (1953 and 1979) also follows a rather traditional kind of episodic adventure time – with a catch, since it is an erotic novel à la Sade. I will also say a few more words about this specific case.

However, we should note that not all of Mandiargues's fictions resort to this kind of strategy in order to mark the different temporal quality of adventure time. If we stick to his novels we'll notice that all of the later ones often do not quite portray episodic strings such as the ones I have briefly presented till now, and develop instead another peculiar system that I'll try to outline.

It is a consistent pattern throughout Mandiargues's long works – and, to a minor degree, in some of his short stories, but the longer format is of course better equipped for the exploration of time patterns – that time, and space, are made into a “bubble” (the word is the author's) that is at once a point of exceptional condensation and one of expansion. Mandiargues's characters either find themselves trapped in the bubble, or actively create it through a ritual of sorts (normally related to magic and/or sex). Indeed, the bubble and the ritual that creates and maintains it are not just strongly linked, but often coextensive, as they are with the story itself. The textual margins of the bubble\(^{46}\) tend to coincide roughly with those of story time, i.e., of the book. Within this bubble,

\(^{46}\) Evoked, as well as the very bubble's condition of marginality with regard to the “normal” time of life, in the title of *La Marge*, to which we'll be referring shortly in order to illustrate the functioning of bubbles.
space and time seem to be expandable ad libitum; thanks to the expansion of the latter, it becomes possible to explore the former at length (be it, for instance, an offbeat and imaginary Italy or a labyrinthine Barcelona) just like the old heroes of romance did in their quests, and just like in those quests, the exploration of space and time often looks like an end rather than a means. The collapse of the bubble, coincident with the end of the ritual (and of the story) rather than with its failure (as it would be in Landolfi, as we'll see), marks the return to normal space and time – a return which Mandiargues's protagonists, however, are usually both involved in and excluded from: since the end of the ritual tends to correspond to their own violent death, the breaking of the bubble at once reinstitutes the rights of the passing of time (of which aging and death obviously constitute the manifestation par excellence) and sets the characters apart from it forever. The space and time of the bubble, moreover, epitomize not only those of romance but, through them, those of narrative per se; thus the collapse of the bubble at the end of the story also marks a return to normal, extra-narrative space and time (A) for the reader (even though, since Mandiargues declared the main purpose of his work to be “instaurer, s'il se peut, dans le monde, un ordre (ou désordre) panique”47, the reader's situation is also supposed to be more ambiguous – restituted to reality, yes, but a reality that the narrative experience may have more or less magically changed somehow, and specifically in its temporal and spatial functioning, by the ritual enacted in and by the story).

In La Marge, Sigismond Pons is in Barcelona when he receives a letter that he fears might bring news of his wife's death. He will react by leaving the sealed envelope on his night table, covered with a liquor bottle shaped like the local Columbus Monument

47 In André Breton, L'Art magique, Paris: Phébus 1991, p 301
column. As long as the envelope is sealed Sigismond will wander around the city, his movements in space being obsessively reported in minute detail with directions, street names, landmarks, names of bars and restaurants – indeed, a look at Mandiargues's journals at the IMEC archives shows how particular the author was about faithfully reproducing a real topography and the real names of its elements. Two different notebooks\(^48\) carry long lists of toponyms and notes about the city, including – under the memo title “Vérifier à Barcelone” – such trifles as the color of taxicabs and the price of the entrance ticket to the Columbus monument; Mandiargues asks himself twice “entrée Colonne Colon 5 pes[etas]?” before going back to it with a “oui”. However, the very punctiliousness of the description of Sigismond's ramblings through the ramblas produces a somewhat opposite effect: the reader who doesn't already know Barcelona by heart will likely be disoriented by these lengthy reports, and get a general feeling of a maze-like, confused space that Sigismond walks as in a dream, without being able to make much sense of it. This defamiliarizing technique also dilates diegetic space in the same way that diegetic time within the bubble is dilated by means of recording Sigismond's every smallest action, even those seemingly far below the commonly accepted levels of tellability – that is to say, a redundant bunch of seemingly irrelevant actions\(^49\).

\(^48\) PDM 6.10 and PDM 6.11

\(^49\) Here's a random example: “il ne pourrait actuellement éviter de se diriger vers l'hôtel Tibidabo pour y entrer, traverser le hall, prendre à la conciergerie sa clé, monter par l'ascenseur, ouvrir la porte de sa chambre et s'immobiliser devant la colonne transparente [...] il serait grand temps qu'il se fit la barbe. A telle fin il s'est débarrassé de son veston, qui sur le lit va tomber, suivi bientôt de la chemisette (que Sergine appela toujours un polo). Torse nu, devant la glace, il fait à l'eau chaude et au blaireau un masque de mousse sur son visage au préalable enduit de crème de savon, et de la paume il modèle comiquement cette sorte de fourrure onctueuse. Son rasoir, garni d'une lame neuve, a chauffé dans l'eau, pour couper mieux. Quelques légers mouvements de l'instrument suffisent à retrancher la
Mandiargues's treatment of space is also rather consistent with Bakhtin's ideas about the chronotope of adventure. Of course, Greek novels are a specific and historically determined type of romance, but much like in the case of time, the principal features of their treatment of space seem to hold as a basic model for later narratives of the romance/adventure kind. In fact, in chivalric poems or modern pirate stories just as in Greek novels, the (etymological) absoluteness of adventure time seems to be reflected upon space – which not only appears to be infinitely expandable, but is often untouched by history. By this I mean that the different locations, much like the sets of Hollywood movies, are interchangeable; they only present as many references to their own history as are needed for ornamental reasons or in order for the plot to move on, and exist otherwise in some kind of ahistorical vacuum. The latter remark, already made by Bakhtin, still seems to me to work as a general rule of thumb, at least in the purest examples of romance (on the other hand, history plays an important role in a book such as D'Arrigo's *Horcynus Horca*, a novel including many romantic elements, and indeed it's far from meaningless even in Pratt's *Corto Maltese* graphic novels). In *La Marge*, several references to Francisco Franco and to fascist and antifascist Spain are made, even though, in line with Mandiargues's generally weak engagement in politics and with his mostly esthetic brand of antifascism, they hardly seem to carry much importance within the

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50 Bakhtin talks about the need for “a very broad and varied geographical background” (Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, p. 88) and “an abstract expanse of space [...] the link between space and time has, as it were, not an organic but a purely technical (and mechanical) nature” (*ibid.*, p. 99, author's emphasis).

51 “No matter where one goes in the world of Greek romance, with all its countries and cities, its buildings and works of art, there are absolutely no indications of historical time, no identifying traces of the era” (*ibid.*, p. 91).
plot. At the end of the book, true enough, Sigismond will commit suicide after having pronounced a wish for the Catalan people to be freed of Franco, whom he nicknames the “furhoncle”. Of course, we may choose to see some kind of political/Christological value in Sigismond's self-sacrifice (a value which, given Mandiargues's surrealist belief in literature's power of action upon the real world, might well be within the author's intentions), but, apart from the debatable political effectiveness of a similar strategy, the actual meaning of Sigismond's act lies elsewhere.

By then, in fact, Sigismond has removed the phallic glass bottle from the letter on his night table, he has read the letter – which does in fact tell him about the death of his wife, and of their child too – and as an immediate result,

Crevée donc est la bulle; explosée. De la paroi qui fut solide, élastique et douce aucun lambeau ne demeure, et la chambre d'hôtel est ouverte à tous les vents de particules et à toutes les tempêtes magnétiques ruées dans le glacial espace où les astres sévissent.

Sigismond will get to his car and drive till he reaches a sandpit out of town, a circular space reminiscent of many other circular spaces in Mandiargues's fiction – theaters born of the author's “obsession de la géométrie” but also referring to a rich tradition of esoteric thought, which, as we'll see, Mandiargues was well acquainted with. Within the circle, Sigismond shoots himself in the heart; the extratemporal time of his narrative

52 Their major contribution, in fact, seems to be by way of providing the red and yellow (or, as Sigismond has it, blood and gold) colors of the Spanish flag as the novel's chromatic field.

53 Ibid., p. 277

54 “C'est probablement en Italie, en effet, que j'ai eu mon premier témoignage de ça, et une certaine obsession de la géométrie m'est venue – et puis, alors, dans mes contes, dans mes nouvelles, dans mes romans, j'essaie de donner une structure symboliste, spirituelle, à des faits qui sont souvent des faits d'amour et de sang, d'érotisme et de sang” (Joyce O. Lowrie, “Entretien avec André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, in The French Review, Vol. 55, No. 1, Oct. 1981, p. 80)
explodes, and real time is reinstated into its former rights.

The circular space is the space in which the definitive bursting of the bubble is staged – being, in some way, the last event in the bubble and the first one outside of it, the bursting reestablishes normal time and it may correspond to one of Bakhtin's “poles of plot movement”, or happen right before it at least. A change in the narrative rhythm is implied. Within Mandiargues's bubbles, as we have seen, all actions tend to be described in meticulous detail and to be presented, as it were, in slow motion; judging by their slowness, and by the attention lavished by the author upon them despite their apparent irrelevance, the reader may tend to assign them a surplus of meaning (partially derived specifically by their insisted meaninglessness) that connects them to the dimension of the ritual proper. Ritual actions and utterances of all liturgies, in fact, can be seen as remarkably pure signifiers – behind which one can imagine whichever pure meanings one wishes. This surplus of meaning, the ritualized dimension with which it is connected, and the temporal bubble in which they take place (openly recognized as such and indeed called a “bulle”) also allow such a repetition of irrelevant details not to contradict the principles of romance's adventure time (normally privileging, due to its non-chronological nature, καιρός over χρόνος, unless the latter is intended as a mere sequence of causally unrelated moments)

David J. Bond, relying on Shklovsky55, observed some defamiliarizing devices often employed in Mandiargues's narratives, such as radical change of perspective (often linked

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55 According to Shklovsky, defamiliarization is not just one among the tricks of the trade for artists, but constitutes in fact the essence of art: “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”, in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds.), op. cit. p. 12).
to a Gulliverian miniaturization or enlargement), maniacally close observation of objects or people and concentration on small details, repositioning of objects or characters in unusual contexts, depiction of various *monstra* and *mirabilia*, as well as wordplay, the establishment of a defamiliarizing system of metaphors and imagery, and various techniques for “laying bare the device” of the literary work.  

The reference to Shklovsky is, indeed, extremely appropriate here; however, Bond's remarks do not quite encompass the whole functioning and value (even as an estrangement device) of the textual strategies to be found in Mandiargues's bubbles, and fail to devote proper attention to the author's employment of time and space. When talking about *La Marge*, for instance, he mostly individuates its defamiliarizing quality in the meticulousness of “description” (which may seem like a bit of an inadequate term for the more than two hundred pages of carefully reported Barcelona wanderings which constitute the novel's action) and the treatment of time – once again however not quite isolating what constitutes, in my opinion, the real peculiarity as well as defamiliarizing quality of such treatment. After duly stating that “in Mandiargues's case, it is especially

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57 Let's recall the words of Conrad Mur, protagonist and, in part, narrator of Mandiargues's “L'Archéologue”: “Comment puis-je me rappeler tant de gens et leurs propos, tant de faits, le cadre exact de tout cela? N'y a-t-il pas quelque chose d'inquiétant à si grande minutie?” (in André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Soleil des loups*, Paris: Gallimard 1979, p. 24)

58 Bond also compares the chronicles of Sigismond's wanderings – which effectively make up the whole plot, or lack thereof, of the book – with actual simple descriptions, however precise, to be found elsewhere in Mandiargues's works, including in short stories: “Among the many examples that spring to mind, one might mention the descriptions of streets, monuments, bars, restaurants, cinemas, prostitutes, sailors, museum pictures, markets and assorted passers-by filling the pages of *La Marge*. A few other examples are the abandoned sheds, boilers and trucks among which the narrator of ‘Rodogune’ walks […] the cliffs described in all their detail in ‘La Marée’ […] the vegetation observed on the beach by Ferréol Buq in *Marbre* […] the descriptions of the village, its environs and the beach in *Le Lis de mer*” (Bond, *op. cit.* p. 68)
the use of time that makes demands on the reader”59, he claims that such demands are mostly made by the lack of “a strictly chronological sequence of events” in works such as La Motocyclette and La Marge, with flashbacks referring to different moments in the past – hardly that demanding for a twentieth-century reader, not to mention the fact that Mandiargues's flashbacks normally are clearly marked as such. There is, however, a third feature of time structure in La Marge that Bond correctly notices, and that's Shklovsky's retardation applied to the plot ending; as he observes, “La Marge is an excellent example of this”60.

Indeed, one of the bubble's main functions is to prepare, and to delay, a crucial plot event (that is, its own bursting) – whose consequences however do not seem to be that relevant for the narration, since they are not described; the protagonist, at any rate, won't be there to witness them. True enough, such consequences would not be described in Greek novels either (nor, say, in fairytales); whenever the second and final pole of the plot is reached, the extratemporal hiatus of adventure time is over – and romance stops being the appropriate narrative mode. Once the Greek couple gets finally reunited at the end of the novel, some sort of realistic scripture would be needed in order to record the workaday events of their living together (and no sense of an impending dramatic change would give them the ominous quality, or the surplus of meaning, of the many equally irrelevant events recorded by Mandiargues in the adventure time of his bubbles)61. At any

59 Ibid., p 74
60 Ibid., p. 76
61 “Usually at the end of the story all the conflicts are reconciled and the interests harmonized. If a situation containing the conflict furthers the progress of the story, then, since the coexistence of two conflicting forces is impossible, one must inevitably prevail. The later harmonious situation, which does not require further development, will neither evoke nor arouse the reader's anticipation. That is why the condition at the end of a work is so static. This static condition is called the ending” (Tomashevsky, op.
rate, the reestablishment of “normal” diegetic time, that is the shift from the adventuristic chronotope of romance towards some other, realistic chronotope, is normally not witnessed by the protagonist. It could be argued that somehow, in the bursting of the bubble, protagonists move away from the world of narrative altogether; at the very least their diegetic existence is, in general, interrupted, since the end of the parenthesis constituted by adventure time normally involves their death 62. If the second pole of the plot that puts an end to adventure time is to be, with Bakhtin (and unlike extratemporal adventure time), a crucial event in the characters' biographical time, then death probably should qualify – but their death isn't just a random death: all, or almost all, of Mandiargues's characters die as a result of the ritual they have been either performing or participating in, and normally they either accept death as the ritual's legitimate conclusion or even impart it upon themselves, as Sigismond does.

At the end of La Motocyclette Rébecca Nul (née Res), who has been traveling through space and time to meet her lover, crashes against a truck on the highway. The man she was going to see, Daniel Lionart, is portrayed in the book with a network of alchemical references 63. In the last scene, Rébecca sees a smiling face of Bacchus painted on the beer truck she is going to crash against, she identifies him with Daniel, and thinks to herself “L'univers est dionysiaque” 64 as she dies, swallowed by the “vrai visage de l'univers”, identifying the thousand metallic splinters killing her with her lover's final embrace. The alchemical marriage between Rébecca and Daniel is made possible by the

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62 Which is not to say that it can't imply some kind of “marriage” as well (as we will see in chapter 1.3).
63 See chapter 4.5
64 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, La Motocyclette, Paris: Gallimard 1963, p. 224
action of this unique kind of solvent, the panic element; and one feels like those last lines change the centripetal, linear direction of movement that Rébecca has been following on the highway throughout the story into a centrifugal movement, directed towards extratextual reality – as the character dies and leaves the textual world, the text seems to aim out of itself in order to “instaurer, s'il se peut, dans le monde, un ordre (ou désordre) panique”.

1.3: *Le temps de l'amour*. Eroticism, Violence, and Narrative

Another element of Greek romances analyzed by Bakhtin consistently comes back in Mandiargues's fictions. If the two poles of the plot isolated by Bakhtin typically were the meeting of two young lovers (at the beginning) and the final consummation of their love in the socially accepted form of marriage (as the happy ending), Mandiargues does provide a somewhat twisted equivalent to that – something that bears a strong relationship to his conception of narrative time. I have suggested an equivalence between the adventure time we see enacted in his bubbles and narrative time *tout court*; on these grounds, it is interesting to observe how these bubbles always carry some kind of erotic element with them. The two poles of Hellenistic fiction tend to hold on to their old plot function, even though they may be concealed or displaced – or rather, in fact, shown in their purest, undisplaced form. We are not likely to see some bourgeois resolution such as marriage; as Northrop Frye found sex and violence to be the “two chief elements of
romance” under the respectable guise of “love and adventure”\textsuperscript{65}, Mandiargues makes a point of showing them in their undisplaced form\textsuperscript{66}, being well aware of their crucial function as cornerstones, perhaps the cornerstones, of narrative as a whole (and we have mentioned how, according to Francesco Orlando, fantastic literature – of which romance is a hyperonym – is some sort of \textit{mise en abyme} of literature at large).

Often, the plot poles constituting the bubble's frame – that is to say, the initial setup of the bubble itself and its ending – are in themselves related to eroticism. Such is the case, for instance, of \textit{Le Lis de mer} (1956), in which the plot poles are as close to the letter of the Hellenistic ones as it gets in Mandiargues's production. The protagonist, Vanina Mari – who is, moreover, a virgin, just like Rébecca was in \textit{La Motocyclette} the first time she met Daniel – meets and chooses her lover-to-be in the first chapter, and their passion will be consummated in the penultimate. Not much else happens in the text, except for Vanina fantasizing about, and getting ready for, her sexual initiation.

The semantic field of sacrifice, passivity, and submission is systematically referred to whenever Vanina is fantasizing about the highly ritualized intercourse she is planning to have, and again when it actually takes place – but Mandiargues doesn't kill off Vanina, nor, for that matter, any other character in the book, possibly making it an \textit{unicum} in his production. As a norm, Mandiargues's narrative frames may not quite show such a neat (and non-violent) adherence to Hellenistic romance plot poles, but it is not difficult to see that even under the bloodstains, their structure tends to be the same. \textit{La Motocyclette}, for

\begin{itemize}
\item[] \textsuperscript{65} Frye, \textit{op. cit.} p. 26
\item[] \textsuperscript{66} “[…] dans mes romans, j’essaie de donner une structure symboliste, spirituelle, à des faits qui sont souvent des faits d'amour et de sang, d'érotisme et de sang. Après tout, le crime et l'érotisme sont les deux ressorts essentiels du théâtre, de la tragédie”. Lowrie, \textit{op. cit.} p. 80
\end{itemize}
one, also presents a sexually connoted narrative frame. Rébecca wakes up, at the beginning, in her marital bed next to her husband Raymond (whose surname Nul implies a general lack of substance, of course, and more specifically a lack of sexual prowess) and leaves in order to meet her lover Daniel. The whole narration is a chronicle of the interstate highway trip that will supposedly take her to her lover and end up in their much-sought intercourse – which doesn't quite happen, and yet in a way, with her death, it does: allowing, in a way not entirely unlike those of Greek romance, for the final reunion of the two lovers after the long journey. This is, of course, the old topos of Eros and Thanatos, the two leading forces in Mandiargues's work – we'll have something more to say about them, and about their superimposition, in the rest of this chapter. Something similar happens to Sigismond in La Marge – his suicide is a reconciliation with and a home-coming to Sergine, his suicidal wife, whom he sees in the back of the car, likely hallucinating, as he's driving to the sandpit where the bubble (and his heart) will explode.

Eroticism is then always present within the bubble: the latter always constitutes a ritual of sorts, that never fails to be sexual in nature. In La Marge, Sigismond walks through Barcelona but he seems to have a certain predilection for its seediest parts and, in particular, for the shady joints where prostitution is exercised. He meets repeatedly with one of the señoritas, a young girl named Juanita – and not only memories of Sergine always surface whenever they are together, but Sigismond already superimposes the image of his own wife on the decadent, grotesque crowd of prostitutes he sees on his first tour of the prostitution district: “L'image de sa jeune épouse est liée maintenant à celles
des putes sur trois rangs\textsuperscript{67}. In Tout disparaîtra (1987), Hugo Arnold meets on the subway with a woman called Miriam, follows her, and plays under her direction sadomasochistic games that almost make him go crazy before moving to the Seine and meeting with her enigmatic almost-namesake Mériem and his final, barely displaced dissolution. Even when sexual intercourse as such does not happen within the time of the bubble, the protagonists never fail to evoke it. Marbre's protagonist Ferréol Buq constantly happens to be in a series of situations that, while not implying sexual activity \textit{per se}, always carry strong sexual (and ritual) connotations. In Le Lis de mer, Vanina spends the whole time fantasizing about her final rendezvous with the nameless Italian lover she has chosen, preparing it, and anticipating it in the conversation she has with him – in which she lays down the very specific rules of the erotic ritual they will enact together – as well as in the voyeuristic scene she performs midway through the narration, in which the lover-to-be is asked to stand outside Vanina's window and watch as she displays to him her carefully prepared body before shutting the windows close. Rébecca, in La Motocyclette, also spends almost the whole time of her journey (during which she will only meet very few people, such as the customs officers, and their conversations tend to show a heavy undercurrent of sexual tension) either fantasizing about the forthcoming meeting with her lover or thinking about their past ones, remembering down to their smallest details the peculiar sexual rituals they had enacted.

Objects may also play a role both as more or less magical creators and keepers (or correlatives) of the narrative bubble as a whole and as reminders of its essentially sexual nature. Such a function is best performed on the textual margins of the bubble itself, that

\textsuperscript{67} La Marge, cit., p. 73
is to say in the locations corresponding to its creation and final burst, which is bound to happen whenever the relevant object is broken, neutralized, or anyway subtracted from its task. Rébecca's motorcycle (which effectively allows for the whole narration to happen, and to end, between the two poles of the departure from the house and the fatal crash, being the necessary instrument of her journey as much as of her death) isn't just a wedding present that her lover gave to her – it is insistently sexualized throughout the book, “taureau noir”\textsuperscript{68}, “chose vivante, frémissante et furieuse”\textsuperscript{69}, “nègre soumis à sa jeune maîtresse”\textsuperscript{70} being only a few of the epithets attributed to it. The liquor bottle thanks to which Sigismond, in \textit{La Marge}, can temporarily neutralize the letter and its contents on his night table and go around Catalan bars of ill repute is defined “\textit{talisman ou maléfique bulle}”\textsuperscript{71}, explicitly recognizing both its magical or apotropaic function and its relationship to the temporal bubble structuring the narrative itself; it is also referred to as a “\textit{phallus transparent}”\textsuperscript{72}. And perhaps we should also list the eponymous castle in the erotic novel \textit{L’Anglais décrit dans son château fermé}: the castle – Gamehuche – is the location and theatre of the whole narrative action, which takes place between the narrator's arrival (this being the only long fictional work of Mandiargues's to be written in a first-person narrative) past a narrow bridge regularly flooded by the high tide, and his final, rushed departure. Consistent with all of Mandiargues's theaters, Gamehuche is rigorously geometrical in shape (specifically circular, which makes it look like an arena to the narrator), a feature that is replicated by its internal spaces. However, the castle isn't  

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{La Motocyclette, cit.}, p. 16  
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 29  
\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 108  
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{La Marge, cit.}, p 50  
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid.}, p 66
just a space for the action but a significant object in itself, and namely a counterpart of sorts for its owner Montcul's monstrous genitalia, “objet essentiel du roman”\(^{73}\) in their own right – a correspondence suggested by its shape (wider than it is tall) as well as by the toponyms surrounding it, such as St-Quoi-de-Vit and the Côte de Vit, but most of all by its spectacular, orgasmic explosion at the end. Montcul had stacked the castle's cellars with explosives, and in the short conclusive chapter the narrator learns by the local newspaper (Le Phare de Vit) that not long after his departure Montcul had likely decided to blow up the whole building, causing a flash to erupt vertically over it and the whole coast to be shaken – just like Montcul's own body was when, in chapter three, he reached climax (a process that took time, work and difficulties, as is the norm for a much typified libertine character of the Sadean kind, which also somehow parallels the castle's belated blast). Both scenes, I'll note in passing, are not without some grandeur – but here's how Montcul himself had anticipated the final explosion:

Le château de Gamehuche, braillait-il, est un énorme vit courtaud, toujours bandé, qui peut décharger d'un instant à l'autre. Ses couilles sont les caves creusées vastement dans le rocher qui le porte, et elles débordent d'explosifs volés aux Allemands, puis aux Anglais et aux Américains […] Savez-vous bien qu'il me suffirait d'allumer la mèche de telle bougie que je sais, de tirer tel cordon, de branler tel petit bouton électrique, pour foutre tout en l'air dans une éjaculation grandiose qui amidonnerait le ciel comme la chemise d'un bagnard? Et je le ferai, je le jure, à la première fois qu'après avoir bandé je ne serai pas capable de cracher du sperme. La décharge de Gamehuche sera la revanche de mon fiasco!\(^{74}\)

The narrator will learn in the conclusion to the book that Gamehuche has, in fact, been blown up, and in the very last lines he'll recall an epigram stated by Montcul that

\(^{73}\) André Pieyre de Mandiargues, L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé. Édition revue et corrigée avec une préface de l'auteur, Paris: Gallimard 1979, p. 16 (preface)

\(^{74}\) Ibid., pp. 133-134
will serve as the explicit of the novel – “Eros est un dieu noir”\textsuperscript{75}. Interestingly enough, this sentence appears in a later page by Mandiargues's, under the guise of a quotation from an author that is left unnamed: “‘Eros est un dieu noir.’ Sur cette phrase s'achevait le livre d'un écrivain assez infâme, dont je tairai le nom”\textsuperscript{76}.

Mandiargues was a connoisseur of erotic literature and a keen collector of erotica; some items from his collection figure in an exquisite 1973 short movie by Walerian Borowczyk, \textit{Une Collection particulière}, which Mandiargues also contributed to by writing the commentary for the voice-over\textsuperscript{77} and figuring in the movie as the dapper presenter – always framed however from the neck down, his head never appearing. He didn't just write erotic fiction – or fiction strongly characterized by an ubiquitous erotic element – but devoted several theoretical reflections to the topic, further clarifying his stances. To him, eroticism seems to be hardly separable from violence; and this is openly affirmed in his essays, mostly collected in the four \textit{Belvédères} (a fifth one was published posthumously). These put together a charmingly heterogeneous series of articles, many of which discuss the work of writers and artists from the past as well as from the present day; a devoted reader of Sade and Bataille, Mandiargues was also among the very first to recognize the value of \textit{Histoire d'O} at its very appearance. But he also wrote articles that do not even try to conceal their self-reflective nature (and their relevance to the appreciation of his own work) under the veil of references to other authors. From the beginnings of his literary career, he elaborated a personal notion of eroticism that was

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 151
\textsuperscript{76} André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Eros noir”, in \textit{Id.}, \textit{Le Cadran lunaire}, Paris: Laffont 1958, p. 147. Indeed, \textit{L'Anglais} had originally been published under the pseudonym of Pierre Morion.
\textsuperscript{77} See folder PDM 21.11 at the IMEC archives
tightly intertwined with those of violence and monstrosity\textsuperscript{78}.

A fascinating early piece of writing that repeatedly hints at this conception is the text about the monster statues in the Italian Renaissance gardens of Bomarzo. The piece was collected in the first \textit{Belvédère} (1958) one year after having been first published by Grasset in a photographic book titled \textit{Les Monstres de Bomarzo}\textsuperscript{79}, but the IMEC archives show that the text had already been composed as early as 1954, reworking and expanding on an article written for an issue of the magazine \textit{Arts} that appeared in 1952\textsuperscript{80}. The original, much shorter 1952 text already shows the principal reason for the author's interest in the garden (closely following its rediscovery, which seemed to have been started by a short movie shot in 1948 by the weekly newsreel \textit{La settimana Incom} that portrayed Salvador Dalí as he visited the park, climbed on the monuments, and picked up local cats). Bomarzo, in fact, isn't just an offbeat treat of the kind Mandiargues has always been fond of, but actively embodies in landscape and stone several of his own most cherished obsessions. For one, the statues appear incongruous in the landscape that is hosting them, and they hardly respect Classical canons of beauty – they are roughly carved in local stone and portray, in different proportions defying the rules of perspective, an array of monsters, beasts, whimsical architectures and mysterious figures, situated on uneven ground amidst the vegetation. Mandiargues sees in them the depiction of a primitive, Mediterranean world of obscure forces\textsuperscript{81}; the statues may very well represent

\textsuperscript{78} For an introduction to this topic see Étienne Boillet, \textit{op. cit.} (specifically in the section “Monstruosité, violence et érotisme”)


\textsuperscript{80} The drafts for the 1952 article are to be found in folder PDM 16.16; the 1954 text, published in 1957, is in folder 16.17

\textsuperscript{81} See, for a review of this specific theme – quite ubiquitous in Mandiargues's work – along with the
ancient gods – but if so, because of the very ancientness that makes them unintelligible as well as the crude execution of the stonework, these “gods” would rather pertain to the category of the demonic (a category to which Mandiargues resorted when describing Landolfi’s first novel, itself set in a nightly Mediterranean atmosphere complete with wizardry, sensual lures, and old, nameless deities)\(^8\). To this day several attributions have been attempted but nobody seems to be quite sure about the subjects of the statues, let alone their intended meaning\(^3\) – even though it is possible that Vicino Orsini, the local lord who ordered the construction of the park, might have meant it to be of an esoteric nature\(^4\). Mandiargues seems to be pretty sure that the statues enact scenes of violence and sexuality – among their most frequent attributes are lust and bestiality, which are not mutually exclusive with their divine (or demonic) nature: “le monstre de Bomarzo,

\(^{82}\) “De telle séduction, qui tient de près à la catégories du ‘démoniaque’ [...] l’un des meilleurs exemples est, au début de La pietra lunare, la nocturne apparition de l’héroïne Guru, fille-chèvre, ou, si l’on préfère, chèvre-garou”. André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Préface”, in La femme de Gogol et autres récits, cit., p 8

\(^{83}\) For a state-of-the-art discussion about the scholarship on the park see Maurizio Calvesi, Gli incantesimi di Bomarzo. Il Sacro Bosco tra arte e letteratura, Milano: Bompiani 2000

\(^{84}\) Such is the reading proposed, among others, by Elemire Zolla in his erudite essay “Bomarzo: il santuario neoplatonico”, in Quaderni d’italianistica, vol. IV, no. 1, 1983 (originally published in German as Id., “Bomarzo, eine neuplatonische Weihestätte”, in Antaios, vol. 5, 1964). Zolla attempts a reading of the park as a Neoplatonic enigma, while making references to Medieval and Renaissance emblematis and Hermetic writers, theologians and even Indian wisdom, and trying to interpret it piece by piece as if it were a three-dimensional riddle, he tries to formulate exact solutions for its individual figures and for their whole ensemble.
dans sa démence aveugle, est sensuel, irresponsable et surhumain comme un dieu fou.\footnote{André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Les Monstres de Bomarzo”, in \textit{Id., Le Belvédère}, Paris: Grasset 1958, p. 187} If this may already sound like a good line from Lovecraft, Mandiargues doesn't stop there – collecting local rumors about the possible existence of a dungeon linking the park to the castle and about the droit de seigneur allegedly exercised by the Orsini family, he wonders:

On se demande s'il n'y eut pas un rôle plus actif que d'ornier, donné a ces statues qui semblent n'avoir été taillées que pour créer l'effroi ou le trouble des sens, et si ces lieux, si propres à faire des horreurs dans le secret le plus convenable, n'étaient pas destinés à un usage qui ne se pût avouer. Ici j'ajouterai qu'un souterrain, comblé, mais dont il reste les issues, reliait jadis le palais ducal aux cavernes, aux fontaines et aux chemins ombreux et sauvages qui occupaient le fond de la vallée. Sade, qui dans sa Juliette a utilisé avec une intelligence bien moderne nombre de ses souvenirs italiens (voyez, par exemple, la description des cires pestiférés dues à Zumbo), s'il était passé à Bomarzo, n'aurait-il pas mis là, plus justement qu'auprès des volcans de boue qui sont au sud de Bologne, la demeure de l'ogre Minski? Et à quels jeux, à quels plaisirs immensément dévastateurs, les grands monstres de pierre n'eussent-ils pas servi de théâtre?\footnote{Mandiargues, “Les Monstres de Bomarzo”, cit., p. 207.}

The mythical references Mandiargues resorts to are, rather than the Olympian cohort (that is quite likely actually portrayed in the statues), those of older gods, more obscure and dangerous, closer to the elemental forces of brute matter – nymphs, giants, and mythical beasts. Further indications are given by the lexicon, heavily insisting on the semantic spheres of violence, eros, and animality. This fil rouge is highlighted from the description of the very first statue Mandiargues considers at length, a she-giant or nymph that he climbs while remembering the verses of Baudelaire's \textit{La Géante} (but, apart from the sense of Nature's overwhelming power, the main emotional tone of the sonnet – the comfortable, child-like feeling of protection in the great woman's womb – is hardly

\footnote{See Chapuis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 73: “tout un peuple mythologique qui perpétue la culture gréco-romaine dans l'art de la Renaissance, ce à quoi Mandiargues semble se refuser de manière systématique”.

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present). Indeed, many oversize or straight-out gigantic women appear in Mandiargues's fiction – examples include, but are by no means limited to, the female guests at the palace of Petit-Colombes in “Le Tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley”, the statuesque, naked, and perhaps thousand-year old woman emerging from the river at the end of Tout disparaîtra88, or the timeless, crudely executed statue of a giantess portrayed in “L'Archéologue”. Like a fairytale ogress, the géante of Bomarzo is perhaps sitting on the remains of her lovers' bodies, whom she has eaten and digested, while two mermaids in the same group seem to be luring a victim.

Many other statues throughout the park are reconnected in the text to this same mixture of violence and lust; what strikes the author, as he strolls through them, is a constant, limited array of features defined in very clear terms – namely, those of an “érotisme cruel”89 that, he complains, has never widely inspired artists in countries of Greco-Roman culture (just like, in the introduction to the collection of French translations from Landolfi he curated, he complained that fantastic literature in general and the “catégorie du 'démoniaque’” in particular had never been much of an inspiration for Italian writers). The passage about this brand of cruel eroticism, and its relative lack of importance in Greco-Roman countries, is already present in the 1952 text, even though the 1954 draft will definitely expand on the whole semantic field of sexuality and cruelty as well as on the beastliness of the stone idols (only about one third of the original article was devoted to their description).

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88 “Malgré ce qu'elle lui a dit, il voit en elle plutôt une statue qui serait animée par l'effet d'une sorte de magie qu'une femme vraiment vivante”. André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Tout disparaîtra, Paris: Gallimard 1987, p. 164

89 “Les Monstres de Bomarzo”, cit., p. 186
This theme was of crucial relevance to Mandiargues, and it remains crucially relevant for a proper reading of his texts. Let's go back to the essay I've briefly mentioned in which Mandiargues quotes, without attribution, the explicit of his own *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé* ("Eros est un dieu noir"). The short piece, which appeared in the 1958 selection of articles *Le Cadran lunaire*, is in fact titled “Eros noir”90, after that very epigram, and it constitutes an interesting meditation about the real significance of eroticism in Mandiargues's views and in his production – a pivotal one indeed, which is why I am going to quote from it at some length. It begins by considering the wide diffusion of the theme of eroticism in contemporary French culture and literature, and it goes on opposing the light-heartedness of the so-called "esprit gaulois" to a very different depiction of Eros – of the kind expressed in the piece's title. Suspicious of all joyful dreams of a sexual revolution, constitutionally prone to the kind of dark ontology of sexuality and to the refined taste for sin as such that would have been shared by many of Compagnon's *Antimodernes*, Mandiargues complains, in accents that closely resemble those of Baudelaire's "J'aime le souvenir": “[des] intellectuels maigriots songeaient à une idéale Grèce antique où leurs corps débiles eussent librement accompli les prouesses que l'on prêtait aux satyres. Cette liberté de moeurs, bien entendu, n'exista jamais”91. Then again, “Eût-elle existé, d'ailleurs, cette liberté, existerait-elle un jour improbable, elle aurait été et elle serait aussi contraire à l'érotisme que le grand soleil aux merveilles de la pyrotechnie”92. Mandiargues argues that love, let alone “free” love, has nothing to do with eroticism, which in fact can be considered from only one point of view – that of

90 “Eros noir”, cit., pp. 145-150
91 Ibid., p 146
92 Ibid., p. 147
Bataille, in his conferences, has tried to explain the importance of this tragic point of view, to which Mandiargues adheres wholeheartedly. One could perhaps try to distinguish, he states, between a 'white' and a 'black' eros – “le premier gouvernant le royaume immense et lumineux de l'amour; le second couvrant de son ombre tout ce qu'à tort ou à raison l'on désigne sous le nom d'"érotisme"” even though among the two domains there would be secret passageways (known to poets), just like there are secret passageways between heaven and hell. But what is, then, the function of violence in eroticism, and if the two notions are so indissolubly intertwined, what is the function of “black” eroticism – and how does it relate to narrative?

Mandiargues evokes the whole panoply of whips, chains, fires and branding irons made common in erotic literature by the success of Histoire d'O – and claims that whatever they can do to the body is but a part and a figure of their total significance:

Mais c'est par leurs doubles symboliques qu'ils sont indispensables à l'érotisme, car ils figurent les épreuves subies nécessairement par le corps et par l'âme (tout ce que l'on voudra sous ce nom) avant la plongée dans la nuit. Outils pour rompre la chair, ce sont des machines à détruire la personne.

Car l'attrait fou de l'érotisme (de cet éros noir) est qu'il conduit enfin à la perte de la personnalité. Ni plus ni moins que la haute poésie.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the (very important) insight offered by the very last sentence in the quote, let's concentrate briefly on the one preceding it. The final goal of eroticism, at least in Mandiargues's acceptation of the term, is the ultimate obliteration of

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93 Indeed, while debating the definition (given by himself) of Eros as a black god, he writes that he wouldn't be entirely sure of its second part – that is, Eros's godliness – were it not for “la mise à mort, commune à presque tout le genre divin”. Eros, of course, never dies in Greek mythology, and the only Greek god who does is Pan. Perhaps Mandiargues is giving the reader a hint as to what he considered the true nature of Eros?
94 “Eros noir”, cit., p. 147
95 Ibid., p. 148
personality, the loss of the *principium individuationis* – which explains both the beastliness Mandiargues insisted upon in his descriptions of the old gods of Bomarzo\(^{96}\) and the enduring, pervasive fascination of the author with the world of dreams: a world, indeed, that isn't just opposite and complementary with ours, but is heavily related to that of eroticism. “*Eros (le ténébreux) est probablement le seul guide qui soit capable de nous mener tout éveillés sur les chemins de l'inconscience, et de nous rendre un peu de ce bonheur absurde que nous avons ressenti, des fois, dans le rêve*”\(^{97}\).

Thus, violence and pain aren't just a necessary element of Mandiargues's eroticism in themselves – they are so up to their final rigorous logical consequence, that is to say death. The body has to be utterly destroyed in order for the self to follow, and the boundaries between *la petite mort* and the actual one get to blur and disappear just like those between individual and cosmos, as a consequence, will do. Talking about *Histoire d'O* (in an article whose title shares its first two elements with the panoply of sadomasochistic paraphernalia that we have mentioned before, and sums up the meaning of their 'symbolic double' in the third: “*Les fers, le feu, la nuit de l'âme*”\(^{98}\)) Mandiargues celebrates it as a “*roman véritable*”\(^{99}\) and then goes on to call it, rather than an erotic novel, “*un roman mystique*”. This definition, anticipated in the article's title, is perhaps quirky but certainly interesting. The protagonist O's progressive descent into self-annihilation is compared to nothing short of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*\(^{100}\); the

\(^{96}\) “*Cet autre monde est l'érotique. Y entrant, les dieux et les héros se changeaient souvent en bêtes, selon les mythologies*” (ibid., p. 149)

\(^{97}\) Ibid., p. 149

\(^{98}\) In *Le Cadran lunaire*, cit., pp. 81-90

\(^{99}\) Ibid., p. 85; this is such a rare occurrence in French literature, he states, that the book is enough to make its author one of the two or three novelists *tout court* in contemporary France.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., p. 86
humiliation, degradation, and ultimately objectification of her body are also referred to in a brief mention in “Eros noir” as a “désincarnation progressive”\textsuperscript{101}. Just like whips and chains are but figure and correlative of a much deeper process of destruction, of a definitive breaking of the self in addition to that of the skin, so, conversely, this kind of eroticism results in a (somewhat paradoxical) oblation of the body and of its very capability for feeling. Indeed, if \textit{esse est percipere}, it follows that the opposite should also hold, and negating either term of the sentence will automatically negate the other – thus, “black” eroticism deletes sensuality with the senses, and itself with its devotee. What is most interesting, of course, is that this oblation of the sensory apparatus follows precisely its overstimulation via the surcharge of painful (and, in one way or the other, pleasurable) stimuli – in a way that is somewhat similar to the techniques used by Christian mystics and saints in their quest for ultimate denial of the will and of the self. Mandiargues does refer to heretic sects (often much stricter than the Church itself in their views of the sinfulness of the flesh and in the radicalness of their solutions) in the text:

Plus curieusement, l'on s'apercevra bientôt que si la première vertu de l'érotisme est de vous faire perdre la tête, la seconde, qui n'est pas la moins admirable, est de vous faire perdre les sens, c'est-à-dire d'abolir la sensualité en ravageant le monde charnel. Un dictionnaire des hérésies ferait sortir de l'oubli les noms d'une multitude de sectes antiques qui combattaient par là le péché. La méthode était grossière, comme l'idée de la prétendue faute, ou du fait combattu. Il n'en reste pas moins que l'érotisme est une sorte de danse de derviche, qui par son tournoiement délivre de la pesanteur corporelle. Point de meilleur exemple, dans les temps modernes, que la très belle \textit{Histoire d'O.}, dont on ne dira jamais assez la noblesse et l'étrange fierté à tous les stades d'un délire qui ne conduit qu'au dépouillement.\textsuperscript{102}

There's no need to point out what the last stage of this “délire” must be\textsuperscript{103}.

\textsuperscript{101} “Eros noir”, \textit{cit.}, p 150
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 149-150
\textsuperscript{103} “Puis: la mort. Inévitablement; la femme, par la déchéance de sa chair, étant devenue pur esprit” (“Les fers, le feu, la nuit de l'âme” , \textit{cit.}, p 87).
While there are, as we will observe, some important structural differences between a novel such as *Histoire d'O* and Mandiargues's work, it is hard not to notice that such a radical abdication to one's own body and self is indeed the denouement of choice in most of the latter. Sticking to his long fictions only, a more or less sexually connoted death awaits the protagonists of *Marbre, La Motocyclette, La Marge,* and *Tout disparaîtra,* and, presumably, the deuteragonist of *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé*; countless characters in the short stories meet a similar fate. While, strictly speaking, none of the novels' protagonists dies during a sexual act, Faure-style (except, perhaps, in *Marbre*), the bubbles leading to their death are always eroticized to a high degree, as we have seen, and the final dissolution of both bubbles and characters follows and accomplishes such eroticization. Besides, we have also seen how in Mandiargues's black eros, death and the “little death” are ultimately the very same thing; and the physical absence of a sexual partner doesn't diminish this in the least. Rébecca, whose progress of self-annihilation was already marked by the passage from her maiden name Res to the married name Nul, recognizes a coitus with her lover (the thought of whom, distracting her, may very well have directly led her to the road accident) in the steel embrace of the truck she crashes against; Sigismond Pons shoots himself in a sandpit in the outskirts of Barcelona, but his suicide obviously configures a mystical marriage of sorts with his suicidal wife, whose ghost he sees in the car behind him; and Hugo Arnold, having already abdicated to his own will, meets a mysterious woman on the Seine who challenges whatever sense of self he may have left before committing suicide in front of him – and the police will take him away and promise to an onlooker: “Il disparaîtra”104. As for *L'Anglais,* I've mentioned

104 *Tout disparaîtra, cit.*, p. 183
the final explosion of the château that can be either a substitute to or a corollary of Montcul's orgasm, whereas in *Marbre* (originally published in the same year as *L'Anglais*), while Ferréol Buq's death is not narrated, it does get anticipated in the last chapter – and such death isn't just put in a direct relationship with the character's erotic pilgrimage through Italy105 but is very likely to happen as the climax of a sexual ritual that has Ferréol's orgasm kill him, an orgasm similar to Montcul's in that it also involves the participation of all nature:

[…]
a nuit, maintenant qui vient, ne s'écoulera pas sans que Ferréol ne fasse la rencontre d'une femme, ou d'une fille encore, et ne la suive. Entraîné derrière le bruissement de la porteuse de jupe, il parviendra dans un lieu d'une géométrie plus précise et plus spectrale que tous ceux qu'il a déjà explorés, ignorant, toutefois, que ce lieu, de sable, de poussière, de briques chaulées, de planches ou de calcaire usé par l'air salin, n'est autre que le terme fixé à ses pas. Car, et sans doute à proximité de statues (nudités retirées de la pierre froide), d'armures (choses de métal qui sont les carapaces des corps nus et chauds) et d'un corps féminin dépouillé de son vêtement jusqu'au moindre fil, il va se produire une sorte d'orgasme naturel (tremblement de terre, phénomène volcanique commun en ces parages, orage ou grande vague issue de la mer), sur lequel je ne m'appesantirai pas davantage, mais qui retranchera Ferréol du nombre des vivants106.

Mandiargues's first novel portrays the final dissolution of its main character in accents very similar to those of his last one; and in both of them the natural world is ready to accompany and embrace the disappearance of the protagonists' selves, a “désincarnation” that takes place under the sign of those panic forces the author recognized as one of the most important, or perhaps the most important element and inspirational kernel of his work.

From a formal point of view, the death and dissolution of the characters at the end of the bubble correspond to the happily-ever-after of fairytales and to the marriage

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105 "Du terrain érotique, où je l'avais posé au début […] il a glissé dans un espace mortel" (André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Marbre*, Paris: Laffont 1953, pp. 198-199)

106 *Marbre, cit.*, p 201
concluding, as the second pole of narration, the vicissitudes of Hellenistic novels; and this not only because of the (paradoxically) positive connotation of such death and dissolution or because the destructive sexual orgasm may constitute the undisplaced version of the heroes' marriage, but simply because after their marriage nothing more can happen to them – nothing relatable, at least, that can be of some interest to the reader; from the perspective of narrative, whether they get married or they die, it is the same. Besides, don't all book characters somewhat die once we are done reading?

Leo Bersani, in his brilliant glosses of Freud's theories\(^{107}\), refutes a number of dualistic distinctions proposed by the Freudian texts. Bersani maintains that the aggressiveness of the death instinct is always linked with a strong erotic pleasure, dismissing the common notion of the death instinct being opposed and complementary to the erotic (as formulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) and suggesting instead that "*destructiveness is constitutive of sexuality*"\(^{108}\) – just as Baudelaire had foreseen in his journals. But this isn't all; indeed, aggressiveness, as described by Freud, would also "sound bizarrely like – of all things – the oceanic feeling, which, as we have seen, was an ecstatic sense of oneness with the universe, a breaking down of the boundaries between the ego and the world traceable to the 'limitless narcissism' of infancy […] The oceanic feeling is a benign reformulation of 'the blind fury of destructiveness'"\(^{109}\). The surprising analogies, and indeed coincidences, between concepts that Freud himself seemed to


\(^{108}\) Ibid., p 20, author's emphasis. Bersani sees the footnotes in Freud's texts as playing “the role of the psychoanalytic unconscious in [Freud's] work […] enacting compositionally his own formulation of the laws of repression and symptom-formation, Freud will devote the rest of his symptomatic upper text to the analysis of a presumably nonerotic aggression” (ibid., p. 16)

\(^{109}\) Ibid., pp 19-20
consider as opposites would then be an instance of the text enacting compositionally its own subject matters: “the explanatory logic of Civilization and Its Discontents is both tautological and circular […] It breaks down the boundaries separating concepts, and thereby nicely exemplifies what might be called an oceanic textuality”\textsuperscript{110}.

Moreover, the kind of aggressiveness Bersani talks about is originally an aggressiveness towards oneself, marked by “an association of pleasure with the ego's harming, possibly even destroying, itself”\textsuperscript{111}. Bersani argues that sadomasochism, and more specifically masochism (“aberrations” whose definition, and whose relationship to sexuality, seemed to somehow embarrass Freud himself), far from being an “exceptional or marginal manifestation of sexuality”\textsuperscript{112}, might very well constitute “its elusive 'essence’” instead. Referring to the writings of Freud as well as to Jean Laplanche, he highlights how all sexuality ultimately amounts to a “shattering” of the self, and vice versa, how all shattering of the self ultimately results in sexuality: “Freud appears to be moving towards the position that the pleasurable unpleasurable tension of sexual excitement occurs when the body's 'normal' range of sensation is exceeded, and when the organization of the self is momentarily disturbed by sensations or affective processes somehow 'beyond' those compatible with psychic organization […] Sexuality would be that which is intolerable to the structured self”\textsuperscript{113}. Mandiargues, whose idea of sexuality is precisely that of a force that shatters the self swiping away all psychic organization (a force which would be called Panic in Mandiargues's vocabulary, and which is closely

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p 21
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p 59
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p 37
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p 38
connected to the “oceanic feeling” that is, according to Bersani, rooted in and perhaps identical with the notions of sexuality and violence), sees in the stone monsters of Bomarzo a perfect representation of it and of its power of troubling the senses:

Voudrait-on donner une représentation concrète à certain égarement des sens et de l'esprit qui s'est parfois emparé des hommes et auquel se rapporte bien le mot panique, alors on ne saurait trouver mieux que ce group colossal taillé en pleine roche, perdu dans un petit bois vert et dans une solitude crépitante de cigales et de criquets, entre les montagnes étrusques et le rivage de la Méditerranée114.

However, we should point out that while Mandiargues's plots do normally find their endings in the same kind of (self-)destructive scenarios that he identified as a mystical element in Pauline Réage's novel (whose pseudonym had not been unmasked yet, and made for a good deal of speculation), their internal structure differs greatly from the latter's. Their narrative bubbles almost entirely lack the internal plot development and the sense of teleology that let O progress towards her inevitable self-abolishment; instead, characters get entrapped in a circular motion that they'll be able to break away from only by the burst of the bubble and the final reestablishment of another kind of narrative time – before, indeed, all time gets abolished in the inevitable panic explosion. The pace of Mandiargues's characters is not that of the pilgrim, walking (as slowly as the case may be) towards the final destination of his journey; it is, rather, that of Sigismond Pons, the flâneur casually strolling from brothel to alleyway in the dilated space and time of dreams. And yet, the eventual result will be the same; at one point, the bubble will break and its characters with it. It could be argued perhaps that if O's system is the mystic's, progressively leaving the temporal world (and human language) behind as she

114 “Les Monstres de Bomarzo”, cit., p. 186
approaches the divinity by subsequent steps, the characters of Mandiargues would rather resort to the magician's – always repeating the same words and litanies, in a never-changing ritual that has been established once and for all, until enough power is accumulated for the spell to suddenly take effect or, at any rate, until the blood sacrifice is abruptly consumed. Indeed, in defining *Histoire d'O* a “*roman mystique*” rather than an erotic novel, Mandiargues was taking into consideration two main features of the book – one being its conclusion, that is, “mystical” negation of the self and death; and the other one being the teleologic sequence that leads to it. This is mainly responsible for what he sees as the book's principal difference from erotic literature, which is a difference in time structure.

Mandiargues observes that Pauline Réage doesn't set herself apart from most erotic writers by originality of any sort in the kind of arsenal of kinky tools she resorts to, virtually indistinguishable from that of any basic pornographic novel (a genre of which Mandiargues happened to have more than a superficial knowledge). What sets her book apart is the use she makes of such an arsenal, of course; her *écriture*, which makes him think of nothing less than *La Princesse de Clèves*; the predominance of the “*plan […] de l'esprit (ou mieux: de l'âme)*”\(^\text{115}\) over that of the flesh in the narration, mirroring the “*désincarnation*” of the protagonist; but most of all, as I've said, her employment of time. Mandiargues's insights on this topic are rather penetrating, and deserve to be quoted in full:

Il ne serait pas mauvais, là comme ailleurs, de regarder un peu du point de vue du temps, qui est un

\(^{115}\) “Les fers, le feu, la nuit de l'âme”, *cit.*, p 84
observatoire commode lorsqu'on se trouve embarrassé pour juger d'un objet si proche et si insolite qu'il vous crèverait les yeux. Or, il apparaît assez clairement que le temps d'un récit, de par le tissu et la continuité, est toujours une sorte de passé, bon gré mal gré qu'en ait l'auteur, tandis que le temps de l'amour (physique) est spécifiquement l'instant. Que l'art des amants soit, comme on dit, de "faire durer le plaisir", on l'accorde, mais alors il s'agit d'une multitude d'instants déchirants et splendides, sans passé ni futur et parfaitement déliés les uns par rapport aux autres, quoiqu'ils se ressemblent tous. La comparaison, grossière, avec le courant alternatif opposé au courant continu, n'est pas à rejeter. L'on pourrait aussi, dans un langage trop fleuri, dire des amants qu'il égrènent le plaisir comme un collier de perles. Et quand un romancier, ou un conteur, cherche par le moyen de la narration à faire revivre ces instants précieux dans leur intensité fulgurante, à les placer crûment devant ses yeux, ou ceux du lecteur, afin d'émouvoir les sens, si son oeuvre est vraiment érotique elle déroulera une séquelle de répétitions, à peine interrompues, ça et là, par de péripéties étrangères au fait charnel et sans le secours desquelles elle cesserait d'être lisible. La plupart des romans de Sade, le grandiose Trois Filles et leur mère de Pierre Louÿs, sont exemplaires de ce que j'écris.

Confronté avec ceux-là, ou d'autres plus récents, dont le but, avoué ou non, n'est pas douteux, puisque de l'intrigue au langage tout y concourt à des fins voluptueuses, L'Histoire d'O n'est pas à proprement parler un livre érotique116.

This description of the narrative time of eroticism is startlingly similar in its key features to that of adventure time provided by Bakhtin: a series of unrelated moments, each of which is perfectly self-sufficient and only connects with the others because of their being in the same sequence, only to be disrupted by the final release – a release that the text, just like the sexual act, is not necessarily building towards, and just happens at some point. All of these moments are situated in the present, each of them indeed representing an absolute present perfectly enclosed in itself, and thus logically unable to affect the following one (something that may perhaps recall Borges's refutations of time, as well as his admission that in the end, time is regrettably true; once the marvelous “collier de perles” of adventure is over, protagonists return to their biographical time, and the instants “sans passé ni futur” will give place to a future in which those instants, somehow, have passed already). Such non-progressive, non-causal structure is the same one that I've tried to show in Mandiargues's bubbles – and it is the essential distinction Mandiargues draws between “livre érotique” and “roman mystique”. The former is then

116 Ibid., pp. 83-84
characterized by its way of relating the series of independent moments (which, added to
one another, make up the story) as a game of repetitions and slight variations on the same
theme.

Let's briefly go back to Leo Bersani's essay, in which several compelling links
between narrative and (“black”) eroticism are to be found. Bersani suggests that the very
way in which sexuality develops in the human infant – a helpless creature at the mercy of
whatever external stimulus may be imparted upon them – is inherently masochistic, and
that masochism, as a “psychical strategy which partially defeats a biologically
dysfunctional process of maturation”\textsuperscript{117}, should be considered “an inherited disposition
resulting from an evolutionary conquest”. As such, sadomasochism is in itself a narration:
“sadomasochistic sexuality would be a kind of melodramatic version of the constitution
of sexuality itself, and the marginality of sadomasochism would consist of nothing less
than its isolating, even its making visible, the ontological grounds of the sexual”\textsuperscript{118},
Bersani writes, and then considers how Sade, in \textit{Les 120 Journées de Sodome}, describes
the Duke being sexually aroused by the spectacle of the “violent commotion” he inflicts
on his victims. Here, according to Bersani, we can see the dramatization of another key
feature of sexuality, and again, of a key feature that sadomasochism embodies perfectly:
“Sexual excitement must be represented before it can be felt: or, more exactly, it is the
representation of an alienated commotion. We can see how sadism might be a logical
consequence of this view of sexuality. If erotic stimulation depends on the perceived or
fantasized commotion of others, it becomes reasonable to put others into a state of

\textsuperscript{117} Bersani, \textit{op. cit.} p 39
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ibid.}, p 41
maximal commotion”¹¹⁹. But so – if all sexual excitement is first and foremost a representation, or depends on a representation (of a process that, moreover, may be fictional in itself), which once again makes sadomasochism the perfect *mise en abyme* of sexuality as a whole – doesn't this mean, in only slightly different words, that all sexuality (and, of course, sadomasochistic sexuality *a fortiori*) is constitutionally a narrative?

Bersani doesn't quite make (or indeed refrains from making) this equation, which, as I'll try to show, may be an interesting perspective for approaching Mandiargues's fictions. But the points Bersani makes about narrative are interesting in their own right. In the following chapter of the book he goes back to some arguments he had made in previous works¹²⁰ and isolates two opposing patterns which, to a great extent, overlap with Mandiargues's own distinction between the progressive novelistic structure to be observed in *Histoire d'O* and the play with variations in a suspended time that happens in erotic literature (as well as in the sexual act that such literature not only represents but tries, by these means, to imitate). In Bersani's case, the two categories are respectively that of narrative and that of a different kind of “mobile” esthetic enjoyment. Bersani explicitly attaches a negative sign to the former; one of his interests being the attempt at researching modes of discourse that would not compel the reader's mimetic identification with the enactment of violence, Bersani argues that (traditional) narratives fatally end up

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¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 42
doing so. The “logic of narrativity”\textsuperscript{121} is, according to him, “a logic which both domesticates sexuality and hypostatizes its violence”, and this happens mostly because of the way (traditional) narratives are structured teleologically towards a climax (other formal features such as the foregrounding of certain characters, events, etc. at the center of the stage, while relegating others to the background, are a consequence of and a condition for such teleological structure to be built):

Centrality, the privileged foreground, and the suspenseful expectation of climaxes all contribute to a fascination with violent events on the part of readers and spectators […] In other terms, the calculation, preparation, and control of climaxes results from the establishment of foregrounds (objects of desire) and backgrounds (insignificant, undesired reality). This is also a narrative strategy: the climactic significances of narrative are made possible by a rigidly hierarchical organization of people and events into major and minor roles. In narrative, coherent orders are the privilege of a world in which relations have been limited to precisely those forms from which a central coherence can be made to appear “naturally” to emerge\textsuperscript{122}.

It's interesting to notice that while Mandiargues briefly mentions Sade in passing as an example of the sort of episodic, non-progressive structure that he sees as typical of erotic fiction and we have identified with romantic adventure time, Bersani (who also takes erotic fiction as a litmus test for his theories about narrativity in general) looks at the Sadean oeuvre for a model – but does so in much greater detail, and finds in Sade the perfect case study for a pretty much pure, unadulterated narrative of the opposite kind, the teleological (or “progressive”) one. He agrees with Mandiargues about the ultimate purpose of the textual organization in Sade (that is, the reproduction of formal qualities peculiar to the sexual act itself and of the sort of reactions they engender) but has an opposite viewpoint about the nature of said organization, observing that the narrative

\textsuperscript{121} The Freudian Body, cit., p 52
\textsuperscript{122} “Merde Alors”, cit., p 28
material is expressly set up by Sade in such a way as to give the elements of the fabula the direction of a clear progression towards the climax\textsuperscript{123} – a climax which, much like that of Réage's “roman mystique”, is necessarily self-destructive. Bersani remarks:

That pacing could be characterized as a calculated movement toward explosive climaxes; it is the narrative rhythm most appropriate to the masochistic origin of sexuality. For if sexuality is constituted as masochism, its extreme logic is its explosive end; masochism is both relieved and fulfilled by death\textsuperscript{124}.

While Bersani's positioning of the Sadean texts on the grid is opposite to Mandiargues's, the two still hold very similar views about the grid itself and the nature of its two poles (if not about their ethical value). Antithetical to progressive or teleological narratives and to their “explosive end” we always find a play of repetitions and variations; and if the texts by Sade, according to Bersani, do not show such a play, their cinematic version by Pasolini absolutely does – positioning itself at the opposite end of the spectrum from that of the text it is inspired by\textsuperscript{125}. If “Sade […] exemplifies a

\textsuperscript{123} “Like much erotic literature, The 120 Days of Sodom moves from comparatively mild sexual anecdotes to orgies of erotic violence. But Sade points out that this is not the order in which his characters have the experiences being related. We are told that on a particular day, for instance, Sade's heroes were engaged in activities which will be narrated only as part of the record of a later day. In other words, the progress from one day to the next in Sade's book is not determined by 'real' chronology […]; rather, the work is organized in order to produce a certain type of narrative progression which is itself erotically stimulating. Indeed, the carefully constructed stories of Mme Duclos and her colleagues have an aphrodisiac effect on the libertines" (The Freudian Body, cit., pp 51-52)

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p 52

\textsuperscript{125} Interestingly enough, Mandiargues seemed to think that his own L'Anglais (whose protagonist, Montcul, had been connected to both the Nazis and the French Resistance prior to the narrated events, and at one point describes in gory detail how he had set some Jewish prisoners against two high-ranking Nazi officers he had captured) might have inspired Pasolini up to some point: “En frappant d'une sorte de sceau le donjon marin de Gamehuche, domicile du jeu criminel de mon héros, c'est à la façon strictement impitoyable dont est scellé l'athanor sadien du château de Silling, dans une haute vallée de la Forêt-Noire, bien entendu, que je songeais. Récemment, quand nous avons vu le film de Pasolini, Salò, principal objet que nous ayons d'aimer et d'admirer tant ce poète cinéaste, j'ai cru comprendre qu'il n'était pas moins familier de L'Anglais, traduit en italien quelques années plus tôt, que des Cent vingt journées…Et j'ai été heureux de ce semblant de connivence” (introduction to the 1979 edition of L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé, cit., p. 13)
tendency in art to exemplify that [self-shattering] pleasure in a narrative whose violence is not only anecdotal but also intrinsic, structural"126; if “the purpose of the book is, we might say, to create its own narrative"127, and “storytelling is valued because it is already a certain type of erotic activity”128, such an activity would only be the type that is teleologically directed towards a narrative (and physical) climax. Indeed, in Bersani's vocabulary, the term “narrative” is only applied to this kind of texts, whereas repetitions are rather considered as an example of some kind of anti-narrative esthetics – which, however, seems to correspond pretty closely to the kind of narrative that we've been discussing, from Bakhtin and the Hellenistic novel to Mandiargues. “Sadism is an estheticized erotic, but the esthetic is limited to the controlled movements of narrative progressions. Salò multiplies esthetic seductions and, appropriately, almost neglects the orgasm”129, writes Bersani, who sees in repetitions an antidote to climax-centered and therefore intrinsically violent narratives130 as well as a reproduction of the sort of enjoyment one can find in the “pleasurable unpleasurable” experience of sexuality. The reader's attention is thusly diverted from the anticipation of the story's ending: “One proceeds from A to its repetition in A', but the latter contains a difference which makes us check the model by returning to A”.

Mandiagues's own production is full to the brim with plays of repetitions, to the point that taking a comprehensive look at it, one has to wonder whether it would be even

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126 The Freudian Body, cit., p 51
127 Ibid., p. 52
128 “Merde alors”, cit., p. 27
129 The Freudian Body, cit., p 54
130 “If, as I have been arguing, human sexuality is grounded in masochism, we are, ontologically, implicated in violence almost from the beginning; our choice is not between violence and nonviolence, but is rather between the psychic dislocations of mobile desire and a destructive fixation on anecdotal violence” (ibid., p. 70)
possible that the author did not deliberately construct it as an elaborate hall of mirrors whose building took a few decades and a lifelong engagement on his part. When it comes to the short stories, the impression is that of a kaleidoscope of variations on a few common core layouts: there is a protagonist about whom the reader knows almost nothing, except for his or her name and his or her appearance. Plots often include recurring motifs such as (in random order) dreams, alchemical references, miniaturization or enlargement, folk rituals, stones and statues, and savory peasant food, and they conclude in a sexual encounter and/or in a murder or suicide unfolding against a geometrical setting in one of a few recurring backgrounds, whose décor is described elaborately. All of these elements tend to appear also in Mandiargues's long fictions – which, in addition, can display a tight network of repetitions on the syntagmatic axis too, i.e. within a single narrative (such is the case, in *La Marge*, for Sigismond's wanderings, in *L'Anglais* for the sex scenes, or in *La Motocyclette* both for the remarks about Rébecca's speeding up or slowing down or turning, etc., and for her memories of past encounters with Daniel131).

It could be argued that another feature of Mandiargues's narratives contributes to take away from them the teleological hype, as it were, that compels a reader to look forward to the presumably violent conclusion – and that is precisely, and paradoxically perhaps, the almost inevitable violence of the conclusion132. Any reader with a minimum acquaintance


132 In *Le Musée noir* only one tale out of seven, “Le Tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley”, doesn't end in a violent climax of some kind (or, at any rate, in the dissolution of the main character; sometimes this is not presented in a necessarily “violent” way, as is the case with “L'Homme du parc Monceau” in this collection, as well as other tales in the later books); in *Soleil des loups* it's only one (“Le Pain rouge”) out of six; three more tales – arguably – out of seven in *Feu de braise* (“Miroir morne”, “Le Diamant”, "Le Musée noir", “Le Tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley”, “Le Diamant”),
with Mandiargues's fiction, in other words, has an almost mathematical certainty that any
given story will end up in blood – and the stories themselves never put a strong emphasis
on the plot and its denouement, which is pretty much given for granted. As a result, the
reader is much more likely to concentrate on the present moment of his reading (on the
plays of variations and repetitions, on the preciousness of the writing, on the elaborate
details) than to try and guess or at any rate anticipate the conclusion; thus, the reading
experience itself is partially made into the extratemporal dimension of romance – and of
eroticism. It is quite interesting to observe, in this respect, how many of Mandiargues's
stories happen to be written in the present tense\textsuperscript{133}.

Let's go back to the sentence in which Mandiargues sums up what he sees (with
Bersani) as the fundamental nature of eroticism, and let's take into consideration the
equally important sentence that follows it – and that we had provisionally put aside:

\textit{"l'attrait fou de l'érotisme (de cet éros noir) est qu'il conduit enfin à la perte de la
personnalité. Ni plus ni moins que la haute poésie".} Poetry – that is to say, in

\textsuperscript{133} Not so much in his earlier production (in \textit{Musée noir}, “L'Homme du parc Monceau” and “Mouton
noir”; in \textit{Soleil des loups}, “L'Archéologue” and “Clorinde” have narrative frames written in the present
tense even though most of the story is narrated in the past, and the same goes for “Rodogune” in \textit{Feu de
braise}), this becomes a significant feature later on (out of four tales in \textit{Porte Devergondée}, one –
“Sabine” – uses the present for the narrative frame and two – “La Grotte” and “Le Théâtre de
Pornopapas” – are entirely written in the present, just like the introduction; in \textit{Mascarets}, “La
Révélación”, written in the past tense, is the only tale not to be written entirely or at least partially in the
present, albeit one of them – “Mascarets” – is entirely written in the present conditional; in \textit{Sous la
lame}, all of the tales are in the present tense; in \textit{Le deuil des roses}, all but two are, entirely or – as is the
case of “Le Tapis roulant” – partially). The same happens in the novelistic production: his first novels
are written in the past tense, the last two (\textit{La Marge} and \textit{Tout disparaîtra}) are in the present.

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Mandiargues's old-fashioned lexicon, all high literature in verse or prose – is defined here as being perfectly equal, in its results, to (sadomasochistic) sexuality; far from being an instrument for building one's personality, as well-meaning pedagogues would have it, it is, on the contrary, potentially able to destroy it. The brief but powerful remark is not expanded on in “Eros noir”, and its implications are left to the reader. Now, it is possible that Mandiargues didn't mean anything more than the temporary self-oblivion that may occur to any person getting absorbed in a captivating reading; or perhaps, he intended to point at a more fundamental feature of literature. We should, then, try to keep this all in mind as we make a few more observations about the relationship between eroticism and literature.

One of the most interesting representations of this relationship is perhaps to be found in the limited space of a short story, “L'Enfantillage”, published in the 1959 collection *Feu de braise*. The diegetic frame of the story is simple – and static – enough: the protagonist, Jean de Juni, is having sex with a quite passive and silent girl in a cheap hotel room. Nothing else happens, strictly speaking, and the story itself doesn't seem to have any particularly erotic quality: the action begins in medias res, entirely lacking all buildup of a tension leading to the sexual encounter; neither the act nor, more importantly, the girl are described with the kind of titillating details (at times verging on the *delectatio morosa*) that Mandiargues often expands on at great length, usually resorting to a language that evokes – even by their simple nomination – the different body parts, their clothing or lack thereof, etc.; and Juni's love-making is presented as mechanically repetitive, engendering in himself a trance of sorts that awakes memories in

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a vivid reverie with which the greatest part of the short story is, in fact, concerned – except for a few short passages reminding the reader about the main diegetic storyline, that is, the love-making itself (almost as if they, and not all the rest of the story, were the flashbacks). Now, if we consider the features proposed by Mandiargues in his tentative definition of the “pure” erotic novel (as represented by Sade or by works such as his own *L'Anglais* – in short, what could be called, for clarity's sake, pornography) we'll see that they are not properly followed in the short story, if at all135. “L'Enfantillage” only flirts with the erotic genre by using the latter's most basic setting as the narrative frame for its own plot development, and may even seem to be playing with the generic tropes; the protagonist himself doesn't seem to be too involved in the sexual act per se (and even less so with his sexual partner). The act mostly serves other purposes, chief among which is the activation of a reverie that allows Jean de Juni to create a different narrative intertwining with that of the main frame and complicating it.

The setting of “L'Enfantillage” is that of a seemingly Mediterranean town, perhaps in Italy or the South of France; the story begins as the protagonist is having intercourse with a girl he had picked up for that purpose in the hottest hour of the day, when everybody else was sleeping. Such an hour has in itself a rich and fascinating history in literature136: it is the so-called panic hour, the time of the *daemonium meridianum* or noon-day demon – an hour devoted to sleeping (and, therefore, dreaming) and subtracted to the regular,

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135 In the erotic novel proper, “*de l'intrigue au langage tout y concourt à des fins voluptueuses*”, that which is most certainly not the case here; also, the proportion of erotic repetitions to non-erotic excursuses proper to the erotic novel (that should unfold “une séquelle de répétitions, à peine interrompues, çà et là, par de péripéties étrangères au fait charnel et sans le secours desquelles elle cesserait d'être lisible”) is pretty much inverted in “L'Enfantillage”.

136 Much has been written about it – see, for instance, the erudite essay by Roger Caillois, *Les démons de midi*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana 1991
linear time of work and day despite constituting the very climax of the day, the sun being at the zenith. It is a temporal window opened in the dull fabric of reality and liminal to the world of ghosts and gods; it is also inseparable from a Mediterranean setting, as Mandiargues well knew\(^\text{137}\), and it is strongly linked to eroticism, in that the visions and dreams experienced during it are supposed to be sexual in nature. The nameless girl was perhaps made numb by the heat of the hour\(^\text{138}\); whatever the reason, we are insistingly told that she seems barely able to move and to speak, as if she were partaking in the general sleep, or dream, that the whole town is sleeping – so much so as to be compared to a rubber doll. In other words (and without getting into the many other instances in which Mandiargues's texts confront the theme of sculpted, mechanical, or otherwise inanimate women\(^\text{139}\)), the girl simply works as a prop for Juni to pursue his reveries – as he also gradually shifts into the same kind of dreamy dullness. In a way, she could be said to be the prototype of a great number of Mandiargues's characters (who are often thrown into the narrative, so to speak, without the reader knowing much or indeed anything about them at all – nor, in most cases, additional details will be provided during the course of the story itself – in order to be given a part to play in a representation, or a ritual, that

\(^{137}\) Here's his description of the landscapes in which the statues of Bomarzo (concrete representation, as he wrote, of the panic spirit) are built: “Le pays, coupé de vaux entre des collines modestes, ne manque pas de sources; les fonds ont des petits bois nombreux, surtout de chênes verts avec une broussaille épineuse, très dense, qui par leur obscur éclat rappellent inévitablement le fameux 'bois sacré', lieu commun de nos versions latines. L'air a du latin partout, d'ailleurs, et l'on ne serait pas surpris de voir des satyres. Et puis les tombeaux vides font penser aux spectres de midi, ces apparitions des heures chaudes, dont les Romains avaient peur” (“Les Monstres de Bomarzo”, cit., p. 175)

\(^{138}\) “Il pensa encore […] qu'il s'agissait peut-être de la victime d'une insolation, ou d'une fille tellement abrutie par la chaleur qu'elle n'était plus capable de se diriger seule ni de se défendre” (“L'Enfantillage”, cit., pp. 198-199)

\(^{139}\) Apart from those who become inanimate as a result of murder, suffice to think about the several references to this theme made in L'Archéologue, or even to the statues of Bomarzo. Curiously, a rubber doll is also the eponymous woman in the tale chosen to title the French collection of Landolfian stories curated by Mandiargues, La femme de Gogol et autres récits.
they don't always know much about\(^{140}\). She also represents a plastic image of their final goal, that is to say, the erasure of the self. This is clearly hinted at in the short story – throughout it, Juni will progressively lose conscience of himself and move towards some kind of ecstasy that would duplicate his partner's own apparent thoughtlessness:

Plus tard, ses pensées diminuèrent. Son esprit tendit vers une sorte de point zéro, comme pour une espèce d'union mystique avec la nullité de sa compagne. Ce point était situé assez précisément dans l'espace; il se trouvait devant lui, à gauche, sur la boule de cuivre qui ornait à cet endroit, comme aux trois autres angles, le montant du lit en fer sombrement émaillé\(^{141}\).

A “mystical union” with his partner's “nothingness”: the expressions cannot but strike us as an almost verbatim repetition of those Mandiargues used with regard to Histoire d'O, with the twist that the nirvana of nothingness is here something to be shared with somebody; but then again, it's somebody who has no name, almost no words, and who is said to be nothing – in fact, it's nobody. There are two complementary exercises that should take Juni to that goal.

The first exercise is, of course, the “opération” of physical movements related to the sexual act – on the repetitiveness of which Mandiargues insists almost every time he goes back, amidst Juni's reminiscing reveries, to the character's present, emphasizing the mechanical and rhythmical nature of the act (narrated in the imperfect tense)\(^{142}\). Rather than the pearls on a necklace evoked in “Les fers, le feu, la nuit de l'âme”, the single

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\(^{140}\) Jean de Juni is one of the very few exceptions to this.

\(^{141}\) “L'Enfantillage”, cit., p 199

\(^{142}\) The short story is, indeed, rather short, but there would be too many quotes to make here; see, for instance, pp. 191 (“Par sa persévérance et par sa régularité, ce bruit, comme d'une machine encore, arrivait à faire partie du silence”), 192, 196, 199 (“Le sentiment de sa position […] disparut à la fin, et notre homme ne fit plus que rythme”), 209 (“la brutalité rythmique de l'opération laissant libre cours à sa fantaisie”).
moments of this intercourse would be better compared to the beads of a rosary, perhaps a Buddhist one. While there isn't, for once, any physical violence in the story, Juni's “opération” – compared by the narrator to the working of machines, watches, hammers, and other technological implements – is soulless, hard, and insistently brutal, and reminds one of the surgical operation envisioned by Baudelaire (together with torture) as the aptest comparison for the act of love. Besides, maybe because of its repetitiveness, the mechanical movement of Juni has indeed both of the properties attributed by Mandiargues to the “éros noir” in his article by the same name (“si la première vertu de l'érotisme est de vous faire perdre la tête, la seconde, qui n'est pas la moins admirable, est de vous faire perdre les sens, c'est-à-dire d'abolir la sensualité en ravageant le monde charnel”). Juni doesn't just progressively lose his self-conscience, he loses his sensibility as well – and still, he goes on:

Il avait raidi ses bras de nouveau, tout son corps était raide et dans un état de complète insensibilité, son esprit était entièrement libéré de cette hantise de la mort qui le dominait habituellement et ne laissait point de paix à l'homme hagard que ses pas ne l'eussent conduit vers l'aventure douteuse, la chambre d'hôtel borgne, le lit décevant. Rêveur éveillé [...], il se trouvait au plus haut d'un ciel pur et montait encore, allant vers un soleil chaud et bon qui était aussi le visage de Nina Criticona [...]143

So, while Juni's mindless operation could in itself imply that he is thoroughly absorbed in the pursuit of the bodily end-pleasure to come, this is not the case – indeed, we are told that he got over the hump, as it were, and past the point in which such a pleasure is not even a possibility anymore:

Au lieu de se rapprocher du plaisir érotique, il savait qu'il s'en éloignait à présent, comme si l'ancien

143 “L'Enfantillage”, cit., pp. 212-213
paquebot grec évoqué au début de sa rêverie eût changé de cap pour retourner au port de départ. En même temps, Jean de Juni était vaguement satisfait, il le devait bien reconnaître, qu'il ne fût plus question d'arriver à ce plaisir-là, d'aborder à cette fastidieuse terre de destination.

In the early steps of Bersani’s analysis, the Freudian account of the functioning of sexual arousal, pleasure, and gratification is highlighted as inherently contradictory – specifically in the way Freud seems to think that “a feeling of tension necessarily involves unpleasure” and in how “Freud tends to speak of sexual excitement as if it were something like an itch, or an urge to sneeze. But in sex preceding discharge, the analogy with the itch no longer holds. We scratch, after all, in order to remove an itch, but – to hold on one more moment to the analogy – now we have an itch that seeks nothing better than its own prolongation, even its own intensification”. Here is an argument, among many, against a teleological reading of sexuality and, conversely, one of the arguments in favor of a strong connection between pleasure, pain, and repetition.

Rather than in the ultimate stasis following the end of movement, then, pleasure is to be found in the movement itself; that is, in “repetition – or what could perhaps be called an

144 Ibid., p. 210. It may be worth recalling here the remarks by Tomashevsky we have reported about the ending of stories, a “static” condition that, however inevitable, “will not evoke nor arouse the reader's anticipation”.

145 Quoted in The Freudian Body, cit., p. 33

146 Ibid., p 34

147 Freud's own teleological reading of the formation of sexuality in the individual through the three all-too-famous steps of oral, anal and genital pleasure in the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality is also critically confronted in Bersani’s study.

148 “How are we to understand this exceptional way of dealing with stimuli, as well as the wish to repeat and even intensify an unpleasurable tension? What would it mean to say that in sexuality, pleasure is somehow distinct from satisfaction, perhaps even identical to a kind of pain? […] fifteen years before the Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud is already considering a problematics of repetitions. But in the Three Essays, the mysterious repetition (and even intensification) of something unpleasurable is explicitly seen as inherent in sexuality […] We never, as Freud admits, get to the ‘essence’ of sexuality, but sexuality would be somehow connected to a pleasurable unpleasure, or the impulse to increase an already unpleasurable pleasure, or to remove a stimulus by replicating it” (Ibid., pp. 34-35)
insistent stasis”149. In “L'Enfantillage”, the repetitive movement that goes past the possibility of end-pleasure allows for the staging of the various scenes of Juni's reverie, upon which I'll touch in a moment; it allows for Juni's gradual approximation to whichever nirvana may or may not be waiting for him at some point; and it allows the sexual act to truly become what, according to Mandiargues, it is by definition – a mobile collection of absolute moments, each of them almost identical to the others but different from them, each of them doomed to pass and yet crystallized in some kind of eternal present (“une multitude d'instants déchirants et splendides, sans passé ni futur et parfaitement déliés les uns par rapport aux autres, quoiqu'ils se ressemblent tous”). Juni reflects on the peculiar effect that his “opération” has on his perception of and ontological relation to time, which is exceptionally made one with the time of another human, his partner:

Il pensa que ces mesures valaient pour la fille également, et que (le savait-elle?) ce qu'ils étaient en train de faire ensemble avait la propriété curieuse d'aligner le temps de l'un sur le temps de l'autre à l'imitation de leurs corps superposés, jusqu'à l'instant, lointain sans doute, où s'arrêterait le mécanisme et où cesserait la coïncidence […] Jean de Juni pensa qu'elle était la matrice de ce temps qu'ils avaient en commun, et qu'il jouait, lui, le rôle de poinçon comptable. Ainsi la machine était bien définie; elle pourrait fonctionner, les dieux aidant, jusqu'à la consommation des siècles150.

This mirrors the sharing, on the writer's and the reader's part, of the time of narration that we have labeled time B in the first section of this chapter. Just as the rhythm of his movement marks the passing of time not unlike “une horloge allemande”151 would do, the eternal present into which Juni's time is temporarily made (and which, way before

149 Ibid., p 35
150 “L'Enfantillage”, cit., 197
151 Ibid., p. 196
getting past the perspective of ever reaching “ce plaisir-là” as will happen near the end of
the tale, was envisioned as capable of lasting all day\(^\text{152}\) might as well get to coincide
with eternity itself, till the final *consummatum est*. The present is reaffirmed as the
temporal dimension proper, and indeed exclusive, to eroticism.

But there is another temporal dimension in the tale – and there is another exercise, in
addition to the physical one, that marks Juni's activity. Its link with the first path
represented by eroticism is, I think, crucial. Just as he's devoting himself to the activity
that is, par excellence, situated in the present, Juni gradually slips through a series of
flashbacks into a reminiscing reverie. The past memories he recalls get superimposed to
his sexual experience; and if the latter is narrated in an imperfect tense that highlights its
unfinished, in-progress nature as well as its repetitiveness (which helps easing into the
trance), the former also get to be mostly related in the imperfect – emphasizing how the
two temporal lines merge in Juni's experience, without the memories erasing his
consciousness of the present\(^\text{153}\). From a spatial and visual point of view, the same
happens: Juni's vivid memories enter his field of vision, overlapping and not erasing the
elements within. These memories are activated at first through verbal play. From the
beginning of the story, as I've mentioned, a number of similes and metaphors are
employed for describing the two characters' intercourse, closely connecting their silent
act to language – a language that through these figures of speech is drawing attention
both to itself as a poetic device, and to its possibilities for transcending itself and the
matter-of-factness of the world it commonly describes. As I've said, such analogies are

\(^{152}\) “Jean de Juni ne se sentait pas incapable de continuer jusqu'au soir” (ibid., p. 191)

\(^{153}\) “Jean de Juni, sans cesser d'être cette sorte de diapason en train de battre la mesure sur le ventre d'une
fille impassible, ni rien ignorer de la chose, revoyait l'enfant [...]” (ibid., pp. 201-202, my emphasis)
mostly drawn from the field of machinery and clockwork; and it is not by chance, perhaps, that the very first one likens the noise made by the bed to that of an (old-fashioned) printing press, that is, a device for the dissemination of language. Shortly thereafter, it is because of a chain of analogies generated by some sort of reverie about words that Juni visualizes the first image of his daydreaming – which is, in fact, the visual equivalent to the sort of machinery-related sexual analogies that are lavished throughout the text. Juni's reverie goes on, still fueled by visual associations produced by words, as he begins thinking about love and immediately thereafter reminiscing about his early experiences with the death of animals he loved (a turtle, a pig, and an axolotl) and his consequent decision not to love anything or anybody anymore. And then, the reverie seems to find a gravitational center and a motor.

The mental narrative Juni is letting himself be carried away by constitutes, just as much as the bodily movement that engenders and cradles it, the process through which he can approach the ultimate “point zéro”, the oceanic “union mystique avec la nullité de sa compagne” (and of course, the funereal nature of the episodes he is recalling is not without relation to this nothingness). Mysticism isn't the only cultural tradition at which this “point zéro” seems to be hinting – let's remember how André Breton described the ultimate goal of Surrealism in the Second Manifesto:

154 “Je fais l'amour, se dit-il sans aucune satisfaction, à un certain moment. Et il pensa à l'insuffisance de la petite phrase […] Le français, l'espagnol ou l'italien eussent pu lui fournir des formes plus brèves et plus expressives, dont le sens est généralement celui d'enfoncer un outil, ou, tout au mieux, de clouer. Était-ce donc à river un clou (son clou) à cette fille, qu'il s'employait? Il eût répondu que non, et qu'il s'agissait plutôt de quelque chose comme de la lente traversée d'une mer chaude par un vieux paquebot à machines à pistons, le S. S. Eros […]” (ibid., p. 192). The protagonist is here somehow appropriating the figures of speech otherwise employed by the impersonal narrator.

155 “Le verbe aimer se rapportait à des images et à des objets qui n'étaient pas si formidables. Il suggérait une eau grasse, peu courante, plutôt tiède. Sans doute, Jean de Juni avait aimé sa mère […]” (ibid., p. 193)
Breton's "point" (the word is the same) in which life and death, past and future become one is clearly connoted in alchemical parlance, openly quoting the *quod est superius est sicut quod est inferius* of Hermes Trismegistus's Emerald Tablet as well as the *coincidentia oppositorum* that is the ultimate goal of the alchemical operation. Mandiargues, a friend and ardent admirer of Breton's and a dabbler in the occult himself, almost seems to be quoting, in "L'Enfantillage", the letter and not just the spirit of this passage, if he is, then he may be making a bolder statement than it would look like. Indeed, if the determination of that point is the final goal of Surrealism (other than of alchemy), then Mandiargues's character Jean de Juni has not only managed to determine it, he's even located it physically; it's a point "situé assez précisément dans l'espace" – specifically on a gold-plated copper sphere, one of the bedposts' finials, which is precisely the object that, pretty much like a scrying ball, constitutes the center and the

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157 See also Michel Carrouges, *André Breton et les données fondamentales du surréalisme*, Paris: Gallimard 1950, p. 135: “Pour ce qui est du surréalisme, nous savons qu'il désire par-dessus tout embrasser en un éclair les réalités les plus diamétralement opposées. Comment s'étonner alors que Breton ait accordé une importance suprême à la fameuse loi définie par Reverdy: 'L'image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison, mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées. Plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte – plus elle aura de puissance émotive et de réalité poétique'”.
158 Which, of course, he knew by heart; in his interview with Joyce O. Lowrie, Mandiargues relates it to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas (Lowrie, "Entretien avec André Pieyre de Mandiargues", cit., p. 78)
159 “L'enfantillage”, cit., p. 199
activator for the last, long episode of his recollections. The “point”’s function, in other words, is to generate a narrative.

As a sunbeam reaches the ball and makes it shine, it awakens in Juni yet another childhood scene with a deadly ending – the fall, that he had witnessed together with his nanny Nina Criticona, of a wagon of Italian seasonal workers down a tricky mountain path. Images seem to flock together thanks to the ball's “magnetic” virtue\textsuperscript{160}; until Juni reaches a mysteriously euphoric state, sees the face of Criticona superimposed on the ball that is now identical with the sun pictured in his reverie\textsuperscript{161}, and by looking at the old woman's face on or in the ball he feels something that may be love, and prompts him to speak for the first (and last) time in the story, in oddly religious tones.\textsuperscript{162} Alchemical references are not absent from the tale (despite not being as many, and as explicit, as in other texts of Mandiargues's; see chapter 4.5 for some remarks about the topic of alchemy and magic in his work). The sun towards which Juni is reaching, and to which he is preaching, is, astrologically speaking, ruling over the zodiac sign of Leo and alchemically ruling over the metal gold. The three elements have a tendency to come up together in Mandiargues's work, and to do so precisely in the context of what could be seen as a dramatized recounting of the coincidentia oppositorum, specifically under the guise of the mystical marriage of the opposites (diegetically represented by the male and female

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 201

\textsuperscript{161} Once again here's Breton's idea of the Surrealist image as the merging of two different or even opposed realities, as a coincidentia oppositorum that is made real through the possibilities provided by literature.

\textsuperscript{162} “Pendant ce parcours radieux qui le hissait en contrecoup de l'accident jusqu'au ciel de son enfance, les traits un peu léonins de la gouvernante se dessinèrent comme en sur-impression […] sur le visage de l'astre. Jean de Juni retrouva l'expression bénévole qu'elle avait […] et il fut ému comme il ne l'avait pas été depuis très longtemps. Était-ce enfin l'amour? 'Père soleil...', dit-il à voix très basse, dans le moment où le masque de la vieille bonne éclipsait totalement le globe de feu” (“L'Enfantillage”, cit., p. 211).
characters, respectively linked to the solar and lunar element). In the old books, illustrations showed alchemists working with a female companion whose presence was essential for the good outcome of the work\footnote{See, e.g., Mutus liber, in quo tamen tota philosophia hermetica, figuris hieroglyphicis depingitur, ter optimo maximo Deo misericordi consecratus, solisque filius artis dedicatus / authore cujus nomen est Altus, Rupellae: Apud Petrum Savouret 1677, in which the male and female character are also consistently represented close to the sun and moon respectively.} (although their sexual abstinence was also a requirement. Of course there is no such displacement or sublimation in Mandiargues; just like the marriage of Hellenistic novels, the mystical marriage of alchemy is brought back in its raw, unabashedly sexual nature).

By the ending of the short story, it seems as if Juni is getting closer to reaching the point zero and whatever may be waiting for him there – a mystical union with nothingness, a nirvana, and/or his own death (petite or not), represented, once again, by the solar image of the old Criticona. The nameless girl that originally served to trigger the whole process, and provided him with the tangible image of the process's ultimate goal, is by now entirely forgotten.

To sum up, we have seen that “L'Enfantillage” is built along two main directions, both of which aim at the same goal (the protagonist's mystical path to nothingness). They are represented respectively by his physical and his mental experiences, that is to say, by eroticism and by a reverie that constitutes a full-fledged narrative of which the protagonist, Jean de Juni, is both narrator and narratee. There are several levels of communication, intertwining, and overlap between the two within the tale. The reverie is, first of all, triggered by the physical movement of eroticism, both directly, because of the
cradle-like motions inspiring the daydreaming, and indirectly, since the daydreaming begins as a meditation about language, and more specifically about the language of eros and love; language thus gets restituted to a pivotal importance in the tale, despite the fact that the two characters only actually utter one sentence each. Then, crucially, (a certain kind of) eroticism and (a certain kind of) narrative share the same sort of relationship with time. Chronological time is an external frame into which the erotic or narrative act opens up a window that is governed by its own rules – rules that, in both cases, are the same (namely, those of an episodic structure of repetitions and variations). Just like in Bakhtin's adventure-time romance adventures are bound to end at some random point, marked by a marriage standing for sexual consummation, so in erotic fiction the sexual scenes are going to end up in a concluding (and destructive) orgasm; however, as “L'Enfantillage” shows, there may be no intrinsic reason for this to happen apart from the practical need for the writer and reader to put an end to the narrative – whereas, virtually speaking (and notwithstanding the awareness that some sort of conclusion will come at some point), the latter could pretty much go on forever. The reason for this is the extratemporal nature of both adventure-time and the time of eroticism.

There's one more link between eroticism and narration that I'd like to briefly point out in “L'Enfantillage”. Juni, as we are told (this kind of background information being, if scarce, much more detailed than what Mandiargues usually provides his reader with), got into a life of sexual debauchery as a consequence of his early experiences with death and

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164 “Adventures themselves are strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series: this series can be extended as long as one likes; in itself it has no necessary internal limits”, wrote Bakhtin as we'll recall (Bakhtin, p. 94), and Jean de Juni is willing to go on “jusqu'à la consommation des siècles” rather than till the mere consummation of the sexual act, which is not, in fact, narrated.
his renunciation of the idea of love. All the narratives Juni retraces in his mind are indeed about such early experiences, and the reverie about death already works towards a flattening of the narrative time, which excludes the future (precisely because of the memento of the one point in the future that everybody will sooner or later reach) and gets limited to the present and the past\(^{165}\). It is, then, by means of retracing such narratives (including the last, long one about the Italian workers, which we are told he had forgotten till then) that Juni, as he approaches the mystical “point zéro”, finally gets over his lifelong fear and horror of death and into an acceptance of it instead, which seems to coincide with his recovery of the lost notion of love\(^{166}\). Time then gets further flattened: even though the “élévation grandiose” of Juni’s is rooted into his memories of the past, and stretching out towards a completeness of revelation, or nirvana, or whatever else that is presumably to be found in the future, past and future disappear as Juni finds his happiness in an ecstatic, possibly eternal present. Thus, death doesn't just stand in for the sort of violence that is inherent to sexuality and that gets best narrativized by depictions of sadomasochism, or black eroticism, which (despite the frequent references to the brutality of Juni’s “opération”) are not present in the tale; and it isn't just linked to eroticism by a tradition that dates as far back as human culture does, on which the takes of Mandiargues's and Bersani's are but a recent and refined twist – it also affects the

\(^{165}\) “A la vérité, le passé et la mort régnaient si tyranniquement en lui que la vie, dans sa méditation, se réduisait à son propre déclin, et qu'il ne donnait aucun regard à l'avenir” (“L'Enfantillage”, cit., pp. 197-198).

\(^{166}\) Love, “personnage effrayant créant sa propre solitude” (ibid., p. 193), is imagined in a monstrous, scary guise, and Juni wishes never to run into it (“surtout, pensa Jean de Juni, que je ne le rencontre jamais”, ivi). But by the end of the story, as he thinks he's getting closer to the sun, or to the face of Criticona, and to peace, he'll wonder: “Était-ce enfin l'amour?” (ibid., p. 211). Finally, in the second to last page, Juni is freed by angst: “son esprit était entièrement libéré de cette hantise de la mort qui le dominait habituellement et ne laissait point de paix à l'homme hagard que ses pas ne l'eussent conduit vers l'aventure douteuse, la chambre d'hôtel borgne, le lit décevant” (ibid., p. 212).
notion and representation of time both in eroticism and in narrative. All narratives of the kind we have been describing so far are subtracted from the biographical time of the protagonists' life; death, which concludes a fair share of Mandiargues's fictions, is at once the ending of all experience of time (something close to what Juni, as many others of Mandiargues's characters, is looking for) and the reminder par excellence of the reality of time itself – a disgraceful reality, as Borges would have it in his refutations of time, that is still there no matter how subtly one may try and manage to refute it on logical grounds. From this perspective, one might see in “L'Enfantillage” something similar to a baroque vanitas\(^\text{167}\).

In the tale, just like in Breton's point, past and future become one in the present, life and death become one in the reverie; space and time, too, seem to merge (before their ultimate dissolution)\(^\text{168}\) as the res extensa of the lovers' bodies gets progressively obliterated, in a fashion poorly appropriate to their activity\(^\text{169}\), and finally made into pure rhythm, whereas the temporal stuff of memories is assigned a spatial determination within the finial ball. “L'Enfantillage” finely describes the very tight relation between eroticism and narrative in Mandiargues, the former being, at the very least, a crucial

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\(^{167}\) The category of the baroque has often been used by critics, as well as by Mandiargues himself, in relation to his work. See, for instance, Alexandre Castant, *Esthétique de l'image, fictions d'André Pieyre de Mandiargues*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 2001 (especially on pp. 87 ff.); Alain Clerval, “André Pieyre de Mandiargues: un érotique baroque”, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 38, No. 224, Août 1971; Annika Krüger, “La Marge d'André Pieyre de Mandiargues: une poétique néobaroque”, in *Oeuvres & Critiques* XXXII, No. 2, 2007

\(^{168}\) See the closing line of “Le songe et le métro”, last short story in *Sous la lame* (Zoé Zara is about to be stabbed, without resisting): “Alors le coeur de Zoé Zara sera percé comme une poire mûre, il cessera de battre avec une sorte de hoquet, et le temps, pour elle, prendra forme d'espace” (André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Le songe et le métro”, in *Id., Sous la lame*, Paris: Gallimard 1976, p. 157)

\(^{169}\) “Il cambrait un peu le torse et s'appuyait du coude sur le traversin dur, en haut de l'oreiller, soutenant de la main son menton pour ne pas écraser de tout son poids la patiente; à moins que ce ne fût, sans tant de courtoisie, pour limiter à l'indispensable, c'est-à-dire aux régions inférieures, les points de contact entre son corps et celui de la partenaire” (“L'Enfantillage”, cit., p. 191)
condition of the latter in his tales and a shaping element (perhaps the major one) of those bubbles that in turn shape those tales and that I've tried to describe as a *mise en abyme* of narrative tout court, or at least of the specific kind of narrative we are discussing here. Indeed, given the structural similarities we have highlighted in the ways eroticism and narrative are connoted in Mandiargues, we could make one more step and argue that eroticism itself may be seen as a bubble – a figure and a *mise en abyme* of narrative.

I will show how magic, and dreams, may also serve a similar purpose in Mandiargues's writings. Isolating this chain of tautologies is not, I think, an idle game when dealing with a writer of this kind. The writer's own knowledge of hermetic and occult matters doesn't only provide him with a repository of themes and motifs; up to some point, it shapes his own *forma mentis*, and it is in fact hardly detachable from his most personal ideas and obsessions. Alchemy, and all magic thought in general, is defined by a pronounced hostility to one of the key principles of Western scientific thought from Aristotle on, that of non-contradiction; the final defeat of this principle in the *coincidentia oppositorum* is staged in most of Mandiargues's fictions, and put under the sign of those panic (or, at times, Dionysian) forces he declared he intended to serve with his literature. A certain penchant for tautological thought (and for the mixing up of fields that are not normally considered adjacent, let alone identical) also follows from this sort of reasoning, and the high degree of interconnectivity to be found in the notions of eroticism, dream, and magic on the one hand, and narrative on the other, allows for proceedings that are not unlike those of the old alchemists themselves: “it is a peculiarity of the alchemistic authors to use interchangeably fifty or more names for a thing and on the other hand to
give one and the same thing many meanings”\textsuperscript{170}.

\textsuperscript{170} Herbert Silberer, \textit{Hidden Symbolism of Alchemy and the Occult Arts}, New York: Dover 1971, p. 119
CHAPTER 2: DREAMS, IMAGINATION, AND THE MAKING OF NARRATIVE

2.1: Imagination and Dreams

According to the most prominent occultist of the 19th century, Éliphas Lévi – whose influence ranged well beyond the occult milieux proper into the literary ones, reaching writers like Rimbaud, Huysmans\textsuperscript{171}, Villiers\textsuperscript{172}, and most of all André Breton, the “magus of Surrealism”\textsuperscript{173} – the entire universe is permeated by an 'astral light' ("lumière astrale") which is coextensive with the former's fabric both in space and in time. He who could read into the astral light, in fact, would find in it a veritable universal history of the world – or, rather, of the worlds. “Il y a trois mondes intelligibles qui correspondent les uns avec les autres par l'analogie hiérarchique,” we read in the third chapter\textsuperscript{174} of his Dogme de la haute magie: “Le monde naturel ou physique, le monde spirituel ou métaphisique, et le monde divin ou religieux”\textsuperscript{175}. However, the first chapter of the Dogme had already well explained that such a multiplicity is deceptive, or better, it


\textsuperscript{172} See Émile Drougard, “Villiers de l'Isle-Adam et Eliphas Lévi”, in \textit{Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire}, tome 10 fasc. 3, 1931

\textsuperscript{173} “Judging from the dates of the appearance of the work of Abbé Constant, alias Eliphas Lévi, in 1860-61, and from the apparent infiltration of his terminology into Rimbaud's writing, it is likely that Rimbaud read Lévi (and was impressed by his attempt to give a material basis to the spiritual), in contrast with Baudelaire who is known to have read a popularized form of the writings of the earlier illuminist, Swedenborg (who had spiritualized material reality). If, therefore, Swedenborg was the patron saint of Symbolism, Éliphas Lévi through Rimbaud and more directly through Breton was to become a philosophical mainspring of surrealism” (Anna Balakian, \textit{André Breton Magus of Surrealism}, New York: Oxford University Press 1971, p. 35)

\textsuperscript{174} The chapters' numbers normally correspond to a number discussed within them, as is the case here with number three.

\textsuperscript{175} Éliphas Lévi, “Dogme et rituel de la haute magie”, in \textit{Id., Secrets de la magie}, Paris: Laffont 2000, p. 66
is but a convenient interpretive category for reading reality: “Il n'y a qu'un dogme en magie et le voici: le visible est la manifestation de l'invisible.”  As the microcosm reflects the macrocosm in a complex weaving of correspondences and is one with it, as that which is above reflects that which is below and is one with it, the same goes for the visible and the invisible. The whole numerological system of Lévi's *Dogme* – idiosyncratic and jumbled as many other features of his work – has among its goals that of presenting and proving this basic unity as well as the role played within it by the subject (this is mostly done through extensive use of logical-mathematical demonstrations, even though something often seems to be slightly off in their logic). A unique principle, according to Lévi, would deny the possibility of any hermeneutics whatsoever, and, in fact, would ultimately deny action and existence themselves: “L'unité, pour devenir active, doit se multiplier. Un principe indivisible, immobile et infécond, serait l'unité morte et incompréhensible.” For this reason Lévi posits in the second chapter the necessity of its doubling, because the knowing subject needs an object to be known; in the third, and again without ceasing to be one, the original principle – now doubled – becomes three, because the very relationship between its two parts, subject and object, constitutes in itself “something” and therefore a third element. From here on, this same principle of relationality can be used in order to further split into subsequent numbers by simply adding the relationship between the pre-existing elements – three elements plus their relationship will be four, four plus their relationship will be five, and so forth. Such a mathematical progression from unity is reminiscent of the way

God creates the universe, according to the Kabbalah, as a series of progressive emanations from himself, gradually abdicating to his own fullness in order to leave space for the creation. Lévi is clearly thinking about this: he titles the first chapter of the *Dogme, "Disciplina. En-soph. Keter" – Ein Sof (En-soph) being the kabbalistic name for God before he both manifested and limited himself in creating the world, and Kether being the first of the ten Sephiroth, that is, the emanations of God as he progressively shapes the world and manifests himself into it\(^{179}\); the following chapters in the *Dogme*, up until the tenth, will also have in their composite titles the name of a Sephirah each.

At times, the tree of the Sephiroth is represented as Jacob's ladder, uniting, step by step, heavens and earth\(^{180}\). A ladder of this sort appears on the frontispiece of the quite extraordinary *Mutus liber*, published at La Rochelle in 1677, whose title promises to deliver nothing less than the whole of hermetic philosophy\(^{181}\) – despite being mute: “*cet Ouvrage est admirable en cecy*”, we read in the note to the reader, “*C'est qu'encore il soit intitulé, Livre Muët; néanmoins toutes les Nations du monde, les Hébreux, les Grecs, les Latins, les François, les Italiens, les Espagnols, les Allemans, &c. peuvent le lire & l'entendre*\(^{182}\).” The book is in fact a collection of fifteen rather exquisite plates illustrating what appears to be the detailed, step-by-step instructions for the making of the alchemical work. The use of such images would be standard practice for an alchemical text if the

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\(^{179}\) “The mediaries between the absolute Ain Soph and the material world, are the Sephiroth […] all that exists originated by means of the Sephiroth […] The Sephiroth are emanated and not created” (Isaac Myer, *Qabbalah: The Philosophical Writings of Solomon Ben Yehudah Ibn Gebirol or Avicebron* […], Philadelphia: published by the Author, 1888, p. 286)

\(^{180}\) “The idea of the Sephirothic Tree or Scale, appears to be in Jacob's Dream of the Ladder which is set up on earth, the top of which reached to Heaven” (*ibid.*, p. 308)

\(^{181}\) *Mutus liber, in quo tamen tota philosophia hermetica, figuris hieroglyphicis depingitur, ter optimo maximo Deo misericordi consecratus, solisque filiis artis dedicatus / authore cujus nomen est Altus, cit.*

\(^{182}\) “*Au lecteur*, in *Mutus liber, cit.*, [no pagination]"
engravings, here, did not constitute precisely the text itself (with the sole additions of a
title – followed by three mysterious sequences of numbers and letters which happen to be
references to Bible verses written right-to-left, two of which are about Jacob – a
colophon, a note to the reader, a privilège du Roy, and two brief captions on the two latter
plates), hence the name. The iconographic language they use is a mixed one, combining
like a rebus, in their figurae hieroglyphicae structured not unlike cartoon strips, elements
of both realistic and hermetic-allegorical nature. On the frontispiece, a character is
depicted as he lies asleep, his head on a rock, in front of a ladder which two angels seem
to be descending while playing their trumpets towards him. This may be intended as a
not-too-veiled allegory of an esoteric initiation that may indeed happen thanks to the very
book (and perhaps a not-too-veiled attempt at its marketing as well) in order to awake the
initiate as from a deep sleep into a superior understanding of things – even though one is
supposed, in the kind of vicious circle that is common in alchemical literature, to master
the subject already in order to be able to understand it\textsuperscript{183}. Such awakening, in a slightly
paradoxical way, happened to Jacob precisely thanks to a dream.

Lévi provides us with a fascinating explication of how dreams and visions work.
They can be, just like in the Homeric and Virgilian image of the gates of horn and ivory,
either a glimpse of a higher truth or a deception; and both true visions and deceptive
images may happen to us either during wake or sleep.

Within the lumière astrale some kind of all-encompassing memory of the universe is

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.: “Aussi est-ce le plus beau Livre qui ait jamais esté imprimé sur ce sujet, à ce que disent les
Savans, y ayant-là des choses qui n'ont jamais esté dites par personne. Il ne faut que d'estre un véritable
Enfant de l'Art, pour le connoitre d'abord”.
preserved – nothing short of the “livre des consciences, qui, suivant le dogme chrétien, doit être manifesté au dernier jour”\textsuperscript{184}. In Lévi, the astral light is one and synonymous with the \textit{anima mundi} as well as with the \textit{grand agent magique},\textsuperscript{185} the fluid running through all things which can be manipulated by the true magician – itself synonymous, in a tautological chain that is typical of the occult tradition, with the elusive \textit{prima materia} of the alchemists\textsuperscript{186}, the basic substance supposed to be located everywhere and needed for the making of the alchemical work. Astral light preserves forever the memory and the plastic image of even the smallest things ever happened within the visible world, as well as of those that have simply been thought, imagined, desired\textsuperscript{187}.

“\textit{Il n'y a pas de monde invisible, il y a seulement plusieurs degrés de perfection dans les organes}”\textsuperscript{188}, writes Lévi – and the finest human organ, the one that can relate to astral light, is imagination: “\textit{Ce qu'on appelle en nous l'imagination n'est que la propriété inhérente à notre âme de s'assimiler les images et les reflets contenus dans la lumière vivante, qui est le grand agent magnétique}”. When disciplined and combined with intelligence and willpower, it is the magical faculty par excellence\textsuperscript{189}: thanks to imagination the magician can see into the \textit{lumière} (as a repository of visions that allow us to glimpse into the invisible world), and also thanks to imagination he can utilize the

\textsuperscript{184} Lévi, \textit{op. cit.} p 87
\textsuperscript{185} See, e.g., \textit{ibid.}, pp 64, 105
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}, p 112
\textsuperscript{187} A great dreamer like Gérard de Nerval had wished already for something very much like that in the preface to the third edition (1840) of his translation of the \textit{Faust}: “\textit{Il serait consolant de penser, en effet, que rien ne meurt de ce qui a frappé l'intelligence, et que l'éternité conserve dans son sein une sorte d'histoire universelle, visible par les yeux de l'Ame, synchronisme divin, qui nous ferait participer un jour à la science de Celui qui voit d'un seul coup d'œil tout l'avenir e tout le passé}”. (I quote from the edition printed in Paris: Michel Levy Frères 1868, p. 8)
\textsuperscript{188} Lévi, \textit{op. cit.} p 78
\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Ibid.}, pp 57-58
lumière (as the grand agent magique) to operate onto the world and change it. Lévi mentions phenomena as different as the ancient idea that the child's body can be shaped within the mother's womb by her imagination, sympathetic magic, or the sort of magical thinking according to which a soldier who doesn't fear death can't be killed; and not only that – through imagination it is possible, he states, to influence the seasons and even to resuscitate the dead: indeed, to become godlike.

All of this seems to work through an exchange of images: imagination allows the magician to work onto the fabric of reality by superimposing, so to speak, a mental image on it, and conversely imagination also allows him to see visions of truth into the astral light. But this faculty has to be trained: for, if it is that which “les kabbalistes appellent le diaphane ou le translucide”, it has to become worthy of its name, and literally translucent enough for astral light to penetrate it without being refracted, or without being mistaken for its own lost reflections. Otherwise we get duped by false images, which can be very dangerous. There are two main kinds of dreams or visions, and Lévi makes a
distinction between “songes” and “rêves” – the former being the true ones (“la vision produite par la réfraction d'un rayon de vérité”) and the latter being just derivative and deceptive images (“l'hallucination occasionnée par un reflet”) that might be created by a glimpse of astral light that is not coming directly to the subject but is reflected from somebody else's 'perverted imagination'\(^{194}\). Such was the case, for instance, with the devilish visions tempting Anthony of Thebes in the desert; or with the witches' sabbath, which, Lévi maintains together with an age-old tradition, did not really take place and was in fact the simple product of deranged imaginations – and, according to him, of the astral light's reflections of similar acts happened in the past throughout the world. Astral light is, in fact, such a rich repository of visual fragments from all places and times that those who do not know how to master it through willpower and intellect can easily find themselves led astray, and even willfully search for and indulge in its seductions as in some kind of *delectatio morosa*, and get lost in it:

This is the state commonly known as reverie.

\(^{194}\) “Ce qui contribue le plus aux erreurs du vulgaire et aux extravagances de la folie, ce sont les reflets des imaginations dépravées les unes dans les autres […] Démêler le rayon direct et le séparer du reflet, telle est l'oeuvre de l'initié” (ibid., p 79). All men can not only look into the astral light, but also modify it with their own memories and desires; indeed, astral light constitutes some sort of collective imagination of humankind.

\(^{195}\) *Ibid.*, p 87
In the country promenade scene of Goethe's Faust, the eponymous character talks to Wagner about his vague, phantasmatic desires – the sudden, strange urges and longings that he wishes the other may never get to know. He describes the 'beautiful dream' of the flight of his spirit towards the light, in the high regions of the atmosphere, in tones and words very similar to those that Baudelaire will use in his Élevation – and he gets to invoke the help of whatever spirits there might be between heaven and earth (to which a scared Wagner replies that one should be careful with such creatures). Significantly, it is immediately after this long reverie that Mephistopheles, in the shape of the black dog, joins Faust. In his erudite and quirky Storia del fantasticare, Élemire Zolla insisted at length on the dangers of reverie and on the bad reputation that it had always had, from the implicit condemnation already embedded in the words the Italian language used to refer to it196 to that explicitly stated by the Church (from the earliest theologians on, in fact, Christian thinkers have followed the old pagans in relating reverie, the pictorial quality of its images, and the visitations of demons – constituting some kind of theatricalization of one's inner life):

Il fantasticare era opera, secondo i traslati antichi, di uno spirito di tenebra: chi si favoleggiava potente e satrapico era detto in preda al demonio della superbia, chi si ammennava scene erotiche era considerato vittima del demone della lussuria, chi comunque si attediava con frasi e figure vacue era reputato sofferente di accidia, cioè colpito dal demone meridiano. L'attribuzione ai demoni di queste tentazioni interiori consentiva almeno di alienarle, di strapparle al buio tepore dell'intimità197.

Such a state is fundamentally opposed to both action and clear thinking, and indeed

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196 Élemire Zolla, Storia del fantasticare, Milano: Bompiani 1964, pp. 7-8
197 Ibid., p 33
to all that is productive. Zolla mentions several remedies for getting rid of it, from the sistra shaken during the celebrations for the goddess Isis to the top spun by the Pythagoreans\textsuperscript{198}, to the simple act of snapping one's fingers or whistling – and should the devil himself happen to be in sight (all reverie is, according to this tradition, devilish), one may just whistle at him “mockingly” in order to make him run away\textsuperscript{199}. Imagination is represented by the snake in the Genesis, Zolla argues, and the whole monastic path can be thought of as a lifelong attempt at a progressive and definitive putting out of the imagination, so as to reach a state of constant wakefulness that will close the mind to all demons and unwanted images\textsuperscript{200}. Even when sleeping, wise men either don't have dreams or they have exceptionally clear ones\textsuperscript{201}: Pythagoras taught how to purify oneself for this purpose with chants and fumigations, in order to obtain 'an imagination similar to a mirror\textsuperscript{202}' (a translucid one, in Lévi's terminology) while according to Zeno the opposite would also be true, i.e., one could purify oneself by means of purifying one's dreams\textsuperscript{203}.

Lévi (who, by the way, considers the snake a symbol of astral light\textsuperscript{204}) thinks, too, that the magician can influence his own dreams. This can happen through an actual magic ritual, by summoning the spirits with the aid of a pentagram in order for them to appear in a songe\textsuperscript{205}, but not necessarily:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}, p 11
  \item \textsuperscript{199} “[Alfonso] Rodriguez elenca gli accorgimenti coi quali i Padri fugavano queste fantasticaggini, raccomandando anzitutto di burlarsi del Demonio, 'ed alcune volte lo si può fare fischiandogli dietro, senza dire cosa, e senza entrare in ragioni con lui’” (\textit{Ibid.}, p 36)
  \item \textsuperscript{200} \textit{Ibid.}, pp 36-37
  \item \textsuperscript{201} See also Elémire Zolla, \textit{Uscite dal mondo}, Milano: Adelphi 1992, p 73
  \item \textsuperscript{202} \textit{Storia del fantasticare, cit.}, p 27
  \item \textsuperscript{203} \textit{Uscite dal mondo, cit.}, p 73
  \item \textsuperscript{204} Lévi, \textit{op. cit.} p 93
  \item \textsuperscript{205} “Ainsi, avec le pentagramme, on peut forcer les esprits à apparaître en songe, soit pendant la veille, soit pendant le sommeil, en amenant eux-mêmes devant notre diaphane leur reflet, qui existe dans la lumière
Quand nous dormions, ce spectacle [i.e., that of the “panorama mobile de la lumière astrale”] se présente de lui-même à nous, et c'est ainsi que se produisent les rêves: rêves incohérents et vagues, si quelque volonté dominante ne reste active pendant le sommeil et ne donne, à l'insu même de notre intelligence, une direction au rêve, qui alors se transforme en songe.

Simply thanks to his willpower – so internalized that it actually becomes unconscious – the true magician can direct the flow of the dream and subtract it from the disorderly bundle of its spontaneous imagery. It's interesting to note in passing how this kind of lucid dream seems to coincide with the revelatory songe, making the latter, paradoxically enough, some sort of a product of the subject's own directing will. In an essay dedicated to lucid dreaming, Zolla regrets that Western civilization had historically ignored the possibility of 'exercising power upon our dreams', with very few exceptions – such as mystical texts, in which 'it is often claimed that after a certain degree of perfection, dreams become clearer (si illimpidiscono). He also relates some techniques for mastering one's dreams: Tibetan yogis, for instance, allegedly reminded themselves several times during the day that waking life itself is but illusion and dream – of course such techniques had to be coordinated, once again, with a strong willpower in order to do the trick.

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206 Ibid., p 80
207 Uscite dal mondo, cit., p 73. A disagreement about this possibility had apparently led to the breaking-off of his friendship with another protagonist of the Italian 20th century intellectual history, the anglicist Mario Praz.
208 Ibid., p 74: “Questi accorgimenti sono alcuni fra i tanti che, metodicamente applicati, consentono a una volontà inflessibile di dominare i sogni e poi di modificarli, convertendoli in apparizioni fauste, esaltanti, redentrici”. 
In 1932, André Breton's *Les Vases communicants* is published by the Éditions des Cahiers libres. The book—a composite work in three partially independent parts whose respective relationship is probably best described by its title—begins by referencing Marie-Jean-Léon Lecoq, marquis d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, author of a curious treatise appeared anonymously in 1867 and titled *Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger*. In it, Hervey de Saint-Denys provides the reader with a brief history of the literature about dreams, from the Egyptians to his present day; with scientific observations about sleep and dreams; with studies about the dreams' nature and structure (including notations about the phenomenon of substitution that changes dream characters into one another); and most importantly—before concluding with an appendix about his experience with hashish dreams—with his own techniques for establishing and controlling the dreams' subjects and development. Hervey de Saint-Denys insists, first and foremost, on the importance of keeping a dream journal, in order to exercise one's memory in keeping trace of the dreams' storyline and to be easily aware of being asleep when such is the case. This allows to use one's will in order to modify the dream—he argues at length, indeed, for the possibility of keeping one's attention and willpower awake during the sleeping process.

Probably unaware of the admittedly sparse attempts in this direction made in the

209 “La faculté de penser s'accroit par l'exercice qu'on en fait; il n'est donc pas invraisemblable que le même principe s'étende à la faculté de rêver” (Anon. [Hervey de Saint-Denys], *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger. Observations pratiques*, Paris: Amyot 1867, pp 13-14)

210 Ibid., p 476

211 Ibid., pp 268-292. Other techniques suggested by the book concern external stimuli, such as specific sounds or smells which one should get used to associate with particular images; then one could get one's servant to spray the right perfume on one's pillow when one is asleep, or to play the right music during the night through appropriate contraptions: see *ibid.*, p. 377.
West (and of the non-Western cultures that have traditionally made similar claims), Breton writes, in the incipit of his Vases communicants, that Hervey de Saint-Denys “semble avoir été le premier homme à penser qu'il n'était pas impossible, sans pour cela recourir à la magie dont les moyens n'arrivaient plus de son temps à se traduire que par quelques recettes impraticables, de vaincre à son profit les résistances de la plus aimable des femmes et d'obtenir rapidement qu'elle lui accordât ses dernières faveurs” – that is to say, of course, in a dream. But the nineteenth-century dream connoisseur doesn't quite fit into Breton's agenda, as it were. Originally intended as some kind of third Surrealist Manifesto²¹² (and indeed, we could say, as some kind of scholion on the Baudelairian couplet from Le reniement de Saint-Pierre: “Certes, je sortirai, quant à moi, satisfait / d'un monde où l'action n'est pas la soeur du rêve”), Les Vases communicants goes back to issues that have been a major concern of Breton's ever since the first Manifesto. While showing a certain evolution in the author's approach it is still mostly developing the concept, appeared in that text, of a fundamental unity between dream and waking life. Breton expands at some length on the concepts of time, space, and causality in dreams, but his take on the subject is always directed at the possibility of an action in the world, and he is relatively dismissive of Saint-Denys' escapist retreat into his dreams – although this doesn't prevent him from recognizing an epistemological value in the latter's outcomes and indeed considering them part of the nineteenth century great 'poetical

²¹² See the notice to the text by Marguerite Bonnet and Étienne-Alain Hubert in André Breton, Oeuvres complètes I, Paris: Gallimard 1988, pp 1355-1356; however, this original project of a short text "genre 3e manifeste” seems to have evolved quickly into a more elaborate one (that would have required plenty of preliminary readings to do).
conquests', together with Rimbaud's *dérèglement de tous les sens*\textsuperscript{213}.

\[\text{2.2: Mandiargues: Writing with Dreams}\]

In Nice, during the Second World War, André Pieyre de Mandiargues (who was, of course, familiar with the work of Eliphas Lévi as well, as most artists and intellectuals of his time would be\textsuperscript{214}) finally found a copy of Hervey de Saint-Denys' book, which had become a rare treat for bibliophiles and which he had been searching for ever since having found it mentioned in *Les Vases communicants* – as he states in the long interview published as *Le Désordre de la mémoire*:

\[\text{A partir d'une certaine époque, et surtout du début de la guerre, pendant les années de semi-réclusion que j'ai passées à Monte-Carlo, j'ai cultivé le rêve de façon systématique. C'est pendant ces années-là que j'ai eu la chance de trouver chez un libraire-antiquaire, à Nice, un livre très rare qui m'avait été révélé par ce qu'en dit André Breton et que j'avais longtemps et vainement désiré [...] Que ce livre m'ait aidé à concentrer mon attention sur ce qui (tant pis pour la guerre!) m'intéressait plus que tout, non, mais sa trouvaille a confirmé}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 104: "Sans m'émerveiller à proprement parler de ce résultat, je l'inscrirais volontiers en bonne place parmi les conquêtes poétiques du dernier siècle, non loin de celles qui illustrèrent, sous la responsabilité de Rimbaud, l'application du principe de la nécessité pour le poète de provoquer le parfait, le raisonné « dérèglement » de ses propres sens. L'apport de l'auteur de l'ouvrage qui nous occupe serait cependant tout au plus susceptible de fournir un complément à la méthode susdite d'expression et par suite de connaissance si je ne me laissais aller à y voir une possibilité de conciliation extrême entre les deux termes qui tendent à opposer, au bénéfice d'une philosophie confusionnelle, le monde de la réalité à celui du rêve, je veux dire à isoler ces deux mondes l'un de l'autre et à faire une question purement subjective de la subordination de l'un à l'autre, l'affectivité restant juge ; s'il ne me paraissait possible d'opérer par cet intermédiaire la conversion de plus en plus nécessaire [...] de l'imaginé au vécu ou plus exactement au devoir-vivre ; si je ne m'avisais qu'il y a là une porte entrouverte, au-delà de laquelle il n'y a plus qu'un pas à faire pour, au sortir de la maison vacillante des poètes, se retrouver de plain-pied dans la vie".}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., p. 104: "Sans m'émerveiller à proprement parler de ce résultat, je l'inscrirais volontiers en bonne place parmi les conquêtes poétiques du dernier siècle, non loin de celles qui illustrèrent, sous la responsabilité de Rimbaud, l'application du principe de la nécessité pour le poète de provoquer le parfait, le raisonné « dérèglement » de ses propres sens. L'apport de l'auteur de l'ouvrage qui nous occupe serait cependant tout au plus susceptible de fournir un complément à la méthode susdite d'expression et par suite de connaissance si je ne me laissais aller à y voir une possibilité de conciliation extrême entre les deux termes qui tendent à opposer, au bénéfice d'une philosophie confusionnelle, le monde de la réalité à celui du rêve, je veux dire à isoler ces deux mondes l'un de l'autre et à faire une question purement subjective de la subordination de l'un à l'autre, l'affectivité restant juge ; s'il ne me paraissait possible d'opérer par cet intermédiaire la conversion de plus en plus nécessaire [...] de l'imaginé au vécu ou plus exactement au devoir-vivre ; si je ne m'avisais qu'il y a là une porte entrouverte, au-delà de laquelle il n'y a plus qu'un pas à faire pour, au sortir de la maison vacillante des poètes, se retrouver de plain-pied dans la vie".}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{214} "Dès l'âge de quinze ou seize ans, je lisais Rudolf Steiner; j'ai lu Eliphas Lévi et Stanislas de Guaita d'une façon assez désordonnée, et j'ai toujours donné une grande part de mon attention à cet univers, mais je n'ai pas la prétention de me croire initié". André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, in *Plexus* 29, Novembre 1969, p. 52}\]
Mandiargues gives no specific information about when he had read *Les Vases communicants*. We may observe that, even though it is reasonable to think that he (having been an admirer of Breton's long before meeting him in 1947 and becoming his friend) might have purchased and read it not too long after its publication, a bibliographic reference to Saint-Denys' work appears in one of his personal notebooks dated “Août ’42 – Juin ’43”. Mandiargues used to note down in his journals the authors and titles of books he was interested in searching for, normally together with the time and place of publication (especially if he was going for a specific edition, *en bibliophile*). While it is true that we don't have any of his journals and notebooks written before 1938 (if any existed), the reference to Saint-Denys would make it seem like Mandiargues had just stumbled upon a mention of it. On one page, in fact, we read, “*Hervey de Saint Denis [sic] / Art de diriger les rêves*”217, whereas on the following one Mandiargues (likely after further research) emends the book's title and adds some information about its author: “*d'Hervey Saint Denis [sic] (M.J.L. marquis d') / (Paris 1823 [sic] + 1892) professeur de chinois et auteur de multiples ouvrages d'histoire, d'orientalisme, de sinologie / Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger / (anonyme 1869) [sic]*”. It is possible, of course, that Mandiargues had just remembered the existence of a book which he had found mentioned years before, and which suddenly resonated with his new, strong preoccupations. Right

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216 Chrystèle Taravella, “André Pieyre de Mandiargues, André Breton: une rencontre sous influence?”, in Marie-Paule Berranger et Claude Leroy (eds.), *Plaisir à Mandiargues*, Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2011, p. 54
217 Folder PDM 6.3 at the IMEC
after these notes, on the same page of the notebook, he lists several titles in some sort of provisional bibliography about dreams (taken perhaps, like the biographical information about Saint-Denys, from some encyclopedia, as the *sub voce* abbreviation after Lucretius' name seems to suggest):

Aristote --- Traité des rêves  
Lucrèce --- s.v.  
Albert le grand --- De somno et vigilia  
Hobbes --- De la nature humaine. C III [*subscribed: (Leviathan)*]  
Descartes --- Méditations  
Cabanis --- Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme  
Maury --- Le sommeil et les rêves  
Macario – Du sommeil, des rêves et du somnambulisme dans l'état de santé et de maladie  
de Manacéine --- Le sommeil tiers de notre vie  
Grote --- Les rêves – objet d'analyse scientifique.  
[T...?] --- Les rêves  
Max Simon --- Le monde des rêves  
Ellis --- Rêves relatifs aux morts

Indeed, as Europe was being bloodied by the massacres of the war, Mandiargues – who had taken refuge in Monaco – spent his time writing, and dreaming. He began keeping a dream journal, as suggested by both Breton and Saint-Denys, and exercised lucid dreaming with some success. This was no passing fancy, either. While the lines we have quoted from *Le Désordre de la mémoire* may suggest that he had only tried this kind of experiments during the war (as if attempting to radicalize even more his escaping or hiding from historical reality), there is indeed an earlier text – a 1969 interview with Yves de Bayser – in which, while talking about dreams, he stresses the importance that such practices had had for him, and the substantial time frame he had devoted to them:

Pendant une très longue période de ma vie, à partir du début de la guerre surtout, pendant une dizaine
While this claimed impracticality of dream notations could certainly have struck a temperament such as Mandiargues's as a paradoxical benefit, they served nonetheless many purposes. First of all, he considered this kind of work a self-exploration, a lateral way to approach his inner self through its own self-dramatization (that is, a poetic way) without aiming at it with the blunt means of direct analysis. Then, for a man who kept hiding while history at its purest, and at its most tragic, was happening all around him (and we can think already of the strange 'Cymmerian club' described in his short story *Le Marronnier*: an organization one of whose main goals is “arriver à modifier la philosophie politique de ce siècle en donnant au rêve la place qui est occupée par l'histoire”) there was the crucial topic of the mutual relationship between dream and reality. Like Breton, Mandiargues seems to think that the two were but one; but Breton begins the *Vases communicants* by criticizing those who consider life ontologically and axiologically inferior to dreams at least as much as those who think the other way around – and, in his analysis, Breton ultimately finds in dreams the same structures of time, space and causality as in waking life, of which the oneiric one is but a function. On the

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218 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, *cit.*, p. 52

219 “Tout à l’heure, je vous ai dit que je n'avais pas trop envie d'éclairer ce moi profond ni de descendre au-dessous de ce qu'il m'offre par le fil de l'inspiration. Sans doute, mais je voulais alors l’approcher par les figures innombrables de mes rêves et par là prendre conscience de son irréalité, en laquelle je sais que s’aspirais à me reconnaître” (Le Désordre de la mémoire, *cit.*, p. 189)

220 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Le Marronnier”, in *Id.*, *Mascarets*, Paris: Gallimard 1971, pp 52-53. See *infra*, chp. 4.4, for further remarks about this text.
other hand, Mandiargues, who explored at length such structures in his narratives, wanted to make life as unreal as a dream\textsuperscript{221}. Last but not least, the dream journals had an even more practical goal: they provided him, in fact, with the raw materials for his writing\textsuperscript{222}.

In one of the notebooks preserved at the IMEC, written in the 1970s, we read:

\begin{quote}
L’histoire touche à l’os, cette petite phrase, qui se présente à moi ou qui est le vestige d’un rêve naufragé, au matin du 19 février 1970, je la recueille. Fidèle en cela au moins à l’enseignement d’André Breton, j’ai toujours donné beaucoup de \[pr...?\] à ces petites épaves, et souvent, à partir d’elles, j’ai construit des livres\textsuperscript{223}.
\end{quote}

In 1943 Mandiargues published his first book, \textit{Dans les années sordides}, a collection of poetic proses that, he declared, was entirely the product of such experiments (at least in the first edition, significantly shorter than the second one): \textit{“La première version était sortie directement du rêve et de la rêverie dirigée. Ce que je voulais, c’était rédiger une sorte de catalogue de thèmes oniriques et de visions fantastiques\textsuperscript{224}”}. It is of some interest to notice that here, as in many other instances, Mandiargues does not differentiate between sheer nocturnal dream and reverie; \textit{Dans les Années sordides} is avowedly based on the former, while the latter, as we are going to see, has more of a ubiquitous presence in Mandiargues's production – but dreams appear to serve as an inspirational kernel for

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[221]{\textit{Je pourrais dire que le rêve et la rêverie sont aussi inséparables de tout ce que j’ai écrit qu’ils le sont de ma vie même, que je m’efforce de considérer comme un rêve, ce qui me paraît le meilleur moyen de la rendre acceptable} (Le Désordre de la mémoire, cit., 187-188). This was not without some ambiguity and complexity – see infra.}
\footnotetext[222]{André Pieyre de Mandiargues, \textit{Un Saturne gai: entretiens avec Yvonne Carouthch}, Paris: Gallimard 1982, p 189: \textit{“D’une part, voyez-vous, je me livrais à cet enregistrement et à cette critique de mes rêves de façon utilitaire, pour en tirer des arguments de récits, ou de poèmes en prose; de l’autre, je cherchais par là à me connaître mieux et à tirer de l’obscurité la face cachée de mon moi profond”.}}
\footnotetext[223]{Folder PdM 6.13 at the IMEC}
\footnotetext[224]{\textit{Le Désordre de la mémoire}, cit., p 190}
\end{footnotes}
his fictions as well.

Such is the case, for instance, for “L’Archéologue”, a short story collected in *Le Soleil des loups* (1951). The story has a rather complex structure, resorting both to third-person narrative and a very long first-person flashback, and consisting of at least four quite different scenes (the first reverie about the submarine statue; the village festival; the journey to the South of Italy; and the final appearance of the mysterious woman and her toads). The tale is very carefully designed, and despite its composite structure it is probably one of the most coherent among the longer short stories of Mandiargues. However, a look at the notebooks preserved at the Institut Mémoires de l’Édition Contemporaine in Caen will reveal that its different parts had been conceived separately – and that the original idea came from a dream. In the notebook 6.1 at the IMEC\(^\text{225}\) we find, first, a description of the wax mannequin that will become the *bella Cesarina di cera* in the story; then the brief description of a “*belle malade*”; and on the following right-hand page, a text written under the title: “*Songe des yeux d'or*”\(^\text{226}\). Mandiargues is noting down

\(^{225}\) A small spiral notebook of a faded shade of red, dating from 1941-'42, with the drawing of a flower and the word “Lohengrin” written on the inside cover; it was mistakenly labeled 6.15 at the time of my research. Right-hand pages are the only ones used for writing in the whole notebook; the left-hand ones are left blank so that the author could add later comments, corrections or notes.

\(^{226}\) “*Paysage le pont à mi-hauteur de la montagne, au-dessus d'une masse de joncs, de ronces, d'orties. S'ouvre une caverne spacieuse où je vis une grande femme, très sombre, et plus grande que le commun des mortelles, se dévêtir – comme une statue de bronze orientale – peau brillante d'huile. Puis je me trouve sur la route et je vois s'avancer vers moi cette femme nue aux grands yeux de cuivre doré, baguette à la main, suivie d'une immense multitude de crapauds dont les yeux, dorés comme les siens, me fixent avec colère. Tous ces crapauds tendus contre moi crirent furieusement leur haine pour moi. Et je sais que seule sa baguette les retient encore, mais je sais qu'elle ne peut plus les tenir longtemps car leur fureur croît. Et elle les laisse se jeter sur moi. Je suis renversé sous le choc des milliers de crapauds, et je sens qu'ils me déshabillent. Leur petites mâchoires découpent avec prétresse mes vêtements comme des ciseaux et je suis nu entre leurs horribles pattes gluantes ; ils me prennent, me roulent au précipice et me font tomber à travers les ronces et les orties qui me déchirent. En même temps ils m'accompagnent en me mordant et en criant toujours. La femme sombre descend aussi en marchant sur les orties et les joncs qu'elle ne fait pas même plier malgré son aspect lourd. En bas, dans le lit du ruisseau, à demi submergé par l'eau qui me pénètre, blessé, muet, impuissant, je suis
a dream he had, elements of which will obviously inspire Conrad Mur's reverie at the beginning of “L'Archéologue” – in which the golden-eyed, statuesque woman becomes a statue laying on the sea bottom\(^{227}\) – whereas the bulk of the dream anticipates the short story's enigmatic conclusion. At the end of “L'Archéologue” Conrad Mur, having abandoned his dying betrothed Bettina in a miserable hotel in Naples, sees a big woman performing a strange ritual in the middle of a circular space and is then thrown into a river by the crowd of toads following her; the toads then rip his clothes apart and submerge him entirely. The published version of the story repeats at times verbatim the notebook version. On the left-hand page Mandiargues has written “L'Archéologue ou les yeux d'or”, keeping the provisional title of the dream and adding that which will become the title of the short story; by the time he wrote this he had clearly decided already that the dream material could be worked into a wider narrative (which would include the images of the bella Cesarina di cera and of the “belle malade” described in the previous pages). This is made clear not only by a couple of notes setting up the basic time structure and a few details of what would become “L'Archéologue”\(^{228}\), but in fact already by the shift from the first-person of the dream account to a third-person narrative, and by the

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\(^{227}\) “Et alors surgit une grande statue de femme qui dresse en face de lui sa nudité très lourde, sculptée dans un marbre vert tout près d'être noir, éclairée par deux prunelles d'or, sur des globes d'émail blanc, dans de larges orbites [...]” (“L'Archéologue”, in Soleil des loups, cit., p. 17)

\(^{228}\) Of course, also given Mandiargues's habit of going back to older journals and resume working on them (see Marie-Paule Berranger, “Les Carnets de création: ‘logiques d’incohérence’”, in Plaisir à Mandiargues, cit., pp. 125-126), there's no way of dating with some certainty these interventions on the dream notation; however, if we admit that the latter does in fact date back to the years 1941-42 as the journal in which it is written, then “L'Archéologue” or at least its kernel would probably be the older material collected in Soleil des loups (despite Mandiargues's statement about “ce recueil de petits récits, paru en 1951 mais dont le premier en date, L'étudiante, avait été écrit peu après la fin de la guerre”) and indeed among the oldest in his whole production. Such a long gestation period may have a part in the short story's remarkable sense of “finishedness”.

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mention of 'his fiancée'\textsuperscript{229}. In addition, on top of the (fountain pen-written) right-hand page with the dream account, the Roman numeral II has been added in pencil; on the following right-hand page, the numeral I precedes a short abstract of the story as Mandiargues had envisioned it by then (still lacking the part set in the Alpine village with Conrad's first meeting with Bettina), until its climactic end in the scene seen in the dream\textsuperscript{230}.

A whole theory of recurring motifs of Mandiargues's fictions gradually finds its way into the text throughout its genetic process – from the “Songe des yeux d'or” through “L'Archéologue ou les yeux d'or” to the published version of “L'Archéologue”. Among these are dreams, of course, and the ubiquitous motif of the giantess; copious references to the comparison between actual female bodies made of flesh and the cold, hard bodies of automatons and statues (with more or less implicit references to Jensen's \textit{Gradiva} and Gautier's \textit{Arria Marcella}\textsuperscript{231}); an Italian, indeed Mediterranean, setting, and the sea, with

\textsuperscript{229} “Ses vêtements, dès qu'ils la quittaient et tombaient sur le sol, se consumaient et s'évanouissaient en fumée. Il n'eut pas peur de cette nudité car sa couleur sombre et le caractère luisant de la peau la faisaient ressembler à une statue de bronze comme celles des musées. Mais dès ce moment le souvenir de sa fiancée disparut complètement en lui. | Amalfi-présent – Naples, la bella cesarina...passé | Amalfi – les yeux d'or – présent | Toilette de Bettina : rose-carmin- brocarts incarnats – merveilleux colliers de grenates de topazes et d'améthystes [...] | Le docteur Scarpetta. Esposito Scarpetta Polpia”

\textsuperscript{230} “Au cours de l'été, après un voyage à Naples (la bella cesarina di cera?) il se trouvait à Amalfi avec sa fiancée, celle-ci malade et mourante de fièvre. Du corps de la femme il ne connaissait que les statues des musées et redoutait cette mollesse et cette fragilité qu'il [illegible word] soupçonnait (la cire crevée). Aussi il avait peur du jour des noces qui approchait, et horreur de l'intimité du corps de sa fiancée que la maladie lui montrait souvent dans le désordre des draps baignés de sueur. | Il fit venir un médecin de Salerne, par amour de l'antiquité. Une sorte de croquemort lubrique en pelisse de fourrure usée qui contemple avidement la fiancée gigante. La chair de sa fiancée, très pale sous l'immense chevelure noire est comme un émail blafard dans lequel sont enchâssées des dents – artificiellement semble-t-il – et il pense que seules ces dents et la chevelure échapperont à la putréfaction prochaine. | Des Suédoises à l'hôtel [...] Il déteste leurs babillages et leur apparence physique si éloignée des statues antiques [...] Il s'enfuit dans la montagne où il rencontre : les yeux d'or.”

\textsuperscript{231} In the published story, Conrad Mur – an archeologist – and Bettina visit at some point the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (where, among other things, most artifacts from Pompeii are preserved); ironically, as soon as they get out of it their coach driver proposes to take them to see some “filles de marbre (telle ancienne expression désignant, c'est connu, les femmes de plaisir)”
its strange fauna and flora; manifold (bad) omens – foreshadowing an ending in which
the female protagonist dies and the male one also gets somehow obliterated; a folk
festival; great, sensual female figures somewhere between the godlike and the beastly,
pointing like those of Bomarzo at a dark past more ancient than Rome and the Greeks232;
and painstakingly geometrical settings, as the pentagon-shaped ice skating rink in the
Alpine village with its folkish tree pole in the center, and the round space with an
inscribed square (whose vertices mark “les quatre points essentiels de l'espace”233
and are marked in turn by stone piles adorned with buffalo skulls) in the exact middle of
which the giantess celebrates her ritual by the end of the tale. However, what I'd like to
point out now is the oftentimes visual nature of Mandiargues's compositional technique,
and its close relationship with dreams and daydreaming

232 The giantess or goddess, stripping naked within what may be one of the altars remained on the
mountains since primitive times (ibid., p. 58), has "un air […] de majesté tranquille et de bestiale (ou
divine) inconscience"; and the attributes of beastliness and, even more so, lustiness are repeatedly
attached to the submarine statue (who becomes, at one point, "la grande putain", p. 20), in which Mur
recognizes "la déesse (car ce fut évidemment la redoutée souveraine d'un collège de prêtres et de
sacrificateurs, l'hôte d'un sanctuaire vénéré qui a disparu, et Conrad Mur n'est pas pour rien chargé de
mission archéologique par les musées de son pays, qui reconnaît tout de suite une figure de la grande
Vénus mérétrice)" (ibid., p. 18). Curiously enough, Venus meretrix isn't just the name of a clam
(Linnaeus in his Systema naturae picked other raunchy names for different species, such as the Venus
mercenaria or the Venus deflorata; however, Mandiargues being a fine connoisseur of marine fauna, it's
not clams but nondescript "coquillages coniques" that encrust the submerged statue) but also that of a
goddess anciently worshipped in Lampsacus; and one Prussian diplomat by the name of Tietz reported
about these rites in his travel journals detailing a trip to Naples – not, however, the better-known one
where Conrad and Bettina go, but rather Napoli di Romania, now called Nafplio, in Greece (see M. von
Tietz, St. Petersburgh [sic], Constantinople, and Napoli di Romania, in 1833 and 1834, New York:
Theodore Foster 1836, p. 169).

233 “L'Archéologue”, cit., 59
“L'Archéologue” is quite a fine example of this – the whole tale found its origin and compositional kernel in the (rather static) image of a statuesque, golden-eyed woman and of her aggressive toad companions. The author then proceeded by addition, aggregating to this scene a couple of others, themselves lacking an actual narrative development (the “bella Cesarina di cera” and the “belle malade”, jotted down on contiguous pages of the notebook). Finally, as if in a flip book, these tableaux are given life and movement by their very juxtaposition, as well as by the further addition of other scenes, of a minimum of biographic details hinting at an individualized existence of their protagonists (the only truly essential of which is their name), and of some narrative connective tissue, as it were. Indeed, several of Mandiargues's short stories seem to be almost entirely built around one or two major scenes, or kernel-images as we could call them, whose connection often appears to be fortuitous at best but whose visual vividness is always beyond question – with the addition, at times, of other materials that in turn appear to be chosen in the spirit of a collector of exquisite oddities or striking figures rather than because of any inherent relevance, thematic or otherwise, to the specific narrative in which they happen to be arranged. In the typed draft of an interview to Yves Bayser we can read a passage that did not make it into the published version (on the magazine Plexus, mostly dedicated to erotica): “Si je l'ai dit”, Mandiargues states (that is, if he had said that he would never write a novel),

234 Marie-Paule Berranger has observed how this “récit nomade”, throughout its subsequent name changes, seems to progressively migrate from an original destination in Dans les années sordides to Le Musée noir and finally to Soleil des loups, according to the preliminary tables of contents laid out by Mandiargues for his short story collections in the journals (see Plaisir à Mandiargues, cit., p. 136). Of course, the migration of the text out of the dream notations of Dans les années sordides and into the later collections (of which it could be argued that the second one is further distancing its contents from the static nature of poèmes en prose than the first one is) is in itself a significant indication of the text's move into a more properly narrative domain.
ça devait être dans un esprit d'antipathie à l'égard de certaines formes bien françaises de roman dépourvues de ces violences un peu élisabéthaines, un peu russes, un peu espagnoles que nous trouvons dans les romans qui nous passionnent le plus. Cela me fait penser au merveilleux Pierre-Jean Jouve, quand il parle de scène capitale. Si je préfère le conte au roman, c'est parce que le conte se réduit à peu près à la scène capitale\textsuperscript{235},

or occasionally, we might say, to a few “scènes capitales” linked together with the minimum possible amount of narrative connective tissue between them, like panels in a polyptych. The general impression is that hardly any narrative necessity dictates the placement of such kernel-images or “scènes capitales” in one tale instead of another one, and hardly any diegetic relationship of cause and effect normally links them together (at best, some faint thematic and atmospheric fils rouges may do). Their association often seems to be mostly based on analogical and visual grounds – including, not uncommonly, concerns of a purely chromatic nature. The resulting feeling of arbitrariness echoes, on the compositional level, the principle of arbitrariness already advocated by Breton in his first Manifesto with regard to images and tropes, and given some kind of tangible existence by the absurd statues of Bomarzo and their lack of reasonable relationship with their surroundings. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these kernel-images in order to make up the story is in some way the enhancement of the horizontal modular structure that we have identified, with Bakhtin, as the basic structure of romance narratives – largely independent, as we have seen, from both chronology and cause-and-effect relationships, the latter being a feature that Mandiargues explicitly recognizes as typical of dreams (and drugs):

\textsuperscript{235} PdM 22.5, p. 31
Nous devrions plutôt parler d'enchaînements logiques de cause à effet. Le monde dans lequel nous transportent le rêve et certaines drogues est un monde où la causalité est abolie […] je me sens bien dans une sorte d'éparpillement : éparpillement de la pensée, de la lumière, des images, et cela, le rêve et la drogue nous l'apportent.

Thus, in Mandiargues, as in Lévi, imagination is reconnected to its etymological roots and is strictly speaking a way of thinking by images; as in Lévi, reverie and (more or less lucid) dreams are the fundamental method for opening oneself up to such imagery – which, by the way, often happens to fall into the kind of lustful *delectatio morosa* against which Lévi, like Zolla, warned the reader, and more often than not to do so quite deliberately. It would be tempting to remember here, given the symbolic interpretation of the snake proposed by both Zolla and Lévi, Mandiargues's love for reptiles and cold-blooded animals in general, both in his fictions (“L'Archéologue”, just like the already mentioned “L'Enfantillage”, being among the cases in point) and in his life.

2.3: Staging Dreams in Writing

This imaginative process is staged in several of Mandiargues's fictions. At times the narrative develops precisely as the attempt made by a character of replaying in the “real” – i.e., diegetic – world a dream that he or she has had and that consists of one, extremely

236 “Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, *cit.*, p. 52
vivid scene. Such is the case of “Le Songe et le métro”, in *Sous la lame*, a tale in which the heroine reaches the location in which the dream was set – a subway station, a place frequently resorted to in Mandiargues's fictions probably because of its liminal, underworld connotation as well as its suitability for random encounters – hoping to make it come true, although she won't meet there the lover she had dreamed of but, rather, her killer. Other times, the character is indeed fearing the actualization of a nightmare scene, as the young Noémie Boileau in “Crachefeu”, who truth be told doesn't seem to try very hard to escape it, since she chooses to ride her bike on the very same road in which she was supposed to – and will – die; or Véronique Arès in “Le Triangle ambigu”, who recognizing in Simon Game's ring the same skull depicted on the clothes of the faceless man she kills in a recurring dream, walks away from him in order to avoid murdering him for real.

But it is reverie, rather than nocturnal dream, that gets staged by Mandiargues more often and in the most interesting way, and a good number of his characters appear to have a strong penchant for and a certain expertise in it. Alfred Maury, who figures in the little bibliography about dreams that we have quoted from Mandiargues's journals, studied – in a different work than the one mentioned there – what he called “*hallucinations hypnagogiques*”, that is to say visions experienced by the subject in a state intermediate between wake and full sleep (the 'hypnagogic' state according to Maury's terminology). This state is defined by the peculiar vividness of the images it presents, and some other of its features are reminiscent of the state of reverie often described by Mandiargues, such as the subject's passive stance: “*Quand ces hallucinations débutent, l’esprit a cessé d’être*
attentif; il ne poursuit plus l’ordre logique et volontaire de ses pensées, de ses réflexions; il abandonne à elle-même son imagination, et devient le témoin passif des créations que celle-ci fait naître et disparaître incessamment”\textsuperscript{237}, so that “dans l’état intermédiaire entre la veille et le sommeil, l’esprit est le jouet des images évoquées par l’imagination, que celles-ci le remplissent tout entier, le mènent où elles vont, le ravissent comme au dehors de lui”\textsuperscript{238}.

Daniel Point, the character lending his point of view to the reader in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils” – a witness, we may say with the term Mandiargues uses, as we'll see shortly, in Marbre – is introduced precisely as a longtime aficionado of the “douce inoccupation”\textsuperscript{239} of after-lunch napping\textsuperscript{240} and a daydreamer – so much so, in fact, as to have actual inveterate habits when it comes to his reveries. The reverie into which he slips at the beginning of the tale, however, seems to be different, and Daniel's old habits are disrupted; these, as specific as they were, could be summed up in the definition of a lucid, or directed, reverie. But this time things are different, and Daniel's mastery of directed reveries is not enough to govern the new one – “il n’avait jamais eu de rêverie aussi peu dirigée que l’actuelle”\textsuperscript{241}. Similarly to how the nocturnal dreams of Zoé in “Le Songe et le métro” or Véronique in “Le Triangle ambigu” present a slight lag of sorts with respect to reality, as if they had an independent life to some extent, Daniel's reverie


\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., p. 4

\textsuperscript{239} “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”, in *Feu de braise*, cit., p. 93

\textsuperscript{240} The author tongue-in-cheek refers to this activity with “la plaisante formule de 'gymnastique napolitaine' […] que j’ai entendu employer par certains Italiens du Nord”

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., p 101
surprises him by presenting some object that he did not expect, and escapes his control (the lack of control being here not relative to the relationship between dream/reverie and waking life but already set into the former).

The statues of Bomarzo – whose beauty according to Mandiargues resides specifically in their alienness, in their violent disruptiveness vis-à-vis a location that gets defamiliarized by their very being there – may remind us of some similar coming into reality of a “corps étranger”. I'll also recall the palace that Borges talks about in his “El sueño de Coleridge”, in Otras inquisiciones – the palace dreamt first by Kublai Khan, who decided to build it, and some five centuries later by Coleridge, who put it in verse. Borges argues that these two independent dreams might be seen as proof that something is trying to slide into our reality: “acaso un arquetipo no revelado aún a los hombres, un objeto eterno […], esté ingresando paulatinamente en el mundo; su primera manifestación fue el palacio; la segunda el poema. Quien los hubiera comparado habría visto que eran esencialmente iguales”\textsuperscript{242}. In like manner, something independent from his own directing will slips into Daniel's directed reverie, without following his directions. We may think again of the strange, and apparently contradictory, way in which Lévi's “songes” could have been at once a product of a very strong willpower directing one's own dreams (or at any rate its gazes into the repository of images constituted by the lumière astrale) and the revelation of some truth radically external to the subject – imagination being, according to him, less a creative effort than the capability of opening windows onto significant pre-existing images: “pour le sage, imaginer, c'est voir, comme

\textsuperscript{242} Jorge Luis Borges, Otras Inquisiciones, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2007, pp. 32-33
pour le magicien, parler, c'est créer. On peut donc voir réellement et en vérité les démons, les âmes, etc., au moyen de l'imagination".243

The same happens to Conrad Mur in his long daydreaming about the submerged statue of “la grande courtisane, ou […] la déesse”244 at the beginning of “L'Archéologue”. We are told how the character does indeed use a great deal of “attention”245, “énergie”, “volonté”, “décision”246 in order to be able to hypnotize himself, as it were, and (mentally) break into the shiny surface of the sea and down to its floor; and yet,

Conrad, like Daniel, is therefore a habitué of similar “directed” reveries; he knows very well that these live, somehow, a life of their own, and do not provide their metteur en scène with what one would normally expect (the seascape, in fact, proves to be extremely peculiar – although Conrad would rather trust the epistemological value of his own absurd visions than the words of those who have explored the seafloors for real248).

Still, he will not fail to be astonished, frightened in fact, by the revelation of what he's

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243 Lévi, op. cit. p 79
244 “L'Archéologue”, cit., p. 59
245 Ibid., p 12
246 Ibid., p. 13
247 Ibid., p. 13
248 “Les scaphandriers sont-ils tous menteurs […] ? Conrad Mur est assez de l'avis que ces gens l'ont trompé par leurs contes et que sa présente rêverie, mieux que tous leurs discours après boire, lui découvre dans son entière et laide réalité le fond de la mer” (ibid., p. 16)
searching for, of “quelque chose d'inédit, quelque chose d'inconnu qu'il sent confusément
sur le point de lui apparaître au sein du liquide”\textsuperscript{249}. Curiously, what will frighten him the
most in the vision of the statue is her ring, which, as I've mentioned already, is a copy of
the one he has given to his fiancée – that is to say the one element that, if one were to
judge by the criteria of common rationality, should mark the vision as nothing more than
a dreamlike creation of Conrad's own unconscious. But this suspect is never so much as
hinted at, neither by him nor by the narrator – the objective, external reality of what he
sees in the reverie having been irrefutably postulated once and for all. The dream ring,
like the statue, is necessarily \textit{real}, at the risk of turning reality itself into a nightmare.

In “Le Nu parmi les cercueils” Daniel Point, who shares with Mandiargues himself
and with most of his characters (including those that will appear further on in the story,
such as Mariana and her boyfriend) a taste for heavy and somewhat unusual meals\textsuperscript{250},
falls into his postprandial reverie, seeing at first a long room and then a girl dancing in it.
From the very beginning, the vision distances itself from Daniel's usual ones:
“\textit{Contrairement à la coutume des débuts de rêveries (celles, tout au moins, de Daniel
Point, lequel avait peu d'empressement après les repas), la fille était entièrement nue}”\textsuperscript{251}.
Soon enough, as she is performing a dance figure, Daniel thinks he has actually heard the
thud made by the dancer hitting the floor\textsuperscript{252}, and the text goes on: “\textit{Semblablement,}

\textsuperscript{249} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 17
\textsuperscript{250} “[...] œuf de tortue marine plutôt qu'œuf d'oiseau, pensa le rêver enfin, qui avait mangé la veille, pour
son petit déjeuner, trois ou quatre de ceux de la première espèce, pareils à des balles de ping-pong,
servis crus puis cassés, vidés dans une tasse et arrosés d'un jus de citron” (“Le Nu parmi les cercueils”;
cit., p. 96)
\textsuperscript{251} \textit{Ibid.}, p 94
\textsuperscript{252} Alfred Maury did observe a similar phenomenon, which he called “hallucinations hypnotagogiques de
l'ouïe” (Maury, \textit{op. cit.} p. 9)
inventait-il le reste, le spectacle auquel il avait été bizarrement convié? Non pas. C'était en face de lui, et il le constatait\textsuperscript{253}. Once Daniel asks the girl her name, he 'receives' her words as if coming to him “d'on ne sait où”\textsuperscript{254} in some inexplicable way – “Point ne les inventait pas”. The girl proceeds to introduce herself as Mariana Guajaco and tells him her grim story, explaining how she ended up in the room (a coffin maker's shop, as it turns out) in which he saw her dancing. Unlike Conrad Mur in “L'Archéologue”, Daniel realizes at the end of his reverie that some elements within it (namely the way the girl speaks, rather unfit for a humble seamstress) should induce a certain disbelief in its truth, carrying as they do “plutôt la marque de la fantaisie du rêveur”\textsuperscript{255} – perhaps inspired by the sight of young girls resting against the windows of funeral agencies he had experienced the day before. However, he still obstinately tells himself that no character in his reveries had ever seemed so real as this one, and in the last lines of the tale, in order to make up his mind about it, he goes out, hoping to meet something or somebody “qui aurait sur sa vie les plus graves conséquences, et qui serait la suite d'une vision dont il se refusait à croire qu'elle n'avait été que mensonge ou vaine fantasmagorie”\textsuperscript{256}.

The impression of truth that Daniel immediately gets from his reverie also explains why he asks the girl's name as one would do with a real person:

\begin{quote}
Dans le passé, Daniel Point avait imposé des noms aux personnes de ses rêveries, pour les amener à devenir des personnages et pout qu'elles fussent capables d'action. Mais le jeune corps de femme qui retenait son attention avait tant de présence et de réalité déjà, il se comportait de façon si autoritaire et inattendue, avec une personnalité si véritable, qu'il eût été probablement fort déplacé, maladroit, sinon même impertinent, de
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{253} “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”, cit., p. 98-99
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., p. 100
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., p. 140
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid., p. 141
Daniel Point is more than a lazy practitioner of “gymnastique napolitaine”: in his reveries, he's both author and consumer of narratives in which he creates characters “capables d'action” in order to move them, like a puppeteer, on the stage of his mind. It is safe to assume that these reveries may generally include some erotic element (if it is only uncommon for their characters to be naked right at their beginning, and only because Daniel normally has “peu d'empressement après les repas”). With the new reverie described in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”, however, Daniel's role seems to change a bit: as his direction upon the reverie fails, he shifts (like Conrad or, as we'll presently see, the narrator of Marbre) towards the purely passive position of the spectator of an external reality, or the consumer of a narrative created by someone else. (Incidentally, it should be noted that the show Daniel witnesses – the dance of Mariana Guajaco – is precisely what the coffin maker, Pedro Virgula, had tried in vain to witness himself; once naked, the girl had fallen into a semi-comatose state, and her kidnapper had raped her without having the satisfaction of watching her dance as he wanted. In a way, this produces an overlapping between Point and Virgula: the former, in his reverie, witnesses a scene that the latter, as a character of that reverie, had planned; the reverie is somehow directed – from the inside, as it were). Narrative and reality, in fact, can be said to be to some extent the same thing; and the possible effects of Daniel's reverie onto the diegetic reality – when, at the end of the story, he'll walk out to search for something “qui aurait sur sa vie

257 Ibid., p. 100
258 The puerile pun on Daniel Point's name (restated with obvious gusto in the coffin shop windows: “Les cercueils Virgula mettent le point final!”; p. 122) implies of course some metalinguistic, namely typographic, reference.
les plus graves conséquences, et qui serait la suite d'une vision” – may figure the Surrealist reverberation of the text itself onto extratextual reality. We have recalled how Mandiargues declared in the enquête for L'Art magique that his whole oeuvre was intended as some kind of magic ritual aiming at the establishment of a Panic order, or disorder, in the world – and besides, he genuinely believed in the mantic powers of art in general and, in his case, of poetry in particular. In Le Désordre de la mémoire, for instance, Mandiargues complained that it never happened to him to have a true premonitory dream and, while not excluding that such a phenomenon could happen to other people, added that the only divinatory powers he could claim for himself came from poetry (which he meant in a very literal sense).

2.4: Characters

It is interesting to notice how, according to the brief excerpt we have just quoted, it is the act of naming them that makes into actual characters what would otherwise be “des vaines silhouettes”, and makes them “capables d'action”. The simple act of assigning a name to his characters is the necessary (and, many times, sufficient) condition for Mandiargues to give them narrative substance – turning into an effective actor (or actant).

259 “Dans la réalité, si je suis arrivé plusieurs fois, comme je viens de dire, à obtenir la répétition d'un rêve, jamais, malgré mes espérances, je n'ai pu vérifier la moindre réalisation de quelque chose que j'eusse rêvé. Pourtant, une quantité de personnes assurent qu'elles ont été transportées dans le futur par le songe et, en laissant à l'illusion une part aussi large que l'on voudra, leurs témoignages ne sauraient être récusés. Si je me reconnais un certain don de voyance, c'est à la poésie que je le dois, point au rêve” (Le Désordre de la mémoire, cit., p. 190). As for his wife Bona, he recognized her divinatory faculties too – except they came from her painting: so it happened that Bona portrayed the unmistakable face of their daughter Sibylle in one of her paintings well before Sibylle was born.
in a fictional story what would otherwise have remained a mannequin with no history, maybe part of a lavishly described *tableau vivant*, hardly distinguishable from the rest of the décor and limited to spatial extension, as it were, not unlike the décor itself. I will note in passing that even the description of his characters' appearance hardly does much to give them an individualized reality, and would rather seem to pertain to the wider game of mirrors that Mandiargues plays throughout the *disiecta membra* of his stories. We are rarely given a description of the physical features of male protagonists, but rather – if anything – just one of their clothing, normally including at least one or two eccentric or somewhat vulgar items. Female characters, on the other hand, tend to be portrayed thoroughly, but this has the fairly odd effect of making them all the more indistinguishable – all, or almost all, of them are introduced as dressed in light clothes that normally do not include underwear, as the author is keen on specifying, and a good number of them also share similar looks that seem to be more or less inspired by Bona de Mandiargues, the author's wife: a boyish air, huge and often golden-ish eyes, short hair, very small ears and tan skin. The great majority of these girls is also roughly of the same age range, somewhere between their teenage years and the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth, which further contributes to this blurring. The characters' names, then, tend to be rather unconventional, but the laws presiding over them – such as the frequent use of Italian given names or surnames, the occasional *particule nobiliaire*, some recourse to the names of lesser known historical characters, and most of all an almost obsessive use of alliteration – are pretty much always the same. Finally, there hardly seems to be any attempt in the direction of a mimetic representation of spoken language: Mandiargues's characters, whether they be noblemen or seamstresses, tend to speak all in the same way,
in a polished, ornate, and old-fashioned speech with frequent allusions to literary, historical or artistic trivia. Daniel Point's recognition of Mariana Guajaco's unrealistically polished manner of speaking constitutes an unicum in Mandiargues's stories – and perhaps an ironic acknowledgment of this feature.

Such characters are mostly defined by an absence: the absence of a background and a personal story, that makes it perfectly normal for them not to inquire about it when they get to meet each other\textsuperscript{260}, and in fact the absence of any psychology – or, if one wished to indulge in puns, of a character. Indeed, the final goal of most Mandiargues's characters is the attainment of the supreme absence, that of whatever faint individuality they had to begin with, in the final death or petite mort. Their actions thusly appear to be – just as the text presents them as if they were somewhat inevitable – sovereignly arbitrary; the characters perform them as if they were following the established liturgy of a ritual they know by heart, unknown however to anyone else (this being particularly true for their sexual encounters), or as if they blindly followed every passing whim or all sorts of obscure suggestions that the universe is somehow pouring on them, like madmen. It could be argued that these characters are, in fact, largely devoid of free will: the events happening to them are often presented as heavily influenced by omens and preternatural influences, and their reactions to external events – just like the desires that move them – are possibly determined by similar forces rather than by their own intention.

\textsuperscript{260} When the hitherto strangers to each other Simon Game and Véronique Arès meet in “Le Triangle ambigu”, we are told: “Ils n'avaient pas trouvé singulier de n'avoir d'intérêt pour aucun événement de leur double passé” (“Le Triangle ambigu”, in Mascarets, cit., p. 91)
Astrology, a discipline which Mandiargues was familiar with and believed in, provided him with a neat device for a similar mechanistic predetermination of the characters' course of action. Another old-fashioned science (whose application in narrative works is, of course, old-fashioned in itself), namely physiognomy, could serve a similar function. Thus Ferréol Buq, the protagonist of *Marbre*, is given an unusually detailed physical description which should help the reader understand that “ce Buq est un porc!” and which includes a weak chin “comme il se voit assez souvent chez ceux qui sont nés sous le signe des Poissons”. Another feature in Buq's description is noteworthy, especially given its positioning right at the end of it (and of the introductory chapter): “il a un pantalon gris Oxford, des mocassins bruns, et dans le pantalon la même chose exactement que vous tous, amis lecteurs...quoique j'aie dit de mon 'témoign' qu'il n'avait aucune réalité”. Such a “chose”, or indeed the sexual drive that it designates metonymically, could be said to constitute one of the few genuine (or at least clearly understandable to us, as readers, and not just to the characters themselves) motivations for action within Mandiargues's fictions; in a way, one of the few “psychological”, so to speak, components of his characters. Apart from the sex drive, and the death drive that we have already discussed as the other side of the coin, only very simple and broad emotions – if anything – are perceivable as moving these characters. Their psychology, if indeed

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261 We can think for instance of the long introduction to *Un Saturne gai*, dedicated to the explanation of the author's own natal chart, or of the critical essays – such as the article on Octavio Paz collected in the *Quatrième Belvédère* or the pages dedicated to Isamu Noguchi – in which the work of an artist is connected to the latter's zodiac sign. Mandiargues also held the critical work of Jean Richer, who confronted Shakespeare and other writers from an esoteric perspective, in high esteem. See chapter 4.5 for some additional remarks about this topic.

262 *Marbre*, cit., p 17, author's emphasis


264 *Ibid.*, pp 16-17
we can talk about any psychology here, is only presumable and only staged in dramatic form through their own actions – not unlike the psychology of Homeric heroes, in a way, or that of the characters of chivalric poems, fairytales, and other genres associated with the tradition of romance or, at any rate, with literary traditions predating the modern development of the novelistic genre. Even when a character does appear to have an inner life, we only get a glimpse of it through its dramatic portrayal: such is the case, for instance, for Ferréol Buq's dream journals, which allow the reader to witness the theatrical representations staged by his mind while lacking, as the author informs us, the pages that Ferréol may have devoted to the interpretation and commentary of the dreams he recorded. The difference with the simple recording, on the narrator's part, of the character's deeds and action is purely quantitative; it is action nevertheless, the extroversion of a (supposed) inner self in dramatic form, that gets to be described. This reminds me of the kind of primitive descriptions of psychology attempted in ancient times, as Zolla recalls in an excerpt I have already quoted, by means of attributing the otherwise inexplicable instincts and sudden inspirations of the soul to demons, or, later on, to the fallen old gods of paganism – a comparison which, I feel, Mandiargues would have enjoyed, and which certainly seems to me to be particularly relevant in regard to the sudden, enigmatic urges that seem to pull the strings of his characters' puppetry.

Thus, Mandiargues's characters are radically marked by a sense of absence. They come from an absence, insofar as they lack any background explicitly communicated to the reader (and this can work towards making them as alien, and virtually
interchangeable\textsuperscript{265}, as dream characters are) who can only posit an implied one: why would the author be telling us about these, and not other, characters if there were not something inherently important or otherwise interesting about them? But should there be something of the sort, we don't know it; as we read on, we still miss it. The characters live in a present state of absence: many of their actions (which often furthermore denounce another absence, that of basic morality) don't seem to make much sense to us, or at least they would seem to be interchangeable with any other random action – if we did not get the strange feeling that they are acting a part, following a script of sorts or (more or less explicitly) performing some ritual whose origin, meaning, and goal however we do not know; we are thus tricked into attributing a surplus of meaning to the characters' actions just like we are to the characters themselves\textsuperscript{266}. Finally, they move towards a definitive absence, an absence that constitutes the only “meaning” authorized by the text to be granted, \textit{a posteriori}, to their enigmatic behavior within the narrative; and this final absence is the fatal movement towards self-annihilation. In another essay of his, specifically dedicated to lucid dreaming, Élemire Zolla mentions Chinese theater, its possible connections to shamanism, and the 'unnatural recitation' and 'trance-like movements' of its actors\textsuperscript{267} – which would allow them to act as a channel for forces

\textsuperscript{265} See, about the importance of this latter feature in dreams, Mandiargues's observations in “Des rêves”, collected in \textit{Le Cadran lunaire}.

\textsuperscript{266} In “L'Archéologue”, for instance, Conrad Mur – who has just abandoned his dying fiancée in a squalid hotel, leaving her, moreover, to a doctor who not only won't be able to cure her but may, in all likeness, try to rape her – describes his behavior as follows: “lâchement (si je voulais peser mes actes au commun jugement des hommes), j'ai abandonné la femme qui se confiait en moi pour devenir son époux […]” (p. 56). But why shouldn't Conrad's deeds be subject to the “commun jugement des hommes”? What, in the story, should authorize us to suppose in him any kind of superiority to or difference from the rest of humankind? The text does not suggest any answers.

\textsuperscript{267} “L'attore dell'opera cinese incarna le forze cosmiche o i morti con una recitazione sforzata e canonica, che però ha movenze da transe anch'essa”. Élemire Zolla, “Sogni dominati e transe al di là del libro”, in \textit{Id.,uscite del mondo, cit.}, p. 75
greater than themselves, possibly for the spirits of the dead\textsuperscript{268}. Something similar seems to appear in the “recitation” of Mandiargues's own characters (which, by the way, is just as unnatural in his actual plays, such as \textit{Isabella Morra}) – they go around the narrative dreamscapes in the moony state of trance of a dreamer, and if the dead act (through) them, these are the ghosts of their own inevitable future.

2.5: Narrative as a Dream Theater

Both Daniel Point and Conrad Mur are, of course, just fictional characters – but it can be argued that through them, Mandiargues is representing the way he conceives of the production of narrative in general, or at least of his own narratives. Not only, in fact, did he acknowledge in \textit{Un Saturne gai} the usefulness of dream journals for coming up with fictional materials, a statement that as we have seen is supported by his private notebooks (although none of them is entirely dedicated to dream notations); but this process of creation via (day)dreaming is explicitly staged. Furthermore, it is moved up

\footnote{268 One may also think of Jean Rouch's 1956 classic documentary \textit{Les Maîtres fous}. The film portraits some peculiar forms of cultural appropriation on the part of the religious sect of the Hauka in Niger, who confronted the phenomena of British occupation, technology, and a rapidly growing urban industrialization, by magico-dramatic means, as it were. During their ritual, the Hauka fall into a state of trance and then impersonate, or rather are possessed by, the colonial officers – the Governor, the General, the Truck Driver, the Doctor's Wife, and so forth. This seems to be intended as a strategy to both understand and gain (by magical techniques) status in a society of which, at the same time, the ritual offers a striking representation; a grotesquely distorted representation perhaps, and yet a stylizedly realistic one, for it portrays British colonial society in a purely formal manner, replicating (and of course exaggerating) the looks, movements, speech, and interactions of the entities who are possessing the Hauka. The British officers are made into something similar to the stock characters of ancient theater or commedia dell'arte, as it were – with the main difference that this stylization occurs not because of an artistic design, but through the supernatural medium of possession (which displays by the way exactly the same visible features of possessions in “authentic” tribal rituals: foaming at the mouth, invulnerability to pain, mannequin-like movements, etc.).}
from an entirely intra-diegetic phenomenon related to fictional characters to the level of the making of the fiction itself – in *Marbre*, Mandiargues's first attempt at a longer kind of narrative (together with the erotic novel *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé*, which was published, however, under another name) and his most open attempt at creating a narrative that thematizes itself and its compositional process. The back cover of the book states: “*Le sujet de Marbre est aussi bien le fait du roman (ou de tout écrit narratif) en soi, que le récit, traité légèrement en trois scènes principales et une suite de rêves, de la perdition du débauché. Les personnages de Marbre sont l'auteur et le lecteur non moins que le héro imaginaire [...]“. A preparatory draft of this text, stored at the IMEC in the folder PdM 4.1, goes on right where the back cover stops, adding two more short paragraphs expunged from the published version:

Le récit se développe ainsi sur des plans différents et dans plusieurs temps à la fois, d'une manière qui doit certainement beaucoup aux idées de Pirandello sur le fait du théâtre et qui rappelle un peu les récents investigations de Francis Ponge sur le fait de la poésie. Plutôt que la pierre froide qui est matière de nudités blanches dans l'ombre des musées, *MARBRE* est le brûlant miroir de Pan sous le soleil à pic, essentiel autant que le vin, l'olive ou le lézard au climat furieux et tranquille de l'été méditerranéen.

“*Le fait du roman (ou de tout écrit narratif)*” is of course the act of its composition. The book's first chapter, titled “Présentation du témoin”, begins in the first person, and the unnamed narrator is clearly intended to represent André Pieyre de Mandiargues himself, en auteur (the author being, as the back cover has warned us, one of the main characters of this fiction). It is Mandiargues's desk that the narrator occupies, Mandiargues's memories that he borrows, and Mandiargues's friends that he mentions – namely Jean Paulhan, who we are told has given the author one of the objects lying on his
writing desk. This (apparently) heterogeneous set of objects is an interesting one, both because of the nature of its parts and because it is from there (and specifically from the observation of an insect moving among the objects) that the narrator's reverie, which will engender the whole narrative of the book, begins.

Lying right next to the ink and notebooks is the gift from Paulhan: a booklet of female names, which (given what we've remarked about the naming of characters) seems to be of no lesser importance in the writing process than those implements and which is easy to imagine actually lying on Mandiargues's desk. I have found, in the notebooks at the IMEC, similar lists of feminine names written down by Mandiargues and arranged, like the “répertoire de prénoms” described in the novel, in alphabetical order. The narrator comments that by quickly flipping through the book one can see the names blend together (which seems to come out on the side of the virtual interchangeability of Mandiargues's characters that I've been suggesting), and this, together with the erotically charged impression of a “catalogue de sérail” given by all those feminine names, “procure un aliment pour les heures de rêverie et un plaisir innocent”. This reverie made of words somehow reminds me of the last paragraphs in a fine, but unfortunately unfinished tale also preserved at the IMEC under the title “La belle dame sans merci. Fragment d'un récit inachevé” and dated to 1946: Julian Glanville, the internal narrator interrogated in an Italian questura, is telling the cops about how in his childhood years he had fallen in love with reading because of his explorations of the family library. He states:

269 See the notebook PdM 6.22
270 Marbre, cit., p 9
Les mots sont des êtres surprenants: sachez, Mr le questeur, que pas plus qu'aux créatures naturelles, saisies dans l'épaisseur d'un buisson ou sous une pierre de la plage, il ne leur manque des griffes, des dents, des cornes, des queues, des becs, des crétes, des verrues, des plumes, du poil ou des écailles. Les avez-vous jamais contemplés à l'intérieur d'un dictionnaire? Leurs mouvements ont une agilité qui rivalise avec celle des crevettes roses dans une mare d'eau limpide. On peut les attirer en leur offrant l'appât du cadavre d'un autre mot. Alors ils surgissent de par tous les trous des lignes imprimées et viennent à vos yeux [...] je pensais par-dessus tout à la marée [...] Un livre s'emparait de moi comme ferait un flot qui monte, je m'y noyais littéralement, puis, avec le déclin des pages, j'êprouvais une joie puissante à reprendre conscience et à me découvrir en possession d'une nouvelle faculté de voir et de menues et multiples images ainsi que des objets inconnus recueillis sur le sable. J'arrivai à mélanger de la plus inextricable façon les vues d'ensemble laissées par les livres et les figures suggérées par les mots avec les formes et les monuments qu'à mon observation sans répit stimulée par la lecture fournissaient le règne animal, le végétal et le minéral. Personne ne m'arrêta sur ce chemin, rien ne fut opposé à cette frénésie visuelle, si bien que je devins vraiment un captif de l'imaginaire; et je crains que ce ne soit un monde où difficilement la police voudra me suivre.271

The animal, vegetal and mineral kingdoms are all represented on the narrator's writing desk in *Marbre*, where his reverie is begotten between the word-laden paper of dictionaries, a crawling insect and a marble paperweight. The latter is the other object that Mandiargues wants to describe at length – because, we are told, it is between it and the booklet that 'life has appeared'272, which may be meant to refer either to the manifestation of the insect or to that of the novel's protagonist, indirectly generated, as we'll presently see, by the former and named after it. It is possible that the very title of the novel may come from this paperweight; none of the “*monuments imaginaires*”273 described by Mandiargues is in fact made of marble (not the Palais Vocabulaire in the second chapter, not the enormous statue of the hermaphrodite or the geometric solids surrounding it in the third, nor the *théâtre de la mort* or the town of Borgorotondo in the fifth). Only the paperweight is, and it would be fitting that this novel about the writing of

271 Folder PdM 3.3, pp. 17-19
272 “Je dirai quelques mots du répertoire et du presse-papiers, car c'est entre eux qu'est apparue la vie” *(Marbre, cit., p. 9)*
273 *Ibid.,* p. 198
a novel took its title from a rather insignificant tool of the writer's desk; the only other mention of marble I have found – although a very circumstantial one – is in the quick description in passing of a “palace de marbre crasseux”274 in one of the dreams of Ferréol's, reported in a dream journal of his that I'll later discuss. Of course, the possibility that an obscure dream architecture found in a second-degree narrative275 may be suggesting the book's title, or be one of the non-mutually exclusive suggestions for it at least, is an equally valid hypothesis; on the text expunged from the draft for the back cover, Mandiargues only stated what the title does not stand for – “la pierre froide qui est matière de nudités blanches dans l'ombre des musées”, the conventional, neoclassical portrayal of Mediterranean antiquity to which he opposed “le brûlant miroir de Pan” and, indeed, the whole demonic representation of the South in this book as well as in all his other ones. The paperweight also seems to be the likely inspiration for the “corps platoniciens” in the third chapter276, coherently with a narrative that develops as a reverie inspired by the random objects on which the author/narrator's eyes fall. The whimsical Palais Vocabulaire visited by the protagonist at the beginning of his ramblings, then, could very well be inspired by the “plusieurs dictionnaires” that conclude the list of objects on the desk together with “divers couteaux” – which as a matter of fact don't seem to inspire any of the main scenes in the following chapters, even though

274 Ibid., p. 118
275 Third-degree, indeed, if we consider (as we should) the narrative frame constituted by the goings-on of the narrator at his writing desk in the first and the last chapter.
276 “Le second objet est précisément un morceau de marbre serpentin (d'un fond vert et cireux, avec des taches rouges et blanches), taillé en forme de cuboctaèdre (polyèdre semi-régulier archimédien, qui a douze sommets, huit faces triangulaires, six faces carrées et vingt-quatre arêtes égales)” (ibid., pp. 9-10). As for the great sculptures of geometric solids on the island of the third chapter, they are not Archimedean but Platonic and namely “les figures grandioses des cinq polyèdres réguliers (platoniciens): le tétraèdre, le cube, l'octaèdre, le dodécaèdre et l'icosaèdre” (ibid., pp. 82-83).
Mandiargues, who actually collected knives among other items, did often make use of the knife as a plot-resolving tool (starting with his very first published tale, “Le Sang de l'agneau” in *Le Musée noir*) and did consider it an objective correlative of the tragic form itself: narrative use of violent death, he stated, raises the quality of a writer's production, and the naked knife blade and the naked sex are the instruments of ’noble theater’277.

*Marbre's* narrator sees a longhorn beetle moving on the desk, from the paperweight to the booklet, and lapses into series of digressions. He plays with the insect's name, compares it to other elements of the animal kingdom, then remembers a woodpile crawling with insects close to a house in which he had lived in Italy, and finally decides to stick with these recollections which, he declares, are entirely unsought: “L'Italie, pourtant, à laquelle je ne songeais pas le moins du monde et que la bestiole m'a fait venir à l'esprit, je veux l'y retenir, et qu'elle me fournisse des images qui soient sujets de délèctation ou d'émoi”278. If all reveries seem to retain a mostly spatial nature in Mandiargues, space is also charged with varying degrees of emotional force; as magnetic fields get stronger when one approaches the poles, Mandiargues observes that a certain “tension vitale”279 is intimately linked to all displacements in space but is at its strongest on the Mediterranean, and decreases proportionally as one moves away from the latter. “Jamais je ne fus aussi heureux qu'en Italie”, the author/narrator says, and simply remembering Italy is enough to make his blood flow faster and make him live “sous tous les rapports, plus activement et avec plus de goût”280. The images randomly coming to

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277 See *Le désordre de la mémoire*, cit., p. 250
278 *Marbre*, cit., p. 14

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his mind are deliberately withheld in an open attempt to direct the narrator's reverie towards these pleasurable feelings; the chain of memories generated by imagination thanks to the random encounter with a beetle on a writing desk becomes an exercise in conscious evocation (and will create the very subject of the book, as well as its subtitle in the 1985 edition when *Marbre. Récit* will become *Marbre ou les mystères d'Italie*<sup>281</sup>). However, much like those of Daniel Point or Conrad Mur, the directed reverie of the unnamed narrator is eschewing rigid direction, and a certain degree of independence that is intrinsic to it is once again gets intensified, as in Daniel Point's case, by the action of its protagonist.

Despite his extensive travels, Mandiargues has never written an actual *récit de voyage*, and since he considers travel memoirs very boring *Marbre's* narrator chooses, instead of resorting to his personal recollections, to 'create a witness' who will make up his own (in his words, “*susciter un témoin*”<sup>282</sup>: and it seems to me that the verb “*susciter*” already implies a somewhat limited control, an initial push after which things would develop of their own accord, not unlike a magician who may conjure up a devil but can't really command him after he's been evoked). Enter Ferréol Buq: the 'witness', i.e., the protagonist of the story. Of course, a witness and a protagonist are not exactly the same thing, a witness being by definition somebody who does not act as much as observe events and actions of others, over which he has but a limited amount of influence and power. This kind of passive posture towards the flow of events is a common feature with many other protagonists of Mandiargues's fictions. Ferréol Buq, despite the insistence

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<sup>281</sup> Les mystères d'Italie appears however to be the original title in the black spiral notebook PdM 6.6 at the IMEC, begun in August, 1945 and carrying the first notes about this project.

<sup>282</sup> *Marbre, cit.*, p 14
about his libertine nature, despite his (poor) sexual exploits, is indeed in a very passive position throughout the whole novel: starting from his indecisiveness about whether to get married or not at the beginning of the second chapter (that is, the first chapter of actual narration after the “Présentation du témoin”), an indecisiveness which he'd like to prolong as much as he could, and going on with the series of curious situations in which he subsequently finds himself, either simply witnessing them, indeed, or being driven by them, until his inevitable death foreshadowed in the last chapter. This passive position mirrors that of the narrator. He evokes his witness/protagonist – who, like the girl in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils” or Lévi's songes and rêves, springs up fully formed already – and then does hardly more than give him a name; or rather let the reverie, or the exterior circumstances that have generated it, suggest a name for the character (the beetle on the desk being a “scarabée-bouc”). The character's existence is at once explicitly denied (Buq, who is repeatedly defined as a “personnage”, will have among his roles that of meeting other characters or, indeed, extras, “comparses sans plus de réalité que lui-même”) and posited as a given of sorts: “Quant à son aspect, je me bornerai à donner quelques indications sur ce que j’en peux apercevoir, lorsque, sur la page vacante, il se présente à moi.” The narrator's only advantage on the reader is that of being the one who is visualizing the reverie he jots down. (This also creates some overlapping, despite the explicit mention of the reader as well as the author within the text, between narrator and narratee – that is to say the end-user, so to speak, of the narrative of this reverie, which is staged and reenacted for the narrator's own use and pleasure.) In the same way,

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he seems to have very limited control upon his character's actions, and therefore upon the further development of the text itself – even less so, allegedly, than the témoin himself has. According to what we are told, in fact, he can't do much more than hope that Buq would go on to meet other 'extras' on the theatrical stage of fantasy: and this stage, as well, seem to erect itself in a rather spectacular fashion with no need for a metteur-en-scène, like a fairy palace.\footnote{286}

Even the Italian setting, chosen, as we have seen, because of the fond memories it brings back to the narrator, presents some advantages in this respect: it constitutes for Mandiargues a theatrical frame par excellence – and this frame somehow generates the events that will be staged upon it, and their very plotlines complete with their (typically Mandiarguean, as we'll see) denouement:

L'on ne dira jamais suffisamment que le plus grand attrait de l'Italie est d'être un pays où l'on rôde à l'intérieur d'un vaste décor de théâtre planté comme pour créer une tension si fiévreuse que le dénouement ne saurait être que provisoirement une rencontre amoureuse ou définitivement la mort. Comme ai-je rôdé de cette façon-là, le jour et la nuit, en Italie ! Toujours je m'attendais à ce que tout arrive, comme on s'y attend au théâtre [...].\footnote{287}

Since all the conditions for the plot to unfold itself autonomously are established, the author could, so to speak, withdraw at ease and let it run, while enjoying the dream theater he has activated. The link between theater and dreams, of course, is nothing new; and if its resonances with the Baroque imaginary would certainly appeal to Mandiargues,

\footnote{286} “[...] je vais susciter un témoin, personnage à l'égard duquel j'espère qu'il se rencontrera des comparses sans plus de réalité que lui-même, tandis que se dresseront des murs, des arcs, des colonnes, des pins parasols, sur un fond de mer bleue, de ciel limpide et de rochers couleur de lion” (ibid., pp 14-15, author's emphasis)
\footnote{287} André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Mystères d'Italie”, in XX\textsuperscript{e} siècle, no. 55, 1980, p. 96

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a more immediate and punctual precedent is to be found in Breton's *Vases communicants.* Breton applies to dreamwork specifically literary categories, and talks about the besoin inhérent au rêve de magnifier et de dramatiser, autrement dit de présenter sous une forme théâtrale de plus intéressantes, des plus frappantes, ce qui s'est en réalité conçu et développé assez lentement […] Peut-être même y a-t-il là, puisque je parle théâtre, de quoi justifier dans une certaine mesure la règle des trois unités, telle qu'elle s'est imposée curieusement à la tragédie classique et cette loi de l'extrême raccourci qui a imprimé à la poésie moderne un de ses plus remarquables caractères288

Other features of the dream theater seem to be relevant to a study of Mandiargues's narrative, while the concept of dream theater itself is perhaps a good key for reading the many strange theaters that crowd Mandiargues's stories (apart from the general sense of theatricality of his rituals and his *mises en scène*)289. One of these features is the lack of identity of dream characters, flat masks defined only by their external appearance. In one of the texts collected in his *Cadran lunaire* – a text to which he attached some value as an actual study of the dream process290 – Mandiargues considers the phenomenon of substitution that had already struck, as we have mentioned, Hervey de Saint-Denys, and while calling for further attention on the topic by the “historiens du rêve”291 he consistently resorts to the terminology of fiction and theater292 and concludes by pleading

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288 Breton, *Les Vases communicants*, cit., p 136, author's emphasis  
289 See note 22 to chapter 1.1 of this dissertation.  
290 “Au cours de ma concentration onirique, je crois avoir fait quelques remarques assez originales sur un sujet pourtant rebattu par les psychologues. On les trouvera dans mon recueil Le Cadran lunaire où, parmi des textes consacrés surtout à la 'curiosité' j'ai glissé des notations de rêves, des études de rêves, des commentaires sur le rêve, qui ont pour moi beaucoup d'importance, malgré l'humour sous lequel je les ai voilés” (*Un Saturne gai*, cit., p. 189)  
291 *Cadran lunaire*, cit., p 110  
292 “des personnages qui n'existent pas hors sommeil” (ibid., p 110), “le décor habituel”, “à l'intérieur du songe, n'est-ce-pas, comme on regarde un guignol sur une grande scène”, “rêvasser […] au spectacle attendu” (ibid., p 112), “la fable du rêve” (ibid., p 113; *fable* is meant in the specific acceptation of “plot”, and of that which is hidden beneath the images – such as the real identity of the
for an effort to “chercher à connaître les machines de ce théâtre, oui, savoir pourquoi, dans ce milieu sans discipline, l'usurpation d'identité est quasiment la loi. Surtout, le problème du masque […]”. More significantly, in his interview with Yves de Bayser Mandiargues also observes the kind of blurring between 'actors' and 'spectators' (and we might add the producers and consumers of the pièce as well) that happens in dreams, and the splitting experienced by the dreaming subject: “il s'agit d'un théâtre qui s'offre à nous. Nous sommes en même temps spectateurs et acteurs, il s'agit d'un jeu de miroir double, le miroir du spectacle que nous regardons, et le miroir de notre conscience dans lequel ce que nous regardons et ce que nous jouons sont inscrits à la fois”.

This rather disorienting status is not unlike that of the narrator, the reader, and the protagonist in Marbre. Mandiargues stated in an interview: “Reportez-vous à Marbre. Il me semble y avoir clairement démontré que la toile d'araignée de tout récit est un labyrinthe de miroirs où l'araignée se confond avec la mouche, comme s'y confondent l'auteur, le héros et le lecteur de la narration.” I have made some remarks about the ambiguous status of the narrator within the text, who stages a reverie of which he is at once, to some extent at least, narrator and narratee, and tries on the one hand to direct it while effectively abdicating his directing role, or at any rate failing at it. This becomes clearer in the short sixth and last chapter (“Queue de poisson”), in which the author/narrator looks again out of his window as he did in the first lines of the book; some time has passed (the people outside are now silent) but not too much. Reverie – just like eroticism, as we have seen, and narrative itself – plays out in an eternal present after

characters hidden beneath the “mascarade” of their dramatic interpretation).

293 “Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, cit., p 52
294 Désordre de la mémoire, cit., p 194
all, and the two hundred pages of Marbre have passed without the day giving way to dusk ("il fait grand jour encore"\textsuperscript{295}). All of a sudden, the narrator arbitrarily chooses to abandon Ferréol Buq to his destiny, complaining that

Ce personnage, en effet, qui devait servir de point de vue pour me faire mieux apercevoir certains paysages et certains monuments imaginaires dont je me plais à croire qu'ils pourraient être italiens, a cessé de m'obéir presque tout de suite après que je l'eus mis en fonction,\textsuperscript{296}

moving away from the “\textit{terrain érotique}” where the narrator had placed him and (not unsurprisingly\textsuperscript{297}) into “\textit{un espace mortel}”\textsuperscript{298}. The narrator's abdication to his narrative duties is finally complete as he asks the reader himself – “\textit{personnage du récit non moins que l'auteur ou le héros}”\textsuperscript{299} – to take his place and thus become (co)author of the story. A few guidelines are provided in order to make sure that the reader/narrator may successfully pick up the thread of the author/narrator's fantasy where he had left it, and carry it on: it is in fact possible, he states, to foresee to some extent where Ferréol's “\textit{divagations}”\textsuperscript{300} will take him, in order to give to Marbre (“\textit{ce livre mal cousu}”\textsuperscript{301}), as the reader is instructed in the last paragraph of the book, a “\textit{dénouement}” that may eventually make it “\textit{passer pour un petit 'roman'}”. As a matter of fact Marbre, which is titled in the 1985 edition by Gallimard \textit{Marbre ou les mystères d'Italie}, in the first one (1953) carries the simple subtitle \textit{Marbre. Récit}. (The word “\textit{roman}” will only be used first as a subtitle

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{295} \textit{Marbre}, cit., p. 197
\item \textsuperscript{296} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 198
\item \textsuperscript{297} See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.
\item \textsuperscript{298} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 199
\item \textsuperscript{299} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 202
\item \textsuperscript{300} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 199
\item \textsuperscript{301} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 202
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to *La Motocyclette* and then again for *La Marge* – the cover of *Tout disparaîtra* will state once again “récit” instead). One might see here an echo of the Surrealists' distrust for the novel as a genre, openly professed ever since the *Manifeste* of 1924. The back cover, as we have observed, does use the “r-word”, although with an immediate caveat: “le fait du roman (ou de tout écrit narratif)”. I have quoted already the interview with Yves de Bayser in which Mandiargues suggested another related reason why the traditionally conceived novel put him off, namely the necessity for the novelistic writer to add the burden of connective scenes between narrative climaxes (whereas short stories just allowed him to focus on the climax); the rhapsodic structure of *Marbre*, however, can refrain from such burden. Moreover, on the one hand Mandiargues seems to think that a “roman” must follow a certain disciplined structure which cannot be achieved by the rambling, uncontrolled movement of reverie, and to feel like he must pass the baton to someone else for this to be achieved; as for him, he declares with some contempt, “je ne me sens nullement, ce soir au moins, ce que l'on nomme avec assez de grandiloquence 'l'âme d'un romancier', et je doute fort qu'il me vienne bientôt quelque chose de semblable à cette âme-là”. The final paragraphs of *Marbre* suggests that a “livre mal cousu” could become a novel on the condition that it complies with some prerequisites of formal polish, such as a proper conclusion. On the other hand, it doesn't take much to turn the narrative mishmash of Ferréol's gallivanting into a novel; indeed, the guidelines that the reader should follow to this effect are very simple – providing a rough draft of the final, unfinished chapter or scene, but also an essential diagram of narrative denouements in Mandiargues's fiction in general (as I have described them in Chapter 1 of this dissertation). Adventure time has to come to an end and to do it in Mandiargues's usual
way, that is to say through sex and violence – with the added remark that in Marbre, the two poles of the plot between which it unfolds are not only two significant moments in the character's biography, as they are wont to do (the most significant ones, in fact: creation, and death), but concern the diegetic as well as the metadiegetic plane. Sick with a “fièvre morose” Ferréol will resume his journey to the South, reach either Lecce or Otranto, meet a woman and follow her to “un lieu d'une géométrie plus précise et plus spectrale que de tous ceux qu'il a déjà explorés”, where “sans doute à proximité de statues […], d'armures […] et d'un corps féminin dépouillé de son vêtement jusqu'au moindre fil, il va se produire une sorte d'orgasme naturel (tremblement de terre, phénomène volcanique […], orage ou grande vague issue de la mer), […], qui retranchera Ferréol du nombre des vivants”. Truth be told, the freedom of the reader, in his or her new role as a co-narrator, is rather limited, being circumscribed to the choice between a couple of given scenic designs (Lecce's baroque architectures, Otranto's back alleys) and to that of “le détail de telles circonstances de la fin” of Buq, including the fate of his corpse. But even so, one more figure is brought into the already tricky game of mirrors of Marbre's narrative – and as they multiply, identifying the rêveur of this reverie gets more and more complicated (when, say, a feverish Ferréol will meet with the girl in that place of exaggerated geometry, whose reverie will it be? The author's, the narrator's, the reader's, the character's?). As a result, the reverie itself progressively gains independence. It goes without saying that Ferréol is a dreamer himself; and the fourth

302 Ibid., p. 200
303 Ibid., p. 201
304 “[…] car les noms de ces deux villes ont une résonance particulière qui les a imposées à son esprit malade, comme en surimpression phosphore par-dessus le confus mélange de lignes et de figures géométriques dont il est prisonnier (ou mieux: captivé)” (ibid., p. 200)
305 Ibid., p. 202, author's emphasis
chapter of the book ("Petite oniroscopie du témoin") is mostly dedicated to his own dream journal, jotted down every night in an old tower on the Mediterranean after a sleep fueled by wine and by excessive amounts of heavily aphrodisiac "truffes marines". This is the "suite de rêves" announced on the book's back cover as an addition to the three main scenes. One of the dreams includes a vision that will constitute, with some modifications, the core imagery of "Le Pain rouge", in Soleil des loups; in the last one in the series Ferréol dreams of going out of the tower and finding a huge statue, or corpse, and he suddenly knows that that body "s'était nommé le lecteur, et que c'était la charogne d'un dieu (c'est-à-dire d'un être d'une essence supérieure à la mienne) à l'intention duquel j'avais été, moi-même, créé" – then a voice tells him that the corpse of the author, who's also dead, must be near, and Ferréol rejoices in having survived them. The author/narrator informs us that this journal has been found a long time after he had left the tower – but unfortunately, he later adds, no commentaries by Ferréol about his transcribed dreams have been preserved, if they existed in the first place, and in lack of the character's own observations one should abstain from making conjectures about the dreams and their imagery. This sounds of course a little off, since given the very explicitly fictional nature of Ferréol the literary device of the found manuscript is at odds with the (meta)diegetic frame; it is, of course, one of the instances in which Mandiargues

306 Ibid., p. 100
307 It's the second to last dream in Ferréol's journal (ibid., pp. 117-124); he finds himself in the translucent chambers inside a gigantic cheese, surrounded by gigantic worms (the same scene is present, as a reverie, in the unpublished La Belle dame sans merci), whereas Pluto Jedediah in “Le Pain rouge” will get miniaturized and explore the chambers inside a glowing red bread populated by outsized aphids.
308 Even though the voice warns him (“Qu'adviendra-t-il de Ferréol Buq, qui avait été créé par celui-ci et pour celui-là, s'il reste tout seul dans un monde où la cause et la fin n'existent plus?”, ibid., pp. 125-126) Ferréol feels overwhelmed with joy, dances, kicks the face of the reader, and prays to the sun with words ("Soleil, mon frère...") foreshadowing those uttered by Jean de Juni in “L'Enfantillage” when he's reaching ecstasy ("Père soleil...").
blatantly lays bare the artifice of narrative texts, and yet, at the same time, if author and reader are dead the narrative may perhaps stand by itself, taking on a life of its own. To further complicate the matter, Marbre's narrator first describes the circumstances of the dream journal's finding among a nasty mass of rubble, and then goes on: “et je voudrais persuader mon lecteur qu'il les a recueillis lui-même sous ce répugnant sédiment, et nettoyés avant d'en prendre connaissance”\(^{309}\). Perhaps the only way for the reader to escape death would be to escape reality altogether, physically taking refuge in the diegetic world and becoming just one more of its characters; but it is within the diegetic world, after all, that a character discovers the petrified corpse of the reader. Moreover, this dream journal – “petite écriture égoïste”\(^{310}\), according to the narrator – compiled by a fictional character (and found perhaps in the real world or perhaps within the diegetic one) reminds us of the very first book published by none other than Mandiargues himself: *Dans les années sordides*, written in the ivory tower of Monaco during the war. The staging of this complex dream theater (“un jeu de miroir double”, or triple, or quadruple...) becomes one with the staging of the mechanisms of narrative itself.

There is one more story that I'd like to discuss in this regard: “L'Étudiante”, possibly one of Mandiargues's best works, originally published in 1946\(^{311}\) and then collected in *Soleil des loups* five years later. The girl referred to in the title is not, in fact, a student, but the narrator had given her the nickname because of her looks and because of her habit of window-shopping at the local second-hand bookstore. The first time the narrator actually sees her inside the store, the girl – Marie Mors – is buying a book, namely *De la

\(^{309}\) Ibid., pp. 103-104
\(^{310}\) Ibid., p. 127
\(^{311}\) André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *L'Étudiante*, Paris: Fontaine 1946
diferencia entre lo temporal y lo eterno by the Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (who was also author of works of occult and natural philosophy), a bestselling seventeenth-century treatise dismissing the reality of time and of the temporal world compared to eternity. The narrator's attention has been drawn to the book by a glove that Marie had dropped, and he had picked up and laid on the book's cover – a beautiful pink leather glove with red and purple embroideries in the shape of a wing. The two begin to hang out together and presumably become lovers, even though when describing their time together the narrator only speaks at length about the girl's gluttonous obsession for elaborate sweets; finally, Marie tells him about the visions she has from her miserable room's balcony. There she sits, emptying herself of all feelings into a “condition de vacance absolue” and looking at the balcony and the window of the opposite house, across a very narrow street. On the opposite balcony, an angel often appears to her; a strange angel indeed, all covered in fluff and feathers, in shades of pink and red. Both the colors and the affectionate name she gives to the angel – her “mie pigeon” – are, the narrator guesses, inspired to Marie Mors by the title and the bright colors on the cover of a book she must have seen in the bookstore, *Le mie prigioni* by Silvio Pellico (just like Conrad Mur's and Daniel Point's reveries were inspired by the images of the engagement ring and of the girls in the coffin makers' district respectively, and *Marbre's* narrator's was by both the seraglio of girls' names in the booklet and the writing implements on the desk – partaking, then, of both the literary roots of reverie in “L'Étudiante” and the erotically charged ones in the two short stories). She tells him that her pink glove had once been thrown into her room by

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312 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “L'Étudiante”, in *Soleil des loups*, cit., p. 103
the angel, and with a feeling of awe she had found it still laying there the next day. Marie's reveries might have been generated by unconscious memories of a book, but the uncanny presence of the glove still testified to their reality (like that Coleridge's flower, remembered by Borges in the essay immediately preceding in Otras inquisiciones the one about Coleridge's dream we have quoted; and perhaps, to some extent, like the “finding” of the dream journals in Marbre). The moment in which Marie picked up the glove from the ground was “un instant pour elle de la gravité la plus singulièr e, puisqu'il avait introduit dans le monde tangible et chaud du jour ce qui n'avait à ses yeux été jusque-là qu'images du crépuscule et vaines hallucinations”\textsuperscript{314}. Once again we are reminded of Éliphas Lévi's visions, at once produced by the dreamer and received from the outside.

Moreover, all of her reveries – like the songes of Lévi – come true. They are described with ample recourse to theatrical vocabulary (introduced, in fact, as the “théâtre de la mie pigeon”\textsuperscript{315}) and portray different sceneries to be seen within the window frame, be they rooms, cityscapes, natural landscapes, that suddenly change each time the angel standing on the balcony like a curtain operator flaps her wings, “comme découvre le rideau de scène les accessoires du monde factice”. Several “personnages” – “comparses”\textsuperscript{316} or “acteurs” – take turns on the stage (and the sentences in their dialogues, rather than being heard, are perceived by Marie “comme si elle les avait lues”, similarly to what happened to Daniel Point in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”). A double of Marie Mors is always one of the actors in these scenes, which invariably depict the chance meeting with a man – a meeting which shortly thereafter happens to the girl in her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[314] Ibid., p. 106
\item[315] Ibid., p. 107
\item[316] Ibid., p. 108
\end{footnotes}
real life, in the same places and circumstances and even with the same words, as is the
case for the one in the library between her and the narrator, and which always leads to
“amitiés seulement passagères”\textsuperscript{317}, until the final one that she is waiting for and that she'll
recognize because it will show her a man together with his father (as she knows with an
absolute albeit entirely unfounded, irrational certainty, the kind of knowledge we
commonly experience in dreams). At last Marie Mors disappears, and the narrator
remembers that she had told him about a reverie in which this final encounter took place;
the setting was, once again, the second-hand bookstore, and the double of Marie (who
also somewhat serves as her point of view, or a doubling of her point of view of the kind
provided by dissociative drugs, within the reverie scene, and speaks words that seem to
her to be born “à l’instant au fond d’elle-même telles que sa véritable réponse à
autrui”\textsuperscript{318}) walked down a trapdoor into the rare books section in the basement, where the
girl had only seldom been allowed to descend. There, among ancient collections of
oddities of a somewhat esoteric flavor\textsuperscript{319}, she found a book illustrated with surprising
engravings (“c'est partout sa propre image qu'elle découvre et la représentation des
figures de ses songes”\textsuperscript{320}) which Marie saw as if they were in three dimensions, with
moving characters, and which reminded her of the small puppet theaters providing a
temporary distraction on the side of the stage among the main acts of a play. Both the
literary and the specifically theatrical nature of the reverie are thus further stressed, as
well as the confusion between actors and spectators in the dream theater – a third avatar.

\textsuperscript{317} Ibid., p. 109
\textsuperscript{318} Ibid., p. 108
\textsuperscript{319} “[... ] son regard s’enchaine parmi tous les maillons de ces Memorabilia, de ces Prestiges, de ces
Secrets, de ces Emblèmes, de ces Devises et de ces Arts perdus” (ibid., p. 112)
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., p. 113
as it were, of the girl was (re)present(ed) in the moving scenes within the book's engravings, and in a somewhat dizzying crescendo “Marie Mors, spectatrice du balcon, observait – à travers les yeux de son double, l'actrice de la chambre – une troisième incarnation d'elle-même en train de réciter, comme des rôles appris, ses rêves sur la petite scène du livre de gravures”\textsuperscript{321}. These scenes, by the way, remind us in themselves of the often loosely connected \textit{tableaux} in Mandiargues's own stories – they are \textit{“absurdes, compliquées et savantes”}, but carry no relationship whatsoever with \textit{“la présente aventure”} and the narrator chooses not to describe them at all; Marie only browses through the book for the pleasure of re-experiencing once more her own old dreams\textsuperscript{322}.

In the remainder of the vision the girl is approached by the bookstore clerk, a man of \textit{“origine exotique”}\textsuperscript{323} complete with a fez and a yatagan, while she hears the store owner walking upstairs with her wooden leg and talking about some precious jewels she had hidden in Jericho before the fall of the city walls (the city, we'll recall, was destroyed in biblical times with a little help from the Ark of the Covenant). The clerk opens a secret

\textsuperscript{321} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 113
\textsuperscript{322} This may echo, \textit{“en réduction”} like the theater itself, what is done elsewhere by the narrator of \textit{Marbre}; I shall also point out that the dreams Marie is re-experiencing here are specifically those \textit{“qui précédèrent un peu ses rêves d'autrefois”}, and while we are not told here whether the reference is to her nocturnal dreams or to her past reveries on the balcony (which, as we know, all came true) an oneiric connoisseur such as Mandiargues certainly knew that according to a tradition dating back to the Classical world dreams immediately preceding the awakening are always truthful, as is testified by Dante: \textit{“Ma se presso al mattin del ver si sognà”} (\textit{Inf.} XXVI 6), we read in the \textit{Inferno}, and three more such dreams are described in the \textit{Purgatorio}, the first one being thusly introduced: \textit{“Ne l'ora che comincia i tristi lai | la rondinella presso a la mattina, | forse a memoria de' suo' primi guai, | e che la mente nostra, peregrina | più da la carne e men da' pensier presa, | a le sue vision quasi è divina, | in sogno mi parea veder [...]”} (Purg. IX 13-19). Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, curator of the Mondadori edition, points out that Ovid, Cicero, Avicenna and Vincent de Beauvais all contributed to the popularity of this theory (see Dante, \textit{Commedia}, vol. I: \textit{Inferno}, Milano: Mondadori 1991, p. 768 n. 7, and vol II: \textit{Purgatorio}, Milano: Mondadori 1994, p. 265 n. 18).
\textsuperscript{323} \textit{“L’Étudiante”}, cit., p. 111
door in a revolving bookcase and Marie walks through with him, while her book falls
down and gets immediately eaten by his dog; the angel's wing changes the landscape a
couple of times while they proceed, showing at first a long tunnel in which they walk
together with a silent procession of other people and finally their destination – a desert
camp with tents and camels, in which a naked, extremely fat man waits for them between
two rows of people. The man's eyes dangle from his orbits at the end of two long stems,
like a snail's, and when Marie approaches they raise and look at her; that's the end of the
vision, and she knows she has finally met “ce 'père de l'époux' qu'elle attendait
clairivtement depuis toujours”\(^{324}\). The denouement of “L'Etudiante” complies with both
conditions we have identified in the endings of romantic narratives in general and, more
explicitly, in Mandiargues's own in particular – we know that she'll marry the library
clerk, and we know that, at least as far as the narrator is concerned, she disappears from
the world; her imminent death is not openly postulated, but her surname (Mors) and the
feeling of fear with which she had waited for her father-in-law do carry some ominous
foreboding. The narrator briefly concludes by stating that he has never seen the girl again,
and that he found the bookstore closed the day after hearing her account of this reverie;
the neighbors informed him that its owner had left for an undisclosed location, desperate
for having lost her clerk (and secret lover).

The progression and ending of the vision, Marie Mors's last one, obviously
emphasize already – from their very setting in the library and the latter's opening onto a
fairytale world – the rooting of her reveries in a literary universe, as did the angel's own

\(^{324}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 117
likely origin from the colors and the words on the cover of a random book in the shop. The funny string of stereotypes from the encounter with the book clerk to the arrival in the desert camp do the same, albeit pushing in the direction of a specific kind of literariness – heavily connoted toward a specific (set of) genre(s), namely the romance and the “romanesque”325, and indeed a “romanesque” of such a high degree that perhaps it would be defined with more exactly as feuilletonesque (in line with the somewhat snobby taste for popular entertainment – analogous, in a sense, to the notion of covert prestige in sociolinguistics – already professed by the Surrealists).

Here are Mandiargues's remarks about the trite arsenal of whips, chains, and branding irons displayed in Histoire d'O: “Et si Réage, dont l'art de bâtir une histoire, je l'ai dit, est d'un très grand romancier, se refuse ainsi à toute fantaisie dans le détail, il faut bien penser que c'est orgueil, et qu'elle met sa gloire à triompher par des moyens qui soient du domaine public”326. While I'll come back to a similar recourse to the popular props and tricks of genre fiction in the next chapter (with regard to the writings of Tommaso Landolfi327), there is indeed something more than a simple resorting to “moyens qui soient du domaine public” in “L'Étudiante”s insistent series of adventure novel topoi and Orientalist sketches. It might be argued that crossing that line (separating the mere domaine public from the feuilleton proper), that is to say that degree of textual

325 I use the term, as I'll do hereafter, in its French acceptation – meaning, in general, something that pertains to the roman (which means both novel and romance), and more specifically the more adventurous, sentimental, imaginative and marvelous aspects of fiction.
326 “Le fers, le feu, la nuit de l'âme”, cit., p. 87
327 Incidentally, the main feature of feuilletons – namely, their publication in installments – can sometimes be applied to oneiric activity, according to Alfred Maury: in describing a character whose presence was recurrent in his dreams, he observed that “ce qui est bizarre, c'est qu'il continuait fréquemment dans un rêve des actions qu'il avait commencées dans un autre” (Maury, op.cit. p. 6)
self-awareness, not only leads Mandiargues's experiments with and discourse on narrative
to some extent necessarily into the territory of irony, itself synonymous with literary self-
referentiality, but somehow makes him cross over into that of self-parody. This
mechanism is perhaps facilitated by the fantastic genre, which doesn't require the *topoi* a
writer might employ to be consistent with one another and has in itself a certain
disposition to a playful approach, both historically ("Si l'on sait que l'émergence du
fantastique est, en France et ailleurs, étroitement liée à la genèse du mouvement
romantique […] on retient moins, en revanche, que ce nouveau champ d'expression, dans
le temps même où il se constitue, engendre sa propre parodie"328) and ontologically, if we
accept, with Francesco Orlando, that the genre appeals to the same "pleasure in
nonsense" that originates wordplay, jests, and wit.

The exhibition of tricks from a children story (the bookstore owner, dressed in old
tulle like a doll, who twirls on her wooden leg like in a music box – having lost the real
one millennia ago during the fall of Jericho, where she also left some precious jewelry in
a secret closet hidden in her other bookstore, or library; the bookstore clerk, with his
exotic appearance and weapon, and the secret doorway in this bookstore; the camels, the
carpets laid out in the desert and the knives planted in the rocks between the Barbary
figs…329) adds to and builds on the text's high grade of *lettralité*, that is to say its *mise en
abyme* of the textual medium itself330. This is, in itself, very charged: what with the
constant references to books and bookstores, to the several kinds of odd books Marie

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328 Philippe Met, *op. cit.* p. 35
329 "[...] n'est-ce pas derechef une réclame apte à recruter des voyageurs?" (“L'Étudiante”, *cit.*, p. 116)
330 "[...] la force et l'intérêt d'un texte fantastique [...] résident peut-être […] dans l'aptitude à créer un
univers, une (sur)réalité éminemment, voire strictement, textuels […] contribuant ainsi à ce que l'on
pourrait appeler une poétique lettrale." Philippe Met, *op. cit.* p. 32, author's emphasis
finds there – *Memorabilia, Prestiges, Secrets, Emblèmes, Devises*... – and the *Vigiliae* tome which, ironically, contains dreams instead (and precisely the figures of Marie's own dreams that come to life and movement in the “*menus théâtres*” of the engravings, and include Marie herself) and which appears within the very narration of Marie's last reverie, further deepening the kinship between dream representations and narrative per se. Some tongue-in-cheek winks to the reader certainly do not undermine the fundamental seriousness of Mandiargues's intent and approach to his own work as a writer (which is obvious to any reader with some familiarity with his interviews), while increasing the degree of literarity of the text, that is to say its fundamental nature of literature built on literature. We can also think of *Marbre* and its frequent ironic pokes to the reader – at times bordering on parody – going hand in hand with its very marked *lettralité* (the staging of the book's own writing, the objects on the desk and the invention of the character, the insertion of a found manuscript which is – significantly – the character's own dream journal, allegedly discovered moreover by the reader well within the layers of narrative levels, the indications to the reader as to how to finish the story...).

The kind of (para)literary references that contribute to this effect in “L'Étudiante” are a perfect example of escapist fiction or *littérature d'évasion*, and such an escape is indeed represented in the short story with such conspicuousness that one might be tempted to see it as yet another jest, playing on the genre's very name. At the same time, while it is, of course, quite blatant that the escape takes place through a bookstore (and through a heavily book-influenced reverie), it could be argued that it is also in fact an escape from a bookstore; but should this be the case, where is Marie Mors escaping to? The space she is

331 “L'Étudiante”, *cit.*., p. 113
journeying to is outside, or beyond, the narrative one – or indeed behind it, as a (diegetic?) surreality hidden behind or in the folds of (diegetic?) reality. Or perhaps it is some sort of sur-literature, as it were, both beyond (or outside) literature and quite paradoxically made up of hyper-literary materials such as those of feuilletons (the triteness of paraliterature being specifically the result of the employment of materials already used and digested by umpteen previous literary texts, until they are made into some sort of zero degree of literature), in a manner not entirely unlike that of the point of no contradiction posited by Breton.

All these techniques also come to facilitate some kind of blurring between narrative, the creative kernel that generate it, and its textual strategies (or possibly even, as I have suggested, extratextual reality). Such an indistinctness is often triggered by the mechanisms of dream and reverie, which allow the text to abandon the logic of narrative, the logic of causation, and indeed, in some way, logic as a whole – in favor, if anything, of an ana-logical movement (as is the case of the juxtaposed “scènes capitales” substituting their pictorial value and random consecution to the proper weaving of “certaines formes bien françaises de roman”).

On a diegetic level, this happens through the staging of dream and/or reverie within the text; they get to constitute some kind of threshold, whose beginning is normally more or less coincident with the beginning of the text itself. This process can work on the one hand as a narrative frame and as a prelude to the narration proper, which in fact it engenders; and/or, on the other hand, it can constitute the narration itself – as we have seen, e.g., in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”. Dreams and reverie thus come to represent one
of the most ubiquitous and effective chronotopes for the staging of narrative bubbles in Mandiargues's fictions.

But since dreams and reverie are indeed (one of) the author's own compositional technique(s)\textsuperscript{332}, their description within the text takes on a metaliterary character while contributing to the blurring of boundaries between narrative and extratextual reality. Finally, in Mandiargues's view, dreams and reverie get to match not only the creative process leading up to the literary work, but literature itself:

Je crois que mon œuvre tout entière est une sorte de grand rêve ou de vaste rêverie, mis à part le souci formel sur lequel j'ai insisté. N'ai-je pas écrit que tout livre est une rêverie coulée dans les formes d'un style? Je pourrais dire que le rêve et la rêverie sont aussi inséparables de tout ce que j'ai écrit qu'ils le sont de ma vie même, que je m'efforce de considérer comme un rêve, ce qui me paraît le meilleur moyen de la rendre acceptable\textsuperscript{333}.

This, of course, is all the more true with regard to the specific brand of narrative crafted by Mandiargues – that is to say fictions deeply rooted in the literary tradition of romance, which, as such, escape cause-and-effect relationships and are often structured by the visual or thematic juxtaposition of images. One may note in passing that this erratic movement of romantic narratives is (part of) what Élemire Zolla reported as the

\textsuperscript{332} “En principe je devrais écrire tous les après-midi, mais je suis aussi capricieux, paresseux, et il y a bien des après-midi où je voudrais travailler et où je n'arrive pas à travailler. Je reste allongé sur mon canapé à rêver, à rêvasser, ce qui, d'ailleurs, est une forme de travail: il n'y a rien de plus utile que la rêverie, comme vous le savez vous-même; c'est une sorte de drogue qui vous illumine souvent d'une façon beaucoup plus compliquée que les drogues, et qui a une action beaucoup plus concrète que celles-ci” (“Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, cit., pp. 50-52)

\textsuperscript{333} Désordre de la mémoire, cit., pp. 187-188. The link between dream and narrative can also go the other way around: “La littérature est la seule sorte de patrie que j'aie jamais reconnue, la vie découle de la littérature à peu près dans la même proportion qu'elle en est la source. Ainsi en va-t-il, selon la conception romantique, du rêve, qui pourrait être considéré comme une forme automatique de littérature, exercée dans la nuit de l'inconscient dans les esprits de tous” (André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Troisième Belvédère, Paris: Gallimard 1971, p. 200)
danger of reverie, which according to him could impair the artist's creative potential just as much as it impaired the active possibilities of the man of action. Only with Romanticism, he claims, daydreaming and its practitioners came to be somewhat appreciated; it is not by chance that Romanticism – often mentioned by Mandiargues among the main sources of inspiration for his work on dreams\textsuperscript{334} – also marked the beginning of the modern revival of fairy tales and romance in general. Another danger of reverie (between which and lucid dreaming Zolla traces a sharper line than Mandiargues and his characters seem to be willing, or able, to do) is its almost inevitable crossing over into the territory of sinful fantasy, or \textit{delectatio morosa}. Mandiargues did in fact recognize – and disapprove of – this with regard to some of his earliest production\textsuperscript{335} and, in one other occasion at least, with regard to a much later erotic tale which didn't satisfy him and remained unpublished\textsuperscript{336}. However, much like the lack of control on the flow of images in the reverie is accepted and indeed made into a formal feature of Mandiargues's texts, its likely crossing over into erotic territory is also quite willingly appropriated and becomes a usual component of both the author's and the fictional characters' reveries. Besides, the characters seem content with letting their dreams and reveries carry them away; and if, as Mandiargues baroquely states, life is a dream, then trying to wake up from that dream can only have one consequence. This will be learned the hard way by Florine, the protagonist of “Feu de braise”: as soon as she stops believing the reality of

\textsuperscript{334} See, e.g., \textit{Un Saturne gai}, cit., p. 99: “Influencé par ce que j'avais lu des romantiques allemands, je m'aissais beaucoup de mes rêves”.

\textsuperscript{335} “Entretien avec Yves de Bayser”, cit., p. 50: “les premiers textes que j'ai écrits, les premiers poèmes que j'ai écrits étaient presque des actions inavouables, ce que les pères jésuites auraient appelé de la \textit{délectation morose}.”

\textsuperscript{336} It's “Cécilie”, a tale of intensely sadomasochistic tones, whose drafts are preserved in the journals 6.16, 6.17 and 6.22 at the IMEC. In the first journal, the author disowns the work in a later remark: “Ce récit, écrit par amour et pour le plaisir, est une bluette de vieux homme”.

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the dream she is dreaming, she gets killed – as if there were no possible narrative, and indeed no possible life, outside dreams.
CHAPTER 3: TOMMASO LANDOLFI: WRITING AS NECROMANCY

3.1 Autobiographic Lie and “Romanesque” Truth

In his 1967 diary Des mois, Tommaso Landolfi talks about a project dear to his heart. It is a story he fancies writing, only the incipit of which is already perfectly clear in his mind: “Sogno, o diciamo mi figuro, di cominciare un'opera così: 'Landolfo III di Pontecorvo, detto lo Scinti...”

Landolfo III di Pontecorvo, also known as Scinti, was a local historical character coming from the same house of the counts of Aquino from which Thomas Aquinas would later spring – a family of Lombard descent and, as such, one of the most ancient and noble ones in the South of Italy, with whom Tommaso Landolfi himself was possibly related. (A playfully misattributed quote – “Bene dixisti de me, Thoma” –, which the moon addresses to Landolfi in the epigraph of his first novel La pietra lunare, was originally the review of Thomas Aquinas's work allegedly uttered by Jesus.) Scinti's castle was situated in a place that also took the name of Scinti (or Scinto) from him, and kept it from then on. Landolfi seems to doubt he'll actually ever get to write this story (“Vi giungerò mai davvero?” For what we know, since the archives of Landolfi's unpublished material still aren't open to researchers, he didn't) but acknowledges that by

337 See note 323 to chapter 2.5 of this dissertation.
339 Antonio Grossi Bianchini, a local priest with antiquarian interests, identified Scinti with a different man of the same family, count Giovanni d'Aquino, from whom the place would have taken its name (Antonio Grossi Bianchini, Pico Farnese: Cenni storici, edited by Giuseppe Pompei, Cassino: Soc. An. S.T.E.M. 1929, p. 18). A copy of Grossi Bianchini's book was owned by Landolfi; it is presently in the archives of the Centro Studi Landolfiani in Siena, Italy.
means of fantasizing about such incipits he did come to write his best work: *Landolfo VI di Benevento* (1959), a dramatic poem also featuring a protagonist – the last Lombard prince of Benevento – perhaps related to the author\(^{340}\).

The incipit for this story yet to be written is what appears to be intriguing Landolfi first and foremost. Its formulaic nature and the network of generic associations it brings about are enough to create a stereotypical situation a whole narrative could logically unfold from:


What does Landolfo III do? 'It's clear', he rides on horseback towards his castle; what will he find there? 'It's obvious: a fair maiden', etc. The associations activated by the incipit work as a generic generative machine, conveniently providing the author with a series of 'obvious' plot points from the repository of chivalric romance tropes. As for how the story will go on from there, Landolfi states, it's not a big deal – it might very well proceed at random:

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\(^{340}\) *Landolfo VI di Benevento* actually descended from a different family than Scinti, even though he shared his first name with many Counts of Aquino, but Landolfi seems to enjoy playing with obscure genealogical data from the dark ages. In *I due figli di Stefano*, a short story staging the composition of a literary work that might very well be the *Landolfo VI* (see Daniele Visentini, *Il “Landolfo”, Landolfi, i Landolfi*, available on the website of the Centro Studi Tommaso Landolfi at the URL http://www.tommasolandolfi.net/il-landolfo-landolfi-i-landolfi/), the protagonist is writing about an 'almost mythical' ancestor. The *Des mois* passage only mentions writing his 'best work', with no specifications, but we know that *Landolfo VI di Benevento* was recognized by Landolfi, in a rare television interview, as his own favorite among his books: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cujlBe2_DnY

\(^{341}\) *Des mois*, cit., p. 42
This passage appears to be one of the not-too-frequent glimpses into Landolfi's compositional technique, or at the very least one of the few pages published by Landolfi about compositional technique in general; it is also a slightly paradoxical statement. Landolfi expresses, or affects, a haughty disdain for mere matters of plot – a supposedly irrelevant feature of the story that could be established at random, perhaps by means of discussing it 'with one's own wife, even with one's servant'. This rather blasé position (that may remind one of an anecdote about George Brummell asking his servant, whilst seeing two lakes from above, “which one do I prefer?”) would in fact have been perfectly acceptable and even mainstream in 1910s and early '20s Italy, in a cultural milieu still very indebted to D'Annunzio and heavily influenced by literary reviews such as La Voce and La Ronda. The novel as a genre, with its prosaic recounts of workaday facts, was still considered a novelty in Italy and, for many years, a rather disreputable one: something that took longer than elsewhere to be accepted into literature proper, and even then could only achieve this by 'presenting itself as a pretext to hold together a collection of lyrical fragments'. Now, as much as Landolfi's own work could have been permeated with a similar vision (albeit with a significant delay: but Landolfi took some kind of perverse pride in never quite being a man of his time, or posing, at least, as if he weren't one – and looking back just a couple of decades wouldn't have been that much of

342 Des mois, cit., pp 42-43
343 Giacomo Debenedetti, Il romanzo del Novecento, Milano: Garzanti 1998, p 53. For a deeper discussion of these topics see the section “I vociani contro il romanzo”, pp. 13-55
a stretch for somebody who seemed to plunge into the 19th century more often than not) one should note that his early works, indeed his so-called 'first phase' up until *Cancroregina* (1950), show elaborate plots and sparkling imagination, both in the novels and the short stories, although they certainly don't lack in vivid lyricism. As for the later works, consisting to some extent in a long meditation on Landolfi's impotence as a man and as a writer and indeed on the impotence or even impossibility of literature at large, this lyrical side does progressively fade away together with the narrative proper, as if the two were somehow tangled – leaving only a blank space, a mirror that reflects nothing but itself. The only actual novel Landolfi will publish after *Cancroregina, Un amore del nostro tempo* (1965), barely has a plot at all; he'll compose instead several diaries, two plays (*Landolfo VI di Benevento* and *Faust '67*), themselves anti-dramatic reflections on the impossibility of action, collected articles, short stories that often take refuge in the pseudo-dramatic form of the dialogue in order to refrain from any narrative development, and poetry also written in an increasingly less and less poetic style. Paolo Zublena has studied this progressive scraping away of the shiny surface of Landolfi's writing, as if it were a skin that the author was somehow attempting to scuff, corrode, and inflict pain onto344; indeed, in one of his 'diaries', *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR*345, Landolfi explicitly states his being tired with the kind of 'artistic writing' towards which he can't seem to help but lean, and describes his useless attempts to distance himself from it in order to get an

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345 To be written in capitals without any accent, so that it could mean 'the fisherman's beer', 'the sinner's coffin' (Tommaso Landolfi, *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR*, Milano: Adelphi 1999, p 13), or indeed either of the other two possible combinations.
authentic glimpse of his own self\textsuperscript{346}. His style seems to him to be 'false' by necessity, because 'the feelings [he] express[es] are mostly false and rhetorical, too'\textsuperscript{347}, so that, one may conclude, the only way to write in a 'true' style would be by expressing the truth – but it is in \textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, a diary (the genre appointed to the expression of truth par excellence) that we find this sentence; except that, to add paradox to paradox, the book is not \textit{quite} a diary, and its narrator, as we discover only at one point rather far into the text, is not even called Tommaso\textsuperscript{348}.

Just as the narrative and lyrical factors disappear more and more from his later works, Landolfi accentuates their autobiographical element – which had never been missing, of course, as many if not all of his protagonists (from his earliest books till the very last ones) could easily testify, but becomes in his so-called second phase a fixed,

\textsuperscript{346} “Ma c’è di più: fatalmente la mia penna, cioè la mia matita, piega verso un magistero d’arte, intendo verso un modo di stesura e di composizione che alla fine fa ai pugni colla libera redazione propostami, e di’ pure colla mia volontà di scansar la fatica. Non potrò dunque mai scrivere veramente a caso e senza disegno, sì da almeno sbirciare, traverso il subbuglio e il disordine, il fondo di me?” (\textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, cit., p. 18)

\textsuperscript{347} “Per forza, la mia scrittura è falsa: falsi e retorici sono anche in gran parte i sentimenti che io esprimo”. (\textit{ibid.}, p. 115)

\textsuperscript{348} Critical bibliography about the much-debated autobiographical status of Landolfi's diaries abounds. See in particular Idolina Landolfi's “Nota al testo” in \textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, cit., pp. 139-155, and to Andrea Cortellessa's essay “Caetera desiderantur: l'autobiografismo fluido dei diari landolfiani”, in Idolina Landolfi (ed.), \textit{Le lunazioni del cuore. Saggi su Tommaso Landolfi}, Firenze: La Nuova Italia 1996, pp. 77-106. About the \textit{BIERE} specifically, we will only hint at the complex game of hide-and-seek that Landolfi is playing with the reader: for instance, before including in the text three letters sent to him by three women, the narrator states: ‘there is no pretense or counterfeiting here, nor any of those little games or expedients that made me famous in my day. I, Alessandro dei Tali, and indeed not just the usual character speaking in first-person, publish here three absolutely authentic letters […]’. (“Intendiamoci subito, e bene: qui non c’è finzione o contraffazione, né alcuno di quei giochetti o di quelle trovatine per cui andavo ai miei tempi famoso. Io, Alessandro dei Tali, e non già il solito personaggio che parla in prima persona, pubblico qui tre lettere assolutamente autentiche […]”, \textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, cit., p. 101). The narrator is also referred to as Alessandro in the letters following this declaration of sincerity. The family name of Landolfi's alter-ego is quite curious too: “dei Tali” follows the convention used in some parts of Italy – such as Dante's Tuscany – during the Middle Ages to refer to the (patrician) family a person was related to (e.g. Lorenzo de' Medici; as opposed, for instance, to the French custom of indicating the person's fiefdom), and yet “un tale” means in Italian a nondescript person, 'a guy'. The resulting name seems to tell the reader that the author did not even bother coming up with a credible pseudonym, or giving his narrator/alter-ego as much as an iota of diegetic reality, precisely while declaring not to be 'just the usual character speaking in first-person'.

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distinguishing feature of his work. Autobiographical writing was considered in hindsight by the founder of the review *La Voce*, Giuseppe Prezzolini, as an antidote to the kind of fragmentary lyricism (“*frammentismo*”) that according to him only came in a second phase and somehow betrayed such writing and its original research for truth\textsuperscript{349}. Critic Giacomo Debenedetti disagreed, as he considered “romanesque” truth the only kind of truth to be found in literature, whereas in an autobiography we could find at best a more or less accurate copy of that restricted and partial truth that is a single individual’s life\textsuperscript{350}; he ascribed to this autobiographical tension, as well as to the penchant for fragmentary lyricism, the substantial failure of all Italian attempts at novelistic narratives in the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{351}. Landolfi’s sliding from one of these poles to the other, and indeed to the one (autobiographism) specifically in order to refrain from the other (lyricism), might testify to a certain debt towards this kind of early 20\textsuperscript{th} century cultural milieu (making him, once again, not quite a man of his time but rather a man of a time imperceptibly gone already, as *La Voce* was founded the very year he was born) or to some similarity of vision at the very least. At any rate – if, of course, we are to believe his statements – this sliding towards autobiography seems to happen once again against his own will. In the same *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR* in which he declares his being weary of his own (*malgré soi*) masterful style, Tommaso/Alessandro complains about his frustrating impossibility to reach the third person he had always longed for, and about being doomed to the use of the first one (“*Così, su tutte le altre, si trova frustrata la mia antica e perenne aspirazione alla terza persona: son condannato, e forse per sempre, a

\textsuperscript{349} See *Il romanzo del Novecento*, cit., p. 48
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., p 49
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid., pp 48-52
A few years later, a similar stance will be discussed in a well-known scene in Carlo Emilio Gadda's masterpiece *La cognizione del dolore*: during one of his characteristic outbursts of rage, don Gonzalo Pirobutirro cries out for a few pages against the first-person personal pronoun “I”, which he famously defines 'the filthiest of all pronouns'. However, if the reader of Gadda's novel is presented with the rants of an idiosyncratic, neurotic fictional character, in the *BIERE* a diaristic “I” is speaking. Of course, Gadda's character is strongly autobiographical, and Landolfi's narrator is at least unreliable in his claims to autobiographicality – but even so, the author (or rather his alter-ego, Alessandro dei Tali) isn't complaining on an ethical or philosophical level, but rather referring specifically to a literary and compositional problem; indeed, to a genre problem. He misses the ability to write in the third person, which, together with other specific features such as the use of the past simple, is commonly perceived by the reader as an obvious, revealing sign that what one is reading is fiction.

Interestingly, since the book, as we remembered, does not just complain about the impossibility to write fiction, but also about that of writing a sincerely autobiographical

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352 *LA BIERE DU PECHEUR*, cit., p 15. This is the first page not printed in italics, after a complex paratext made of a series of epigraphs under the title “Tre poesie dell'autore, un passo del signor Eliseo Reclus, uno del signor Giuseppe Giacosa, il tutto per servire di citazione epigrafica” and an introductory note titled “Fatti personali e dedica”. Right before these lines, Landolfi complains about not being able to put together even 'the simplest short story' anymore. But later on in the text, he will observe that the third person for which he longs in vain should be 'a deep inclination of the soul' and not just a 'grammatical matter' (“Ed ecco anche il massimo effetto che possono ormai sortire i miei conati di terza persona. Quasi la terza persona non fosse un'attitudine profonda dell'animo, ma una mera questione grammaticale”, ibid., p. 88)


354 Or – quite on the contrary – historiography.
page (“falsi e retorici sono anche in gran parte i sentimenti che io esprimo”), it is precisely through a compositional and in fact grammatical mark – the usage of passato remoto, equivalent to the past simple – that Landolfi seems to offer to the reader an unforeseen helping hand in order to determine the actual autobiographical status of some of the events narrated in the BIERE. Towards the end of the book he tells the story of two women, Bianca and Ginevra, who had attempted to kill him on two subsequent days: the first one by locking him in a secret trapdoor in his own palace, the second one by shooting him with his own gun. And then, right after these two episodes, Landolfi begins a new chapter and writes:

Così, nello spazio di due soli giorni, due donne hanno tentato di uccidermi...e via discorrendo: non ho più voglia di seguitare su questo tono.

Invero queste ultime due giornate sono inventate di sana pianta. D'altronde è appena necessario avvertirlo, né c'è lettore un po' fine che non se ne avvedrebbe. Beh, inventate non proprio tutte: da un certo limite assai arretrato in qua. Ma a quel lettore medesimo non sarebbe difficile, suppongo, situare questo limite colla sola analisi della scrittura355.

We are suddenly told that whatever we had been reading in the preceding pages of this 'diary' had been, in fact, entirely made up, at least after a certain point that – Alessandro is sure about it – could easily be spotted by the simple means of an 'analysis of [his] writing'. Now, at the conclusion of the first episode – that of Bianca – the narrator had wondered:

Ebbene, mi piacerebbe ora sapere perché io sia in queste paginette scivolato dal passato prossimo al remoto. Ma la spiegazione deve essere la più semplice e qui le preoccupazioni letterarie non devono entrare per nulla. Questa cosa è avvenuta ieri, e a me sembra già d'un lontano passato: tanto è debole la mia coscienza della realtà.356

355 LA BIERE DU PECHEUR, cit., p. 130
356 Ibid., p. 124
Landolfi asks himself why he had switched tenses (from passato prossimo to passato remoto), but then – as if trying to persuade himself – states that literary concerns mustn't play a part here and the likely explanation is simply that the events already seem to him to be distant in the past. Let's sum up what had happened in the text. Bianca, we had been told, was a woman whom the narrator had tried to seduce for a very long time – thirty years, no less – and who had always refused to surrender to his advances. This time, he received her at his place with “i soliti abbracciamenti sfiniti e senza futuro”\(^{357}\), then brought her to a bedroom, where their flirting and petting went on for a while; but all of a sudden, to his great surprise, she gave in – and he panicked. She gave in: 'to whom or to what, to what violence? Where had I the valor needed for the challenge? Realizing this [...] she stood up\(^{358}\). Some kind of sexual impotence seems to be implied here, as well as in other parts of the book, and could in fact contribute to explain his awkward behavior with the several women wooing him throughout it – a sexual impotence also referred to, for instance, in several short stories of the later collection A caso (1975), but which is relevant to us only insofar as it could be seen as some sort of narrative correlative to a more profound kind of (existential and) literary impotence. Be it as it may, the scene we have summed up started outside the narrator's house in the passato prossimo – a composite tense corresponding to the French passé composé and traditionally not employed in literary narratives – then moved to the imperfect while describing the petting

\(^{357}\) Ibid., p. 119
\(^{358}\) “[...] ella s'abbandonava, cedeva... Oh, eccoci al punto: a chi o a che, a quale violenza? Dove avevo io il valore necessario all'impresa? Di questo avvedendosi ella [...] si levo” (ibid., p. 120)
on the bed, and only reaches the *passato remoto* 359 with that verb: “si levò”, she stood up from the bed. From then on, Bianca seems to be a bit distant but not too upset – until she tries to murder the narrator (the whole scene, from her standing up till the attempted killing, is described in the *passato remoto*, right until the narrator asks himself, as we have seen, why he did switch tenses in the first place). In the following chapter another woman, Ginevra, visits Alessandro, complains to him about his behavior with her, finally sits on his lap and tries to kiss him (once again, this whole part is narrated at the *passato prossimo*) – but he doesn't kiss her back. This time, he explains that he might very well have kissed her, as 'it's not like [he] cannot somehow kiss a woman back after all' 360, but some nondescript physical flaw of (again) the girl – something, we are told, almost irrelevant but still unpleasant – makes him shy away. And once again, the narration switches to the *passato remoto*: Ginevra runs to his bedroom, takes his gun, threatens him and finally shoots (and misses). There are no final remarks about verbal tenses here, but the same verbal pattern of the previous chapter is repeated exactly; we may therefore assume that the switch to the classical narrative tense represented by the *passato remoto*

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359 With the exception of some brief parenthetical remarks already written in the *passato remoto*, previously offered to the reader in order to provide a bit of background information about Bianca's previous denials to Alessandro; it may be significant that these, too, refer to a condition of sexual impotence – except that whereas the following fictional narration in this tense somewhat covers the narrator's impotence by making up the unlikely story of the assassination attempt, here the *passato remoto* is used to suggest a possible frigidity on Bianca's part, again substituting a fiction to the narrator's actual responsibility and/or autobiographical “truth” (“Qui peraltro […] è necessaria un'ulteriore premessa. Sempre, considerando la sua resistenza davvero innaturale e il modo di essa, io sospettai non soltanto austera costei, ma altresì sofferente per qualche impedimento fisico o psichico, o comunque poco da natura disposta alla completa effusione dei suoi sensi […]”, LA BIERE DU PECHEUR, cit., p. 119).

360 “Non è che io non possa al postutto rendere come che sia un bacio a una donna”, ibid., p 127; one may notice, however, a brief parenthetical aside of the narrator during her long speech that, once again, might point to some kind of physical impossibility on his part: “[…] Lei si ostina a non crederlo, ma anche io ho un cuore; e son fatta d'ossa, di carne, di sensi…’: (In sostanza tutte, e tutti, vogliono da me quello che io non posso dare).”
is an indication of the switch from 'autobiography' to fictional narration that allows for the “romanesque” episodes of the attempted murders. We can also observe some sort of double self-sabotage at play here, in typical Landolfian fashion: on the one hand, 'autobiography' undermines Landolfi's heartfelt attempts at pure narrative; on the other, fictional narrative jeopardizes the possibility of an autobiographical truth, of that glimpse into the true self that Landolfi, as we have seen, felt was always compromised in his work by an involuntary literary artfulness – which, of course, the passato remoto tense may exemplify as well as anything else.

After these accounts, as we know, Alessandro dei Tali seems to get tired of his game (and let's remember once again: 'there is no pretense or counterfeiting here, nor any of those little games or expedients that made me famous in my day'...) and plainly confesses to having fabricated them. But then he goes on wondering, within a few lines: “Ma ancora: si tratta appunto di invenzioni o non di immagini fedeli, anzi più vere del vero? A tutto ciò non so rispondere”361. In other words – it is perhaps fictional truth, or “romanesque” truth, that shines through the pages of this 'autobiography', lighting up its characters and making them 'truer than truth'362.

361 Ibid., p 130
362 Interestingly, Debenedetti – against the opinion of Prezzolini – judged 'the greatest writers of autobiographies' specifically by this tendency to let fictional elements sneak into their stories (while dropping hints to the reader about this mixed nature of the text), elements that would allow the 'petty autobiographical truth' to rise up to some higher, novelistic kind: “I più grandi scrittori di autobiografie, il Rousseau delle Confessioni, per esempio, non mancano di mettersi sull’avviso circa i coefficienti di simulazione o di dissimulazione che introducono nel loro racconto. Ciò è avvertito che, in certi momenti, abbandonano se stessi e creano, magari sulla falsariga di se stessi, un personaggio di invenzione. Ciò è un personaggio narrativo, quindi capace di durni, attraverso la verosimiglianza, una verità che ci implica, ci compromette, ci rischiera tutti quanti siano. Una verità sull'uomo, un proverbio sceneggiato su certe pieghe o inflessioni del destino che tocca agli uomini. Una verità, insomma, ottenuta tradendo quella circoscritta e, in fondo, gretta verità autobiografica, di cui Prezzolini fa l’apologia”. (Il romanzo del Novecento, cit., pp 49-50)
We have seen that while jotting down, in *Des mois*, a summary of sorts about the sequence of events that would constitute the story of Scinti, he dismissed the importance of such events as ultimately irrelevant. What actually matters, according to that passage, is not the plot but 'the roar of the river's overflow as the lord draws near' – i.e., the *effect*, or in other words the potential for an epiphany of the “romanesque” (which, of course, is embedded to some extent in the events themselves, in their choice and in their order, despite their alleged irrelevance). “Ciò che importa, invece, è lo scroscio della piena all'avvicinarsi del signore: difficile varcare il torrente, i contadini devono buttarcì grosse pietre, tendere una corda perché Landolfo vi si attacchi, eccetera”\(^{363}\).

The literary mode of romance, as defined by Frye and as some kind of container of the narrower literary genres of “legend, folk tale, *märchen*, and their literary affiliates and derivatives”\(^{364}\), would once again prove to be the natural place of emergence of “*ciò che importa*”, what really matters in the literary text – and once again, reaching it would seem to constitute Landolfi’s more authentic ambition as a writer (while also allowing him to attain the long-sought third-person of novel and *epos*). Moreover, romance – and specifically chivalric romance – already provides Landolfi with a handy, ready-made set of elements to be annexed into the story of Scinti, therefore relieving him of the boring duties of the plot-maker (others elements would come from the historical references to Landolfo III himself: an historical *epos* that could remind Landolfi of something similar to that subset of chivalric literature once devoted to the individual members of powerful noble families). Scinti – 'it's obvious' – finds a fair maiden at the castle. And so? 'And so

\(^{363}\) *Des mois*, *cit.*, p 36  
he falls in love with her'. 'And then, and then? Hunting, by Jove [...] and of course, the lord goes hunting in order to justify his presence at the castle [...] And so on...'. But as much as this adherence to the tropes of a given genre, one could imagine, would be useful to an aging writer who systematically complains about the progressive drying up of his own creative faculty, Landolfi's penchant for romance seems to reach much deeper.

We will see how romance, and the genres it encompasses, are explored throughout Landolfi's narrative production: the debt and tension towards them, still evoked in longing tones in Des mois (when Landolfi had more or less concluded his career as a writer of narrative already), are clearly visible from his very first books – one can think of the short stories “La morte del re di Francia” or “Il mar delle blatte”, published in his first and second collection respectively – and constitute a hallmark of his entire novelistic work. This includes his so-called “first phase”, which certainly did not show any lack of creativity; we will uncover some of the hypotexts chosen by Landolfi as inspiration for his novels, which get readapted with no want of imagination into his own plots and work, at the same time, both as a semi-hidden connection to the romantic genres they embody and as plot-generating machines, repositories of tropes to be mixed and matched for making up narrative frames – the indifferent 'data constituting the groundwork on which literature can be built. Moreover, to him who is able to identify the hidden hypotext or simply to pick up the set of generic associations it entails, the genre evoked in a piece of literature can already suggest some possibility of meaning – even some possibility of truth: the narrative, or more specifically “romanesque” truth that Alessandro dei Tali

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365 “E poi, e poi? Caccia, perbacco […] e naturalmente, il signore va a caccia per giustificare la propria presenza al castello […] E così via...” (Des mois, cit., pp. 42-43)
briefly envisions in *Des mois*. We will try to isolate such elements in one of Landolfi's novels and proceed thence to discuss what the employment of romance and of its genres in Landolfi's fiction can tell us about the latter's meaning, and how this very employment is staged and put *en abyme* in his narratives.

### 3.2 Autumn Sorceries. Landolfi, Eichendorff, Shakespeare

In 1942, Bompiani published an anthology of German literature, titled *Germanica*, edited by Leone Traverso, an old acquaintance of Landolfi's. Traverso had appointed their common friend Carlo Emilio Gadda with the task of “tempting” Landolfi, whom he would have liked to collaborate to the anthology, by proposing him to translate Schiller's 1789 *The Ghost-Seer (Der Geisterseher)*, an unfinished Gothic tale that dealt with themes of occultism, debauched aristocracy, and necromancy; such a choice was meant to arouse Landolfi's interest\(^{366}\). However, the latter chose instead to provide Traverso with the translation of some fairytales by the brothers Grimm, and of a lengthy excerpt from Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In the same subsection of the book (the one devoted to Romanticism – the book being structured chronologically) was also published a translation, by Bianca Ugo, of Joseph von Eichendorff's 1808-1809 tale *Die Zauberei im Herbste*, under the title “Sortilegio d'autunno” ('Autumn Sorcery')\(^{367}\).

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\(^{367}\) In Leone Traverso (ed.), *Germanica*, Milano: Bompiani 1942, pp. 578-592. The introductory page presenting Eichendorff would probably have resonated with Landolfi: “Nato un minuto troppo tardi diceva di sé Eichendorff; e arrivato – si può dire – a tutte le tappe della sua vita un minuto troppo tardi, quando la stanchezza aveva ormai esaurito ogni piacere e curiosità dell’attesa” (p. 577). I will refer to
As it is, to my knowledge, yet to be noticed, this text constitutes an important basis for Landolfi's own novel *Racconto d'autunno* ('Autumn Tale'), to be published a mere five years later. It isn't possible to ascertain whether Landolfi, more than well acquainted with German literature and especially with German Romanticism, discovered *Die Zauberei im Herbste* under such circumstances for the first time, or perhaps was simply reminded about it by its appearance in the anthology (not, at least, until Landolfi's manuscripts and the books in his personal library will be made available to scholars by the writer's heir). However, the coincidence is a singular one and the influence of Eichendorff's tale upon *Racconto d'autunno* is remarkable, and most certainly not limited to the title.

Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno* has a strikingly Gothic atmosphere, which has been duly noted by critics.\(^{368}\) Indeed, one might say that the bulk of Gothic tropes is present here: the mountainous setting on the Apennines; a decayed and incestuous rural nobleman; scary, wolfish hounds; a haunted (or haunting) picture; morbid sexuality; an isolated, labyrinthine manor-house; portrayals of dark femininity; folly or possession; and the evocation of the dead. The setting is that of the last months of the Second World War; but contrary to most, or indeed all, Italian Resistance narrations (*letteratura resistenziale* – a rich literary current, inextricably tied to *neorealismo*, that flourished in the ten years after WWII but contributed to shaping Italian culture for a much longer time), Landolfi,

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\(^{368}\) It is debatable, and it has been indeed debated, whether Italy actually ever had a specific Gothic tradition. With the possible exception of the Scapigliatura, in fact, this is not apparent, and one may have to search for subtler plays of influences and nuances than explicitly Gothic works. A useful overview is provided in Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis (eds.), *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic. Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Traditions*, Madison and Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press 2007
constitutionally averse to political discourse, only seems to resort to the war here as a mere narrative frame and device. This is indeed the first level in which we can observe at work the compositional hypothesis formulated in Des mois: “Si può da ultimo agevolmente supporre che la letteratura sia in una leggera, appena sensibile accentuazione di dati fornitici tal quali dalla realtà, o dalla più ignara storia d'avventure”. History (“dati fornitici [...] dalla realtà”) only serves as an indifferent pretext for the fictional text; upon the support of reality the unreality of supernatural events is built, generated, like in the plans for the Scinti story, thanks to the machine of generic tropes (“[la] più ignara storia d'avventure”) which the hypotext(s) help activate. This, in turn, helps further distance the text from history. Landolfi wrote in LA BIERE DU PECHEUR about his (or Alessandro's?) wartime memories, which were paradoxically happy ones but did not involve any fighting (very much like in Mandiargues's case). Just like, when briefly imprisoned at the Murate jail for antifascist conversations, Tommaso/Alessandro had allegedly lived one of the most cheerful times of his life – thanks to a 'negative freedom' that deprived him of 'any thought and any possibility of action and choice'\footnote{\textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, cit., p 98} –, life in hiding on the mountains, escaping from the forced recruitment by the Germans, presented him with an unprecedented bliss. Once again, he felt like the weight of choice and responsibility was taken off his shoulders – including any kind of moral responsibility, if, when witnessing the bombings, he somewhat enjoyed them aesthetically (describing the sounds as music and poetry, and the pleasant view of the warheads' smoke)\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p 97. Adding paradox to paradox, these are obviously Futurist tropes – expressed in a passatista}. Indeed, this new life seemed to suit him all too
well; in addition to the gleeful irresponsibility, he enjoyed the kind of atmosphere that is
to be found in children's games, complete with costumes and a setting in the wilderness
(and only lacking perhaps Indian headdresses: “un grande e generale gioco fanciullesco,
cui magari solo mancavano, su per quelle balze, le penne dei pellerossa”\textsuperscript{371}). Just like in
the games of chance of which Landolfi, as a gambler, was particularly fond, and just like
in romantic literature, it was of course the opposition between game and routine, the
extraordinary and the unpredictable versus real, ordinary life, that made these
circumstances so memorably happy (circumstances which provided not only a great game
to play, but playmates as well – although forced ones). At one point, however,
Tommaso/Alessandro got tired of this life, and also fancied experiencing the fun and
'undoubtedly exceptional life conditions, with several species of banknotes and
whatnot\textsuperscript{372} that were to be found in the already-liberated parts of Italy; and thus decided
to leave, cross the enemy lines, and offer his services to the Allies, as if looking to
exchange one kind of adventurous, “romanesque” existence for another, or to switch
literary genres as it were. But the day he was going to leave a light snowfall came: he
looked out of the window and postponed his departure – indefinitely.

The reader is presented with a somewhat analogous situation in the incipit of
\textit{Racconto d'autunno}. We don't get to know whether the protagonist and narrator is a
resistance fighter or simply someone trying to get out of the way, and of the war. This

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\textsuperscript{\textit{371}} \textit{Ibid.}, p 98
\textsuperscript{\textit{372}} \textit{Ibid.}, p 99
ambiguity is carefully created since the very first page, already setting the story very much apart from most Resistance narrations – indeed, Landolfi does not even bother to call the two opposing armies by name, plunging them into some kind of moral night in which all cats are grey; they are just defined as 'the invader' and 'the other one, known as the liberator' ("l'invasore, che lentamente s'andava ritirando, attraverso il paese, davanti all'altro, detto liberatore"; and if the 'invader', i.e. the Nazi-fascist army, is presented as the true problem here, one cannot but observe that the definition of the Allies seems to be even more contemptuous – the conclusion of the novel will somehow justify this a posteriori, as we'll see).

All we are told is that, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator's life had long been "quella del bandito, anzi, avuto riguardo ai luoghi più o meno impervi che frequentavo, del brigante, di continuo braccato". The clarification – brigante, better than bandito – helps better define the setting geographically and, at the same time, abstracting it historically, as the term brigantaggio, an ancient and widespread phenomenon in Italy, had come to indicate more specifically the activities of bandits in the South of Italy and even more so, those which happened during the 18th and 19th centuries before and immediately after the unification of Italy. The phenomenon had long been considered in chronicles, historiography and literature, and Benedetto Croce himself devoted an essay

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373 “Inoltre le esose pretese, in uomini e materiali, d'uno di questi eserciti (l'invasore, che lentamente s'andava ritirando, attraverso il paese, davanti all'altro, detto liberatore), nonché spirito patriottico o compromissione politica, costrinsero numerosissime persone a cercar rifugio per lunghi mesi o anche per anni in posti selvaggi [...] Dove, coloro che ne avevano la possibilità o se ne sentirono il genio, si organizzarono per una residenza armata o addirittura per l'offesa, altri resisterono almeno passivamente alle imposizioni degli invasori, altri infine badarono soltanto a togliersi dal folto della mischia. Poiché, dico, appartenevo a una di queste categorie, la mia vita fu lungamente quella del bandito [...]” (Tommaso Landolfi, Racconto d'autunno, Milano: Adelphi 2005, pp 11-12)

374 Ibid., p. 11
375 Ibid., p 12
to a famous brigante;\textsuperscript{376} but of course, the romantic figure of the brigante could not fail
to bring to mind folktales, adventure novels, and the (often Italian) highwaymen of early
Gothic fiction – suffice to think of the \textit{Mysteries of Udolpho}. In Landolfi’s first novel, \textit{La pieta lunare}, an important role was played by the ghosts of the briganti, who
participated in the nocturnal sabbath on the mountain and evoked a rich corpus of
Southern legends later described by Carlo Levi in his \textit{Cristo si è fermato a Eboli}.
However, this wink to one of the classical Gothic tropes often turns out to be, if not
deceptive or superficial, incomplete at least. \textit{Racconto d'autunno}'s narrator is living his
brigand life together with a band of his peers; but at the very beginning of the novel he is
left with just one comrade – and from that one, too, he parts ways in a late Autumn day
(because the invading army is proceeding to forced recruitments close by, as in the
autobiographical pages of \textit{LA BIERE}) after having established a place for their rendez-
vous for that night. This rendez-vous will never happen, as the narrator stumbles upon a
military patrol and has to run away from them till dusk, and figuring out that his comrade
would probably have experienced similar circumstances, decides there's no point in
trying to make it back to their meeting place. The plotline has already started to roll
alongside that of the \textit{Märchen} by Joseph von Eichendorff, \textit{Die Zauberei im Herbste}.
Here's the latter's very first, terse sentence:

One tranquil Autumn afternoon, when he was hunting, the knight Ubaldo found himself separated from his
company.\textsuperscript{377}

\textsuperscript{376} Benedetto Croce, \textit{Angiolillo (Angelo Duca), capo di banditi}, Luigi Pierro: Napoli 1892. In the years
following the Second World War the \textit{brigantaggio}, not much talked about during Fascism, will become
a fashionable topic again, both in literature and cinema.

\textsuperscript{377} Joseph von Eichendorff, “Autumn Sorcery”, in \textit{Fantastic Tales. cit.}, p. 19
If we remember the quotation from Des mois – a fictional plot might indifferently be built upon the simple facts of reality or upon those of “la più ignara storia d’avventure”, provided that they are subjected to a “leggera, appena sensibile accentuazione”, i.e. they are made into the “romanesque” proper – we can see not only that Landolfi builds the plot of his ghost story right upon the (normally almost sacred) material of Resistance narrations, but that a second filter is then inserted: that of the adventure tale, which Landolfi proposes in Des mois as the other example of a repository of facts capable of giving birth to literature once duly accentuated. Thus, history is first reduced to a plot device and then further distanced through its insertion into the framework of Eichendorff’s Märchen. This could also be part of Landolfi’s own, peculiar way of treating autobiographical material: a material both constantly showed off and constantly denied through the different phases of his œuvre, used as a deep emotional and inspirational kernel and concealed in aristocratic, or neurotic, modesty. Besides, for any reader familiar with the hidden original of Landolfi's plot, i.e. Eichendorff’s tale, whatever kind of business the protagonist might have in the war-ridden wilderness – either partisan combat or just hiding out – gets somehow demoted one step further by its structural equivalence to Ubaldo's merely recreative activity of hunting (in accord with the explicit reference to children's games in LA BIERE). However, even more than Landolfi's brief and more or less playful experiences as a wartime evacuee, what is at stake here on a biographical level is a far more disturbing event – namely, the partial destruction of his family house in Pico during the war. He had escaped the house only to find it, on his return, wrecked by the bombings and ravaged by its wartime use as a lodging and defensive position by the Germans first and by the French and the Algerians
afterwards, and finally as a shelter for groups of evacuees. Idolina Landolfi, the writer's
daughter, gives a brief account of the facts (which are also referred to in *LA BIERE DU
PECHEUR*, in the 1954 collection *Ombre*, and in the 1977 poem collection *Il
tradimento*, where the crumbling house is defined “il Ricettacolo dei sogni”, 'the
The destruction of the family house was a deeply traumatic event for Landolfi, who went
back there right after the war, found it in such conditions, and settled there in order to
write the ghost story of *Racconto d'autunno* in a couple of months.

It is perhaps partly because of Landolfi's proverbial reticence and of his never-
ending, well-known game of masks that he doesn't seem to be able to discuss even
circumstances that had been so personal and painful to him without recurring to a double
literary filter. (The old count, in *Racconto d'autunno*, will talk about some soldiers having
entered the manor house as of a 'profanation': an expression that the narrator will
remark as a bit odd or exaggerated, but in fact – apart from having a precise diegetic
significance, since the manor house, we'll later learn, has been transformed into some sort of shrine for the dead countess and is seen by the narrator, too, as the countess's very embodiment – does resonate perfectly with the accents used by Landolfi himself about the family house in Pico). The Gothic framework is the most visible (and, so far, the only noticed) generic device here, but on a deeper structural level – albeit somehow declared in the tale's title – there's another one at work: the adventure tale, like the one prospected in *Des mois* about the Scinti, and more accurately the romance, in the specific genre of the *Märchen* (with medieval, ballad-like resonances not unlike those of the Scinti itself).

*Die Zauberei im Herbst* does in fact function as some kind of *canovaccio* for *Racconto d'autunno*, making up not only the general scheme of its plot, its *coup s de théâtre*, its atmosphere and setting, the late autumn timeframe, and some of its principal characters (indeed, a reader happening to know Eichendorff's tale will already have a precise key for deciphering and anticipating characters and events), but even a few punctual elements of the décor, as it were – like Raimondo's crumbling palace, parallel to the decay of the count's manor house at the end of *Racconto d'autunno* and mirroring the destruction of Landolfi's family house in Pico. The hypotext – or rather, as we'll see, the hypotexts – provide an effective plot-generating machine, relieving (up to some point) Landolfi of the duties of the plot maker.

After being separated from his companions, Ubaldo, riding in the mountain woods, stumbles upon a man (riding alone in the woods, as fairytales and chivalric poems teach us, happens to be the most convenient way to stumble upon somebody). The man is dressed in rich, but very old-fashioned clothes; and since Ubaldo got lost, offers him shelter for the night. Seeing the stranger's cave, Ubaldo understands the man is a hermit;
but as the latter's clothing doesn't quite fit with the part, Ubaldo asks him to tell his story. The hermit, in turn, asks Ubaldo not to inquire further. In the middle of the night, though, the knight is woken up by the hermit singing a dark hymn to God (partly about how sin, and worldly images, keep him from true worship), and then mumbling "an imperceptible prayer that resembled a confuse magic incantation"\(^{385}\). Ubaldo leaves on the morning after, but he will come back again and again and make friends with the hermit, who, he guesses, is trying to atone for some serious wrongdoings but is hardly able to dominate his "restrained earthly anxiety"\(^{386}\).

So far, the plot is almost exactly replicated in Racconto d'autunno, although with one basic inversion. Landolfi's old count\(^{387}\) doesn't quite invite the narrator to stay over for the night; indeed, the latter, hungry and lost into the mountainous wilderness, finds the former's manor house and has a hard time trying to get in, so much so that he starts thinking the place might be deserted. Nobody answers at his knocking on the main door nor at his rifle shot, and only after a long time does he manages to break open the lock of a backdoor, gets into some kind of Mexican standoff with two giant hounds, and finally, after three chapters, meet the landlord – who's keeping him at gunpoint. The count, like the hermit, is dressed in rich but faded, old-fashioned clothes; unlike him, he does not stand out for his hospitality. Reluctantly, he will allow the starving narrator to eat and sleep there. On the morning after (we don't get to overhear magic-sounding words during the night...yet) he'll tell him that, because of unspecified circumstances, he isn't able to

\(^{385}\) Fantastic Tales, cit., p. 20

\(^{386}\) Ibid., p. 21

\(^{387}\) Recognized by the narrator, thanks to his coat of arms, as one of the 'rare counts of Germanic origin' of the South (Racconto d'autunno, cit., p 51) – a detail that might obliquely refer to the Lombard heritage of Landolfi, or perhaps to Eichendorff himself.
offer the hospitality that would normally be customary for his family; and while not kicking the narrator out just yet, the count lets him understand that he isn't welcome to stay for a long time, and tells him he is counting on his discretion.

Back in Eichendorff's tale, at this point a feminine presence enters the story – and will dominate it till the end. Let's briefly recap the rest of Die Zauberei im Herbst: after some visits, Ubaldo gets the hermit to come over to his castle and persuades him to tell his story. The hermit, we learn, had been a knight himself, and at one point was supposed to take the cross and embark for the Crusades with his best friend; but then he let the other go alone, because he had fallen in love with a girl who was also present at the friend's farewell party. From then on, the narration quickly plunges even deeper into romance and the Märchen. Out hunting, he heard horns playing and a song being sung, which shocked both his falcon and him; following the sound, he found a castle in whose garden was the girl he loved. There she declared her love to him; revealed him that his treacherous friend did not leave at all for the Holy Land and would have come back on the following day in order to take her to a faraway castle; and told him that only his friend's death would have allowed them to see each other again. The knight slept in the garden, went hunting again on the following day to get distraction, followed a marvelous bird and found a lake where many beautiful girls were bathing, among whom was his beloved. He ran away, obsessed by the vision of such beauty, by the sound of horns, and by the remembrance of her ominous words – and the savvy reader can easily see the figure of the belle dame sans merci (as brilliantly studied in Praz's 1930 classic essay La
carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica\textsuperscript{388} being outlined. Night fell, and on a high crag the knight found his friend; they fought, the friend got killed, and the knight rushed to reclaim the damsel, finally his “on earth and in hell”\textsuperscript{389}. (At this point, the hermit's narration is interrupted: a strange music is heard from outside Ubaldo's castle, and Ubaldo explains to his very upset guest that “they say that in the neighboring forest there exists a sorcery. Very often, on Autumn nights, that music reaches [the] castle\textsuperscript{390}.”) The knight went on to live with her, reveling in earthly delight, even though the last days of autumn always made her deeply melancholic – but then, one night, he woke up to find her sleeping, as white as a corpse, and heard men talking obscurely under the keep's windows; he felt a sudden, unexplainable terror, ran away and away, and found that it wasn't autumn as he thought, but spring. Confused, he decided to atone for his sins by becoming a hermit – although the world kept alluring him, and strange songs from the forest kept coming to him, especially in autumn. At this point, Ubaldo calls the hermit by name (“Poor Raimundo!”\textsuperscript{391}) and reveals that he was the friend who had left for the Crusades, that his wife – who had been present at the recounting of the story – was Berta, the girl Raimundo loved, that they recognized him only when he started telling his story, and that no part of it had happened for real. Ubaldo had actually left for the Crusades, he didn't fight Raimundo, and only on his return he married Berta, who had never seen Raimundo again after Ubaldo's farewell party. Raimundo shakes in horror, recognizes the other two, and again runs away. He reaches his old castle, which is now crumbling in

\textsuperscript{388} Mario Praz, \textit{La carne, la morte e il diavolo nella letteratura romantica}, Milano-Roma: Società Editrice La Cultura 1930, translated in English as \textit{Id., The Romantic Agony}, New York: Oxford University Press 1933

\textsuperscript{389} \textit{Fantastic Tales, cit.}, p. 27

\textsuperscript{390} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27

\textsuperscript{391} \textit{Ibid.}, p 30
ruins; he hears again the strange music, sees the marvelous “bird of the enchanted forest”\textsuperscript{392}, and glimpses, at one of the castle's windows, the blood-stained image of Ubaldo. Then, down in the valley, he sees the beautiful damsel again, still “in the flower of her youth”; “overcome by madness”\textsuperscript{393}, he follows the damsel and the melody into the forest, never to be seen again.

In \textit{Racconto d'autunno}, too, right after the “hermit” (i.e. the count, who lives a very secluded life in his remote house) is introduced, a cumbersome feminine presence starts looming over the story. I say looming, because she isn't presented to the reader in the flesh, as it were, for a rather long part of the novel; this helps maintain an atmosphere of mystery and expectation as the protagonist gets somehow trapped (albeit by his own will, and against that of the landlord) in the manor house, where he is stuck in a strange, suspended environment. When a peasant shows up to bring some food to the count, the narrator witnesses his departure with pain: for, as much as he and the peasant cannot communicate with each other, the latter is at least part of the realm of the living (or, as the text adds, of the 'almost living') whereas the former feels like he is stranded in that of the dead\textsuperscript{394}. In Eichendorff's story, the fairy palace where Raimundo has remained for an unspecified but at any rate quite long period of time likely represents some sort of realm of the dead (and he gets a glimpse into this when, waking up next to the fair damsel, he sees her as immobile, cold, and white as a corpse). The land where time does not pass, or flows at a very different speed (we'll remember that as soon as Raimundo runs away from

\textsuperscript{392} \textit{Ibid.}, p 31

\textsuperscript{393} \textit{Ibid.}, p 32

\textsuperscript{394} “Devo dirlo? Mi si strinse quasi il cuore a vederlo partire: se anche di un'altra razza, egli veniva tuttavia da un mondo di viventi, di semiviventi almeno, e a me pareva di essere in quello dei morti. E tuttavia non me ne andavo” (\textit{Racconto d'autunno, cit.}, p55)
the fairy palace he sees that it is spring, and not late autumn, out there in the world, and asks himself, “Where have I been so long?”\textsuperscript{395}, is a well-established folkloric trope, as is the equivalence between fairyland and the afterworld. In Irish and Scottish mythology and folklore, for instance, this equivalence is clearly stated: when the hero Ossian comes back from the Land of Youth (i.e., the afterworld) where he has been living with a fairy princess, he gets warned by her that he should not dismount his horse and touch the ground with his feet – but he does, ages three hundred years all of a sudden, and dies. The medieval atmosphere of Eichendorff's \textit{Märchen} – which, by the way, predates Keats' \textit{La belle dame sans merci} by only a few years – also adds to this suggestion. Just like in Celtic mythology, in fact\textsuperscript{396}, the knights errant of medieval romances often just happened to cross by chance the line between the worlds, and find themselves in the other one. Such is the case of Gawain at the Roche de Canguin in Chrétien's \textit{Perceval}\textsuperscript{397}, and such is the case of Tannhäuser, who is referenced by Italo Calvino in his introduction to \textit{Die Zauberei im Herbste}. The legend of Tannhäuser, as Calvino observes, also features another key element of Eichendorff's and Landolfi's autumn tales – that is, of course, the crucial feminine character we have mentioned, and its characterization as a dangerous and powerful \textit{belle dame sans merci}\textsuperscript{398}.

So, as soon as the narrator of \textit{Racconto d'autunno} begins to explore the manor house – which happens on the very first day he wakes up there – this feminine presence enters

\textsuperscript{395} \textit{Fantastic tales}, cit., p 29
\textsuperscript{396} Another example is to be found in the Welsh \textit{Mabinogion}, in which the prince Pwyll gets indeed separated from his companions while out hunting and finds himself in Annwn, the realm of the dead.
\textsuperscript{397} For some bibliographical references about this much-discussed topic see Arthur Groos and Norris J. Lacy (eds.), \textit{Perceval/Parzival: A Casebook (Arthurian Characters and Themes)}, London: Routledge 2002, pp. 95-96, n. 82
\textsuperscript{398} \textit{Fantastic tales}, cit., p. 17: “Eichendorff gives us a Romantic version of a famous medieval legend: Tannhäuser's sojourn in the pagan paradise of Venus, presented as the world of seduction and sin”
the narration. Some noises, and the constant feeling of being watched, immediately bring him to suspect that the count may not be the only inhabitant there, whereas the sight of the count coming back to the house and rather inappropriately carrying a black cabbage in his hands excludes the presence of any servants. Then, in the library (which includes a complete edition of Voltaire's works and a book with a nail scratch close to a love poem by Tasso, bringing the narrator into a sentimental mood) the narrator first finds a small, feminine satin box, then sees a portrait hanging on the wall: that of a woman in old-fashioned clothes\(^{399}\), apparently responsible for his feeling of being spied on yet again. The portrait — whose peculiar gaze reminds him of that of the old man and of the dogs, and seems to contain some “\textit{alta virtù magnetica}”\(^{400}\) — deeply upsets him; only another mysterious noise, distracting him, breaks the spell. Over the following days, as the narrator somewhat imposes on his unwilling host, he becomes progressively obsessed with the portrait. Once, the count makes a veiled reference to his having been married and then gets mad at narrator when the latter points at the portrait. After that, the narrator begins considering the woman in the portrait as “\textit{una presenza cara, e inquietante, e se temibile, di nuovo cara}”\(^{401}\) as well as the most important inhabitant of the house — indeed its personification — and to feeling like the portrait conveys something of its model's own nature, “\textit{una natura [...] persistente oltre la presenza fisica}”. He will also go on hearing noises, suspecting secret passageways that may host a secret inhabitant of the house, and

\(^{399}\) Including a tiara on her forehead, like Eichendorff's maiden: “\textit{La massa dei capelli bruni era pettinata in conseguenza, cioè in ampio cercine o cannuccio attorno alla fronte, in mezzo alla quale spiccava un minuscolo diadema in forma di corona}” (p. 47) we read in \textit{Racconto d'autunno}, whereas \textit{Die Zauberei im Herbste} talks about “her golden curls, which were held in place by a diadem of precious stones above her forehead” (\textit{Fantastic tales, cit.}, p. 24)
\(^{400}\) \textit{Racconto d'autunno, cit.}, p. 47
\(^{401}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52
looking for him or her – to no avail, though, due to the manor house’s labyrinthine nature. Although still elusively, and while being mostly defined by its absence or imperfect presence (expressed by a faint human smell and obsessively heard noises reminding us of the sounds and songs haunting Eichendorff’s Raimundo), the feminine character is extending over the narration. The narrator will finally manage to find the room he suspected could be communicating with his own through a secret passage; indeed, he’ll even find the passage itself. This allows for a preeminent invasion of the narrative by an already heavily-used trope of genre fiction (after, that is, the *briganti*, the isolated manor house, the solitary old nobleman with his hounds, and the perhaps magical portrait), so much used in fact as to flirt with self-parody, popularized by genres as diverse as Gothic fiction (think of *The Castle of Otranto*) and adventure tales (such as Alexandre Dumas’s, Maurice Leblanc’s, or Salgari’s novels, popular with generations of Italian kids). At this point, however, the narrator has begun to believe that the count must really be the only one living there; but another “romanesque” gimmick comes into play – the shawl of the woman in the portrait, left on a chair in the secret room he has entered. The shawl is by this point already an obvious signal to the reader, and it will come back once more in a key point of the plot; the very words used for referring to it (“*zendado*”, a fine silken cloth, and “*amoerro*”, mohair)\(^{402}\) are remarkably old-fashioned, somewhat reinforcing the impression of some reference to pre-existing literary modes.(This is a common feature of Landolfi’s writing, whose high degree of literariness always makes it sound as if it were imitating, referencing, or parodying some other text, and shrouds it in a Mannerist *ottocentismo* that replicates forms and stylistic features like simulacra whose original lies

\(^{402}\) *Ibid.*, p. 64
nowhere, building up stylistic atmospheres, as it were, that would have the reader think Landolfi is hinting at specific works; it has been said that his writing was 'the pastiche of an imaginary pastiche'\(^{403}\). The shawl also persuades the narrator that the mysterious woman must be, after all, the other inhabitant of the house – while he realizes that she must be an old woman by now, he is somehow sure that she will not have aged at all, just like the fairy reappears in all of her youthful splendor at the end of Die Zauberei im Herbst (and, in more than one way, he happens to be right). In his further explorations the narrator will discover an underground cavern deep into the mountain (similar ones appear in La pietra lunare and in the later Cancroregina), complete with a dungeon cell with rusty chains, on which a bouquet of autumn roses is placed. Here's yet another trope that in 1946, when Racconto d'autunno was written, already belonged to a previous stage of literariness, a(n) (ab)used device that had already made the switch to the paraliterary realm of feuilletons – the cavern is a “cupo sotterraneo”\(^{404}\) where monstrous subterranean plants and mushrooms grow away from sunshine and horrible reptiles dwell, and which may have served to lock up the enemies of the count's ancestors. Finally getting out of the dungeon, the narrator enters a room that looks as if it were inhabited and is mostly colored in yellow, as are all the spaces linked to the mysterious woman – Eichendorff's fairy maiden being instead related to the color red. In the room he finds yet another object portrayed in the painting – this time it is the topaz necklace worn by its subject – and decides, once and for all, to get to the bottom of the riddle.

\(^{403}\) “pastiche di un pastiche immaginario”: Giacomo Debenedetti, “Il 'rouge et noir' di Landolfi”, in Id., Saggi, Milano: Mondadori 1999, p. 1236

\(^{404}\) Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 73
Before we move on to consider the key chapters that follow, I'd like to take a quick step back now. I have already hinted that Eichendorff’s Märchen only constituted one of the two most important foundations for Racconto d’autunno; the other one has also, to my knowledge, been ignored by scholarship so far, despite being responsible for the other half of the text's title – as well as for several of its narrative features, including the central episode to which I'll come back shortly. I am referring to another romance, and more specifically to a Shakespearian romance – namely, to The Winter's Tale.

We are moving back in time from Eichendorff, albeit remaining on the side of what Frye called “sentimental” or sophisticated romance; the play, in fact, is in turn inspired by Robert Greene's 1588 popular prose romance Pandosto. The Triumph of Time (as well as, to a lesser degree, to a handful of other rather high-brow texts deeply rooted, however, in folk culture)⁴⁰⁵. The Winter's Tale provides Landolfi with several key features for his own autumn tale, ranging from the generally thematic level to more specific plot points and narrative features – including, as we'll see, the one episode that proves to be crucial (although with very different outcomes) in both texts. The play begins by staging a warm, indeed royal, hospitality offered by Leonte, King of Sicilia, to his friend Polixenes, King of Bohemia, which like the hermit's hospitality to Ubaldo may provide an ironic background for the Landolfian narrator's intrusion upon a very unwilling host. Soon enough, however, the setting radically changes, and in act I, scene II, the deadly seed of jealousy immediately enters the picture (overturning Leonte's hospitality into an attempt to get Polixenes killed). A mad jealousy, and an immoderate passion, are indeed – as we'll

learn in the last part of *Racconto d'autunno* – the reasons for the count's dwelling in such solitary confinement. Moreover, other themes appearing in *The Winter's Tale* will come back in a stronger, undisplaced form in Landolfi's text, such as the wife's imprisonment (carried out, in *Racconto d'autunno*, in the cramped dungeon I have described), forbidden love (that of Florizel and Perdita in Shakespeare, and both that of the narrator and the count's daughter, and that of the count and his wife in their youth, in Landolfi, who doesn't provide any sort of happy endings), and indeed, incest, induced in both cases by the uncanny resemblance between mother and daughter, who even (sort of) share the same name, Lucia, in *Racconto d'autunno*. The crucial feature of the Shakespearian hypotext that we can easily identify in Landolfi's tale, however, is another one – perhaps its most “romanesque” one, namely the coming back to life of the statue of Hermione (which, as a matter of fact, is not a statue at all, but rather Hermione herself posing as one after having been hiding, bizarrely enough, for sixteen years: “If this be magic, let it be an art | Lawful as eating”\footnote{Act V, scene III, lines 110-111}, Leontes shouts out as he sees the statue moving and feels her warmth). We'll now see how this narrative device is evoked in *Racconto d'autunno*.

\footnote{The incest theme is only quickly hinted at in Shakespeare – in the last lines of act V, scene I – whereas Landolfi, while seemingly veiling the reference under the guise of the unsaid and of oblique allusions, is somewhat cruder in suggesting not just the potential for an unconsummated incest, but its actual having happened in the past: “Sicché neanche al la bimba mancarono sevizie e sviscerate prove d'affetto, ed anche nei suoi riguardi la gelosia di quel temibile e sventurato uomo raggiunse forme parossistiche. Ma troppe cose di costui e delle sue torbide passioni dovrei qui riferire, che mi porterebbero assai lontano; troppe cose che d'altronde soltanto indovinai dalle parole della fanciulla; da cui la mia mente stessa, ormai adusa al peggio, rifuggi con orrore, che mi porterebbero assai lontano; ma anche nei suoi riguardi la gelosia di quel temibile e sventurato uomo raggiunse forme parossistiche. Ma troppa cosa di costui e delle sue torbide passioni dovrei qui riferire, che mi porterebbero assai lontano; troppe cose che d'altronde soltanto indovinai dalle parole della fanciulla; da cui la mia mente stessa, ormai adusa al peggio, rifuggi con orrore” (*Racconto d'autunno*, cit., p. 113), and again: “Poi mi guardava a lungo, con occhi strani; ma anche tu, diceva allungando la mano, anche tu sei bella, sei tutta lei; e anche lui mi accarezzava a lungo, tutta. Era male, questo? Altre volte invece...” (ibid., p. 117).}
3.3 Evoking the Dead (Genres)

Once, at the beginning of chapter 12, Landolfi's unnamed narrator has decided once and for all that the house must conceal another inhabitant – and that, since the old count oftentimes disappears inside the house for extended periods of time, following him might just be the easiest (if not the least dangerous) way to find out about the mysterious third person – the plot enters its climactic zone. This corresponds to the introduction of a third important hypotext of *Racconto d'autunno* – one that, unlike *Die Zauberei im Herbste* and *The Winter's Tale*, is not openly hinted at in the title nor otherwise, despite, as we'll presently see, a quite lengthy verbatim quotation. As for the relationship of this hypotext to Landolfi's experiments with romantic genres, this is perhaps a tad less obvious than that of Eichendorff's and Shakespeare's romances, but I'll do my best to try and consider it in due time.

The hypotext is nothing else than Eliphas Lévi's *Rituel de la haute magie*. There is, to my knowledge, only one scholarly essay (and a fairly recent one at that) recognizing this debt, Keala Jewell's "Gothic Negotiations of History and Power in Tommaso Landolfi's *Racconto d'autunno*"\(^{408}\). I've also been able to find out in the private papers of Landolfi's daughter Idolina – preserved at the Centro Studi Landolfiani at the University of Siena, Italy – that she, too, had identified the reference to Lévi (or was, at any rate, well aware of it; there is no sure way of telling whether she had received this information from her father or discovered it herself – even though one of the two documents

referencing Lévi does it in the following fashion: “L'evocazione di Racconto d'autunno | citare p. 491 I | → (Elfas Levi!)”\(^{409}\), and the exclamation mark may suggest that this was Idolina's own finding).

Keala Jewell and Idolina Landolfi, however, while recognizing the long verbatim quotation – or, rather, translation – that Landolfi takes from Lévi, didn't notice how the pages leading up to it are themselves written in full observance of Lévi's instructions. Indeed, while introducing it rather surreptitiously (at least in comparison to the two major hypotexts that we have identified) Landolfi seems to follow Lévi's text almost to the letter – as one, after all, ought to do with a magical grimoire – with however the odd twist that he mixes and matches, as it were, two different parts of the *Rituel* into one apparently cogent ritual, as we are going to see. In a way, then, it could be said that Lévi's text – perhaps the most influential text of 19\(^{th}\) century occultism and an almost inexhaustible source of inspiration for Romantic and Symbolist writers, to whom Landolfi's affinity cannot be overestimated – works, just like Eichendorff's and Shakespeare's, as yet another plot-generating machine. The supposedly sacred (or, at any rate, magical) nature of Lévi's text does not necessarily imply an irreverent or desecrating attitude on Landolfi's part in its employment. While such an attitude is a trait that I'd be ready to attribute to the writer (who looked back with some sarcasm, as we'll see in the next chapter, to his youthful excursions in the realm of magic), Landolfi – in his own twisted, tormentedly ironic, self-deprecating way – didn't just feel a natural affinity for the Romantic writers marked by

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\(^{409}\) See the orange notebook of Pignastyl brand, included in the folder “Idolina landolfi | Taccuini”, in the “Fondo Landolfi Corrispondenza” case at the Centro Studi Landolfiani
some kind of mystical, or magical-religious inspiration\textsuperscript{410}, but most importantly always maintained an extremely high regard for literature, considered in terms that we could indeed define sacred. This was consistent with the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century cultural milieu that we have mentioned, and with its evolution into phenomena such as \textit{ermetismo} – to the theorists and practitioners of which Landolfi was personally close. Resorting (together with a text of Landolfi's much beloved German Romanticism and with one by none other than Shakespeare himself) to the solemn pages of Lévi's \textit{Dogme et Rituel de la haute magie} as a plot-generating machine might work in the context of the mixed feelings Landolfi seems to have towards plot (ostensibly dismissed as something that a chat with one's wife might be enough to establish) and narrative – which, after all and contradictorily enough, seems to have remained his highest ambition as a writer. At any rate, the most important function that I recognize in the use of this specific hypotext is quite a different one, and one that is closely linked to the Shakespearian hypotext as well – I'll come back to this in due time.

Now, to quickly sum up the events of the next climactic chapters of \textit{Racconto d'autunno} before the final denouement: the narrator follows the old count into a part of the house that he had never found before during his explorations; there he witnesses a ritual through which the count attempts to evoke his dead wife, interferes with it and thus effectively ends it; when the count fails to kill him, he flees the house.

Keala Jewell, while correctly identifying (as Idolina Landolfi also does) the provenance of the evocation liturgy as a verbatim quotation from Lévi's \textit{Rituel}, points out

\textsuperscript{410} See the folder “Landolfi. Miei appunti”, in the case “Fondo Idolina Landolfi. Manoscritti e dattiloscritti”, at the Centro Studi Landolfiani in Siena. I will make some additional remarks on the topic in the conclusion to this dissertation.
that its formulas actually pertain to a ritual (the so-called “Conjuration of the Four”) that, in itself, is not related with the raising of the dead\textsuperscript{411}. While this is correct, their employment here, as we'll see, is not technically out of place. The Conjuration of the Four is reported in chapter four of the \textit{Rituel}\textsuperscript{412}, but Lévi provides in fact a detailed how-to guide for necromancy rituals in chapter 13 (chapter 13 of the \textit{Dogme} is also titled \textit{La Nécromancie} and is devoted to the same subject, but – following the quite rigid distinction between \textit{Dogme} and \textit{Rituel} – from a theoretical point of view only). Each chapter of Lévi's book is also linked to a Hebrew and a Latin letter, to a Sephirah (in the case of the first ten chapters), and to body parts or other keywords indicated in the subtitle. Notably, given Eliphas Lévi's expansion on Court de Gébelin's extravagant theories about the true nature of the Tarot and his role in popularizing the game's supposedly hermetic-hieroglyphical origin and use, each chapter of the book is also linked to the corresponding Tarot trump (considering it nothing less than “la \textit{clé universelle des arts magiques}, […] \textit{la clé de tous les anciens dogmes religieux, la clé de la kabbale et de la Bible, la clavicule de Salomon}”\textsuperscript{413}, Lévi has been the first one to connect the Tarot with the Kabbalah and, through the chapters of his \textit{Dogme}, its twenty-two trumps with the twenty-two Hebrew letters\textsuperscript{414}, and moreover the four suits with the letters of the Tetragrammaton, and the ten minor arcana in each suit with the Sephiroth\textsuperscript{415}). The thirteenth trump of the Tarot de Marseille is normally just known as the \textit{arcane sans nom}, for it is the only one that carries a number but not a text caption

\textsuperscript{411} Keala Jewell, \textit{op. cit.} p. 19, n. 47
\textsuperscript{412} As I mentioned, the numerical value of the single chapters normally coincides with or alludes to some of their contents.
\textsuperscript{413} Eliphas Lévi, \textit{op. cit.} p. 296
\textsuperscript{414} This became a staple of some later Tarot decks, such as Papus's, Wirth's, and Crowley's.
\textsuperscript{415} Christopher McIntosh, \textit{Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival}, \textit{cit.}, p. 148
(whereas in the English-speaking world, in which the Tarot became popular with the later Rider-Waite deck, the trump is indeed captioned “Death”); it portrays a skeleton with a scythe mowing crowned heads in a scruffy meadow. Now, in Racconto d'autunno the evocation ritual is also appropriately described in chapter 13. However, neither Keala Jewell nor Idolina Landolfi seem to recognize that Landolfi’s debt to Lévi’s prescriptions is quite broader than the simple use of the Conjuration of the Four: throughout chapter 12, in fact, the reader is presented with an elaborate preliminary staging of the ritual that will take place in chapter 13 of Racconto d'autunno – a staging that follows most accurately the instructions provided by Lévi in chapter 13 of the Rituel.

The day appointed by the narrator for his final discovery of the house's secret by tailing the count turns out to be the very day appointed by the count himself for his own shady business (or, rather, his business with the shadows). The count unusually appears in his Sunday best – even though, of course, his dress is old and out of fashion, like the one he wore when the two first met and like the one worn by Raimundo at the beginning of Die Zauberei im Herbst. Indeed, in chapter 13 of the Rituel, Lévi – after having made a distinction between actual resurrection of the dead and necromancy rituals, whose goal is rather the temporary evocation of the dead's shadows in order to talk to them and ask them questions – further distinguishes between “évocation […] d'amour”416 and “d'intelligence” and prescribes, for the former, that one should dress up “dès le matin comme pour une fête”. The narrator is also struck by the fact that the count doesn't seem to eat throughout the day, despite disappearing at meal times. The latter finally stands up, at the time in which he usually excused himself during the previous days as well (“l'ora

416 Lévi, op. cit. p. 236
in cui il vecchio era solito assentarsi: the preparation leading up to the ritual, in fact, prescribes that for fourteen days a certain procedure is to be followed every night “à la même heure” – during this time, moreover, only a light daily meal is to be had, consistently with the count's habits, and besides, no token of affection is to be given to anybody but the object of the evocation, which might explain the count's scowling attitude towards the narrator). Thus, the narrator furtively follows him in what appears to be the best preserved and the most dignified part of the house, until the count enters a room and the narrator manages to sneak in behind him. The room appears to be the marital bedroom, and for sure “il suo sacrario”, her shrine, every single object of which carries the woman's trace (and her golden-yellow color), presumably preserved in this state by the count. The preparation of a similar shrine – in a room where the object of the evocation had lived, if possible – is a mandatory first step for the preparation of the ritual:

On doit d'abord recueillir avec soin tous les souvenirs de celui ou de celle qu'on désire revoir, les objets qui lui ont servi et qui ont gardé son empreinte, et meubler soit une chambre où la personne ait demeuré de son vivant, soit un local semblable, où l'on mettra son portrait, voilé de blanc, au milieu des fleurs que la personne aimait et que l'on renouvellera tous les jours.

The chief indication in these instructions – the presence of the portrait – is, of course, followed in Landolfi’s novel. If the writer allows himself to differ slightly from the occultist's text (the veil on the portrait isn't white, but rather a cloth of dark red velvet), he makes up for it by letting his narrator somehow recognize the painting's subject despite

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417 Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 82
418 Lévi, op. cit. p. 236
419 Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 83, author's emphasis
420 Lévi, op. cit. pp. 235-236

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the veil\textsuperscript{421} and by explicitly pointing out that the autumn roses placed – together with some objects such as the already mentioned shawl and topaz necklace – close to the painting might be the wife's favorite flowers, as per Lévi's recommendation ("forse i suoi fiori preferiti fra i pochi che l'aspra montagna produceva?"). We already know by the freshness of the autumn roses the narrator had found in the dungeon that they are appropriately renewed everyday. In front of the painting is also the explanation for the count's apparent fasting during the day and for his absences at meal times – a split bread and a glass that looks like watered-down wine (an explanation, at least, for the reader familiar with the unmentioned hypotext by Lévi\textsuperscript{422}). Even the wood ("ginepro o cipresso"\textsuperscript{423}) burned by the count in a "fiamma chiara" is consistent with the "feu clair"\textsuperscript{424} of cypress wood prescribed by Lévi, as are the seven-fold invocation of Lucia's name pronounced as the count throws frankincense on the fire, his subsequent letting the fire die while throwing some more frankincense on the coals, and, again, the gesture of covering his face with his hands.

Then the invocation starts. I'll note in passing that some observations by Keala Jewell seem to imply that she may not have been familiar, in fact, with chapter 13 of the \textit{Rituel de la haute magie}, and might have known only the fourth one (pertaining to the Conjuration), which could explain her failure to reference the rituals prescribed by

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\textsuperscript{421} "Perché lo chiamo ritratto e perché parlo di persone? Non so dirlo, ma fui certo alla prima che quello era il suo ritratto" (Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 86, author's emphasis)
\textsuperscript{422} "Le jour fixé pour l'évocation, il faudra [...] ne faire qu'un repas composé de pain, de vin et de racines ou de fruits; la nappe devra être blanche; on mettra aussi quelques gouttes de vin dans le verre de la personne qu'on veut évoquer. Ce repas doit être fait en silence, dans la chambre des évocations, en présence du portrait voilé; puis on emportera tout ce qui aura servi pour cela, excepté le verre du défunt et sa part de pain qui seront laissés devant son portrait." (Lévi, op. cit. p. 236)
\textsuperscript{423} Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 86
\textsuperscript{424} Lévi, op. cit. p. 236
\end{flushright}
chapter 13 in her essay. Commenting on Landolfi's remarks that the count's voice – when beginning to utter the invocation – seems not to be his own, and that he appears to repeat misheard suggestions made by somebody else or to identify with somebody else's 'memory, being, or essence', Jewell talks about “an astonishing 'she' whose voice substitutes for the Count's”\footnote{Jewell, \textit{op. cit.} p. 18} and goes on: “The female sorceress takes his role and acts by means of incantatory speech to command the spirits that can achieve her return from the grave. She relays power from one reign to another […] The sorceress defies the laws of the natural world […] The sorceress […] takes over the male Count, producing a gender hybrid”\footnote{Jewell, \textit{op. cit.} pp. 19-20}. As suggestive as this reading might be, it does not take into account the letter of Landolfi's text, nor that of Lévi's hypotext. First, the invocation we'll read in the following chapter of \textit{Racconto d'autunno} is in itself not aimed at commanding “the spirits” in order to force Lucia's return from the grave (as a matter of fact, as we'll see, it's not even explicitly stated that her resurrection should be the final outcome of the ritual at all) but is, rather, a “\textit{preghiera a un dio ignoto (o troppo noto?)}”\footnote{\textit{Racconto d'autunno, cit.}, p. 87}, a prayer to some god. Lévi states, in fact, that God has to be invoked “\textit{suivant les formules de la religion à laquelle appartenait la personne décédée}”\footnote{Lévi, \textit{op. cit.} p. 236}, and since Lucia had actually been in her life – as the narrator will learn from her daughter in the last part of the novel – a practitioner of magic, it makes sense that the Conjuration of the Four, with its repeated addresses to a higher God, is used here as the prayer of choice of the countess's
“religion”, that is to say occultism or magic itself\(^{429}\). (By the way, the Conjunction – a short version of which is also employed, to no avail, by Goethe's Faust in order to confront the demonic dog – is meant to dominate, according to Lévi, not only the spirits of the four elements but also, through them, the \(lumière\) astrale and all the forms and souls within it, including of course those of the departed). Secondly, and more to the point, there is no such thing as a “taking over” of “the male Count” by the “sorceress” resulting in a “gender hybrid”, nor does the countess speak through the count – at the very least, this is not the immediate suggestion of the text and even less so if one confronts it with its hypotext. Lévi, in fact, clearly states that “\(Il\) faudra, en faisant cette prière, s'identifier à la personne évoquée, parler comme elle parlerait, se croire en quelque sorte elle-même”, and this is by far the easiest explanation for the count's strange and a tad creepy way of speaking – which Landolfi (who does not talk about possession\(^{430}\)) explicitly links to an attempt at identification:

Ma la sua voce stessa, devo dirlo? non sembrava la sua, e le sue parole egli sembrava cercare a fatica, quasi taluno gliene suggerisse e lui non intendesse bene; quasi, in termini meno as surdi (eppure, che cosa non fu assurdo quella notte?) egli si studiasse con taluno di immedesimarsi; colla memoria, coll'essere o l'essenza di taluno. Non so come giustificare questa ingiustificabilissima fra tutte le impressioni, ma so che accolsi le sue parole, e persino le udii, come di altri. Come di lei\(^{431}\).

After this remark (and, indeed, a passing remark that may be the only veiled

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\(^{429}\) While discussing the other kind of evocation, the “\(évocation\) […] d'intelligence” (p. 235), Lévi states: “\(On\) commencera par une prière appropriée au génie de l'esprit qu'on veut évoquer, et qu'il pourrait approuver lui-même s'il vivait encore. Ainsi l'on n'évoquerait jamais Voltaire, par exemple, en récitant des oraisons dans le goût de celles de sainte Brigitte […] Lors de notre évocation d'Apollonius, nous avions pris pour rituel la magie philosophique de Patricius, contenant les dogmes de Zoroastre et les ouvrages d'Hermès Trismégiste […]” (ibid., p. 237)

\(^{430}\) The only possible hint is perhaps the narrator's rhetorical question after the invocation is pronounced: “\(Ma,\ mio\ Dio,\ se\ era\ veramente\ lei\ che\ parlava\ per\ sua\ bocca,\ che\ voce\ e\ che\ detti\ erano\ mai\ quelli?\)” (Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 92)

\(^{431}\) Ibid., p. 87
reference to Lévi's hypotext: the narrator says he is able to partially report the words of
the count's long invocation because of some 'circumstances which [he doesn't] have to
disclose' – and what circumstances other than the existence of a written text in which
those very words are published?432), the thirteenth chapter of Racconto d'autunno begins.

The Conjuration of the Four is uttered almost in its entirety, with the “oraisons” to
the Sylphs, Undines, Salamanders, and Gnomes, followed by (most of) the Latin
invocation that follows them (which appears, in Lévi's text, to be called “la conjuration
des quatre” proper). Landolfi likely had a first-hand knowledge of Lévi's original text,
since this seems to be his very own translation of the Rituel – only one Italian edition had
appeared by then, translated by Carlo De Rysky and originally published by Atanòr in
two separate installments, Il dogma dell'alba magia in 1915 and Il rituale dell'alba magia
in 1916 (later collected in a single volume in 1921). The text of De Rysky's translation is
not the text of the invocation we can read in Racconto d'autunno, nor it appears likely
that Landolfi – who was highly proficient in French, and might have come in contact with
Lévi's text at the time of his youthful dabbling into the occult and/or through his friends
in Florence, where an occultist milieu thrived – might have simply modified, for artistic
purposes as it were, the published Italian version (even though it is, of course, possible
that he had read it or even that he had it on his desk at the time he was writing his
Racconto). While Landolfi's version does omit a few sentences and words of the original
and adds, perhaps for effect, a few of his own coinage (also modifying, rather oddly, a

432 “[...] per circostanze che non devo qui riferire sono in grado di trascriverla in parte” (ibid., p. 87). True
enough, after some Latin formulas in the last part of the Conjuration – and just before some Hebrew
names are mentioned in Lévi's text – the narrator, who has faithfully reported the whole invocation till
then, concludes: “E altre frasi o formule del genere che non sarei in grado di trascrivere, queste” (p. 92,
my emphasis).
couple of single words), he does not in fact fall into the trap of the few typos or mistakes present in De Rysky’s translation\textsuperscript{433}.

The count pronounces the Conjuration, accompanied, after each of its four parts, by natural phenomena pertaining to the element he invoked: wind gusts after the oraison des Sylphes, sudden heavy rain after the oraison des Ondins, and so forth. In these scenic effects, one might see again a dash of the “appena sensibile accentuazione di dati fornitici tal quali dalla realtà, o dalla più ignara storia d'avventure”: as if literature, far from being opposed to it, consisted in the “roman-esque” effect itself. Then the smoke over the brazier seems to thicken. The count – in full observance, once again, of Lévi’s Rituel – calls Lucia's name three times, and finally her figure appears in the smoke\textsuperscript{434}. The narrator is terrified; the spectral image, he says, isn't the woman he thinks at this point he has a deep connection with, but rather an evil, infernal thing. He lets go a scream, she disappears, and the count – suddenly made aware of his presence – roars in pain and anger, points a gun at him and asks, pathetically, just “Why?”. Then, in a telling preterition, the count admits (to the reader in the know) both the reason for his past eccentricities and, once again, his adherence to the ritual exposed in the Rituel, stammering

\textsuperscript{433} Namely, De Rysky translates “parlez-nous dans le grandes commotions de la mer […] parlez-nous aussi dans le murmure des eaux” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 194, my emphasis) as “parlateci delle grandi commozioni del mare […] parlateci del mormorio delle acque” (Il dogma e il rituale dell’alta magia, Todi: Atanor 1921, p. 267, my emphasis); “profondeur, qui vous exhalez dans la hauteur” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 194, my emphasis) as “Profondo che nell'altezza ti esalti” (De Rysky, op. cit. p. 267, my emphasis); and “vous qui portez le ciel à votre doigt comme une bague de saphir” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 195) as “voi che portate al dito il cielo come forse un anello di zaffiro” (De Rysky, op. cit. p. 269, my emphasis; this is likely a typo for *“fosse”). Landolfi translates all of these correctly.

\textsuperscript{434} The process of her embodiment in the smoke is described by Landolfi at some length, with vivid and colorful effects, and it might be inspired by this passage in the description of the évocation d'intelligence: “On comprend assez, d'ailleurs, qu'un rayon de soleil ou de lampe diversement coloré et tombant sur une fumée mobile et irrégulière ne peut en aucune façon créer une image parfaite” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 237). The use of the brazier or tripod, which is not mentioned while describing the évocation d'amour, is also prescribed for the évocation d'intelligence, but in the thirteen chapter of the Dogme (which we can assume Landolfi knew as well) and not in the corresponding one in the Rituel.
'for fourteen days, I – 1435. The count then passes out before shooting, and the narrator flees the house. Once again, nothing is said about whether the evocation is aimed at talking with Lucia's ghost or at resurrecting her for good – the latter being, of course, the easier interpretation for the reader, especially if one doesn't know the *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* by heart, but in no way the only one authorized by the text; indeed, the former interpretation would be the only one authorized by a strict reading of the concealed hypotext.

Three more chapters and a short conclusion are left before the novel ends. The narrator comes back to the house and sees a woman he initially mistakes for the count's dead wife Lucia, whose clothes (including shawl and necklace) she's also wearing; but she is, he states, Lucia for real, unlike the ghost evoked by the count. She tells him that she's the count's daughter instead (who may or may not also be named Lucia436, but at any rate, that's how the narrator calls her); she speaks like a mad person, swinging from haughty disdain to the most tender accents. Then they move into the house and in her bizarre and touching way of talking, she tells him about her heightened senses and her animistic relationship with nature437 and inanimate objects; she says it was her who

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435 “Miserabile, morrete!’ disse sordamente; poi, con voce rossa dal tremore: ‘Da vent'anni...io...Ma non sapete, signore, chi sia, che cosa sia per me quella...? E da quattordici giorni...Perché, perché?...” *(Racconto d'autunno, cit., p. 97).* We have seen how the preparation to the ritual prescribed by Lévi lasted fourteen days.

436 The narrator says that, unable to distinguish between mother and daughter, he naturally called the latter with the former's name (“Poiché, curiosa logica dei sentimenti, non facevo distinzione alcuna fra la madre e la figlia, distinzione che ai miei affetti sarebbe apparsa superflua e persino sofistica, quasi un curioso inganno o un trascurabile particolare della realtà; e alla figlia davo senz'an altro il nome della madre, o della larva invisa”, *ibid.*, p. 105). When, three chapters later, Lucia persuades the narrator to flee the house again upon the arrival of the colonial troops, she tells him to 'do it for Lucia' (“tu corri, fallo per Lucia”, *ibid.*., p. 125). But she might be referring to the (nick)name the narrator made up for her, or indeed to her mother, or perhaps to some indistinct figure somewhat comprising both women.

437 This evokes, somehow, the nurturing by wild beasts that Leontes commanded for Perdita (*The Winter's Tale*, act II, scene III)
escaped and spied him in the house, and kisses him. The narrator begins to gather from her confused discourse something about her sad, lonely life. She tells him about her father the count, who married – against the wish of their respective families – a girl he loved too much, tells him about the sadomasochistic rituals the two lovers practiced together, and tells him how her mother was a magician and how she and the count had sworn to each other fidelity beyond the grave, making plans for a common afterlife together438. The countess had then died a sudden death – so sudden, in fact, that her soul remained bound to the people and objects she had loved439. The girl tells the narrator about (or, rather, hints at) the horrible abuses her parents had inflicted on her too; her mother had also threatened her (or, rather, foretold) that she would die on the very day she dared love somebody.

The narrator laconically states that this broken conversation, and their exchanges of affection, constituted their only, brief moment of happiness – a bit short of the “savage and ineffable pleasure [Raimundo] tasted in the arms of the damsel”440 in Eichendorff’s Märchen. There, Raimundo panics and escapes the castle after having seen the maiden lying cold and still like a corpse; in Racconto d’autunno, Lucia has an epileptic seizure on the bed on which they’re talking, and as soon as she recovers she hears – thanks to her preternatural senses – soldiers coming and (quite easily) persuades the narrator to flee again the manor house without her. However, he isn’t fast enough and gets ingloriously

438 See Raimundo’s shout at the fair(y) maiden: “Now you are mine, both on earth and in hell!” (Fantastic Tales, cit., p. 27)
439 A similar condition is described by Lévi in chapter 13 not the Rituel but of his Dogme: “Les âmes qui doivent vivre, mais qui ne sont pas encore entièrement purifiées, restent plus ou moins captives dans le cadavre astral […] C’est pour se dégager de ce cadavre que les âmes souffrantes entrent parfois dans les vivants, et y demeurent dans un état que les kabbalistes appellent embryonnat” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 116, author’s emphasis).
440 Fantastic Tales, cit., p 27
beaten up by the Allied colonial troops\textsuperscript{441}, until Lucia appears at the door perhaps in order
to distract them and is also caught by them; she shoots one soldier, but gets killed. When
the narrator wakes up next to Lucia's body a bird is singing in the distance, like the
magical one Raimundo sees close to his now ruined castle in the conclusion of \textit{Die Zauberei im Herbste}. The count's house, too, will progressively fall into decay, as the
narrator comes back every autumn to visit it and Lucia's grave, where the autumn roses
grow; “\textit{in giro c'è il medesimo silenzio, solo rotto dai medesimi solitari richiami degli uccelli}”\textsuperscript{442}. In the last lines, he asks himself whether Lucia's last words – 'we'll meet
again' – won't come true one day after all.

It is interesting to notice that in this book, set during the war and narrated by some
kind of resistance fighter, Lucia fires the only shot other than those of the colonial troops
– and even that shot doesn't save her.

Indeed, something about guns seems to be going on in \textit{Racconto d'autunno}. They are
mentioned and displayed with an almost obsessive frequency – which would be just
reasonable in a story that is introduced as some sort of \textit{narrativa resistenziale}, albeit one
of a kind, and that moreover plays with the tropes of \textit{feuilletons} and adventure stories
(“\textit{ignar[e] stori[e] d'avventure}”); after all, Resistance itself, as we have seen, is described
by Tommaso/Alessandro in \textit{Des mois} as “\textit{un grande e generale gioco fanciullesco, cui

\textsuperscript{441} The soldiers, described in stereotypically exoticizing and scary terms that wouldn't be out of place in a
19\textsuperscript{th} century feuilleton (“\textit{Bruni di carnagione e d'uniforme, parendo alle labbra e agli occhi gente
d'Affrica, avevano lunghi capelli inanellati sotto l'elmetto e cerchi d'oro alle orecchie […] nulla di
buono presagivano i loro ceffi, i quali avevano alcunché di crudele, di belluino e persin di diabolico”},
\textit{Racconto d'autunno}, cit., pp. 125-126), come from an African country previously colonized by Italy
(“\textit{in tempi precedenti avevano avuto a subire gravi torti, nel loro paese medesimo, dai nostri
connazionali}”, \textit{ibid.}, p. 126). Indeed, Algerian troops did station in Landolfi's family house in Pico.

\textsuperscript{442} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 130
magari solo mancavano, su per quelle balze, le penne dei pellerossa”, and there is a thin line between the make-believe games of children pretending to be in faraway countries and the children's literature that can nourish and be embodied by those very games. However, these guns never shoot. The narrator has a gun (not quite a blunderbuss, as one would imagine, but a hunting rifle) that he always carries around from the beginning, but it is utterly useless to him. While the weapon is often mentioned as the narrator repeatedly puts it in a corner in the living room, picks it up again and takes it around, all he ever manages to shoot are two partridges. When he is involved in a shootout after his first escape from the house, we are told that he gets wounded but nothing is said about him hitting his enemies; and in the final climactic fight with the colonial troops the rifle isn't even mentioned (and his guns are made useless as he is seized by the aggressors; indeed, he doesn't do anything more than some indignant talking⁴⁴³). The colonial troops also put down with one hail of bullets the two hounds, which had kept the inept (but armed) narrator at bay for two whole chapters at the beginning of the book and later dissuaded him from attacking the count when the latter wanted to kick him out. Indeed, the narrator realized in the latter circumstance, his 'violence' in imposing himself on the first night (to which more than two chapters are devoted) had only been apparent, as he wouldn't have been able to enter the house if the count really hadn't wanted him to. As for the count, he is described from the get-go as brandishing an old-fashioned, ineffective pistol (a 'hambone') that is enough to scare the narrator but never fires – indeed, once his ritual is interrupted, the count seems to forget that he has a gun in his hand, and falls

⁴⁴³ “Reagii vivacemente (a parole) alle loro ingiunzioni, accomunate da spintoni e manate […]” (ibid., p. 126)
down as from a stroke without shooting. The count's daughter, during the confrontation with the colonial troops, is the only character – apart from the troops themselves – to fire a shot and take down one of the assailants, after which her gun is grabbed from her and she gets killed. For all the guns and rifles mentioned in this modern-day adventure tale, this is the only bullet shot by one of its protagonists; and these useless weapons seem (quite like the sexual impotence implied in LA BIERE) to make a commentary on genres.

The hunting rifle and the count's nineteenth-century 'hambone' prove to be no match for the colonial troops' machine-guns; and that's because they seem to belong to another genre altogether – to the “romanesque”, daredevil swashbuckling of adventure books, which are no longer a feasible literary option as history, through its heavily armed harbingers, brutally reclaims its rights. As a sidenote, I'll also emark that Racconto d'autunno's narrator is perpetually on the run: he's hiding and escaping at the beginning of the novel, flees the house after the ritual, and once again flees it when the count's daughter hears the approaching soldiers and he agrees, somewhat less than gallantly, to run for his life and leave her there. This sort of behavior would also look a bit out of place in an adventure novel. If we choose to see in the narrator's perpetual escaping, as we suggested it might have been the case with Mandiargues's “L'Étudiante” as well, some kind of narrative pun on or dramatization of so-called littérature d'évasion avoiding the confrontation with the real, then we'll have to observe that this broad category also seems to be staged in its own failure, as once again the soldiers as representatives of history effectively put an end to the narrator's last and crucial escape (we'll remember that the novel had begun with another, specular escape from history as the narrator retreated from the civil war into the manor house, and from letteratura resistenziale into a Gothic tale or
a *racconto nero* in the Scapigliatura fashion). Moreover, the narrator's and the count's weapons belong to another time, as do the genres they could legitimately be used in and the bookish, intellectual characters brandishing them: a time different from that of history that has ravaged the palace in which Landolfi writes the book as it will ravage the manor-house of the count – the manor-house in which the unnamed narrator arrived sporting a big beard, like the beard and the adventurous costumes Landolfi himself enjoyed sporting while in hiding from that very history (save that, unlike his narrator, he never got to cross the enemy lines as he wished to do)\(^4\). History, indeed, proved to be no place for children's games, illustrated stories, and Indian headdresses – whose domesticated exoticism had to give way to the real-world radical alterity of the colonial troops.

This same inadequacy, and this same failure of a set of literary genres, seems to be even more obviously stated in the book's central episode, the necromantic ritual. We have mentioned Shakespeare's *The Winter Tale*, listing some minor features in the play that could relate to *Racconto d'autunno*, but hinted that the crucial symmetry between the two texts lay elsewhere – namely, in the staging of magic and even more so in that of a very specific magic ritual, the evocation of a dead wife. Shakespeare's Hermione, of course, is in fact in excellent health, despite her theatrical acting of the part of a statue coming to life. Not so for Landolfi's Lucia. She is dead for good, and only the desperate love of a

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\(^4\) See Tommaso Landolfi, “Introduzione”, in *Id.* (ed.), *Narratori russi*, Milano: Bompiani 1948, p. xv: “*Fu detto:* '[…] Ma io mi sono sorpreso mille volte a desiderare un'avventura di quelle narrate nei romanzi russi, a desiderarmi in una di quelle situazioni che sarebbero, secondo alcuni, la vita di tutti i giorni. Avventure, invece. E allora? E come volete che ciò ci fornisca una norma? […]’ I russi, in altri termini, non hanno mai contestati alla fantasia i suoi esclusivi diritti; pare impossibile, ma la tranche de vie, ad esempio, è genere sconosciuto alla grande letteratura russa. L'evidenza dell'eccezionale è costi promessa d'universalità […]'". 

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man who doesn't accept her condition, together with the dark readings the two of them had done in their youth, allow him to attempt to resuscitate her.

I will argue that here we are presented with the crucial metaphor of the novel, and indeed, for the purposes of our reading, perhaps of Landolfi's production as a whole. Lucia's ghost, as the narrator repeats in horror when he sees it take shape, is but "un'immagine perversa, terribile e cupa"\textsuperscript{445} that has nothing of the original. Hermione, posing as a statue while still warm and breathing, is in fact only representing herself; the ghost of Lucia is a simulacrum of something that has gone long ago and shall never come back: "Ma ella era ormai qui. No, che ahimè non v'era, non v'era più da gran tempo, e mai più vi sarebbe stata.\"\textsuperscript{446} The resurrection of long-dead literary genres is not possible; its only likely outcome would be a horrible caricature at best, a ghost that someone can create only by imitating somebody else's voice, as the count does.

The reading of Lucia's evocation ritual as a metaphor for the attempt at resuscitating past literary genres is perhaps reinforced by what the reader gets to know about Lucia. Both her powerful family and the count's had tried to prevent their marriage (the oldest trick in the book), and their subsequent brief life together involved "romanesque" activities such as practicing magic together or traveling to far Oriental countries, and is characterized in terms that look like they come from a Postromantic or Scapigliatura tale – the two went on to live secludedly, only absorbed in their excessive passion to the point of risking to go mad, and acted out this destructive love in literally sadomasochistic

\textsuperscript{445} Racconto d'autunno, cit., p 96 \textsuperscript{446} Ibid., p 93
performances in the dungeon\textsuperscript{447}, which partially reverberate on the weird games Lucia played with her daughter, piercing her with pins. It is romantic, and Romantic, literature in a nutshell; and both, perhaps, are meant to be abjured as the woman cannot come back to the world of the living\textsuperscript{448}. It can also be observed that for more than half the novel, while Lucia is absent, the genre mechanisms seem to lag in the long labyrinthine wanderings (hardly characterized by any action at all) within the manor-house. It is mostly through her absence (and/or through signifiers hinting at some imperfect presence, such as scents, sounds, or objects) that mystery and indeed the “romanesque” proper enter and shape a story that would otherwise mostly just concern an awkward landlord and a rude tenant. It is therefore only natural that the “romanesque” climax will be constituted by the introduction of Lucia herself, or rather of the signifier (the ghost evoked in the ritual) that has the closest connection with her.

Indeed, the staging of this ritual marks perhaps the highest point in the text's own attempts at genre fiction. It amplifies a certain spooky, witchy atmosphere already present in Eichendorff's \textit{Märchen} (already set in a palace that coincided with the afterlife to some extent), and it adds to the Gothic novel allure of the text both by the obvious introduction of black magic\textsuperscript{449}, thunder and lightning, and a resurrected ghost, and by its very referencing a text – Lévi's \textit{Dogme et Rituel} – which displays (even more so in its non-liturgical parts) a flamboyant purple prose and macabre descriptions that are every bit as

\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., p. 112. Mandiargues, of course, would have described at obsessive length these rituals, and Mario Praz would have immensely enjoyed them as well.

\textsuperscript{448} In the conclusion to this dissertation I will also point at some links between Lucia and another of Landolfi's characters, Gurù, whom according to Andrea Zanzotto may represent the poetic word in the novel \textit{La pietra lunare}.

\textsuperscript{449} The necromancy ritual described by Lévi is not strictly speaking a black magic one – indications as to the black magic variant of the ritual, much different from this, are given at the end of chapter 13 of the \textit{Rituel}.
good as the black charms of Gothic Postromanticism. As we have seen, the real aim of Lévi's necromancy ritual isn't quite an actual resurrection of the dead (which, at any rate, he deems possible) but rather, consistently with the etymology of the word (μαντεία) and its literary illustrations beginning with book XI of the Odyssey, the temporary evocation of the spirit of a departed for divinatory and conversational purposes. We have also remarked that Landolfi, as a reader of Lévi, was quite likely aware of this and that the actual aim of the ritual in *Racconto d'autunno* is not explicitly mentioned, although the narrator seems to think that the resurrection of Lucia should be its logical outcome. Even if this were not the case, however, an even more pessimistic view would emerge: not only an all-around resurrection of dead literary genres (specifically, in this case, the Gothic novel, the Märchen, and Shakespearean romance) wouldn't be possible – even the mere looking into them, relating to them, engaging with them has become an impossibility. Significantly, it is the narrator himself (somebody, moreover, who might share the same kind of perhaps antiquated cultural background of the count if he is able to report the text of the necromancy invocation) who interrupts and thus dooms the ritual; only later, in the last part of the novel, the external circumstances represented by the soldiers will definitely prove the failure of the genres the text tried to revive and embody. As always in Landolfi, some degree of confusion – or at least a complex relationship – between narrator (and/or main character) and author, of which the former represents a somewhat authorized literary counterpart, is present, and we can legitimately wonder whether this narrator does not act within the text as the spokesperson for the author's own position, and whether his doing away with the ritual does not reflect the author's own painful doing away with the old genres.
The unnamed narrator, after all, seems to be just as in love with Lucia as the count is (even if his love might be just a romantic, indeed a literary infatuation, produced by the mere sight of a portrait – a way of falling in love that has in itself a rich tradition, dating back to Antiquity through the Middle Ages), and he would presumably be just as overjoyed if she were to live again. But as we have mentioned, the image (the apparition is repeatedly called “figura”, “immagine”, “spettro”, “larva”, “fantasma”\footnote{Racconto d'autunno, cit., pp. 95-96}) looks to him like a horrible fake: he wants the original, and unlike the count – too obsessed with his love for a lost form – is unable to settle for a rehash; but the original is now unattainable. Indeed, soon after he has prevented the evocation/resurrection of Lucia, the narrator does get to meet a convincing reincarnation of the woman under the guise of her own daughter (and namesake?). But the kind of excessive, or all-too-perfect, love story Lucia had lived with the count cannot be replicated in the present day; and her daughter gets killed by the soldiers. All the narrator will be able to do is bury her and visit her grave from time to time – but one last question lingers on:

Io guardo queste cose e mi dico: qui è sepolto il mio cuore. Ma non risorgerà, col suo? Non si compirà la promessa, quella che m'ha fatta nel punto della sua morte?\footnote{Racconto d'autunno, p. 131}

The narrator's heart lies with Lucia – who, as a double of her mother (and to some extent, as we'll see, of La pietra lunare's Gurù), may have represented something close to an alternate, successful outcome of the evocation ritual described in chapter 13, if her appearance in the story weren't also quickly truncated by her death. But he keeps...
wondering whether her promise ('we'll meet again') won't come true after all, and the question is the novel's last line: won't their hearts resurrect together?

If we believe that Lucia – by which we mean both mother and daughter – and the failed ritual of her evocation may allude to the diegetic correlative of a certain set of genres (or even, more generally, of a certain “way of writing”), then we should ask ourselves whether and how Landolfi answers *Racconto d'autunno's* final question in his later works, and consider how it was confronted in the earlier ones.
CHAPTER 4: RITUALS

4.1: Failed Rituals in Landolfi's Fiction

If we choose to see the narrator of *Racconto d'autunno* as the kind of diegetic stand-in for the author that is usually present in Landolfi's texts⁴⁵², then his interruption of the ritual of evocation may represent some sort of narrative counterpart to a major event marking Landolfi's own poetics and production. Critics have traditionally distinguished two subsequent phases in Landolfi's work, with Edoardo Sanguineti and Romano Luperini having been among the supporters of a similar distinction. The first phase is mostly characterized, on the narrative level, by a remarkable delight in the fantastic and the grotesque, and, on the stylistic level, by a precious, vivid verbal smorgasbord that doesn't lose its literary allure even when rummaging through the coarse petrosità of Tuscan dialect. The second phase – with very few exceptions – moves away from narrative altogether, or at least away from attempts at forms of narrative longer than (very) short stories, and privileges instead autobiographical or dramatic forms (which are in turn quite emptied of their autobiographical and dramatic features respectively). In this phase the language and style tend to reduce their exuberance, getting more colloquial and elliptical; the aging writer seems to doubt, or get tired of, his own writing skills, and metaphors of impotence become more ubiquitous, as in several stories of *A caso* (1975).

⁴⁵² This has been observed by Mandiargues (among others) in his preface to the collection of translated Landolfian short stories that he curated for Gallimard: “Landolfi a un très fort penchant (et sans doute il éprouve une délectation ou une excitation pareilles à celles que lui donne le jeu) à se mettre en scène”. André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Préface”, in Tommaso Landolfi, *La femme de Gogol et autres récits*, cit., p. 9
The author's voice, in the meanwhile, increases its self-referentiality and its self-consciousness (which, of course, was always quite there to begin with) to an almost painful, solipsistic extent, and the ironic distance typical of Landolfi crosses the line into a somewhat cruel irony mixed with self-loathing. We have recalled, in chapter three, Landolfi's complaints about his inability to write spontaneously, with no artfulness—writing, as it were, without always listening to his own words as they are uttered. The line between the first and the second phase is normally drawn around the beginning of the Fifties, that is to say with or immediately after Cancroregina (first published in book form in 1950); I will argue that an analysis of Cancroregina itself does support this view, while Racconto d'autunno already prepares and anticipates the shift.

Cancroregina does in fact represent what could be Landolfi's last big burst of novelistic phantasy, while situating itself within a coherent fil rouge connecting Landolfi's major narrative works—namely the experimentation with literary genres, and with those of romance in particular. This, if as yet unobserved by critics, seems to me to be a consistent phenomenon throughout his narrative corpus; indeed, Landolfi's ultimate dismissal of narrative as a whole might be related to the inevitable checkmate of these very experiments. Throughout his novels (or at any rate his long prose fiction works) Landolfi systematically approaches, engages with, deconstructs, and dismisses a number of genres representative of romance—while somewhat respecting, curiously enough, even the diachronic succession of said genres within the history of literature.

La pietra lunare (1939), Landolfi's first novel, is mostly dedicated to the exploration and the reenaction of the folktale and the fairytale—the oldest and, as it were, the noblest forms of romance, appropriately represented in a style nostalgic of a grand manner that...
turns out not to be feasible anymore. Fittingly for the first Landolfian text to engage in the recreation of romantic (and Romantic) forms, *La pietra lunare* tells the story of an initiation; in a way, the ritual that will be interrupted in *Racconto d'autunno* starts here – the two novels, that could be seen as bookends of Landolfi's first phase, display specular features.

*La pietra lunare*’s protagonist, Giovancarlo, goes back to his small hometown, where he meets a girl – Gurù – who turns out to be a were-goat. She initiates Giovancarlo to love and also has him undergo a more literal initiation to the supernatural, taking him up a mountain where he'll witness magic wonders and a strange ritual involving three awesome figures – the Mothers – before going back to his life in the city. Diegetically, Gurù is introduced by the old wives' tales in the village; extradiegetically, it could be argued that her character and the legendary background before which she is set (a whole demonic\(^{453}\) world of supernatural creatures and events, constituting a persuading, original and intimately consistent mythology) are based not only on the writer's imagination but also on a probable first-hand knowledge of local folklore as well as on literary sources\(^{454}\). Thus, the novella or short novel succeeds in creating a *Märchen* that according to poet Andrea Zanzotto is convincing enough to allow for the 'generation of a myth' and paradoxically maintains features of a real tale rooted in orality\(^{455}\). The three dreadful

\(^{453}\) The term is employed by Mandiargues in *ibid.*, pp 7-8: “Controversé depuis longtemps est le point de la tendance au fantastique chez les artistes et chez les écrivains italiens […] De telle séduction, qui tient de près à la catégorie du “démoniaque” […] l'un des meilleurs examples est, au début de *La pietra lunare*, la nocturne apparition de l'héroïne Guru, fille-chèvre, ou, si l'on préfère, chèvre-garou”. The ritual he defines as an “originale variation sur le sabbat […] le sang qu'y versent des spectres […] est en accord avec l'animalité du poil dans l'exaspération de l'érotisme lunaire”

\(^{454}\) See this dissertation's Conclusion.

\(^{455}\) “[…] tutto il racconto dev'essere percepito quasi all'interno di un particolare tipo di oralità che mal sopporterebbe la scrittura, e che secondo la tradizione orale, vorrebbe la viva voce” (Andrea Zanzotto,
Mothers, and the nocturnal ascent onto the mountain in order to join a Sabbath-like gathering of fairy creatures, call to mind Goethe's *Faust*, a text that not only resonates with themes, such as self-agency and willpower, that haunted Landolfi for a lifetime (exactly thirty years after this novel he will publish his *Faust 67*), but in itself stages a complex research in and experimentation with literary genres. Gurù, who has been said to represent the poetic word within the narration, also acts as the agent, it could be said the very embodiment, of romance – introducing, in the low comedic atmosphere of the provincial sketches of the book's beginning, the erotic as well as the supernatural element (to both of which she will initiate Giovancarlo), and involving him in the all-important romantic generic convention of the quest. Whenever she appears, she raises the "literary mode", as Frye would have it, from the low comedic (generally) to that of romance, and the style rises appropriately. Gurù's own, very peculiar idiolect (virtually overlapping with that of the count's daughter in *Racconto d'autunno*: both at the same time highly poetic and somewhat moving beyond the ordinary constraints of rational speech, and both to some extent spoken, as it were, by the external and particularly the natural world)


456 “As far as poetic genres are concerned, Goethe is constantly quoting genres of literature from all times and cultures, again not at random, but in calculated series or conflations. In Part I, for instance, we find a number of genre inlays, from the late medieval Easter play in the first scene to Margarete's folk song in gaol, which the Romantic artist Philipp Otto Runge had published in the fairy tale of Machandelboom. I have already mentioned the three fragments of plays in Part II, recalling the epochs and cultures of antiquity, the Middle Ages and the present. Parallel to the Renaissance and contemporary aspects of the Faust figure in Part I, the scholars' drama becomes a Renaissance drama of admonition in the manner of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, on which, in turn, a modern drama of social conditions developed by Diderot and Lessing is superimposed. In the Gretchen drama, a domestic tragedy in the tradition of Lillo's London Merchant is projected onto a Renaissance legend [...].” Hans Schulte, John Noyes, Pia Kleber (eds.), *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity*, Leiden: Cambridge University Press 2011, p. 66

457 “Ed è ben essa l'immagine della parola nella sua amorosa e impossibile colluttazione col mondo” (A. Zanzotto, *op. cit.*, p. 25, author's emphasis)

458 See, again, the Conclusion.
stands in parallel opposition to the corrupted language spoken by Giovancarlo's provincial relatives in the first scenes, explicitly connoted as unsteady, vulgar, and vernacular. In fact, the very ascent on the mountains may represent to some effect, other than an archetype of the initiation ritual, a diegetic correlative of this process, reaching its peak with the description of the ritual involving the Mothers.

Giovancarlo, however, doesn't really prove to be up to the task – he's not up to the initiation he is put through, nor to the possibility of living, as he dreamed to do459, the mystery and adventure of romance. Quite at ease as long as he is portrayed in the kind of comedic situations, such as the initial scene of provincial life, that he fancies himself superior to, he progressively loses confidence and self-agency as he gets more entangled in the world of romance he craved460. More and more dazed by a dreamy, crepuscular state of conscience, by wine and by drowsiness as the night goes on, Giovancarlo doesn't play any active part in the spirit battle that is fought on the mountain, is unable to help in any way the ghost of the old servant of his family against his enemies, and finds himself involved in an abortive brawl with another ghost, who moreover questions with some success Giovancarlo's own rights on Gurù. Finally, in the conclusion, Giovancarlo – who has woken up on the mountain and seems inclined to believe that the whole experience

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459 As many protagonists of Landolfi’s fictions, Giovancarlo is characterized as some kind of a fanciful youth deluding himself with wish-fulfillment dreams of unrealistic nature, while being inexperienced if not more or less inept at everyday life. See La pietra lunare, cit., p. 45: “Eh, non è che un sogno purtroppo! S’era anzi detto con amarezza l’avventuroso giovane, eleganti fanciulle con zoccoli di capra non girano per questo nostro mondo inviso, tedioso eccetera”, or p. 46: “il giovane s’immaginava di fare chissà che, quasi fosse un avventuriero al suo risveglio, di quelli che dormono con un occhio aperto e si devono guardare da innumerevoli pericoli; gli avveniva persino, passando da una stanza all’altra, di stringere e alzare un pugno, come se vi reggesse una pistola, e di gettare un’occhiata decisa e non esente da ferocia dietro la porta”.

460 If we were to follow Frye’s table of “literary modes”, itself based (as Aristotle’s own distinctions) on the protagonist’s power of agency, we could observe an opposite movement represented by the two main characters; Giovancarlo progressively descends the scale, despite the inverse, progressive rise of atmosphere, generic elements, and style promoted by Gurù.
had been a dream – leaves to return to the city, and gives quite an ungentlemanly farewell to Gurù, maintaining that he'll come back for her (but the reader easily understands that he is lying; indeed, the reader might easily imagine Giovancarlo growing up and forgetting everything about Gurù and the strange night on the mountain, caught up in the kind of bourgeois routine he affected disdain for). Giovancarlo is inadequate to the literary genre that Gurù introduces into the novel; it could be said that, just like he is not up to his own dreams, he is not up to the generic form that should make them into narrative. This checkmate, made explicit in the melancholic scene of the last farewell from Gurù, would then rather openly figure the author's failure as well as that of the protagonist – even though La pietra lunare will remain the text that displays, in Landolfi's production, the most unbridled creativity and the loftiest style.

So much for the folktale; the fairytale will instead be addressed in two children's stories by Landolfi, Il principe infelice and La raganella d'oro, both also sabotaging to some extent the conventions of their genre by presenting inept, or somewhat failed, protagonists. The former, written in 1938 published in 1943, enacts a curious reversal of the usual gender roles of fairytales, portraying a prince who gets saved by the feminine protagonist instead of saving her – and ends up marrying her, but losing all of his kingdom\textsuperscript{461}. In the latter, written in 1947 and published in 1954, a humble boy manages to save from an evil giant the princess he loves; however, not only doesn't he get to marry

\textsuperscript{461} Luca Federico has studied the relationship between Il principe infelice and Oscar Wilde's The Happy Prince, and other Wildean fairytales. In general, he observes, Landolfi's fairytales tend to refer to a high-brow literary tradition rather than to popular folklore: “Invece di attingere al folclore o alla tradizione orale, l’autore sceglie di misurarsi con la fiaba avvalendosi di modelli letterari particolarmente eruditi: la favola esopica in versi, l’Asino d’oro di Apuleio, la fiaba barocca italiana e francese, soprattutto il fairy tale inglese dell’Ottocento” (Luca Federico, (“L’infelicità del principe felice”, in Parloined Letters. An international journal of quotation studies, no. 12, Dec. 2015), p. 55)
her – she falls in love rather randomly with a prince, at the very end of the story, and ends up marrying him instead – but he doesn't even get the half of the kingdom he was promised. He does, however, get some money and an appointment at court, which doesn't make him properly happy but provides him with some degree of bourgeois satisfaction – of a prosaic kind that we rarely get to see in the feudal world and in the wish-fulfillment context of fairytales: “e i quattrini, se non sono la felicità, sono pure qualcosa...”\textsuperscript{462}, the narrator remarks, and observes for the benefit of his children readers that good people don't always get properly rewarded\textsuperscript{463}. Landolfi's interest in the fairytale form was long and significant; he also translated some German and Russian ones, from the brothers Grimm and from Pushkin.

Another ritual is described in the novel (or novella) following \textit{La pietra lunare} in Landolfi's production, \textit{Le due zittelle}, first published in book form in 1946. The story is about two old spinsters more or less happily living in the same oppressive, provincial reality the protagonist of \textit{La pietra lunare} already tried to break away from – until their pet monkey creates a scandal that threatens their little world. The monkey comes from exotic lands and was given to them by their dead sailor brother; it represents the dangers of both the physical elsewhere of adventure tales and of the long-debated 'immorality' of romance – diegetically embodied by the monkey's lack (one would be tempted to say disdain) of common morals with their hypocritical repressiveness. This links it to other Landolfian characters (such as Gurù, the count's daughter, the woman in “La piccola apocalisse”, the protagonists of \textit{Un amore del nostro tempo}...) representing the hope for

\textsuperscript{462} “La raganella d'oro”, in \textit{Il principe infelice e altre storie}, Milano: Adelphi 2004, p. 102

\textsuperscript{463} “Tant'è che lo sapiate fin d'ora: al mondo non sempre i buoni e generosi hanno la ricompensa che si meritano”, ibid., p. 103
an unadulterated 'naturality' that is mirrored by the writer's impossible and self-sabotaging search for a 'natural' language, which these characters either speak to some extent – as is the case with for Gurù and the count's daughter – or long for in vain. Such an ideal natural state includes of course its own Edenic, carefree sexuality, a feature that is quite apparent with most of the characters supposed to embody it. The monkey – traditionally viewed by Christianity as a figure of the devil, a mockery of man, and a symbol of unbridled lust (the old scientific name of the chimpanzee, for one, was not by chance *Pan satyrus*) – obviously carries similar implications, with the addendum of some possible hint at a sublimated incestuous charge. This, a rather common theme in Landolfi's production from “La morte del re di Francia” and *Racconto d'autunno* to *Un amore del nostro tempo*, may be somewhat implied in the references to all the love for the sailor brother that the spinsters transferred onto the monkey instead\(^{464}\), as well as in their need to castrate it. In fact, the spinsters take great care that everything the monkey represents – adventure, the romance, sex and a freer morality – is kept under control and neutered, rendering it helpless in all possible ways: the monkey has been castrated, has had its teeth sawed off, and is kept both chained and caged. (On a related note, another sailor just like the dead brother, a rear admiral in this case, is mentioned among the few relations of the spinsters, but this is no window open to the "romanesque" either: the narrator hastens to specify that no faraway countries, free spaces and glorious deeds should be associated to this character, who in fact – after having navigated a little bit in

\(^{464}\) “Egli morì poi in terra straniera, e le sorelle, che su di lui avevano a poco a poco concentrato tutto l'affetto di che erano capaci – non poco certo – e a lui soltanto votati i palpiti del loro cuore femminile, questo affetto riversarono sull'animale” (Tommaso Landolfi, *Le due zitelle*, Milano: Adelphi 1992, p. 29, my emphasis)
his youth – spent his career and life at a desk as a dull ministry employee\textsuperscript{465}). But all of these repressive measures haven't really curbed the monkey's unruliness – it remains “sebbene eunuco, il maschio di casa”\textsuperscript{466} – and do not succeed in keeping it under the yoke of the comfortably predictable routine of provincial life. The irruption of the bizarre and the unexpected, or in other words of the "romanesque" proper, into the plot happens once again through the staging of a ritual: the monkey, as the nuns of the neighboring convent inform the spinsters, escapes from its cage every night and enters the convent's chapel, where it eats and drinks the holy bread and wine. One of the spinsters, unable to believe this story, will hide in the chapel and spy on the monkey: which, indeed, sneaks into the chapel and not only consumes the bread and wine but does so while officiating the Catholic Mass ritual or a parody thereof. Giovancarlo, in \textit{La pietra lunare}, proved to be not really up to the initiation ritual he was subjected to, and inadequate to the genre channelling (and channeled by) the initiation plot. In \textit{Le due zittelle}, the monkey is by definition inadequate to the ritual it performs, or, indeed, monkeys, of which it can only provide an awkward imitation; although, one should observe, the Mass already represents in and by itself an imitation, that of the last deeds and words of Christ – and indeed all rituals, as remarked by Mircea Eliade, are rituals precisely insofar as they imitate some sacred model set once and for all. \textit{This} specific imitation, however, cannot but be

\textsuperscript{465} “Contrammiraglio dice al cuore di magnanime imprese, di liberi spazi e di paesi lontani. Ma ahimè, questo non aveva navigato che nella lontana gioventù, per diventar guardiamarina, e il resto della carriera l'aveva fatto anche lui al ministero; e adesso era un ufficiale timorato di Dio che soltanto imponeva ai propri figli, adolescenti spirulgoni, maglie turchine da marinaio comunque battesse la stagione”, ibid., p. 17, author's emphasis. The contrammiraglio echoes perhaps one of the characters in Landolfi's first book, the fanciful protagonist of "La morte del re di Francia" in \textit{Dialogo dei massimi sistemi} (1937), a fanciful captain who loves to imagine "romanesque" adventures (in the safe space of his restroom) and recount them to his friends, except that – as the reader learns at the end of the story – he hasn't really ever been a captain at all, and was a public sector employee instead.

\textsuperscript{466} \textit{Le due zittelle}, cit., p. 30
particularly clumsy – and fail to be up to its model, just like Landolfi, as I am arguing, would consider his own imitations of literary models to fail invariably and therefore stages and describes such failures (perhaps as a preemptive measure) into the very texts that imitate said models in the first place. The negative outcome of the endeavor is anticipated and represented within the endeavor itself.

Once again, the ritual gets interrupted – this time, by the horrified spinster; the monkey, terrified, flees. After a lengthy debate involving two different priests the spinsters conclude that the monkey has to die, and – in a pathetic scene, itself not devoid of some ritualistic character – they sacrifice it. Like the Countess in Racconto d'autunno, and unlike Jesus Christ in the mythical exemplum that founds the Mass ritual it was caught performing, the monkey will not resurrect.

Up to some point, it would be possible to see in the book a parody of the detective story too – the spinsters originally don't believe the nuns' story, which they feel is based on a lot of suspicions and speculation, and so decide that one of them should watch and catch the monkey red-handed, as if the old ladies were in fact cops. The model seems to be rather obviously that of Poe's The Murders in the Rue Morgue. Perhaps the first modern detective story ever written, Poe's tale describes an almost impossible crime scene and then, through the acumen of a dilettante by the name of Auguste Dupin, solves the puzzle by attributing the murders to an ape escaped from its owner – a sailor, indeed, who obtained it in exotic places, just as in the case of the spinsters' brother. In particular, the meticulously accurate description of the procedure followed by the ape for entering

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467 In this case, scholarship has in fact correctly observed Landolfi's debt (see, for instance, Simone Castaldi, “Il linguaggio come funzione del fantastico nella narrativa di Tommaso Landolfi”, in Forum italicum, no. 2, 2010)
the room in rue Morgue (which is, of course, crucial to the story, as the killer's possible ways of entering and exiting the apparently sealed room are of paramount importance to the detective's reasoning process) is mirrored by that of the monkey escaping its chains, cage, and room (by sliding down a drainpipe near the window, by the way, much in the same way as Poe's ape does with the lightning rod) and breaking into the chapel. Of course, the relationship of Landolfi's story to Poe's (which also features the ape imitating, as Landolfi's monkey does with the Mass, human behavior by shaving itself, and being reprimanded for it – which causes the ape to flee, razor in hand, and go on to commit the murders) is parodic. Moreover, Poe's ape succeeds in committing its crime, and indeed escapes all punishment and is re-obtained by its owner at the end, whereas Landolfi's monkey is caught, interrupted in flagrante delicto, and (despite the remarkably less serious nature of its 'bad deeds') executed by its very owners. The long discussion with the priests mimics perhaps the classic, lengthy explanation that we usually find at the end of detective stories, as is the case for The Murders in the Rue Morgue about half of which is devoted to Dupin's clever reasoning and final exposure of the ape as the culprit; approximately the same proportion is maintained in Le due zittelle, except that in this case the identity of the culprit is already well-known and the reasoning is rather moved onto a more philosophical level, in an attempt to determine whether, and to what degree, the guilty party could in fact be considered guilty, that is to say responsible. In Poe's story, this issue isn't really addressed at all; but as the ape is not punished, it is apparent that this happens because an animal cannot be held accountable for its actions.

As in the ending of La pietra lunare, the normalcy of provincial life is – through the killing of the monkey – restored. This is the “normal course of life”, the “biographical
time” that according to Bakhtin precedes and follows the digressive “hiatus” constituting adventure time, or the "romanesque" proper. In the Conclusione, we are actually given a resume of the fate of the main characters after the events described in the book: consistently with the return to anti-"romanesque" normalcy, all we are told – in a rather depressing tone – is that they age and die, and even the one young priest that had defended the monkey and opposed its execution somehow falls into line. Even the birds populating the graveyard where the spinsters are buried conform with such an apathetic, prosaic reality: they are melancholic, indolent magpies, who squawk and fly about with no energy, and whenever a livelier bird passes by it soon flies away from such grim companions.

Cancroregina, as we have seen, is normally considered the boundary book separating Landolfi's two 'phases'. In fact, such a separation – with regard to his narrative work – is already forecasted and implied in the book preceding it, Racconto d'autunno, and specifically in its failed ritual. Much like, in Le due zittelle, the monkey can only perform an imitation of a ritual (the Mass) that it doesn't really understand, the necromancer count only manages to bring back a phantom image, if not a straight-out mockery, of Lucia, who is (and remains) as dead as the forms in which the story is told – the old forms of romance, Märchen, Gothic tale and Shakesperian romance, that Landolfi tries in vain to resuscitate, just as he had confronted the fantastic and the folktale in La pietra lunare and the adventure and the detective story with Le due zittelle.

If the old forms of romance are dead, however, there still remain some other ones that could be experimented with in a last, one would say almost desperate try. Cancroregina is published only a few years after Racconto d'autunno; given the failure of
his own evocation attempts, Landolfi is bound to look not at the past forms of romance anymore but rather at its contemporary one par excellence, that is to say science fiction. The story begins with the narrator – who is of course the usual, semi-autobiographical small town gentleman of *La pietra lunare* and so many of Landolfi's short stories – languishing in his palace and flirting with the idea of death, or more exactly of leaving this world: which is, indeed, precisely what will happen to him, in the kind of literal embodiment of a figure of speech that is in itself a well-tried mechanism of fantastic literature. This wish-fulfillment dream, however, will not only prove unsatisfactory, as it normally happens in our author's fictions, but ultimately turn into a nightmare. A madman escaped from an asylum persuades the narrator to follow him to a remote cave, which they reach through a nocturnal ascent on the mountains that calls to mind that of Giovancarlo and Gurù; the moon, that was intimately linked to Gurù as well, doesn't only shine on them as they climb – it is their final destination, as the madman keeps in the cave a spaceship in which the two embark in order to leave the Earth. *Cancroregina*, however, doesn't really comply with sci-fi conventions – the spaceship, in itself a bizarre contraption seemingly closer to a demonic creature than to a machine, can't even take off properly, although its whole purpose is a journey to the moon, and it must circumnavigate the Earth several times in order to slowly get altitude. More to the point, its whole functioning is and remains utterly obscure to the narrator (despite the madman's vain attempts to explain it) and, as a result, to the reader, whose basking in the sort of explanations *Cancroregina* does not provide would be part of the unspoken rules of science fiction. In fact, whatever little hypotheses of his own the narrator offers verge on the ridiculous (as for the main functioning principle of the ship, which doesn't feature
wings nor visible propellers, the narrator acknowledges that he may be entirely mistaken but thinks that the vehicle somehow emanates atmosphere in front of itself, and then 'clings' to it; as for the source of its energy, the way it is driven or stopped, etc., the reader is only presented with a series of 'I didn't understand', 'I can't say', 'I don't know').

This will prove fatal to the narrator, who kills the madman in self-defense and as a consequence finds himself trapped in the spaceship, as he is incapable of resetting its controls after the madman tampered with them. During the whole second part of this odd sci-fi tale he will remain prisoner of the spaceship, not moon-bound anymore and unable to return to Earth, forever doomed to orbit in a never-changing motion around it – and, what is even more ironic, forever facing the very hemisphere which he thought he hated when he was down there and wanted to escape the world altogether, and which he now longs for in vain. Nothing will happen to him anymore, except that – alone and trapped in the spaceship, through whose windows he sees the corpse of the madman that's now somewhat captured in its trail – he will go mad himself; and his progressive descent into madness, antithetical to the interrupted ascent to the moon, is documented by his more and more rambling notes. The second part of Cancroregina is structured as a diary, and indeed, it does constitute Landolfi's first experimentation with the diaristic genre; to what degree it would represent a more fictional approach than the later LA BIERE DU PECHEUR, Rien va and Des mois is perhaps debatable. Towards the end of the book the narrator unhappily turns to God, begs him to let a teardrop fall on his head, and then asks whether Gogol didn't already write something similar\(^{468}\). As a matter of fact, he did – in

\(^{468}\) “Signore, abbi pietà del tuo povero figlio, lascia cadere una lagrima, una lagrima di celeste rugiada, sul suo capo in fiamme! […] Oh, ma non ha già detto Gogol qualcosa di simile?” Tommaso Landolfi,
his *Diary of a Madman* (1835), which describes the protagonist and narrator's gradual derangement (conveyed to the reader by the more and more insane nature of his writing and thoughts) until he is locked up in a mental asylum. This is clearly the model for *Cancroregina*'s second part; in fact, in the first edition of the novel – both in the magazine where it first appeared and in book form – a third part (written in dramatic form, in two scenes) was also present and it continued the parallel, letting the reader know that the narrator of *Cancroregina* is in fact a madman himself and is, like Gogol's, institutionalized in an asylum. (This was expunged in later versions and is now published as an appendix to the text in the Adelphi edition). Landolfi himself had translated Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* for the anthology *Narratori russi* (1948) he curated for Bompiani – published in the same series as the 1943 *Germanica* volume that we have mentioned in regard to Eichendorff's influence, to which he had also collaborated. The last entry in Gogol's madman's diary, once he has been institutionalized and subjected to brutal treatment, invokes somebody who would take him out of this world, and then addresses the narrator's mother in words extremely similar to those Landolfi's narrator addresses to God\(^{469}\). Neither one's prayers will be answered; indeed, Landolfi's character – once the third part is expunged from the text – suffers perhaps an even harsher fate than Gogol's. He does leave the world, as the latter would have wanted and as he did want himself in the beginning of the novel, but the fantastic journey – just like all textual incursions into the domain of the romance and the "romanesque" in Landolfi's fictions – turns into an

\[^{469}\text{This is obvious in Landolfi's own translation: "[...] ho la testa in fiamme [...] Mammina, salva il tuo povero figlio. Lascia cadere una lagrimuccia sul suo piccolo capo ammalato." Nikolaj Gogol', "Il diario d'un pazzo", in Tommaso Landolfi (ed.), *Narratori russi. Raccolta di romanzi e racconti dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Milano: Bompiani 1948, p. 248.}\]
utter failure (this is not, for once, directly caused by the narrator, although his inability to fix the spaceship once it has been tampered with by the madman proves, of course, to be just as critical). Such a failure is testified by the gloomy formula the narrator begins his narration with ("Io ero solo e sconsolato"\textsuperscript{470} – 'I was alone and hopeless'), which is reiterated in almost identical terms at the beginning of the second part of the novel, once the madman has been killed and the journey to the moon interrupted ("Io sono solo qui dentro, solo e senza speranze"\textsuperscript{471}) and once again on the very last page, as the narrator – imprisoned in the spaceship and gone crazy – begins writing his own story, in a circular fashion ("Io ero solo e senza speranze..."\textsuperscript{472}).

The first part of Cancroregina could be seen as constituting the swan song of Landolfi's narrative attempts within his novelistic production. The second part of the book hardly features any events at all other than those imagined by the raving protagonist's own mind, somewhat providing us with a textual analogy to the author's increasingly solipsistic condition and growing issues with narrative at large (the kind of issues Landolfi complains about at length, as we have seen, in Des mois and LA BIERE DU PECHEUR). Indeed, this is formally reflected in the text as the first-person narrative of part one gives way to the actual diary, complete with entry dates, of part two. The monologuing voice of the narrator, lost in the absolute solitude of the broken spaceship and deprived not only of all company but of any possible plot development as well, somewhat paves the way for the dramatic structure (and the minimalist plot) of Landolfi's last novel, Un amore del nostro tempo, which consists almost entirely of dialogues – and,

\textsuperscript{470} Cancroregina, cit., p. 12
\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., p. 61
\textsuperscript{472} Ibid., p. 93
at the same time, it anticipates the diaristic form that will constitute the bulk, and the most interesting part, of the remainder of Landolfi's production in his 'second phase'. In a way, thus, the physical separation between parts one and two of this book could mirror quite accurately the very shift from the first to the second phase of Landolfi's writing.

After this book, just like his characters always end up stranded in a frustratingly prosaic reality, Landolfi will begrudgingly move on to write more or less autobiographical works, progressively raspier lyric poetry, and a couple of dramatic texts – undermining their own dramatic structure – in addition to some collections of short stories and articles that somehow tend to repeat patterns from the author's earlier production. He will only try to pen one more actual novel, *Un amore del nostro tempo*, published in 1965. Since the previous attempts at reviving the traditional forms of the romance have failed, as is mirrored diegetically by the several failed rituals and by all of the protagonists' own failures, and since the attempt at confronting its contemporary form represented by science fiction has failed as well, Landolfi gives it one last shot by confronting the most degraded, kitschy form of romance – that is to say, “romance” in the common acceptation of the word: the love stories of the romance novel. If there is no place for grand adventures anymore (neither in fiction nor, after the parenthesis represented by the civil war years portrayed in *Racconto d'autunno* has come to an end, in life) then one last thing might succeed in bringing adventure and the pleasure of the unexpected into the otherwise colorless provincial life that all Landolfian characters try to evade and systematically find themselves sent back to: love. The heroes of old epic, of medieval romance, of adventure tales and even of fairytales usually obtain love as a mere side-effect of their deeds; in the romance novel, love is the focus and the deeds become a
function of it – but as much as this may reflect a relative retreat from aristocratic to bourgeois morals, love still provides the possibility of transcending them and their world. In almost all of the earlier novels by Landolfi, in fact, the protagonist (himself a half-decayed nobleman, somewhat in between the two poles of aristocratic and bourgeois morals) was on a quest for love as much as for adventure, the marvelous, etc.; indeed, the two often tended to coincide. This quest is all is left here. The love story narrated in *Un amore del nostro tempo* is, however, a peculiar one, and in some way it could be said to represent the wish-fulfillment of a ghost haunting many of Landolfi’s fictions and, indeed, hinted at in his diaries too – namely, incest. The novel's protagonists are in fact two siblings who fall in love in their (usual) ancestral manor, actually consummate their love and move abroad in order to live it freely, even having a son in the meanwhile. This unique circumstance should effectively suffice to divert the risk of an otherwise trite subject matter; moreover, the very bourgeois morals we have mentioned are questioned by another remarkable feature of the novel – not only no real obstacles of any sort are placed in the protagonists' way (as if to give their story the maximum effect of wish-fulfillment) but, in the long-winded dialogues that make up the book almost entirely, there is no place at all for moral scruples, or indeed for morality at large. While the two do discuss, to some extent, the possible reactions of other people to their love, and for that very reason choose to expatriate, they never really get to talk about the morality or immorality of said love per se, as pettier bourgeois characters would of course have done ad nauseam. However, even such an extraordinary love inevitably becomes, in the long run, unsatisfactory; something – precisely whatever should constantly make it 'special' – seems to be missing out. So, paradoxically, what is remarkable is precisely the inevitable
banality of any love story, even this one, its inability to actually represent a true alternative to everyday boredom. This is perhaps foregrounded in the choice of the destination for their romantic escape, a tropical paradise in the Southern seas complete with 'lagoon, palms, volcano, cabin'\textsuperscript{473}, 'silver fish' that can be caught with bare hands, and groups of naked youths playing. An Edenic scene, for sure, appropriate for the kind of prelapsarian Edenic morals that the siblings live by (the same kind of morals that was represented, with little luck, by the monkey in \textit{Le due zittelle}, who also came from exotic places), but such a markedly stereotypical one that it almost sounds like a postcard. This impression gets intensified by the casual way in which the location's features (lagoon, palms, volcano, cabin) are laconically thrown into a list with no description whatsoever, not even a couple of adjectives, by an author who can't normally be charged of being telegraphic. This hint of parody, or of self-conscious kitsch, makes the scenery into a correlative of the characters' disappointing attempt at living a unique adventure. The same goes for the characters' speech. The two siblings (and the brother in particular) speak in a high, even excessive, overtly literary language; this mirrors Landolfi's own, and its main paradox – as he wrote in \textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, "fatalmente la mia penna, cioè la mia matita, piega verso un magistero d'arte"\textsuperscript{474}. Sigismondo, the brother, writes poems that sound like literature specifically because they do away with all literary scruples and influences\textsuperscript{475}; the two often discuss the very way they speak, mock the

\textsuperscript{473} Tommaso Landolfi, \textit{Un amore del nostro tempo}, Milano: Adelphi 1993, p. 96
\textsuperscript{474} \textit{LA BIERE DU PECHEUR}, cit., p 18
\textsuperscript{475} "Sigismondo, ripeto, poetava come se prima di lui non vi fossero stati poeti, o solo gli antichi vati che all'alba del mondo avevano nuovamente piegato ad armonia ed ordine la propria voce – e non v'è nulla quanto l'assenza della letteratura, cioè delle preoccupazioni letterarie, che possa indurre il sospetto e il fastidio della letteratura, ossia indurre a tacciare di letteraria una composizione" (\textit{Un amore del nostro tempo}, cit., p. 20).
pompous peaks of highbrow expression they use, and lament their inevitable sliding back into such kind of speech. Indeed, their attempt at getting language back to its original power of expression by avoiding everyday speech and resorting to an archaic, literary style (that is to say, a language that can avoid the triteness of that of everyday use only at the price of employing words and formulas heavy with the use of hundreds of years) cannot but fail their goal and sound like a parody, fall into kitsch – which is, by definition, an unauthentic expression of unauthentic feelings. This doubles Landolfi's own efforts, both at the level of style, which will become more and more self-loathingly ironic throughout his production specifically because of the painful knowledge of this paradox, and at the level of narrative, in which the employment of dead literary genres provides an equivalent to the employment of dead literary expressions – and is equally doomed, as we have seen, to failure. Thus, as the tropical postcard and the novel's very language reflect (when it was published, critics were very harsh about its over-the-top style in particular, even asking whether the whole book couldn't be a prank after all476), this supposedly unique love story ends in the way that those of other Landolfian fictions would have ended, perhaps, if their lovers did not get separated – dying of routine and boredom. Once again, adventure and the marvelous prove to be unattainable; romance (in both of its acceptations) has failed once again in its perennial attempt at injecting something else, something radically other, into the grey fabric of this world.

Un amore del nostro tempo is Landolfi's last novel, and his last (failed) attempt at playing with the forms of romance; the story of Scinti, as far as we know, was never written. There is, however, one slightly earlier novella that I will mention here: Ottavio di

476 See Idolina Landolfi's “Nota al testo” in Un amore del nostro tempo, cit., pp. 142-144
Saint-Vincent, first published in book form in 1958. Ottavio di Saint-Vincent is the ultimate wish-fulfillment fantasy (something like Rolfe's Adrian the Seventh, if one wishes, but in the humorous accents of a capriccio or a modern fairytale). The plot recalls that of The Prince and the Pauper, but it deals with only one side of the story – making up in sheer nihilism, albeit of a rather happy-go-lucky brand, what it lacks in social criticism. The eponymous Ottavio di Saint-Vincent is a young and penniless poet from an old impoverished family, who wanders at night by the Seine and toys with the idea of suicide, complaining about poverty and, even worse to him, boredom, when he overhears a conversation from a lofty palace's window: a duchess is telling her suitor that she fantasizes about picking up a drunk from the road and making him – and everybody else – believe that he's her husband the duke. Ottavio quickly exchanges clothes with a timely drunk, lies down on the sidewalk in front of her palace, pretends to be drunk himself and is promptly picked up by the duchess's lackeys, waking up the next morning in the ducal bedroom. He then pretends to be unaware of the trick and plays the part of the fool who can't believe what's happening (even though the duchess will later tell him that she had known about his own trick all along), and plays the part of the duke with ease, surprising those who are in on the duchess's practical joke (many aren't). He turns down three people – one of whom is the Dauphin of France posing as a servant – who try to bribe him out of the house, and tries to enjoy high society as much as he can; playing one coin he finds under a table, he manages to win an amazing amount of gold at cards, which would make him rich even if the whole charade terminated; finally, he falls in love with the beautiful duchess, who clearly reciprocates and indeed turns out to be as close as possible to his actual soulmate. However, money, luck, and even true love are not
enough: Ottavio ends up renouncing everything and going back to his life as a penniless poet – in the last scene he finds a few golden coins left in his pocket, and anticipates the carousing of the coming night. Like in any other (long) Landolfian fiction, the extraordinary is rejected and routine reestablished.

On assuming the part of the duke, Ottavio – not unlike *The Prince and the Pauper's* Tom – thinks that this is, after all, the world he was made for, especially because it seems to suit his 'aesthetic, or at least decorative sense'\(^{477}\): “*In fondo questa raffinatezza, questa bellezza, e soprattutto questo linguaggio, non erano ciò che egli aveva sempre sognato? non erano, per così dire, il suo clima naturale?*”. Ottavio being a Landolfian character, what he had always dreamed of are ‘this refinement, this beauty, and *most of all* this language’ (my emphasis); and it is mostly thanks to his naturally lofty language, and noble manners, that Ottavio manages to fit in high society – once again, out-of-the-ordinary experiences (a notion which overlaps with that of a 'truer' experience, more authentic than usual) can only be talked about and indeed experienced through an out-of-the-ordinary language – which also should thus become more 'authentic', as does that of Gurù, at the risk of trespassing into the territory of rhetorics and parody as in *Un amore del nostro tempo*. But such out-of-the-ordinary experiences turn out to be just not extraordinary enough. When renouncing his new fortunes, Ottavio points out that he doesn't do it because, as in 'fantastic tales', he has got to know the 'true soul' of the happy few, has found them immoral or whatnot, and has chosen to go back into obscurity as a result: actually the world of high society, he states, isn't better or worse than the one he

\(^{477}\) Tommaso Landolfi, *Ottavio di Saint-Vincent*, Milano: Rizzoli 1979, p. 34
comes from, and indeed they aren't different at all\textsuperscript{478}. What pains him, rather, is that nothing – in either world – is \textit{real}, everybody is ultimately alone like ghosts are in their respective haunted houses, and all actions – and, ultimately, the whole world – are only unrealizable potentialities. Love itself is therefore unrealizable, and the reason he doesn't stay in the ducal palace (if, indeed, this sense of unreality plagues both worlds in the same way) is that people there seem to dare believe in their own existence, they seem to aspire to actually living, and Ottavio himself was 'almost falling for it'. Indeed, the last few pages of \textit{Ottavio di Saint-Vincent} provide us not only with the moral of the story, but with something close to the philosophical stance of Landolfi's whole opus – the tormenting acedia of his diaries, the painful lack of self-agency that burdens so many of his fictional characters, are only the logical result of the cruel joke pulled by existence itself, of our being in a world that does not allow any action in, not to mention on, it.

4.2: Evoking a Meaning

In this light, Landolfi's experimentations with genres acquire some fuller meaning. First of all, the literary mode of romance is by definition the textual place for wish-fulfillment fantasies coming true – “a romance is normally comic, in the sense that usually the heroine's wiles or whatever are successful and the story ends with marriage or

\textsuperscript{478} “Nei libri fantastici si legge sovente di taluno che, balestrato dalla sorte in dorate sale e avendone da presso conosciuto gli abitatori col vero animo loro, volontariamente ritorni alla sua oscurità. Speciosa favoletta: no, questo vostro mondo non è diverso, non è migliore né peggiore dell'altro, del mio se volete. No, non è ciò” (ibid., pp. 92-93)
some kind of deliverance”⁴⁷⁹. It could, therefore, provide an antidote, if only a fictional one, to the sort of dire reality Ottavio describes at the end of the novella (the kind of antidote, of course, that might have drawn not entirely inaccurate accusations of escapism). However, as we have seen, this is never the case, and Landolfi's romances invariably lack a happy ending; their failure, as well as the oftentimes ironic filter provided by the author's voice, prevent both characters and readers from 'falling for it' and believing in the fiction, reestablishing instead reality at its crudest. The very limited power of action of Landolfi's characters, who are normally reacting to external stimuli at best (that is, if even such stimuli aren't absent – as they are in a good chunk of Cancroregina and Un amore del nostro tempo) echoes the impossibility of action in and on this world that Ottavio complains about. But romance apart, playing with literary genres at large becomes significant per se in the context of such meaninglessness. Indeed, literary genres can (or, at least, could – until their *mise en scène* is interrupted and its failure is staged and declared) provide a text not only with what we have called a plot-generating machine, both easing the writer's work and allowing the actions whose very possibility Ottavio doubted, but also with some kind of a guarantee of meaning. Genres constitute templates, as it were, that suggest to the reader the possibility – nay, the certain existence of a meaning of sorts within and behind the text; simulacra, if we wish, involving the reader's previous knowledge of the genre itself, of its conventions, and of the wide spectrum of meanings that it has been used to convey in its past history. Moreover, the structures and plot devices of, say, the detective story do indeed constitute up to some point its very “meaning”; if nothing else, a detective story will always be

⁴⁷⁹ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, cit., p. 92
“about” something – if only a detective catching a criminal. This effect, the suggestion of a meaning (that does not necessarily exist, or escape the purely verbal character of the literary enterprise; indeed, it could very well be a fiction in itself, the ultimate and most sophisticate fiction that fiction has to offer), is achieved in part through the resonances of the textual universe that a given literary genre can evoke and muster, as Northrop Frye observes about romance as a whole:

The symbolic spread of realism tends to go from the individual work of fiction into the life around it which it reflects: this can be accurately called allegorical. The symbolic spread of a romance tends rather to go into its literary context, to other romances that are most like it in the conventions adopted. The sense that more is meant than meets the ear in romance comes very largely from the reverberations that its familiar conventions set up within our literary experience, like a shell that contains the sound of the sea.480

Readers of even the most mundane genre fiction, thus, finds themselves confronting not just a single text, but the whole body of tradition that the text is stemming from and pointing at through the use of generic conventions; ultimately, such a body might convey nothing less than “the mythological universe itself”481. And, indeed, there is one feature of myth, as analyzed by Furio Jesi – perhaps the foremost Italian scholar of myth – that seems to be quite relevant here. In his essay “Simbolo e silenzio”, Jesi considers ancient funeral bas reliefs and remarks that their 'symbols are complete in themselves, and therefore do not point at any reality transcending them. They have the same nature as the

480 Ibid., p. 59. This peculiar quality of romance-derived genres builds on and adds up to the nature of “square literature” that, as we have recalled in our first chapter, Francesco Orlando attributes to fantastic literature

481 “With romance it is much harder to avoid the feeling of convention, that the story is one of a family of similar stories. Hence in the criticism of romance we are led very quickly from what the individual work says to what the entire convention it belongs to is saying through the work […] The reading of an individual romance, say a detective story or a Western, may be in itself a trivial enough imaginative experience. But a study of the whole convention of Westerns or detective stories would tell us a good deal about the shape of stories as a whole, and that, in turn, would begin to give us some glimpse of still larger verbal structures, eventually of the mythological universe itself” (ibid., p. 60)
true epiphanies of myth, to which one could attribute a thousand meanings without ever reaching their truth – which is precisely their lack of any meaning transcending their appearances. It wouldn't be a big stretch to apply this definition to literature as a whole, if one considered its ultimately verbal nature and how, as a consequence, any extralinguistic “meaning” applied to it would result, up to some point, in being arbitrary. However, in a narrower sense generic structures better fit this description, supplying, as they do, formal patterns (narrative functions, plot devices, tropes and motifs, typical characters, and so on) that, while lacking any necessary “meaning” outside themselves, not only can be used to convey one but, even if the author did not intend to do so, would nonetheless carry “the sense that more is meant than meets the ear” thanks to the echo of the uncountable past uses of their conventions within the literary tradition. Moreover, the more the threads making up the plot are laid bare, the more this reverberation effect – the suggestion of some profound meaning that must be there, somewhere – is amplified: first, by getting closer to the deep structures of narrative at large (it is, of course, no coincidence that Vladimir Propp turned to fairytales and not, say, to Dostoyevsky for his analyses); and second, thanks to the proximity of such deep structures to the ageless archetypes of folklore, legend, and myth – which may or may not translate, as Jung would have it, deeply rooted psychological schemata, but certainly resonate with our own oldest, more powerful experiences as consumers of narrative.

482 “[..] quei simboli sono compiuti in se stessi, e quindi non rimandano ad alcuna realtà che li trascenda. Essi posseggono la natura delle genuine epifanie del mito, cui si potrebbero attribuire mille significati senza mai giungere alla verità, che consiste – appunto – nella loro mancanza di significato trascendente le loro parvenze” (Furio Jesi, “Simbolo e silenzio”, in Id., Letteratura e mito, Torino: Einaudi 1968, p. 17)

483 “[Shakespeare's] Pericles […] seems to be a deliberate experiment in presenting a traditional archetypal sequence as nakedly and baldly as possible. Perhaps literature as a whole, like so many works of
The narrative structures of genre fiction, and more generally of romance, could thus be seen as the formal correlative of their mythical content (a “content” that, as we have seen, may very well coincide with a lack thereof). As such, their nature is, sensu stricto, first and foremost ritual:

According to Aristotle (expanding the very elliptical argument slightly), two types of human actions are imitated in words. The historian imitates human actions or praxeis as such […] There are other types of action which are symbolic and representative of human life in a more universal perspective, and which the poet is more interested in. For these actions the best term is ritual […] We said that in romance as a whole neither the waking world nor the dream world is the real one, but that reality and illusion are both mixtures of the two. Similarly, ritual is a conscious waking act, but there is always something sleepwalking about it: something consciously being done, and something else unconsciously meant by what is being done.

One of the major nonliterary social functions of myth is to explain or rationalize or provide the source of authority for rituals. We do this now, the myth says, because once upon a time, etc. The ritual is, so to speak, the epiphany of the myth, the manifestation or showing forth of it in action. In literature itself the mythos of narrative of fiction, more especially of romance, is essentially a verbal imitation of ritual or symbolic human action […] Narrative forms have to depend more than drama does on descriptions of rituals […] But in romance, essentially the whole human action depicted in the plot is ritualized action. The ritualizing of action is what makes possible the technique of summarized narrative that we find in the “and then” stories of romance, which can move much more quickly than realism can from one episode to another.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 55-56}

The plot of a story, the words uttered by its characters and their actions, come to be close to ritual in the strictly liturgical sense. Of course, the more an author does away with mimetic preoccupations of realistic likelihood and moves towards a strongly typified kind of narration, a puppet play whose actors are mostly reduced to their dramatic functions as actants, the more the ritualistic nature of romance is highlighted – and the sense that some meaning should be hiding behind it, as it happens with (and indeed as it is the very purpose of) all liturgy, gets stronger. This may remind us of Mandiargues's
technique rather than Landolfi's, but there is another feature that holds true for the latter just as for the former. Indeed, Frye also points out that ritual is typically depicted in romantic narratives – “ritual” meaning here, according to him, all “symbolic acts of social cohesion in which the acts that we think of as specifically 'religious' are not yet clearly differentiated from others”\textsuperscript{485}, such as “the long accounts of tournements in chivalric romance, singing matches in pastorals like Sidney's Arcadia, the highly stylized scenes of courtships in love stories, and the like”\textsuperscript{486}. In Landolfi's work, as we have observed, rituals are given a crucial diegetic function, being more often than not the centerpieces and turning points of the plot; furthermore, rather than pertaining to the admittedly quite vague and somewhat all-inclusive category of social symbolic acts described by Frye, they actually belong to the much narrower, properly liturgical acceptation of the word. Such is the case for \textit{La pietra lunare}'s ascent to the mountain and epiphany of the Mothers (which, in its solemn mysteriousness and strong sense of a surcharge of ungraspable meaning, makes an excellent case for Furio Jesi's empty symbol argument), for the Mass celebrated by the monkey in \textit{Le due zittelle}, for the necromantic conjuration in \textit{Racconto d'autunno}; in his 'second phase' explicit, high rituals of this kind are abandoned and substituted by more practical, mundane attempts at making something work – \textit{Cancroregina}'s spaceship, \textit{Un amore del nostro tempo}'s love story – while also staging the kind of journey away from workaday reality that each and every ritual proper mostly consists of.

These rituals draw attention to themselves first of all because of their diegetic

\textsuperscript{485} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 55
\textsuperscript{486} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 56
position and function, since, as we have remarked, the whole plot normally depends on
and develops around their climactic role; indeed, it tends to be wholly determined by
them. Moreover, the rituals' very nature could contribute to letting the reader think that
something important seems to be going on there, accentuating their sense of consequence
– thanks, in part, to the ritual's peculiar effect of suggesting that some arcane meaning be
implied, and concealing it at the same time (one could think again of the Mothers in La
pietra lunare: all characters seem to have a very clear idea of their power and purpose,
but protagonist and reader alike are only given a vague sense that, indeed, some
compelling power and some obscure purpose are at stake – it may not be by chance, in
this sense, that the Mothers never utter a single word). The result could remind us of a
purloined letter of sorts – the feeling that something crucial might be just there, in plain
view, for us to grab – and we, as readers, feel like these scenes are perhaps the ones to be
scrutinized more closely if we want to get a clearer picture of the whole. I have already
pointed out what I take to be the first and foremost value and function of such rituals:
they work as a textual metaphor, a diegetic counterpart and a mise en abyme of Landolfi's
attempt to bring back past literary genres connected with romance. Both this attempted
retrieval and its eventual, certain failure are, I maintain, represented in all of them;
however, if La pietra lunare might in part be seen as staging the young writer's (failed)
initiation, and Le due zittelle might show his (failed) attempt to confront, as an outsider,
the sacred space of literature and its texts, it is Racconto d'autunno that presents the
clearer analogy to Landolfi's doomed necromantic operation. Rituals become very
reliable textual clues signaling and reinforcing the structures of extinct genres being
reanimated and experimented with; indeed, rituals do offer the perfect diegetic device (to
the point of becoming in Landolfi’s fiction a distinct plot device of their own) for this.

A ritual constitutes by definition the imitation of a model; more exactly, it constitutes the somewhat paradoxical imitation of an inimitable (*qua* sacred/mythical) model – an imitation that, in fact, doesn’t just formally replicate its model, but brings it back to life and somehow becomes one and the same with it. A ritual may consist in nonverbal acts and/or in speech acts alike; these repeat the words and gestures already performed by countless officiants before, and established once and for all by a mythical figure in a time before time. Therefore, it is the perfect textual place for the emergence of the kind of intertextual references we have been observing, and, through them, for the “reverberations” that provide romance, according to Frye, with its “symbolic spread”. In Landolfi’s fictions, the ritual scenes we have isolated are indeed the *loci* in which the fabric of references gets thicker. Giovancarlo’s ascent on the mountain and vision of the Mothers in *La pietra lunare* highlights the novel’s (arguable) debts to a rich tradition of local folklore while retracing the steps of Faust; the monkey’s escapade into the chapel in *Le due zittelle* reactivates memories of Poe and of holy texts (the Mass, celebration of the sacrifice of Christ, will prelude here to the sacrifice of the monkey itself); the necromantic ritual in *Racconto d’autunno* perfects the novel’s evocation of Gothic literature and black romanticism while making explicit references to Shakespeare and quoting directly from Eliphas Lévi.

This is appropriately mirrored in the style of writing. The ritual’s inherent nature of “already told”, together with its obvious solemnity, well matches the double and often conflicting tension of Landolfi – towards a highly poetic style, on the one hand, and towards a parody of high-brow literary conventions on the other (the doubling necessary
to irony being, to some extent, implicit in the multiplication of utterances and voices of the “already told”). Landolfi attempts to escape the triteness of a common language made insignificant by everyday use by taking refuge in the high language of literature, only to find out that countless other voices have already colonized, used, and perhaps exhausted that language. The two possible reactions are therefore either making fun of the literariness of literature or castling on yet higher ground (such is the path trodden in “La passeggiata”, a short story published in the 1966 collection *Racconti impossibili* and entirely written with such archaic lexicon that critics originally thought it was a joke – a nonsense text respecting the Italian syntax but written with made-up words). In Landolfi’s fiction, the rituals’ function as a pivot of the dense network of intertextual references is further marked by a style of writing appropriately contributing to the imitation of a model. In *Racconto d’autunno*, Landolfi’s translation of Eliphas Lévi’s conjuration picks a text already strongly characterized by ceremonial gravitas and makes it even more stately (and even more old-fashioned, despite translating it almost a century after it had been written). The description of the monkey celebrating the Mass in *Le due zittelle* obsessively repeats, while providing the reader with an almost full catalogue of the kind of paraphernalia that one may find around an altar, the word “sacred”, and at the same time provides a stylistic equivalent to the sort of blasphemy the monkey is committing by adding an insistent counterpoint made of words pertaining to low and vulgar semantic spheres (‘feet’, ‘lust’, ‘orifice’, ‘angrily’, ‘beastly’, ‘pissed’)\(^{487}\). The hike on the mountain in

\(^{487}\) *Le due zittelle*, cit., pp 56-60. It could be noted that, in (old) Italian, the verb “sacrare” or “sagrare” can mean (somehow replicating the fundamental ambivalence of the concept of sacred, which we’ll briefly touch upon at the end of this chapter) both “to consecrate”, “to offer to a god”, and “to blaspheme”, “to curse”. The obsessive repetition of the word here may very well call to mind the second, sacrilegious
La pietra lunare corresponds to a steady rise of the style, which reaches a peak of loftiness with the apparition of the Mothers. Language too, then, contributes to the establishment of special textual loci, since in Landolfi’s view, as we have remarked when talking about Ottavio di Saint-Vincent, there could be no experience above the ordinary if a language above the ordinary does not express it – Landolfi might well be the very last believer in the rota Virgill.

This whole operation – the evocation of dead genres, the evocation of the elusive shadow of “meaning” through them, and then the failure of both kinds of evocation – could not have been assigned a better diegetic correlative than the staging of rituals. As far as genres are concerned, as we have seen, the notion of imitation (and, at least at times, of evocation proper, as it is in Racconto d'autunno) inherent in rituals makes them the perfect stand-in. But rituals, linked by definition with the dimension of the sacred (which is inseparable from the view of literature held by Landolfi and by the literary milieus we have mentioned as contributing to his artistic development), are also what allows the sacred to manifest itself into our reality, infusing it with meaning: “the manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world”488. We will now turn to Mandiargues in order to analyze how this happens through the interconnected categories of space and time.

4.3: Initiation Rituals in Mandiargues

Rituals are no less crucially and obsessively used by André Pieyre de Mandiargues in his fiction. If, in Landolfi's texts, they are mostly staged in order to suggest to the reader (as we have been proposing here) that a re-activation either of romance structures and/or of an inter- and hypo-textual apparatus is under way, their function seems to be partially different in Mandiargues's case – but they still provide the sense that some kind of superior “meaning” may be hiding behind them.

Mandiargues's fictions, as I have observed in chapter 1, manage in some way to lay narrative processes bare, removing several kinds of superstructures (such as displacements, psychological analyses, or even, to some extent, causal relationships) in order to expose the primitive diegetic elements of romance at their purest489 – “lust” and “bloodlust”, with Northrop Frye – as well as romance's fundamental narrative strategy: the kind of virtually ever-expanding juxtaposition of diegetic events that constitutes the “adventure time”, devoid of any “real duration”, that we have seen described by Bakhtin and that Northrop Frye calls a “‘and then’ narrative” (as opposed to a “‘hence' narrative”)490. It shouldn't come as a surprise then that a narrative mechanism reduced to its basic – one would be tempted to say its most ancient – features would consistently resonate with the kind of basic narratives constituted by myths, legends, folktales and the

489 In a way, this stylization process can also serve the purposes of defamiliarization, by means of exposing the most basic elements of the plot and thus calling attention to the most stereotyped aspects of narrative. The return of many such elements from one tale to another, as it often happens in Mandiargues's characteristic, almost combinatory play on variations, can further emphasize this effect.

490 In Bakhtin's words, “‘Suddenly' and 'at just that moment' best characterize this type of time [...] This logic is one of random contingency [sovpadenie], which is to say, chance simultaneity [meetings] and chance ruptures [nonmeetings], that is, a logic of random disjunctions in time as well” (Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 92)
like, in other words the historical repository of romantic fictions (a resonance which, by itself, can strongly add to the sense of deep hidden significance we have mentioned), as well as with their roots in the obscure territory of folklore and the sacred. Vladimir Propp, isolating on morphological grounds a subgenre of the folktale which he defined the “wondertale”⁴⁹¹, attempted to formulate some historical hypotheses (even though, as he pointed out, he couldn't come up with actual proof) as to how it came to be. According to his reconstruction, the wondertale had its origins in a gradual “profanation”⁴⁹² of mythical narratives which didn't, however, immediately lose their sacral value; Propp suggested that wondertales might originally have maintained a strong connection with rituals, either including in their plot some motif that had a direct correspondent in ritual (such as a certain way of burying the dead) or substituting ritual elements which have become impossible to understand with others that still maintain a relationship to the original form and meaning. Indeed, according to him, the wondertale was originally employed within rituals; as a young man was undergoing his initiation process, somebody else described to him aloud “the very thing that was happening to him, but with reference to an ancestor”⁴⁹³. Thus, Propp stated, “initiation is the oldest basis of the wondertale”⁴⁹⁴.

The concept of initiation, which we have already found in Landolfian texts such as La pietra lunare, is of paramount importance in Mandiargues's fictions – indeed, it could be easily argued that most, if not all, of them are best read and understood within its semantic field. All initiation rituals, as suggested by Propp, constitute to some extent the

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⁴⁹¹ Vladimir Propp, Theory and History of Folklore, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p 102
⁴⁹² Ibid., p.122: “The 'profanation' of the sacral plot began very early; by 'profanation' I mean the transformation of a sacral tale into a profane, artistic (not spiritual or 'esoteric') one”
⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 118
⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 117
narrativization of a descent into the tomb or the womb and the subsequent coming back anew into the world; to some extent, all romantic narratives provide us with the diegetic counterpart of a similar movement. It should be carefully noted, though, that death – or a displaced signifier that represents its stand-in – is, within the structure of initiation rituals, but an intermediate step. The initiated party “dies” in order to be born again, and thus establishes once and for all their belonging to the world or society they are initiated into; in other words, they die and resurrect in order to acquire an identity (which, originally at least, is first and foremost a social identity: adult, warrior, father, and so forth). The initiation process is therefore, by definition, a *process of individuation*. Northrop Frye makes very similar observations about the structure of romance at large:

What there does seem to be is some connection between illusion and anxiety or apprehension, and between reality and serenity [...] between illusion and the absence of identity [...] and between reality and the possession or recovery of it. Reality for romance is an order of existence most readily associated with the word identity. Identity means a good many things, but all its meanings in romance have some connection with a state of existence in which there is nothing to write about. It is existence before “once upon a time,” and subsequent to “and they lived happily ever after.” What happens in between are adventures, or collisions with external circumstances, and the return to identity is a release from the tyranny of these circumstances [...] Most romances end happily, with a return to the state of identity, and begin with a departure from it [...] Most romances exhibit a cyclical movement of descent into a night world and a return to the idyllic world, or some symbol of it like a marriage [...]" 

Here, too, identity seems to be mostly intended as a social identity; marriage, as the archetypical conclusion of romances and the second and last of its plot poles, well exemplifies it. Whatever is comprised between the two plot poles, then (that is to say, whatever constitutes the Bakhtinian “adventure time”, or in other words the "romanesque": whatever makes a story interesting, nay, tellable), represents an

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495 Frye, in chapters 4 and 5 of his *Secular Scripture*, expands at remarkable length on such themes of descent and ascent in romance narratives.
496 *The Secular Scripture*, cit., p 54
aggression to “identity”. Thanks, in part, to the very time structure of romance, which favors non-consequential “and then” juxtapositions of events over causal relationships, and to the characters’ quite two-dimensional nature, romance characters tend to have a very limited power of agency:

All moments of this infinite adventure-time are controlled by one force – chance. […] Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of events, the normal, intended or purposeful sequence of life's events is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of nonhuman forces – fates, gods, villains – and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, who in adventure-time take all the initiative. Of course the heroes themselves act […] but they act, as it were, as merely physical persons, and the initiative does not belong to them […] a purely adventuristic person is a person of chance. He enters adventuristic time as a person to whom something happens. But the initiative in this time does not belong to human beings […] Alongside chance (in its various guises) a number of other types of predictions inevitably figure in the novel, prophetic dreams and premonitions in particular⁴⁹⁷.

This is particularly true for Mandiargues's fictions. Not only, in fact, do his characters seem to be moving and acting in a trance-like state, with no real motives for their actions, as if they were simply following some mysterious script – but the reader is often given the sense that some powerful force beyond his (and possibly their own) understanding is driving them. This may be reflected by an unexpected remark about a character's zodiac sign, as we have seen with Ferréol Buq in Marbre. Not infrequently, Mandiargues's characters also happen to be shown signs and omens that foreshadow their future, in a kind of diegetic predestination that obviously eclipses their own possibilities to affect and modify it with their actions. It should be noted that characters themselves – unlike the reader – aren't always fully equipped with the instruments to notice and interpret such signs. One exception is Conrad Mur, protagonist of “L'Archéologue”: thanks to his knowledge of the ancient world (let's remember that the short story is

⁴⁹⁷ Bakhtin, op. cit., pp. 94-96, author's emphasis
clearly influenced both by Mérimée's *Vénus d'Ille* and by Jensen's *Gradiva*), Mur is able to decipher the omens correctly – unless, of course, he's just over-reading into random accidents and then letting his own behavior change accordingly. Thus, when he sees his beloved Bettina dressed in Pompeian fashion and sporting a black scarf, he can be sure that something “d'assurément funeste (la maladie, la maternité, la mort...)” is going to happen to her real soon (we shouldn't forget Mandiargues's fascination with the darkest, irrational side of the ancient world: ancient Romans, Mur argues, would not have tolerated such an ill-boding display on Bettina's part)498. Another ill omen, and one that also echoes with the augury practices of ancient soothsayers, appears to the protagonist of “Les pierreuses”499 – and, unbeknownst to him (but hardly so to the reader), marks his doom: ravens, and the pattern traced by their wings against the sky500. Ravens also appear in the 1963 novel *La Motocyclette* and constitute one of the several premonitions of its fated ending.

Moreover, Propp's remark that “the entire initiation rite was experienced as a visit to the land of the dead”501 doesn't just hold true for Mandiargues's rituals, but in fact points at the core motif of most of them. However, such a motif isn't followed slavishly but rather approached and appropriated with some important twists; and a look at these twists

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498 “Je regardais cette écharpe – et voilà que je me souviens d'une pensée autoritaire et sotte qui me vint alors, dont j'aurais pu me libérer (mais je n'osai) en lui donnant forme à haute voix: 'Telle qu'un reste de nuit attardé sur les présents de l'automne, des Romains n'en eussent pas toléré le mauvais augure' […] je me demandai ce que lui réservait d'assurément funeste (la maladie, la maternité, la mort...) un proche avenir, maintenant qu'elle avait tant perdu de sa première trempe” (“L'Archéologue”, cit., p. 44)

499 In André Pieyre de Mandiargues, *Feu de braise*, cit.

500 “Des corbeaux s'envolèrent à quelques mètres du promeneur […] Leurs ailes, sur le ciel gris, dessinaient en nor des M très ouverts, qui sont, au rebours du W d'èviva, l'écriture abrégée d'à mort, telle qu'on la voit carbonnée à de multiples adresses sur les murs des maisons en Italie. Bénin marcha plus vite, non pas que l'eussent inquiété ces signes dans le ciel […]” (ibid., p. 57, author's emphasis)

501 Propp, *op. cit.*, p 117

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may help us get an interesting angle into Mandiargues's operation and the meaning of these initiations within the wider context of his literary work. *La Motocyclette*, which I've just mentioned, is perhaps the clearest example of this kind of journey. David J. Bond, author of the first monograph on Mandiargues, isolated a number of diegetic elements that unmistakably connect the story to the archetypal tale of the journey into the underworld – which, in its undisplaced form, appears in some of the very first texts of Western literature, like the eleventh book of the Odyssey and the epic of Gilgamesh, and continues to be retold throughout the millennia in barely disguised forms such as in the Medieval texts pertaining to the matter of Britain, as we have mentioned in the previous chapter. Indeed, Rebecca, dressed in black and mounting, as the narrator frequently remarks, her motorbike as a steed, is already likened to a knight errant leaving for a quest. “Rebecca, and the other characters like her, once they have set out, proceed to what Campbell calls 'the threshold of adventure'. Like the hero of myth, they have to cross thresholds, pass significant barriers, and go beyond points of no return”502, Bond observes, and then goes on to mention many punctual correspondences in this and other texts by Mandiargues with the traditional tropes of the journey to the land of the dead. However, there is in my opinion a crucial point that Bond doesn't seem to grasp entirely. He states that “Rebecca's journey in *La Motocyclette* recreates the descent of the goddess into the underworld in search of her male consort”503, a search that is successfully completed when, in the last scene of the novel, the dying Rebecca has a final vision in which the face of Bacchus painted on the truck and that of her lover (whom she was

traveling to meet) merge, and the impact that kills her somehow represents the embrace of and union with “the god who is the object of her quest”\(^5\). It is here, in fact, that the main significance of Mandiargues's rituals and their major deviation from the standard pattern of the initiatory ritual, as well as from that of all narratives that follow the initiatory ritual's structure, becomes apparent.

We have said that in the initiation, and in the narratives that follow its structure, the person undergoing the ritual dies – but only in order to be born again. This is not the case with Mandiargues. When Rebecca dies at the end of *La Motocyclette*, she dies for good. The same is true for Sigismond Pons in *La Marge*, for Ferréol Buq in *Marbre*, and to some extent for Hugo Arnold in *Tout disparaîtra* (Vanina Mari, in *Le Lis de mer*, is the only protagonist of a novel by Mandiargues to survive unscathed the plot, even though this is as obvious an initiation as any – a sexual one, specifically) as well as for countless characters in the short stories. If this kind of initiation were to be put under the auspices of a god, that would doubtless be the black Eros we have talked about in chapter 1 – the sexual union being, almost invariably, one of the elements of the ritual, and death being its foregone conclusion without any kind of resurrection to follow.

The initiatory ritual at large is about losing or risking to lose oneself in the journey (a loss that corresponds to symbolic death) before finally establishing one's own identity. This is mirrored in the narratives that reenact the initiation model, which replicate the core of the ritual (i.e. the perilous journey and its trials) by staging a number of chance-driven “adventures, or collisions with external circumstances” over which the protagonist has no real power. Likewise, such narratives represent the conclusion of the process of

\(^{504}\) *Ibid.*, p. 54
individuation in the final plot point (marriage, typically) through which the adventure time of romance is over and protagonists are restored in their personal and social identities. Coincidentally, the successful reaching of identity constitutes, according to Frye, “a state of existence in which there is nothing to write about”: in other words, if the adventures of the initiatory journey representing the loss or search for identity are synonymous with the "romanesque" and indeed with narrative proper, the individuation that concludes them puts an end to the story – indeed to the very possibility of telling a story whatsoever. The *Odyssey* itself, though by no means a wondertale of the kind described by Propp, offers a clean example of a similar narrative, with Odysseus constantly at risk of losing himself – one can think of the episodes of the sirens, of Circe and of the lotus eaters as the most obvious illustrations of this – until he is back in his role as a king, a husband, and a father. “Death”, in initiation rituals, is a figure of the loss of one's identity in order to get a new one505.

In Mandiargues's fiction, however, this archetypal pattern is subject to a crucial modification as the second plot pole, while putting in fact an end to the narration and to the adventure time in which this is possible, doesn't actually allow a diegetic movement towards the establishment of identity – in fact, it does the contrary. In their initiation rituals, characters don't meet a symbolic death they have to overcome; their death is the final step of the ritual itself, and the whole plot somehow amounts to an elaborate itinerarium ad mortem. David J. Bond has well remarked that all of Mandiargues's characters seem to be constantly defined by their urge to lose themselves, to step beyond

505 Initiations represent “a total crisis, which sometimes leads to disintegration of the personality. The psychic chaos is the sign that the profane man is undergoing a dissolution and that a new personality is on the verge of birth” (Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.* p. 196)
the boundaries of their self (or, I'd add, of whatever little self they have to start with):
“much of Mandiargues's fiction is an attempt to escape the limits of the self. When his
characters open themselves to the 'panic' powers and commune with the natural world,
they are breaking out of the bounds imposed on them by their individual identity”\textsuperscript{506}. As
Bond observes, drugs and masks are a rather frequently occurring diegetic element (and,
as can be gathered from his interviews and essays, a distinct interest of the author in his
life); both serve the purpose of facilitating this kind of escape from the self. More
crucially, dreams and reverie, which we have analyzed in chapter 2, and the kind of
violent eroticism we have described in chapter 1 also serve the same purpose. We have
recalled the vivid interest Mandiargues had in Pauline Réage's \textit{Histoire d'O} and the terms
in which he talked about the book, comparing it to a special kind of \textit{Pilgrim's Progress} –
a mystical path to nothingness that progressively strips the protagonist of her own self
until its final accomplishment in death; for both Eros, or at least a certain kind of Eros,
and literature constitute a veritable \textit{ars moriendi}, necessarily embracing the final
dissolution of the individual as their fulfillment. “\textit{Car l'attrait fou de l'érotisme (de cet}
\textit{éros noir) est qu'il conduit enfin à la perte de la personnalité. Ni plus ni moins que la}
\textit{haute poésie}”. This, in the analysis of Leo Bersani, is in fact always true if we accept that
sadomasochism, and more specifically masochism, may constitute the true nature of
sexuality, which comes to coincide with the destructuring, or the destruction, of the self
and is ultimately “both relieved and fulfilled by death”.

\textsuperscript{506} Bond, \textit{op. cit.}, p 39
4.4: Time in Rituals

The initiation rituals described by Mandiargues always repeat carefully or, at most, play a game of variations on a limited set of recurring features. These are indeed so consistent that one could easily argue for the existence of a properly called liturgy comprising them – it is as if, one gets the sense, all of Mandiargues's characters belonged in some way to the same obscure cult or religion, one complete with its own pantheon (either circumscribed to or at the very least centered on the gods Pan, Dionysos, and Eros noir), theology, places of worship, and rituals fixed down to the officiants' liturgical clothes and most minute acts. The variations allowed within these boundaries are limited and of little consequence, and most of Mandiargues's rituals can clearly be traced back to very few archetypal situations and developments – which, in turn, are nothing but (slightly) different takes on the same founding mythos, broadly defined as the path to final mutual or self-annihilation through sex and violence. Here is, for instance, how Joyce O. Lowrie sums up the defining features of one of these variations:

One of the most consistent rituals in Mandiargues's work is that in which a young woman, barefooted or wearing sandals and dressed in a long white robe, is led voluntarily, by a male similarly attired, to the center of a circular space on which is depicted a stylized or "literal"eight-spoked wheel. At the center of the wheel is a cross composed of the intersection of the horizontal and vertical spokes of the wheel [...] The young woman is invited to lie down in the middle of this circle, to extend her arms and legs so as to form an X figure with her own body over the spokes [...] Sometimes she forms [...] an inverted Y, or iod, if her wrists are tied together above her head. A triangle may be drawn from her head or her hands to each of her two feet. Her wrists and ankles are tied to the rim of the circle, she is struck with a bouquet of roses, and a sexual union is consummated.507

A good amount of attention is often reserved to the characters' clothes and to the acts of dressing and undressing. This has to do in part, of course, with the rituals' – and the stories' – erotic nature: female characters in particular tend to wear light, rather risqué clothes, often over their bare skin (as the alternative English title of the 1968 movie based on La Motocyclette, Naked Under Leather, as well as the Italian Nuda sotto la pelle spell out clearly), that are usually portrayed in great detail, with an ekphrastic length bordering on the delectatio morosa and inversely proportional to the amount of cloth they are made of. In point of fact, even this scant clothing tends to be removed pretty soon. The erotically suggestive nature of this ritual clothing, however, is but logical given the erotic nature of the rituals themselves; and while an emphasis on ceremonial vestments is organic to most religious rituals of any description, it is precisely the act of putting certain specific clothes on – or, conversely, of taking them off – that marks and highlights the very approach to a sacred dimension. When Catholic priests dress for liturgical celebrations, for instance, they are supposed to wash their hands first (“the washing of the hands is in some manner equivalent to removing the sandals before the burning bush”\textsuperscript{508}) and then proceed to wear, in a given order and one by one, the several items constituting their regalia; each item has a specific symbolic meaning, and a different prayer is recited while putting on each one. Similarly, Eliphas Lévi gives meticulous instructions in his Rituel for the different kinds of clothes, colors, and jewels (in addition to perfumes and flowers) to be worn for ritual purposes on different days of the week, according to the kind of magic each day is favorable to (which boils down to whichever Roman god it is

\textsuperscript{508} See http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/details/ns_lit_doc_20100216_vestizione_en.html, which also provides a detailed description of the whole vesting procedure and prayers.
named for); in the *Dogme*, another thorough description of the clothes Lévi himself had worn for a necromantic ritual is given (although these do not, in fact, correspond to the seven possibilities outlined in the pages of the *Rituel*). As Mircea Eliade stated,

Le sacré est toujours dangereux pour qui entre en contact avec lui sans s'être préparé, sans être passé par les “mouvements d'approche” […] De là les inombrables rites et prescriptions (pieds nus, etc.) relatifs à l'entrée dans le temple.

These measures are necessary in order for the officiant or participant in a ritual to safely approach the space and time of the sacred; in Mandiargues's fictions, they are part of a standard set of elements that on the one hand come to constitute part of the ritual itself, and, on the other, allow both the execution of the ritual and the irruption of the sacred experience into the text and the characters' lives.

Another of such preparatory props, and quite a significant one, is the taking out of one's wristwatch. In *La Motocyclette*, for instance, Rebecca leaves her watch home before beginning her initiatory journey, a detail that is repeatedly remarked throughout the text. Sarah Mose, protagonist of “Le Diamant”, does the same before entering the room in which she'll be impregnated by a theriomorphic creature. Analogously, getting rid of their watches (and shoes) is the first step taken by characters in “Le marronnier”, a fine short story written in 1968 and published in a booklet in that same year before appearing in the 1971 collection *Mascarets*. The story's plot is really quite simple and static – three friends, two boys and a girl, are together in the garden of the house of one of them; they

509 Lévi, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208
510 Ibid., p. 118
smoke some weed and talk, and the conversation, together with the thoughts of one of them (Jean de Lugio), makes up most of the story. Before getting to the garden, we are told, the three had left their watches in the house since Lugio had requested that they did so. In fact, having one character – usually, but not necessarily, the female one – give the other(s) step-by-step instructions as to what they should do, wear, and say, in a word briefing them on the whole liturgy of the ritual to be officiated, is so common in Mandiargues to rightfully constitute a trope in itself\textsuperscript{512}. The instructions are often so elaborate and specific that they seem to come out of some book, such as a missal, although no rationale at all – let alone a bibliography – is ever given for them (in terms of the effect on the reader, it could be argued that having all instructions laid out beforehand instead of simply staging the characters doing so and so contributes strongly to the sense that, whatever they are doing, they are following a ritual procedure – if a whimsical one – and not just acting on a whim). At any rate, as far as the abandonment of one's watch is concerned, its ritual significance can hardly be mistaken; this short story shows it with particular clarity.

“Le marronnier” begins with an epigraph from the eighteenth chapter of book 11 of Augustine of Hippo's \textit{Confessions}: “\textit{S'il est vrai que l'avenir et le passé soient},” Augustine asks, “\textit{où sont-ils}?”\textsuperscript{513}. The whole book is mostly dedicated to a discussion of time, or rather, up to a certain extent, to a refutation of time. In book 11 Augustine argues

\textsuperscript{512} The plots of \textit{Le Lis de mer} and \textit{Tout disparaîtra}, for instance, actually depend in great part on the instructions that their feminine protagonists give (the latter, to the man she'll initiate; the former, to the man she'll be initiated by). In the very book, \textit{Mascarets}, in which we can read “Le marronnier”, three other short stories present us with the same device: “La marée” and “Le triangle ambigu”, whose male protagonists offer detailed instructions to their partners about how to undress and how to perform specific sexual acts, and the titular “Mascarets”, whose female protagonist, Agostina Ramelli, provides the members of the 'society of her friends' with strict rules and even gives them new names.

\textsuperscript{513} André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Le marronier”, \textit{cit.}, p 31
that past and future times, as such, are a logical impossibility, being by definition something that was or will be – and therefore is not. However, we know that they exist, and this knowledge is mostly empirical. Since it is possible to truthfully remember and foresee things that are in the past or in the future, these must exist – somewhere; but wherever they exist, they must be present, both for logical reasons (if they existed, wherever they are, as future or past, then they would not exist, for they still would be something that was or will be and therefore something that isn't) and for empirical ones (our experience of the past through memory, and our experience of the future through expectation and divination – whose reality Augustine does not exclude – both take place in the present). Incidentally, we can see that even the reality of present itself is somewhat challenged by Augustine's line of reasoning. Both future and past, in order to exist (and to be experienced), must be present – but present itself cannot be always present, or it would become eternity; and, moreover, any interval of time can always be further divided into smaller unities of future, present, and past, in a Zenonian regressus ad infinitum that could only stop once we isolate a “particle” of time so small as to be the temporal equivalent of an atom – but this particle would be so imperceptible in its minuteness to be almost just hypothetical. All time then is reduced to the present, and the present is reduced to one single fleeting moment; thus, even the present has no space.

It is in the present tense that “Le marronier” is (almost) entirely narrated, and it is with a trite remark about the temps that it begins:

“A cette heure-ci, en cette saison, le temps est presque toujours beau.”
Voilà ce que vient de dire Jean de Lugio [...] 514

Of course Lugio is talking about the weather, and not about time – but the pun can hardly be unintentional; and his sentence begins with a very precise reference to the present time, specifying its season and hour. (In book 11 Augustine observes how, because of time's divisibility down to the indivisible present moment, it is impossible to say that a given year, month, day, or hour is present). But the reply of one of Lugio's companions, the inevitably beautiful Cérès Alfarélos, does not criticize him in Zenonian terms – rather, she retorts:

– Pour ce qui est de la saison [...] même si la fumée nous donnait des troubles de mémoire, ton marronier suffirait à nous la rappeler. Arbre de Noël au début de l'été, il indique la proximité de la Saint-Jean aussi sûrement qu'un feu de joie. Mais je me demande comment tu peux parler de l'heure, puisque tu as voulu que nous laissions nos montres sur la table de la salle à manger, quand nous nous sommes déchaussés 515.

Drugs are another prop that, like heavy meals and alcohol, can help Mandiargues's characters step into their reveries and/or the dimension of ritual (we can remember that drugs and hard liquor are mentioned in the mise en abyme of narrative thresholds that we have seen, in our first chapter, at the beginning of Porte dévergondée). Without delving into the excessively rich literary precedents of such practices – incidentally, the tale is dedicated to Henri Michaux – I'll just mention that a link between enhanced dreams, or reveries, and the use of drugs hasn't been observed by poets only, but by Eliphas Lévi 516

514 Ivi
515 Ibid., p. 33
516 “Il existe des substances enivrantes qui, en exaltant la sensibilité nerveuse, augmentent la puissance des
and Saint-Denys (whose appendix to his treatise on lucid dreaming bears the subtitle “Un rêve après avoir pris du hatchich”) as well; Mandiargues, on his part, while admitting to having tried several drugs with keen interest, maintained that directed reverie had a stronger, deeper effect, the final purpose of both drugs and reverie being the subject's detachment from the temporal flow of causal relationships. As far as “Le marronnier” is concerned, the choice of marijuana is likely linked to this drug's peculiar effects on the perception of time and on memory – which, according to Augustine, is the only guarantee we can get that the past has ever existed (and is still somewhat existing). In Cérès Alfarélos's words: “même si la fumée nous donnait des troubles de mémoire [...]”.

The conversation of the three young folks deals almost entirely with concepts related to time. Specifically, it is narrative concerns (and, more precisely, narrative concerns about the fantastic genre) that spark off the discussion, as Cérès remembers the “contes anglais ou yankis” that the three have read while having lunch. These tales invariably focused on the disappearance of one of more characters – and indeed such a complete disappearance that the characters, once removed from the present, are also wiped out not
just from the future (obviously) but from the past as well, as if they had never been:

Ce qui est capital […] c'est la possibilité supposée d'un effacement dans le passé à partir du présent […] c'est la remise en question du passé, donc de l'histoire, par la simple réflexion que rien après tout ne prouve que ce temps-là soit immuable, et qu'il pourrait bien être aussi incertain au contraire et aussi hasardeux que le futur, auquel il s'oppose par rapport au présent comme tout existant s'oppose à son image par rapport à un miroir.520

What mostly concerns Méric Magne (the third member of the party) is that, in these tales, writers invariably have their characters welcome the “révelation de l'effacement”521 with dread or fear. This is, in his opinion, nothing short than a mistake (“un peu inconsciente, un peu inconvenant, voire un peu ridicule”) since it would be illogical to expect modern man to meet a similar fate – one that would, in fact, put him out of his constant misery – with such negative feelings. Of course, this is never the case for Mandiargues's characters, who walk towards that effacement with glee, or indifference at best. Fear, in general, seems to Magne to be a poor “motif” for fantastic narrative, which he'd rather see founded on “la notion de merveilleux” (as it happens, in fact, with Mandiargues; his characters' generally blank response to the events happening to them, which never shock them as it would be reasonable to expect, is in line with the canonical Todorovian definition of the category). Magne seems to look at the diegetic device experimented with in those tales not simply as a literary “trouvaille”522 or “invention”, but as a reflection on a possibility (that of a sudden, utter disappearance “à travers tous les modes du temps”) which could then logically apply to him, Cérès and Lugio as well. Indeed, as the conversation goes on, Lugio begins to desire that Magne would disappear

520 Ibid., p 41
521 Ibid., p. 47
522 Ibid., p. 40
just like that; as this desire, in parallel with his sexual desire for Cérès, grows, Lugio wishes for the other man's disappearance with increasing rage, formulating his wish in a prayer-like way. At the same time, he realizes that some strange communion is happening between him and Cérès, as the girl replies aloud to thoughts he has only been formulating in his mind. This kind of magical thinking finally reaches its peak, and full success, when Lugio imagines in vivid detail the scene of Magne going away and inverts the sense in which the joint is being handed around, giving it back to Cérès in anticlockwise direction so as to interrupt the suspension of time; as a result, Magne actually leaves. The tale's last page abandons the present tense and switches to the future, describing Lugio's and Cérès's eventual love-making.

The peculiar notion of time that would allow for somebody's disappearance (or, conversely, appearance) from the present, future, and past at once also happens to be organic to Mandiargues's own skeptical view of the reality of history. In an interesting essay about astrology, published in his Troisième belvédère, Mandiargues wrote:

Je ne crains pas d’imaginer l’homme dans le temps un peu comme une holothurie dans la fluide boue du fond sous-marin ou comme un réacteur d’avion dans l’air raréfié de la haute altitude, c’est-à-dire comme un mobile doué d’une bouche antérieure et d’une autre postérieure aptes à engloutir et à rejeter la matière du milieu dans lequel la bête ou l’objet se déplacent. Ainsi considéré, le temps ne serait au présent qu’à l’intérieur de l’homme (comme l’air dans le réacteur ou la vase dans la biche de mer), et le futur serait flou, riche en possibles, dans les lointains, pour ne prendre de la consistance qu’un peu avant de se changer en présent, tout de même que le passé perd sa consistance et s’effiloche à mesure qu’il cesse d’être proche et s’éloigne. L’astrologie pourrait alors nous éclairer sur le temps à venir un peu comme l’histoire prétend mettre le passé en lumière. Faut-il ajouter qu’il est prudent de se fier relativement à l’histoire?523

History, then, wouldn't necessarily be more reliable than astrology – a discipline in which Mandiargues did, in fact, believe, but mostly only as far as it is used in order to

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523 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Parler de l’astrologie”, in Id., Troisième belvédère, cit., p. 138
determine the character of somebody, whereas he had doubts about its actual ability to foresee the future. We still have to point out that the three characters of “Le marronnier” belong to a curious organization, or cult, whose members are called “cimmériens”, 'Cimmerians'. According to Ovid, Cimmeria was the country where the god Somnus, i.e. Sleep, had his dwelling; appropriately, Mandiargues's Cimmerians are devoted to dreams. The short story, written in Paris in June 1968, has its characters discuss the nature of time and history and ultimately deny their reality while, at the same time, letting history itself have its place in the text: when Méric Magne is about to go, the three hear the sound of police grenades coming from either the Observatoire or the Sorbonne, and Magne, remarking the circumstance, nonetheless reminds the others of the Cimmerian rendez-vous “au lieu habituel, dans l'arrière salle du café arabe de la rue de Bièvre”. It is exceedingly rare for a Mandiarguesian fiction to carry such distinct a reference to history (here, indeed, to contemporaneity – history in the making). The only other major cases are the short stories “Le fils de rat” (in Porte dévergondée) and “Mil neuf cent trente-trois” (in Sous la lame). In both of them, the historical frame is that of Italian fascism (which is, as a matter of fact, hinted at in other stories, such as Feu de braise's “Miroir morne”, albeit in vaguer tones), even though of course it seems to be employed as little more than a rather exotic theatrical scene or, as it is in “Le fils de rat”, a plot device in order to stage crude, hallucinated fantasies. The result is a mixed feeling of fascination, if anything, for the kind of somber, violent aesthetics of the time; not only,

524 “[...] en matière de caractérologie au moins les astrologues ne se trompent jamais” (ibid., p 135). See also the first chapter of Un Saturne gai, which is entirely devoted to the description and explanation of the author's astrological theme (reproduced right after the frontispiece)
525 Met. XI, 592
526 “Le marronier”, cit., 58
in fact, a clear political stance is lacking\textsuperscript{527}, but the violence of fascism becomes some sort of "romanesque" setting not unlike the Italy seen in Gothic novels, and some sort of narrative equivalent to the unsettling geometries of De Chirico ("Mil neuf cent trente-trois" is, by the way, set in Ferrara)\textsuperscript{528} rather than an actual historical phenomenon to be dealt with\textsuperscript{529}. True enough, during the thirties Mandiargues himself – who, by his own repeated admission, really felt politically engaged only once in his life, against the Algerian war – lived the life of a wealthy traveler, traversing Europe and visiting several times Italy, which as late as 1938 still looked to him and to his travel companion Meret Oppenheim like the usual 'marvelous theater'\textsuperscript{530}. We know how, after 1940, he chose to spend his time in Monaco, writing and experimenting with dreams, while WWII was being fought. The Cimmerians, in fact, seem to some extent to be replicating Mandiargues's personal experience during the war, except in the collective form of a society and against the background of a different fight – but for a Cimmerian, who believes in dreams and not in history, the difference is but a trifling one\textsuperscript{531}. We have

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{527} "En suggérant, à travers le regard fasciné d'Abel Foligno, une lecture non politique de la violence fasciste, Mandiargues en donne une lecture ambiguë" (Chapuis, op. cit. p. 331)
\textsuperscript{528} For an analysis of the relationship between Mandiargues's fictions and "l'oeuvre de Chirico comme un modèle possible de sa poétique de l'espace" see Alexandre Castant, Esthétique de l'image, fictions d'André Pieyre de Mandiargues, cit., pp. 205 ff.
\textsuperscript{529} "Il y a manifestement, chez l'écrivain comme chez ses personnages, un refus de l'histoire, du temps historique, dont Abel Foligno se fait le porte-parole: 'Maud est persuadée que les monuments préhistoriques sont supérieurs aux monuments historiques, justement parce qu'ils sont situés en dehors de l'histoire, et Abel Foligno s'est toujours abstenu de combattre un argument qui d'ailleurs allait selon ses vues'" (Chapuis, op. cit., p. 333). We can also think of Mandiargues's longstanding preference, in his observations about the garden of Bomarzo, for the nameless deities of prehistory over well-established historical gods.
\textsuperscript{530} "A Venise, à Ferrare, à Mantoue, l'Italie fut pour nous le merveilleux théâtre qu'elle est aujourd'hui encore, et je n'eus pas l'impression qu'il y eût du complot dans les coulisses" (Un Saturne gai, cit., p. 87)
\textsuperscript{531} Here are Lugio's thoughts as he hears the grenades' noise: "Une fois de plus, se dit Jean de Lugio, tout recommence. La justice et l'injustice, la générosité et la malignité, la jeunesse et la vieillesse, l'avenir et le passé, se trouvent affrontés à égale distance d'une paroi de pierre et de feu. Les forces d'oppression et les forces de libération vont se choquer sur une barrière aussi mince que celle qui est entre le sommeil
mentioned how Mandiargues's characters, inevitably preparing and enacting obscure initiation rituals, almost appear to be part of an unnamed, tentacular underground cult complete with its own liturgy and beliefs; this is very much the case for the Cimmerians. Mandiargues dreamt and noted down his dreams, which he regarded as a powerful tool for self-knowledge; the Cimmerians, who are no less devoted to the \textit{observation des rêves} \textsuperscript{532}, somehow do the same thing collectively – the female members of the group serving the specific function of recounting their own dreams to their male counterparts:

\begin{quote}
Ce n'est que pour trouver des miroirs où se connaître sous d'autres aspects que ceux du passé et du présent banal, ou pour éprouver leur force dominatrice, qu'ils se font livrer les rêves de leurs compagnes. Les cimmériennes sont exploitées par eux ainsi qu'un bétail médiumnique\textsuperscript{533}.
\end{quote}

The curious definition of \textit{bétail médiumnique} – 'psychic cattle' – already seems to hint at a possible truth value of dreams that goes beyond that of common reality, as it was for Eliphas Lévi's \textit{songes} and much like it happens to Daniel Point and Conrad Mur in the dreams and reveries we have talked about in chapter 2.2. These practices, moreover, correspond to an established body of beliefs which the reader is offered a short glimpse into. We are told that the society actually has one crucial 'secret goal' – nothing short than replacing history with dreams in political theory: \textit{L'un des buts secrets de l'organisation cimmérienne, dit-il, est d'arriver à modifier la philosophie politique de ce siècle en donnant au rêve la place qui est occupée par l'histoire}\textsuperscript{534}. Quitting historical reality for dreams wouldn't be possible without modifying the very processes one resorts to in order

\textsuperscript{532} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 41
\textsuperscript{533} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 38-39
\textsuperscript{534} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 52-53

\begin{center}
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\end{center}
to understand the world; thus, we learn, the Cimmerians have a habit of thinking in terms of specular symmetries somewhat reminiscent of Augustine's take on the past and future as something that can only be conceived in relationship to the thin membrane represented by the present moment. When, by the end of the tale, the verbal tense switches to the future and we are told about the forthcoming sexual union between Cérès and Lugio, eroticism becomes once again – as we have seen in chapter 1 when talking about “L'Enfantillage” – the key to the Surrealist “point” in which past and future become one with the present, even providing it with a paradoxical continuity of sorts (thus providing a solution to the aporia which Augustine, who solved it by finding the guarantee of eternity in God, probably would not have liked).

The disappearance the three characters talk about is, to some extent at least, staged into the narrative twice: when Magne up and leaves right before the end, repeating the steps wished and predicted in Lugio's magical thinking, and when Lugio makes Cérès's clothes “disappear” (in his perception, at least) by means concentrating on a detail of her ear, in a rather conscious exercise of Shklovskian defamiliarization on his part. The whole tale, in fact, constitutes quite an outstanding unicum in Mandiargues's production thanks to its self-reflective quality, as not only do its characters openly discuss narrative techniques (and dreams, which, as we have seen in chapter 2, are often a stand-in and a generative device for narrative at large in the author's production) but these are linked both to the kind of (a)temporality Mandiargues usually engages with and to the very

535 “Elle s'accorderait avec cette idée de symétrie par rapport à un plan de miroir à laquelle je sais que les cimmériens reviennent toujours dans leurs spéculations politiques, chronologiques, métaphysiques, oniriques” (Ibid., p. 55)
536 “[... ] dans le plaisir du couple un mouvement de balancier aura introduit l'illusion de la continuité du présent” (Ibid., p. 60)
process of character (self-)annihilation that constitutes the basic fabula of most of his fictions. One could think of Mandiargues's last published novel, the appropriately titled Tout disparaîtra, which is entirely structured around a complex initiation ritual – one that begins in the subway, a place dear to Mandiargues because of the anonymity it forces on everybody and because it involves “un temps et un espace différents”537 from those of everyday reality. There, Hugo Arnold meets a woman, Miriam, who takes him in the theatrical “foutoir” of the mysterious Sarah Sand, where Hugo is given at first the upper hand – that is, the dominant role – in Miriam's sadomasochistic games, and then is ordered to submit to her; later on he's thrown out, wounded and barefoot, and he wanders until he reaches the Seine and the Ile de la Cité. This, as it has been observed, is where Breton had reportedly met Nadja: “Il se retrouve sur l’île de la Cité pour permettre à Hugo de rencontrer l'ombre d'André Breton, fidèle habitué du lieu, et de lui promettre enfin une rencontre capitale, la seule de toute l'oeuvre et dont tous les personnages antérieurs ont été privés”538. Hugo's “rencontre capitale” is that with Mériem (the Arab form of the name Miriam), a great, statuesque woman whom he sees swimming naked in the Seine. When asked who she really is, Mériem will answer with the lost lines from the original stone of Bologna (“Hac est sepulchrum intus cadaver non habens: Hoc est cadaver sepulchrum extra non habens: Sed cadaver idem est sepulchrum sibi”), a bizarre riddle entirely formulated in the negative form. Mériem persuades Hugo to pursue the process of effacement of his identity till the end, before committing suicide in front of him so that the police may take him to jail as the presumed killer, and let him spend the

537 “Métro-mirage”, in Troisième belvédère, cit., p. 145
538 Chrystèle Taravella, op. cit., pp. 66-67. Moreover, as Hugo learns from the enigmatic character he meets there, Mars and Venus are in conjunction just like they were the night Breton was born.
rest of his life there without a care in the world.

Myriam Boucharenc, studying time and repetition in Mandiargues, focused on the concept of “dernière fois”, the last time, which “nous inviterait à quitter le temps chronologique que pour entrer dans la ronde de la répétition, au sens temporel aussi bien que théâtral du terme”⁵³⁹. Boucharenc, who sees Mériem as the archetype of the eternal feminine of which Miriam wouldn't be but an ephemeral embodiment in time, states:

_Tout disparaîtra_ est en conséquence, pour le dire de façon sommaire, l'histoire d'un homme qui apprend à conjuguer, à un mode non répertorié par les grammaires, le mode de l'éternel. Un homme qui se défait du goût des jours qui se succèdent, pour accéder au mode mythique, à l'occasion d'un récit où l'auteur lui-même change de manière⁵⁴⁰.

Such a special conjugation of the temporal mode, however, isn't just the end goal of Mandiargues's rituals; even though its full accomplishment may depend on the ritual coming to an end, it still constitutes the ritual's own temporal mode as well as its precondition – as is highlighted by the preliminary removal of the characters' watches. This happens, among others, to Léon Lucain, protagonist of “Le Deuil des roses” (published in the 1983 short story collection of the same name). At the beginning of the tale, Léon already finds himself in a suspended time of sorts thanks to the music being played in a blues joint called Nyctalope in some kind of “répétition perpétuelle”⁵⁴¹:

_Mais cette nuit, au Nyctalope, tout futur et tout passé même n'avaient-ils pas été engloutis sous les vagues d'un présent continu comme la ritournelle des notes […]_

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⁵³⁹ Myriam Boucharenc, “La dernière fois”, in _Plaisir à Mandiargues_, cit., p. 114
⁵⁴⁰ _Ibid._, p. 117
He is then kidnapped and blindfolded by beautiful Japanese girls who take him to the house of their mistress, the former theater actress Naka Han. There, he will witness the death of the naked Naka Han on a theatrical stage (quite like, in *Marbre*, Ferréol Buq does in the town of Borgorotondo, where Dona Lavinia dies in front of the whole citizenry), but not before his watch is taken from him. As one of the eponymous “roses” – i.e. the Japanese girls – tells him, “*Nous sommes ici hors du temps des hommes et nous devons oublier que l'on a la prétention d'en mesurer le cours*”\(^543\). The whole scene insistently features the colors black, red and white, and one of the roses explains that the three colors are linked to the Bardo – a Buddhist notion related to the suspended time between an individual's reincarnation and the next one. By the end of the tale, Léon agrees to commit suicide with the four roses in a near future.

The kind of absolute present in which these rituals take place reminds us, of course, of the remarks we have made in our first chapter about several recurring time structures in Mandiargues's fictions. We have observed how both his short stories and his novels, albeit in different ways, provide variations on the suspended time-out-of-time of romance: this may happen through a staging of a horizontal, episodic time string constituted of a virtually infinite series of scenes, as it happens in *Marbre* (or, to some extent, in the short stories, if we consider them collectively as a wide repository of variations on few recurring key elements), or it may happen thanks to the procedure that we have defined – paraphrasing Mandiargues's own wording – the construction of a narrative bubble, and its eventual bursting. Both techniques are linked to the notion of

\(^{542}\) *Ibid.*, p. 10
\(^{543}\) *Ibid.*, p. 42
“extratemporal hiatus” that we have found in Bakhtin; however, they aren't simply employed in order to create a certain effect for narrative reasons but rather correspond in full to the author's vision of mankind, immersed “comme une holothurie” in the fluid of time – a time that has no actual existence outside man himself. We have also remarked that there are certain privileged themes that help set up this suspended time and indeed are somewhat indivisible from it, such as dreams and reverie on the one hand (set in a “monde où la causalité est abolie”) and perhaps even more crucially eroticism on the other: in the essay about Histoire d'O we have previously quoted, eroticism is set apart from the usual narrative time, “de par le tissu et la continuité”, by its eschewing the normal setting in “une sorte de passé” and being instead always necessarily – ontologically, one could say – situated in the present, as we have seen in the case of “L'Enfantillage”, the perennial present of ecstasy. This, which is often the grammatical tense of choice in Mandiargues's fictions, is also the temporal mode of all rituals according to Mircea Eliade:

Dans la religion comme dans la magie, la périodicité signifie avant tout l'utilisation indéfinie d'un temps mythique rendu présent. Tous les rituels ont la propriété de se passer maintenant, dans cet instant-là.

All of these time structures, employed by Mandiargues in order to stage his rituals, share a common core and represent as many variations on ritual time – something that doesn't simply characterize ritual, but makes up its truest nature. Besides their liturgy and whatever actions and words they may or may not include, rituals are first and foremost constituted by a certain experience, which could be called the experience of the sacred,

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544 Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions, cit.,* pp. 335-336, author's emphasis
and which basically amounts to a peculiar experience of space and time – one that is radically different from the experience of common reality. All rituals then, and not only their representations in the fictions of Mandiargues, are fundamentally a chronotope. Insofar as its temporal aspect is concerned, here is how Eliade defines it:

Le terme “temps hiérophanique” […] peut désigner le temps dans lequel se place la célébration d'un rituel et qui est, de ce fait, un temps sacré, c'est-à-dire un temps essentiellement différent de la durée profane à laquelle il fait suite. Il peut aussi désigner le temps mythique, tantôt recouvré par le biais d'un rituel, tantôt réalisé par la répétition pure et simple d'une action pourvue d'un archétype mythique. Enfin, il peut encore désigner les rythmes cosmiques […] en tant que ces rythmes sont considérés comme des révélations – nous voulons dire des manifestations, des actions – d'une sacralité fondamentale sousjacente au Cosmos. Ainsi, un moment ou une portion de temps peut devenir à tout moment hiérophanique: il suffit qu'il s'y produise une kratophanie, une hiérophanie ou une théophanie pour qu'il soit transfiguré, consacré, commémoré par l'effet de sa répétition et par conséquent répétable à l'infini.

Tout temps, quel qu'il soit, est “ouvert” sur un temps sacré, en d'autres termes peut révéler ce que nous appellerions d'une formule commode l'absolu, c'est-à-dire le surnaturel, le surhumain, le surhistorique545.

“Le surnaturel, le surhumain, le surhistorique”: and, we may add, surréel. The idea of a hidden time dense with meaning, at the same time antithetical to, complementary with, and in some way accessible from the time of normal life resonates, of course, with the central preoccupations of Surrealism. Bakhtin's adventure time generally comprises several features that echo those of such sacred time, being something that may not carry actual consequences on the “real” biographical time but still is, somehow, that which gives the latter its meaning (and gives its raison d'être to narrative itself, biographical time falling short of the threshold of tellability). This holds even more true in Mandiargues's fictions, which insist – as we have done in this work – on several kinds of suspended time that enter the narrative and shape it. Likewise, in Eliade's definition, the “durée profane” of everyday reality is constitutionally meaningless; sacred time

545 Ibid., pp. 332-333, author's emphases
represents the only chance for an irruption of meaning into the otherwise dull fabric of the world, of *kairos* into *chronos*.

**4.5: Alchemical Initiations**

Mandiargues, as he told Lowrie in an interview, shared with the Surrealists a deep fascination for “heretical” religious spirits, although he found this to be contradictory with Breton's militant atheism. In one of his notebooks at the IMEC we read: “Surréalisme. *L'athéisme absolu, définitif, est-il compatible avec l'apologie de l'ésotérisme, de l'occultisme, de l'alchimie, du tantrisme? Il me paraît que non*”\(^5\text{46}\). However, because of Breton's esoteric interests, he went as far as to suggest that the chief of Surrealism may have fostered a spiritual, indeed even religious, side: “Breton, j'aurais été bien heureux de savoir ce qu'il pensait vraiment. Mais la pensée de Breton était extrêmement rapide et changeante. Alors, mon avis est que dans un autre temps, Breton, qui était un grand spiritualiste, aurait probablement été un grand hérésiarque. Il y avait en Breton un penchant spiritualiste et un penchant religieux très grand combattu par un anticléricalisme d'une violence extrême, que je partage, d'ailleurs”\(^5\text{47}\). As for himself, he declared: “au fond, je pourrais vous dire que j'adore toutes les religions et que je déteste les prêtres”. Despite some sort of deliberately cultivated skepticism, perhaps not unrelated to an attempt to put into practice on an epistemological level the *coincidentia*

\(^{546}\) PDM 6.19, author's emphasis.

\(^{547}\) Lowrie, “Entretien avec André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, *cit.*, p. 76
oppositorum that both Surrealism and alchemy saw as an ultimate goal, Mandiargues never repudiated a nondescript kind of spirituality nor his fundamental belief in at least some disciplines, or traditions, historically linked with spiritual or religious speculation – first and foremost, alchemy and astrology:

As for astrology, we have seen that Mandiargues also found that the discipline could come in handy for a writer in order to help with some narrative concerns, such as the process of character creation. Something similar could be said with regard to alchemy, which, in fact, is given much more space and a much more critical role in his fiction. This can be an apparently minor one at times, as when serving to establish a specific story's color palette – even though even the simple color coding of a story does carry further implications when it comes to Mandiargues. First, most if not all of his stories are clearly connoted by a combination of two or three dominant colors, making them immediately recognizable, creating specific atmospheres, and of course working as some kind of aide-mémoire for the reader, but also – far from being a trivial matter of décor – playing a key

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548 “Je crois […] que c’est un peu un vice d’esprit […] chez les meilleurs intellectuels de ce temps, que ce besoin de certitude et d’absolu et que cette peur du flou et de la coexistence des contraires”, PDM 6.13. A certain degree of noncommitment, or agnosticism, seems to be an ethical precept that Mandiargues held dear; on the same notebook (the one richest in considerations about the topic of religion) he remarked, “Je n’aime pas la conviction intègre (menteuse)”.

549 PDM 6.13
part in Mandiargues's inspirational and writing process. Moreover, whenever the palette is associated with alchemical references, these (consistently with the importance of colors in the alchemists' parlance and practice; the very preparation of pigments, in the old days, was after all part of alchemical science) tend to branch out into a deeper symbolic network. The combination of black, red and white is a recurring one, and it parallels the alchemical stages of *nigredo*, *rubedo* and *albedo* respectively, meaning the pursuit and accomplishment of the *opus* (the alchemical – and, here, literary – work). The three colors, however, do not stand alone, and are linked to a wider set of alchemical notions. In *La Motocyclette*, for instance – a novel that prominently displays this color field – the color red is associated with Rebecca's lover, Daniel Lionart, the man she is traveling to meet; but Daniel, a solar figure, is equally associated with gold as well as with his namesake animal, the lion, exactly as it happens with the unnamed lover in *Lis de mer* and with the lion-man (who is also the protagonist's lover in the complex initiation ritual staged in the short story) in “Le Diamant”. Mandiargues often resorts to these networks of associations, inspired by the alchemical traditions, which incidentally also provide him with a handy, pre-made set of images and metaphors.

The initiation ritual portrayed in these fictions, then, will consist in an alchemical

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550 "Mes coordonnées comportent aussi des combinaisons de couleurs, qui varient d'un récit à l'autre et sont pour moi inspiratrices autant que déterminatrices, car elles peignent dans ma mémoire le plan sur lequel je suis en train d'écrire mon histoire ; ainsi m'aident-elles à lui donner son caractère et à lui conserver son unité spécifique, ce qui fait d'elle une chose vivante comme une plante ou une bête" (Le Désordre de la mémoire, cit., p 194)


552 In *Feu de braise, cit.,* pp. 143-186. See also Susan Campanini, “Alchemy in Pieyre de Mandiargues 'Le Diamant', in *The French Review*, vol. 50, no. 4, Mar. 1977

553 “Associative components of the male red force are, for example, heat, fire, gold, the sun, the lion, the ram; the female white encompasses cold, water (particularly the sea), silver, the moon, the wolf, the fish; the androgynous black is linked to all that which lies in the shadows of life, hidden, disguised, or transformed – genital organs, decaying matter, funeral objects, masks, larval creatures” (Campanini, *op. cit.,* note 3 p. 603)
marriage between the male and female principles, corresponding to solar and lunar
archetypes, as does the *opus alchemicum* itself in its quest for the philosophers' stone; the
(male) alchemist, as can be seen for instance in the illustrations of the *Mutus liber*, was
indeed supposed to work together with a woman in order to be able to obtain the stone.
I'll refer to Susan Campanini's article for further, more punctual observations about the
widespread alchemical chromatism and symbols in Mandiargues's work. Rather, what
matters for our present purposes is remarking how Mandiargues could find in the
alchemical imagery not only a useful instrument, but indeed a whole system of
coordinates that perfectly matched his needs as a writer, his philosophical stance, and his
beliefs about what fiction should be about.

This could happen thanks to a certain looseness and flexibility that has always been a
fundamental feature of alchemical thought and lexicon, in which the same concept could
be expressed by a plethora of equivalent expressions and, conversely, the same symbol
could mean several different things at once, thus creating a vocabulary that – even
disregarding its inherent imaginative, almost pictorial quality – may not meet the needs of
modern science but is obviously very adequate to poetic expression. Moreover, since
alchemy gradually came to lose its place among the accepted branches of knowledge, fell
into disrepute, and was no longer part of the educated man's standard cultural
background, not only it came to acquire a growing power of fascination as everything
that is ancient and mysterious, let alone occult, does, but its lexicon's ability to lend itself
to an increasing amount of uses and meanings grew proportionately^554_. Thus, alchemical

^554_ "The reasons for this literary involvement with alchemy, in a period when literal belief in its basic
assumptions and methods is long past, are multiple and complex […] but from the outset it is clear that
thought can provide a useful, interesting system of cultural references to be employed in order to structure and form a narrative, pretty much in the same way as Joyce employed classical myth in T. S. Eliot's famous analysis of his "method". But as much as alchemy, in modern times, can be reduced to a hollow signifier deprived of its original semantic associations, some basic structures of its worldview and language necessarily continue to hold true, since the whole alchemical grammar depends on them; and Mandiargues couldn't but find these structures particularly congenial.

Such is the case, first and foremost, of the *coincidentia oppositorum* that constitutes alchemy's most crucial goal and shapes to some extent its very lexicon, allowing it to eschew the principle of non-contradiction that normally informs all other kinds of language; we have recalled how this concept resonates (down to its application to language itself) with Surrealist preoccupations that Mandiargues, on his part, shared and very much cared about. Furthermore, the *coincidentia oppositorum* is in itself an indisputably sexualized concept: “The most complete symbol of the conjunction of opposites is [...] a sexual one, variously called the matrimonium, coitus, coniunctio, hierosgamos or chymical wedding. Medieval alchemists, in particular, believed that metals are born from the union of two principles, male sulphur and female mercury, figured usually as Sol and Luna, King and Queen respectively. The product of their union...
in the alchemical process is the androgyne or hermaphrodite, the *filius philosophorum* or Rebis which symbolizes the imminence of the Stone. This illustrates what Gilbert Durand has called 'alchemy's general character of nuptiality’. In Mandiargues's fictions, the conjunction's sexual nature is emphasized, and even exaggerated, through the erotic procedures of his rituals. It could also be remarked that, insofar as the alchemical process can be seen as a metaphor of sorts for the writing process itself, the product of the *opus alchemicum* – which is (and is symbolized by) the androgynous – was in some way experienced by Mandiargues in the very act of writing, and, in part at least, this happened precisely thanks to the kind of violent eroticism that his fictional rituals staged:

Quant au sado-masochisme […] n'a-t-il pas en outre l'avantage d'effacer ou plutôt de confondre les sexes? Il me semble que oui, et que mon meilleur bonheur, qui me donne la preuve du succès ou de la réussite de mon écriture, est quand je ne sais plus du tout qui ou ce que je suis en écrivant. Homme et femme à la fois, ni femme ni homme peut-être, voilà le pur androginat auquel me fait accéder l'écriture, en particulier dans le récit érotique.

“Ni homme ni femme”: these words are part of the inscription on the Bologna stone, and are quoted by Hugo Arnold in *Tout disparaîtra* after Mériem has described herself with another expression from the same source. It is interesting, then, that Mandiargues would phrase the description of the effects of the writing process on himself exactly in the same wording employed in the “rencontre capitale” concluding his final novel (“la seule [rencontre capitale] de toute l'oeuvre et dont tous les personnages antérieurs ont été privés” according to the already quoted remark by Chrystèle Taravella). But there's another sentence not to be overlooked in this passage: “mon meilleur bonheur […] est

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556 *Un Saturne gai*, cit., p 160
quand je ne sais plus du tout qui ou ce que je suis en écrivant”. Here is, then, another
important coincidence between the way Mandiargues experienced the writing process and
the kind of narratives he wrote. Alchemy's goal, the conjunction of opposites, has been
read by Jung as a representation of the individuation process, like – as we've seen –
initiation rituals and romance narratives alike are; but here, the very opposite holds true.
Mandiargues, when writing, and his characters, when participating in the rituals he
describes, aim at a panic dissolution of identity, losing, like O. in Pauline Réage's “roman
mystique”, their self at the same time as they lose their body (we can think, once again, of
Bersani's description of sexuality as anything that is intolerable to the structured self and
shatters it; as we have seen in “L'Enfantillage”, the loss of individuality is the very
purpose of eroticism according to Mandiargues). The coincidence between the effects of
the writing process on the writer and those of the diegetic rituals on their participants
becomes perhaps even more meaningful in light of the relationship (which we have
insisted upon at some length in the first chapter) between the various kinds of suspended
narrative times employed by Mandiargues and narrative, or at least romantic narrative, at
large. The initiation rituals narrated by Mandiargues may thus correspond, to some
extent, to a ritual enacted by the writer on himself, granting some sort of performative
and, indeed, magical value to the process of writing. This Surrealist kind of overlapping
between literature and life, textual and extratextual reality, isn't just the writer's goal but
the characters', too, as they seal and complete the ritual: Sigismond Pons kills himself
because that's precisely “ce qui lui reste à faire pour s'accorder avec le monde fantastique
et avec celui de la réalité”557.

557 La Marge, cit., p. 247
4.6: Space in Rituals

Other references to esoteric notions and practices, apart from alchemy and astrology, are frequent in Mandiargues's work (we can think of the concept of Bardo mentioned in “Le Deuil des roses”, or of the tarot symbolism analyzed by Lowrie with regard to La Motocyclette)\textsuperscript{558}. However, if these can vary, what truly matters and never changes is the chronotopical aspect of the ritual itself. The “extratemporal hiatus” of a sacred, suspended time, reminiscent of that of dreams, eros, and narrative itself, and also characterized by the notions of repetition and variation, has a necessary analogue in the kind of spaces that narratives portray.

In “Le marronnier”, as the three characters discuss time and narrative in Lugio's garden, they sit leaning on the only tree of the garden, the titular Indian horse-chestnut tree. Talking about it, Cérès remarks that “Arbre de Noël du début de l'été, il indique la proximité de la Saint-Jean aussi sûrement qu'un feu de joie”\textsuperscript{559}. The “Saint-Jean”, or Saint John's Eve, is the Midsummer night, close to the summer solstice and traditionally celebrated in France with bonfires and dances; in Northern Europe, dreams dreamt during Midsummer night (like those dreamt on the night of the winter solstice and on the twelfth night after it, now coinciding with the Epiphany\textsuperscript{560}) were regarded as being particularly

\textsuperscript{558} Joyce O. Lowrie, “The Rota Fortunae in Pieyre de Mandiargues' La Motocyclette”, cit.
\textsuperscript{559} “Le marronnier”, cit., p 33
\textsuperscript{560} These twelve days represent a temporal microcosm, as it were, subsuming and summarizing the whole year, and at the same time are somewhat excluded from time itself. See Roger Caillois, “Festival”, in D. Hollier (ed.), The College of Sociology 1937-39, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. In La Motocyclette, Rebecca's journey follows an identical one that she had done twelve days earlier.
important and holding prophetic value. It is also the night in which Tristan and Iseult
drink the love potion (whose effect will last three years, and also end on the Saint-Jean).
The tree, however, isn't just a reference to the temporal indicator of the Saint-Jean (which
is by the way a recurring one in Mandiargues's stories) but it marks the pivot of a
carefully construed space as well, right at the center of

[...] un gazon bien ras qui fait un espace circulaire, limité par un rond de petits buis taillés en forme de
danseuses de ballet classique, et ce rond est inscrit dans le carré du jardin qu'enferment une maison d'un
seul étage, deux bâtiments aveugles et un mur bas qui sépare de la voie ferrée. Ainsi les pieds des fumeurs
pourraient marquer les sommets à peu près équidistants d'une étoile à trois branches, dont le centre
coinciderait avec l'arbre, au milieu du jardin561.

The circle, the mandala which it constitutes within the square, the star, the axis
mundi represented by the solitary tree, are all notions and shapes that come back
obsessively in Mandiargues's texts. According to his interview with Joyce Lowrie, it was
in Italy that he first developed his deep fascination for geometry562, which invariably
shapes the spaces described in his work. The spatial settings of Mandiargues's tales never
fail to be carefully described, always within a rather narrow set of possible features.
Exactly as it happens with time, space is nonhomogeneous, and it can take two forms: the
dull profane space, and special spaces in which something can (and does) happen. The
former is inherently meaningless, and a profane perception of profane space is the
disorienting, fragmentary, and centrifugal perception of neutral spaces that are, at most,

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561 “Le marronnier”, cit., p. 32. Cérès will also curiously remark that if their heads somehow melted with
the tree trunk and they lied sideways, they would form a trinacria.
562 “Q: La géometrie essentielle qui se trouve partout dans votre oeuvre – est-ce que l'Italie n'a pas été
source, en grande partie, de votre inspiration ésotérique et géométrique? Je pense au cercle, aux trulli...
R: C'est probablement en Italie, en effet, que j'ai eu mon premier témoignage de ça, et une certaine
obsession de la géométrie m'est venue-et puis, alors, dans mes contes, dans mes nouvelles, dans mes
romans, j'essaie de donner une structure symboliste, spirituelle, à des faits qui sont souvent des faits
d'amour et de sang, d'érotisme et de sang” (“Entretien avec André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, cit., p. 80)
good for moving through them; this is often reflected in a labyrinthine quality that confuses characters and reader alike. The clearest example would be the urban maze of Barcelona, traversed by the absent-minded Sigismond Pons in *La Marge* through its streets, alleys, and corners which the narrator incessantly names one by one, with the curious effect of disorienting the reader precisely thanks to the painstaking report of each direction and turn the protagonist takes. The lengthy, defamiliarizing descriptions further serve the purpose of building up some kind of tension, a sense of charged suspension, and suspense, towards the eventual coming into the text of a meaning.

On the other hand, we have the special spaces in which this meaning can happen; these represent the other side of the ritual chronotope staged by Mandiargues, and act as a threshold to the dimension of the sacred. According to Eliade, only sacred space truly has consistency, form, and structure – and, as a result, full reality. Such form and structure are given preeminent diegetic evidence in the ritual spaces described by Mandiargues. Most of the time, like the lawn in “Le marronnier”, they are circular: in *La Marge*, again, a circular sandpit will be the scene of Sigismond's final suicide. The same goes – but the list is hardly exhaustive – for Borgorotondo, stage of the “théâtre de la mort” in *Marbre*, or the clearing where the final apparition of the goddess happens in “L'Archéologue”, the titular castle of *L'Anglais décrit dans le château fermé*, and the several circular spaces beating time in *La Motocyclette* and hosting the various episodes of the protagonist's initiation:

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563 “For a believer, the church shares in a different space from the street in which it stands. The door that opens on the interior of the church actually signifies a solution of continuity”, between two worlds and two ways of being in the world (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, cit., p. 25)
La Motocyclette is composed of three or four grand moments that are initiatory in character. Each is a microcosm of secret initiatory rituals. Each takes place within a magic circle and together they signify Rebecca's rite of passage […] The novel's structure, symbolized by the straight line of the highway on which Rebecca travels, accommodates within itself the full dimensions of these rites of passage. Initiation can occur only through a symbolic descent into the underworld, through the experience of pain and death […] The straight lines converge with circular figures as Rebecca moves towards her ultimate rendezvous […] The straight lines are not only interrupted […] so as to recall circular symbols and rites performed within circles, but also they lead towards a climactic encounter with a circular divinity.565

Even when they are not circular, spaces reserved to the rituals always maintain rigorously geometrical shapes (triangles, as the room in “Le triangle ambigu”; pentagons, such as the omphalos in Marbre's island and in “L'Archéologue”’s ice-skating rink; hexagons, as is the whorehouse mentioned in “Rodogune”; stars, as the town of Copula in “La Spirale”…). Picking up a book at random, Feu de braise, we can find highly geometrical locations in all the stories but “L'Enfantillage”: the everlasting spiral staircase in the eponymous “Feu de braise”, the hexagram-shaped brothel in “Rodogune”, the half-sphere of purple crystal in which the diminutive spirits are found in “Les Pierreuses”, the circular clearing of “Miroir morne”, the half-round stage of the “théâtre particulier” Tivoli in “Le Nu parmi les cercueils”, and the prismatic space encapsulated within the stone in “Le Diamant”. This experiment can easily be repeated with any of Mandiargues's other collections. The back cover of Marbre informs the reader that its protagonist “se trouve jeté en des lieux d'une géométrie singulièrement inquiétante” […]

565 “The Rota Fortunae in Piyre de Mandiargues' La Motocyclette”, cit., pp. 387-388
qui sont ainsi que la cristallisation des forces démoniaques soulevées par ses égarements dans le domaine érotique”. Several of these geometrical shapes, such as the “point au centre du cercle” (i.e. the astrological symbol of the sun and alchemical symbol of gold), the sun cross, several figures inscribed in wheels, stars, swastikas, crosses, polygons, and roses are again described by Joyce O. Lowrie in an article that seeks to “illuminate many aspects of Mandiargues's own geometric figures” through the “explications and hermeneutics” of none other than René Guénon – one of the central figures of French, indeed of Western, contemporary esoteric thought (and, of course, reactionary extraordinaire). While discussing with Lowrie the importance of alchemy and esotericism for the Surrealist group, Mandiargues had stated that “René Guénon c'est un peu notre maître à tous”.

In her article, Lowrie observes that “Mandiargues became aware of Guenon around 1945, when his friend Jean Paulhan decided to edit a collection called 'Tradition' for Gallimard [ ... ] Informed readers of Mandiargues recognize the role that numerology plays in his work. Guenon's knowledge of Pythagoras as well as of the Kabbalah provided Mandiargues with one more useful source for his own pursuits in that domain”.

When Rebecca, as we are told in one of the flashbacks corresponding to the pauses she takes during her journey, followed her lover for the first time, she felt “l'impression d'être entrée dans un autre monde”, and realized life is made of a series of secret thresholds. In order to step into the chronotope of ritual, Mandiargues's characters usually

566 Joyce O. Lowrie, “René Guénon and the Esoteric Thought of André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, cit., p. 391
567 “Entretien avec André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, cit., p. 78
568 “René Guénon and the Esoteric Thought of André Pieyre de Mandiargues”, cit., p. 393
569 André Pieyre de Mandiargues, La Motocyclette, cit., p. 131
have to cross a series of thresholds, the last of which is the physical entrance into the
normally circular or geometric space in which the emergence of an “autre monde” is
possible – so that the ritual chronotope, in turn, may work as a threshold for the entrance
of the "romanesque" into the text. The establishment of what we have called narrative
bubbles serves specifically this purpose – it is the deliberate creation of such a threshold.
Just as profane time can turn out to be “"ouvert' sur un temps sacré”, space, too, may hide
in its infinite folds special locations that are particularly apt for the experience of the
sacred. Occasionally, these can be found into our world, i.e., the world that the reader
shares with Mandiargues himself: such is the case of Bomarzo, whose statues, with their
suggestions of sex and violence, may mark a rare irruption of a Surrealist radical alterity
into our own reality that is there for all to see. It isn't by chance, perhaps, that the fellow
Surrealist Dali had been the first to rediscover the old garden (which may or may not
have been created by the Orsini family for magical purposes, and/or in order to serve as
an appropriate scenery to unnamed Sadean rituals related to their droit de seigneur). In
truly Surrealist fashion, art and reality are mingled and made into one; and fantasy itself –
together with the liberating, or menacing, derangement that its panic sources promise –
vades the physical world in the shape of Bomarzo's statues. Bomarzo is configured like
the macrocosmic equivalent (i.e. that in the “real” world) of many estrangement devices
present in Mandiargues's own literary work; conversely, the latter's ambition would then
be entering reality itself, and deranging it. Normally, however, the world of common
experience cannot provide us with locations so apt for the revelation of otherness, and it
is up to the writer to create them. Much like Mandiargues's time is an achronic, or
uchronic time, space tends to be some kind of impossible space, marked by bizarre
geometries. On the one hand, most of the places Mandiargues describes as stage of his rituals appear to be perfectly interchangeable, devoid as they are of any specificity that would logically link them to a specific region, its history, and its peculiarities, and closer instead to a number of virtually infinite variations on and declinations of an abstract model; at times, one could get the impression that they work as a pure theatrical décor, like places in dreams do (in Breton's *Les Vases communicants*, this effect seems in fact to be deliberately pursued). On the other hand, the very oddity of these places and the sense of incomprehensibility they hold, together with the sense of sacred that the text conjures up for them, irrationally convey the idea of an extreme significance that they must have somehow. These places don't only share recurrent features such as their shape, but tend to be located within a certain number of wider settings. Italy, where the author declared he first developed his taste for geometry, is a recurrent one – even though, of course, it isn't actually Italy, but rather some fantastic version of it as it could be seen in a bewitched hall of mirrors; metaphysical cities like Ferrara, the decadent, theatrical stage of Venice, or the primitive Mediterranean settings of the South and the islands are, inevitably, the corners of Italy that Mandiargues favors the most. Other recurring settings – at times located within real regions, at times entirely and explicitly fictional, and at times suspended as in some kind of abstract void – are theaters, brothels, red-light districts, *wunderkammern*, gardens, woods; in-between places, such as beaches, subways, *passages*, roads and alleyways, are also particularly dear to our writer, somewhat replicating on a spatial level the character of hybridity that the present has on the

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570 “[...] certains paysages et certains monuments imaginaires dont je me plais à croire qu'ils pourraient être italiens” (*Marbre*, cit., p. 198). Lise Chapuis's doctoral thesis is an extremely detailed study of the importance of Italy in Mandiargues's life and work.
temporal one. Other places are most clearly connoted by their impossibility, and by a Surrealist taste for the absurd\textsuperscript{571}.

It is there that characters will find (or build) the enclosure that circumscribes the sacred space, something that Eliade calls the “centre” – the ideal center of the whole world, for, wherever it may be, it is the place that can satisfy man's desire for a meaning, for fuller state of being and a fully authentic experience; it is the place that can get him out of biographical \textit{chronos} and into the radical otherness of \textit{kairos}\textsuperscript{572}. For a fictional character, this means that that's the place that can get him into the infinite pleasures of adventurist time, the play of variations and repetitions, the joys of the "romanesque". This is, of course, dangerous, but all true experience of the sacred and of its \textit{mysterium tremendum et fascinans} is (also) an experience of danger: “\textit{la dialectique paradoxale de l'espace sacré [\ldots] rentre d'emblée dans ce que nous avons appelé l'ambivalence du sacré. Nous avons vu que le sacré attire et repousse, est utile et dangereux, donne aussi bien la mort que l'immortalité.”\textsuperscript{573}

\textsuperscript{571} See, for instance, the gigantic mirror wardrobe-tomb in “Armoire de lune” (\textit{Mascarets}), the living, fleshy cave in “L'Homme du parc Monceau”, the marvelous palace of Petit-Colombes in “Le Tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley” or the absurd pile dwelling-casinos in “Le Casino patibulaire” (all in \textit{Le Musée noir}), the creepy red room and the “stone garden” in “La Vision capitale” (\textit{Soleil des loups}), the star-shaped city of Copula, where men bring their wives to be impregnated in “La Spirale” (\textit{Sous la lame})...\textsuperscript{572}

\textsuperscript{572} “[\ldots] l'abolition du temps profane et l'intersection dans cet illo tempore mythique de la cosmogonie sont impliquées dans n'importe quelle 'construction' et dans n'importe quel contact avec un 'centre’” (Eliade, \textit{Traité d'histoire des religions}, cit., p 323)\textsuperscript{573}

\textsuperscript{573} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 328
CONCLUSION

We have analyzed some key features of Landolfi's and Mandiargues's engagement with the forms of romance; and yet, as I have suggested, the eventual outcomes of their respective attempts at reviving such forms are not the same. Landolfi systematically dismisses the various romantic genres he confronts, each time showcasing his failure; as for Mandiargues, we have pointed out in chapter 4 that his rituals, while clearly following the initiatory structure that all romance narratives are (according to Frye) based upon, regularly stop short of said structure's conclusion – corresponding to the resurrection from death in the ritual proper and to the hero's eventual settling down (and, normally, to his marriage) in romances, after he has returned from the underworld or has concluded his ramblings. In this way, I've remarked, Mandiargues's tales subvert and in fact overturn the usual symbolic value associated with this structure, which is that of a process of individuation; in doing this, they replicate the loss of identity experienced by the author while writing and even somehow aim to contribute to the establishment of a “désordre Panique”, or in other words a deindividualizing condition of indifferentiatedness, into our world574. Clearly, then, the initiatory structure's incompleteness – or, rather, reversal – doesn't amount, as the recurrent ritual interruptus does in Landolfi, to the admission and the narration of a failure. There is one formal feature of Landolfi's stories, in fact, that is

574 We have also observed how the mise en scène of eroticism, violence, and their combination is particularly suited for the diegetic representation of the loss of identity in Mandiargues's rituals. Talking about ritualistic orgies, Eliade remarked: “L'orgie est, elle aussi, une régression dans l'obscur', une restauration du chaos primordial […] La fusion de toutes les 'formes' en une seule, vaste unité indifférenciée, répète précisément la modalité indistincte du réel” (Traité d'histoire des religions, cit., p 341)
perhaps paradoxically consistent with the very romantic tradition whose failed resurrection those stories narrate; namely, the normal reestablishment in their endings of some sort of equilibrium, parallel to the equilibrium that existed before the parenthesis of adventure time, the biographical time that nothing could be told about. However, the inherent insipidness of a similar condition, one that is below the threshold of tellability, is always foregrounded, and the reader always reminded that Landolfi's characters are bound to find it dull and unsatisfactory (even more so, perhaps, after they have tasted the salt of romance); as a matter of fact, the narrator at times goes almost out of his way in order to make sure that no “happily ever after” is intended, as if it could be. Mandiargues, on the other hand, doesn't want any equilibrium to be reestablished; his rituals are what he wants them to be, and the loss of identity is precisely their goal. This has consequences on a narrative level: if the characters' death can somehow relate to what Bakhtin called the second plot pole of adventure time insofar as there is nothing to say about them anymore, this plot pole (corresponding to the recovery or attainment of identity) is however never reached. The loss of identity generated by Mandiargues's rituals merely continues and extends the loss of identity represented by the vicissitudes of adventure time, which in turn constitute the essence of the romanesque; since no conclusion of adventure time is reached and no equilibrium is established, it is, in a way, as if the narrative universe remained open. If identity isn't reestablished, and death (as at the end of La Motocyclette) is mystically conceived as the explosion of the character's self in order to identify to some extent with the world itself, then the world remains there.

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575 We can think of Le due zitelle's ending as well as that of the fairytale La raganella d'oro, quite openly subverting, as we have demonstrated in chapter 4, the kind of comforting conclusion typical of the genre.
with all its seductions and all its stories, identity can still be played with in a carnival of masks, and infinite new characters can be created, live their own ritual, and dissolve in turn in order for others to emerge from the indistinct magma of all potential, yet untold stories. The very initiation constituting these rituals is to some extent an initiation to narrative itself, given how it coincides with the establishment of the suspended time or eternal present of romantic narrative, as we have described at length, and how it is performed through the two instruments (themes and plot devices at once) of sex and violence, which Mandiargues regarded as the fundamental elements of narrative at large. Perhaps, the Panic disorder he claimed his work intended to help establishing might have been just that – a deluge of narrative into the world, as in an evocation whose wizard forgot to close the door to hell or left it deliberately open for any demon to come through. For sure, this is what happens in Mandiargues's own fictional universe, in which the basic form of his ritual gets to be conjugated in an ever-growing web of variations and to be told again and again; and this confidence in the forms of romance corresponds to a never failing belief, expressed in many interviews throughout his lifetime, in the possibilities of literature as a whole. The risk of losing oneself, courted by the author in his writing as well as by adventuristic characters in their journeys, corresponds to a self-destructive letting go to a pleasure principle which, more than ever, is identical with the death drive, consistently with our remarks in chapter 1. It is after all the same principle that accounts for Odysseus's roaming and, indeed, the principle shaping a good deal of the Western literature that followed in the Odyssey's tradition – from Hellenistic romances to Chrétien, from Cervantes to Melville, through the picaresque novel and Ariosto; contemporary novels such as those of Roberto Bolaño still perfectly embody it in the
sprawling explosion of digressive movements, themselves spreading out from central
plotlines which already describe centrifugal strayings into adventure time and space, that
provide a brilliant textual correlative to the entropic push of the pleasure principle while
calling into question notions of identity and chance, and delving deeper and deeper into
narrative levels.

Mandiargues's approach, then, might well be a dark one but does retain a good
amount of faith in the possibilities of romance. There is, to my knowledge, no written
record of Mandiargues ever questioning his faith in romance in particular and in literature
in general, let alone doing so in the excruciating accents of Landolfi's diaries. Among the
reasons for this there could be his keen attention for erotic literature, which lived a
glorious season in mid-century France576, or perhaps the intuition that new literary
developments and the coming wave of postmodernism would have brought new blood to
a kind of literature that, for a good part of the century, seemed to have become inadequate
to current times577. However, his old allegiance to André Breton and to the Surrealist
ideals was most likely what kept him going, reassuring him about the possibility to
ultimately substitute history with dreams, as the Cimmerians would have it, and to

576 In the late fifties alone, Klossowski's novels Roberte ce soir and La Révocation de l'édit de Nantes, plus
Arsan's Emmanuelle (which, however, Mandiargues didn't appreciate too much), were published within
a few years in addition to Histoire d'O – enough, perhaps, to suggest a resurgence of the golden age of
French pornographic and erotic novels in the early decades of the twentieth century, when the likes of
Apollinaire, Bataille, and Louÿs brought luster to the genre.

577 Curiously, perhaps, nobody seems to have asked Mandiargues in his several interviews what opinion of
South American magical realism he had. He did, however, sincerely admire Octavio Paz and maintain
that South America was home to powerful forces in world literature: “[... il me semble que, sous l'angle
de tout ce qu'il y a de plus sacré en littérature, l'Amérique porteuse de vraie culture et de vraie
civilisation s'étend approximativement du cap Horn jusqu'à la frontière qui va de San Diego à
Matamoros en suivant à l'ouest le cours du Rio Grande Del Norte, l'autre partie du continent étant
peuplée de gens qui usent à peine d'un langage et dont les activités se réduisent à peu près à accumuler
des bank-notes et à porter la mort dans le ciel pour la jeter d'en haut sur les innocents qui ne
consentent pas à devenir leurs esclaves” (André Pieyre de Mandiargues, “Signature du Bélier”, in
penetrate and to some extent shape reality with his art. This would correspond to the Panic ritual he mentioned in response to the Surrealist enquête collected in *L'Art magique*, and it is likely that his own penchant for esoteric thought contributed to his belief in the eventual success of said ritual.

A well-visible feature of Mandiargues's work, perhaps not unrelated to Landolfi's experimentations with genres, may be worth some further research. I am referring to his deliberate construction of a literary genealogy, which is done through open references to specific texts (often pertaining to the marginal, the weird, or even the not-quite-literary, as in Rimbaud's famous preference later shared by the Surrealists: “la littérature démodée, latin d'église, livres érotiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes de fées, petits livres de l'enfance, opéras vieux, refrains niais, rythmes naïfs”578) in his fictional works, rather than through Landolfi's network of concealed intertextual references and references to generic Ur-tropes; through the abundant work of bibliographic research, as testified by his personal notebooks (which are literal mines of names and titles: these, too, often lean to the obscure and the marginal, and are not infrequently linked to esoteric topics); through the interviews he published in volume; through his non-fiction production as an essayist, attentive to the production of artists and writers whom he would recognize as his own kind (which was also done, in part, by Landolfi); and, finally, perhaps also through his travel pages, which at times seem willing to extend to physical geography the research for romance, for semblables and frères, for oddity, and for magic, that would otherwise be limited to literature – in accordance with

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Mandiargues's own (relative) optimism as to the outcome of the evocation that literature has to perform. One may even venture to wonder whether the plethora of dedications (almost every single one of Mandiargues's short stories is dedicated to this or that writer or artist) may not play into the equation, further enriching the hall of mirrors of reverberations. The construction of this literary genealogy widens the “symbolic spread” of romance into a textual universe, which includes legends about the Gothic queen Amalasuntha sung by fishermen in rhyming couplets together with Aldrovandus's *Monstrorum historia*, and the Jesuit Cangiamila's remarks about the opportunity to baptize half-human children together with popular fiction\(^{579}\). It is the same, indiscriminate *lettralité* that we have seen embodied in the magical bookshop of “L'Étudiante”.

The notion of hybridity evoked by Aldrovandus's and Cangiamila's monsters could also represent another interesting direction for further investigations about Mandiargues. We have briefly mentioned how many of his sacred spaces retain a somewhat hybrid nature; in *Marbre*, Ferréol meditates at some length on the topic – wondering about the border between land and sea, the impure, the indefinite, the double and the multiple, and about the verbal expressions designating such liminal states\(^{580}\). The reverie loved by Mandiargues and by his characters is somewhere between dream and waking life; the alchemical androgynous is the fusion of man and woman, like the hermaphroditic statue discovered by Ferréol on the island where he feared fishermen had perhaps relegated “*un être demi-humain, bestial pour l'autre moitié, tel que souvent il en naît aux campagnes*”\(^{579}\). See *Marbre*, cit., pp. 73 and 76

\(^{579}\) Ibid., p. 61
perdues, et ils ne meurent pas toujours à leur venue au monde, à moins que le médecin n'ait rétabli l'ordre de la nature en leur serrant la gorge ou en leur donnant un bon coup sur la tête". Mooncalves and monsters are defined by their hybrid status. The notion of impureness goes hand in hand with that of the sacred, and an indifferenitated blurring of all identities is, as we have seen, Mandiargues's Panic goal; Pan himself is the only Greek god with a half-human body. The *coincidentia oppositorum* that Mandiargues aims at is also to be found in these mixed, indistinct regions; Ferréol “*songea d'un état qui serait entre la vie et la mort*” before contemplating a bizarre plant that showed perhaps both sexual characteristics. Indeed, isn't in-betweenness one of the most striking features of fantastic (and horror) literature? More uncanny than mere otherness could ever be, in-betweenness and hybridity amount to an unsettling introjection of otherness, that comes to haunt the subject from within. Werewolves (and, of course, were-goats) are hybrid creatures as much as vampires, ghosts, and revenants, stuck between life and death. Lovecraft portrayed a radical kind of otherness in his Great Old Ones, but the only reason why this makes his protagonists crazy is a philosophical vertigo, the utter impossibility to understand; impure races and unholy crossbreedings, on the other hand, are his great obsession, and they represent the ideal way for such a radical alterity to actually come to threaten men – by becoming like him, by making him become like it. Besides, as I'll soon suggest, the hybridity typical of a compromise formation may also provide a modern, cultivated man with an acceptable way to look at esotericism and magic without him having to choose between refusal and full belief.

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581 *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76
Did Landolfi, other than representing rituals (and rituals doomed to fail at that, since, as we have seen, he did not buy into Mandiargues's relative optimism as to the feasibility of the forms he experimented with) in his fictions, share Mandiargues's curiosity for esoteric matters at all? As a matter of fact – even though testimonies are scarce and the topic has only been cursorily confronted by scholarship – he did; at least, as far as we know, during his youth.

After the end of the Renaissance Italy hasn't seen a blossoming of esoteric thought and groups comparable to that which characterized the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century in France; and yet, *si parva licet*, a similar milieu did develop (and have some influence on literary production) south of the Alps as well, although on a smaller scale and with the delay that one would expect in a cultural province – as has been recently shown, for instance, by some contributions to the volume of Einaudi's *Storia d'Italia* dedicated to esotericism, as well as by Simona Cigliana's well-documented essay about spiritism, theosophy, pseudoscience and occultism in nineteenth-

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583 “In realtà, come ha scritto Antonio Gramsci, ‘tutta la vita intellettuale italiana fino al 1900 (e precisamente fino al formarsi della corrente culturale idealistica Croce-Gentile) [...] è semplicemente un riflesso francese’: è infatti perfettamente vero che ‘Se non si studia la cultura italiana ... come un fenomeno di provincialismo francese, se ne comprende ben poco’ [...] La poesia e la letteratura d'oltalpe, impregnate di suggestioni simboliste e magiche, riverberandosi per via indiretta sulla produzione letteraria italiana, d'avanguardia e non, vi immisero così inquietanti fermenti che, seppure non diedero direttamente vita a scuole o a correnti riconoscibili come tali, giunsero a gettare i loro bagliori fin sulla poesia ermetica. Ma in Francia, e in particolare a Parigi, l'ambiente intellettuale era saturo di esoterismo, di curiosità spirituali e perfino alchimistiche. In considerazione di questo fenomeno, che aveva assunto, tra i letterati, le proporzioni di un dato culturale generalizzato, Anatole France, nel 1890, aveva scritto che ‘per la comprensione di un gran numero di opere letterarie, si rende oggi necessaria una certa conoscenza delle scienze occulte’; ‘La magia infatti occupa largo spazio nell'immaginazione dei nostri poeti e romanzieri: li ha colti la vertigine dell'invisibile, li ossessiona l'idea dell'ignoto’” (Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico. Contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra Otto e Novecento*, Napoli: Liguori 2002, p. 171)

and twentieth-century Italy, and about possible esoteric influences on Futurism\textsuperscript{585}. For a few decades, spiritism and séances were a common hobby of the bourgeoisie, and at least a general understanding of basic esoteric notions used to be part of the average cultivated person's background\textsuperscript{586}. Medium Eusapia Palladino became a worldwide sensation. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writers, still influenced by Romanticism, often dabbled in the occult\textsuperscript{587}; the Scapigliati, in particular, were exceedingly keen on whatever could point to the other world (or to Paris) – and a little later, the literary magazine \textit{Leonardo} often mentioned occultists and published several esoteric texts.

Sparse attempts to give birth to a specifically Italian brand of esoteric thinking, one that would look back at the Renaissance tradition from Ficinus to Giordano Bruno\textsuperscript{588}, were made (chiefly by Arturo Reghini, a significant figure within the movement, who also opened an influential \textit{biblioteca filosofica} in Florence). New scientific developments research led many to believe that spiritism, occultism, and so-called metapsychic researches would soon enough find a place within the bulk of authorized science, which, in turn, would explain phenomena heretofore considered unreal or unexplainable, allowing mankind to regain at last its full, prelapsarian potentialities: "\textit{In questo quadro,}

\textsuperscript{585} Simona Cigliana, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{586} "Capurro ("Ignis" I, 4-5) dice che 'non v'è studio d'uomo mezzamente (parli meglio!) colto, o salotto di signora intellettuale, dove non figurì qualche libro, opuscolo o rivista da cui occhieggi cauto e incauto l'ermetismo'. Forse, la fa un po' troppo alta: ma quella moda è certamente diffusa e c'è oggi molta gente che fa il mago e molta altra che sta a guardar" (Mario Manlio Rossi, \textit{Lo spaccio dei maghi}, Roma: Tipografia Operaia Romana 1929, p. 73, footnote 3).

\textsuperscript{587} "Nel panorama italiano, come già abbiamo accennato, le più spiccate, e inequivocabili, propensioni occultistiche si manifestarono in scrittori ancora legati all'ambito dell'ultimo romanticismo, scapigliato e non, come in Antonio Fogazzaro e Salvatore Farina, in alcuni protagonisti del tardo realismo, come in Capuana, o, in personaggi eccentrici come Pirandello (con i limiti che abbiamo evidenziato) e D'Annunzio, il quale, con esoterismo e occultismo intrattenne sicuramente legami non effimeri" (Cigliana, \textit{op. cit.} p. 170)

\textsuperscript{588} The first publication of Bruno's magical works, in the third volume of his \textit{Opera latine coniectrata}, dated 1891.
anche l'occultismo, tornato in auge grazie alle ricerche psichiche, poté spesso non venire interpretato in opposizione all'indirizzo positivistico, bensì come possibile campo di esplorazione della scienza stessa [...] Secondo molta trattastitica, la possibilità e finanche realtà di questi poteri [magici] sarebbero state provate storicamente dal rilievo che tutti i popoli, sia pure in modi e misure diverse, diedero a queste fenomenologie: molti, anche tra gli intellettuali, dimostrarono di credere che i poteri perduti fossero 'privilegi adamitici', posseduti dall'uomo dell'età dell'oro e recuperabili grazie a un assiduo addestramento"589. The subsequent rise of fascism, however, split the esoteric community in two; some attempts to give the regime a magical and neopagan imprint were made590, until a frontal opposition with the Church (and, to a minor degree, the regime's distrust of freemasons and of the Anglophile theosophists among other factors; all secret societies were banned in 1925) led to the end of occultist societies and magazines. Several of these had been printed over the twenties, including Igis, UR, KRUR, La Torre, and Atanòr, the latter one being published by the house of the same name which also printed the first translation of Lévi's Dogme et Rituel we have mentioned in chapter 3. Only the main protagonist of that season, Julius Evola, never laid down his arms, or his wand, and managed to carry on his esoteric researches within the Fascist cultural organs. Aleister Crowley, who had founded his Thelema Abbey in Sicily, was expelled from Italy in 1923; the last occultist magazine, La Torre, was shut down in 1930.

589 Simona Cigliana, op. cit., p 44
590 The Fascist police even ended up investigating a bizarre attempt to magically control the regime, and public opinion at large, through a collective ritual (a 'magical chain') proposed by the magazine UR. (see Marco Rossi, op. cit., pp. 615-616)
The hub of Italian occultism during this time was Florence, the city where Landolfi attended University – or, at least, got his degree, since he seldom actually set foot in the building and rather spent his time with friends like Leone Traverso and Carlo Bo, or gambled. In 1929 Mario Manlio Rossi devoted the first chapter of his *Lo spaccio dei maghi*, a curious disavowal of his former occultist interests and beliefs (I don't believe in these things, he stated, and yet they are real), to a vivid description of the mixed crowd attending the popular Giubbe Rosse café, in which artists and intellectuals mingled with occultists, cabalists, spiritists, astrologists, and misfits\(^591\). The one text, to my knowledge, in which Landolfi talks about his past dabbling in occult matters doesn't however refer to his Florentine years but rather to his teenage ones; it is a diaristic *elzeviro* describing an episode set in Trieste in 1924, when Landolfi was only sixteen. At that time, he states, he devoted his spare time to studying 'unorthodox' disciplines – esotericism and the magic\(^592\). He used to hypnotize his landlady, who in turn was a medium and clairvoyant who mastered some kind of ouija board, was able to read a book with her eyes closed, had premonitory dreams, and could see people far away and tell the future. The short text relates several examples of the landlady's divining skills. The young Landolfi even came to think that he might become able to rule over time and chance, or even to practice (literal) necromancy rituals – and yet, as always, he couldn't avoid a sense of dissatisfaction:

\(^591\) Mario Manlio Rossi, *op. cit.*, pp. 3 ff.
\(^592\) “Gli è che, in quel torno, io mi andavo dedicando a studi non proprio ortodossi: tutto quanto forma oggetto delle discipline chiamate (se ben ricordo) metapsichiche, come sarebbe misteriose manifestazioni della psiche appunto, poteri soprannaturali dell'uomo, eventuale presenza di enti invisibili eppur vivi ed operanti tra noi, e rimanenti bazzecole, tutto ciò mi attraeva irresistibilmente. Finiti appena i miei compiti scolastici, e vergate le opportune poesie romantiche, mi mettevo a compulsare irti testi, che Dio sa in qual modo mi procuravo” (Tommaso Landolfi, “Le blatte del mistero”, in *Id.*, *Del meno. Cinquanta elzeviri*, Milano: Rizzoli 1978, p. 121)
Il lettore insomma avrà già inteso che, tra padrone di casa isteriche, letture proibite e personale follia, io mi ritrovavo in capo una fiera confusione. Ero, anzi, divenuto una specie di ossesso, e la mia vita interna pericolosamente pendeva verso pretese e presunzioni di recupero dalla morte, o verso un sognato dominio sul tempo e sulle sorti. Eppure, tale sfrenato orgoglio era spesso minacciato da dubbi: non discutevo in termini espliciti la validità delle mie pratiche più o meno magiche, ma qualche volta esse mi apparivano arbitrarie o insufficienti, quasi oziose ripetizioni di una realtà che in barba a tutto serbasse il suo impenetrabile segreto\(^{593}\).

Much like high society does in *Ottavio di Saint-Vincent*, magic merely seemed to duplicate reality's fundamental predicament without actually managing to solve it. The one experiment Landolfi describes at some length in this text as the attempt to get a clearer glimpse into the whole matter is, admittedly, rather mundane (he asked the occult powers to knock on his door, and they did); when reporting the fact, however, he points out that he has no explanation for this phenomenon, or rudimental communication\(^{594}\).

Scholarship about the topic of Landolfi's relationships with occultism is almost nonexistent, being limited to two essays included in the proceeding of the conference “Gli altrove di Tommaso Landolfi”, held in Florence in 2001\(^{595}\). I have, however, found within the papers of Landolfi's daughter collected at the Centro Studi Landolfiani in Siena some preliminary notes for an essay that Idolina intended to pen on the topic of

\(^{593}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124


Landolfi's magical and religious sources. These take up several pages (although, unfortunately, the essay was never written), in which Idolina Landolfi includes possible influences and other intertextual relationships – naming among other Eliphas Lévi, Cyrano de Bergerac, Lovecraft, and Mandiargues (to whom a poem by Landolfi was dedicated) – and broadly outlines the features of a philosophical tradition that her father, she held, was closely linked to; this would be best described as a theistic, tolerant and anticlerical vision, characterized by a strong connection with nature and ultimately amounting to some form of pantheism. In her notes, Idolina also mentions some names related to this kind of thinking, and highlights its deep roots into the nineteenth century and specifically into Romanticism.

On the third page she writes:

Religione magica → l'uomo è dio, il mago tenta con tutte le sue forze di recuperare ciò che di divino ha perduto, di riaccedere alla perduta “patria celeste” – L'afflato mistico (cf. Des mois → “Io mistico”, “io asceta”, ecc.) in gente come Nerval, Hoffmann, Landolfi è fortissimo.

– Non a caso la preferenze di Land. vanno ad autori del medesimo genere, e che si occupano di queste cose (es. Villers, Nerval, De Maistre, ecc., Hoffmann, Goethe, Novalis, ecc.

I romantici

La religiosità di Land. permane quella di un romantico

596 It's a small bundle of papers held by a paper clip, filed within the folder “Landolfi. Miei appunti”, in the case “Fondo Idolina Landolfi. Manoscritti e dattiloscritti”. The first page carries the memo: “scrivere un saggio sulle fonti magico-religiose di Land. → v. Racconto d'autunno”. A few lines later, the name of Lévi is included within the “fonti ermetiche di Land.” (author's emphasis)

597 It could be remarked here that in his tale “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”, the eponymous characters also uses a conjuration by Lévi (“that cryptic soul who crept through a crack in the forbidden door and glimpsed the frightful vistas of the void beyond”, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”, in Id., The Whisperer in Darkness. Collected Stories, Volume One, Ware: Wordsworth 2007, pp. 118-119). This specific conjuration, like the “nightmare phrase” that follows it, is taken verbatim from the chapter 15 of the Rituel and is part of the ritual Lévi prescribes for “les évocations infernales” (Lévi, op. cit. p. 253).
The man-god evoked by Idolina strongly echoes a kind of preoccupation that frequently emerges in Simona Cigliana's essay about esoteric influences in Italy during the 1910s and early 1920s, when many intellectuals (including Giovanni Papini and some Futurists) seemed to hope they could find in esoteric thought and practices a way to expand and empower their own willpower and power of action, in very literal Faustian overtones; this, as we have mentioned, also implied the recovery of supposed Adamic “powers”. In her notes, Idolina Landolfi also observes her father's problematic relationship with his own willpower, always failing him except when it came to writing; in the last pages she insists on notions of mysticism, religiousness, and on a constant, mighty “tensione verso l'alto, verso una perduta 'patria celeste’” – or, even more, an impulse towards the overcoming of human nature which is in fact, according to her, the ultimate meaning of the frequent mentions of God in Landolfi's writings (and perhaps of his writing themselves).

Although these pages barely amount to a collection of self-addressed memos for future research, they do touch upon a whole array of themes and remarks that would be worthy of further exploration. Landolfi's undeniable spiritual and philosophical (other

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598 “Come Papini e i suoi, tutta una parte della cultura del primo Novecento, sarà influenzata dall'illusione di poter trovare nella dimensione del paranormale e nelle tecniche dell'occultismo una risposta, anche empirica, alla crisi dei tempi. Ma, sul piano dell'elaborazione culturale, per poeti ed artisti, questa via rappresentò anche, oltre che un interesse vivo e concreto, una tecnica di esplorazione profonda dell'io, una sua modalità di proiezione titanica, una specie di maieutica volta a favorire il dischiudersi di inedite 'facoltà dell'anima'. Insomma, uno dei tanti volti della sensibilità decadente” (Cigliana, op. cit. p. 89).


600 Although “naturalmente, ça va sans dire, del dio dei cattolici se ne fa un baffo”.

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than thematic and stylistic) kinship with the great Romantic authors should help understand the real significance of his ottocentismo, and Landolfi's longing for a 'lost homeland' could be material for a whole study in itself. Its implications would reach out to Landolfi's private mythologies – the nostalgia for a prelapsarian kind of morality, linked with regressive fantasies of incest (which are hinted at in his diaries as well\textsuperscript{601}) and settings of isolated or provincial nobility still proud of its past privileges, and the pervading sense of lack and failure. Characters such as Gurù, first and foremost, Lucia, who shares with her the ability to communicate with the natural world, or Tombo the monkey well exemplify the Edenic ideal of such lost homeland, which is also, and perhaps most crucially, reflected in Landolfi's language practices. Gurù and Lucia, in particular, also share an extremely peculiar idiolect – a highly original kind of language characterized by syntactical looseness (often, especially in Gurù's case, pushed to asyndetic coordination), icastic imagery, synesthesia, assonance, profuse references to the natural world (and to local topography, as if these characters were wholly part of it), intimate accents, great musicality, and a remarkably poetic quality which tends however to eschew Landolfi's penchant for antiquate and overtly ornate lexicon, rather resorting, in general, to a familiar and simpler one. The result is somehow reminiscent of the way a child may talk: a child who marvels at everything, like Pascoli's fanciullino or like mankind itself in its childhood – evoked by Leopardi in the cento of quotations from his Zibaldone humorously assembled by Landolfi into the “Appendice. Dal giudizio del signor Giacomo Leopardi sulla presente opera” placed after the novel's conclusion. The

\textsuperscript{601} See, e.g., Des mois, cit., p. 702, talking about his children: “Se loro due, fratello e sorella, un giorno si sposassero (davanti a Dio o a nessuno) e fuggissero il mondo in un'isola felice... Questa è forse la mia più cara fantasia”.
whole text deals with notions of poetic and artistic expression, arguing that the deep
knowledge and scrupulous implementation of artistic rules, as well as the 'psychological
art', characterizing modern poetry are precisely what prevents it from attaining true
greatness; reason, he states, is indeed the enemy of greatness. The reference is to the kind
of distinction between naïve and sentimental poetry that Schiller made (and Frye will
return to); choosing art and reason over illusion, and according an epistemological value
to literature, poets walk away from the imaginativeness and the constant sense of marvel
that is typical of children as it was of humanity itself in its youth602. Leopardi complains
that “s’è perduto il linguaggio della natura, e questo sentimentale non è altro che
l'invecchiamento dell'animo nostro, e non ci permette più di parlare se non con arte”603.
This appendix published in Landolfi's first novel is a document of the utmost importance
for anybody willing to study his écriture, or, indeed, his very notion of literature. The
mythical golden age of language that Leopardi conventionally identifies with Greek
antiquity is the true patria celeste dreamed of by Landolfi. Gurù's language corresponds,
on the linguistic level, to the ideal return to naïve forms that La pietra lunare vainly
attempts in its mimesis of the forms of romance, and at the same time sets an impossible
goal for Landolfi's own linguistic endeavor. As we have seen in chapter 3, he rather
attempted to reach the expressive purity of an Edenic language through the recovery of
the archaic and literary forms pertaining to earlier, although obviously used up in turn,

602 “Mentre l'uomo […] si allontana da quella puerizia in cui tutto è singolare e meraviglioso, in cui
l'immaginazione par che non abbia confini, da quella puerizia che così era propria del mondo al tempo
degli antichi, come è propria di ciascun uomo a suo tempo, perde la capacità di essere sedotto, diventa
artificioso e malizioso, non sa più palpitate per una cosa che conosce vana, cade tra le branche della
ragione […] e svanisce ogni'ispirazione, svanisce ogni poesia” (La pietra lunare, cit., pp. 151-152)
603 Ibid., p. 150
stages of language – and the recourse to nineteenth century dictionaries. Indeed, when his youngest son was learning to talk, Landolfi was under the singular impression that the child (whom he dubbed “Minimus”) somehow recreated in his progress the very evolution of language itself and even showed some sort of reemergence of linguistic atavisms coming all the way from the family's ancient Germanic roots.

In his introduction to *La pietra lunare* Zanzotto also mentions – in connection with Landolfi's language – the notion of hierophany, which, in his opinion, Landolfi constantly introduces and negates at once in his works. This sacrality, both proposed and recanted, matches the proposal and refutation of the romantic genres we have been analyzing Sinhalese rituals and mantra, S. J. Tambiah describes the “‘language of demons’, as opposed to human language”, in which these are spoken. Such “language of demons” is in fact a composite, polyglot stratification that employs, depending on which gods and entities it is addressing, ancient forms of different languages, from Sanskrit to Bengali. Although supposedly understood by demons it is unintelligible to the Sinhalese, who do not realize that such magical mumbo-jumbo does in fact come from several historical languages (and always from a former stage of their evolution). The archaicness of the words serves a crucial function in the proper preservation of magical rituals in oral societies, guaranteeing their correct transmission: “Many ‘primitive’ peoples who recite their religious mythology in saga form do so in an ‘archaic’ form of speech which is only barely comprehensible to contemporary speakers […] their ‘archaicness’ may also be related to the fact that they are composed in a special style, which uses highly symbolic devices, specially coined words, and words without meaning to fill in gaps” (Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, “The Magical Power of Words”, in *Man*, New Series, vol. 3, no. 2, Jun. 1968, p. 182). Dante's famous *Pape Satàn, Pape Satàn aleppe* (*Inf. VII*, line 1) as well as the whole “Litania” section in Arrigo Boito's *Re Orso* are excellent examples of the latter kind of speech.

“in tutte [le sue formazioni verballi], ripeto, mostra una certa teutonica durezza in cui a me piace ravvisare un riaccensione di caratteri obliterati, un segno delle nostre lontane ascendenze germaniche […] Nel supremo fiore della stirpe sarebbe presente il più remoto e selvatico retaggio, ove soltanto fosse, senza esclusione d'altronde dell'odierne e raffinata e disperata e intellettualistica cultura o civiltà, da trovare la salvezza […] 'Dove' si dice in lingua minima (del Minimus) 'u'; del resto perfettamente corretto, benché alquanto arcaico […] Senza andar tanto lontano e senza trarre problematiche conseguenze, mi parrebbe chiaro almeno che egli stia rintracciando in sé e col suo linguaggio la storia della nostra lingua, non dissimilmente forse da come l'ontogenesi è la ricapitolazione della filogenesi; in altri termini, le ragioni o l'istinto per cui egli dice 'u' in luogo di 'dove' (o piuttosto in luogo di 'ubi') avrebbero ad essere le medesime per cui lo dissero i nostri antichi” (Des mois, cit., pp. 699-701). The first pages of *Des mois* also describe Landolfi's own youthful attempts at pure glossopoiesis – an *idée fixe* that will come back in the eponymous short story of his first collection, *Dialogo dei massimi sistemi*, in which a man discovers that he hasn't written his poems in Persian, as he thought, but in an entirely made up language.

“Si forma così quel falsetto di cui Giacomo De Benedetti affermò che era la base stessa del discorso di Landolfi, come se egli continuamente recitasse il falsetto di un autore inesistente […] e, si può aggiungere, dichiarasse la jerofania di una sacralità che si autonegava” (Zanzotto, “Nota introduttiva”, cit., pp. 13-14)
observing. The childish, natural language of Gurù almost seems on the verge of getting a real grasp on and access to reality, overstepping all boundaries between reality and language and all symbolic order, reaching a world that is in turn as fresh and new as her language is – as if this were the very first time that mankind spread the layer of language upon the world, and words could still get hold of things instead of contributing to conceal them. The frequent enumerations of natural elements made by Gurù could make one think of Adam standing in front of the creation he was tasked with the sacred task of naming. Any magical language must presuppose a necessary and univocal relationship between signifier, signified, and referent, the possibility of a naming that would be the only right one. The principle of non-contradiction itself wavers in Gurù's and Lucia's speech – besides, the latter is clearly half-mad and the former seems to lose much of her sanity whenever the moon strikes her, and their own physical existence (one is at once girl and goat, the other appears to be mother and daughter under the same name) may look to some extent as a refutation of such principle. It is perhaps because of this wandering away from rational expression, itself in line with Leopardi's preoccupations, that Eugenio Montale commented on Gurù's final song, on the typewritten copy that was submitted to him, describing it as “il cantare uterino di una folle”. In the introduction he wrote for his translation of Pushkin's poems, Landolfi complained about the inherent inanity of all attempts to recreate language and, through it, reimagine reality; the only way in which this failure could be averted, he stated, would be if poetry had actual

607 In his *Demeures Philosophales*, published in 1929, Fulcanelli talks about a “langue des oiseaux” which is synonymous with the “cabale hermétique” ou “langue des dieux”, and is the language used by the old alchemists and magician when writing their treatises. It is “un idiom phonétique basé uniquement sur l’assonance” and it would be nothing less than the very first language known to man, the language Adam used when naming animals and things. Francis of Assisi, Fulcanelli states, used this language in order to talk to birds (Fulcanelli, *Les Demeures philosophales*, Paris: Pauvert 1964, vol. 1 p.114)
magical, or indeed necromantic, properties – some kind of extreme performative value that would literally allow it to make things happen into the world. As the whole passage seems to be particularly relevant to me, I will quote here in full:

[...] la sgradevole impressione di vanità che tutti abbiamo conosciuto di fronte alle opere purchessiano che tentano di rompere lo schema della realtà, di trasferirsi altrove, daccapo di generare mostri, di riformare il linguaggio e piegarlo a funzione diversa dalla sua naturale, la nostra impressione di vanità deriva però unicamente dal fatto che quei tentativi sono per l'appunto inani, che presuppongono nel poeta un'abietta sfiducia e un'abietta coscienza compensatoria, come dire che lui sa benissimo di non risolver nulla, di non creare se non vuoti fantasmi, di non creare senza più, ma in mancanza di meglio, a titolo di ripiego... [...] Ma cosa, se una data poesia codesti oggetti abnormi non li creasse soltanto sulla carta, non si limitasse a vagheggiarli e ad invocarne l'esistenza, ma li creasse davvero e bellamente, in un ordine e in una dimensione naturali, fisici, materiali? Evidentemente nessuno penserebbe allora a tacciarla di svagata, di fuor dal mondo o che altro; ma questo importa poco.

Devo precisare. In altri tempi credo credessi di percepire, e sopra ogni cosa ammirassi, in Dostoevskij proprio un tale anelito e quasi fiducia a creare oggetti fisici e materiali, sottintendendo egli a mio senso o sospettando almeno che per la poesia il massimo risultato e la vera vittoria sarebbero stati l'inventarsi, il cavare dal nulla non già un carme sublime, ma una comune seggiola o infine il più umile appunto degli oggetti materiali, e in poche parole realizzare il passaggio da un'ombra a una consistenza, da una potenza a un atto. Ebbene, postuli o no un simile discorso una particolare definizione della realtà e ci sia o non ci sia ciò in Dostoevskij difatto, è in questo senso che parlavo qui sopra di creazione. (Poesia magica anzi negromantica? Sia pure, se vogliamo giocare al tirassegno con le parole, ma almeno in accezione propria. O diciamo più semplicemente ed esattamente: poesia creatrice del mondo fenomenico)\textsuperscript{608}.

The topic of willpower (or lack thereof), touched upon by Idolina, is also a particularly interesting one, having been one of Landolfi's longest and most productive obsessions. From the \textit{acedia} described time and again in his diaries to the chronic inadequacy of the daydreaming protagonists of his fictions, the debilitating sense of an incurable lack of agency haunted Landolfi's writings for a lifetime; his two dramatic works seem to subvert the very etymology of “drama” by putting on stage two main characters who are utterly unable or unwilling to act – the later of the two plays even carries a clear reference to the schoolbook example of willpower in its title, \textit{Faust '67}. We

cannot act in this world, all there is are unrealizable potentialities, as Ottavio di Saint-Vincent told the duchess. Idolina's mention of a man-god and her subsequent remarks upon her father's willpower is also particularly relevant with regard to the relationships between occultism and early twentieth-century Italian literature, as we have already mentioned. In this context, the thought of Eliphas Lévi and his insistence on the notion of willpower, which we have touched upon in chapter 2, came to be of crucial relevance.

I will report at some length Simona Cigliana's remarks on this topic:

Following on the association of magic and willpower suggested by Idolina Landolfi, one may also think of some of the key concepts expressed by Ernesto De Martino in *Sud e magia*, his milestone study of folkloric traditions and folk magic in the remote Italian region of Lucania. According to De Martino, in fact, Southern magical rituals (operated

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609 "L'interesse per il mondo occulto, che aveva già fatto parte della cultura dei padri [positivisti], si tinse però, nelle giovani generazioni, di nuove sfumature, destinate a trasformare l'interesse teorico in un coinvolgimento di natura pratica: la 'volontà di potenza', trasposta dal piano empirico-scientifico al piano psicologico-spirituale, trascolava nell'ambizione di modificare il mondo sensibile mediante una studiata alchimia delle 'forze sottili' e l'investigazione dei poteri della mente, anche con la mediazione del pragmatismo, additava, nell'idea, uno strumento non solo atto a postulare nuove dimensioni della realtà, ma anche a crearle" (Cigliana, op. cit. p. 116)

610 Cigliana, *op. cit.* pp. 124-138
by witches called *maciari* or *maciare*) are specifically aimed at confronting a peculiar condition – a malady of the will, or, rather, a radical lack of agency, the feeling of being-acted-upon (“*essere-agito-da*”611) by unknown forces that usurp the subject's power upon his or her own actions. Even the subject's words seem to come from elsewhere612, and this “*paralisi dell'agire*”613 would fatally lead to a disintegration of the self. Magic, then, can help the subject regain self-agency, mediating the process of his or her reintegration within reality: “*scopo della magia è garantire la presenza, l'unità dell'io, la sua possibilità di agire nel mondo*”614. De Martino also suggests that this feeling of being-acted-upon may represent the “*riflesso ideologico e di costume di un difetto di energia civile, nel senso moderno della parola*”615, a “*limite dell'agire civile e laico*” whose energies could be recovered thanks to myth and ritual616.

It would be hard to resist seeing here an oddly accurate portrayal of Landolfi's own condition, to the point that one may wonder whether De Martino's researches don't offer a good key for the understanding of Landolfi's own fascination with magic – which would then be somewhere along the lines of the Nietzschean impulse that characterized, for instance, Papini's interest in magic, but carry a heavier existential investment toward the possibility of a therapeutic, or thaumaturgical, function of magic itself, and could be

611 Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia*, Milano: Feltrinelli 1971, p. 73
612 “Mi sento parlare ed è un altro che parla”, ibid., p 75
613 Ibid., p. 80
614 Ibid., p. 71
615 Ibid., p. 138
616 Eliade's insistence about the sacred as a repository and guarantee of true “being” also seem particularly relevant here: “for primitives as for the man of all premodern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality. The sacred is saturated with being […] religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power” (*The Sacred and the Profane*, cit., pp. 12-13, author's emphasis). The imitation of a divine founding model represented by all rituals is then the product of a “ontologic nostalgia” (*ibid.*, p. 106).
rooted perhaps in some cultural specificities of his own region. But of course, the kind of
magic phenomenon De Martino studies isn't an abstract kind of thinking: it's a historical,
cultural fact, necessarily linked to its geographical, historical, and social context – and, as
such, entirely different from any private psychopathological condition; magic is a social
act, and if a urban intellectual lamented the same kind of condition as the Lucanian
peasants he would just be a sick man, suffering from a private delirium that magic cannot
cure. Any rituals he hypothetically tried in order to help himself would fall into the
arbitrary, and would be destined to failure\(^{617}\) – even though the diegetic staging of rituals
in narrative works such as Landolfi's or Mandiargues's may also have the purpose of
allowing the author's private mythologies to be transfigurated into myth proper. In the
second part of his book, however, De Martino makes some other interesting remarks,
putting the city of Naples into the picture as well and showing the stark contrast between
urban high culture and popular folklore that historically characterized Southern Italy; the
city that would give birth to Vico and be an outpost of the Enlightenment opposed Bruno,
Campanella, the \textit{magia naturalis} and “\textit{il senso delle possibilità demiurgiche
dell'uomo}”\(^{618}\) to ceremonial and demonological magic – which however, as De Martino's
own studies show, resisted in remote rural areas such as Lucania well into the twentieth
century. In particular, though, De Martino analyzes the concept of \textit{fascino} or \textit{jettatura}
(which is in itself a challenge to its object's self-agency) as it developed within the
Neapolitan urban society into a compromise formation: on the one hand, the serious

\(^{617}\) \textit{Al contrario, nel regolare funzionamento della magia come momento di una certa vita culturale in una
società definita, non si hanno conati individuali irrisolventi, ma sistemi tecnici socializzati e
tradizionalizzati mediante i quali l'esperienza di essere-agito-da viene sottratta dall'arbitrio irrisolvente
della vuota immaginazione culturale, mediamente reintegrandosi nella realtà culturale e nei suoi
valori} (De Martino, \textit{op. cit.} p 84)

\(^{618}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 96

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magical belief in the folkloric concept of *fascino* came to fade, and yet, on the other, this process didn't go all the way to the development of an entirely rational viewpoint but rather was blocked midway, in a bizarre and sophisticated form of irony. The cultivated classes could, then, joke about these topics or perhaps pretend to joke about them, recognize them as superstition and still somewhat believe in them. This kind of irony does carry a somewhat Landolfian flavor, and the text I've mentioned about Landolfi's own youthful experiments certainly recalls it.

*Sud e magia* deals with traditions pertaining to the Lucania region and to Naples. Another topic that would deserve, in my opinion, some additional study is that of *La pietra lunare*’s possible links with local folklore. In addition to De Martino’s study, I would argue that a punctual comparison with the folkloric corpus described by Carlo Levi in *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* – narrating the author’s internal exile in the Lucania region just few years before *La pietra lunare* was published – would show a whole array of identical motifs (including, but far from limited to, were-women and ghosts of *briganti*) despite the couple hundred kilometers separating the Lucanian mountains from those of Landolfi’s Pico, which provide the setting for his first novel. No conclusive evidence that Landolfi did in fact include local legends and folkloric elements into his novel could

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619 This peculiar phenomenon was boosted by Nicola Valletta's 1777 *Cicalata sul fascino, volgarmente detto jettatura* (the “cicalata” being a playful, half-serious genre by definition) and was utterly misunderstood by almost all foreign visitors to Naples, who didn't quite get the tongue-in-cheek nature of the cultivated classes' participation in this set of beliefs, nor its origin “in una risoluzione pratica di compromesso fra l'antico fascino stregonesco, il fascino della magia naturale e i temi del razionalismo settecentesco” (De Martino, op. cit., p. 119). Gautier’s *Jettatura*, according to De Martino, was an involuntarily grotesque tale in that its author also didn't understand this and mixed a Romantic, Byronic kind of irrationalism and individualism with the compromise formation of Neapolitan *jettatura* – two approaches that are just not compatible. Something similar could be said for Igino Ugo Tarchetti’s “I fatali” – whereas Italo Svevo’s unfinished short story “Il malocchio” has a somewhat more appropriate ironic undertone.
perhaps be found, and yet the number and relevance of the commonalities that I argue would be identified should be significant. If this were the case, in fact, not only the possibility of some common cultural ground with the kind of views described by De Martino would become more likely; not only yet another hypotext (of an oral nature, consistently with Zanzotto's suggestion that La pietra lunare itself somewhat gives the feeling of an oral narrative) would be added to those we have already isolated; but the additional proof of the novel's willing reposal of the romantic genre of the folktale would support, I think, the likeliness of the reading of Landolfi's work I have proposed insofar. The line that goes from La pietra lunare's exuberant, self-confident writing, and its experimentation with the noblest form of romance, to the last two novels' somber dabbling in the territory of science fiction and love stories shows a progressive disillusionment about the possibilities of narrative – which Landolfi was highly conscious of, as demonstrated by the reflections about the Scinti and about the use of the third person we have seen in his diaries. It is the kind of pessimism that I have been opposing, through the textual lens of the rituals they respectively stage in their plots, to Mandiargues's relatively brighter stance on romance and narrative. Such a disillusionment parallels the growing hoarseness and thematic darkening of Landolfi's later poetry as well as his progressive switch from narrative to diaristic forms, and has an equivalent in the process of linguistic self-harming described by Paolo Zublena. The inclusion of local folklore in La pietra lunare would show a deeper connection between the novel and some of its themes, such as the core episode of the nocturnal “originale

620 See La lingua-pelle di Tommaso Landolfi, cit.
variation sur le sabbat”\textsuperscript{621} – which, according to the historian Carlo Ginzburg, was precisely constituted as a 'cultural compromise formation', the 'hybrid result of a conflict between high and folkloric culture’\textsuperscript{622}. Finally, if such an inclusion were demonstrated, it would be consistent with Landolfi's own beliefs about fairytales, and in fact about all “popular literature”. Landolfi maintained, in fact, that highbrow culture has always gotten inspiration from the latter, which in turn is constituted by a grammar (a 'rhetoric', he says, or 'lesser poetics') of 'images, situations, and even procedures' strongly marked by 'conventional and […] literary elements'. He who wants to make a similar matter into a proper artistic endeavor should, in fact, shape it into 'even more rigorous conventions'\textsuperscript{623}. The kind of experimentation with literary genres that I have been hitherto arguing for carries out precisely that function, providing the author with as many sets of pre-established conventions as he may wish.

\textsuperscript{621} Mandiargues, “Préface”, in \textit{La Femme de Gogol et autres récits}, cit., p 8. Idolina, in turn, saw a possible influence of Lovecraft's \textit{The Dunwich Horror} on the sabbath scene.

\textsuperscript{622} “Nello stereotipo del sabba ho ritenuto di poter riconoscere una 'formazione culturale di compromesso': l'ibrido risultato di un conflitto tra cultura folklorica e cultura dotta” (Carlo Ginzburg, \textit{Storia notturna. Una decifrazione del sabba}, Torino: Einaudi 1989, p. xxv)

\textsuperscript{623} “Converrebbe, così, principiare col mettersi d'accordo sul concetto stesso di fiaba o favola, e anzi addirittura su quello di letteratura popolare […] A noi dunque basterà accennare che di tutti i tempi la letteratura qualificata ha di fatto attinto al cosiddetto ricco fondo popolare: resterà a vedere con quanta consapevolezza. Ma piuttosto, diciamo subito che tale fondo è in realtà assai meno ricco che non sembri alla prima: di popolo in popolo e di paese in paese è, in questa partita, tutto un palleggiamento di immagini, di situazioni e persino di procedimenti, che pertanto risultano (anche perché riproducono posizioni fondamentali e originarie dello spirito) a tutti i popoli comuni, e finiscono col costituire una specie di poetica minore o di retorica, per non dire arcadia, come tale grave di elementi convenzionali e, neppure a farlo apposta, di tipo letterario. Affinché poi quella poetica diventi il caso maggiore, occorrerà, al solito, l'intervento di qualche mente eccelsa e sintetica che, conferendole dignità d'arte... la chiuda entro convenzioni ancor più rigorose. E insomma, sembra davvero che l'uomo disponga d'un numero finito di combinazioni fantastiche e che il suo anelito di evasione non possa essere sedato se non da qualche medicina estetica. Il qual ragionamento si potrebbe per avventura applicare anche a certe favole contemporanee che parrebbero segnare uno scatenato incontrollato della fantasia – quali la fantascienza” (Tommaso Landolfi, “Fiabe russe”, in \textit{Id.}, \textit{I russi}, Milano: Adelphi 2015, pp. 54-55).
Genres also allow Landolfi to introduce the rich *lettralité* of his hypotexts, referencing a whole literary universe as if the author were attempting, with decreasing hope, to evoke literature itself at his side and reinvigorate it; but as we know, the failure of such evocations is always prominently shown. If both Mandiargues and Landolfi accord the highest dignity to language and literary expression, it is the latter who sees more clearly (and painfully) how tragically outdated similar ideals, bordering on Parnassianism, are. One could even suppose that the novels of his second phase, *Cancroregina* and even more so *Un amore del nostro tempo*, may hint bitterly – in their play with the degraded forms of romance represented by genre fiction – to the definitive *déclassement* of the twentieth-century artist, utterly subject to the will and whim of the newly emerged cultural industry in order to scrape a living. “*Non chiederci la parola*”, Montale wrote; the kind of poetic word that Landolfi dreamed of is unattainable. Mandiargues experienced, when writing, the same kind of liberation that the endings of his tales grant to his characters; but in Landolfi's very first novel, when Giovancarlo meets the very embodiment of the poetic word represented by Gurù, he is unable to go through his initiation successfully and let that word radically transform his life. The world has become no place for necromancers.
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