



Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

2 | 2009

Benjamin Franklin / Richard Powers

Juvenile Cosmology; Or Richard Powers' Post-Global Doughnut

Judith Roof



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/4586>

ISSN : 1765-2766

Éditeur

AFEA

Référence électronique

Judith Roof, « Juvenile Cosmology; Or Richard Powers' Post-Global Doughnut », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 2 | 2009, mis en ligne le 07 février 2010, consulté le 01 mai 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/4586>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 1 mai 2019.



Transatlantica – Revue d'études américaines est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Juvenile Cosmology; Or Richard Powers' Post-Global Doughnut

Judith Roof

- 1 *Alfred Jarry and Marcel Schwob have a conversation, say around 1900, after Jarry has staged Ubu Roi and Schwob has published his simulated documentary account of the 13th century children's crusade. Jarry, as you may know, dedicated Ubu to Schwob, their joint interest in the logics of children binding them to a certain cosmological mysticism.*
- 2 *Alfred: Funny thing, Marcel, that eternity has brought us to this eternal point.
Marcel: Or perhaps, mon ami, merely drinking ether.
Alfred ignores the small jibe. Continues: By what impulse did you decide to recount recountings of the children's crusade?
Marcel: Seeing that the fate of children is linked to the apocalypse, which by the laws of eternity and perpetual coincidence will never and is always occurring.
Alfred: The beginning and the end, my friend, ensemble?
Marcel: So says our future reformer Sam Beckett. "The end is in the beginning and yet we go on."
Alfred: Isn't he in the past?
Marcel: Not yet.
Alfred: How far into the future do we have to go before the definitive character of the hovering disaster disappears?
Marcel: The character of apocalypse is always and will ever be only the threat of apocalypse. All that will happen is that we will meet ourselves coming back.
Alfred: Let us hope we are nine years old.*

Eternity

- 3 *Operation Wandering Soul, Richard Powers' 1993 framed narrative loosely organized around inner-city LA surgeon, Richard Kraft, deploys every hall-of-mirrors trick in the book, iterating the apocalyptic threat to and of children in a culture dependent on their destruction. Enacting the canny link between an anachronistic globalism and the child as a despoiled category, Operation Wandering Soul, Powers' fourth novel, performs the*

paradoxical intimacies of hyperbolic scale, merging the infinitely expansive with the infinitely particulate with the infinitely retold as coincident, mirroring, inter-contributing systems. Two (or 3 or n) sides of its infinite torus surface (the hollow doughnut) enwrap endlessness and timelessness as the derailing of narratives and the coincidence of loss¹. The novel's iterated infinities—the universe and the child, the cosmos and the bios, commerce and history—recalibrate the conception, scope, narrative structure, and style of the contemporary novel as a genre.

- 4 What is at stake in *Operation Wandering Soul* is not simply a different novelistic structure, nor up-dated figurations of recounting, but the very notion of what might constitute narrative itself. *Operation Wandering Soul* enacts a mode of narrative that makes sense of disparate phenomena and organizes perception and conception without the structural symmetries of Aristotle and Oedipus, the libidinal dynamics of the pleasure principle, or the mapping constraints of narratology's systemic taxonomies². An uncannily pleasurable text in Roland Barthes' sense of the term, *Operation Wandering Soul* revels in its nearly-redundant proliferations, ample furnishing of gaps, accrued near-misses, and eerily-welcome recursions that fold the narrative in and out at the same time—that produce and play through narrative as a field instead of as a trajectory, as a bouncing through histories and disparate discourses instead of as the sequestering and organizing impetus of the cause/effect ordering of traditional narrative³.
- 5 Reaching for something beyond the structuralist oedipality of traditional narrative practice, Powers' critics have sought other models to account for his novels' innovation, reach, and uncanniness. The novels are neither simply nor traditionally postmodernist, but evince something different and beyond. Trey Strecker describes the narrative in Powers' *The Gold Bug Variations* (1992) as “encyclopedic,” working as a “narrative ecolog [y]” about ecological issues in which the various elements give and take (67, 68). Tom LeClair characterizes Powers' work as a “new naturalism” in which systems models, genetics, and cybernetics provide templates for the “prodigious” knowledge his narratives manage (20). Sharon Snyder describes Powers' narrative method as “retracing the convoluted lines of authorship and fictional source materials” and characterizes his exposure of “authorial masquerade” as the effects of a “feminist-based ethics” (85, 88). Powers himself describes narrative as including “the whole process of fabulation, inference, and situational tale-spinning that consciousness uses to situate itself and make a continuity out of the interruptive fragments of perception” (Neilson 14-15). Powers refers as well to the recursive tactics he often employs: “The various techniques that I seem to come back to, such as recursion and interlocking story frames, are, in this sense, ways of using the problem of narrative representation to cast a light upon itself” (Neilson 15). Powers also evokes cybernetics to account for an alternative narrative practice: “The feedback loop between perception and story cuts two ways” (Neilson 16). James Hurt sees Powers' narrative practice as ultimately therapeutic: “The ‘interlocking dreams’ that make up the structures of all his novels are, like Linda's story of the innkeeper's wife, both hermeneutic and healing; they offer us a way of understanding some aspect of our world and thus a ‘regimen of blessed, bourgeois, fictive closure’” (24). Hurt also sees recursion as “an important organizing principle” in *Operation Wandering Soul* (38).
- 6 Powers' commentators indeed envision aspects of the works' reconfiguration of narration as systemic and cybernetic. Their insightful characterizations, however, do not take on Powers' works' re-imagining of our larger concept of narrative as a mode of making sense. Leaving behind the Aristotelean, the Euclidean, and the Oedipal in favor of the

Einsteinian, the Riemannian, and the Feynmannian, *Operation Wandering Soul* enacts a new conception of narrative as a field⁴. Its terrain is the multi-dimensional bricolage of systems suspended between the then and the now, neither of which have any purchase in a universe in which all times coexist despite the imposed linearities of textuality. Its multiple, regressively embedded narratives collapse space/time into a field of narrative probabilities made up of circulating versions of vain pilgrimages, juvenile evacuations, terrestrial displacements, corporeal disasters, medical misdirections, and cultural alienations. The novel's accruing lore of loss and entropy rapidly expends the myth of childhood innocence, making the recently resanctified child as irrelevant as Ptolemy, while its contemporary, more damaged version bobs in a sea of bottled messages. Collapsing space/time via the Klein-bottle inter-circulation of stories, however, is not a simplistic paean to the neo-global or the outdated transnational⁵. Instead, the novel bags the gathering consciousness of systemic reiterations and proliferated coordinates as the stuff of narrative itself, enacting a new, transformative matrix for a narrative dynamic as multiple, simultaneous, and probabilistic.

- 7 In its figurations and dynamics, *Operation Wandering Soul* enacts concepts from quantum physics, cosmology, and pataphysics. Its dynamics of circulation, iteration, and clinamen produce something analogous to Richard Feynmann's "Sum over histories," a theory about how we can conceptualize the travel of atomic particles. According to Feynmann, atomic particles travel from one point to another via every route possible at the same time. Each route is a history. The routes together produce a field of possibility—thus, a "sum" over the histories. The specific route a particle might take is a matter of probability. In addition, these histories are not synchronized with one another, "and, like the amplitudes of ripples on a pond they can interfere with one another to reinforce the strength of one path while cancelling out the amplitudes of others" (Gribbin 389).
- 8 Feynmann's modern understanding of quantum travel echoes the ideas of Roman philosopher Lucretius who coined the term "clinamen" to refer to the vague deviations of all atomic particles. In his poetic treatise, *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius describes atoms as swerving:

when the atoms are falling downward through empty space
of their own weight, at indeterminate times and places
they swerve a very little out of their downward course,
just enough for you to call it a change of direction. (Book II, ll. 216-20)
- 9 Alfred Jarry, the pataphysician who comes between these two figures, adopts Lucretius' notion of clinamen in his formulation of the concept of "Ethernity," the inevitable coalescences of chance, fate, and endless end. As Roger Shattuck paraphrases it, the term "ethernity" points "to a crossing of ideas concerning the propagation of light, the nature of time, and the dimensions of the universe" (xviii).
- 10 Taken together, these concepts from very different discourses—the quantum physics of "sum over histories," Lucretius' "clinamen," the pataphysical "Ethernity"—result in *Operation Wandering Soul's* narrative as infinite, resonant, recursive—as a field comprised of a plethora of slightly varied histories come together in a suggestive harmony. That analogies from hard science might end up tailing into Jarry's pataphysical "science of exceptions" is suggested by *Operation Wandering Soul's* focus on children, echoing Jarry and his friend, Marcel Schwob, who had written a history of the Children's Crusade in 1896, in the novel's plethora of deviated, enframed, and iterated stories of juvenile

wandering and loss, organized in attention to both the infinities of cosmos and the quantum universe⁶.

- 11 The recursion, repetition, and clinamen of the novel's histories form what finally might be imagined as a torus figure, a geometrical space that is infinitely curved in all directions, producing a hollowed doughnut shape, believed by some to be the shape of the universe itself. Going any direction within the torus will eventually result in a return to the beginning even as the space can host an infinite number of trajectories or histories. *Operation Wandering Soul* maps this torus infinity of histories, tracing, reiterating, and performing a field of possibility, producing recursion and the regressive framings of tales and tellers as both cause and effect where both have become meaningless and at the same time highly coincidental in the most literal meaning of the term.

"Sum Over Histories"

- 12 *Operation Wandering Soul* tracks the present and pasts of pediatric surgical resident Richard Kraft during his tenure at an inner city Los Angeles public hospital. Winding Kraft's peripatetic personal history in and through the histories of a group of globally-displaced pediatric patients, their medical afflictions, multiple, embedded histories of wandering and displaced children, and enframed and enframing stories describing everything from the Children's Crusade and the Pied Piper of Hamelin to pillage, shopping, comic book trading, circulating library books, creoled patois, and music, the novel erects a network of iterations and circulations, coincidences and displacements. The regressive illusions of enframing along with the novel's adept leaps through time and space reproduce the economies of relativity as intrinsic to the novel's enactment of narrative. In *Operation Wandering Soul* time and space are relative, interdependent, and inconsistent. Different times and histories enjamb and overlap. All space co-exists in the parallax of the narratives it hosts. The co-illusions of movement and stasis meet in the paradoxes of recursion and enframement. This narrative dynamic is in contradistinction to more traditional structuralist conceptions of narrative, which understand narrative as a species of timing in which an initial order is disrupted, characters go through a middling series of displacements and mistakes until they finally set upon the proper road to resolution. The classical story's disordering of its opening stasis produces a protracted tension through the story's middle premised on a desire to return to resolution and stasis. *Operation Wandering Soul* is itself a perpetual middle in which both the sense of a beginning and resolution are not only impossible, but also inconceivable and nonetheless perpetually coexistent.
- 13 Compared to a notion of narrative as the structure by which we understand as parallel everything from sex to Oedipus to capitalism to the course of a life, *Operation Wandering Soul's* narrative dynamic disallows the overlapping of such grand narratives and ideologies in favor of a particularity and idiosyncrasy that invite only accrual. Amassing the narrative wreckage of lives gone wrong from the start, *Operation Wandering Soul* substitutes field—that is, a series of slightly different possibilities all coexisting—for structure and situates the halts and misfires of story-telling as story. One child is a dislocated boat refugee with a rotting ankle. Another suffers rapid premature aging. Chuck was born with no face. Ben is a double amputee. Rapparition had a toothpick smashed into his soft palate. And if these radical detours are not enough, then enwrap

them in and through various mythical and historical scenes of violence, displacement, evacuation, and childhood loss.

- 14 One effect of the novel's iteration of fragmented catastrophes differentiated sometimes by only as much as the vague and unmotivated veering of clinamen, is the production of a field of possibility constructed both of what has happened historically and of what could happen or might have happened or could be imagined to happen. Instead of a structure balanced on the static arrangement of predictable binaries, *Operation Wandering Soul's* narrative economy is comprised of an amplitude representing the sum total of possible trajectories, which in the novel proliferate like proverbial mushrooms. The novel's multiple, embedded stories are not simply fragments of familiar narratives, but emerge as always already un-endable, tailing into uncharted regions in unfamiliar scales with unremunerative non-pay-offs. The novel's version of Feynman's "sum over histories," thus, enacts an uncanny, vaguely familiar version of story-telling that seems always to be just off somehow. A modernist might view the novel's field of unresponsive possibilities as the failure of form or structure, as truncated narrative, or even as perverse, especially in so far as that modernist Sigmund Freud defined the perverse as deviations from a proper stream⁷. A postmodernist might regard *Operation Wandering Soul's* narrative tactics as a successful challenge to a traditional need for closure. In the end, however, *Operation Wandering Soul's* self-conscious attention to story-telling and its iteration of narrative's pervasive, incipient defect, displacement, and dislocation enact a notion of narrative as a straggled spray of trajectories instead of as a normative, regular, and predictable structure, as a field of probabilities instead of as familiar repetition, and as vagary instead of as the comfortable and predictable parabolas oedipal narratives consistently provide.
- 15 The notion of a narrative field occurs on multiple scales and in multiple dimensions in *Operation Wandering Soul*. These different registers, vectors, and even regimes constitute the sites from which circulation and exchange are accomplished as well as multiply the instances of multi-scalar iteration and clinamen. The novel's dynamic models hint at an infinity of losings, receding perpetually through the interwound images and stories evoking wandering and lost children, versions of failed apocalypse, pathologically proliferated bio-matter, and the lost-and-found economy of perennially circulating texts. Perhaps the predominant iteration is recountings of wandering children, stories that figure a dynamic of eventual aimlessness figuring the novel's redefinition of narrative itself. As one delusively focal point, surgeon Kraft emerges from a history of constant displacement as the child of parents who served the American foreign service. The juvenile Kraft has moved around the globe, experiencing displacement as normal. As an intern he experiences constant relocation, moving from placement to placement.
- 16 Kraft's narrative is amplified by the story of Joy Stepaneevong (or vice versa), a Laotian boat child, whose peripatetic existence only changes its scale when she enters Carver Hospital, lamed by an incursion in her ankle. Her wanderings, like Kraft's, range from international to internecine, from global to biological, from landmasses to books embedding tales of wandering children. Joy's recumbent readings splay a field of loss evoked from the novel's presentation of an illustrated Children's Treasure volume recounting the tragic medieval children's crusade in which all of the children disappear, the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin who eventually spirits all of the town's children away for lack of payment for his pest disposal services, a paratext of *Peter Pan* and the lost boys, stories of Renaissance religious pillagings always involving child victims, a version of the World War II evacuation of children from London, a compilation of creation myths

in which lost children constitute a necessary abandoned remainder, the incident of a mummy child, and a newspaper clipping about a boy surviving Niagara falls. In *Operation Wandering Soul* the failures of narrative closure linked often to a sheer lack of knowledge figure loss itself not as a lacuna nor subtraction, but as transformational in a way analogous to the way the child monk Kraft recarves the statue he has broken. In a narrative field, loss becomes refiguration.

- 17 The text's renditions of juvenile wanderings and loss are accompanied and amplified by its figurations of music. Kraft's previous occupation was playing the French horn. The Pied Piper hypnotizes both rats and children with his flute. The hospital children demand dancing lessons, moving to a selection of music as varied as their own stories. Kraft whistles polyphonically during surgery. The Rapparition, a child patient with a damaged soft palate memorializes everything in rap. Kraft narrates the novel's final epic surgery with a whistled medley.
- 18 Music's figure which connotes pattern, repetition, magnetism, and harmony reminiscent of Alfred Jarry's notion of "Ethernity" brushes up against the multiple stallings of failed conclusion, mis-predicted apocalypses, and questionable determinism that undermine any notion of structural regularity or narrative predictability. The children of the children's crusade simply disappear, as do the children spirited away by the Pied Piper and the children evacuated from London. Baseball games fail in their endings, lacking what Kraft calls, "the nineteenth-century, determinist thing" (201). Fairy tales leave them nowhere:

Even the most cross-language remedial among them sees through the fairy narrative now. The old crone who tricks the charmed early readers into believing she is their mother spits them out four paragraphs before the ever after, stranding them in wildest nowhere. Or a place worse than nowhere, sicker, wider with not, with never: this Emerald City blazing away all its nonrenewable futures at this instant, there, outside pediatrics. (247)

- 19 And this nowhere, now here, now there produced by narrative's abandonings is gathered and harbored only by the torus, the doughnut of infinite planes evoked by the hospital children's fixation on a space television drama. *Operation Wandering Soul's* torus is evoked by the children themselves as a means of salvation, when Linda, their physiotherapist asks them what the space show's "cyclogeneron" refers to. "It's this humongous metal ring..." they respond.

"More of a torus, really. A doughnut."
 "I'm sure" [Linda retorts]. "A galaxy-sized metal doughnut. Give me a break."
 "Arm or a leg?"
 "And it's lined with these awesome hyperelectric solenoids that accelerate these subatomic..."
 "And truly brutal cosmic forces come shooting out the other end."
 "End? How can a doughnut...?" (156).

- 20 Indeed. For as Kraft notes later, "All predictions are perverted remembrance" (188). And even later:

They are leaving now in all epochs, all regions, packing off by candlelight. Stories continue to pour in. Myth shades off into reportage, fact into invention. If, tomorrow around the fire, to seed the needed child-courage, the one leading this group God-knows-where were to make a diagram on a

strip stranger than a Moebius, dotting every place a child has ever disappeared, would a revealing curve take shape?" (347-48).

- 21 The novel's perverted iterations project loss, refiguration, and salvation as a torus hall of mirrors in which the pointless future is also a repeated and fractured memory. *Operation Wandering Soul* amplifies this narrative field infinitely through its intertextual embeddings, its 5th, 6th, and 7th dimensional enfoldings of mini-narrative versions of the same old unendable story resounding through a plethora of disparate and uncoordinated times. The same range of vagaries write from the infinitesimal to the incomprehensibly enlarged, from the cell to the universe, from the middle ages to a present that can no longer find its bearings. The novel's bio-field, whose figure-ground relationship incorporates both extremes of dimension, scatters throughout, signaling the very fact of endless proliferation in its evocation of HeLa cells, the longest living and largest organism in the world filched from the cervical malignancy of an African-American woman from Baltimore and cultivated ever since. The story of wandering and deviation is written over and over again in evocations of DNA, viruses, bacteria, the hi-jacked cells of carcinomas, the million and one things that go awry on the populous level of the body's infinite biosphere exponentialized through time and in masses of accruing bodies.
- 22 *Operation Wandering Soul's* multi-dimensional infinity of wanderings—its amplitude of deviation—is figured stylistically as well in its overlaying of anachronisms and incommensurate discourses, its creolization of language, its inmixture of registers, and its constant evocation of figures of circulation, commodification, exchange, multiple enframings, and complex embeddings. The Pied Piper speaks in the jargon of contemporary corporatism while the precociously-aged Nicolino, ruler of the pediatric ward, uses language from the 1940s and 50s. The novel repeatedly describes the modes of traffic circulation in LA, the experience of shopping, and the perpetual comic trade of Nicolino. Nicolino's endless, meticulously documented comic inventory butts up against the novel's second-hand descriptions of books—*Peter Pan*, for example—and libraries of books figuring disappearing children—*The Wizard of Oz*, *Beyond the Looking Glass*—and the plots of television shows, which contrast with the vagaries of Kraft's own biography as a child wandering the globe, Kraft the juvenile speaker of every argot on the equator, Kraft the would-be school-builder, Kraft the monk, Kraft the savior of the refugees he finds in LA. Language is always polyglot, creole, nodded, signaled, missed, devoured in a million ways. Kraft, for example, can remember a Thai argot learned when he was a boy, which is close enough to the Laotian dialect Joy's father speaks to enable a hesitant and uncertain conversation between them. Kraft and his girlfriend, mestiza Linda, and Joy and Nicolino and the Hernandez brothers—every child Kraft encounters—range among languages and discourses in a free-floating sea of signifiers in which communication, finally, can be had almost without them. And also fail until it is too late, until the children are dead or have vanished.
- 23 "And Kraft alone is left to tie apocalypse to vanishing children" (330)—the novel's benediction on the eternal paradox of perpetually rerouted assemblage, and assemblage itself finally rerouted through the frame of the narrator's attribution of the story to his surgeon brother, a sleight-of-hand cheating towards reliability and displacement. But it is no accident that the novel's flocking, torqued narratives always fail in their delivery from the point of a childish present participle, a failure in perpetual process, aeons of stories begun and never finished, the child no seed to the future, but all children seeds of some infinite amplitude modeled on the disappearance of fate. When the story of the child

disappears instead of returning, when fate ceases prediction, when the primary mode of organization is a clumping around that disappearance, then we know the oedipal has vanished and a new concept of the universe—and its telling—has commenced.

24 Alfred and Marcel, having counseled our fictional Powers, consider what they will tell him:

25 Alfred: (Quoting Dr. Faustroll) "Ether has always appeared to me, to the touch, to be as elastic as jelly and yielding under pressure like Scottish shoemakers' wax (104-05)."

Marcel: Quit quoting Faustroll.

Alfred: I know of no more childish expert.

Marcel: You know at least one, and as you know, one is the wormhole to infinity.

Alfred: On the contrary my dear Marcel, if I know one and am one, then don't epistemology and ontology square exponentially? Jarry/Faustroll are the moebius horns of the torus figure of child squared by child, child meeting itself on the way back to the child who never left, an infinity of unendings where the concept of ending has both failed to emerge and has departed forever.

Marcel: Don't be merely stylish. Prattle means everything.

Alfred: And everything is prattle.

Marcel: No wheel or sphere as the less imaginative dream in their wildest imaginings.

Alfred: No, the infinities of the rhizome become rhi-zone, the tuning fork vibrating against another tuning fork in turn vibrating...

Marcel: Quit shaking. I get the idea.

26 Or that's what they told me later, when they had learned that I had written this paper.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

BAL, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

BARTHES, Roland. "Introduction to the Structure of Narrative." In *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977:79-124.

—. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.

BROOKS, Peter. *Reading for Plot*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

CHAMBERS, Ross. *Room for Maneuver: Reading Oppositional Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

FREUD, Sigmund. "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria." 1905. In *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Vol. 7. Ed. And Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press: 2-122.

—. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. 1905. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

GRIBBEN, John. *Q Is for Quantum: An Encyclopedia of Particle Physics*. New York: The Free Press, 1998.

HURT, James. "Narrative Powers: Richard Powers As Storyteller." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 18:3 (Fall 1998): 24-41.

- JARRY, Alfred. *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor. Introduction Roger Shattuck. Boston: Exact Change, 1996.
- . “Siloquies, Superloquies, Soliloquies and Interloquies in Pataphysics” in *Adventures in ‘Pataphysics’*. Vol 1 of the Collected Works of Alfred Jarry. Ed. Alistair Brotchie and Paul Edwards. Trans. Paul Edwards and Antony Melville. London: Atlas Press, 2001: 221-331.
- LECLAIR, Tom. “The Prodigious Fiction of Richard Powers, William Vollmann, and David Foster Wallace.” *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 38:1 (Fall 1996): 12-37.
- LUCRETIUS. *On the Nature of the Universe*. Trans. James Mantinband. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965.
- NEILSON, Jim. “An Interview with Richard Powers.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 18:3 (Fall 1998): 13-23.
- POWERS, Richard. *Operation Wandering Soul*. New York: Perennial, 1993.
- PROPP, Vladimir. *Morphology of the Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968.
- SHATTUCK, Roger. *The Banquet Years*. New York: Vintage, 1968.
- SNYDER, Sharon. “The Gender of Genius: Scientific Experts and Literary Amateurs in the Fiction of Richard Powers.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 18:3 (Fall 1998): 84-96.
- STRECKER, Trey. “Ecologies of Knowledge: The Encyclopedic Narratives of Richard Powers and his Contemporaries.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 18:3 (Fall 1998): 67-71.
- SCHWOB, Marcel. *La Croisade des enfants*. Paris: Ombre, 1997.
- TODOROV, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. Trans. Richard Howard. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978.

NOTES

1. A torus is a three-dimensional geometric surface produced by revolving a circle around an axis that does not touch the circle itself—imagine the inside of a doughnut or an inner tube. One virtue of the torus surface is that it is infinite in all directions.
2. In the majority of its presentations, narrative theorists define narrative as a structuralist endeavor shaped by Aristotelean conceptions of arc, the binaries of structural linguistics, and motivated by Oedipal notions of closure and return. See for example, Roland Barthes’ “Introduction to the Structure of Narrative,” or Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Poetics of Prose*. Narratology, derived from Vladimir Propp’s structural readings of folktales reflects the taxonomies of structuralist linguistics. See, for example Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. This characterization is, of course, a simplification and many theorists have tried to envision ways around the structuralist impasse. See, for example, Ross Chambers, *Room for Maneuver*.
3. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes envisions another order of narrative inhabiting what he calls “the oedipal.” Theories of narrative as mapping Freud’s notion of the pleasure principle include Peter Brooks’ *Reading for Plot*.
4. In exploding various aspects of both Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics, Albert Einstein, Bernhard Riemann, and Richard Feynman extend the conceptual capacities we might attach to the physical universe. Einstein’s theory of relativity, which asserted that time does not “flow” evenly and that the same object might travel at different speeds depending on one’s vantage, Riemann’s development of a geometry of higher dimensions, and Feynman’s “sum over

histories” or the notion that a quantum particle exists at the sum of the probabilities of all of its possible paths produce concepts of time, location, and velocity as phenomena produced and producing fields as opposed to singular points or three-dimensional structures.

5. A Klein bottle is a manifold, or a surface with no distinct inner or outer sides. It circles in and through itself, requiring the dimension of temporality.

6. Pataphysics is a term coined by Alfred Jarry to refer to what he called “the science of exceptions.” See for example, “Siloquies, Superloquies, Soliloquies and Interloquies in Pataphysics” in *Adventures in 'Pataphysics'*.

7. Freud envisions several psychic dynamics as akin to narrative, but already a notion of narrative as a literal kind of field. Although the libidinal dynamics he outlines in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* provide Peter Brooks with a ready model for understanding the emotional investments of narrative, Freud's characterizations of perversity see it as something which deviates from a flow, trickling into little side streams. See for example Freud's discussion of the perverse in both *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.”

RÉSUMÉS

Le roman de Richard Powers, *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993), présente le lien subtil qui associe un mondialisme déjà usé et vieillissant à l'enfant perçu comme catégorie dominante. Comme les faces serpentine d'un ruban de Möbius lové autour de l'illimité et de l'intemporel, le texte, tendu entre ses deux infinis – l'univers et l'enfant – révisé la portée, la conception, la structure et le style du genre romanesque. Délaissant Aristote pour Einstein, *Operation Wandering Soul* se place sur le terrain de la cosmologie. Le récit, qui rassemble la kyrielle des grands ralliements juvéniles et leurs vains pèlerinages, concentre l'espace-temps dans une présentation qui évoque la « somme des histoires » de Richard Feynman. La contraction de l'espace-temps opérée par le roman ne fait pas de celui-ci un hymne simpliste au global (catégorie déjà aussi datée que celle des malheureux vétérans du Vietnam), mais capte au contraire la conscience grandissante d'une existence sans origine qui s'étend à perte de vue au-delà de ses coordonnées supposées. Le roman s'enroule sur lui-même tout en s'épanchant au dehors, boucle ses cadres et ses détours tout en desserrant leur emprise. Il fait tourner la roue de ses récits comme des planètes en rotation, la ronde d'un système solaire, le tourbillon d'une galaxie. La conscience que présente *Operation Wandering Soul* ne se résume donc pas au seul point de vue de l'âme errante qu'est le personnage de Kraft, mais consiste en la somme de tous les temps et de tous les lieux, de leurs strates accumulées comme une conscience en acte, complexe et tissée de réseaux, qui n'appartient à personne et est partagée par tous. Cette accumulation organise le jeu des perspectives multiples qui instaurent l'acte de lecture et sont instaurées par lui. À cet égard, lire constitue ici une physique des oubliés.

Richard Powers' novel *Operation Wandering Soul* (1993) enacts the canny link between an already jaded and out-dated globalism and the child as an ascendant category. Two sides of a snaking Möbius enwrapping endlessness and timelessness, the novel's tailing infinities—the universe and the child—recalibrate the scope, conception, narrative structure, and style of the novel as a genre. Moving from the Aristotelean to the Einsteinian, *Operation Wandering Soul's* terrain is cosmological, while its narrative collapses time/space into an exhibition of something like

Richard Feynman's "sum over the histories" made up of proliferating versions of juvenile massings and vain pilgrimages. The novel's collapse of time/space is not a simplistic paeon to the global (a category already as out-dated as hapless Vietnam vets), but instead bags the gathering consciousness of an originless existence forever extending beyond its supposed coordinates. The novel wraps both inward and out, framing its frames and detours while losing them. It spins tales like a revolving planet, wheeling solar system, or careening galaxy. The consciousness enacted by *Operation Wandering Soul* is not defined, thus, only as the perspective of its wandering soul surgeon protagonist Kraft, but as the accruing of all time and place, layered as an enactment of a complex and networked consciousness belonging to no one and everyone. Such accrual is a multi-perspectival echoing instigated by and instigating the act of reading, where reading itself constitutes the physics of the forgotten.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Récit, Richard Feynmann, clinamen, éternité, structure, champ, tore

Keywords : Narrative, quantum physics, pataphysics, field, structure, torus

AUTEUR

JUDITH ROOF

Michigan State University