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## Tournier's Theoretical Pretext Works Like a Charm

### Abstract

By playing on the expectations that a reader would have for a *Bildungsroman*, Tournier puts generic parameters and received ideas into question. In *La Goutte d'or*, he writes a text in which thematic considerations become so over-determined that they give way to a set of theoretical considerations about how the novel is constructed and perceived.

Tournier does engage the reader in two "orthodox" theoretical perspectives on the nature of the text. The first involves the generation of meaning through the determination of a signified; the second involves the play of the signifier. But the largest portion of the theoretical perspectives of the novel is given over to the development of a phenomenological position of perception within the text. Tournier generates a structure of intentionality, signification, and meaning that he "develops" by means of the novel's *fil conducteur*, the photographic image.

Tournier eventually refuses the status of image-making for the text and closes with a theoretical perspective that depends on the double valorization of writing: as the aesthetic dance of signifiers and as the seduction of the well-told tale.

### Keywords

Bildungsroman, Tournier, La Goutte d'or, generic, over-determined, theoretical considerations, orthodox, generation of meaning, signified, signifier, phenomenological, perception, intentionality, signification, meaning, fil conducteur, photographic image, image-making

## TOURNIER'S THEORETICAL PRETEXT WORKS LIKE A CHARM

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“Dessine-moi un chameau.”—Saint-Exupéry

“Qu’est-ce qu’un tatouage? C’est une amulette permanente, un bijou vivant qu’on ne peut enlever parce qu’il est consubstantiel au corps. C’est le corps fait bijou, et partageant l’inaltérable jeunesse du bijou” [What is a tattoo? It is a permanent amulet, a living jewel that can’t be removed because it is consubstantial with the body. It is the body turned jewel, and it shares the unchangeable youth of the jewel.]<sup>1</sup>

Understanding *La Goutte d’or* (1985) depends on how we read the story of the death of a camel.<sup>2</sup> The interpretation of the text as a whole relates intrinsically to the way in which the readers understand this specific incident, which is strategically situated at the beginning of the work. Idriss, the protagonist of the novel, and his friend, the one-eyed nomad, Ibrahim, approach a well in a wadi in the Sahara. The well is barely defined, without the usual signs that signal a well: “[s]eule une levée de terre . . . signalait la présence d’un puits. Ni bassin, ni murette, ni margelle” [only a slight rise indicated the presence of a well. No basin, no curb, no rim].<sup>3</sup> Readable nonetheless by the adolescents, despite the absence of signs, it is dangerously unreadable for a camel, who, not recognizing the invisible limits, falls in. In order to see if the camel is wounded, Ibrahim goes down into the well. Returning, climbing up like the creature from the black lagoon: “ce n’était qu’une vivante statue sculptée dans un limon sanglant” [he was only a living statue sculpted in bloody mud] (21), Ibrahim jumps on a support beam. Paying more attention to his genitals than to the precariousness of the situation, Ibrahim falls into the well as two of the

beams give way. Panic-stricken, Idriss approaches the well, finds the situation hopeless and finally hears or thinks he hears the laughter of his friend now buried alive.

Such a neatly defined episode begs not only for reading, but for over-reading. In part, the over-reading arises simply from the disposition of the anecdote in the text. It is strategically situated after the initial kernel of the plot, and thus, it can (or may) be read in counterpoint to the beginning of the story. The first episode is the anecdotal origin of the story: an archetypically and stereotypically blonde European woman, wearing large, stereotypical sunglasses, takes a photo of Idriss. Tournier presents this episode as an interruption in Idriss' search for Ibrahim, and thus as an accident; yet it is the story of the photograph that is eventually found to be at the heart of the novel's employment. For the essence of the plot consists of Idriss' voyage to the North and eventually to Paris in search of the woman who has taken the photo and perhaps all too easily taken his soul as well. The story of the camel interrupts the flow and thus prevents the plot from unfolding as it should, according to the stereotyped signs and structures given in the anecdotal scene of the Europeans. The double story of the camel and of the death of Ibrahim interrupts a very transparent determinism in plot, psychology, and political commentary that readers have already seen and which they know all too well. For what modern reader, at least what modern critic, would accept another *Bildungsroman*, another *Paysan parvenu*, another supplement to *Robinson Crusoe*?<sup>4</sup> Tournier himself has already written that revisionist text in *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967).

There is an alternative to seeing the novel as merely a stereotyped text whose general flow is predictable or even to seeing it as a "bad" novel. A critical position on the text depends on a reading of the way in which the counterpoint of the camel-scene is played out; this critical position then itself informs the reader's structuring of the text. Everything depends on how the reader reads the death of the camel, precisely because Tournier is creating a phenomenological game in the novel. In part he is playing on the reader's desire, already present, to interrupt the seemingly predetermined flow of plot. Two possible readings come to mind (as the most likely among several), and each determines a mode of reading the book that is not simply the predetermined path of a *Bildungsroman*. First of all, the death of the camel and of Ibrahim is a scene that presents a conjunction of thematic threads. The motherless baby camel will wander, as will

Idriss, now deprived of his soulmate, Ibrahim. The camel's accident prefigures that of Ibrahim; together their deaths point to the isolation and solitude of the protagonist, the one who has to fight alone, travel alone, and be alone in a hostile world. Yet such an interpretation of the counterpoint thematic of the camel has two major faults. As the metacommentary on the plot of the novel, this version of a thematic reading does nothing to interrupt the unfurling of the standard plot. Rather, through such a thematic reading the episode becomes extraneous filler. Tournier's readers already know what a protagonist is and how he functions alone. Unlike the hypothetical and apostrophized adolescent girls to whom Rousseau appeals in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, modern readers are far from innocent: we have all read novels before. A thematic reading would tend to make this novel *déjà vu, déjà entendu, déjà lu*.

There is however a second possible set of readings. Tournier makes a point of creating a theoretical *mise-en-scène* both at the beginning and at the end of the novel. The establishment of a theoretical groundwork for the novel is not only the means of actualizing our knowledge of the text but also, and more importantly in view of the construction of this novel, the means of enabling our understanding of how we may read it. Tournier performs the equivalent of a translation from one mode of discourse to another. In general, the theoretical position allows for the possibility of translating the narrative discourse with its attendant structures and tropes of verisimilitude into a critical discourse. But before this theorization from within can be examined, it is necessary to look at the concept of translation.

The reader's immediate perception is that there has already been a critical short-circuit in *La Goutte d'or*: the novel is already translated within itself into critical discourses and into a theoretical perspective on semiosis. Since the reader must refuse to read a stereotypically bad (redundant) novel, the more standard set of thematic possibilities can be put aside. Yet it is ultimately a facile gesture to condemn the various thematic possibilities, be they political, social, or psychological. The fundamental problem of the novel appears to be that of the already translated text, the work that implies the discourse of the critical other within the text of verisimilitude. Hence, as far as the phenomenology of reading is concerned, there is an immediate result of this process of translation: the reader's position is not so much critical as reflexive, and his task can be envisioned

as a reflection of the theory of the text. It is up to the critic to mimic, in his or her writing, the phenomenology of theory. This presentation is the *mise-en-fiction* of theory—not only as point-of-view within the framework of the text's own presentation of itself, but more importantly, as the text's vision and demonstration of itself.

The translation of discourse has found its most eloquent spokesperson and theoretician in Michel Serres. In *Hermès III. La Traduction* (1974), he has produced a series of articles that deal with the phenomenon of translatability.<sup>5</sup> It is Serres' contention, one that is by no means unrelated to a Foucauldian archaeology of discourse, that contemporaneous discourses in different fields or realms of human endeavor (where there is a question of semioticity or communication in general) can be intertranslated. For example, according to Serres, Zola's work has a homologue in the discourse of science of the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> It is not merely in the biological model that Zola willfully employs in his naturalist doctrine that the author mimics, echoes, or translates science in a conscious fashion. According to Serres, what is important is the discourse of thermodynamics that is constantly translated into the fictional discourse of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. The deep structures of the two discourses partake of the same epistemological model.

Though still a translation in Serres' terms, Tournier's text differs markedly from that of Zola. Contrary to the multiple translations performed in Zola's text, one can only perceive the willful and conscious introduction of theory in *La Goutte d'or* as the translation of and for narrative discourse. It is difficult to imagine or determine a translation for the work other than that of the proleptic and reflexive critical position that theorizes narrative from within. No third discourse comes into play: there is no text of post-modern culture and there is no move away from a Newtonian universe. Yet it is this local translation within the work that gives rise to a phenomenology of theory for the work. The reader becomes aware that this local translation, both in its insistence on and its exclusion of other possible translations, is of interest to Tournier's critical readers.

The beginning of the novel, the scene of the camel, is a dramatization of the theories of René Girard, though they appear in a somewhat convoluted form.<sup>7</sup> The propitiatory victim, the sacrificed Ibrahim, who is already marked by being one-eyed, comes to stand in for the scape“goat”ed camel. Tournier reverses what we take to be Girard's view of the development of rites and rituals in a society. For

Girard, the chain of development usually passes from the sacrifice of the human victim to the enactment of ritual sacrifice. This enactment occurs through the representation of the original sacrifice, either through the rite of sacrificing the propitiatory victim or through the aesthetic transformation of the rite into drama. The reversal of Girard is the first of Tournier's attempts to introduce a theoretical position into the novel: the reversal itself is the means of refusing to honor any transcendental meaning in the text, whether thematic or theoretical in nature, a rhetorical move absolutely essential to the completion of Tournier's project.

At the end of the novel, counterbalancing René Girard, is found a *mise-en-scène* of certain textual strategies of the post-structuralist theorizings of Roland Barthes and, even more to the point, of Jacques Derrida. Having made his way to Paris and survived a certain number of adventures in Paris (those necessary to maintaining the illusion of the *Bildungsroman*), Idriss finds himself in a calligrapher's workshop. This episode is a veritable scene of learning as well as a scene of writing<sup>8</sup>; it provides instruction on the meaning of life (or the lack thereof) through the insistence on, and persistence of, the letter. Life comes second to writing; real work disappears behind the Mallarméan or Yeatsian dancer:

L'arabe s'écrivant de la main droite et de droite à gauche, il faut prendre garde que la main ne passe sur la ligne fraîchement écrite. En vérité la main, telle une ballerine, doit danser légèrement sur le parchemin, et non peser comme un laboureur avec sa charrue. (233)

[Arabic being written with the right hand and from right to left, one must make sure that one's hand does not go over the freshly written line. Like a ballerina, one's hand must lightly dance over the parchment and not weigh heavily like a field-hand with his plough.]

Thus in a certain sense the text does pass from a Girardian theorization of the world and of itself, a world of substance, content, and themes, to a Derridian view, a world of moving signs.<sup>9</sup> The presentational aspect of a representation, that which indicates the contents as such, is illusory for Tournier. The image itself is a false hope, a mirage of images of life, of truth promised, of fulfillment to come.<sup>10</sup> Like



religion for Marx, but on a larger scale, the very process of representation on which the west founds its institutions is, so to speak, a pipe dream:

En vérité l'image est bien l'opium de l'Occident. Le signe est esprit, l'image est matière. La calligraphie est l'algèbre de l'âme tracée par l'organe le plus spiritualisé du corps, sa main droite. (235)

[The image is really the opiate of the West. The sign is spirit, the image is matter. Calligraphy is the soul's algebra traced by the most spiritual organ of the body, the right hand.]

The text would seem to pass to a reading that values writing over content, where the beauty of the writing or of the story-telling represents not a whole but the void, that echoes in the hollow "en vérité" that begins the paragraph just quoted. The sign recalls a vacuum and the infinite. It is not without an echo of the metaphysical post-modernism of Borges in stories like "Ibn-Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth" and "The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths." Echoing Borges as if he, Tournier, were another post-structuralist critic who were using the Argentine's works as a *point de repère*, Tournier describes the desert itself in unmistakable terms: "L'arabesque manifeste la présence du désert dans la mosquée" [The arabesque shows the presence of the desert in the mosque] (235). "Post-structuralist" as well is the song of Zett Zobeida, along with her most Barthes-ian of names.<sup>11</sup> The song speaks of writing on the wing of a cricket that unveils the secret of life; the reader is zetetically in pursuit of the unveiled signs. Even the *goutte d'or* itself is inscribed within the theorizations of post-structuralism, or at least within the realm of the *idées reçues* of post-structuralism. It is the sign that signifies the loss of virginity, though it is clearly not that of any of those to whom it properly belongs; it is only Idriss' by accident. And the sign only signifies when it is absent. Moreover, perhaps to make sure that we read theoretically, Tournier inserts a capital sign of Derridian wordplay with the word *prétexte*: "Lorsqu'ils [Roman boys] échangeaient la robe prétexte contre la toge virile, ils abandonnaient également la bulla aurea en offrande aux lares domestiques" [When Roman boys exchanged the praetexta for the manly toga, they also



gave up the *bullā aurea* as an offering to the household gods] (118).<sup>12</sup>

If Derrida seems to win out over Girard in this battle of the theories, it is not because Tournier wants to swear fealty to the rue d'Ulm instead of to the hills of Palo Alto. This is not a *roman à thèse(s) à clef*. Tournier is using his pretexts as a short-hand way of engaging certain theoretical positions as integral parts of his story. Tournier's pretextual theorizations are still subject to the narrative function. For regardless of content or reference, the act of writing "is" (as opposed to "exists") insofar as it is read; the story "is" only insofar as it is heard. Tournier does not fail to make the point of his theorizations with the legend of "La reine blonde," which follows the epiphany or *aletheia* of the calligrapher's workshop. The story is closed by a note:

Ces vérités éternelles inscrites dans les lignes du visage ont été maintes fois exprimées au cours des siècles et des millénaires. Nous avons choisi de les recopier chez les écrivains suivants: . . . William Wordsworth . . . Ibn Al Houdaida . . . Goethe . . . Alain . . . Paul Valéry . . . Germaine de Staël . . . Edward Reinroth. (252)

[These eternal truths written in the lines of the face have often been expressed over the centuries and millenia. We have chosen to copy them from the following writers: . . . William Wordsworth . . . Ibn Al Houdaida . . . Goethe . . . Alain . . . Paul Valéry . . . Germaine de Staël . . . Edward Reinroth.]

Theory and theme dissolve into the dialectical relation given ontologically as that between writer and reader, or given epistemologically as that between text and perception. Finally then, theory comes into play in the novel, not as a mode of knowing, but as a mode of seeing. Moreover, it is not simply the ways in which Idriss sees, if it is even that at all. The novel deals with the modes in which the representable or the represented is in fact seen. It is a question of the phenomenology of theory.

What counts then is the reflexive phenomenology of representation, not merely how the text represents what it represents, but how it overtly and avowedly conceives of its act of representation, as if

within the text there were already an explicit meta-narrative. The crystallization of this reflexive phenomenology of representation is seen at length in the novel's figuration of photography. Photography, picture-as-writing, is now false for Tournier both in name and in content, since it purports to tell the truth of an image, one that re-presents an absent object. In name, photography lies, for writing and image cannot work together; writing shows or hides the desert and not the object. The falseness of the photographic image is a pipe dream; in its prosaic way it can never correspond to the aesthetics of writing, the beauty of the line of the written word, the song sung like that of Zett Zobeida, or the story told. Whereas now, for Tournier, all is in the beauty of the sign, photography reproduces the banal image that things or people, taken as things, have for all comers.<sup>13</sup> There is no subjective phenomenology, no act of communication, but instead the mediocrity of the surface lines given freely, or even meretriciously, to any and all. Thus, if photography lies in name, it lies in phenomenological content even more. It reproduces nothing worth reproducing, not the quantified or substantified "nothing" of the ineffable desert, but rather nothing at all.

As any good primitive tribesman knows, the photographer steals the soul of the person whose photograph he takes. The fantastic, Nordic-looking (that is to say, typically Occidental) woman who takes a photo of Idriss in the first pages of the novel steals his soul. It is only natural then for him to follow her to Paris in search of himself. For with her camera she has given him the evil eye. The person using a camera transfixes the object and steals its content. But we know that primitive superstition is wrong for Tournier, unless, as in *Vendredi*, it can be used as a source of rebirth. But now the camera steals nothing, takes nothing, represents nothing.<sup>14</sup> As theory is a mode of looking, the person looking through the camera lens has entered into a relation of power with the one apprehended. The looker dominates in a relationship that is immediately defined by the very fact of gazing through a lens. And this gaze reproduces any and every other line of power where the spectator dominates the one who is seen. The man with the Parisian woman remarks to her: "Tu pourrais au moins lui demander son avis" [You could at least ask if he minds]. Underlining the discourse of power through the inequality of forms of address, she ironically answers with the polite form of the second person: "C'est bien à vous de le dire" [You're one to speak] (16).

The power structure of dominance focused by the camera recalls,

naturally, the philosophical *point de repère* of Hegel. And it is Hegel who is ready to perform the *coup de grâce* on the ontology of the photograph. Perhaps more than any other, Hegel is the philosopher of the *idées reçues* of recent theory. So it is Hegel of course who (ironically introduced later on) is made anachronistically to insist on the relation of power exercised through the lens of the camera, though this time it is a movie camera: "L'oeuvre cinématographique est, comme la cathédrale gothique, une oeuvre d'équipe, a écrit Hegel. Toutefois . . . toutefois . . . à toute équipe il faut un cerveau!" [Like the Gothic cathedral, the cinematographic work is a team work, Hegel wrote. Still . . . every team needs a brain!] (175).

The photographer is thus in the role of the Hegelian master, dominating his subject, fixed in his relation, but dominated as well by his need of a subject.<sup>15</sup> A photographer cannot be a photographer without the subject or object to be (mis)represented by the lens. It follows then that the artist-photographer, like Mustapha in the souk in Béchar, needs to impose his own fantasies or to play on those of his subject. Needless to say, the fantasies described are precisely those relating to the power structure described in the master-slave dialectic: "Tu es le cheikh, le sultan, le maharadjah. Tu es fier. Tu es le grand mâle dominateur. Tu domines" [You are the sheik, the sultan, the maharajah. You are proud. You are the great dominating male. You dominate] (93).

Tournier's phenomenological approach to a theorization of his craft is beginning to impose itself. And his phenomenology of textual theory as meta- and para-narrative begins to produce a polarization between the "good" writing that does not give in to stasis, "une boutique sur laquelle dansaient ces lettres: *Mustapha artiste photographe*" [a store where the following letters danced: *Mustapha artist photographer*] and the "bad" power structure of domination, the false image of photography translated into nothing more than the spiel of a hawker. One gives an image of oneself to the camera, and however false this image may be, there is still a breath of life, a trace of presence in the look, the gaze, or the theoretical view. Caught between the falseness of the image and the truth of presence, this falseness may in fact inspire. The text shows its own aporia of representation in a chiasm that marks both closure and the lack of closure, both sign as presence and as absence, both transcendence of signifiers and the absence of any possible transcendence. This aporia as chiasm is figured in the text in the figuration of the unnameable Sahara.<sup>16</sup> We

know that the real desert cannot be named, since there is no word for it among the people living there. Perhaps, it is this real desert that also transcendently marks the system that can never be photographed. Instead there is a copy, a *trompe l'oeil* desert that can be named, though falsely, with a *nom impropre*, even if the real desert cannot be named. But, if one cannot afford the luxury of a fantasy to be forever captured in front of a *trompe l'oeil* Sahara, one can give oneself to the penetrating eye.

Theory is a mode of looking that falsifies the text in its referentiality; the gaze of the text is a *trompe l'oeil, un oeil trompeur*. It lies close enough to the surface of the text that it is quite visible and it becomes a part of the verisimilar narrative. The eye, this *trompe l'oeil*, this *oeil trompeur*, is translated too, into the evil eye, given (or thrown) by the "vieille sorcière" [the old witch], Lala Ramirez, who fixes and transfixes with her look. It is a means of making the pretexts of representability present. Idriss, the one who has no dream to be sold, can belong to her as she looks at him. In fact, she captures him momentarily as she calls to him with the name of the one always called: "Mais pourquoi l'avait-elle appelé Ismaël?" [But why had she called him Ishmael?] (106). Tournier is never far from reminding us that his trump card is the fact that he can choose his intertexts and thereby manipulate theory. Here he uses Melville, with all the attendant implications of the transcendental whiteness of the whale and the unnameability of the sea, which is taken as a precursor for Tournier's desert.<sup>17</sup> With the *oeil trompeur* that tries to fix him, name him, and hence represent him, Idriss, who by now is a junior varsity poststructuralist, has to deal with the theorizations of representability, perhaps even more than he has to deal with the hostile and foreign environment. Idriss is not taken in for long by this theory: "La photo d'Ismaël, cela suffisait pour aujourd'hui!" [Ishmael's photo, that was enough for today] (108–09). Ishmael, who is dead, has already been sacrificed to the system; Idriss can still escape.

In a certain sense then, the novel has become an allegory of itself, with theoretical considerations of representability and vision allegorizing or translating the surface signs of verisimilitude. If one subject can be substituted for another in the power game of looking and domination, it becomes clear that one sign (false or true) of the subject is as good as another and thus, that one photograph is as good as another. Idriss needs to have his photograph taken. As long as it is only his photograph that is taken and not he, who has already been

taken as the pretext of the text, nothing of him will be taken; one substitute is as good as another:

Ils partirent enfin, et Idriss prit leur place derrière le rideau. Il y eut des éclairs de flash. Il ressortit, et examina le tiroir où tombent les épreuves. Il restait une photo: c'était celle d'un des gamins louchant et tirant la langue. Idriss attendit encore. Deux nouvelles images tombèrent: celles d'un homme barbu. (108)

[They finally left and Idriss took their place behind the curtain. The flash went off. He came out and looked at the drawer where the prints fell. One photo was left: it was a photo of one of the kids who was squinting and sticking out his tongue. Idriss waited some more. Two new images fell: they were of a bearded man.]

After all, he says, why could he have not had a beard before leaving home? The evil eye taken care of by a medusa and counter-medusa (shield) all in one, the machine can produce any photo whatsoever. And because others will give in to a photo, seeing what they believe they want to see, the anonymous photo of "no one" will work for Idriss like a charm.

It is not long after his arrival in Paris that Idriss is once more the object of the theorization of another, the all too appropriately named Monsieur Mage, the film-maker. Mage hires Idriss, now a street-sweeper, to do his job of street-sweeping, but on film (145). The work that Idriss is doing because he has no more images to give is itself specularly transformed into an image to be signified on film; this sign of work is of course worth much more than the work itself. Thus the theorization that is the fixing of an image determines a power structure, but this specular relation determines a speculation on value. Living in a crystal palace of tessellated images toponymously and eponymously located on the rue de Chartres, the mage, magus or magician, has the power to determine point-of-view and to fix meaning and value with his gaze. Recalling a mythological homology between personality and profession,<sup>18</sup> the nickname of Monsieur Mage names him, his job, his view: " 'Les garçons m'appellent Biglou, parce que j'ai comme une coquetterie dans le regard' " (167) [The boys call me Biglou {cross-eyed}, because I have a cross-eyed condition]. With this bit of information, the final component of the theoretical perspective that is important for Tournier comes into view.

In addition to determining a structure of power and intersubjectivity, in addition to determining a set of values and meanings, the theoretical view is a structuring of desire by the one who sees, albeit falsely or in a cockeyed manner, the one who gazes, and since “coquetterie” has a denotative sense as well, it is also the one who penetrates with his look.

Having established the various components of a theoretical position, Tournier casts much of the rest of the novel in relation to this position. What he ostensibly does is to recast the beginning of the novel in a self-reflective mode. Instead of presenting new material, Tournier repeats (though in a specular sense) three points he has made at the beginning: the sacrifice of the camel, the establishment or the creation of a character, and the initial impetus that is the kernel of the story, the encounter with the blonde woman. This last event, for example, is again the excuse for a photo session, but not of one single photo, but rather for the reproduction of signs endlessly distanced from any reality: Idriss winds up at the police station where he is photographed again. Afterwards he remarks: “ ‘C’est pas ma faute moi, tout le monde me photographie’ ” [It’s not my fault if everyone takes my picture] (200). There is no more soul to take, no signified to be given, even factitiously; there is only the endless reproduction of signs.

Now Tournier insists on the production of story through the manipulation of signs. Idriss is asked to dispose of a camel used in Mage’s studios for filming. But the camel is not a real one in the sense that the first one was, a flesh and blood camel, giving milk to its young. It is rather something that is the excuse for a sign of a camel, something that will be the pretext for the image of a camel on film. This camel does not drink or spit. It is the excuse for a cratylistic and nihilistic dialogue about the humps of dromedaries and camels. Much like the discussion of the horns of Ionesco’s rhinoceroses, this exchange of signs takes the place both of tangible reality and of real, meaningful discussion. Once used, this camel-prop can be disposed of as horsemeat. Or maybe not, for the slaughterer makes a comment that is undoubtedly informed by the intertext of Ionesco’s play:

“Moi, y en a tuer les vaches et les chevaux. Moi, y en a pas savoir tuer les rhinocéros. . . . laisse-le au Bureau des objets trouvés, c’est à deux pas d’ici, rue des Morillons!” (183)



[Me, I gotta kill cows and horses. Don't gotta know how to kill rhinoceroses. . . . Leave it at the Lost and Found. It's right near here on the Rue des Morillons.]

There is no Girardian sacrifice here, but a manipulation of useless signifieds. Having eventually disposed of the camel, at the *Jardin d'acclimatation*, Idriss finds himself now manipulated as are all the other signs in the book: "Il côtoie le Palais des miroirs déformants, et s'observe gonflé comme un ballon, ou au contraire filiforme, ou coupé en deux au niveau de la ceinture" [He goes by the Hall of Mirrors in the funhouse and sees himself swollen like a ball or skinny or cut in half at the waist] (184).

Totally separating signifiers from singular signifieds, Tournier introduces an act of multiplication or prestidigitation. Once more there is a photographer, Etienne Milan; not surprisingly, he lives on the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. More than taking photographs he collects simulacra. As "milan" means "kite," this bird of prey collects department store dummies that he then photographs *en scène* at picnics, ballgames, and celebrations. Having introduced this endless deferral of referentiality, Tournier can take only one logical step in his development of this theoretical view on the production of writing. There is only one point of view to be taken on the emission of signs: he repeats his own action of creating simulacra. Idriss himself will become the model for future dummies: "Et dans moins d'un mois, une vingtaine d'Idriss, qui se ressembleront comme des frères jumeaux, vont peupler mes vitrines et mes étalages intérieurs" [And in less than a month a score of Idrisses, looking like twins, will populate my store-windows and displays] (219). Tournier emits signs in which a desire of presence is invested by the writer. But this hyper-conscious writer knows that his investment of desire is the kernel and the fiction of the fiction-making process. And the reader, who invests his desire of presence as well, does so knowing that he participates in the phenomenolization of the theory. The dummy, the simulacrum, or the automaton only exists if it can be seen in a mirror or through a plate-glass window.

With the endless reproduction of images comes a concomitant debasing of desire, as if there were a multiplicity of false, hollow images that were less and less related to a (Girardian) representational schema, in which the sign figures desire. Nowhere is this better



seen that in the peep show, where along with the reproduction of sign-images *ad infinitum* comes evil itself: "Il comprenait peu à peu que, contre la puissance maléfique de l'image qui séduit l'oeil, le recours peut venir du signe sonore qui alerte l'oreille" [Little by little he understood that, opposed to the evil power of the image that seduces the eye, help may come from the audible sign that alerts the ear] (222). So Tournier returns to the reader, implicating him at the end as the vis-à-vis for a teller of tales. The good, oral emission of signs counterbalances the evil multiplication of simulacra through a theoretical structure that situates power, desire, knowledge, and value well within its confines. But the theoretical structure that Tournier has carefully constructed throughout the novel is ultimately a problematic one, for its conclusion is at the same time a vitiation of the writing-project. Tournier's hand is forced by his theorization; only a middle ground will provide a solution to the dilemma that would otherwise force a choice between two unsatisfactory solutions. Writing is situated midway between the bad, false image and the good (though unattainable), vocal or verbal presence. Writing can be used to tell a tale, to seduce a reader, to capture his good will, or to allow the reader to enter into an erotic relation with all of language and literature, from a legend of a blonde queen to the seduction of story-telling in Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. This then is the good writing, the beautiful writing that is calligraphy. It is the world of tropes, figures, and poetic license, both as liberty and as libertinage. It is the world of the "eternal truths" that Tournier underlines in his story of the legend of the blonde queen.

Elsewhere and otherwise there is bad writing, the "cacography" that tortures the perceiver, that lies, that forces the reader to have dreams that are not his own. And this writing that remarks falsity at every level must be broken:

Cristobal and Co. Jewels & Gems from Africa and the Middle East. Idriss lut ces lettres sur la vitrine la plus proche. Un seul bijou y était exposé: la goutte d'or . . . symbole de libération, antidote de l'asservissement par l'image. (256)

[ . . . Idriss read those letters on the nearest window. There was only one jewel on display: the *goutte d'or*, symbol of liberation, the antidote for slavery to the image.]

That writing, that phenomenology of medusa-like possession, must be

shattered, along with the mode that crystallizes the power structure of fixed imagery. Even though it never did symbolize anyone's virginity or purity, the golden drop, symbol of the freedom of dancing meaning, must be allowed to dance again. Left in the window it is condemned to the sterile block prose of verisimilitude, of fixity, and of death. Like the phallic pneumatic drill that all too symbolically repeats the dance of Ibrahim, it must dance. It must be pretext once more; it cannot be fixed into a Flaubertian immobility of dead textual description: "ovale, légèrement renflée à sa base" [oval, slightly enlarged at the base] (256).<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately for Tournier, the text must be made to dance like Zett Zobeida, like the pneumatic drill of liberation:

C'était sa danseuse, sa cavalière infernale, Zett Zobeida métamorphosée en robot enragé. Dansant sur place avec son marteau-piqueur, il ne vit pas la vitrine de Cristobal & Co se fendre de haut en bas" (257).

[It was his dancer, his infernal partner, Zett Zobeida metamorphosed into a wild robot. Dancing in place with his jackhammer, he didn't see the window of Cristobal & Co split from top to bottom.]<sup>20</sup>

Tournier opts for the good writing, the writing that refuses the monumentality of Charles Bovary's *casquette* and the writing that refuses the romanticism of Emma Bovary's dreams. For himself, for his text and, ironically for us, thereby forcing our freedom, and in so doing he co-opts our freedom, Tournier chooses the zig-zags of the dancer. He opts for the writing that recalls the breath of life: "Idriss continue à danser devant la goutte d'or avec sa cavalière pneumatique" [Idriss continues to dance in front of the goutte d'or with his pneumatic partner] (257). At this point it remains to be seen whether or not Tournier will himself dance in his next novel or whether too much developer and too much fixing solution will have taken their audible and legible toll.

NOTES

1. Michel Tournier, *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p. 52. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are by the author.
2. I should like to thank both Alain Buisine and Mireille Rosello for their thoughtful and constructive comments.
3. Michel Tournier, *La Goutte d'or* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 20. Future references will be given by page number in the text.
4. In *Idriss, Michel Tournier et les Autres* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1986), the only monograph to date on the novel, Salim Jay seems to value the thematic side almost exclusively. For example, he sees the camel as "exoticism itself" (21). The one intriguing point he makes, in which he sees the *goutte d'or* as the return of the repressed, a drop of semen (64), is unfortunately neither substantiated nor explored.
5. Michel Serres, *Hermès III. La Traduction* (Paris: Minuit, 1974).
6. Michel Serres, *Feux et signaux de brume. Zola*. (Paris: Grasset, 1975).
7. See for example the following works by Girard: *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972), pp. 122–29; 140–49; et alii, and *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982). Passing over the theoretical implications of the work of Girard and of Derrida does not imply a cavalier attitude on the part of the author (or of the critic). The point is that even these theories are translated into a language not their own, a simple encapsulated version that can itself be translated into the language of narrative verisimilitude.
8. For the post-structuralist intertext here, see Jacques Derrida, "Freud et la scène d'écriture," in *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967).
9. See what is perhaps the essay of Derrida that is most often referred to: "La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," which can be found in *L'Écriture et la différence*.
10. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), pp. 21–31, and "La Pharmacie de Platon," in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 147–63.
11. See Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).
12. Cf. Derrida, "La Double Séance," in *La Dissémination*, p. 242: "L'hymen est donc une sorte de tissu. Il faudrait en entretenir les fils avec toutes les gazes, voiles, toiles, étoffes, moires, ailes, plumes, avec les rideaux et éventails qui prennent dans leurs plis tout—presque—le corpus mallarméen."
13. With no pun intended, this applies to the meretricious, hollow screen world of the peep-show, the *image-mouvement*, as Deleuze would say, of the photograph; there just happens to be no film.

14. Similarly, the *goutte d'or* ironically represents the lost virginity of no one to whom it properly belongs.
15. See another philosophical commonplace in the discourses of post-structuralism: Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 2ème édition (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 9–34.
16. See Rodolphe Gasché's comments on the chiasm, in his "Introduction" to Andrzej Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. xvi–xxvi.
17. Later on, he chooses the magical story, the "good" story that dances, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's book, *Le Petit Prince*.
18. Lévi-Strauss studies this homology extensively in his recent work, *La Potière jalouse* (Paris: Plon, 1985). A biographical note is of interest here. In a text on Lévi-Strauss in *Le Vol du vampire* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1981), p. 387, Tournier writes: "il ne me fallut pas moins de quinze ans pour exprimer à ma manière la leçon des sociétés dites 'primitives' et des bons sauvages qui les composent. Mais, lorsque j'eus publié *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique*, j'hésitai à envoyer ce petit roman lyrique à mon ancien maître. Pourtant la filiation ne devait pas demeurer secrète. Un critique américain écrivit aussitôt du roman: 'C'est Robinson Crusoe réécrit par Freud, Walt Disney et Claude Lévi-Strauss.'" [I needed no less than fifteen years to express, in my own way, the lesson of so-called "primitive" societies and of the noble savages in them. But when I had published *Vendredi*, I hesitated sending this little lyrical novel to my former master. Still the relation didn't stay a secret. An American critic soon wrote about the novel: "It's Robinson Crusoe rewritten by Freud, Walt Disney and Claude Lévi-Strauss"].
19. As if to underscore the debt he has incurred in this book to the theorizations of structuralism and its avatars, Tournier seems to feel obliged to quote one of structuralism's preferred examples: the *casquette* of Charles Bovary. For fear of wearing out the very letters of this description, I shall spare my readers another reprinting of this intertext. See *Le Vol du vampire* (156): "Or, dès la deuxième page du roman, cette phrase-pièce-montée trouve une première ébauche dans la description de la casquette de l'écolier Charles Bovary, comme si Flaubert avait voulu se faire une première fois la main avant de réaliser le chef-d'oeuvre du genre." [But already on the second page of the novel is the first draft of this sentence-production number, in the description of the schoolboy Charles Bovary's cap, as if Flaubert had wanted to try his hand once before completing a masterpiece of that nature.] Tournier has used Flaubert before as a pretext. In *Gaspard, Melchior & Balthazar* (101), he recalls the *festin* of *Salammbô*: ". . . je ne vis d'abord que le reflet mille et mille fois répété d'une forêt de torches flamboyantes dans les plateaux d'argent, les carafes de cristal, les assiettes d'or, les coupes de sardoine." [. . . at first I only saw the thousands and thousands of

reflections of a forest of flaming torches, reflected in the silver platters, the crystal carafes, the golden plates, the cups of sard.]

20. Tournier does waver, for he chooses as his inter- or pretext a dangerous simulacrum, inscribed cacographically as a silent-screen image: the false Maria frenetically dancing in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. The ambiguity of the image and the sexual ambiguity discovered among competing pretexts perhaps point to a *crise d'écriture* as yet unresolved.