

Narrative and Social Identities

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Bookish Identities in Nerval and Lacroix

Centuries after Gutenberg there was what was known as the “second revolution of the book”¹. This time of great change in the 19th century publishing world saw both the democratization of the book and an increasing devotion to books of the past. The post-revolutionary explosion of bibliophilia was a social phenomenon whose effects were often recuperated by the literary text². This paper will seek to consider two literary works against the backdrop of developments in material culture and the history of the book. In his « Portrait de P. L. Jacob » (1830), Balzac presents the fusion of the human and the material in his description of Paul Lacroix as « un homme qui s’est fait livre ». His formulation will serve as a starting point for this reflection on moments of interpenetration between individual and object identities. Through a reading of Gérard de Nerval’s *Les Faux Sauniers* (1850) and Paul Lacroix’s *Ma République* (1855), I will explore the relationship between subjectivity and the rare book, and attempt to situate these subject relations in the context of 19th century popular culture and media studies. Nerval and Lacroix’s texts represent provocative moments when characters disintegrate into books, when the quest for the object overtakes individual will and when the acquisition of the rare book becomes a prerequisite for existence. Thinking about the expression of ‘book fetishism’ in these texts offers a unique way to approach questions of identity, the exotic and the cultural institution of bibliomania. Privileging the rare and exotic object in characterization opens the door to a larger questioning of the material anchoring of literary identities in 19th century French literature.

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What’s in a Name: the Power of Austin’s Performative Applied to Changes in Identity

John L. Austin introduced the philosophical and linguistic concept of the performative and in doing so enhanced the general understanding of communication. The performative, referring to a statement which not only conveys meaning, but brings about tangible and intangible changes in its utterance, had been put into practice well before Austin coined it and exposed its properties. Playwrights of 19th century France, such as Victor Hugo and Edmond Rostand, used this technique in order to bring about a transformation in their characters’ identities. With an understanding of the performative one can better understand the changes that take place within

¹ Frédéric Barbier, “The Publishing Industry and Printed Output in Nineteenth-Century France”, *Books and Society in History*, Kenneth Carpenter (ed.), New York: R. R. Bowker, 1983.

² Daniel Desormeaux, *La figure du bibliomane, Histoire du livre et stratégie littéraire au XIX^e siècle*, Grenoble, Nizet, 2001, and Jean Viardot « Les nouvelles bibliophilies », *Histoire de l’édition française*, vol. 3, Paris, Promodis, 1985, p. 343-363.

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characters and their relationship with one another in theatrical production. While on the one hand the performative adds intrigue and complexity to the body of the play, on the other the author is able to comment on life outside the theatre and more precisely on the importance society grants to the individual by placing emphasis on an individual and the identity that a character embodies. This emphasis likewise reflects the developing support towards the rising republic that many of the authors, and most notable Victor Hugo, championed in his writings. Using the eponymous character of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Ruy Blas*, this study will examine how new identities are spawned through the performative.

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“Female Phantoms and the Orientalized Other: The *Doppelgänger* Re-Defined”

In nineteenth century France, a myriad of studies were devoted to the inner-workings of the brain, particularly to those areas which house the sinister side of human emotions (i.e. obsession, perversion, mania, etc). The idea of the *doppelgänger*—the menacing double of a living being—floods the pages of the century’s literary works. And while the inclusion of this sort of evil twin typically manifests itself in the fearsome form of ghost or monster, certain works present the *doppelgänger* as a submissive complement to the self. In this paper I will demonstrate how a pair of paradigmatic *contes*, Théophile Gautier’s *La Morte Amoureuse* (1836), and Auguste de Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *Véra* (1876), offer a unique perspective on the idea of the double. In both texts, the male protagonist gradually assumes a secondary identity, which is linked, if not wholly defined, by his fixation upon an exoticized female Other. The women depicted in each story—an undead enchantress and a wife resurrected from the grave—represent the conflation of Eros and Thanatos, an overlap which drives the male protagonists towards a sort of psychological unravelling. Described in distinctly Orientalist terms, the women are further relegated to a state of Otherness capable of driving men mad. It is the trinity of these three types of otherworldliness—the non-male, the non-French and the non-human—which will serve as the focus of this paper.

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Alfred Bardey: Geographer, editor, trader, traitor?

Alfred Bardey remains in popular memory primarily as the employer of Arthur Rimbaud. Bardey, however, maintains a lively written record through and beyond “the Rimbaud connection.” I propose to examine Bardey’s writings, both the geographical memoir *Barr-Adjam* (1931) and his contributions to the *Société de Géographie de Paris*.

Bardey – like Barbosa in 1518, and Burton in 1878 – provides a definition for the title of his memoirs: “Barr-Adjam,” in Somali language, means “terre inconnue.” The first part of my paper considers the implications of a French trader’s seeking to *make known* a land seen as unknown by its inhabitants. How does one translate an idiom of absence into a memoir of

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presence and passage? If the geographer's task is, literally, to write the earth, how does geography address unknowable spaces?

In the second half of my paper, I extend these questions into a discussion of Bardey as corresponding member of the Société de Géographie, and address his role in transmitting Rimbaud's periodic reports back to the prestigious Parisian audience. Bardey, whether out of rivalry or self-righteousness, edits Rimbaud, and we can read in the suppressed details and altered letters a competition between the two narrative voices where personal and political motivations remain tangled. I suggest ultimately that Bardey's editing Rimbaud's geographical work participates in the same kind of critical tension visible in his own memoir – the interplay between familiar and foreign, *connu* and *inconnaisable*.