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Sam Bootle, *Laforgue, Philosophy, and Ideas of Otherness*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2018. 169 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. £75.00/\$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN: 9781781886472.

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Until well into the twentieth century, Jules Laforgue was more widely read in the English-speaking world than in France. Even as he was scorned by Apollinaire and his friends, later loathed by the surrealists, and even stripped of his role in the invention of modern prosody [1], overseas Laforgue was becoming a critical figure for such writers as Eliot, Pound, and Hart Crane, as well as Joyce and Beckett. This interest in the poet extended to scholarship, and a number of important studies on Laforgue published during the second half of the last century came from the Anglo-Saxon world (W. Ramsey, J. A. Hiddleston, P. Collier).[2] In recent years, Laforgue seems to have become somewhat less central a figure in American and British academia, and despite the existence of significant contributions to Laforgue studies written in English in the past two decades (J. Forrest, R. Pearson, C. White),[3] Sam Bootle's *Laforgue, Philosophy, and Ideas of Otherness* is the first monograph on the poet to appear in that language since Anne Holmes's excellent *Jules Laforgue and Poetic Innovation* in 1993.[4]

As its title indicates, the book sets out to elucidate the status of "philosophy" in Laforgue's work. Contrary to claims made by some Laforguian scholars in the past, Bootle contends that philosophy is not a mere "tone" ("un registre," as Philippe Bonnefis has it [quoted p. 18]) for Laforgue, but is at the core of the poet's aesthetic project. The book thus puts forward a portrait of Laforgue as a reader—namely, in this case, a keen reader of German and Indian philosophy. Although such a facet of the poet has been underlined by other scholars in the past, the *value* of the philosopheme in Laforgue remains a moot point. "Se moquait-elle?" asks the narrator of "Salomé" (*Moralités légendaires*) about the protagonist's delirious ode to the Unconscious at Herod's feast, in Laforgue's rewriting of Flaubert.[5] The same question can be and has been asked about the poet's relationship to philosophers. *Se moque-t-il?* Or, in other words: How serious is Laforgue's engagement with philosophical texts and concepts? And what, exactly, does the poet make of those? Parody, of course, is a central category here, but one that should not be thought of as precluding the possibility of a true involvement with the texts parodied.[6]

The book is also, and more fundamentally, a reflection on the status of otherness and the other in the poet's work. The central claim here is that "otherness emerges as crucial to the very principles of [Laforgue's] literary practice" (p. 43). This assertion is developed later through the image of contagion, a corporeal metaphor which runs through the study: "Laforgue's aesthetic... is inhabited—infected, even—by other discourses" (p. 72). Of course this itself raises

interrogations, pertaining both to poetics and to philosophy, about the status of discourse and that of identity/otherness: “It is ironic... that philosophy is the most important of these discourses [which infect L.’s poetry], its very presence within the body of Laforgue’s work suggesting both his adherence to philosophical ideas and his subversion of them” (p. 72). Two types of “crossings” at work in Laforgue’s oeuvre are examined in the book: across disciplines (philosophy to poetry) and across cultures (Germany to France, India to Europe).

Chapter one, which explores the context of an “othering” (p. 3) of German philosophy in France from the French Revolution to World War I, is a fine piece of comparative literature and history of ideas, in the wake of Anne Henry and Claude Digeon’s classic works.[7] Bootle uncovers the political underpinnings of such a reception, and the latter’s entanglement with nationalism from Napoleon to the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1). At the fin de siècle, German philosophy, pessimism, and Wagnerism, came to be described as a foreign disease, a veritable miasma threatening the health of the French body. Laforgue did not deny this “otherness” of Hegel or Schopenhauer [8], but contrary to the nationalistic discourse dominant at the time he perceived such “otherness” as an opportunity—to borrow Michel Foucault’s words—to “think differently” [9], to “disrupt our practice of the Same and the Other.”[10]

The thesis of this chapter and the next is that Laforgue’s “engagement [with German philosophy] is inseparably related to contemporary discourses surrounding” the works of Schopenhauer and Hartmann (p. 22). The author convincingly argues that Laforgue’s shift towards a more ironic stance vis-à-vis Hartmann and Schopenhauer stemmed from his reading of E.-M. Caro’s *Le pessimisme au XIX^e siècle* (pp. 51 and 54). More generally, Laforgue is here presented as a reader of readers (p. 56), in a way not dissimilar to that in which L. J. Austin once showed Mallarmé’s reading of Hegel to be, so to say, second hand, mediated by French critics.[11] In a 1986 article not cited by the author, “Laforgue and His Philosophers”, Ursula Franklin had already undertaken some pioneering work on Laforgue’s palimpsestic reading of German, Buddhist, and Vedic thought, asking: “Exactly what Buddhism, what Hartmann, and what Schopenhauer... did Laforgue read, and how?”[12] Franklin’s reflection would be all the more relevant here as she, too, showed that the poet’s relationship to philosophers was always indirect and overdetermined by previous readings and intermediaries—a forking paradigm she called “the intertextual maze.”[13]

The second chapter constitutes a valuable contribution to the history of postromantic literary “suffering” (p. 50). Regarding pathology as the very stuff of poetry in Laforgue, the author follows Arthur Symons’s suggestion in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* that Laforgue perceived “the possibilities for art which come from the sickly human being” (quoted p. 43). Bootle reminds us of the affinities between Laforgue’s poetics and the Decadent movement, as the poet “reconfigures illness and physical debility as aesthetic principles” (p. 13), thereby subverting both Hartmann’s aesthetics of genius and Schopenhauer’s view of art as an annulment of human suffering. Laforgue inverts the ideologies of national decline as well as the dominant discourse extolling health and masculine vigour, enacting within his aesthetics a Nietzschean transvaluation of disease and illness.

Chapter three examines the forest as embodying the “otherness” of Germany as well as that of the Unconscious for Laforgue. The poet manifests a utopian and primitivistic vision of Germany as Other—a view which can be said to “recapitulate Staël’s idealisation of Germany, but with a Hartmannian inflection” (p. 93)—while at the same time debunking such exoticism. Furthermore,

the Other in Laforgue is seen as being primarily *within* the self. The forest, along with its symmetrical double, the subaquatic world, thus becomes the inner locus of instincts. This has consequences on poetry itself, and the author brilliantly analyses Laforgue's play on the double meaning of "coupe," both the felling of trees and a break in a line of verse (pp. 81 and 84). Laforgue, advocating the liberation of prosody from its historical strictures, takes to task the French tradition since Malherbe for having subjected poetry to "coupes réglées," (*OC*, III, 334; cited in Bootle, p. 81) thus implicitly comparing this linguistic process to the way French formal gardens force nature under the yoke of geometry. Germany, by contrast, remains the land of the "forest murmurs," to cite a famous passage in the second act of Wagner's *Siegfried*.^[14] Whispered by the Unconscious itself, those murmurs are the fabric from which *vers libre* is woven. Poetry, springing from the impersonal inner forests of the self, is directly connected to the "irregular rhythms of sexual excitement, illness and so on" (p. 85). Free verse thus "represents an unfettering of the body's energies" (p. 85) building up to a poetics of liberated, deviant sexuality.

Chapters four and five deal with another avatar of "otherness," that of Indian philosophy. Chapter four is centred on cosmopolitanism, and shows how Laforgue's aesthetics displays a "de-hierarchized model of intercultural relations, a model that favours the pluralism of 'cultural difference' over the binarism of 'cultural otherness'" (p. 97). Laforgue's is a cosmopolitanism of the Unconscious, the "Tout-Un" (p. 15) or "Tout-Nihil" (*L'Imitation*) that transcends cultural boundaries—as, incidentally, does Édouard Glissant's "Tout-Monde," another rhizomatic model, and one of which the reader cannot but think here.^[15] The author stresses the relevance of Buddhism in this postnational framework. Buddhist thought matters here on two levels—conceptual and metaconceptual (political). Buddhism is not only "influential in its questioning of selfhood," it is also "emblematic of openness to non-European thought" (p. 120). Bootle writes: "The challenge to unitary selfhood *within* Buddhist thought also implies a challenge to unitary culture through the *use* of Buddhism" (*ibid.*). Indeed "the very presence in [Laforgue's] work of Buddhist ideas and references is emblematic of his principle of... embrac[ing] diversity while rejecting exoticism" (p. 108). Analysing the aesthetic of the bibelot and the dissolution of the self in the poems of 1884-6, the chapter tracks Laforgue's subtle subversion of orientalism, in which the East is no longer "the source of a restored plenitude, of a return to a lost fullness of self, but... a way of *destabilizing* the self" (p. 121). The book in general highlights the tensional aspect of Laforgue's attitude towards exoticism, both practised and parodied by the poet, who refuses "to indulge in the picturesque elements of exoticism—except where he is openly mocking such tendencies, such as in 'Salomé'" (p. 120).

Perhaps the discussion of Laforgue's affinity for Buddhism would have benefited from a consideration of the reception of "Eastern" philosophies in Europe over its *longue durée*. The disputes around the annihilation of the self purportedly advocated by "Buddhist" thought (see pp. 125-130), and the ensuing myth of Eastern nihilism, are much older than Schopenhauer. They date back to Leibniz at least, with the philosophical resistance to "introduire *chez nous* le nirvana bouddhiste" (to quote Ribot [cited here p. 128, my emphasis]) already at the foreground in the German thinker's "Discourse on the conformity of faith with reason" (*Theodicy*, 1710).^[16] For more than a century, such a discussion crystallised in a polemic pro or contra pantheism (qua atheistic nihilism), which gave rise to the topos "Leibniz or Spinoza"—viz. individual monads versus unique substance. Because of its monism, Bayle (in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*) likened the doctrine of the *Ethica* to that professed by the Chinese and Japanese schools of Buddhism.^[17] One and a half centuries later Spinoza became a major character in the French

intellectual debate. His “pantheism” (as Spinoza’s monist doctrine of God-nature came to be called in France and Germany in the course of the Eighteenth Century) was consistently compared to Buddhist thought after the publication of Burnouf’s *Introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien* (1844), for example in Saisset’s *Introduction critique aux Œuvres de Spinoza* (1860) and, more importantly, in Flaubert’s *Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1874).^[18] Failure to take into account the wider historical background to this “othering” of pantheism leads Bootle to misinterpreting a passage in the *Feuilles volantes*. It is of Spinoza, not of Hartmann and the Hindu principle of Brahman, that Laforgue was thinking when he jotted down: “Il n’y a qu’une Substance, tout le reste est modalité pure, phénomène passager de la vie divine.... L’individu n’est qu’un mode.... La substance seule existe et subsiste.”^[19] As it happens, this two-page fragment by Laforgue (*OC*, III, 1138-9) is a collage of quotations by the three main protagonists of the Spinozist camp in the “pantheism controversy” (*Pantheismusstreit*) of the 1780s: Goethe, Herder, and Schleiermacher.^[20]

The fifth and last chapter delineates Laforgue’s reading of the “Buddhist” concept of nothingness. “Buddhist” must once again be placed between inverted commas here, as the idea of this religion as resting on a “culte du néant” (Victor Cousin, *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, cited in Bootle, p. 125) is, Bootle argues, an orientalist invention of the French critics. The chapter maintains that the concept of *nirvana* was misunderstood in late nineteenth-century France, but also, and more interestingly, it demonstrates that such a misunderstanding ultimately proved productive for Laforgue’s poetry and thought. The analysis of the alternative “Vie ou néant” (“Complainte des Voix sous le figuier bouddhique”) leads the author to a detailed reading of sexuality in the poet’s work (pp. 130-6). This non-psychoanalytical interpretation of the Laforguian eros insists on the importance of polymorphous, non-reproductive sexuality from the *Complaintes* to the *Derniers vers*. Such a reading leaves far behind the clichés of Laforgue as a Schopenhauerian promoter of chastity. Finally, the author raises the question of a possible orientalism of Laforgue, and gives it a nuanced answer. “The use of Buddhist and Hindu terms in his poetry seems, at first glance, to be typical of ‘the virtual epidemic of Orientalia affecting every major poet, essayist, and philosopher’ [Edward Said] of the nineteenth century,” and yet Laforgue’s notes “show that he did much more than try on Buddhist terminology because of its curiosity value” (p. 143). In that sense, though Laforgue cannot “unilaterally be detached from the general imperial context” (Said, quoted p. 143) in which he lived and wrote, “his interest in Buddhism goes deeper than the facile, picturesque exoticism of many of his contemporaries, showing a concern not merely with the unfamiliar contours of Buddhist lexis, but also with the profoundly different doctrines of Buddhist thought” (p. 143). It is one of the great merits of this last chapter, and of the whole book, to delve into, rather than mention in passing (as is customary in Laforgue studies), the issues raised by Laforgue’s attitude towards Eastern philosophies and religions.

NOTES

[1] On this last point, see Michel Murat, “L’oubli de Laforgue,” *Romantisme* 140 (2008): 111-123.

[2] Walter Ramsey, *Jules Laforgue and the Ironic Inheritance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); James A. Hiddleston, *Essai sur Laforgue et les Derniers vers* (Lexington, Ken.: French Forum, 1980); James A. Hiddleston, ed., *Laforgue aujourd’hui* (Paris: José Corti, 1988); Peter Collier, “Poetry and cliché: Laforgue’s ‘L’Hiver qui vient,’” in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry: Introductions to Close Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 199-224.

[3] Jennifer Forrest, *Decadent Aesthetics and the Acrobat in Fin-de-Siècle France* (London: Routledge, 2019); Roger Pearson, “The Voice of the Unconscious: Laforgue and the Poet as Lawgiver,” *Dix-Neuf* 20:1 (2016): 125-144; Claire White, *Work and Leisure in Late Nineteenth-Century French Literature and Visual Culture. Time, Politics and Class* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[4] Anne Holmes, *Jules Laforgue and Poetic Innovation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[5] Jules Laforgue, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jean-Louis Debauxe et al., 3 vols. (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1986-2000; hereafter *OC*), II, 443.

[6] See Michele Hannoosh, *Parody and Decadence: Laforgue's Moralités légendaires* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989) and Madeleine Guy, “La bibliothèque imaginaire de Jules Laforgue” (PhD dissertation, Université Paris 3, 2015).

[7] Anne Henry, ed., *Schopenhauer et la création littéraire en Europe* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1989); Claude Digeon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française, 1870-1914* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959).

[8] Indeed, in some early poems Laforgue even took up some of the clichés of his age about the nebulosity of German philosophy. See “Ce qu’aime le gros Fritz” (1879): “Oui, j’aime à promener ma belle âme allemande / À travers l’Esthétique et les brouillards d’Hegel ; / Un nuage en bouteille est tout ce que demande / L’âme éprise de vague et d’immatériel” (*OC*, I, 234; quoted by Bootle p. 76). In the same years, Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* recorded a similar reduction of Mme de Staël’s views to the rank of stereotypes: “ALLEMANDS. Peuple de rêveurs (vieux)” (Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* [Paris: Conard, 1910], p. 415).

[9] At the beginning of his *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault talks about “the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees,” asking: “What is philosophy today... if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently...?” (*The Use of Pleasure, Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality* [1984], trans. by Robert Hurley [New York: Vintage Books, 1990], pp. 8-9).

[10] “Fai[re] vaciller et inquiét[er]... notre pratique... du Même et de l’Autre” (Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* [Paris: Gallimard, 1966], p. 7).

[11] Lloyd James Austin, *Essais sur Mallarmé*, ed. by Malcolm Bowie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), chapter “Mallarmé et le rêve du livre” (first published as a separate piece in 1953).

[12] Ursula Franklin, “Laforgue and His Philosophers: The “Paratext” in the Intertextual Maze,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 14 (1986): 324-340 (p. 325).

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

[14] Richard Wagner, *Siegfried* (1876), act II, scene II: “die Waldweben.”

[15] See, in particular, Édouard Glissant, *Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

[16] In fact this story probably starts with Thomas Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus* (*On the Unity of the Intellect against the Averroists*, c. 1270) and the establishment of an opposition between Western (i.e., for Thomas, Aristotelian) philosophies as based on the individual intellect versus so-called "Eastern" ones negating the individual and defining *thinking* as mere *participation* to the One-God. (In Laforgue's time, Renan's studies on Averroes and his influence in Europe revived this division.) To use Bootle's distinction between two types of "others" (the "external other" and the "other within the bounds of Western culture:" p. 127), one could say there are the enemies from without--Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Buddha--but also those from within, i.e. the members of the *we* who side with the *them*--this time Siger of Brabant, Boetius of Dacia, etc. (for Aquinas), and Spinoza and Angelus Silesius (for Leibniz).

[17] Yuen-Ting Lai, "The Linking of Spinoza to Chinese Thought by Leibniz and Malebranche," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 151-178. See also Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China, A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 166 and 192. In an article on radical enlightenment and Chinese thought, Thijs Weststeijn makes the following remark, which resonates with Bootle's investigation in chapters one and four: "Bayle's identification of Spinozism with oriental thought exemplifies a need to come to terms with new and potentially dangerous ideas by locating them in a geographically remote part of the earth" ("*Spinoza sinicus*: An Asian Paragraph in the History of the Radical Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 [2007]: 537-561 [p. 561]).

[18] Laforgue himself cites Spinoza alongside Flaubert's novel in his article "Paul Bourget" (*Critique littéraire*: OC, III, 126). Before Saisset and the French school of *éclectisme*, both Hegel and Schopenhauer (albeit in different ways) had followed in Bayle's footsteps, comparing Spinoza's doctrine to Buddhism.

[19] OC, III, 1138, quoted p. 109. Compare the end of the quotation to Victor Cousin on Spinoza: "La substance unique est tout, et les individus ne sont rien." (*Histoire générale de la philosophie* [Paris: Didier, 1863], p. 433). On the reception of Spinoza in nineteenth-century France, see Pierre-François Moreau et al., *Spinoza au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2008), pp. 211-318. Laforgue copied these lines from the sixth chapter of Caro's *L'idée de Dieu et ses nouveaux critiques* of 1864. See Bertrand Marchal, "Note sur une source de Laforgue," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 117 (2017): 167-168. Laforgue mentions Spinoza's "god" in a December-1881 letter to Charles Henry: OC, I, 731ff. In "Persée et Andromède" (*Moralités légendaires*), the poem authored by the Monster is a pleasant hodgepodge commingling Spinoza and Hartmann. As for Buddha and Spinoza, they appear next to one another as part of a list of "consolateurs de l'humanité" in a series of notes on the visual arts: OC, III, 380.

[20] The importance of Eastern philosophies in the *Pantheismusstreit* and its relationship to Spinoza's alleged Buddhism is discussed in Gordon F. Davis and Mary D. Renaud, "Spinoza through the Prism of Later 'East-West' Exchanges: Analogues of Buddhist Themes in the Ethics and the Works of Early Spinozists," in Gordon F. Davis, ed., *Ethics without Self, Dharma without Atman: Western and Buddhist Philosophical Traditions in Dialogue* (New York: Springer, 2018), pp. 107-130.

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