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Michaël Abecassis and Maribel Peñalver Vicea, eds., *Rêve d'écriture et écriture du rêve. Entre carcéralités et libertés langagières*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021. 252 pp. Bibliography, indexes and abstracts. €35.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2406114901.

Review by Laura Vordermayer, Saarland University.

Within the field of cultural and literary studies, the topic of dreams has been met with increasing attention in the past two decades. This development has resulted in a large number of publications which examine the representation of dreams in a specific context or take a broader scope, aiming to provide an in-depth account of discourses on dreaming and their evolution through time.[1] In more recent years, multi-volume series testify to ongoing interest in the academic community, notably the twelve-volume series *Traum--Wissen--Erzählen* (2017-ongoing), the bilingual series *Cultural Dream Studies/Études culturelles sur le rêve* (2017-ongoing) and the planned six-volume series *A Cultural History of Sleep and Dreaming*. [2] In addition, we find studies which inquire into the aesthetics and narrative practices of the oneïric and of literary representations of dreams. [3] The question of how dreaming and writing relate to each other goes back to the nineteenth century; in *Smarra ou les démons de la nuit*, Charles Nodier concludes that “les songes tiennent une grande place dans l'Écriture”. [4]

The chiasmus in the present volume's title frames the relationship between dreams and writing as a mutual involvement. The subtitle introduces a third topic that is at the center of the book: the ambivalence of language, which, on the one hand, sets the limits of our perceptual and cognitive capacity but, on the other hand, holds a liberating potential. Assembling contributions from the fields of literature and art studies, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and history, the volume offers a wide range of different approaches, taking into account the ambiguities of “interiorized” (p. 7) languages of dreams and art as well as analyzing the possible impact of particular forms of media on social realities. With regard to their respective subjects, the articles provide different definitions and aspects of imprisonment, language, and dreaming; it should be specified that the three themes alluded to in the volume's title are not equally relevant in each contribution.

Rita Rodríguez Varela explores the relationship between visual art and literature in her analysis of Monique Proulx's novel *Homme invisible à la fenêtre* [5] as one of mutual impact and analogy. On a level of the text's genesis and aesthetics, she points out Proulx's involvement in the film industry, showing how the author's work as a screenwriter affects her literary style. On a level immanent to the text, Varela convincingly shows how the art of painting enables the novel's protagonist to adopt a perspective which differs from society's view of its members. Seeing through outward appearances, it challenges the norms that define society's gaze and gives

visibility to the body that is not seen: the hurt, the fragmented, the traumatized body. Varela quotes a statement by Proulx to demonstrate that this quality of exposing the invisible is at the heart of the author's conception of literature. Both visual art and literature, then, have a liberating potential that Varela identifies in relation to traumatizing experiences and the body as it is perceived by society.

A similar conception of art is outlined in Lydia Vázquez's chapter on Louise Bourgeois's series of spatial installations entitled *Cells* (created 1986-2010). In her meticulous description and analysis of selected installations, and insisting on the work's inherent ambivalence, Vázquez reveals trauma, fear and aggression, sexuality and the body to be key topics that are closely interwoven. She interprets the eponymous walled or barred spaces both as shelters that offer protection and as prisons. Assembling a variety of symbolically charged objects from Bourgeois's personal life as well as from history (a guillotine, for instance), the cells enable the artist to explore and understand the limitations of her memories, to remodel and renew her past. In so doing, Vázquez argues, Bourgeois's art provides the possibility to communicate and eventually overcome trauma. Even though her reading of *Cells* predominantly draws on the artist's biography, Vázquez concludes by emphasizing the universal scope of Bourgeois's art, which she takes to be "une image universelle du monde carcéral de tout individu postmoderne face à une liberté qu'il ne peut appréhender" (p. 42).

The ambiguity of closed spaces that becomes evident in Vázquez's contribution certainly plays a major role in Pierre Alferi's novels *Les Jumelles* and *Hors sol* [6], as Eric Lynch shows. Examining the intertextual references to Auguste Blanqui's *L'Éternité par les astres* (1872) in *Les Jumelles*, Lynch demonstrates how history itself is portrayed as a prison in which its subjects are trapped in constant repetition. In *Hors sol*, Alferi's characters lead their solitary lives inside "nacelles" (p. 52), separate compartments in space, as a consequence of global warming. Lynch's careful analysis reveals the ambivalence of the term, which denotes motherly protection, survival and imprisonment. While both novels negotiate isolation and incarceration, Lynch argues that Alferi's innovative and poetic language develops a liberating quality, breaking up the narrative, deconstructing official parlance, and exposing problematic trends in our contemporary society.

In Chloé Delaume's literary contribution, the topic of dreams, featuring so prominently in the volume's title, gains in importance. In *Dream Operator*, the author intersperses passages from her own recurring dreams with reflections on lucid dreaming and the possibilities and limits of control. Dawn M. Cornelio's introduction to the text elucidates crucial themes and places them in the context of Delaume's autofictional work. Referring to *Dream Operator* as well as to other texts, Cornelio reveals the intimate connection between lucid dreaming and writing: both enable the author to negotiate a traumatizing memory from her childhood—that is, the murder of her mother by her father—, and, what is more, to (re)gain control and to liberate herself from "the collective fiction about her own story" by creating a self-determined fictional version of her past (p. 67). English translations of Cornelio's introduction and Delaume's text are included in the volume.

Stéphane Vinolo's article investigates the relation between dreams and art from a philosophical perspective. Citing Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Levinas, Freud, and Bergson, among others, Vinolo's considerations are based on the observation that aesthetic and oneiric experiences are both frequently associated with the image. In his analysis, the author challenges this interconnection. Conceiving of the visible in relation to the invisible, Vinolo argues that the

dream has a closer resemblance to the icon: both share a discursive language that refers to invisible concepts and absent objects by an act of signification. His phenomenological approach leads him to the conclusion that, while images cage us in “la prison de la présence” (p. 91) by *representing* the visible, the perlocutionary language of dreams and icons has a liberating effect on us and allows the creation of a new world.

The topic of dreams is picked up again in Jean-Jacques Barreau’s study of the *parole* in psychoanalytic theory and therapy. With reference to the writings of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, especially Freud’s *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* [7], Barreau poses the question of whether one can discern in the conversation between patient and psychoanalyst the existence of an “*écriture du rêve, d’un rêve d’écriture* qui se trace dans le silence de l’écoute” (p. 100). Reflecting on Freud’s commentary on Moritz von Schwind’s painting *The Dream of the Prisoner* [8], Barreau argues that Freud, “en ouvrant une fenêtre dans le langage”, enables “la langue” to liberate itself, “dans la parole”, from its “fixations sémantiques” (p. 115).

In Andy Stafford’s contribution on the Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi, the subject of incarceration that characterizes the volume as a whole becomes very concrete. In light of Laâbi’s own experience of imprisonment, Stafford attributes a “poétique carcérale” to the author (p. 121) and postulates the argument that these biographical circumstances shape the portrayal of the sun as a motif in his poetry to a major extent. Aiming to take into account all references to the recurrent theme of the solar, Stafford shows the complexity of the theme, which is represented in a dialectical manner throughout Laâbi’s work. While his analysis convincingly demonstrates the sun’s ambiguity, its nourishing and supporting function for the imprisoned poet as well as its potential for deception, the impact of Laâbi’s imprisonment is not entirely clear, as Stafford’s conclusion applies to the poet’s writing before and after this experience.

Illumination, brightness, and light are examined in the context of their antithetical relation to darkness and gloom in Michaël Abecassis’s study of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* [9]. Focusing on book four, Abecassis analyzes the symbolism of black and white, of night and day, and considers the complex ambivalence of symbols. His detailed examination includes the text’s acoustic, rhythmical dimension as he points out alliterations, cacophonous constructions and rhymes to support his interpretation of *Paradise Lost* as a key text that describes the “genèse de la carcéralité et la quête de liberté de l’ange déchu” (p. 137). Of particular interest are the analogies and contrasts Abecassis uncovers between Satan and the poet himself, which opens up the possibility of taking the interpretation to a meta-level and asking about the role of literature, poetry and language.

María Teresa Pisa Cañete’s contribution returns to the subject of dreams. In her systematic, coherent and detailed analysis of a performance of Dulcinée Langfelder’s stage play *Confidences sur l’oreiller, un essai sur les rêves*, [10] Cañete argues that the artist uses her personal dream experiences to achieve a greater freedom of expression and to liberate herself as well as the audience from the limitations of consciousness, social norms and prejudices. Simultaneously, she convincingly shows how Langfelder employs multiple aesthetic means and techniques in order to adequately portray her dreams and thus liberate their “domaine fugace, insaisissable, et même mystérieux” (p. 175). Examining selected scenes and passages from the play, Cañete refers to Jean-Daniel Gollut’s extensive study *Conter les rêves* [3] and supports her interpretation with his reflections on the structure and aesthetics of dream narratives, all the while emphasizing the play’s distinctive and exceptional form.

Thinking along similar lines, Raymond Delambre argues that the dream can be considered as a genre of its own in Chinese filmmaking. At the same time, Delambre insists on the specificity of cinematic devices and means of representation, postulating “l’écriture cinématique du rêve” (p. 202; it is not quite clear if the formulation, put between quotation marks, is a citation, as the author does not provide a reference). This “dynamique cinématique” (p. 197) becomes apparent in Delambre’s more detailed examinations of particular scenes, especially from the 1962 adaptation [11] of Cao Xue Qin’s novel *Hong Lou Meng/Le Rêve dans le pavillon rouge* [12]. Outside of these passages in which Delambre focuses on particular films, his elliptical and allusive style makes it difficult to follow his line of argumentation.

The volume closes with a contribution which returns to the subject of imprisonment on a more literal level. Kevin C. Robbins examines Miguel Almereyda’s testimony of his traumatizing experiences in the Parisian *maison d’éducation correctionnelle* of La Petite Roquette, a juvenile prison notorious for its abusive practices and cruel conditions of detention, in the November 30 1907 issue of the illustrated weekly *L’Assiette au Beurre*. Supported by Aristide Delannoy’s graphic illustrations, Almereyda’s account denounces the guards’ violent behavior and the deprivation young inmates suffer. In light of the *Assiette*’s reach and circulation, Robbins argues that this graphic, multi-media campaign “gave compelling impetus to major contemporary reforms in juvenile justice” (p. 227). With regard to the situation of young asylum-seekers on the southern border of the United States, Robbins concludes with a hope for new, hybrid forms of media to initiate a liberating debate.

LIST OF ESSAYS

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NOTES

[1] Noteworthy examples in English and French include Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper, eds., *Dreams and History. The Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Jacqueline Carroy, *Nuits savantes: une histoire des rêves (1899-1945)* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2012); Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, eds., *Dream and Modernity: A Cultural History* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Simon Wortham, *The Poetics of Sleep. From Aristotle to Nancy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[2] Cf. <https://www.fink.de/view/serial/TK?L=344&cHash=ef50c40cea0b9b16faba4c967c6b1234> (accessed January 27, 2022) for the *Traum--Wissen--Erzählen* series; the most recently published anthology in the *Cultural Dream Studies* series is volume 5: Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Typologizing the Dream. Le rêve du point de vue typologique* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2022); for the planned six-volume series to be published by Bloomsbury, see https://www.academia.edu/64785026/R_Matuszewski_ed_A_Cultural_History_of_Sleep_and_Dreaming_in_Antiquity_London_Bloomsbury_in_progress_ (accessed: January 26, 2022).

[3] Jean-Daniel Gollut, *Conter les rêves. La narration de l'expérience onirique dans les œuvres de la modernité* (Paris: José Corti, 1993); Frédéric Canovas, *L'Écriture rêvée* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000); Michaela Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Manfred Engel, “Towards a Poetics of Dream Narration (with examples by Homer, Aelius Aristides, Jean Paul, Heine and Trakl),” in Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Writing the Dream. Écrire le rêve* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017), pp. 19-44.

[4] Charles Nodier, *Smarra ou les démons de la nuit*, in id., *Œuvres de Charles Nodier*, 12 vols, Réimpr. de l'éd. de Paris, 1832-1837 (Genève: Slatkine 1968), III, 7-117 (p. 12).

[5] Monique Proulx, *Homme invisible à la fenêtre* [1993] (Montréal: Éditions du Boréal, 2001).

[6] Pierre Alferi, *Les Jumelles* (Paris: P.O.L., 2009); id., *Hors sol* (Paris: P.O.L., 2018).

[7] Sigmund Freud, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* [1915-1917], 3 vols (Leipzig and Vienna: Heller, 1916-17); id., “Leçons d'introduction à la psychanalyse” [1915-1917], *Œuvres complètes*, 21 vols (Paris: PUF, 1989-2019), XIV (2000).

[8] Moritz von Schwind, *Der Traum des Gefangenen*, 1836, oil on board, 53 x 42.5 cm, Pinakotheken, Munich; url: <https://www.pinakothek.de/kunst/moritz-von-schwind/der-traum-des-gefangenen> (accessed June 5 2022).

[9] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* [1667] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[10] Dulcinée Langfelder, *Confidences sur l'oreiller, un essai sur les rêves*, Théâtre Outremont, Montréal, January 19, 2018.

[11] Chen Fan, director. *Hong Lou Meng/ Dream of the Red Chamber*, 167 min (Shanghai Hai Yen Film Studio, 1962).

[12] Cao Xue Qin, *Hong Lou Meng* [1791], *Le Rêve dans le pavillon rouge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

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