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‘La Littérature de Martial’: Plagiarism as Figure in Sade, Lautrémont, Ouologuem and Sony Labou Tansi

*Le mal rongeur s’étend sur toute la figure ...*¹

Plagiarism is an intertextual literary practice with an abundance of intertexts to its name, not all of them literary. It has a history in legal discourse and its etymologies reveal a violent origin in the real: ‘PLAGIAT, Délit du plagiaire. Chez les Romains, on appelait *plagiaire* celui qui était condamné au fouet (*ad plagas*) pour avoir vendu comme esclaves des hommes libres. – Dans notre langue, cette qualification s’applique à l’auteur qui s’approprie les pensées d’autrui.’²

Within literary discourse, scenes of real, Oedipal violence have been figured by plagiarism: ‘Plagiarism is kidnapping. A false fatherhood. The OED points to the Latin *plagiarius*, “one who abducts the child or slave of another”’; ‘Ainsi, pour l’homme, le plagiat est perversion: il équivaut à une relation incestueuse avec la mère.’³

The figural power of plagiarism is a power to name something other than itself. In this article that other thing is writing, restrictively figured as violent, gendered, and historicized by my taking ‘Sadian’ writers as exemplars. My first suggestion is that plagiarism is an appropriate figure of intertextual relations that are characterized by violence.

The figurality of plagiarism originates in an elaborate *mise-en-scène* of the legal question by the Latin poet Martial:⁴

Je te recommande nos Livres, Quinctianus, si toutesfois ie puis dire nostres ceux que ton Poëte recite. Si une servitude trop pesante leur donne sujet de se plaindre, vien procurer leur liberté,⁵ & ne leur dénie point le secours suffisant: Et quand il voudra s’en rendre le maistre, répons qu’ils m’appartiennent, & et que ie les ay affranchis. Que si tu maintiens cela fortement trois & quatre fois, tu feras recevoir au Plagiaire⁶ une grande confusion.’

Martial is representing the court of law where his books, as manumitted slaves illicitly re-enslaved, would have to claim their freedom by the agency of a third party (here, the friend to whom the poem is addressed) since they would not, if shown to be slaves, have had the right to speak for themselves. Though the book-as-slave figure had a certain currency in first-century poetry, Martial’s book-stealer as slave-stealer is unique in classical Latin.⁷ The originating scene complicates plagiarism as literary figure since the plagiarist’s crime is not simply to have alienated the property of another, but specifically to have alienated the freedom of the text. Furthermore, as an

abducted ex-slave, victim of an original abduction by the first master (Martial), the text is implicated in a founding (or confounding⁸) history of appropriation and re-appropriation. Thus the story of the first text to be figured by plagiarism is already a story of recurring violence.

If the association of literary plagiarism with literal abduction seems remote, Suzanne Guerlac, writing of Victor Hugo's *L'Homme qui rit* (where 'a child is kidnapped and disfigured by a band of gypsies who have cut his mouth from ear to ear'), has shown how the child-stealer's crime can derive mythic power from the speaking of its proper and resonantly literary name: the mutilation of the child Gwynplaine by Harquenonne is called a work of art, and Harquenonne is hanged for it 'as a plagiarist'.⁹

The OED's alternative specifications of the plagiarist's crime – child or slave stealer – are actualized in these scenes from Martial and Hugo, though Martial's slave is not actually but only figuratively stolen, and shame is the only punishment imposed. With the arch-plagiarist Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, we are still speaking in figures: the 'mutilation' of Hugo's poem 'Tristesse d'Olympio', abducted by Ducasse and put to work in his *Poésies*, if it rivals Harquenonne for 'artistry', is not actually violent, and if it is deemed that the crime nonetheless deserves punishment, this too need only be figurative.¹⁰

Actually punitive measures are, on occasion, imposed for literary crimes, for instance when Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* was withdrawn from circulation on the discovery of his plagiarisms. Such a crime and such a punishment make this text exemplary for my case here. Its very first sentence clearly illuminates a discussion of intertextuality and violence:

Nos yeux boivent l'éclat du soleil, et, vaincus, s'étonnent de pleurer.

These words have a pretext in André Schwarz-Bart's holocaust-fiction, *Le dernier des Justes*:

Nos yeux reçoivent la lumière d'étoiles mortes.¹¹

Though Ouologuem is a notorious plagiarist, and Schwarz-Bart is, notoriously, his willing victim,¹² the violence done here by one text to another is not the 'délit du plagiaire' defined in Bouillet's dictionary, so deserving of violence in its turn. Ouologuem is using the proximity of his text to the other in order to construct a difference between the situations of the communities represented in each. The exclusively communal first-person subject – we who receive this light, not you the reader – in Schwarz-Bart's opening sentence figures a temporal community, formed through succession. The uninterrupted passage of light through time is influence idealized as tradition. It is a tradition of suffering and death, but influence is, as Harold Bloom insists, '*Influenza* – an astral disease'.¹³ In his own chronicle of holocaust, on the other hand, Ouologuem's appropriative opening sentence can figure neither time-honoured tradition nor a community able to receive its influence. The

sun's splendour is immediate and atemporal; Ouologuem's Africans cannot be as 'receptive' as Schwarz-Bart's Jews, they have to metaphorize light into water and transfigure it (astonishedly) into tears. The vanquished communality of the first-person plural here gives way immediately to a babel of intertexts, the polyvocality¹⁴ of a 'community' constructed out of writing (from Schwarz-Bart, the Quran, C. H. Kane, and Césaire, among others).¹⁵

There is the familiar prospect here of opposing influence and intertextuality, and if I begin to repeat that exercise, it is to situate the violence of plagiarism within that opposition, even if plagiarism turns out to be no more than a more or less appropriate figure of one or the other notion. Bloom theorizes influence as a relation between texts, but enough of his own figurations derive from 'agonistic' relations between subjects for a figure of inter-subjective violence such as plagiarism to serve. Intertextuality, in Julia Kristeva's construction of it, displaces such intersubjectivity: 'Tout texte se construit comme un mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. A la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'*intertextualité* ...'¹⁶ There are violent and non-violent figurations here. The 'absorption' and 'transformation' of texts is a violence done to them, and there is metatextual violence in 'installing' intertextuality in the place of intersubjectivity; plagiarism belongs among such ratios. On the other hand, mosaic-making and interweaving (tesselation and intertexting) are non-linear and benign constructions promising a future of peaceful relations between texts;¹⁷ in such a future, it would seem, there is no place for plagiarism.

These future things are not yet fulfilled, however, and realizing a non-violent intertextual utopia may mean foregoing more than the pleasure of figurations through plagiarism. For example, Kristeva's common recourse to a language of appropriation would have to go.¹⁸ Furthermore, quite acceptable ways of abandoning the literary past – revising the history and reforming the canons – can demand of their practitioners a figuratively violent disposition, especially when the history to be rewritten is a history of violence. On the understanding that the pleasures of the texts to be represented are relative and momentary, this attempt to situate plagiarism as figure uses one such history to present a particularly violent intertext.

Literary history need not be as punctual as, for instance, Denis Hollier's representation of it suggests,¹⁹ but I shall take three points from the literary history of France to stand here for the whole. They represent, at the very least, the continuity of a certain tradition within French letters. These points are marked by texts, the first from 1768:

Il luy a dit de se deshabiller qu'elle luy demanda pourquoy, il luy repondit que c'etoit pour s'amuser, que luy aiant representé que ce n'etoit pas pour cela qu'il l'avoit fait venir, il lui dit que si elle ne se deshabilloit pas, il la tueroit et l'enterreroit luy meme, qu'etant ressorti et l'ayant laissée seule, elle s'est deshabillée, elle ne l'etoit pas encore entierement lors qu'il est revenu et luy aiant encor trouvé sa chemise, il luy dit qu'il falloit aussy l'oter, a quoy aiant repondu qu'elle mourreroit plutôt, il a luy meme arraché ladite chemise en la faisant sortir

pardessus la tete, apres quoy il l'a conduit dans une autre chambre aupres de celle la dans le milieu de la quelle il y avoit un lit de repos d'Indienne rouge a tache blanche, l'a jettée sur ledit lit sur le ventre, l'a lié par les quatre membres et par le milieu du corps avec des cordes de chanvre, luy a mis un traversin sur le col, ... Qu'etant attaché sur le lit il a pris une poignée de verges avec la quelle il l'a fouettée luy a fait differentes incisions avec un petit couteau ou canif, a coullé de la cire rouge et de la cire blanche en plus grande quantité sur ces playes apres quoy il a recommencé a la fouetter, faire des incisions et couller de la cire, tous lesquels mauvais traitements il a réitéré jusqu'a sept à huit fois. Que la deposante aiant crié lors de ces mauvais traitements il luy a montré un couteau, et l'a menacé, si elle crioit de la tuer et de l'enterrer luy meme comme elle nous l'a deja dit, qu'alors elle a cessé de crier. Ajoutte qu'a chaque reprise qu'il lui donnoit des coups de verges, il luy donnoit aussi des coups de baton. Qu'au milieu de ses tourments la deposante luy avoit fait differentes representations, et l'avoit prié de ne pas la faire mourir parcequ'elle n'avoit pas fait ses paques, a quoy il avoit repondu qu'il la confesseroit luy meme; que luy aiant fait encor d'autres representations, il s'est mis a jeter des cris tres hauts et tres effraiants...²⁰

The second is from 1868:

Maldoror passait avec son bouledogue; il voit une jeune fille qui dort à l'ombre d'un platane, et il la prit d'abord pour une rose. On ne peut dire qui s'éleva le plus tôt dans son esprit, ou la vue de cette enfant, ou la résolution qui en fut la suite. Il se déshabille rapidement, comme un homme qui sait ce qu'il va faire. Nu comme une pierre, il s'est jeté sur le corps de la jeune fille, et lui a levé la robe pour lui commettre un attentat à la pudeur ... à la clarté du soleil! Il ne se gênera pas, allez! ... N'insistons pas sur cette action impure. L'esprit mécontent, il se rhabille avec précipitation, jette un regard de prudence sur la route poudreuse, où personne ne chemine, et ordonne au bouledogue d'étrangler avec le mouvement de ses mâchoires, la jeune fille ensanglantée. Il indique au chien de la montagne la place où respire et hurle la victime souffrante, et se retire à l'écart, pour ne pas être témoin de la rentrée des dents pointues dans les veines roses. L'accomplissement de cet ordre put paraître sévère au bouledogue. Il crut qu'on lui demanda ce qui avait été déjà fait, et se contenta, ce loup, au muffle monstrueux, de violer à son tour la virginité de cette enfant délicate. De son ventre déchiré, le sang coule de nouveau le long de ses jambes, à travers la prairie. Ses gémissements se joignent aux pleurs de l'animal. La jeune fille lui présente la croix d'or qui ornait son cou, afin qu'il l'épargne; elle n'avait pas osé la présenter aux yeux farouches de celui qui, d'abord, avait eu la pensée de profiter de la faiblesse de son âge. Mais le chien n'ignorait pas que, s'il désobéissait à son maître, un couteau lancé de dessous une manche, ouvrirait brusquement ses entrailles, sans crier gare. Maldoror (comme ce nom répugne à prononcer!) entendait les agonies de la douleur, et s'étonnait que la victime eût la vie si dure, pour ne pas être encore morte. Il s'approche de l'autel sacrificatoire, et voit la conduite de son bouledogue, livré à de bas penchants, et qui élevait sa tête au-dessus de la jeune fille, comme un naufragé élève la sienne, au-dessus des vagues en courroux. Il lui donne un coup de pied et lui fend un oeil. Le bouledogue, en colère, s'enfuit dans

la campagne, entraînant après lui, pendant un espace de route qui est toujours trop long, pour si court qu'il fût, le corps de la jeune fille suspendue, qui n'a été délogé que grâce aux mouvements saccadés de la fuite; mais, il craint d'attaquer son maître, qui ne le reverra plus. Celui-ci tire de sa poche un canif américain, composé de dix à douze lames qui servent à divers usages. Il ouvre les pattes anguleuses de cet hydre d'acier; et, muni d'un pareil scalpel, voyant que le gazon n'avait pas encore disparu sous la couleur de tant de sang versé, s'apprête, sans pâlir, à fouiller courageusement le vagin de la malheureuse enfant.²¹

The third is from 1968:

'C'est pas mal chez vous, susurra effrontément Awa. Ce que vous en avez, des livres!'

'Ce sont ceux que j'ai écrits', mentit l'administrateur.

'Ce doit être merveilleux d'écrire.' ...

'Ma chambre à coucher', dit-il, s'éclipsant devant une porte rose, et promenant une lampe.

Awa eut le souffle coupé par le plaisir que provoquèrent en elle les tentures roses, le lit en demi-cercle, la courtepointe en soie, que l'on eût juré jonchée de pétales de roses. ...

Caressant la croupe creuse du ventre de la femme, il baisa les longues ailes noires de sa nuque et sortit – revint avec deux setters, chiens beaux et robustes, et une camisole.

Les bêtes dardaient sur eux leurs prunelles avides. Leur maître siffla et Médor s'élança sur Awa, gueule humide et frémissante.

'Médor! jappa-t-il, vas-y! Quartier libre!'

Avant que la femme pût réaliser quoi que ce fût, elle sentit le muffle du setter et ses crocs mettre en pièces ses vêtements, déchirant son pagne et sa camisole, la dénudant à coups de griffes et de pattes, sans érafler la peau. Il devait avoir une habitude peu commune de ce genre de travail, Médor.

Paralysée par une émotion à la fois terrifiée et consentante, Awa se vit dépouillée de ses habits en moins d'une seconde. Lorsqu'elle fut nue, Chevalier se courba vers elle, l'installant au milieu de fourrures recouvertes d'un châle de soie rose.

Il la coucha dessus, promenant sa langue légère sur ses lèvres rouges comme le cuivre, ses cheveux, bleu or comme le fer, ses yeux noirs comme l'argent, ses seins, tièdes et doux comme deux beaux corps de colombes de laine vivante – et soudain ce fut un gémissement, qui s'enfla, quitta les lèvres de la femme, monta, brusquement étouffé par la main de Chevalier.

Les doigts sous ses aisselles, redressée sur ses reins, elle criait, percevant contre ses lèvres la râpeuse âcreté de la gueule de Dick, tandis que Chevalier ralentissait en grimaçant les caresses sur son bas ventre, et qu'elle sentait toujours, la langue dure et tendue tel un gourdin gluant, Médor fouiller sa vulve.

Elle s'affola sous la fièvre étirante de ces morsures, et finit par lécher la langue parfumée de Chevalier, poussant des cris et se débattant. Ordonnant au chiens de se retirer, l'homme laboura la femme comme une terre en friche, comme un océan frappé par la proue d'une nef...²²

Beyond the spurious punctuality of dates, several things establish this intertext. There is, for one, a Sadian tradition, a succession of names,²³ in which the two later authors can be inscribed. However difficult it is to demonstrate that Sade was read by Ducasse, the link between their names has been insisted upon, not least by Blanchot in his *Lautréamont et Sade* (1949). With Ouologuem, the title of his ‘pornographic’ novel, *Les mille et une bibles du sexe* (1969) joins that of the *120 journées de Sodom* (1785) and the *Chants de Maldoror* within a larger tradition of episodic narratives that includes the *Decameron* and *Les Mille et une nuits*, and his proud assumption of the title ‘the Black Sade’ marks a more specific affiliation to ‘Sadology’.²⁴

Even without this extrinsic literary history, there are sufficient features within each text to make of the ensemble a viable intertext. Although the descriptions of sexual violence in the three texts would not alone set them apart, intrinsic correspondences suggest an almost poetic cohesion between them. Sade’s ‘petit couteau ou canif’ and Maldoror’s ‘canif américain’, or the rape of the child by Maldoror’s dog and the two dogs set on Awa by Chevalier make appropriate connections; ‘connectives’, in a Riffaterrean sense,²⁵ may be read into echoes of the name of the ‘Rose’, Rose Keller, who was Sade’s victim in the first scene: Maldoror ‘voit une jeune fille qui dort à l’ombre d’un platane, et il la prit d’abord pour une rose’; and Chevalier’s victim is seduced by the pervasive atmosphere of the association: ‘Awa eut le souffle coupé par le plaisir que provoquèrent en elle les tentures roses, le lit en demi-cercle, la courtépointe en soie, que l’on eût juré jonchée de pétales de roses.’

To return to the premise of this article, plagiarism is a useful figure in covering both intrinsic and extrinsic constants of the intertext. Going beyond the bounds of one literary history into another, all three authors are linked intertextually as plagiarists, not of each other (necessarily), but as eminent practitioners of a literary genre that conceals its borrowings from others.²⁶ Furthermore, each text is associated with narratives of abduction that make them in the most literal sense plagiaristic. The Sadian text is a straightforward account of a kidnapping, if not of a slave, of a servant at least; in the *Chants de Maldoror*, the plagiarism of young boys or adolescents is Maldoror’s most characteristic act; and *Le devoir de violence* tells the history of black Africa as a history of successive appropriations and re-appropriations of ‘la négraille’. Men and women, children, entire peoples, are abducted, sold and re-sold. Plagiarism is a powerful figure of such violence in texts.

Owen Heathcote has analysed the ‘remarkable complicity between the representation of sexuality, violence and literature’, arguing from a diversity of examples that violence in literature is radically *engendered*: ‘violence is shown to be engendered both in the sense that it is inseparable from particular representations of sexuality, and in the sense that it is only parodically or strategically other than male’.²⁷ The literary elaborations of the violence perpetrated on women within my own, less diversified intertext would bear out this contention. Moreover, the occasions for violence within it have not been exhaustively itemized. The particular power each instance has to disturb, shock, or offend is a violence done to the reader, a violence that is *engendered* by the opportunities offered for readerly identifications. Eileen

Julien, reading *Ouologuem* against another male author, Sony Labou Tansi, has argued that the violence in *Ouologuem* is radically offensive because it replicates gendered power relations in its attempts to critique political structures, identifying the subject-position of women with victimhood.²⁸

Sony Labou Tansi represents rapes no less violently than Sade, Ducasse, or *Ouologuem*. Having earlier been forced to witness the murder of her father and then eat his remains, the heroine of *La Vie et demie* is raped, in a room daubed with inscriptions, by that same father, who has stubbornly refused to die:

Martial entra dans une telle colère qu'il battit sa fille comme une bête et coucha avec elle, sans doute pour lui donner une gifle intérieure. A la fin de l'acte, Martial battit de nouveau sa fille qu'il laissa pour morte. Il cracha sur elle avant de partir et tous les écrits disparurent de la chambre, restaient ceux que Chaïdana avait sur les paumes. Elle revint à elle deux jours et deux nuits après la gifle intérieure, elle avait le sexe et le ventre amers, le coeur lourd, sa chair avait franchi une autre étape sur les vides humains.²⁹

Despite this, according to Julien, Sony Labou Tansi's heroine resists victimization. The difference is Sony Labou Tansi's attribution to her of an agency that does not have its source in an essentialized femininity. Julien locates two other sources, the first in the power of a woman's writing:

... Elle composa des chansons, des cris, des histoires, des dates, des nombres, un véritable univers où le centre de gravité était la solitude de l'être. Le vieux Layisho les lisait à l'insu de Chaïdana qui ne le permettait qu'à Amedandio. Il avait tellement aimé l'espèce de poème intitulé 'Bouts de viande, troncs de sang' qu'il l'avait recopié et proposé à l'éditeur nord-américain Jim Panama qui s'était empressé de lui en demander au moins une dizaine de cette dimension-là pour en faire un recueil. ...

Amedandio s'employait à distribuer les écrits de Chaïdana parmi les Gens de Martial. Ainsi naquit la 'littérature de Martial' qu'on appelait aussi littérature de passe ou évangile de Martial. Les manuscrits circulaient clandestinement de main en main.

... Les plus grands écrivains katamalanasiens essayaient d'appliquer la méthode et la vision chaïdaniennes de l'écriture; *Les mots font pitié*, le dernier livre de Chaïdana était publié par Victorio Lampourta qui se vit incarcérer et interdire toutes ses oeuvres; Sabratana Mouanke fut arrêté pour avoir essayé de diffuser *Mon père s'appelait Martial*.³⁰

'Few of her works, of course, will survive censorship', comments Julien. 'They will be burned. Thus language and writing in this context are the site of a constant struggle for power. When Chaïdana writes, writing becomes especially subversive because writing is male.'³¹

The second source located by Julien is women's power to intervene in political struggle from the critical position of the marginalized: 'If Chaïdana's rage is in part the rage of a female object of exchange between two rival men ..., then her acts of vengeance are not only a bid to wrest power from the villainous dictators, but are also an attempt to inveigh against the system of domination that also reduces women to signs between men. ... It is that from their position of marginality they perceive the nakedness of power. And it is that perception that enables them to envision, to challenge.'³²

Necessarily, the second saving grace is as far removed from the Ducasse and Sade texts as it is from Ouologuem. In all three, however, language and writing are engendered as the site of a struggle for power. Awa is first seduced by the book-lined room and the power it evinces: 'Ce doit être merveilleux d'écrire'. As the agent of the local ruler (Saïf) in his struggle with the colonial administrator Chevalier, Awa herself is unlikely to accede to writing; her role is confined to being a conduit of information between men, having made her male aggressor speak despite himself: 'Une semaine plus tard, Awa lui déliait la langue, et faisait communiquer à Saïf la confirmation d'un attentat.'

The girl's rape and murder in the *Chants de Maldoror* is presented via a feminine 'écriture', narrated by 'la folle qui passe en dansant', the girl's mother: 'Elle laisse échapper des lambeaux de phrases dans lesquels, en les recousant, très-peu trouveraient une signification claire. ... Elle a laissé tomber de son sein un rouleau de papier. Un inconnu le ramasse, s'enferme chez lui toute la nuit, et lit le manuscrit. ...' There follows the narrative of the rape, mediated by the 'inconnu', Maldoror, in the role of the reader. 'A la fin de cette lecture, l'inconnu ne peut plus garder ses forces, et s'évanouit. Il reprend ses sens, et brûle le manuscrit.'³³

The Sadian text is, at first sight, the revenge of feminine discourse, a woman speaking out against male aggression – all the more impressively in that Rose Keller, like Awa, did not have writing at her disposal. Her legal deposition concludes: '... qui est tout ce qu'elle a dit sçavoir, lecture faite de sa deposition la temoin de ce interpellée a dit icelle contenir vérité y a persité a requis taxe et a déclaré *ne sçavoir écrire ny signer* de ce interpellée suivant l'ordonnance. Approuvé six mots rayés. Chavane. Lebreton' (my emphasis). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given the several masculine mediations of her text, Rose Keller's speaking out does not triumph, since the conclusion of the case is that she is persuaded to withdraw her accusation, for a price, and Sade is not prosecuted.

A defence of plagiarism as figure is not favoured by association with an intertext premised on the silencing of women or on the suppression of their texts, whether or not Sony Labou Tansi's *La Vie et demie* provides, as Julien suggests, a genuine critique of gendered violence. It may even be that plagiarism, as the stealing of words, is a proper name for the act of a speaking in a woman's place. Sony Labou Tansi notes that Chaïdana's poem 'Bouts de viande, troncs de sang' was plagiarized by Layisho and offered to the American publisher Jim Panama. In *Le devoir de violence*, Awa's admiration for writing provokes Chevalier into plagiarism as he

appropriates the books of others: ‘‘Ce ce sont ceux que j’ai écrits’, mentit l’administrateur.’³⁴ The madwoman’s manuscript in the *Chants* is appropriated by Maldoror and incorporated wholesale in Ducasse’s text. In the rape of Rose Keller, Sade first imposes silence on her – ‘l’a menacé, si elle crioit de la tuer ... alors elle a cessé de crier’ – then answers her ‘representations’ with his own terrible utterance: ‘il s’est mis a jeter des cris tres hauts et tres effraiants’. If they were not, in the overriding first instance, horrific tortures, Sade’s ‘mauvais traitements’ might be read as if he were writing on her flesh, inscribing with his *penknife* and sealing his letter with wax, leaving wounds as traces to be read, later, in evidence against him.³⁵ Rose Keller suffers the further textual indignity of having her deposition signed for her by two men, Chavane and Lebreton. Finally, being noted in the records variously as Rose Keller, Rose Kailair, Roze Kailair, Roze Kelair, Roze Kélair, etc., she is refused even the security of a stable proper name.

I do not despair entirely of plagiarism as figure, despite its deep association with violence towards women. There remain other bodies of evidence to call on, with the promise of quite other constructions. Many women writers have embraced plagiarism. Marilyn Randall elaborates a case for feminist writing as ‘une poétique du plagiat’ through reference to works by Denise Boucher, Madeleine Gagnon, and Louky Bersianik, to conclude with a discussion of Irigaray’s plagiaristic practice as critique of phallogocentrism. I do not want to represent Randall’s case here without reading more closely the intertexts she cites,³⁶ but it can at least be suggested that even a violent plagiarism is not absolutely inimical to an *écriture féminine*. Duras seems to renounce the practice, but her appeal to violence may yet accommodate it in reconstructed form:

... we have to turn away from plagiarism. There are many women who write as they think they should write – to imitate men and make a place for themselves in literature. Colette wrote like a little girl, a turbulent and terrible and delightful little girl. So she wrote ‘feminine literature’ as men wanted it. That’s not feminine literature in reality. It’s feminine literature seen by men and recognized as such. It’s the men who enjoy themselves when they read it. I think feminine literature is a violent, direct literature.³⁷

In my conclusion, with no guarantee of deflecting the phallogocentric violence of the figure, I want to return to the intertexts first cited in this article, returning thereby to plagiarism’s primal, etymological scene.

‘Celui qui était condamné au fouet (*ad plagas*)’. The etymology given by Bouillet of the Latin *plagiarius* places plagiarism firmly at the scene of Sade whipping Rose Keller with his ‘poignée de verges’, but it must also be present when the gender-roles are reversed. It is present, for example, when Ducasse figures – parodically and proleptically – the direct violence of a feminine ‘écriture’: a man refuses to have sex with his mother, so mother and wife together punish him by covering him with tar and whipping him with ‘deux fouets au cordes de plomb’: ‘J’admirais ... avec quelle exactitude énergique les lames de métal, au lieu de glisser à la surface, ... s’appliquaient, grâce au goudron, jusqu’à l’intérieur des chairs, marquées par des

sillons aussi creux que l'empêchement des os pouvait raisonnablement le permettre.³⁸

This is a line that leads from the originating primal scene, via a detour through Sade and Ducasse, to Duras and Irigaray. But there is more than one line to be traced, not least because such origins are plural. Different dictionaries evoke different etymological scenes. Chambers's Twentieth Century, for example, derives *plagiarius* from *plaga*, the 'net' with which the kidnapper snares the child or slave. The Oxford Latin Dictionary gives the variant reading 'a spider's web', such as might be woven by the 'araignée de la grande espèce' in the scene of Maldoror's torment.³⁹ Following this thread we arrive at the 'benign' figure of intertextuality or weaving latent in Kristeva.

Other etymologies leave still more and different traces. Lewis and Short's Latin dictionary shows Bouillet's 'fouets' to be a deceptive metonymy, since *plagas* are not the instruments but the wounds they inflict. This *plaga* is connected, then, to the French for wound, returning us to the scene of Rose Keller's suffering and the wax poured onto her 'playes', and evoking the 'vaste plaie immonde' from Maldoror's struggle with the angel:

... Il se penche, et porte la langue, imbibée de salive, sur cette joue angélique, qui jette des regards suppliants. Il promène quelque temps sa langue sur cette joue. Oh!... voyez!... voyez donc!... la joue rose et blanche est devenue noire, comme un charbon! Elle exhale des miasmes putrides. C'est la gangrène; il n'est plus permis d'en douter. Le mal rongeur s'étend sur toute la figure, et de là, exerce ses furies sur les parties basses; bientôt, tout le corps n'est qu'une vaste plaie immonde.⁴⁰

The all-embracing, all-accommodating figure of these etymological intertexts must be the 'open expanse (of land, sea, or sky)' that, in the Oxford dictionary, is another sense of *plaga*, a sense that expands, metonymically, into the *plage* that marks the limits of such an expanse of sea. This sea may as well be 'la mer maldororienne', that age-old intertextual figure, or Sollers's Ocean, 'ce milieu de résistance à toute science linéaire'.

The lines can be extended further, of course,⁴¹ but the proliferation of intertexts is less of a help than a hindrance to plagiarism's claims as figure. It has lost the necessary economy of the figure; by trailing its intertexts in its wake it has, in effect, transformed itself from a possible aid to interpreting texts into a (one-word) text, itself in need of interpretation. This article concludes by reading plagiarism only as text. As figure, the 'future things' plagiarism promises remain to be fulfilled.⁴²

¹ Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants De Maldoror, Poésies, Lettres*, ed. Patrick Besnier (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992), II.11, 93.

² M.-N. Bouillet, *Dictionnaire universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts* (Paris: Hachette, 1862).

³ Christopher Miller in his book *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), writing of Yambo Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence*; and Marilyn Randall, 'L'écriture Féministe: Une Poétique du Plagiat?', *Queen's Quarterly*, 96.2 (1989), 275. Randall is summarizing, without necessarily subscribing to, the lesson of Michel Schneider's *Voleurs de Mots, Essai sur le plagiat, la psychanalyse et la pensée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

⁴ 'Commendo tibi, Quinctiane, nostros, | (Nostros dicere si tamen libellos | Possim, quos recitat tuus Poëta.) | Si de servitio gravi queruntur, | Assertor venias, satisque præstes; | Et, cum se dominum vocabit ille, | Dicas esse meos, manueque missos. | Hoc si terque quaterque clamitaris; | Impones plagiaro pudorem.' Epigram I.52, from *Toutes les Epigrammes de Martial en latin et en français, Avec de petites notes, En deux parties*, translated by 'M. de M.' [l'abbé Michel de Marolles] (Paris: 'chez Guillaume de Luyne', 1655), vol. I, 76 and 77. I have used this version of Martial to represent this founding text's currency in French literature beyond learned circles. Though substantial, this edition was intended to make Martial available to a wider readership, hence the foregrounding of the vernacular version and the use of the vernacular for the critical materials. At the same time, however, it sought to narrow its readership at strategic points by leaving untranslated the epigrams on sexual topics, 'indigne d'estre expliquée'. Enjoyment of these was confined to those (presumably male) readers with extra-vernacular competence.

⁵ 'Cecy est une metaphore des Esclaves qu'on affranchissoit.' Editor's note in *Toutes les Epigrammes de Martial*, 76.

⁶ 'A celuy qui prend le labour d'autruy pour s'en glorifier.' Editor's note, *ibid.*, 76.

⁷ In simplified form, it found its way into contemporary usage through Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century (Preface to Book II of his *Elegantiarum Latinae Linguae Libri VI*, cited in Peter Howell, *A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial* (London: The Athlone Press, 1980), 230). Howell cites Horace's *Epistle* I.20 as the source for the idea of book as slave.

⁸ To (mis)appropriate George Lang's distinction between 'founding texts (examples of which are the Bible and the Koran, as well as the myriad traditional cosmologies recorded and unrecorded throughout Africa) and those which are *confounding*, which resist the assimilation of text to history, secular or sacred, and tend toward the disruption of textual identity itself'. See 'Text, Identity, and Difference: Yambo

Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 24.4 (1987), 387-402 (388, 401).

⁹ See Suzanne Guerlac, *The Impersonal Sublime: Hugo, Baudelaire, Lautrémont* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 35 & 58.

¹⁰ *Poésies* II.69, in *Chants de Maldoror* (1992), 260-61. See my 'Intertextuality or influence: Kristeva, Bloom and the *Poésies* of Isidore Ducasse', in Worton and Still (eds), *Intertextuality: theories and practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 132-38. The possibility that Ducasse specifically plagiarized *L'Homme qui rit* in the *Chants de Maldoror* is commonly discounted, despite the strong coincidences of theme and expression in the accounts of mutilated mouths, since the first *Chant de Maldoror* appeared in August 1868 and *L'Homme qui rit* did not begin to appear, in serialized form, until January 1869. However, there is the suggestion that *L'Homme qui rit* was available in some form several months before the first *Chant* was published, since Des Essarts, in a letter to Mallarmé, claims to have read some of it in May 1868. See Mallarmé, *Correspondance 1862-1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 274. Alternatively, it is conceivable that Hugo plagiarized the *Chants de Maldoror*, since we know he received from Ducasse a copy of the first *Chant* around September 1868, and that he read parts of it.

¹¹ See *Le devoir de violence* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 9, and *Le dernier des Justes* (Paris: Seuil, 1959), 11. The difference between these two openings is discussed at length by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *In My Father's House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹² 'I am especially touched, even overwhelmed, to think that a Black writer should have relied on *Le dernier des Justes* in creating a book like *Le devoir de violence*. Thus Mr Ouologuem is not indebted to me, but rather I to him.' Letter from Schwarz-Bart, cited in E. Sellin, 'The Unknown Voice of Yambo Ouologuem', *Yale French Studies*, 53 (1976), 144.

¹³ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981 [1973]), 95. In *Le devoir de violence* influence is better called contagion, contracted through the too-close proximity of texts that some call plagiarism.

¹⁴ In 'Colonialism, Polyvocality, and Islam in *L'aventure ambiguë* and *Le devoir de violence*' (*MLN*, 107 (1992), 1000-27), Donald R. Wehrs has analysed the non-communality figured in the opening: 'The interplay of multiple perspectives ... leads to a dispossession of voice that is, in part, a radicalization of Romantic irony' (1012).

¹⁵ Traced intertexts or sources to *Le devoir de violence* as a whole include Graham Greene, Guy de Maupassant, and Camara Laye. Untraced intertexts suggested by Ouologuem himself include Kipling, Portuguese explorer Lope di Pigafeta, detective novelist John MacDonald, and archival documents of the French colonial

administration. Those suggested by (generally hostile) critics include Saint-Exupéry, Kateb Yacine, Sartre, Gatti, Godard, Pascal, and Suret-Canale. For a thorough if patronizing account of the 'Ouologuem affair', see Sellin, 'The Unknown Voice of Yambo Ouologuem', 137-62. In his 'Lettre aux pisse-copie Nègres d'écrivains célèbres', Ouologuem explicitly illustrates his plagiaristic methods. See *Lettre à la France nègre* (Paris: Edmond Nalis, 1968), 163-72.

¹⁶ 'Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman', *Critique*, 23.239 (1967), 438-65 (440-41).

¹⁷ A somewhat less benign, but still non-linear, figure of intertextuality was proposed by Philippe Sollers in a subsequent issue of *Critique*, writing of Ducasse's 'strophe de l'océan': 'Ce milieu de résistance à toute science linéaire a un 'nom' (parmi d'autres): l'océan. Mais entendons tout de suite *texte ...*' (*Critique*, 24.245 (1967), 802). A gendered opposition is latent in the distinction between figures of benign weaving or waving and malign linearity, if only because of Freud's memorable association of weaving with female sexuality and the invention of writing, remembered by Sollers thus (in a footnote): 'Suggestion de Freud: l'écriture inventée par des femmes à travers le tissage et le tressage des poils du pubis. Et, par conséquent: investissement maximum à la place du pénis manquant, masturbation déléguée traçant la pensée, seuil 'magique'. L'homme, lui, s'écrirait d'autant plus qu'en pouvant ce manque' (*Tel Quel*, 64 (1976), 30). Then again, this suggests a malignity in weaving that leaves the original opposition wanting.

¹⁸ See, for example, her reading of Ducasse's *Poésies*, from *La Révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 347: 'L'appropriation du présupposé se fait en entrant d'abord dans ses contraintes, puis en les quittant, pour ne donner, par la suite, comme opposition, que son propre lieu d'énonciation.' Appropriation is, of course, according to Bouillet's dictionary, the act of a plagiarist, 'qui s'approprie les pensées d'autrui'.

¹⁹ Denis Hollier (ed.), *New History of French Literature* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁰ 'Déposition de Rose Keller', in Gilbert Lely, *Vie du Marquis de Sade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 222-23.

²¹ Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror, Poésies, Lettres* (1992), 120-22.

²² Ouologuem, *Le devoir de violence*, 68-70. It is in this passage, precisely, that Ouologuem plagiarizes Graham Greene. See *It's a Battlefield* (London: Heinemann, 1970 [1934]), 55-57. As in his use of Schwarz-Bart, the difference Ouologuem makes between the two texts points self-referentially to his plagiaristic practice; for example, the character into whose place the administrator Chevalier comes is called in Greene's text 'Mr *Surrogate*'.

²³ What, in one acceptation, can be called a theory: 'THEORIE: ... une longue suite de personnes qui s'avancent en rangs', *Petit Larousse* (Paris: Larousse, 1959). The word is employed in this sense by Ouologuem in *Le devoir de violence* and taken from there by Christopher Miller in *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

²⁴ See Carolyn J. Dean's article 'Sadology' in Hollier (ed.), *A New History of French Literature*, 892-94.

²⁵ See 'Compulsory Reader Response: the Intertextual Drive', in Worton and Still (eds), *Intertextuality: theories and practices*, 56-78 (58): '... indices [that] direct readers towards the specific and relevant intertexts, and indeed compel them to look for these intertexts even when cultural changes have made their recovery less likely.'

²⁶ 'La répétition plus ou moins intégrale d'un discours antérieur sans indication de sa provenance' is Marilyn Randall's definition of plagiarism ('L'Écriture Féministe: Une Poétique du Plagiat?', 274). For Ouologuem's plagiarisms, see Sellin, 'The Unknown Voice of Yambo Ouologuem', *passim*; for Ducasse see Peter Nesselroth, 'Lautréamont's plagiarisms, or the poetization of prose texts', in Robert L. Mitchell (ed.), *Pre-Text, Text, Context* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980); for Sade, see Michel Delon, 'La copie sadienne', *Littérature*, 69 (1988), 87-99.

²⁷ Owen Heathcote, 'The Representation of Violence and the Violence of Representation', *New Comparison*, 14 (1992), 202-09 (208, 209).

²⁸ 'Rape, Repression, and Narrative Form in *Le Devoir de violence* and *La Vie et demie*', in *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 160-81.

²⁹ Sony Labou Tansi, *La Vie et demie* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 69.

³⁰ *La Vie et demie*, 76-77. It is tempting to make more of the coincidence of Chaïdana's father's name with that of the founding father in my own scenario of textual violence, especially as, in Sony Labou Tansi's text, textuality is a power that passes from men to women. I suggest that plagiarism has effected a similar passage.

³¹ 'Rape, Repression, and Narrative Form in *Le Devoir de violence* and *La Vie et demie*', 177.

³² *ibid.*, 178, 179.

³³ *Chants de Maldoror*, III.2 (1992), 118-19, 122. In fainting, Maldoror enacts parodically the response of the sensitive reader agressed by the violence of the text. In burning the manuscript, he deals with it as Chaïdana's enemies dealt with her manuscripts.

³⁴ Ouologuem, *Le devoir de violence*, 68. This appropriated phrase self-referentially marks its difference from the source in Graham Greene by translating ‘said’ as ‘mentit’, inviting us to see the lie in Ouologuem’s own claim to ownership: ‘‘What a lot of books you have.’ ‘Those are my own,’ Mr Surrogate said’ (*It’s a Battlefield*, 56).

³⁵ See the ‘Rapport du chirurgien Le Comte sur l’état de Rose Keller’: ‘... une femme qui venoit d’estre maltraité que j’ai appris se nommer Rose Kailair. que j’ai trouvé souffrante de plusieurs partie de son corps. que j’ai examiné et reconnus toute l’estendu des fesses et une parti des lombes vergete et excorié avec coupure et contusion forte et longue sur l’épine du dos. et en outre une contusion echimosé et déchirure sur le dessus de la main gauche, que le tout ma paru estre fait par quelque instrument contondant et tranchant. ay aussi remarqué de la cire fondu sur quelqu’une des playes.’ In Lely, *Vie du Marquis de Sade*, 205.

³⁶ For instance: Denise Boucher, *Cyprine: Essai collage pour être une femme* (Montréal: L’Aurore, 1978); Madeleine Gagnon, *Autographie. I. Fictions* (Montréal: VLB, 1982); Louky Bersianik, *L’Euguélienne* (Montréal: La Presse, 1976) and *Le Pique-nique sur l’Acropole: Cahiers d’Ancyl* (Montréal: VLB, 1979). I shall cite Randall’s conclusion (277): ‘Qu’elle soit sous forme de citation, de parodie ou, finalement, de plagiat avoué, l’imitation remplit d’abord une fonction de contestation par rapport à la notion même d’originalité dont la valeur dépend du phallogocentrisme patriarcal qui constitue la cible de l’écriture féministe. Or, pratiquer le tabou va encore plus loin que le désir de transgression: il revient à annoncer un refus absolu de s’inscrire dans l’économie qui légitimise la loi.’

³⁷ ‘Marguerite Duras’, in *New French Feminisms*, eds Elaine Marks and I. de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 174 (no French source is given). Cited by Marilyn Randall, ‘L’Ecriture Féministe: Une Poétique du Plagiat?’, 266. Duras’s separation of plagiarism and violence rests, as Randall suggests, on a confusion between plagiarism and imitation. See also Duras’s remark in Duras and Michelle Porte, *Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), 102: ‘On n’écrit pas du tout au même endroit que les hommes. Et quand les femmes n’écrivent pas dans le lieu du désir, elles n’écrivent pas, elles sont dans le plagiat.’

³⁸ *Chants de Maldoror* IV.3 (1992), 147.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 192-99.

⁴⁰ *Chants de Maldoror* II.11 (1992), 92-93. This account of malefic proximity is a mise-en-scène of the all-effacing embrace described by Ducasse in his famous maxim on plagiarism (*Poésies* II.59): ‘Le plagiat est nécessaire. Le progrès l’implique. Il serre de près la phrase d’un auteur, se sert de ses expressions, efface une idée fausse, la remplace par l’idée juste’ (*Les Chants de Maldoror, Poésies, Lettres* (1992), 259). This Latin *plaga* is also at the root of the *plague* that is so recurrent a topic in the

Chants de Maldoror. A fuller discussion of plagiarism and intertextuality in Ducasse can be found in my forthcoming *Poetics of the Pretext: Reading Lautréamont* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Eg., into Greek: *πλαγίος* (oblique) allows Suzanne Guerlac, for instance, to speak convincingly of plagiarism as ‘the ‘oblique’ evasion of representation’ (*The Impersonal Sublime*, 155 & 215, n.15). The verb connected with this root can mean, appropriately, to turn sideways, to lead astray, to pervert, or to use tortuous methods.

⁴² See Augustine, *Contra Faustinum*, 4.2: ‘in illis temporalibus figuras fuisse futurorum quae implerentur in nobis’ (in these temporal figures there was the promise of future things, which were to be fulfilled in us). Cited by Erich Auerbach, ‘Figura’, in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 41. I am currently researching an anthology of plagiarisms, ancient and modern.