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THE AUTHORS WITH MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

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As attested by the *Bulletins des Polarophiles Tranquilles*, I am recurrently interested in the multiple masks, identities, pseudonyms and stooges used by some great novelists of the twentieth century such as Frédéric Dard, Romain Gary, Jacques Laurent or even Graham Greene.

This practice has been used for centuries without arousing any inquisitiveness. But beyond the banal usage of a pseudonym in order to better protect their private life or their reputation, these writers felt the need to publish their work regularly which explains the use of several pseudonyms. But this gives rise to reflections

However, one can feel that the University and the critic are embarrassed to tackle the question of multiple identities as if this detail of the act of creation was taboo or disgraceful. This, obviously, led me to ask myself about the motivations more or less well hidden of these writers who are, in fact, equal to themselves with or without mask.

And what is true for the modern writers, is also valid for the authors of the past : Pierre Corneille (French play-writer, 1606-1684) who is said to have written most of comedies and dramas published under the name of Molière (French comedian, 1622-1673), is a good example.

1- The interest of multiple identities in literature.

As a matter of introduction, I let the late Donald Westlake (American, 1933-2008) speaks. He used to be a specialist considering that he signed his works with Richard Stark, Tucker Coe, Curt Clark, Timothy J. Culver, J. Morgan Cunningham and Donald Eastpool.

He gave a simple and general explanation about the game of using so many masks:

To the question: Why all these pen-names ? His answer was:

“When you're first in love, you want to do it all the time. I loved writing, and I was just pushing out too much stuff for a rational marketplace to contend with. I first started putting pen-names on short stories because magazines wouldn't publish the same byline twice in the same issue. With the novels, I had a contract to do a book a year for Random House, so if I added a second publisher, I would need a second name..... (copyright 2008 by the University of Chicago. See the complete interview on internet at press.uchicago.edu/misc/chicago:westlake-interview).

This first reason has the merit of being obvious: the usage of pseudonyms allows to have several editors to publish different sorts of novels and so, reach a specific readership.

Before going further, we need to define three different roles: pseudonym, stooge and ghost writer.

Pseudonym: from the Greek “Pseudes”, false and “Onoma” name. The dictionary gives the following definition: a fictitious name or alias, especially a pen name (Molière is the pseudonym of Poquelin).

Stooge or Figurehead, Nominal Head, Front man, Straw man: one who allows oneself to be used for another's profit or advantage.

Ghost writer: professional writer who is paid to write books, articles, stories, reports and other texts that are officially credited to another person.

All this would be clear if some authors would not mix the genres, making the definitions not convincing. Consequently, the choice of one of these three categories to name the direction selected by an author will depend of his motivation, his reputation, the way he is paid but, above all, the agreement between the persons involved. This explains why it is not so easy to decide who is the true author of a work.

Let me specify the problem: up to which limit, the one using the services of a ghost writer, should be considered as the true author before losing this quality to the benefit of his ghost writer who, hence, becomes his stooge ? And as a sequel: in which conditions, an author practicing a ghost writer activity can be considered as the true author of a text he has written but not signed ?

These questions concern a large part of the literary duets and particularly the relation Corneille – Molière.

It is understandable that the theatrical world draws a discreet veil over these practices because, during their lifetime, it gives the authors some sort of flexibility and freedom that they do appreciate. However, the advantages drawn from this habit, should not discourage researchers and critics who want to enhance and give a new life to some works often misjudged, sometimes condemned rarely for artistic reasons.

A ghost writer can be somebody paid to form a story out of an idea given by someone else. It is the case of the first two works written by Frédéric Dard (French, 1920-2000) for Marcel Prêtre (Swiss, 1922-1995). As a general rule, the ghost writer is often a beginner working for a well-known person. However, although rarely and strangely, it can also happen that a famous author acts as the ghost for a less known individual.

Although acclaimed as San-Antonio, Frédéric Dard continued for quite sometimes to use Marcel Prêtre and Frédéric Valmain's signatures.

Let's go further with the Dard's case: his multiple masks make him a text-book case: first, the pseudonyms acknowledged by Dard during his lifetime: San-Antonio, Kaput, l'Ange Noir (Dark Angel), Frédéric Charles. In the collection "Angoisse" (Anguish) for the editor "Fleuve Noir", he also signed Patrick Svenn, Virginia Lord, Franck Puig, Georges Gauthier, José Michel, Jean Murelli, Jean Redon, Agnès Laurent (and more...).

Not content with many signatures, he also has been the ghost writer for Pierre Berthorrel "*Si Les Femmes m'Etaient Comptées*" (pun not translatable), André Berthomieux "*En Légitime Défense*" (In Self Defence), Michel Massian "*L'Automaboule*" (Self Crazy), Jean Raynal "*Ni Plomb Ni Couronne*" (Neither Lead Pellet nor Wreath), and Marcel Prêtre "*Calibre 475 Express*" (Caliber 475 Express) who will become Dard's straw man. Dard will also use François Chabrey's pseudonym for other "Fleuve Noir" publications.

Also, the comedian Frédéric Valmain was Dard's stooge for various plays. And since we are speaking about Valmain, we should mention some pseudonyms hidden behind some other pseudonyms to avoid the public notice on an over productive front man. It is the case of Paul Baulat alias Frédéric Valmain concealed behind the pseudonym James Carter in the series "Special Police" (Fleuve Noir Editor), in order not to attract attention on his multiple straw-man talents for Dard's benefit.

Discretion is the law, the basic contract between partners. The stooge is successful if he remains uncovered. Corneille is probably an exception since he let Molière have all the fame. For him, writing was certainly more gratifying than his author pride...Unless... He was the tragedian play-writer of the century and as such was a French celebrity. At this time, comedies were execrated by the Catholic Church and the royal court and it was out of the question for Corneille to sign light works often humorous or satirical without endangering his reputation. But he was in need of a lot of money to set up his two sons on the verge to embrace as royal officers, an expensive military career generally granted to the richest class. On top of this, talented for irony and repelled by hypocrisy, Corneille who had started as a successful comical writer, had too much pride not to tell straight what he was thinking about those who would thwart his ambitions, mainly the learned and "précieuses" (affected) persons who were his implacable critics as soon as "*Le Cid*" (1637) and even more "*Polyeucte*" (1642) were played on stage.

At this time, it was usual for play-writers to use a famous comedian's name as stooge. These comedians called "comedian-poet" were the only category not running the risk of being burned on the

stake, imprisoned or exiled. Under these conditions, we can understand that Corneille, who cared about his future, used the weapons that his time was offering: pseudonyms (during “*Le Cid*” dispute) and figureheads, that is to say Molière but not only, for, according to Abbé d'Aubignac 1604-1676), also a Molière's assistant, the young and ambitious writer Jean Donneau de Visé (1639-1710) who signed Corneille's pamphlets.

In the case Corneille-Molière, we are considering two exceptional personalities: Corneille is the most versatile creator of his century: comical author, tragic or licentious poet, polemicist, literary critic, even translator of religious texts while Molière, who brought the plays he managed to create, to a comical summit, pleased not only the Parisian public grateful to him for having humorously denounced all scandals of their time but also the king (Louis the fourteenth, 1638-1715) who kept him busy nights and days. Considering their respective glory, the quality of this pair could explain by itself why the posterity preferred not to bring the truth to light about their mutual agreement.

Particularly creative, some authors form the aristocracy of concealment: Molière and Corneille, Valmain and Dard, James Hadley Chase (British, 1906-1985) for Graham Greene (British, 1904-1991). Let's consider the last case which has aroused the curiosity of the *Polarophiles Tranquilles'* team but which failed to elicit any response yet: as a proof, we were expecting William J. West to publish what he had announced to have found in René Brabazon Raymond's private archives, (alias James Hadley Chase) to prove the existing link between Chase and Greene. However, Raymond's family was on the guard, royalties demand it... and the threat of a lawsuit prevented their disclosure (however, the last *Bulletin des Polarophiles Tranquilles* got a glimpse into it).

The absolute silence is the rule as far as a straw-man is concerned. When I did identify publicly Valmain as Frédéric Dard's stooge, Valmain himself threatened me of a lawsuit; but I refused to retract, explaining my convictions in the first *Bulletin des Polarophiles Tranquilles*...and finally, there were no proceedings.

There is also the case Emile Ajar, pseudonym used by Romain Gary (French, 1914-1980) more than famous to have been awarded the *Prix Goncourt* in 1956 under his own signature with “*Les Racines Du Ciel*” (The Roots of Heaven) and in 1975, using the Ajar name for “*La Vie Devant Soi*” (The Life in Front of Us). You should know that winning the price twice, is strictly forbidden according to the rules set up by Edmond de Goncourt (1822-1896).

Gary's straw-man and at the same time his nephew, Paul Pavlowitch, kept the secret all along which put Gary in an insoluble contentious position for the rest of his life. The literary hoax was officially revealed when Gary's testament was read . The manuscripts having been kept, were used as a proof to allow his son to enjoy the royalties.

With these stories of authorship more or less well managed, all is done to confuse the issues and prevent the reader to look beyond the name written on the book cover or on the playbill.

Therefore, somebody who would try to know the truth, runs always the risk to be taken for a scatter-brain and finally, because of the economical venture involved in some frauds or impostures, he could lose his credibility vis-a-vis the ones who want to see the things staying in the same state of affairs.

2- The authors using Pseudonyms

They are essentially prolific writers working constantly and producing a lot. They generally earn their living only with their pen and, by necessity, work like slaves. At the beginning of their career, they turn anything to good account, but in a genre said minor, obviously not very lucrative and to offset the loss of earnings, they become mass producers. The habit of writing fast will be kept all along their career which, if it covers a long period, will explain the numerous creations. If their number is difficult to be conceived, it is even more difficult to be accepted.

The work done under a pseudonym, correspond often to a period of training, to acquire proficiency. The authors so conceal many texts of poor quality so that they do not harm their future. These texts are often shameful because pornographic or politically incorrect or because they are close to a previous idea or an old text hardly modified but given to a new editor. It can also be a sort of exercise which allows the author to improve his style. The popular authors like Paul Féval (1816-1887), Gustave Le Rouge (1867-1938) or Gaston Leroux (1868-1927) used to produce multiple titles with the same story each time hardly modified. The modern authors such as Frédéric Dard, do the same today.

We can already retain the idea that the writers using several names obey to an editorial rule to produce diverse literary genres published under disparate names to honor their various contracts signed with specialized editors. Besides, their publications exceed the reading capacity of their readership.

Of course, account should be taken of the challenge to try out something new, to approach genres contrary to a well-established reputation and the taste for disguise and mystification. We will not speak about the pleasure to play with or defy the critic as did Romain Gary: at the end of his career, he was considered as a finished author. Because he found it painful, he wished to show the contrary to the whole of Paris and was successful in giving life to Emile Ajar. He had already published two stories under the pseudonyms Shatan Bogat "*Les Têtes De Stéphanie*" (Stéphanie's heads) and Fosco Sinibaldi "*L'Homme à la Colombe*" (The Man with the Dove) but the books did not sell although the editor gave away the real name of the author to improve the stagnant sales but without success..

In any case, this contributed to decide Romain Gary to use the name Ajar.

Dominique Bona, Gary's biographer, explains Gary's wishes to fool the critic:

Sad because the critic stays away of his work or glances at it with a blasé attitude as if his new books were a punishment, he decided, without scruples, to mask his writing. His new name will be Ajar, just to see if the misled public will give him a warmer or a disastrous but real welcome instead of the usual half-hearted tide of dull commentaries. This pseudonym is a kind of rebirth in another

body bringing at the same time a new virginity , the freshness of a beginner. Gary imagines a quite complicated scenario. He asks one of his friends, Pierre Michaut, an industrialist recently installed in Brazil, to send the manuscript from Rio de Janeiro to the Editor Gallimard in Paris including a letter , obviously dictated by Gary, to present the writer Ajar. According to Michaut, Ajar would be a French citizen, native of Oran (Algeria) who would have met Albert Camus (French novelist, 1913-1960) during the war. In exile in South America, Ajar would be a doctor sued by the French police because of a criminal abortion. Impossible to meet him because the author wishes to stay as discreet as possible... This is the beginning of the fraud, the rest is well known... Romain Gary by Mrs Dominique Bona (French, born 1953).

Note that Dominique Bona uses the word “pseudonym”. The word “straw-man” would have been more appropriate although it emphasizes the legal connotation.

There is many other reasons which could encourage an author to use a mask. One of them could be to protect another career: for instance, Romain Kacew who has signed his first novels with his real name, used the pseudonym Romain Gary when he became a diplomat. Another logic to choose a pseudonym is the incompatibility of the name used to sign popular novels with the ambition of a literary prize or an election to an academy (see the case Graham Greene and J.H.Chase).

As far as the old Corneille is concerned, out of favor with the public, pushed aside by Louis the fourteenth, he has found with the comedian and theater director Molière, a means to, behind a mask, come back in the news, taking at the same time a stunning revenge.

We have also to cite a rare case where a straw-man is used to satisfy a literary revenge. It is the Dard/Valmain affair fabricated by Frédéric Dard to retaliate against Simenon (Belgian, 1903-1989) who dispossessed him of his adapter's rights and humiliated him publicly.

Here is the case: in 1950, Dard, young author, proposed to his fellow writer and idol Simenon, a stage adaptation of his novel “*La Neige Etait Sale*” (Dirty Snow). Simenon who knew his poor talent as a play-writer (in 1938, his adaptation for the stage of his novel “*Quartier Nègre*” (Black Quarter) was a failure, accepted the offer but treated his young colleague in a cavalier fashion as much financially as morally. Dard rebelled, both fell out and Simenon humiliated his collaborator with this declaration “I do not have any adapter” delivered in front of Dard in the middle of a reception. Dard, who will never forgive him, put in place a literary revenge with a stunning scenario: some years later, he used the young actor Valmain as his straw-man to propose to Simenon a new adaptation of the play “*Liberty Bar*”. Simenon who agreed, fell for it so pleased to have found a new talented pigeon to fleece. But the pigeon was hiding an eagle who, at the right time, imposed his law and his rights. Simenon, put in his place, became the laughing stock of the initiates. No doubt that this story played a large part in his decision to give up to write plays for the theater.

Convinced of Valmain's role with Frédéric Dard, I wrote to the latter in 1995 to ask the authorization to disclose the story but I never received an answer. Did he simply read my letter ?

In 2000, after his death, I published my paper “*Un San Antonio peut en cacher un autre*” (A San Antonio can hide another one) - see the text on *les Polarophiles Tranquilles* site -. I must add that I met Frédéric Dard' s secretary when I was investigating the Valmain case but she convinced me that he was dead. Once the article published, she called me to give me the deceased' s telephone number.

If the ghost-writer's work, the choice of a pseudonym or a straw man have from the start the need for money or prosaically for tax reasons, it also gives the capability to ensure a larger freedom and leads to manage two or even three lives and hence reach the turning point of a dual personality easily accessed if we take into account the existential problems of numerous authors. As a matter of fact, many are in search of their intrinsic identity. Dard is, one more time, a text-book case. He has multiplied the pseudonyms to the point that nobody (including his closest family) can brag to know them all. As soon as 1949, he accumulated the activities of ghost-writer, adapter, translator and giving some texts to help the editors to solve their difficulties, make friends, by gratitude or more commonly, for money.

Little by little, upset by the constant comparison between the success of the San Antonio's stories and the relative flops of the books signed Dard, he let his pseudonym-star San Antonio to supplant his own signature. An identical reason led him to give up his own name to the profit of Valmain/Carter and Marcel Prêtre/ François Chabrey which were used constantly from 1966 to 1985.

As Doctor Jekyll vis-a-vis his alter ego Mister Hyde, it happened that he could not endure anymore the essential San-Antonio who had brought him fortune and fame. He will write in "Je le Jure" (I swear it) the following :

It is no time anymore to ruin a tried and tested recipe like the series "San-Antonio" but I am decided to go further even if I have to deceive a part of my readers. I can take the risk. Stop writing San-Antonio stories ? No, I do not think so. In any case, it is not a decision that I can take deliberately. It could happen that one morning, when I wake up, I could say to myself: this time, that's what I decided to do, that in this manner and nothing else. Over with San-Antonio ! That's possible, that's very possible. In fact, it could be something I dream on confusedly. To feel like not writing San-Antonio novels any more because of the need to create something entirely different and this desire would be so strong , so pressing that I would be forced to give up this gold mine for the unknown. Oh, yes, it would be great !"

Up to 1966, Dard will turn everything to good account publishing up to exhaustion which leads him to be depressive and to attempt suicide during some family difficulties. Following this crisis, he will get back on his feet quite successfully until his daughter's abduction in 1983. He will return to a normal editorial behavior in 1985 but the back cover of "*Y a-t-il un Français dans la Salle ?*" (Is there a French man in the room ?) warned us: "at last, the event that everybody was expecting, just happened: San-Antonio and Frédéric Dard have linked up" which means that, from now on, Dard will sign all his books San-Antonio, rthe same way that that Jekyll became Hyde, Romain Gary Ajar. Has Corneille himself, from sheer weariness,accepted to become the poet of the company directed by Molière ?

To conclude, we do not entirely know a writer if we do not make the effort to discover his hidden work, essentially if this one is abundant and diverse. Corneill but also Simenon and Frédéric Dard are protean artists and their works are similar to landscapes with contrasted reliefs.

It is then a matter of accepting everything that they have published or not. Their outputs, even different, do not oppose each other but are complementary even if their contradictions seem to prevent a coherent reading of the complete opus. The great virtue of these authors with multiple identities,

their powerful and secret passion which drives them, could be the ontological reason that pushes them to be different and, at the same time, to assume their unity.

We then must accept these artists and their apparent contradictions, the works that they got rid of or concealed or altered for some intimate, commercial or social reasons. Why should we continue to let go on the confusions, the mistakes and the lies? Why should we shut our eyes on some so old practices that we found them already in the Bible? We believe that we should consider the usage of a pseudonym or a stooge with respect as they represent hidden treasures in waiting of their real authorship. To return an author his real dimensions is a long-drawn-out research, and implies a lot of reading with the only reward to have foiled the tricks of a writer we do appreciate and to whom we wish to pay tribute without any astonishing and unhealthy reservation.

A deceased author belongs to the public domain and his oeuvre is owned by his readers fascinated by his personality which should not be limited to the reductive interpretation of his official life.

The in depth analysis that we are trying to perform, gives us the feeling that we are working for a good cause. .