

Meaning, “Writing,” Reading, and the “Equality of Probability” in Louis Armand’s Poetry and Fiction

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Abstract:

This essay studies various ambits of meaning, writing, and reading in Armand’s novels, poetry, and theory, in order to tackle the uneasy task of qualifying Armand’s corpus. For Bessière, the limitation imposed by Armand’s texts on reading has to do with the essence of the “literary,” which begins where metalanguage ceases, pointing to its etymological precursor and ally, literacy. Ultimately, Bessière suggests that Armand reliably, aggressively challenges conventional literature by imploding the roles of writer and reader, and allowing meaning to erupt from their interchangeability in tandem with social inertia.

Keywords: Louis Armand; writing; theory; literature; literacy.

Armand’s works are many and of many kinds, objects, and of a variety of styles and “writings”; they cannot be subsumed under simple headings. To say poetry does not really qualify Armand’s corpus of non-fiction which he names poetry and the word fiction does not say much about these prose works which could be seen as novels. Any qualification remains uncertain because the manifest calculations which characterise these works’ developments do not expose constant rules or constraints, and leave Armand’s calculation of their details to the “equality of probability” (Gregory Bateson’s coinage, qtd. in Armand 2006b, 172). This equality is explicitly thematised in many fictions. In *Cairo*, it is exemplified by the list of the chapters’ titles; each designates a location which is not necessarily named, and identifies an autonomous textual “vignette.” This autonomy does not exclude kinds of repetition or recursivity: the “Dome” of the first title, “Dome City,” often reappears in different “vignettes.” The “equality of probability,” which contradicts the constraint of any continuous calculation in “writing,” does not exclude a kind of programmatic dynamic and identity of the work, which is made manifest by this recursivity. Both “equality of probability” and programmatic dynamic can be obviously assembled as in *GlassHouse*. In this novel, most of the events and actions share more or less semantic links, which makes the signification of the novel a transverse derivation from different systems of knowledge and “evoked” realities. This derivation seems finally “vraisemblable” because it is stopped by time-lapse, while the probabilistic tableau it forms might have gone on indefinitely. *GlassHouse* shows two conclusions: “Till it starts again. But it didn’t” (Armand 2018, 127). And: “[No End]” (128). The novel is finally a kind of trope: it shows that references (even references—by definition fictive—in a fiction) cannot be systematised, and it remains a plane of possibility: when a narrative ends it cannot exemplify its final state or the conclusion of an action, because ending is not synonymous with closing.

In *Cairo* and in *GlassHouse*, whatever conclusion is considered, whatever importance is recognised to time-lapse, multiple evocations of the world, continuous series of tropes, and reading remain a literal possibility because there is no termination to the “equality of probability.” This means that all Armand’s works can be read under the aegis of this probability and linked together even though they do not show any direct mutual connection. *Cairo* and *GlassHouse* are similar exposés of the “equality of probability.”

Because of this equality, Armand's whole work can be described in the way he describes contemporary criticism:

[I]t is precisely such implicit claims of proprietorship over discourses that the avant-garde—both in literature and in criticism—has most strenuously contested. Beyond the mere pluralistic, what we encounter when we approach the question of criticism today is not a doctrinaire or categorical discourse, but one that reflects the radically trans-disciplinarity of discourse as such—both in “practical” and “theoretical” terms—and which stands in open relation to a future possibility. (Armand 2008, 16).

This status which Armand bestows upon his works and which his readers unavoidably identify leaves the issues of meaning, “writing,” and reading open.

Meaning. The “equality of probability” and the contestation of proprietorship over discourses—without this contestation, the practice of the “equality of probability” would be impossible—suggest the equal reading of semantic oppositions or similarities, and consequently do not delineate any meaning or any rule or convention of it. In *GlassHouse*, the equivocal relation between beginning and ending exemplifies this equality of semantic oppositions and similarities. Armand often remarks that meaning is associated with continuous tropes, and a constant transition and transformation of what discourses say. Meaning is consequently a sort of abstraction that readers should view as the possible envelope which could possibly “cover” all texts, were these readers able to read them at once literally and synthetically. This kind of envelope is suggested in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. But *Finnegans Wake* could also be characterised as a systematic erasure of the idea of possibility. The issue of meaning can be defined according two steps: meaning is associated with the search for a trope—actually, a kind of free construction which should be the deconstruction of systematicity—and the restoration of the improbable (Armand 2015b, 54), i.e. of information, of the new, which can be an anachronistic. *GlassHouse* is a continuous play on anachronism, on a *poiesis* which is “*en retard*” (Armand 2015b, 229). Meaning consequently remains constantly imminent, always at stake for the writer.

“*Writing.*” Armand is aware that the conditions of meaning, and the handling of probabilities make the conditions of “writing” paradoxical. The calculation of the “equality of probability,” i.e. the construction of its possibility, supposes to have a writing grid (Armand 2006b, 186) which should enable the writer to expose the equality and the mutual autonomy of all the elements of his work, on the one hand, and on the other, to make equality synonymous with the syntactic continuity of slightly “differentiated textual fields” (Armand 2015b, 49), that is to say, to relate what is differentiated without deconstructing the autonomy and specificity of each element of the work. “Writing” is the handling and the control of this contradiction, if we recognise that language and discourse are, *per se*, the alliance of the systematic discontinuity of their components, letters and words, and of the continuity of their composition. As *GlassHouse* teaches us with its “Qwertz” chapters, atomistic evocations of persons, actions and events is close to atomistic assemblages of letters and their materiality which characterise our

language and are the beginning of all discourse and work, whatever nonsense they eventually illustrate.¹

Reading. Unavoidably, reading is first the observation of the multiple constructions and verbal links that characterise works dedicated to the “equality of probabilities” and it becomes a literal reading when no kind of metalanguage, that is to say, no kind of construction of interpretation, fully applies to these works. This limit of reading is important because it is coincident with what, according to Armand, makes obvious in his writing: the literary begins where metalanguage ceases.² However, this limit indicates that language, as if having returned to an initial state (Armand 2015b, 85), opens the possibility of the equivalence of probabilities—all statements are equally possible and probable—probable, that it is to say, they are viewed as signifying. “Readability is always a matter of potentiality, of the possibility of the text” (Armand 2015b, 48). In Armand’s works, because of its potentiality, this readability defines the work to be read and the means of its developments. Remarkably, Armand’s *The Garden (Director’s cut)* could be described in two ways: First, it presents a series of phantasms linked to the Paradise and forbidden acts, and is the exposé of the dreamwork about specific dreams; and second, it needs to be said that this series of phantasms does not delineate any proper development. Consequently, *The Garden (Director’s cut)* is caught in its own genesis and development as representation and is “resistant to the impulse to organise” (Armand 2015b, 49). It is the prosthesis of its reading and of seeing, that is to say, visualising *The Garden’s* depictions of sex and blood. The title has a reference to the filmic field, while the “fiction” of this work suggests the *raison d’être* of film and literature: the first is a pure possibility of seeing and the second a pure possibility of reading—both in the absence of the object. Reading returns to the equality of probabilities since there is no strict rules for reading and no ascribed effects of it. In its conclusion, *GlassHouse* indicates two equal probabilities: the end and the absence of end.

Meaning, and from Meaning to Reading

The equivalence of semantic opposites and similarities, on the one hand, and the tropism of discourses, on the other, make meaning into a central issue in Armand’s works. These appear either as easily legible or as nearly illegible. This duality is manifest in poems of *Indirect Objects*,³ and more remarkably in the many plays with repetitions which characterise Armand’s works. What is repeated is not necessarily a clear prefiguration of the repetition, and this repetition eventually seems an alteration of the repeated discourse, action or depiction, or of the object which is presented again. This basic duality is illustrated by the investigation into the crime in *GlassHouse*. This investigation should reveal and repeat the past (of the crime); ultimately, it turns out a partial revelation; it is not a complete repetition of the past, not because it is an imperfect investigation, but because of the opacity of what is obvious, known and revealed: any assertion about what is revealed appears a kind of “semblance.” This is not

¹ Qwertz is a keyboard layout used in Central Europe. In Armand’s poetics, the use of this acronym designates the materiality and the atomistic base—letters—for the constitution of discourses. The reference to this acronym remains relevant even about contemporary literatures: Armand’s return to the simple designation of the first stones to be used to develop languages and oral and written discourses means that the definition of literature should be associated with our approach to the alphabet and the technologies it implies. The paradox is remarkable: the definition of literature implies references neither to contemporary criticism’s complexities nor to classical poetics.

² This is an adaptation of a quotation from Makavejev: “[T]he filmic is what, in the film, cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where ... metalanguage ceases” (see Armand 2015b, 229).

³ Let us oppose the clarity of “Patrick White as Headland” (Armand 2014c, 18) and the opacity of “Light Gradually Descends on the Obsolescence Curve” (16).

specific to literature: the condition of filmic images is the “object” which is in front of the camera; filmic images are the representative repetitions of this object; they are also kinds of empty repetitions—displaced repetitions, repetitions without prefiguration (Armand 2015b, 42).

This status of meaning in Armand’s works causes to privilege an exterior approach to them: critics view them as difficult to seize and highlight the reader’s puzzlement.⁴ Most remarks by critics imply, on the one hand, that no coherent meaning can be discerned in these works and, on the other hand, that they do not make anything legible by reference to or in other works, various people, attitudes and actions, the world, “our” world itself. Although these remarks are disputable, they make an excellent introduction to Armand’s conviction that literary works are paradoxical: at once, kinds of autarchic verbal constructions and multiple series of words which authorise many connections. The autarchic construction is the prosthesis (a word broadly used by Armand) for many kinds of reading: whimsical, realist, or oriented to the possible—possible signification, possible literacy environment, possible alterities. All readings should be concordant with the works’ words.⁵

The characteristics of many Armand’s works justify the suggestion that they are illegible.

His works cannot be seized, are not conceived to be seized: they do not aim at being the objects of interpretive grasps, but just to be read. Because of its size of 900 pages, *The Combinations*, a fiction, or a novel, was not written to be seized; should it be commented upon, the comments will be inconclusive and merely expand the possibilities of the “combinations” which the work bears.

No explicit literary identification of Armand’s works leads to a conclusive reading. Any clear reading that aims to identify the work just proves to be faulty. *Breakfast at Midnight* has been defined as a “reprise” or parody of “romans noirs.” This definition is at least partially incorrect: a reprise or a parody of “romans noirs” does not repeat the same kinds of scenes all along as *Breakfast at Midnight* does; at best, *Breakfast at Midnight* might be viewed as a *possible* reprise or parody, and the function of this possibility should be characterised. The same kind of remarks apply to Armand’s poetry. Anyone who expects to recognise clear, undisputable and continuous “signs,” “tokens,” or “clues” of poetry in his poetic works is to be disappointed.

The illegibility of Armand’s works could be quoted to confirm their autarchic status: his works are their own limits. But this shift from illegibility to autonomy draws attention to the ambiguity of the recognition of this autonomy and of the work’s exteriority. *On the one hand*, all referential background which is recognised in Armand’s works is also to be identified as part of the internal relations which organise these works. This means that the “referential game” is not a direct determination of the work. And, *on the other hand*, this game explicitly leads to the recognition of possible “alterities.” Consequently, Armand’s works offer partial views of the status of literature and the real, and are limited by neither.

Partial views of literature: Armand’s novels illustrate literary trans-references, and let discern backgrounds constituted by many works. *The Garden* has allusions to books about the Paradise; *GlassHouse* bears implicit evocations of French “roman noir” and popular literature. Some

⁴ For an identification of this kind of comment and interesting views about Armand’s poetry, see Ali Alizadeh, “Against Representation: Louis Armand and the Limits of New Australian Poetry,” *Antipodes* 25.2 (December 2011): 191-196.

⁵ Regarding the notion of the possible, see Armand 2006b, 11, 106.

poems' titles are literary or filmic designations: "Leon Paul Fargue," "Les enfants du Paradis" (qtd. in Armand 2014c, 16, 14). Remarkably, these allusions or evocations do not frame a specific and strong system of literary references in these works, but make them parts of extended and multiple planes of significance, that is to say, each work is the matrix of innumerable possible literary or "realist" relations. Let us highlight that, in *GlassHouse*, the same kind of remarks applies to the whole of the scientific and technological evocations. These novels and poems are at once limited by the literary identifications they offer, and radically and implicitly open, while no location of literature can be designated or clear definition of it offered. We suggest to substitute the word literature to the word thought, and the word "writing" to the word discursivity in the following quotation from Armand's chapter, "Discourse § the Objectless World," in *Literate Technologies: Language, Cognition, Technicity*, in order to depict this partial view of literature. Original quotation: "Discursivity is rather a "literal" state of affairs, as it were, conditioning the possibility of thought, etcetera – and it is this conditionality [...] that describes – insofar as such a thing is possible – an objectless "locality of thought" (Armand 2006b, 71). This quotation after it has been changed should be read as follows: "Writing is rather a 'literal' state of affairs, as it were, conditioning the possibility of literature, etcetera—and it is this conditionality ... that describes—insofar as such a thing is possible—an objectless 'locality of literature'" (Armand 2006b, 71).

Partial views of the real and realities: the title, *Indirect Objects*, of the poetry book which includes the poems which have been quoted, is a kind of semantic enigma and questions the status of references to objects and of objective descriptions in literature, in the arts and in our daily realities. These poems do not negate the real, but are its possible mediations – objects can be designated in an indirect way only. The expression "indirect objects" indicates that any "objective" evocation in poems, in novels, and our reading practices should proceed by semantic displacements of any presentation and description of objects. This is why the poetry book, *Indirect Objects*, allies the perfect readability and realism of the poem "L'arbre en fleur dans le jardin au printemps" (Armand 2006b, 87) and the phantasmagory of "Acid Comedown § John Olsen' *Five Bells*" (11), a poem which paradoxically opens the section named "Realism." Realism implies its opposites, because any objective evocation and phantasmagory should be viewed according to a paradoxical complementarity: objectivity and phantasmagory are manifestly opposed, and however linked through the puzzling contiguity of parts of a single literary text, and of series of texts, which are either realist or phantasmagoric.⁶ This contiguity and its effects are due to Armand's "writing": words are things; that is why they can be indirectly linked to objects.

Because of their paradoxical limits and of these partial views, literary works do not present any paradigmatic meaning and bar any synthetic interpretation. No work of Armand offers constant and stable fables or allegories. The impossibility to expose a synthetic interpretation is manifest in *GlassHouse*: many fables are suggested—history of the universe, evolution, etc.—, and finally, readers cannot have a systematic view of the novel. The rejection of coherent and continuous hermeneutic perspectives is the obvious "raison d'être" of *The Combinations*: because of its 900 pages and the multiplicity and the segmentation of its themes, the novel should be qualified anti-hermeneutic. A totalising reading of the novel is impossible. The non-paradigmatic exemplification of the universal theme of the Paradise is central in *The Garden*. Consequently, this novel freely plays with the opposite themes and scenes, which characterise the usual evocations of the Paradise, and discourages any conclusive reading.

⁶ For this kind of assertion, see Armand 2006b, 198.

Works' partial views of literature and the real, exclusion of synthetic and interpretative readings have three consequences: the confirmation of these work's exteriority; the possible association of their illegibility with their literal decipherment—they can be read literally, word by word; this possibility make the acts of reading reflexive.

Let us comment on the last two consequences.

Second consequence: The literal—word by word—identification of the work is the condition of the recognition of its illegibility, or quasi illegibility; to characterise a text as illegible supposes to clearly recognise the objects, that is to say, the words, to which apply this characterisation.

Third consequence: the exclusion of interpretive readings engages the acts of reading in a reflexive and questioning move. *Reflexive move:* the literal reading constantly returns to the issue of its continuity. *Questioning move:* the literal reading is without manifest extension; it is the question of its continuation and its possible confirmation by the whole of the text which is read. This double move does not correct the impossibility to have a continuous assertive reading of literary works, but makes this default significant: the reader is subjected to the desire to be in the world—a world which does not seem available through literary works' reading; in place of the world, the prosthesis, which the literary work is, constructs the possibility of a world. Let us have the examples of poems which imply a literal reading and its reflexive move, in *East Broadway Rundown*. Because it includes textual segments and photos without legends, the poems of this book leave open what should be inferred from the shift from the texts to the photos or from the reverse. If these inferences were not, at least, initiated, no (provisional) reading of *East Broadway Rundown* could be achieved: the poems' prosthesis for free associations of textual fragments, photos, and discontinuities would not be made functional. This kind of achievement of reading is paradoxical, because it implies that the reader remains finally silent, mute, about parts of this poetry book, for example about the title of a section: "The measured pace of an idea ascending a staircase" (Armand 2015a, 23), and accepts the "relinquish of any claims to immediate intelligibility" (Armand 2013, 32). Silence and mutism, which are parts of the interpretation of *East Broadway Rundown*, respond to Armand's observation which guides his "writing": "The backwash of meaning never stops" (Armand 2013, 81), and confirm that the poem is the prosthesis for the provisional and performative alliance of series of words, and the possibility of a world.

A wide relevance should be recognised to this double reading— exterior approach and reflexive move—, which Armand's works trigger and his criticism describes. In the opening of his *Helixtrolysis: Cyberology and the Joycean "Tyrodynamic Machine,"* Armand indirectly confirms that this double reading is wholly valuable, by extending the applicability of Wittgenstein's well-known assertion, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world," to literature and more specifically to *Finnegans Wake* (Armand 2014b, 13). Through the case of this work, Armand highlights the paradoxical alliance of the identity of the work, which relies upon an obvious illegibility, and the universal. Whatever debates this extension and its application to *Finnegans Wake* should trigger, they imply a double and contradictory qualification of literature: any literary work relies upon a singular and private language, which define its limits, and does not make impossible a broad reading.

Partial views of literature and the real, exterior approaches to Armand's works do not say anything about the "raison d'être" of this type of literary creation, and of Armand's endorsement of Wittgenstein's assertion. Let us indicate that the exterior approaches are concordant with Armand's convictions about literary works and "writing" practice. There is no conceivable "interiority" of a literary work; any literary work is a prosthesis which makes human subjects, psychological states, the unconscious and many realities visible, supports many kinds of designations of realities, exteriorities, and human imaginaries, and suggests inferences which delineate mental constructions to be read within its limits. Literature itself is not an exercise in expression or representation, but in the depiction and expropriation of any state of affairs, situation, person, etc. According to Armand who quotes André Bazin about cinema: cinema—we should add: as literature—is "the being of the model of which it is the reproduction, it is the model" (2015b, 143). This means that the depiction and the expropriation, i.e. the act of singularising, of any state of affairs are in themselves the presentation of models and makes the work a model. If literature is this exercise in expropriation and the presentation of models, which are free of their spatial and temporal coordinates, it should be viewed as a kind of medium: it makes possible the insertion of many data in its discourses. The contradictory qualification of literature to be read in Armand's use of Wittgenstein's assertion should be understood as the recognition that literary works redistribute the specific and singular figures which they offer as pertaining to the medium as such—the medium which literature is. The singular—the literary work—is a universal because it is a part of this medium. A medium shows no kind of paradigm and is a continuous plane of inscription—this plane is designated by *Finnegans Wake*. Any literary work is at once the "mime" of the "entire textual field" (Armand 2006b, 2) which is associated with this plane, and an orientation or several orientations within it: the meaningful "has no content or antecedent idea—nor an externalised or transcendental one—other than a movement of structural orientation" (27). That is why meaning is always imminent within the chain of vignettes as in *Cairo*,⁷ that is to say, ready to be embodied in one of these many provisional models which are to be read in the literary work itself. When, as in *Breakfast at Midnight*, these models are repetitive (murders, alienation of women, nakedness, etc.), they should not be read as clichés but as the signs of a slow sliding of meaning—all repetitions are alterations. Paradoxically, repetitions should be viewed as "mindless coincidence(s)" (27). "Meaning consists in the differential 'play' between and across signifiers (as between and so-called signifieds)" (17). This play is a commonplace of post-structuralism's poetics. In Armand's works, it has a specific function: to offer singular exemplifications of literacy. In Armand's criticism, literacy should be understood as the whole of our linguistic and discursive environments and of the many kinds of significations they imply.

"Writing"

As we know, the word "writing" was first used in literary criticism and theory by Roland Barthes to designate the broad types and styles of discourses recognised as literary and very often free of explicit literary marks. Since these types and styles were innumerable and always specifically identifiable—including examples of non-literary and "ordinary" discourses—Barthes thought that the label "literature" was no longer relevant. He decided to use the word "écriture" (writing) in the singular to name this immense variety of discourses: they could be assembled because they attracted the attention of readers and belonged to one vast single world,

⁷ Let us highlight that, in *Cairo*, the titles of most of these vignettes are enigmatic and consequently illustrations of this imminence of meaning and of the re-orientation of reading which each vignette.

our world. While being read, they invited an understanding of themselves as mutually corresponding and a view of the wide horizon they implied without showing any systematic character, any organised field, or indeed abandoning their many kinds of singularities. “Writing” is not a frequent word in Armand’s criticism. However, let us use it. It definitely matches Armand’s works. The types and styles of discourse are many in his works; they are partial illustrations of literary genres and conventions, of common discourses, and always function as exercises in making their variety into the means with which to link the parts of a work into a possible signifying whole,⁸ and to let the reader suppose that these literary works are possibly mutually matching. We say possible or possibly because “writing” is obviously the means to make works operational prostheses, which open “the possibility of possibility” (Armand 2006b, 63). Each work is the possibility of a possibility, i.e. of another work, either available in the already written works or to be written. “Writing” designates, on the one hand, the whole and diversity of texts, the possibilities they exemplify, and, on the other, the act to compose them, i.e. to materially trace singularities, possibilities, and series of partial connections.⁹ Partial connections are relations which Armand’s works delineate and which imply different ontologies of the worlds they describe. *GlassHouse* illustrates this multiple ontology. Depending on the way nature is described by humans, on the different histories of the world which can be told, and on the many types of daily life which the novel evokes, the world is made up of identifiable parts which exist interdependently with one another, and which are socially constructed. The same kind of remarks should apply to *The Garden*. The religious background of the Paradise, which the novel evokes, is manifestly multiple, prevents any identification of the Paradise with any fully describable location, and should be viewed as a grid which makes multiple prismatic scenes possible. The hundred vignettes of *Cairo* are exercises in outlining partial connections. Armand’s many poetry books and fictions and their diversity of topics are not kinds of exercises in representations or symbolisations, but make available what could be experienced or conceived through these partial connections. The relations and comparisons between Armand’s works should be conceived as delineating partial connections—a systematic critical description of these works should appear irrelevant.

Since it results in equating literature with an extreme diversity and series of partial connections, “writing” does not make literary works into monuments, and excludes the power of the mind—totalising views of series of works and of the real are impossible. These critical options are opposed to realism which implies a strict mentalism,¹⁰ the absolute resistance of the real, and consequently the impossibility to delineate any possible or partial relation:

the realism is oppressive & too artificial, a trompe-l’oeil
in which all the elements are calculated to heighten the
sense of impenetrability—though everything is “in
the mind,” the illusion is concrete, the architecture solid... (Armand 2003, 68)

⁸ Armand rejects the word “totality” and any reality of this kind. See Armand 2006b, 68. The whole corresponds to a “quasi-translational synthesis” (68).

⁹ For the use of the expression, “Partial connections,” see Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Altamira Press, 2004).

¹⁰ This opposition does not mean that Armand has written realist pieces or realist evocations of his own daily life. This realism is to be understood as part of the process that leads to view a work as assembling signifying parts.

These characteristics of “writing” are obvious in Armand’s poetry and fiction.

Poetry. Let us have parallel evocations of two poems, published in *Strange Attractors*, in order to illustrate the multiplicity and assemblage of discourses which characterise this book—just as any book. The poem “observations towards an epitaph” illustrates the use of common discourse, framed as poetic because it is transcribed in short verses,¹¹ and offers manifest common “semanticism” and content, as this quotation confirms: “though / recognition / comes only / after— / the banal / recit un / folding / between / coffee & / long distance / telephone / calls—” (Armand 2003, 96). The poem “for the duration” might be viewed as triggering a difficult reading. But this is neither the theme nor the expected effect of the poem. Actually, it illustrates the semantic displacement which all literary works share. This displacement does not suppose semantic alterations, but the continuity and discontinuity of the poem’s semantic links, the concordance and discordance of its groups of words and its incomplete or disrupted syntactical organisation. This incompleteness makes possible partial connections and paradoxical continuity. The diversity and the assemblage of discourses and the partial connections trigger a specific experience of reading: readers read “relativistic lacunae” (Armand 2020b, 28), that is to say, the blanks which partial relations cannot saturate, and which are relativistic because they cannot be dissociated from the patchwork of discourses—each poem and the whole of the poems in *Strange Attractors* are patchworks. This poetry collection exemplifies the function of “writing” in the series of Armand’s poetry books: “writing” clothes this lack of saturation which proves the linguistic failure to approach the world and makes possible linguistic constructions, that is to say, partial connections.

Fiction. The same remarks should be made about Armand’s fictions. Let us read a section of *Vampyr: A Chronicle of Revenge*, “The end of writing is the end of history” (Armand 2020b, 28), as the explicit presentation of Armand’s poetics. The main affirmation of this section is that the “author” (Armand) would seem “to prefer to write” “forgeries inserted into history.” Such forgeries are to be identified in many of Armand’s fictions, *Vampyr: A Chronicle of Revenge*, *GlassHouse*, *The Combinations*, *The Garden: Director’s Cut* (the history of Paradise, with many obsessions of the “narrative voice”), and even in fictions which are not historical: *Breakfast at Midnight* repeats its narrative; this repetition is a forgery since, in principle, a narrative should not tell twice its telling.

The function and signification of this duality—history and forgery—are defined by these lines of *Vampyr*, which apply to Armand’s other works as well:

The book [*Vampyr*] operates on two planes of action: one determined by the “Darwinism of competing facts”; the other by a general “epidemiology of alien temporalities,” which assail History’s chronological body... Having placed History in such relativistic lacunae, the author/forgery attempts to fill these voids w/ a more subtle verisimilitude, that clothes the unrecognisable in the illusion of familiarity (Armand 2020b, 28).

Armand’s many fictions are to be read alongside this duality. *GlassHouse* presents competing historical and non-historical facts, a-chronological temporalities, a segmented narration, and non-cohesive facts—all are supports for delineations of partial connections. The title of the novel is paradoxical: it suggests that the novel is a transparent story about a transparent reality.

¹¹ Short verses prevent any stylistic amplification, and support the content’s banality.

The novel is actually the construction of an unlikely series of acts and facts and the illustration of “relativistic lacunae”—these “lacunae” are the depiction of history. In other words, no discourse can saturate both history and reality. “Writing” invites the reader to accept this observation, and to view discourses as constructions of paradoxical continuities. The transparency of *GlassHouse* is the transparency of “writing,” that is to say, the linguistic construction which makes these lacunae visible, and veils what escapes us—these lacunae designate “things,” “states of affairs,” which we cannot fully see, and which are prostheses for more operations and questionings. The main state of affairs in *GlassHouse* is the interrogation of the possible link between nature and time—“evolution” —and its relation to social history. In *Breakfast at Midnight*, the illusory transparency of the repeated narrative interrogates the acts of narrating and describing, or depicting, and the expropriation they practice—the repetition is an expropriation of the initial narrative, and the meaning of this expropriation remains to be defined.

From “Writing” to Reading

“Writing” is synonymous with the multiplicity of discourses, tropisms, partial connections and paradoxical fiction. It should be viewed more widely—through its determinant: literacy. This view should highlight the specific link of writing and reading.

According to Armand, whatever work is considered, “writing” cannot be disassociated from a vast and determinant background which is literacy. Literacy has two components. Firstly, the linguistic environments of writing’s performances, transferences and readings, and the past and geography which “writing” implies. Consequently, “writing” is within literacy, according to its relations to linguistic practices and their past and present backgrounds and their technologies. Secondly, according to Armand, literacy allies the obvious literary construction of poems and fictions with the possibility of an experience. Against the critical commonplace that reading literature triggers a specific experience and the conviction of many avant-gardes that “writing” leads the reader to the experience of signifiers, Armand conceives of “writing” as an experience which allies literacy, the technic of writing and the apprehension of the meaningful: “Hence literacy, while we may say that it is fundamentally technical, is nevertheless ‘experienced’ in the apprehension of the meaningful” (Armand 2006b, 27).

Let us briefly comment on this duality between the background of literacy and the technology of experience.

The background of literacy is obviously used in *GlassHouse*, *The Combinations*, *The Garden*, and *Vampyr*. *GlassHouse*: references to the variety of the discourses on evolution and the views humans have conceived of their world. *The Combinations*: the novel offers a vast rewriting of discourses and historical events about Prague. *The Garden*: its background are texts about Paradise and its phantasmatic actualisation. *Vampyr*: the many cultural themes—for example, the vampire—historical backgrounds, and types of styles are associated with the view of an epidemic present, and justify many deviating imaginations, however still coordinated by the flux of “writing” —“writing” is minimally a flux of segments.

Literacy as fundamentally technological: in Armand’s criticism, literacy, that is to say, any verbal and written environment to which a work is related, is always artificial—added to nature—developed by technics, that is to say, by the matching of words and linguistic structures to technical means: from traces to writing, printing and other means. We should understand that any literary work is a piece of literacy because it is an exercise in verbal and written technic,

that is to say, in systematic invention and constructivism, which “deviate from a norm” (Armand 2006a, 198), and from constant semantic or linguistic structures. This deviation is a reflexive process in itself: any deviation implies its continuity or its consequences and causes a reflective move which can be cumulative. In *GlassHouse*, the segmentation of the narrative results in several duplications of the evocations of the main characters and of the actions and issues associated with them. “DISEASES OF THE BLOOD,” a section of *Vampyr*, can be read continuously and without the slightest recognition of any cohesion as its text is chaotic and cumulative and, at least, partially reflexive. Reading is always possible because of writing’s cumulative and partially reflexive mode. The segmented chapters of *GlassHouse*, the paradoxical continuity of “writing” in *The Garden*—one continuous sentence and broken evocations of various scenes—, the autonomous and correlated vignettes of *Cairo* are illustrations of these characteristics of Armand’s “writing.”

Experience. For Armand, since reading is an experience of literacy, it is free of any kind of universal semantics or grammar—literature is not supposed to imitate language¹²—and associated with “the broadly synesthetic and recursive organisation of experience” (Armand 2006a, 21). The “Qwertz” sections in *GlassHouse* (Armand 2018, 18-22, 34-37, 51-55, 79-81, 92-96), the section “DISEASES OF THE BLOOD” in *Vampyr* (Armand 2020a, 58-61) illustrate the absence of “universal semantics or grammar.” No cohesive continuity in these sections can be restored; reading is a literal, and possibly allows the interplay of many perceptual suggestions, semantic and synesthetic connections, etc. The kind of basic and atomistic writing that these sections present illustrates the degree zero of writing—the assemblage of textual segments—and of reading: the literal linking of the words of the text. In Armand’s works, the degree zero of writing is a play of writing on its appearance and disappearance through the uncertainty of meaning (the “Qwertz” sections, the “DISEASES OF THE BLOOD” segment), through its alliance with scopic nudes or pornography (*The Garden*, *Breakfast at Midnight*), and the obvious entropy of any world: specifically, at the beginning of *Hotel Palenque /1*.

Reading is consequently a kind of manifest operation that shows (reflexively) its own operation. The first step in reading: the literal reading, which paradoxically annihilates itself; the transparency of the literal, as many Armand’s poems show, does not allow any clear reading. The second step in reading: the reader is absorbed in the reading and in the work. In *GlassHouse*, the investigation of a murder, the interrogations about the history of the universe, about the “individuals” who live and work in the Jardin des Plantes or its vicinity, and the paradox of a “GlassHouse” which hides nothing but does not reveal anything, all that makes reading an exercise in a constant “adjustment to itself” (Armand 2015b, 47). Reading is a mode of articulation, which complies with the possibilities of the text—all Armand’s works are plays on their own flexibility, which has a paradoxical condition: they present objects, and no representation stands out. In *Hotel Palenque/1*, the accumulation of representational scenes produces an “objectlessness” (Armand 2015b, 49) —this means that all objects are undifferentiated or viewed or quoted without a specific focus. The kind of non-conclusion of *GlassHouse*, the series of vignettes of *Cairo*, the blurred scenes and individuals’ identities in *The Garden* are the equivalents of this undifferentiation. The reader gets subjected: their reading stops being operational. The dynamics of the work which is being read appears finally to resemble nothing if not a “mindless coincidence” (Armand 2006b, 24).¹³

¹² This opposes the structuralist thesis that literature imitates language.

¹³ For similar remarks about Lynch’s films, see Armand 2015b, 26.

The Existential Frame Reading, Poetry and Fiction, and the “Objective Spirit”

This observation about objectless presentations and readers’ subjection should lead to three connected recognitions. *First recognition*: The “equality of probability” should forestall any opportunity to organise a kind of order—against the full equal probability. *Second recognition*: An objectless presentation is merely a return to this equality and reopens the possibility of literature and “writing”—that is why *GlassHouse* “ends” and does not “end.” *Third recognition*: Armand’s manifest use of dual codes – continuity / discontinuity, order / disorder, signification / a-signification, etc. —is a way to preserve this “equality of probability.”

Armand associates this link between “objectlessness” and the continuity of literature with an existential frame and a limit to the extension and systematicity of “writing.” Remarkably, there are three poems in *Strange Attractors* (“observations towards an epitaph” (Armand 2003, 96), exemplifying the use of the common discourse, “serial noir” (95), dealing with the artificial syntax of poetry, and “for the duration,” (91), engaging with a semantic uncertainty,) that refer explicitly through each of the titles to existence—death and time—and make these titles into the experiential and existential frames of writing and reading. In “serial noir,” “writing” leads to the unavoidable recognition of the limit of time: “... § everything points towards an expiry date, / eschatologies, to account for things as they are...” (Armand 2003, 95). In “observations towards an epitaph,” writing is about memory and biography, and also about an imminent / possible future (“not yet / time future—”) (Armand 2003, 96). In “for duration,” the semantic uncertainty implies a reflective process, which is unrelated to norms but related to the sense of time and change. The title “for duration” might be also read as a qualification of the syntactic uncertainty and the innovation which is attached to it: this uncertainty invites a reading of the poem as a sign of duration, that is to say, as a designation of the future.

In these poems, by associating “writing” with death and dependence upon duration, Armand observes that “writing” cannot be continuously systematic or systematically continuous, but still that it should continue. Consequently, it has to be segmented and exemplified by many works, as Armand’s bibliography shows. If we consider a single work, “writing” has to be obviously continuous—one single sentence in *The Garden (Director’s cut)*—and manifestly deconstructive, or, in Armand’s words, coding and decoding (Armand 2006b, 9), playing upon signifiers and signified, upon opposites. In *The Garden*, the constant alliance of the positive and negative characterisations of the Paradise is manifest.

The reader specifically experiences the duality of coding and decoding. They have a static view of Armand’s works because these are texts, and a dynamic apprehension of them because many links are to be activated and lead to multiple views which cannot be detached from literacy’s background and the equality of probability. This “equality” of probability” implies, for the writer, the calculus of constraints and the recognition of chance—which is the effect of this calculus.

This duality of “writing” and reading, their connection to literacy, that is to say, to the innumerable and the impersonality of discourses, finally make the writer and his readers into interchangeable personalities—since literature is not limited by individualities—and Armand’s works respond to the social “objective spirit,” “the culture as the practico-inert” (Sartre, 35), that is to say, to all that seems “inert” in a society. This can be an imaginary place, the Paradise, or a real place, the *Jardin des Plantes*, or the history of many places and history of totalitarianism in *Vampyr* as in *The Combinations*, etc. The alliance of “writing” and reading

and their dual code authorise steps beyond the “objective spirit”, the inert—steps prefigured by the end of *GlassHouse*. The serial structure of this novel (or fiction) is the history of many quests, “in-quests” (Armand 2013, 80), since they are parts of the reflective game of the work. These quest/”in-quests” do not match any summation or truth, and reject expressionism and formalism (Armand 2013, 80). They are beyond the inert, and the justification of interrogations into meaning—and into Armand’s works.

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