

## Model Behaviour: Cocteau, Radiguet and *La Princesse de Clèves*

Michael G. Kelly

Published online: 9 March 2013  
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**Abstract** This article explores certain implications of the intertextual connections between two canonical French novels, Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) and Raymond Radiguet's *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel* (1924), with particular emphasis on the question of literary individuation as it applies to the later work and its author. The functional importance of exemplary model works in respect of the modern French literary field is examined in the context of challenges to notions of literary tradition and transmission in the inter-war years. Radiguet's literary individuation is seen as both practically enabled and theoretically problematised by the connection to the earlier text. The individuation process, complicated additionally in this instance by Radiguet's literary and personal association with Jean Cocteau, is argued to unfold with respect to a classical imaginary that is facilitated by but independent of the actual classical intertext.

**Keywords** Literary individuation · Intertextuality · Classical imaginary · French inter-war novel · *La Princesse de Clèves* · Raymond Radiguet · Jean Cocteau

“UN JEUNE HOMME NE DOIT PAS ACHETER DE VALEURS SURES”  
(Cocteau, *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* (1918))

The evolving discussion of intertextuality within literary studies (Bassnett 2007) informs a diversity of contemporary critical reading practices. This article focuses on a particular kind of legitimising relationship to an archetypal intertext from *within* the historical canon of a national literary culture. In this respect, its main interest is not on the actual functioning of one or other primary text in that

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M. G. Kelly (✉)  
School of Languages, Literature, Culture and Communication, University of Limerick, Plassey,  
County Limerick, Ireland  
e-mail: michael.g.kelly@ul.ie

intertextual relationship, but on the broader question of literary individuation as it arises in respect of the later work, as both enabled and problematised by its connection to the earlier one.

## 1. Dialectics of literary exemplarity

Literary individuation coheres around the figure of the individual author, a figure (along with its philosophical and ideological underpinnings) with which modern literary practice is engaged in an ambivalent relationship. As developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1992), the theoretical model of the literary field exists as an account of *individuation* within which the notion of *individuality* and the very sustainability of the category of the individual both come under severe pressure. Literary individuation occurs when a subject (generally a biographical subject) becomes durably identified as an actor-practitioner within the literary field. This identification is itself in part a textual achievement, in that such identification is bound up with the publication of literary work and the positions such work and its accompanying discourses are understood to have adopted. The imposition of the name of the author on literary works belies a profound struggle with the institution of the individual, foregrounded to a lesser or greater extent across the spectrum of (by definition) individuated oeuvres. Just, therefore, as individuation is not simply a question of self-definition, neither is it necessarily an assertion of individuality.

Nevertheless, and somewhat paradoxically, the figure of the literary artist (as compelling creative singularity) is central to the maintenance of that of the individual in the wider society with respect to which the literary field stands in a relation of (theoretical) autonomy. This process, its tensions and contradictions, become all the more problematic when the literary text, as is frequently the case, explores the very question it also appears to enact: a feature central, for example, to now classic sociological accounts of the novel such as those of Lukács (1994) and Goldmann (1964). If the confrontation between individual protagonist and social reality is recurrently prominent enough to structure an account of the novel (in particular) as a generic practice, the question of literary individuation is arguably both refined and deepened when specific, conscious and foregrounded intertextual practices are seen to be in play within a particular example of the genre.

Stated in its most robust form, this is the question of the archetype or *model* work, a key aspect in cultural constructions of the *classic* work. Rather than an exceptional case, this question of the model work and its intertextual afterlives has been argued by no less an observer than Paul Valéry to be essential to the modern phenomenon of (French) literary individuation. In a 1938 essay titled ‘Coup d’œil sur les lettres françaises’, Valéry proposes what amounts to an analytical tableau of the French literary system, outlining a mechanics of literary creation as socially constrained activity. Having discussed the determinations of the language on poetic diction and argued for the tradition of abstract prose as the “chef-d’œuvre littéraire de la France”, he concludes that the question of ‘form’ is the central currency of general literary discussion and hence of literary values. This is at the same time a dominant trait of the so-called ‘classical’ period, a trait which therefore, by

definition (the classical being that mode which above all others is both entirely self-possessed and other-directed), transcends that period's historical boundaries as an essentially ideological property:

[L]e trait le plus particulier de notre littérature est sans doute cette action puissante et permanente de l'esprit critique s'attachant à la *forme*, qui s'est prononcée chez nous depuis la Renaissance, qui a dominé les différences de tempéraments et dicté les jugements de valeur pendant la période dite *classique*. Le dogme du style n'a cessé depuis lors d'exercer une excellente tyrannie, souvent combattue, jamais abolie, sur les productions de nos écrivains (Valéry 1986, 251, Valéry's emphasis).

This conjoined supremacy of 'form' and 'style' is understood by Valéry to be of central importance within an apparently transhistorical system of literary individuation. In this system, the writer is socialised as an artist both (synchronically) in respect of the governing abstractions of taste and its norms and (diachronically) against the predecessors it is necessary both clearly to acknowledge and to overcome. The sanctions for failure in this respect are not confined to written responses, indeed for Valéry they are above all a feature of socially influential conversation in "les lieux où l'on cause", a set of circumscribed albeit generically-invoked, socially and culturally key sites: "La Cour, jadis: Paris, plus tard, et ses salons et ses cafés, ont joué le rôle de (sic) plus actif dans la formation et la direction spirituelle de nos Lettres." Governing this process of selection and refinement is the cumulative figure of past achievements, all the more socially powerful for the surfeit of formless energies seeking literary individuation in the present time. This system of literary individuation is, in other words, a socio-cultural phenomenon which (it is alleged) has weathered the advent of a counter-aesthetics of rupture, radical originality and incompleteness characteristic of avant-garde practice (although Valéry does give an understandable hint of uncertainty as to the future prospects of this system):

On dirait qu'il soit demeuré en France littéraire quelque chose de ces règlements de corporations qui exigeaient du *compagnon*, anxieux de devenir *maître*, l'épreuve d'un ouvrage dans lequel toutes les difficultés fussent affrontées et surmontées, toutes les conventions satisfaites, et qui pût enfin prendre place parmi les modèles de l'art. La France est le pays du monde où des considérations de pure forme, un souci de la *forme en soi*, aient persisté, et résisté *jusqu'ici* aux tentations d'un temps où la surprise, l'intensité, les effets de choc, sont recherchés et prisés aux dépens de la perfection (ibid., Valéry's emphasis).

Within a process analogous to an apprenticeship, the thirst for novelty and difference is bound to that figure of past achievement, transformed into a *model* for the purposes of ongoing literary practice. The model is thus understandable as a factor in the social intelligibility of the work, an indicator of social and hence literary intent (or ambition). Successive embraces and rejections of the model are significant, in this account, not so much with respect to the model itself, but insofar as they constitute a process whereby a shared literature emerges over time and

literary individuation continues to occur—in a specifically national context. Meanwhile, a certain kind of *model* intertextuality becomes the key *literary* feature of the literary field as a socially embedded reality. For Valéry, this reality is at the source of a particular developmental pattern:

[L]'accroissement (et non l'évolution) si remarquable de la littérature française qui semble avoir procédé par acquisitions, toujours suivies d'une réaction, plus ou moins prompte; et ces deux actes de croissance nous ont enfin constitué un capital toujours plus complet d'*ouvrages modèles* dans tous les genres : presque tous nos chefs-d'œuvre ont un chef-d'œuvre pour réponse (ibid., 252, Valéry's emphasis).

This account, as intuited by a man of letters of a certain period and disposition, provides an insight into the workings of his literary world that is thus doubly dialogical in its structure. As the new literary work is apprehended in dialogue with its imagined model, so too is its quality recognised and refined in the dialogical ferment of socially and culturally elite rationalisation. Yet the idea of the literary field as constituted in the judgement of a society of skilled peers is also present: it is the figure of the model which anchors each strand of judgement. The multiply socialised workings of the system as Valéry imagines it result in what appears to be a relatively conservative characteristic—the condensation of the literary into a creative negotiation of pre-established parameters. The model thus encompasses—and the would-be model seeks to encompass—the qualities of the *chef d'œuvre* in its original, socialising function for the craftsman, but also of the masterpiece in the superlative, almost magical meaning of the artist.

## 2. *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel* and 1920's literary individuation

This characteristic resurfaces in a critical light little more than a decade later, when the inter-war period has taken on its definitive historical shape. In her 1950 survey of the French novel in this period, Claude-Edmonde Magny sees what she calls “l'ère de la passivité” as characterised by a particularly respectful and at the same time instrumental view of the canon. Among both novelists and critics she discerns a dominant orientation towards the past and a vision of literary excellence as a coming-to-terms or accommodation with the achievements of that past. A key example of this practice in the development of her argument is the second (posthumous) novel of Raymond Radiguet, *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel*, published in July 1924, 7 months after the author's death at the age of 20. Following the *Le Diable au corps* (1923), the *Bal* marked an apparent creative shift in a number of respects for its author. The earlier novel had drawn heavily on personal experience (and was received as thinly veiled autobiography—although the echoes of Constant's *Adolphe* have also been discerned). The second novel, though it again recounted the development of a love triangle of sorts, was understood from the time of its publication to have been intentionally modelled on an illustrious

predecessor—*La Princesse de Clèves* ((de Lafayette 1997), published anonymously in 1678 and subsequently attributed to Mme de Lafayette.)<sup>1</sup> Radiguet's novel, for all its qualities, is for Magny “[sans doute] le meilleur exemple du mal que peut faire une admiration trop passive” (Magny 1950, 92). Moving from this example, she goes on to write more generally of “les enfants de *La Princesse de Clèves*” in the period, of whom Radiguet was—in her view—also the most artistically successful in his relations with the intertext (100).

Leaving aside, for the moment, an evaluation of Magny's overall critical position, her work singles out the relations of the *Bal* with its classical intertext as both exemplary and central to a critical understanding of an entire literary period. Those relations are thus of primary importance for the immediate validity of the processes constructed as transhistorical by Valéry. The example of the *Bal* is rendered especially singular, however, by a second dimension to the problem of literary individuation as that of the establishment of the figure of a specific individual in the literary field, which is that of the work's own specific genealogy. Its elaboration in the context of Radiguet's close personal and artistic relationship with Jean Cocteau, and the revisions to the posthumous manuscript made principally by Cocteau prior to its publication by Grasset, have already given rise to great literary controversy, as well as to a significant body of serious scholarly work (Oliver 1973; Odoard and Oliver (in Radiguet 1993, 1999); Nemer 2003a, b, for example). This genealogy will concern us here insofar as it overlaps with and impacts upon the question of literary individuation in respect of an *imaginary* of the explicit intertext.

Ultimately, we will be arguing for a reading of *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel* in terms of a collaborative act of literary individuation both diachronically, in that the later novel is a creative engagement with the earlier intertext—but also (quasi-)synchronously, in that Radiguet and Cocteau will be seen to attain literary individuation to some extent through their engagement with and involvement in the work of the other. Framed in this way the *Bal* may be seen as a particular, achieved crystallisation of a *wider effort* on the part of both artists, individually and in combination, which is attested by a large number of interventions, of an undeniably strategic value, in the cultural debates of the time. Both writers participate knowingly and creatively in the struggle for legitimacy within the contemporary artistic and, more specifically, literary fields. In these interventions it is possible to observe the organic link between certain rhetorical and intellectual moves characteristic also of their literary styles, and the understanding both writers demonstrate of individuation as dependent upon the assumption of a position with respect to those in competition for artistic legitimacy.

Cocteau's name is, in this respect, most commonly associated with *Le Rappel à l'ordre*—the title given to a 1926 collection of essays, addresses, and other texts from the post-war years which constitute a cumulative reflection on literary and artistic practice. It is a title arguably overcome by excessive clarity, appearing to mediate fully an aesthetico-political agenda. In fact, rather than arguing for a return to traditional values of a more assured and stable era, Cocteau is in the complicated

<sup>1</sup> For more on this correspondence, and detailed discussions of its likenesses and differences, see *inter alia* Magny (1950), Senninger-Book (1963), and Pingaud (1983).

position throughout the *Rappel* of trying to theorise modern practice in terms of both radical innovation and deep continuity. His performance is both an artistic and a theoretical one—the writing treading a precarious path between speculative flexibility and meta-discursive rigour, formulating individualistic maxims while developing an appeal to Cocteau’s own version of an artistic tradition. This leads him very quickly to give expression to the social, cultural and indeed political tensions inherent in his project:

Il faut perdre un préjugé baudelairien; Baudelaire est un bourgeois. La bourgeoisie est la grande souche de France; tous nos artistes en sortent. Fils de famille émancipés. Peut-être qu’ils s’en affranchissent, mais elle leur permet de construire dangereusement sur une base (Cocteau 1995, 429, our emphasis).

The writings collected in the *Rappel* relate to a period in which, as Claude Arnaud (2003) has pointed out, Cocteau’s artistic survival was dependent upon a successful self-reinvention from the figure(s) he had cut in the course of the preceding decade.<sup>2</sup> They make recurrent gestures towards the solitary aspect of the writer’s condition, yet there is also a marked tendency to invoke other artists with whom he has an important personal connection and affinity—most notably Picasso and Radiguet. There is also a constant presence of the idea of literary leadership, even as the idea of *faire école* is imbued with consistently negative connotations when diagnosed in others. This constitutes a significant rhetorical precaution in a work cultivating an overtly manifesto-like tone in parts (especially the earliest, *Le Coq et l’Arlequin* (1918), from which the affirmations on Baudelaire cited above are among the opening lines). If it is not a school that is being outlined, it is certainly a new and challenging form of continuity perceptible to Cocteau—both in his own trajectory, and in the affinities that bind him to the individuals he singles out.

That the *Rappel* can be thought to represent a project of individuation is echoed in the consistency with which Cocteau’s utterances distance the artist from the on-looking crowd. His self-comparison with the tightrope walker in the celebrated analogy of the *corde raide* is a poetically effective example of this. The artist’s utterances and interventions all go, in their different ways, to the perilous performance of artistic difference—a performance to which the onlookers, imaginary or real, respond with a kind of enthralled respect (catalysed perhaps by a secret desire that catastrophe befall this individuated subject). The primary rhetorical device of the high wire act is undoubtedly paradox—and it is a trait of Cocteau’s interventions which has earned him a certain amount of hostility both from critics and fellow-artists.<sup>3</sup> Paradox, however, for Cocteau, far from a simple affectation or a stylistic device, is crucial both to the logic and the territory these writings establish. It translates both the anxiety of maintaining difference and certain judgements on the nature of literary pragmatics, while designating

<sup>2</sup> See Arnaud (2003). For additional discussion of Cocteau’s prior form and particular genius for positioning see, *inter alia*, Fermigier (1967), Hargrove (1998), and Touzot (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Roland Barthes, writing in an autobiographical context, has made an incisive link in this respect: “L’usage forcé du paradoxe risque d’impliquer (ou tout simplement: implique) une position individualiste, et si l’on peut dire, une sorte de dandysme. Cependant, quoique solitaire, le dandy n’est pas seul [...]” (Barthes 1975, 99, ‘Le dandy’).

the state or space of grace differentially—*within* the space of possible artistic positions. Thus, in *Le Secret professionnel* (1925), for example:

Les pompiers ne sont pas là où on se l'imagine. Il ne faut pas les chercher sur d'autres planètes que la nôtre. [...] Les pompiers, les nôtres, doivent être Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Ducasse, Cézanne, et si vite, nous-mêmes. [...] Chacun parle, s'exprime, complique le jeu, surcharge Arthur Rimbaud et Stéphane Mallarmé, embaume de vieilles anarchies. [...] L'attitude maudite a fait du maudit un privilégié, un protégé, aujourd'hui que la place maudite se recherche. Peu l'obtiennent. Les jeunes ne se rendent pas compte que le public ne possède aucun jugement et que ce n'est pas seulement par lui qu'il convient d'être maudit, mais par l'avant-garde (Cocteau 1995, 485–491).

It would be possible to dismiss this reasoning as structurally cynical, potentially usurping an avant-garde position for a reactive oppositional sense. Indeed this was a consistent feature of Cocteau's characterisation by the surrealists at that time.<sup>4</sup> It might equally be argued that Cocteau displays an acute sense of the literary field as an evolving systemic logic, while attempting to move beyond that awareness towards a point of imaginable authenticity within artistic practice. In other words, that his focus is on preserving at any cost a dimension of individual autonomy in the increasingly regimented categories of the field. This contrastive style and the positions it implicitly and explicitly advocates are already well-developed in 'D'un ordre considéré comme une anarchie', the text of a talk given by Cocteau at the Collège de France in May 1923, and also collected in the *Rappel*. Here the style is placed in the service of a construction of the literary field and the speaker's imagined situation as *both* partisan and beyond classification. There is a bid for ecumenical status: appealing to an unexpanded notion of poetry "qui n'est pas ce qu'imaginent les néoclassiques", Cocteau simply affirms that "[e]lle m'autorise, contre toute attente, à louer ensemble la comtesse de Noailles et Tristan Tzara" (Cocteau 1995, 537). Yet it is Radiguet, above all those fellow-artists who are invoked, whose work most clearly corresponds to something approaching a complete view of literary virtue for Cocteau. More pragmatically, it is Radiguet, present in person at the event and with *Le Diable au corps* newly published, who is being launched by his mentor (and self-styled pupil) as the living embodiment of the genuine literary article, a worthy but decidedly different successor to Rimbaud:

J'ai eu la chance de voir Radiguet écrire son livre [the *Diable*], comme un pensum, pendant les vacances de 1921, entre dix-sept et dix-huit ans. Le reste est inexactitude. Je le consigne à cause que cet enfant prodige étonne par son manque de monstruosité. [...] Rimbaud satisfait exactement l'idée dramatique, fulgurante et courte, que les gens se font du génie. Radiguet a eu la bonne fortune de naître après l'époque où trop de clarté fade commandait la

<sup>4</sup> Norbert Bandier (1999, 99–105) has outlined convincingly the plurality of factors contributing to the surrealist view of Cocteau as a figure of particular opprobrium. To differences of class background are added the advocacy of divergent patterns of association between the arts but above all a talent for strategic self-positioning within wider networks of affinity and practice that placed Cocteau in objective competition with figures such as Breton.

foudre. *Il peut donc surprendre par sa platitude, par le calme d'un génie qui ressemble au meilleur talent.* [...] Le poncif du scandale (Rimbaud dirait : cette vieille démangeaison) empêche encore d'admettre qu'à notre époque l'anarchie se présente sous la forme d'une colombe (Cocteau 1995, 536–537, our emphasis).

The conscription of Rimbaud into the construction of another is not an original move. Having already figured among the “pompiers” in the logic of constant renewal set out above, Rimbaud's main role here is to provide the measure of Radiguet's prodigy status. He represents on the one hand a myth of artistic purity which is the ideological solvent of the piece while on the other hand connoting a parallel narrative of symbiotic individuation with his mentor-pupil Verlaine. Mythical functioning is emphasised in the rhetorical resolution of structural tensions and contradictions—the concluding figure of the dove thus absorbs the preceding mention of anarchy. The individuated author has out-manoeuvred history and taste without getting up from the writing-table. This is a slightly more cryptic and coy return of the distinction the anointed younger writer, Radiguet, had ascribed to his mentor-pupil in a comparably institutional setting a year before. Both depict the other as gracefully moving against the grain of *the general movement against the grain*.

Alors que certains poètes courent après les muses et du fait même de leur acharnement ne les rattrapent jamais, ce sont elles qui poursuivent Jean Cocteau. Chaque fois qu'elles le saisissent, il se sauve et cette fuite nous vaut un nouvel ouvrage ('Notice sur Jean Cocteau' for *Les Matinées Poétiques de la Comédie Française* (21 March 1922), in Radiguet 2001, 212–214, 212).

Radiguet had already formulated the strategic and aesthetic tendencies operative in these examples a year earlier again. The appearance of ordinariness which Cocteau was to extol at the Collège de France emerges fully-formed, for example, in his protégé-teacher's 'Conseils aux grands poètes', published at the end of 1920:

On a dénaturé le sens du mot précieux. [...] L'or est précieux, la poésie est précieuse, et, précieuse, nécessairement, la banalité que notre style réhabilite. [...] « Efforcez-vous d'être banal », recommanderons-nous au grand poète. La recherche de la banalité le préviendra contre la bizarrerie, toujours détestable ('Conseils aux grands poètes' (published in *Le Coq parisien* in November 1920), in Radiguet 2001, 98–100, 98).

The position outlined here shares common structural features with Cocteau's remarks on reverse *malédiction* by the avant-garde, and his apparent courting of censure from that quarter. At the same time it maintains a clear pretention to the possibility of an original purity of meaning and form. This pretention has, however, all the appearances of defence become attack. It is as if the accusation of *préciosité* is one that had been anticipated and defused with a programmatic commitment to plain speaking. The 'plain speaking' soon results, however, in another paradox—this time specifically related to the example of Cocteau:

En une époque d'extrême complication comme la nôtre, « écrire comme tout le monde » (pour prendre un exemple littéraire), quand chacun s'efforce



d'écrire comme personne, est considéré comme une insolence. [...] Croire qu'il y a des précurseurs, ce serait accorder de l'importance aux imitateurs, aux vulgarisateurs, qui n'en ont aucune ('Parade' (published in *Le Gaulois* on 25 December 1920), in Radiguet 2001, 107–112, 111–112).

Writing of the figure of the author as an "agir postural", Jérôme Meizoz has argued that "la notion de posture permet [...] de penser relationnellement un agir linguistique (l'éthos discursif) et des conduites sociales (vêtements, etc.), en vue d'une sociologie de l'auteur" (Meizoz 2004, 63). Rather than try to reduce the corpus of Radiguet's affirmations of this type to a single aesthetic position, it is perhaps more fruitful to try to imagine the *agir postural* within which they achieve imaginary reconciliation. 'Ingres et le cubisme' (1921) is a further critical piece which sets out an apparently clear theoretical position in resonance with this ideal personal position. Profoundly interested in continuity and conformity and yet evincing disdain for all that is perceived as a collective pressure, it expresses a pragmatic desire in terms of principles:

Il y eut de tout temps deux façons de comprendre la nouveauté en art. Les uns courent après l'originalité : en vain, car elle court toujours plus vite que celui qui cherche à l'attraper. C'est la méthode des artistes trop faibles pour renoncer à surprendre le public. L'autre (et nos classiques nous prouvent que c'est la bonne) est de concilier l'amour de la nouveauté avec la Raison, non celle qui nous semble telle et qui pourrait être encore de l'extravagance, mais celle qui au public lui-même apparaît digne de ce nom. [...] La sagesse, pour un artiste, sera donc de trouver, à côté de « sa » nouveauté, ce qui fera admettre celle-ci ('Ingres et le cubisme' (published in *Le Gaulois* on 21 May 1921), in Radiguet 2001, 133–35, 133).

Artistic 'wisdom' (*sagesse*) here denotes a structuring tension in the imaginary at work whereby the writer is not simply cognisant of the literary tradition, but interrogates this tradition for ways of responding to present reality. The effects of a strong association with the canonical text are thus arguably key to the *agir postural* of Radiguet (that is, both his own and that undertaken on his behalf by Cocteau). Connoting both the acceptance of the (imagined) rule of genre and the intention of playing with/modifying it, that association becomes key, as Bourdieu and Delsaut (1975) have argued, to the "magical" function of the creator's name. The intertextual *contrainte* frames the later work both as a demonstration of virtuosity and as an exercise in creativity, attaining in both respects a distance from its subject that foregrounds the presence of a (thereby artistic) consciousness. This tallies with established modernist and proto-modernist practices in literary and visual art (see Compagnon (1990, 38–45) on Manet, for example). These practices both align the later work with a figure of the artistic tradition and suggest a lucid, self-possessed independence from this tradition in a way that hidden/anxious affiliations would not. In both Radiguet and Cocteau's cases this strategy could be assimilated to a straightforwardly neoclassical aesthetic of the kind amply documented in the inter-war years across the arts (see Fulcher 1999; Boehm et al. 1996). Yet, on the level of literary individuation, moving beyond the abstract statement of principle or

aspiration, this requires in addition to be enacted through a felt relationship with specific works. It thus becomes necessary to examine a particular functioning of Radiguet's specific model for the *Bal*.

### 3. *La Princesse de Clèves* and the question of a modern classical imaginary

In notes made in the summer of 1921, later published in his *Journal des faux-monnayeurs*, André Gide purports to trace a dominant philosophy of the novel in both a French context and a wider one. He does this in the process of reinventing and reordering the modern novel (the text here is a celebrated example of reflective literary practice), and to this end he articulates a broad allegiance between a realist aesthetic and the generic practice in question:

Le roman s'est toujours, et dans tous les pays, jusqu'à présent cramponné à la réalité. Notre grande époque littéraire n'a su porter son effort d'idéalisation que dans le drame. *La Princesse de Clèves* n'a pas eu de suite ; quand le roman français s'élançait, c'est dans la direction du *Roman bourgeois*. (Gide 1995, 61-62)

Intriguingly, however, the novelistic road allegedly less travelled here, *La Princesse de Clèves*, is associated with what Gide terms the 'effort d'idéalisation' of a literary period (as we have already seen with Valéry) itself characterised as a generator of both aesthetic ideals and literary models. While suggesting that that novel failed to beget a tradition, Gide is at the same time marking it out as a possible literary model—indeed, indicating for it a primary historical function *qua* potential model and hence orientation of a national novelistic tradition to come. A work's 'iconic status' may be reinforced through a kind of splendid isolation. Recent cultural and political controversy in France has shown that this cultural iconicity is certainly not in doubt in the case of *La Princesse de Clèves*.<sup>5</sup> But this iconicity is arguably only a facet of a more general property in the case of that work, problematically prominent within the national literature of which it forms part—its ability to function ideologically downstream *regardless* of its internal 'ideological' indeterminacy.

This indeterminacy, the ability to absorb and project contending meanings, had arguably been central to the literary success of *La Princesse de Clèves* from the time of its publication. It certainly has been material to a great deal of the critical and social reflection devoted to it from Valincour (2001), in the year of its publication, to some of its most recent critical reception. Laurence A. Gregorio (2004) and Helen Karen Kaps (1968), for example, both point out open-ended questions regarding aesthetic and philosophical orientation operative within the novel, while John Campbell (2006) has convincingly problematised the identification of *La Princesse*

<sup>5</sup> As John Campbell (2011), evoking the controversy surrounding declarations made by President Nicolas Sarkozy which appeared to stigmatise literary education in general through a specific attack on the teaching of *La Princesse de Clèves*, has recently recalled. Similarly, the work's ability to appeal as a privileged intertext appears entirely undiminished—a prominent recent example being Marie Darrieu-secq's novel *Clèves* (2011).

*de Clèves* with any particular preceding philosophical position. These readings restore to the literary text a certain resistant quality along with its discursive distinction.

Rather than a literary ideology adhering to and in specific literary works, one may then begin to reflect on the ideological value of the quasi-platonic forms of the literary model and their cultural afterlives. It is arguably at this level of signifying that the classical inter-text takes on greatest significance with respect to literary *individuation*, and thus in this direction and at this level of generality that the idea of a *classical imaginary* becomes valuable. In the idea of a *classical imaginary*, the cultural and political implications within the national scene of recourse to the ‘siècle de Louis XIV’ taken as a *lieu de mémoire* in all its “densité problématique” (Zékian 2012, 13) are compounded by the cultural and political overtones of modern (especially twentieth-century) appeals to the notion of the classic work (Prendergast 2007, 308). Both of these aspects go well beyond the propositional or specifically ideological value of a given work, engaging broader associations in respect of the source historical period (and prevalent representations thereof) as well as issues specific to the dynamics of a latter-day (receiving) literary field. These issues include the very principles of continuity, tradition or transmission within a given literary culture.

The question exemplified by the *Bal* is thus arguably as much one of ‘cultural memory’ as it is of specific literary continuities. Astrid Erll and Anne Rigney have written recently of a shift from ‘sites’ to ‘dynamics’ in memory studies. They see this shift as “running parallel to a larger shift of attention in cultural studies from products to processes, from a focus on discrete cultural artefacts to an interest in the way those artefacts circulate and interact with their environments” (Erll and Rigney 2009, 3). If *La Princesse de Clèves*, for example, is thinkable as a site of cultural memory constantly revisited in the act of individual reading, it may also be linked to historical dynamics—and indeed philosophical and aesthetic positions—that are not circumscribed by the terms of the work itself. Bearing its own literary imaginary, it also reflects a meta-literary imaginary—this in turn making it particularly capable of assuming what Barthes (1957) might have diagnosed as a fully ‘mythological’ function within an evolving general cultural imaginary. What, then, might the *classical imaginary* be thought to connote, emerging specifically in relation to *La Princesse de Clèves*? Three traits suggest themselves as particularly salient to the intertextual relation under discussion here.

The first is an association with a form of secular reason and, thereafter, with a modernity-tending perspective of rational autonomy. There are many versions of this general account. Regarding the theme of central interest to Mme de Lafayette, however, Denis de Rougemont has argued that the seventeenth century in France, and the French classical tradition in particular, see the myth of passionate love separated from its mystical underpinnings and realigned with “les lois de la raison du siècle” (Rougemont 1979, 225). He singles out *La Princesse de Clèves* as a key transitional text in this respect—both a “dernière flamme, mince et pure” of the mystical courtly tradition and announcing the new purchase of secular reason on human affairs. One senses that this latter presence, of a ‘reason’ both distinct from religious feeling and stronger than it, is the vein in *La Princesse de Clèves* that

Albert Camus, writing roughly three decades earlier, had found particularly attractive. Camus recognises the imaginary properties of *La Princesse de Clèves*—contrasting its actual complexity of structure with the kind of purity of line that is mistakenly but repeatedly attributed to it. This trait of the literary imaginary is attributable to a more fundamental property of the classical complex, which Camus identifies with the specific kind of intelligence he sees as characteristic of a French ‘classical’ position: “l’intelligence, ici, n’apporte pas seulement sa conception, elle est en même temps un principe d’une merveilleuse économie et d’une sorte de monotonie passionnée. Elle est à la fois créatrice et mécanicienne” (Camus 1967, 1898). This *intelligence* is, in turn, inseparable from a self-aware but highly socialised ethical autonomy: “Chez Mme de la Fayette [...] la grandeur de cet art hautain est de faire sentir que ses limites ont été posées avec *intention*” (1900, Camus’s emphasis).

The practice of the limit in *La Princesse de Clèves* is directly associated with the figure of the heroine and her unrelenting commitment to conscious self-determination in the face of her own (and Nemours’s) acknowledged passion. For Camus, mastery and achievement in the French novelistic canon become—following this example—a matter of facing down “la douleur des hommes [...] par les règles de l’art” (1902). Reason’s merit is to clothe the turmoil of the mortal subject in a display of an exceptional degree of intentional control at the interface between emotions and creation. Though presented in philosophical terms, the position articulated by Camus is clearly related to a broader imaginary at work in and in relation to the literary tradition in question. To return to the *Bal*, a key editorial interpolation of Cocteau’s bears out the operative quality of this *imaginary* as it regards the later work’s status as intertextual individualational act. This is the original edition’s culmination in the exemplary gesture of conscious willpower that is Anne d’Orgel’s injunction to his wife: “Et maintenant, Mahaut, dormez! Je le veux” (Radiguet 1983, 207). The ‘je le veux’ stood as the final utterance of Radiguet’s oeuvre for 70 years. Following Odoard and Oliver (in Radiguet 1993, 1999), Nemer’s 2003 edition removes Cocteau’s addition, finishing thus: “Et maintenant, Mahaut, dormez” (Radiguet 2003, 308). In what Nemer condemns as Cocteau’s “inutile surenchère à la métaphore de l’hypnotiseur” (Nemer 2003b, 47) the levels of character, narratorial and authorial consciousness appear tellingly aligned with the symbolic pre-eminence and imposition of the individual will.

A second, related quality of the classical imaginary is the multi-layered idea of *distance*, in which classical and modern are understood to stand in aesthetic and philosophical sympathy. In an important 1961 essay on *La Princesse de Clèves* Jean Roudaut identified a consistent link in the modern meta-literary imaginary between a doctrine of tone or style and a construction of the literary subject. The achievement of Mme de Lafayette in this respect, Roudaut demonstrates, is first and foremost a technical one. He contrasts the soliloquies of the protagonist with the modern stream of consciousness technique in order to suggest the strangely modern qualities of the classical ‘distance’: “on ne lit ici [i.e. in *La Princesse de Clèves*] que les pensées claires, à l’instant où elles naissent à la clarté” (Roudaut 1961, 42). Rather than perform or imitate the workings of the mind, the classical text can be

received by a modern reader as a report from the threshold of the unconscious. It thereby honours not only the reality with which it is concerned, but also its own status as the separate work of a discrete subject. That this is an artifice, an act of *representation*, is also clear in the modern reception: “Si les soliloques de Mme de Clèves suivent avec souplesse les détours des mouvements passionnels, ils ne déroulent cependant que le discours d’une conscience organisée” (ibid.) Furthermore, due to the modern reader’s exposure to the less ordered innovations of more recent periods, the classical text appears to offer even greater depths of meaning than before. What set the work apart in the seventeenth century distinguishes it anew in the modern field, for revised and renewed reasons:

En combinant les ressources du rapport impersonnel avec l’introspection du soliloque au style indirect, Madame de Lafayette a réussi le plus heureux composé du il et du je, de la relation et de l’analyse, *de l’absence et de la présence de l’auteur*. [...] Le cœur est un abîme, la romancière avait su utiliser la nouvelle technique romanesque pour faire de cet abîme une réalité sensible et pénétrable au lecteur (ibid.,43–44, our emphasis).

Mme de Lafayette takes a postulate of human singularity (the heart as abyss) and makes it amenable to a surefooted, socially-grounded code and sociolect—the phlegmatic and yet highly refined language of the Court. Working within the aura of this model, the *Bal*, its narrator and its author seek the elusive balance between conformity and difference that results in a perfectly socialised modern individuality—that is, one that overtly displays no discernible social anxiety. It is in this sense that Radiguet’s celebrated aspirations to writing in an unremarkable way (see above, and Galateria 2004, 18–20), and to a style “genre mal écrit comme l’élégance doit avoir l’air mal habillé” (see Radiguet 2003, 313) require to be understood. An apparent surefootedness is thus perhaps the key meta-literary value that the *Bal* takes from the classical intertext. Far more than the actual structure of relationships, what seems important here is the idea of a confident language of social and psychological appraisal, grounded in a social space in which such a language and its attendant values could be thought to exist. In the case of the *Bal*, the specific social space (arguably both on the level of the text and on that of its author) is that in which an increasingly superfluous ‘aristocracy’ encounters an upwardly mobile bourgeoisie seeking to recuperate its social and cultural forms. (see Elias 2006; Veblen 2007) Mme de Lafayette achieves the effect—at the level of textual performance—of invoking and addressing an actual court society even as she engages in the *fiction* of an historical novel. Radiguet is arguably *imagining* and *performing* such an address implicitly, (re-)instating a social world fictionally, but also interpellating such a world through the work’s reception. This is a world in which a self-possessed, articulate, socially entitled individuality (of a kind deeply contested in the literary field at the time he is writing) is both a cultural prerequisite and a cardinal social value.

It is however in the *Bal*’s pursuit of a balance between conformity and difference in this respect—where the *primary* creation is arguably a figure of the author or source of literary utterance—that an element of anxiety may also be discerned. While Mme de Lafayette achieves an identity of consciousness between representation and the represented—the surefootedness of her text mirrors that, discursively

and ethically, of her main characters—the *Bal* for the most part limits its display of lucidity to the level of representation. This supports a key quality of its young author's individuated presence in his novel—a knowing quality that Alfred Thibaudet (1924) had very quickly identified in terms of a 'romanesque psychologique', whereby it is the narrating consciousness that renders the psychological exposition coherent and compelling. The corollary of this quality—as has been observed by several critics—is that Radiguet's characters unconsciously conform to truths mastered only by the narrative voice and display less in the way of a conscious self-awareness than do those of Mme de Lafayette. In no respect, therefore, is the slippage between actual correspondences and imaginary ones in the intertextual relation more palpable than in the constant displays of narratorial lucidity in the *Bal*—crystallised in the repeated practice of the maxim. For Magny, the heightened recourse to maxim was the key stylistic difference between Radiguet's two novels. Crucially, however, she also observes that this recourse is wholly absent from *La Princesse de Clèves* (Magny 1950, 95–96).

That Radiguet's adoption of his particular model could be interpreted as 'classically' influenced *reaction* to developments in the fully-fledged (subsequent) modern novel is a prevalent understanding in the matter. Clément Borgal, for example, in his preface to the 2001 edition of Radiguet's *Œuvres*, links that reaction to an imagined fidelity to an archetypal 'national' difference in the practice of the novel. Authorial individuation is, in this respect again, facilitated by typicality:

La vérité est qu'en réaction contre les tendances du roman social, du roman d'aventures, du roman de conquêtes, issu particulièrement de Balzac, Radiguet a voulu retrouver l'âme du *roman typiquement français*, né au XVIIe siècle à l'ombre de la tragédie : et c'est pourquoi, selon l'expression de Cocteau, il a posé son chevalet devant *La Princesse de Clèves* (Borgal 2001, XLV, our emphasis).<sup>6</sup>

Just as the classical imaginary is linked to an idea of *emerging* modernity, its imaginary efficacy is thus arguably linked to its *degree* of pastness. It is more associated with the foundational possibility of individuality than with the modern proliferation of 'individuals'. This difficult balance leads us to a third salient quality of the classical imaginary in the case of the *Bal*, which might be termed its *authored impersonality*. Quite apart from the apparent tensions, as regards the direction of actual literary history, with the analysis of Gide cited earlier, the insistence here that Radiguet is mobilising a *type* through his choice of intertext sits well with Gide's accordance of exemplarity to Mme de Lafayette's novel. But this is arguably both a textual type and the type of the modern individuated novelist per se. Analysing the genesis of the French literary field in the seventeenth century, Viala (1985) has pointed out that the supreme literary achievement in that age was for an authorial name to become synonymous with a genre—generally one that author had earlier been seen to have invented or substantially modified. As such, *La Princesse de Clèves* becomes not only the canonical novel of the analysis of an individual

<sup>6</sup> The stepping aside from the world of Balzac et al. in the *Bal*'s imaginary establishment of foundations is foregrounded thematically from the outset, in the history of the Grimoard de la Verberie family.

personality (that of its heroine), but also connotes the act of literary individuation at the very point of its historical appearance in respect of the genre in question. That the novel was published anonymously, and that debate long existed as to a collaborative aspect to Mme de Lafayette's authorship, is not at issue. Rather, these realities serve only to emphasise the distance—mirrored in the case of the *Bal* itself—between the dominant modern imaginary of individuated authorship and the frequently more complex and obscure processes resulting in a finished work.

The preference for the century of French classicism over subsequent ones suggested in the choice of *La Princesse de Clèves* could be interpreted as both an acknowledgement of this distance and an espousal of the formal, depersonalised yet ineradicable individuality to which it plays imaginary host. *Art poétique* (1922), written by Radiguet with Max Jacob, suggests some of this thinking when affirming with all the sententious assurance of a 'classical' style:

Il y a le style de tête (Voltaire), le style de poitrine (Jean-Jacques) et le style du ventre qui est celui des grands classiques du XVIIe, sauf Racine ; il y a le style de bouche qui est celui des verbaux du XIXe siècle. Le meilleur est celui du ventre (Radiguet 2001, 200)

Reclaiming the *ventre* for the *Grand Siècle*, though perhaps counter-intuitive, is consonant with a mythical reading whereby that style is closest, among modern options, to a foundational, pre-individual expression. The *ventre* emerges at the top of an inverted hierarchy to assert the *counter-canonical* potential of a classical imaginary. The point is, however, equally significant on a synchronic axis, where the *ventre* is a symbolic site claimed—in a contest that might be termed the 'Ubu question'—by competing literary mythologies. King Ubu, Alfred Jarry's most celebrated creation, whose *ventre* or *gidouille* is the centre of the pataphysical universe, is arguably the French literary antithesis, and end-point, of the modern individual. His is the literary character in which total individuality spills over into a grotesque all-devouring appetite, attaining at the same time the status of a historical principle. As such he presents a kind of litmus test to the actors of the literary field of the inter-war period. For the dadaists and surrealists he is the defining literary character of the age, one of totemic value. In another article from the year of his appropriation of the *ventre*—one of a number whose incidental theme is literary *success*—Radiguet distances himself polemically from this identification:

[L]a présence d'Ubu dans la littérature est de celles qui donnent la chair de poule, comme d'imaginer un homme « invertébré ». Je ne suis pas un amateur de monstres, un homme sans préjugés. Par son inconsistance même, *Ubu roi* ne gêne personne. C'est par son inconsistance qu'il me gêne. Dans cette œuvre aucun angle où se heurter. La belle qualité! [...] Serait-ce qu'une autre époque va commencer, qu'elle ne veut plus entendre parler de ce pantin ('Bilan' (published in *Catalogue* in March 1922), in Radiguet 2001, 210–211, 211).

This is not on the face of it an argument *ad hominem*, targeting rivals through the figure of Ubu, but an aesthetic judgement grounded in visceral dislike. The image of the "homme invertébré" is particularly telling in this respect—denoting a resistance to the apparent threat to the sense of self associated with the radically different



construction of artistic agency than that in evidence among the self-proclaimed ‘enfants d’Ubu’. It is instructive, in this respect, to compare the differing auras of purity surrounding the prodigious individual in different parts of the field. The opposition that becomes apparent between Radiguet and, for example, the image of Robert Desnos at around the same time is almost perfectly diametrical.<sup>7</sup> Whereas surrealism can thus present itself as an “approche des sources originelles de l’esprit” (Breton), the *Bal* approaches a specific identifiable source of the modern literary tradition whilst making a counter-claim on innovation within the field. Mme de Lafayette and her novel thus connote meta-textually a return to *historical* sources as distinct from mythical or pre-historic ones—and yet in that process both novel and author function mythically. The specific individuating property in Radiguet’s case, the ‘base’ on which he will proceed to ‘build dangerously’, is an imagined purity of extreme consciousness aligned with the myth of *history*. This stands distinct (in the bid for both social and artistic legitimacy) from an imagined purity of enhanced consciousness aligned with the myth of *myth*.

#### 4. Conclusion

If the *Bal*’s appeal to a classical imaginary can be seen to re-inscribe the individuation process and the figure of the literary individual into a construction of a model tradition, it can thus equally be argued that it functions as an unresolvably collaborative and reciprocal example of modern literary individuation. This exemplarity extends out in time on either side of the event of the work itself. The work done by Cocteau on the level of the authorial figure/persona prepared the literary field and the reading public for the genial performance of his protégé constituted by the revised *Bal*’s publication. But the mutual processes of individuation bound up with this relation did not cease once that publication had occurred. In particular, Radiguet-as-myth remains a presence in Cocteau’s constantly evolving artistic self-appraisals and inventions (see for example *La Difficulté d’être* (1947), in Cocteau 1995, 855–978). Indeed, Cocteau’s subsequent artistic career, with all its exemplary diversity, continually returns to questions of originality and self-invention exemplified in the episode of the *Bal*.<sup>8</sup> In this perspective the elder writer was both capable of glorifying his younger friend and of assimilating him to a function of his own artistic practice, writing the following, for example, two years after Radiguet’s death:

<sup>7</sup> 1923–25 being the years of the surrealists’ ‘période héroïque’, beginning with the ‘époque des sommeils’ that marks a radical difference of their creative principles (see Nadeau 1964, 45–51).

<sup>8</sup> Jean Delannoy’s (1960) film version of *La Princesse de Clèves*, from a screenplay by Cocteau, is perhaps not the most significant episode of this kind. It does however provide, as Cocteau’s own life was drawing to a close, a somewhat uncanny echo of the processes surrounding the *Bal* four decades earlier while suggesting more generally—this time in the era of the *Nouvelle Vague* and the *Nouveau Roman*—the abiding model status of Mme de Lafayette’s work.



J'ai voulu faire du blanc plus blanc que neige et j'ai senti combien mes appareils étaient encrassés de nicotine ; alors j'ai formé Radiguet pour réussir à travers lui ce à quoi je ne pouvais plus prétendre. J'ai obtenu *Le Bal du comte d'Orgel* [Cocteau, *Le Mystère de l'oiseleur* (1925)—cited by Bernard Pingaud in Radiguet 1983, (225)].

From having earlier constructed Radiguet as a genius, Cocteau here appears to be turning him retrospectively into a vessel through which it became possible to project a purified form of his own artistic self (see, in this regard, Touzot 1998). The move, admittedly at the extreme end of Cocteau's accounts of the matter subsequent to Radiguet's death, is perhaps ultimately not as offensive to the dialectics of literary individuation as might be thought. It mobilises the legitimising properties of that purity engendered, as far as the *Bal* is concerned, in the knowingly *artificial* nature of the aesthetic exercise. Radiguet the author comes to denote Cocteau's purer self—the artist Cocteau would have wished to be, and in a sense continually became. Only, by the very same logic, both writers' 'purities' have become complex, their 'geniuses' plural, their individuated selves the alias of a reciprocal effort and influence that are both unusually forthright and irrevocably intermingled. This is consonant with the paradoxical nature of the act of individuation we have been attempting to delineate.

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