

Love and Homicide in the Jazz Age Novel

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In the '20s and '30s contemporary American novels had a growing influence on French novelists. Among the reasons for this fascination perhaps the most important is related to a major change in the language French novelists were allowed. When Céline published *Voyage au bout de la nuit* in 1932 the language used in this novel toppled a basic literary tenet which prescribed a literary style as de rigueur in serious works. Céline succeeded in attracting attention to his work without having a classical style. At the same time a certain "vision of the world," according to Sartre's expression (89), had emerged in France from the reading of Faulkner and other American writers. Raymond Queneau, whose *Le chiendent* (1933) was published on the heels of Céline's ground-breaking novel, was one of those influenced by the existence of a technique in storytelling and construction particular to the American novel.¹

This vision of the world was based on a metaphysical conception of time according to Sartre. Meanwhile, however, a new form of the American detective novel, the hard-boiled crime novel, began to appear in print. This popular genre told of semi-literate characters who found themselves involved in violent plots for illicit gain. Albert Camus apparently had James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) in mind while writing his novel *L'étranger* (1942).² Camus chose to use the imperfect verb form throughout the novel. This preference contrasted with the more frequent use in French novels of past forms that can precisely depict iso-

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lated actions, such as the *passé composé* or the *passé simple*. Camus' stylistic choice of the imperfect makes for the reading equivalent of seeing a movie in slow motion.³ Only after Céline did the French novelist have the possibility of choosing such language. The overall impression of Camus' novel corresponds well with the combination of confused motives and barely assured narrator found in Cain's novel. In any case, for the French this new genre, the *roman noir*, was equally characteristic of the Jazz Age in America. French fascination with the literary production of the Jazz Age was always at least tangentially affected by this additional characteristic. In the hard-boiled crime novel, a transgression, often a homicide, is committed by the somewhat sympathetic central character who is, in addition, a potentially heroic figure.⁴

A Tragic Muse

The imagination of a well-known novelist of the Jazz Age such as F. Scott Fitzgerald seems to be formed from contact with certain ubiquitous ideas of the times. Fitzgerald (1963) outlines the popular intentions of a Jazz Age novel in his well-known piece "Echoes of the Jazz Age". The Jazz Age novelist prefers a symbolic language that features a similar response to the post-war climate. There is a new sensuality in the language used to describe their characters. The replacement of the omniscient narrator by the unconscious, however this is accomplished, signals, too, the awareness of the existence of a moral vacuum newly apparent in the wake of World War I. These were several of the beacons that attracted the imagination of Jazz Age novelists. But, in addition, Fitzgerald reveals his personal involvement with the themes of his novels. Writing of himself in the third person he tells us that the Jazz Age "bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did, that something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War" (323). Thus this energy, born of personal involvement with the Jazz Age, takes several destructive and idealistic guises, frequently repeated in the form of topoi. For Fitzgerald, a novel, whether the story is located in Paris or West Egg, is a place and time that creates a vision of the world in order to explore more thoroughly the signification of this rhetorical topos.

The Jazz Age novel also features a character who experiences a diffi-

cult decline in life expectations, which in turn is transferred to these topoi. Sartre (1975) observes something like this happening in many works of this period:

. . . most of the important contemporary authors, Proust, Joyce, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Gide, V. Woolf, each in his or her own way, tried to mutilate time. Some deprived it of a past and future in order to reduce it to pure intuition of the instant; others, such as Dos Passos, make it a dead and shut up memory. Proust and Faulkner simply decapitated it, they took away its future, that is to say the dimension of action and liberty.⁵

. . . la plupart des grands auteurs contemporains, Proust, Joyce, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Gide, V. Woolf, chacun à sa manière, ont tenté de mutiler le temps. Les uns l'ont privé de passé et d'avenir pour le réduire à l'intuition pure de l'instant ; d'autres, comme Dos Passos, en font une mémoire morte et close. Proust et Faulkner l'ont simplement décapité, ils lui ont ôté son avenir, c'est-à-dire la dimension des actes et de la liberté. (93)

Studies of character and motive in these novels often show the important role played by the leitmotif of disillusionment.⁶ Nevertheless, there exist other basic motivations typical of the characters of the Jazz Age novel. In Faulkner's *Sanctuary* (1931) the central character, Temple, first has her easy life shattered by a sadistic misfit named Popeye, then sends another man to death to protect him. Despite her rescue, the memory of her ordeal causes her to suffer psychologically during a voyage in Europe with her father. As they enter the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, at the end of the novel, two visions of the universe seem to present themselves spontaneously to her mind. First, she notices the statues of French queens. Secondly, her grandiose imagination allows her to compare this perception to her perception of the entire heavens as a cosmic order:

She closed the compact and from beneath her smart new hat she seemed to follow with her eyes the waves of music,

to dissolve into the dying brasses, across the pool and the opposite semicircle of trees where at somber intervals the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused, and on into the sky lying prone and vanquished in the embrace of the season of rain and death. (253)

It is as though Temple's psyche has been suddenly struck by this vision of the heavens which is the closing image of the novel. The self representation to Temple of a cosmic order reveals to readers the deficiency, the inferiority of the humanistic order represented by statues of French royalty.

A Comic Sensibility

The same "disillusioned" opposition of orders in the universe, humanistic and cosmic, dominates in paradoxical fashion the lengthy final passage of Raymond Queneau's first novel *Le chiendent*, in which Queneau imaginatively retells the history of World War I. In addition, one is struck by the presence of a type of commentary concerning the American way of life in these novels. In effect, the merits of the American image (of success, of conspicuous consumption) are open to debate. By inscribing his novel as a part of a new literary genre Queneau identifies his work with other works of a similar nature, and makes a serious contribution to it.

Two characters are seen leaving the forest where peace has finally been signed with a third, Mme Cloche, who claims to have control over the weather. Mme Cloche says : "—I am the rain! The rain that dissolves the constellations and which shakes up kingdoms, the rain that floods empires and dampens republics" "—Eh bien oui, je suis la pluie ! La pluie qui dissout les constellations et qui détraque les royaumes, la pluie qui inonde les empires et qui humecte les républiques" (427). Sartre tells us that novelists in this epoch wanted to efface the means of measuring time since "Man's ill fortune is to be temporal" 'Le malheur de l'homme est d'être temporel' (86). Faulkner, for instance, "hates our reconciled consciences, our garrulous engineers' consciences" 'il hait nos consciences bien ajustées, nos consciences bavardes d'ingénieurs' (16–17). Queneau wants to internalize the passage of time to his story via the representation of Mme Cloche, who, by controlling the weather, controls the universe. So his technique confuses the story of the novel and the characters with meteorology.

logical “time,” that is, in French, weather⁷ (another translation of the French word “temps,” and by metonymy the rain).

To summarize her role in the novel until this moment, Mme Cloche convinces a waitress named Ernestine to marry a much older man named Taupe because of a treasure that she thinks is kept concealed behind the blue door in his junkyard. Taupe’s blue door, like Gatsby’s green light, turns out to be a souvenir of a love affair that Taupe had as a young man. The blue door and the green light have a similar importance in each novel since they are the key to understanding the motivation of the principal characters. Readers of Fitzgerald, however, might just laugh at the “tragic” similarities, but Queneau, as if to be sure of the contrary, adds emphasis to the printed text in Taupe’s monologue:

And this door? this door is always the same story. Yes, the same. The *same* stories happen to you all the time. Funny, huh? When I was twenty, a woman. But I am not going to bore you to tears with the love story of a young man, am I? Well, a woman who is dead. This door is a souvenir. That’s all. Forty years after I found this door again. Both our names are on it. I bought it. That’s all. No fortune, no treasure, no mystery. Nothing. And if that bores you, too bad. Or rather that’s great. Yeah, forty years afterward, I again found a door where we had written our names. And, *thanks to this door*, Ernestine, who I loved is dead. It’s not normal, is it? Don’t you think ? Don’t you think it’s even tragic ? (emphasis original)

Et cette porte ? cette porte, c’est toujours la même histoire. Oui, la même. I vous arrive tout l’ temps les *mêmes* histoires. C’est drôle, hein ? Quand j’avais vingt ans, une femme. Mais j’ vais pas vous barber avec une histoire d’amour de jeune homme, hein ? Enfin, une femme qu’est morte. Cette porte, c’est un souvenir. C’est tout. Quarante ans après, j’ai retrouvé cette porte. Il y avait nos deux noms dessus. J’ l’ai achetée. C’est tout. Pas d’ fortune, pas d’ trésor, pas d’ mystère. Rien. Et si ça vous embête, tant pis. Ou tant mieux. Oui, quarante ans après, j’ai retrouvé cette porte où nous avons écrit nos noms. Et, *grâce à cette porte*,

Ernestine, que j'aimais, est morte. C'est pas ordinaire, hein ? Vous trouvez pas ? Vous trouvez pas même que c'est tragique ? (360–1)

Mme Cloche, who also recalls for us Temple's vision of the "season of rain and death" in Faulkner, represents the general destruction of illusions, as both Taupe and Ernestine die. After the ceremony, though, the wedding party goes on a brief excursion to the country. Here is how Ernestine daydreams about it later:

Ernestine is shining. Ernestine is beaming. Ernestine is sparkling. Is it because of her wedding or the day in the country? Camélia, who doesn't know anything, finds it funny, this transformation of Ernestine, but if she knew more, she'd attribute it to inaccurate motives. Because Ernestine's, for the moment, forgotten completely about Taupe's million and the sumptuous life that Sidonie Cloche had designed for her; her joy is due to other things: an afternoon in the country after four hundred eighteen consecutive days of rinsing glasses and washing the floor. If she smiles it not because she is dreaming of her future outfits, but because she is still letting herself glide along the current; if she is smiling it's not because she is dreaming of future beauty treatments, but because she is seeing herself still drinking a lemonade under a big old green tree; if she smiles, it's not because she believes she's already riding in her own automobile, but because she still sees, despite the thick smoke in the café, the cow excreting majestically while grazing on clover incarnate. Ernestine feels blooming in her heart an enormous little blue flower of naive sentimentality that she waters with Pernod. . . .⁸

Ernestine rayonne. Ernestine respandit. Ernestine scintille. Est-ce le mariage ou la journée à la campagne ? Camélia, qui n'est pas au courant, trouve ça drôle, cette transformation d'Ernestine, mais si elle était plus documentée, elle lui attribuerait sans doute des motifs inexacts. Car Ernestine, pour le moment, a complètement oublié le million taupique et la vie fastueuse dont Sidonie Cloche lui traça un si bril-

lant tableau ; sa joie a d'autres causes : un après-midi à la campagne après quatre cent dix-huit jours consécutifs de rinçage de verres et de lavage de plancher. Si elle sourit, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle pense à ses futures toilettes, mais parce qu'elle se laisse encore glisser au fil de l'eau ; si elle sourit, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle songe à ses futurs soins de beauté, mais parce qu'elle se voit encore buvant de la limonade sous un grand vieil arbre vert ; si elle sourit, ce n'est pas parce qu'elle se croit roulant déjà dans son automobile à elle, mais parce qu'elle perçoit encore, à travers l'atmosphère épaisse du café, la vache qui fientait avec majesté en broutant du trèfle incarnat. Ernestine sent croître dans son cœur une immense petite fleur bleue qu'elle arrose d'un pernod. . . . (260-1)

Poison is suspected when Ernestine dies. Although there is no proof of foul play *Taupe* is certain that her death is due to the hard-boiled atmosphere of greed surrounding the blue door.⁹ This is what *Mme Cloche* represents too, but, even so, nothing matters since, during the last part of the endless war, France is again called Gaul and, as the two characters enter Paris, they are transported symbolically to the opening situation of the novel. "The silhouette of a man emerged; simultaneously, thousands. There were easily thousands of them." "La silhouette d'un homme se profila ; simultanément, des milliers. Il y en avait bien des milliers" (9; 432).

The question here is, are they also transported back in time? If we can accept the thesis of Sartre, whose Faulkner has as his paramount concern the metaphysical conception of time through symbolism, then we also can postulate that a Jazz Age novel which converts this symbolism perfectly into a topos of a novel is, of course, *The Great Gatsby*. As Nick concludes in the novel, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (172), where "we" are all universally transported back in time. Thus the closure of our three novels displays an immediate affinity concerning time as history, whether it be cosmic or humanistic.¹⁰ We can therefore hope to show that the central character of a Jazz Age novel often loses track of time. The story then offers a study of the repercussions of the misconceptions and misapprehensions of history. Finally, these visions of cosmic or humanistic order are often confronted, as they are brought to bear on the present.

On the other hand, for Queneau, with his Surrealist past, the writing of *Le chiendent* is colored by a spirit of revolt. It spurs him on to create certain odd figures of symmetry, odd apparently because the similitude exists, to a certain extent, only through the distorted imagination of Queneau as a reader of Faulkner and Fitzgerald. Queneau is undoubtedly addressing his own goal in the novel *Le chiendent*, to produce a pastiche of the novel of his time, when he has Taupe, his character, saying: "I am not going to bore you to tears with the love story of a young man, am I?" (360). Of course, this could be any romantic novel, but Taupe affirms that these stories are somehow identical: "this door is always the same story. Yes, the same. The *same* stories happen to you all the time. Funny, huh?" (360; emphasis original). Queneau is taking his initial cue, at least, from a passage in the first Surrealist manifesto, since his novel seems to resemble on this point what André Breton calls there a "faux roman:"

Whoever you are, if your heart desires, you will burn several laurel leaves and, without trying to keep this thin flame alive, you will begin to write a novel. Surrealism will permit you to; you will only have to move the needle from "Fair Weather" to "Action" and it's done [. . .] The result will be a plot more or less skillful in appearance, at each point justifying the moving or reassuring dénouement which you don't care about. Your false novel will simulate perfectly a real novel [. . .]

Qui que vous soyez, si le cœur vous en dit, vous ferez brûler quelque feuilles de laurier et, sans vouloir entretenir ce maigre feu, vous commencerez à écrire un roman. Le surréalisme vous le permettra ; vous n'aurez qu'à mettre l'aiguille de « Beau fixe » sur « Action » et le tour sera joué [. . .] Il en résultera une intrigue plus ou moins savante en apparence, justifiant point par point ce dénouement émouvant ou rassurant dont vous n'avez cure. Votre faux roman simulera à merveille un roman véritable [. . .] (43)

Thus Breton writes for humorous and subversive reasons.¹¹ In his first novel, *Le chiendent*, what Queneau writes agrees at the beginning with

this reasoning but we will see how he relativizes it in the midst of writing his novel.

A French Jazz Age Novelist

A creative process, therefore, enables the novel *Le chiendent* to transform itself finally into an exemplary Jazz Age novel. In making time of the cosmos into a metaphysical concept this “false novel,” Queneau’s cloning of a novel by a Faulkner or a Fitzgerald, enters into an odd and symmetric way of thinking with Jazz Age novels in general. There is a virtual dialogue in *Le chiendent* with the creative process of novels written by others. Queneau’s novel is a novel that proposes a Surrealist meditation on the definition of the novel, notably through the use of multiple dream sequences supposedly in order to put his characters’ unconscious on display. Because Queneau has two Jazz Age novels particularly in mind, the result is an axiomatic proposition concerning this novel’s intrinsic linguistic qualities. In other words, amidst the generic features from all the novels he knows, Queneau singles out allusions that permit the creative intertextual dialogue with hard-boiled crime novels, a dialogue which is already present certainly in such Jazz Age novels as *Sanctuary*, and, at least in larva form, in *The Great Gatsby*.

What is the point of studying these novels together, especially given the tentative nature with which we have to approach the Queneau text? We can, for example, observe *Gatsby*’s motivation with new eyes by reading some well-known passages differently. We can thus introduce an element of uncertainty which is absent when one reads the same passages again and again. Pierpont claims that Fitzgerald left things out for stylistic purposes,¹² but this is because novels concerning the Jazz Age often are elliptical. This approach to novel writing counts on readers such as Pierpont to fill in some areas of motivation. The central characters, Jay Gatsby and Étienne Marcel, are for instance figures surrounded by uncertainty although it seems that we cannot help but read them otherwise. Marcel is in many ways the comic antithesis of a Gatsby, yet his portrait is also true to the Jazz Age novel’s preference for ellipsis. Stylistically these two novels are very different also, yet we argue that they were shaped by a similar sensibility towards the world, and that this attitude towards the world is in evidence in their topoi. So the perception of the Fitzgerald novel can be

modified by the study in mirror so to speak of the Queneau novel. Finally, an unusual philosophical interpretation by Queneau isolates the importance of certain topoi in *The Great Gatsby* which could escape our notice otherwise.

In respecting the interior forms of a Jazz Age novel in *Le chiendent* Queneau gives the reader characters that can show more than just esthetic choices made by the author. This is because the central character makes the existential choices to live in his or her time. Only under these circumstances does he or she become capable of something heroic. And it is only under these conditions that he or she is thus temporarily a hero, instead of the ordinary anti-heroic self that typifies the atmosphere and setting of hard-boiled crime novels. The novel which characterizes the Jazz Age features a central character who is enigmatic at his or her esthetic core. Both a murderer and a saint. Because the Jazz Age novel consciously or unconsciously contrasts the anti-hero and the hero, these topoi will contrast a humanistic vision of the world to a cosmic one. These existential choices show a psychological intelligence with the universe, an affinity with time displayed by the hero of the novel in general. A reversion to type, on the other hand, the anti-hero represents the situation of an internalized Jazz Age dilemma, namely a destructive topos generated, according to Fitzgerald, by "all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War" (323). In creating a mental image within its own fictional universe, for instance, each novel finds the rhetorical means to represent different nuances concerning an aspect of this dilemma.

Queneau essentially offers French readers a reinterpretation of certain themes of the "hopeful" anti-hero who refuses to let himself be completely disillusioned, as Fitzgerald had already depicted him or her. In doing so Queneau reinterprets the myth that makes *Gatsby* the exemplary hero in Jazz Age America. He gives this American myth French substance.¹³

As both Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Queneau's novel also contains characters drawn from upper and lower classes. The story is not, however, about social class. Rather the story centers on the homicidal crime impulse, common to members of both classes, but which is often hidden by the facts of social class. The crime novel in Faulkner's *Sanctuary* hardly requires explanation. Sartre writes that "Faulkner never foresees anything concerning his heroes; the automobile carries them away, turned toward the past" "Quant aux héros de Faulkner,

il ne prévoient jamais ; l'auto les emporte, tournés vers l'arrière' (94). Queneau occasionally resorts to this abrupt style also, for instance, where action results from the crime intrigue. Étienne and Pierre, who have leagued together to grab Taupe's blue door, are leaving the "Fries" restaurant after a fruitless tentative to learn more. The text has the reader see how much their actions make them resemble gangsters in the sentence: "And the automobile plunged into the night" 'Et l'auto plongea dans la nuit' (157). There are several hints of a crime story in *The Great Gatsby* and it would be possible to read the whole tale as a subject for lurid newspaper treatment.¹⁴ For instance, Nick distinctly yet discreetly evokes this possibility when he recalls how the New York papers talk about a " 'death car' " in the aftermath of the death of Myrtle Wilson in a car accident and the killing of Gatsby by her husband (131), or, as Nick informs readers elsewhere: "Someone with a positive manner, perhaps a detective, used the expression 'madman' as he bent over Wilson's body that afternoon, and the adventitious authority of his voice set the key for the newspaper reports next morning. Most of those reports were a nightmare—grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue." (155). With "adventitious authority" if we are not at the heart of the hard-boiled novel's language, we are at the heart of the anti-hero's confused motivation for committing homicide.

The central characters in Fitzgerald and Queneau, Jay Gatsby and Étienne Marcel, are, in essence, born and lead a "life" in the "time" of the novel, but readers quickly discover that these concepts are metaphors for the fundamental conflicts. The characters are thus both observed, almost from birth, by a second central character. In *Le chiendent* Pierre Le Grand has the opportunity to describe this "birth" process to Etienne Marcel in person.

—In the beginning, you were only a silhouette; you would go from the bank to the Métro and from the Métro to the bank; that's when I noticed you. One day, you made a detour and you became a flat being. But maybe you yourself have never seen such individuals; my story is probably becoming obscure.

—Please, go on, Étienne says politely.

—This transformation, useless to tell you, added to the interest I already had in you. One day I was seated facing

you, in a train; I saw you swell slightly. You had acquired a certain consistence; but personally I didn't know the cause. When my taxi crashed into you, you were still in the same condition. But when I saw you again in the restaurant, you probably remember, you had taken on another dimension, which you still have: the dimension of a man, of one who thinks.

—Au début, vous n'étiez qu'une silhouette ; vous alliez de la banque au métro et du métro à la banque ; c'est alors que je vous remarquai. Un jour, vous faites un détour et vous devîntes un être plat. Mais peut-être vous-même n'avez - vous jamais vu de pareils individus ; mon récit en devient sans doute obscur.

—Je vous en prie, continuez, dit poliment Étienne.

—Cette transformation, inutile de vous le dire, accrut l'intérêt que je vous portais déjà. Un jour j'étais assis en face de vous, dans un train ; je vous vis vous gonfler légèrement. Vous veniez d'acquérir une certaine consistance ; mais personnellement j'en ignorais la cause. Lorsque mon taxi vous tamponna, vous en étiez toujours au même état. Mais lorsque je vous revis, au restaurant, vous vous en souvenez sans doute, vous vous présentiez sous l'aspect que vous possédez encore : celui d'un homme, et qui pense. (188–9)

Nick Carraway furnishes a much briefer although very similar observation in the form of conclusions about Gatsby's growth cycle: "He was left with his singularly appropriate education; *the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man*" (97; emphasis added).¹⁵ Furthermore, the narrative technique implies, first, that Nick and Pierre possess Platonic qualities similar to those of Etienne Marcel and Jay Gatsby. This impression becomes more prominent when we look at the use of reported discourse, for example in Nick's claim that "The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (95). Because Nick Carraway often in the narrative shows his pride at being a skeptic, the Platonic aspect of the main characters becomes appar-

ent through an intrinsic linguistic quality attributed especially to Gatsby by him.

For example, Nick makes allusions to Plato's allegory of the cave to describe how his, Nick's, imagination influences his mental process concerning Gatsby.

‘Who is he?’ I demanded. ‘Do you know?’
 ‘He’s just a man named Gatsby.’
 ‘Where is he from, I mean? And what does he do?’
 ‘Now *you*’re started on the subject,’ she answered with a wan smile. ‘Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man.’
A dim background started to take shape behind him, but at her next remark it faded away.
 ‘However, I don’t believe it.’ (50)¹⁶

This shadowy mental image makes the creation of characters dependent on a Cartesian way of thinking, that is to say that in the dialogue with Jordan the Cartesian way of thinking takes the form of doubt applied to Gatsby's existence, his past as well as his present.

A Criminal Universe

These characters perform timeless occupations as well as representing a potentially heroic Everyman based on popular culture, such as he or she is found depicted in a hard-boiled crime novel. So, in terms of philosophy and classical rhetoric, we can consider that this character is a type to be understood in its esthetic as a rhetorical argument, that is, these characters are types who are supposedly universal. Queneau does not just present his character Marcel. He shows how Marcel becomes more than a silhouette by labeling each step in the process in Cartesian fashion.¹⁷ This is the intrinsic linguistic quality that Nick and Le Grand attribute to the enigmatic aspects of the “beings” in the fictional universe of the novels. Gatsby rations the amount of information he permits people to have about his past. Carraway feels constantly that he must learn more about Gatsby. He, Carraway, partially envies him and wants to become a second Gatsby just like Marcel begins to reason like a second Le Grand. Here is an example of these dynamics in the formation of the points of view. When first asked to play the host to his cousin Daisy in order that Gatsby might stop by and

see her again, Nick can only muse that the self-made Gatsby will have “waited five years and bought a mansion [. . .]so that he could ‘come over’ some afternoon to a stranger’s garden” (76). We will discuss the signification of gardens later. Fitzgerald has, however, renounced in Nick the use of an omniscient narrator whose omnipotence would have dictated that the narrative fulfill Nick’s wish for a garden reunion. Instead, in the course of events the cosmic vision of the world intervenes: rain keeps Daisy and Gatsby from the garden. During this scene, which takes place in Nick’s living room, the symptoms of an alienation from time is indicated when Gatsby almost breaks a timepiece found there (84).

Fitzgerald (1966) admits in a letter from 1925: “you are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any one time saw him clear myself—for he started as one man I knew and then changed into myself—the amalgam was never complete in my mind” (383). The indeterminacy of the central character, coupled with the indirect look at the Jazz Age thanks to the use of the several different characters in order to expose the personal weaknesses of the narrator, makes this novel one of those which explore the style of the hard-boiled detective novel to make a philosophical reflection in the novel.¹⁸ The mental representation is not just the account by Nick of a direct perception but a mixture of different impressions, mainly containing the memory of the effect, for Nick, of his imagination on things. As well as being the composite of two fictional characters, this final amalgam is transformed into an intellectual argument about human nature.

These dynamics function because Nick and Pierre wish to see their inner selves in Gatsby and Marcel, two halves of a whole. But this fictional universe, with its destructive topos, is also a criminal one. So, the dynamics imply not that they see their better half, but simply their other half, an idea which reveals more sinister aspects. Nick needs to struggle to share with Gatsby his “extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness” (8), and perhaps fails. Nick sees these heroic traits concretely when they first meet:

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole

eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (49; emphasis original)

Nick's failure to share Gatsby's optimistic trust in life's possibilities, or his smile, is manifest in the other image he perceives immediately afterward, namely that of a Gatsby whom he describes as "an elegant young rough-neck [. . .] whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd"(49). Nick's native skepticism thus causes him to oscillate between wonder and mistrust throughout the novel. This metamorphosis of Gatsby is troubling. It is as if Nick's second thoughts had suddenly and inexplicably been incarnated. They appear to be a projection of an unrelenting self-interrogation. Pierre Le Grand in *Le chiendent* acts a part which he repeats each day and can seemingly do so for eternity:

For years this same instant was identically repeated, each day, with the exception of Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. He didn't haven't anything to do with all this. He didn't work, but was in the habit of being there between 5 and 8, motionless. Sometimes he extended his hand and seized something; it was thus this day, a silhouette.

Depuis des années, ce même instant se répétait identique, chaque jour, samedi, dimanche et jour de fêtes exceptés. Lui n'avait rien à voir avec tout ça. Il ne travaillait pas, mais il avait accoutumé de venir là entre 5 et 8 heures, immobile. Parfois, il tendait la main et saisissait quelque chose ; ainsi ce jour-là, une silhouette. (10)

This "silhouette," whose life is transformed by the mere prospect of hope much as Gatsby's "contour" has filled out in Cody's company, is later identified as Étienne Marcel, whereas the character who has the eternal quality of living this same instant seemingly outside the fictional place and time, is called Pierre Le Grand.¹⁹ Each novel alternates scenes in the suburbs with those set in the city, with several notable exceptions. More-

over, instead of a billboard advertising the services of Dr T. J. Eckleburg, an outdoor sign in *Le chiendent*, which advertises a restaurant where Marcel meets Mme. Cloche, is located next to the suburban railroad track:

The being of less reality looks at the scenery; he hypothesizes the number of times that he had probably seen this factory and is surprised that he never noticed the dumpy FRIES place a little further on. Just like the little ducks, he thought. All of a sudden, he conceives a really extraordinary undertaking: someday he will go eat some fries in this dump. Worries for an instant whether FRIES isn't somebody's name: Mister Fries. This idea makes him smile.

L'être de moindre réalité regarde le paysage. Il suppose le nombre de fois qu'il a pu voir cette usine et s'étonne de ne pas avoir remarqué la baraque en planches FRITES un peu plus loin. Comme les petits canards, pense-t-il. Tout un coup, il conçoit un projet vraiment extraordinaire : un jour, il ira manger des frites dans cette baraque. S'inquiète un instant de savoir si FRITES n'est pas un nom de personne : Messieu Frites. Cette idée le fait sourire. (37)

Of course the billboard in *The Great Gatsby* depicts the face of a man wearing glasses, and advertises the services of a Dr T. J. Eckleburg.

Material wealth is largely obtained in the city. To get there characters of both novels must take a commuter train which passes near to a waste land. Many details concerning these commuter trains are similar, or at least symmetrical. Queneau's "waste land" is also a dumping ground, although his is next to a chemical factory:

Étienne smiled. He saw pass by, through the railway door, the tiny houses of Coquette-sur-Seine, then appear the land of truck farmers announcing Blagny. Then it was the waste lands, then the chemical products factory, then FRIES.

Étienne sourit. Par la portière, il vit défiler les villas minuscules de Coquette-sur-Seine, puis apparaître les étendues maraîchères annonçant Blagny. Ce furent ensuite des ter-

rains vagues, puis l'usine de produits chimiques, puis FRITES. (327)

Fitzgerald represents a waste land peopled by homunculi:

This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (26)

In the first paragraph of *Le chiendent* people in the fictional world of Paris are represented as being “other forms” which are as rudderless and without hope as Étienne. When first seen they are close in spirit to those horrific homunculi, the “ash-gray men” described in Fitzgerald:

The chosen silhouette extracted itself from against the wall of a great and intolerable massive structure, an oppressed appearing edifice which was a bank. Once unstuck from the wall, the silhouette wavered, shoved by *other forms without visible individual behavior*, and was occupied in different ways, less by his own worries than by the collective worries of his thousands of neighbors. (emphasis added)

La silhouette indiquée se dégagea du mur d'une bâtisse immense et insupportable, un édifice qui paraissait un étouffement et qui était une banque. Détaché du mur, la silhouette oscilla bousculée par d'autres formes, sans comportement individuel visible, travaillée en sens divers, moins par ses inquiétudes propres que par l'ensemble des inquiétudes de ses milliers des voisins. (9)

This is a pointed satire with a definite underpinning in social and political issues. The allusions in Queneau's work have many times, however, been explained as a desire by the author to bring the notion of literary cachet into play.²⁰ To our interpretations of symmetrical patterns they would

counter by saying that, in fact, Taupé's blue door is nothing more than a humorous parody of Gatsby's green light, if that. The fact is that Gatsby lives in a palatial mansion that Fitzgerald describes room after room (88) whereas Étienne Marcel's house is described in this way: "The silhouette had a villa; it had had it built, or rather it had begun the construction, because the money was lacking and the second floor wasn't finished. The house gave the impression of a region struck by a catastrophe, which was no longer scarcely stylish" 'La silhouette possédait une villa ; elle l'avait fait construire, ou plutôt elle avait commencé à la faire construire ; car l'argent manqua et le premier étage resta inachevée. La villa avait un petit air région dévastée qui n'était plus guerre de mode' (12). This comical point-by-point contrast could be satirical, a dig at the American conception of the self-made man as epitomized by Gatsby with his enormous mansion. The contrast between the billboard sign of Dr T. J. Eckleburg and a supposed Mister Fries, in addition, allows us to fix the symbolic range of such descriptions as being beyond the realm of one-shot adolescent humor. Negative parody in *Le chiendent* results in a novel having a substantial weight of social satire that merits further consideration.

Contrastive Points of View

At the end of *Le chiendent* Etienne Marcel returns to Paris where he is found at the beginning of the novel under the form designated as a silhouette. Since the central character in *Le chiendent* becomes anonymous, this closure is contradictory. Defying the king of France at the head of a group of merchants, Étienne Marcel, an historical personage, briefly ruled Paris in 1358. His statue today graces the grounds of City Hall. As other characters point out, Etienne Marcel is also the name given to a street in Paris. At the end of the text the novel doesn't go back, in historical time, to Étienne Marcel of French history or return to his street in Paris. Étienne Marcel, in fact, is once again referred to as simply a silhouette. Neither does the novel go back, in space, to the suburb where the fictional Étienne Marcel lives in an unfinished house, that is, a metaphor for the unfinished fictional time. (The waste land exists in the fictional time side by side with other products of any symbolic language which eventually could contradict our interpretation of this closure.) Instead, the text goes back to a cos-

mic time found before the humorous and subversive parody of time and space in the novel.

So, too, in the social satire we can read of symmetric patterns that rely for their subversive content more on similitude rather than on comedy. One of these parallels is for the anti-hero to change into a hero given the possibility, in the Jazz Age novel, of the topos of a garden. In *Le chien-dent*, we have seen, to celebrate Ernestine's wedding an afternoon outing to the country takes place. The bus which transports them to this bucolic spot becomes the pretext for a personification which assumes epic dimensions by its use of a series of poetic devices:

. . . the bus which is transporting the wedding party *cleaves through the air*; its chassis vibrates with impatience; like a fiery horse transporting on its back a police captain who fears arriving for an evening versification class when it's over, so the powerful four wheeler carries the joyous wedding party towards its destiny [. . .] It accumulates one by one the hamlets along the route and *hops* over the ditches, the ruts and the gutters. [. . .] Snorting, it stops in front of its terminal; carried by its acquired speed, wasn't it going to *go beyond?* (emphasis added)

. . . l'autocar qui la [la noce] transporte fend l'air ; sa carrosserie trépide d'impatience ; tel un cheval fougueux transportant sur son dos un capitaine de gendarmerie qui craint d'arriver à l'école du soir quand le cours de versification sera terminé, ainsi le puissant quadricycle emporte la noce joyeuse vers son destin [. . .] Il égrène un à un les villages de la route et bondit par-dessus les fossés, les ornières et le caniveaux [. . .] Il stoppe en renâclant devant son terminus; emporté par sa vitesse acquise, n'allait-il pas le dépasser ? (253–55)

We find once again in Queneau's novel an oddly negative way to think of Fitzgerald, if his intention is just style. Because Fitzgerald has used a similar vision as a poetic device in describing the topos of gardens. Nick sees in Tom Buchanan's garden in *The Great Gatsby* the same personified movements that the semi-omniscient narrator of *Le chien-dent* sees before

a visit to the country, namely “run”, “jump”, “drifting up” : “The lawn started at the beach and *ran* towards the front door for a quarter of a mile, *jumping over* sundials and brick walks and burning gardens—finally when it reached the house *drifting up* the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run” (12; emphasis added).²¹

These passages are also odd for a parody because a contradiction of the style-based pastiche lies in Queneau’s use of rhetorical question mark at the end. Which audience could such a rhetorical gesture be addressed to? The style can be said to be used philosophically as a means to engender confusion. The audience to be confused by the pastiche is not composed of Fitzgerald’s readers but rather the anti-hero. Just as the romanticism in Fitzgerald’s description fits the state of mind of the narrator, Nick Carraway, the confusion in *Le chiendent* is done exactly in the state of mind of the main characters who then briefly appear to be comic (and thus also tragic). What’s more, if we consider Tom Buchanan’s garden as a possible topos of a Jazz Age novel, beginning by this representation of the wedding party but our search is rewarded by a long list of such comic situations in Queneau. In fact, the garden is woven into the fabric of the novel itself, at the level of its style and conception. Characters change their focus, leaving one part of a triad consisting of city, suburb, garden for another, just as they make the daily trip from suburb to city and back again on the commuter train, for instance.²²

The central characters and the story yield a cosmic as opposed to humanistic vision of the world although, of course, Jazz Age novels tend to differ stylistically. The representation of the suburb as a middle world in *The Great Gatsby* and *Le chiendent* completes the triadic representation of the whole. Queneau’s style is often that of a pamphleteer.²³ Queneau, however, is ready to argue even from universals which are ersatz as a justification of a particular course of action. The bucolic spot which awaits Ernestine’s wedding guests is depicted this way.

That’s right, we had a great laugh in the country. The new arrivals still seemed red and out of breath. We’d danced to the mechanical piano, drunk white wine and lemonade, gathered little wildflowers, toured in small boats, done somersaults, sung old refrains and new couplets in chorus. Mme Cloche had almost capsized a boat

and Florette had almost been bitten by a dog. Mister Pic'd imitated a cow mooing and Thémistocle a belly dance. And when with the sun going down we'd felt hungry, we'd climbed back into the bus, full of joy. That's right! What a beautiful day it was.

Vrai, ce qu'on a rigolé à la campagne. Les arrivants en paraissent encore tout rouges et tout essoufflés. On dansa au son d'un piano mécanique, on but du vin blanc et de la limonade, on cueillit des petites fleurs des champs, on se promena en barque, on joua au tonneau, on chanta en chœur des refrains anciens et des couplets nouveaux. Mme Cloche faillit chavirer une barque et Florette faillit se faire mordre par un chien. Messieu Pic imita le meuglement de la vache et Thémistocle la danse du ventre. Et lorsque avec le soleil déclinant on se sentit l'estomac vide, on regrimpa dans le car, toute joie bue. Vrai! Quelle belle journée ça avait été. (259)

The French "on", equivalent of the infrequently used English pronoun "one", is really the unidentified voice of a pan-culturally oriented Everyman who partially functions here in the place of an omniscient narrator. Queneau, in addition, often uses the present verb form, which is associated with generalizations.²⁴ In *The Great Gatsby* the representations of Tom's gardens, in the back of his house and at the front, are perhaps how Nick Carraway sees things, that is, through the eyes of an Italian Renaissance ideal of the garden: "Turning me around by one arm, he [Tom] moved a broad flat hand along the front vista, including in its sweep a sunken Italian garden, a half acre of deep, pungent roses, and a snub-nosed motorboat that bumped the tide offshore" (13). So Nick's desires, as embodied in this type of ideal, serve as an unreal stage set for the action of the story. This is because Nick's perceptions here as elsewhere can be regarded as merely a mental representation of other things.

This style is the equivalent of a philosophical representation. The characters' mental image is drawn from the creative process in which, as well as designating the topos of the garden as the setting of the novel, is also, by metonymy, a bucolic setting that constitutes an ideal of the work of art. Through a style that focuses on one part of the triad in the mind of the

character at a time, the representation, moreover, establishes a limit of clarity for a Jazz Age novel. The characters must confront a potential transgression. The mysterious sense of guilt has made of him or her the anti-hero of the popular crime novel. The Jazz Age novel never focuses totally on this tragic homicide. After the mysterious death of Ernestine, for instance, the novel *Le Chiendent* only partially becomes a crime novel. The text reenacts Ernestine's death ("Ernestine, disparue," 361) by repeatedly affirming the disappearance of characters ("Alberte disparut," 407). This destiny is a slight interpolation of names that Proust highlighted in the title of his novel *Albertine disparue*. For a reason connected to the creative process though, the situation of the anti-hero here, as in a Jazz Age novel in general, is that he or she can only glimpse the garden on the horizon of the suburb, which thus risks to appear ersatz. The situation of the man or woman character seems antithetic since he or she only unconsciously senses this *lieu* exists in the time of the novel. In our hypothesis, this idea of a limited reading is a rule of the genre.²⁵ It's an axiomatic proposition that makes it possible to interpret the death of Ernestine as a sort of limit of clarity each time that her death is invoked by a pastiche of a crime novel. Finally the topos of the garden as an ideal of the work of art seems also to typify the genre, a mysterious limit which can only be abrogated through a transgression.

Imaginary Gardens

So, revolving around a bucolic *lieu* or garden, this specific topos of place and time is comparable to different perspectives on the garden of Eden. The central character does not dwell there. Instead, the central character in *The Great Gatsby* and *Le chiendent* lives in the suburb of a large city. The garden rests on the horizon of their experience. The suburb is a middle world, alternatively seen as a substitute of the garden, or the city where the characters both work. Readers are asked to examine one after the other as the focalization changes. How this topos of the lost garden of Eden functions is made clearer by a study of the language of flowers.

It is not new to point out that characters in *Le chiendent* are often designated after the names of flowers.²⁶ Many examples come to mind. A wedding guest is named Camélia. Sensitif, name of a minor character, bears a name that is a slight spelling modification of the name of several

mimosas. The French word “cloche,” as in Mme Cloche, can indicate the flowering portion of a plant. There is, nevertheless, also a certain symbolic or metaphysical use of proper names in the novel which further complicates the language of flowers. When two characters steal the blue door they take it to Sophie Issis’ place to look for the treasure. Their crime yields no real treasure, as we have seen, but while there Narcisse guiltily notices that Sophie walks around only half-dressed. Later, in his recollections, its representation turns into an obsession: “At that moment, in his memory, Narcense perceived a naked breast very close. He was bowled over.” ‘Narcense aperçut alors tout près, dans son souvenir, un sein nu. Il en fut bouleversé’ (380). This nurture image, an emblem typical of fertility, is an elevation of the crime novel to poetic height, just as the dead queens in Faulkner, and the long epilogue of Nick Carraway, in which he talks of “the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world” (171), is as well the transcendent metamorphosis of the chest wound seen in connection with Myrtle Wilson’s death in a car accident. The name Isis, in addition, also designates the goddess of nature in Egyptian mythology. In this symbolic use of language we thus have a type of equality that works according to a syntagmatic association²⁷ of nature with the image of fertility, which together form the ideal of the world as a garden of Eden.²⁸ The central character in *The Great Gatsby* is also an anti-hero, who, however, wants to believe, if only briefly, in an impossible reality, a dream seen through the figurative language of flowers. This language is associated here with the color green. Gatsby says:

‘You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock.’

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (90)

The vision of the world as language collapses little by little as the imagination of the character meets a limit of clear thinking. There are phenomenological brakes on the seemingly unlimited metaphysical world epitomized by the language of flowers.

Parts of the names of two characters in *Le chiendent* also form two distinct nouns. When combined differently Potice and Narcense produce the common names *potence* and *narcisse*. Narcissus is of course the name of a flower. Most readers of *The Great Gatsby* know intuitively that the names of characters such as Daisy and Myrtle allow Fitzgerald to derive an additional layer of complexity from proper names. But Fitzgerald's metaphysics lies in the introduction of a character, significantly named Rosy, whose death is a precursor to the destruction of the vision of Eden composing Gatsby's ideal of the world. "'The old Metropole,' brooded Mr. Wolfshiem gloomily. 'Filled with faces dead and gone. Filled with friends gone now forever. I can't forget so long as I live the night they shot Rosy Rosenthal there'" (68).

It is not just that the account of Rosy's death anticipates Gatsby's. It also expresses a limit. Wolfshiem's tone, his voice resemble Nicks's after Gatsby's death as well. The language of flowers somehow evokes the novel in its own limits. In the same way in *Le chiendent* Potice is run over by a bus (41), and Narcense will be executed by a firing squad (412) though, ironically, Queneau does not have him hung from the gallows, *potence*. On a figurative level, Ernestine's sentimental recollection, when daydreaming back to the bucolic scene in the country, is a naive and sentimental "blue funk" or, literally, blue flower²⁹ "fleur bleue" (261). Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby* observes that, after Gatsby's death, "Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower" (165). This has a double meaning. Because the spoken language accepts a popular form of rhetoric as satirical, Nick's observation wavers between tragedy and melodramatic pathos. The following passage is a good example of drama that has the added level of a destructive topos. This additional layer of meaning is created by the anticipatory symbolic presence of dead flowers.

He broke off and began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and *crushed flowers*.
'I wouldn't ask too much of her,' I ventured. 'You can't repeat the past.'

‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’

He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. (106 emphasis added)

This poetic rendering of an ideal through the manipulation apparent in this language places the story, therefore, on a fantastic footing. Because of the presence of flowers in the scene the reader knows that the narrator sees this, his story, as a way of “repeating the past.”³⁰ This idea coincides with the fact that Queneau in *Le chiendent* performs a speech act in returning characters and reader back to the first sentence of the novel. Here Gatsby is not ignoring the fact that the flowers are crushed, he is insisting that it is possible to have them restored to their ideal state. The intention of a speech act becomes explicit later when Gatsby insists that Daisy tell Tom that she never loved him: “He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ *After she had obliterated four years with that sentence* they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken” (105–6 emphasis added).

After the Fall

Readers don’t need to resolve how Daisy, Myrtle³¹ or Mme. Cloche can be represented as flowers because we agree to believe, at least temporarily, the genre which chooses to use such a symbolic language. For instance, Faulkner’s novel *Sanctuary* ends with Temple being thrust into playing the role of a Persephone, or simply a season in the cosmic order of things. Temple and Popeye are thus doomed eternally, at least in her imagination, just as the couple composed of Persephone and Pluto. Transformed by death Nick sees “it,” Gatsby, as a cosmic presence: “The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water” (154). This is our reading of the image of the swimming pool where Gatsby’s body is found adrift outlining, in blood, a spiral that resemble the transit of heavenly bodies over time.

Nevertheless, if the anti-hero is to be transformed by the work of art, a garden setting for heroic action is necessary. Fitzgerald uses narrative technique to bolster the plausibility of reading his central character as an

Agrarian ideal of the pioneer West.³² It is a nostalgic Nick Carraway who returns to the site of the original garden, “the rolling hills of the republic” (171), with the hope one day to “run faster, stretch out our arms further” (172). Fitzgerald briefly parodies this technique too when he describes Doctor T. J. Eckleburg as a “wild wag” (26) and has the doctor’s billboard and Tom Buchanan supposedly “exchanging a frown” (29). Despite the disappearance of the omniscient narrator, thanks to the West a Jazz Age novel can thus intimate the realization of its Agrarian ideal.

A paradoxical stance informs, on the other hand, the closure of *Le chiendent*. There is less hope about the past since Mme Cloche proclaims herself to be the weather/time that “floods empires and dampens republics” ‘inonde les empires et qui humecte les républiques’ (427).³³ The creative choice to return to the time of the cosmos before the novel was written underlines the futility of writing novels. Queneau seems to agree in part with Breton here, but Queneau also seems to have understood the existential sensibility of Jazz Age characters, such as Gatsby and Temple, who are characters onto whom the reader can project different temporal aspects of the symbolic.³⁴ (This is what we were thinking of when we said earlier that, although the motivation of the characters is sometimes meant to be shrouded in uncertainty, elliptical, readers tend, even so, to feel a strong conviction about them.) When the character called Étienne Marcel, instead of going home to the suburb, returns to the beginning of the novel he is seen again as an urban silhouette. Pierre Le Grand is again a mask observing an anonymous silhouette that moves in a crowd while seated at a Paris café. So their historic identity, once associated by the novel with humanistic civilization, is lost. Naturally the sensual language of flowers evaporates at the same time. As we have seen in the case of a disillusioned Temple the advent of cosmic order leaves the humanistic order behind. Mme Cloche, Étienne Marcel and the others also return to a third, alternative place. In the Jazz Age novel a triad of city, suburb, garden thus combines topoi of the humanistic and the cosmic to create its temporary vision of the world. The Jazz Age novel stops short of focalizing our view exclusively on an imaginary garden or, in the case of *Le chiendent*, returns from the brink.

Our postulations concerning this new genre are also confirmed by the history of the novel. In an article that outlines the novel’s reception, Jauss

points to differences between the history of the epic and the history of the novel. The identification with a hero is more crucial for the audience of the epic, for instance, than to the audience of the novel. Jauss notes how aesthetic history makes a choice of heroes among the characters in all the novels produced. In order for the novel to have remained relevant to its audience the existence of each anti-hero must potentially correspond to that of a hero. We have seen that, in the case of a Jazz Age novel, a potential anti-hero with a destructive topos, exists side by side with a would-be hero. The topos of a garden of Eden represents a new departure from the theme of a humanistic civilization. It signals the search for an Agrarian ideal via a rhetoric which aspires to an artistic language capable of coalescing the mental image of all the characters. Through the Agrarian ideal a heroic figure can bridge, in a sense, a cognitive gap between the inner self and the homicidal anti-hero. As the perennial popularity of these novels demonstrates, the axiomatic propositions of the genre were recognized by audiences aware of the importance of these contradictory creative and destructive inclinations.

Notes

I wish to thank Shirley Thomas for her many helpful comments and suggestions.

1. Queneau (1987) reports that a copy of the novel *Sanctuary* by William Faulkner accompanied him during an important voyage. It is possible that he was, in effect, reading this novel while writing *Le chiendent*. Our argument isn't historical, but it is important to note the fact that Queneau was interested in the newly published, and as yet not translated novel, in English and that, consequently, when Queneau writes that he was reading *Sanctuary*, we have to include the possibility of a misreading.
2. qtd. in Cain *Postman* on the book cover. We are still searching for the original source. See Camus (1965) on the American novel in *L'homme révolté*. There Camus uses the expression "le roman 'dur'" (669), hard-boiled novel. Camus does not mention Cain specifically in *L'homme révolté*.
3. Roland Barthes (1970), in his analysis of *L'étranger*, says the images of the sun develop the theatrical unity of the novel, as in an ancient Greek tragedy.
4. One of the tenets of the Jazz Age novel will be the intention to shock its audience. Both Hemingway and Camus use the maternal figure as a means to do this.

Hemingway has his disillusioned central character in “Soldier’s Home” deny the sway of maternal affection for instance. Similarly, when Meursault in *L’étranger* shows the rest of the world only a stoic indifference towards the death of his mother and that of his victim, both these attitudes are used to convict and sentence him to the death penalty. The story underlines how a society can persuade itself that it is just even as it kills for unjust reasons. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice* the narrator becomes convinced of his own guilt, and agrees to a plan that results in the death of his accomplice as well as himself in a suicide pact. In the essay quoted above, “A propos de *Le bruit et la fureur*. La temporalité chez Faulkner,” which was first published in July 1939, Sartre (1975) writes from a point of view of another generation (cf. Sartre 1985). After World War II, a French writer, Boris Vian, produced several spoofs of the hard-boiled crime novel, published under the pseudonym Vernon Sullivan.

5. All translations are mine.
6. See, for example, Berman (15) and Nash.
7. See Simonnet (1961).
8. For the French, clover can be associated with good luck, i.e. a four-leaf clover, or slang usage for money, as in English. However, as is often found in Faulkner and Fitzgerald, in this passage the presence of a word such as “incarnate” becomes a symbolic evocation that points in the direction of anagogy. See Eco on the term symbolic used this way.
9. The novel thus contains two essential ingredients of the hard-boiled crime novel, namely a possible homicide and a study of greed.
10. Faulkner’s text ends in allegory, Fitzgerald’s (or Nick’s) in nostalgia and Queneau’s uses a speech act.
11. Breton’s caustic comment is based on his own practices according to the several indications furnished by Bonnet (Breton 1988 1226). Furthermore, in the opening piece from *Les pas perdus* Breton describes himself as having an “anti-establishment mind” ‘esprit frondeur’ (Breton 1988 194), where “mocking” and “scoffing” could be used here as synonyms for *frondeur*. The piece we are quoting, “La confession dédaigneuse,” is in fact an exercise where the 27-year-old Breton can try out, in print, attitudes towards literature and art which were both subversive and humorous. This is the reason, at least according to Bonnet (1219), *Les pas perdus* can be said to signal a complete break with the Dada movement. This, in turn, will stimulate Breton to produce the first Surrealist manifesto the same year.

12. Writing on the occasion of the publication of a version of *The Great Gatsby* entitled *Trimalchio*, Pierpont claims that “Fitzgerald’s incisiveness isn’t every reader’s ideal, since it leaves out many things—psychology, detail, the messiness of life—yet it makes for tautness of line and a verbal iridescence that few techniques can match” (79).

13. At one point in *Le chiendent* Queneau makes an allusion to Gide’s novel *Les faux monnayeurs*. This novel is certainly a precursor since Gide’s story also recounts the aftermath of a transgression. This “crime” exists as well only in the interior universe created by the mind of his character. Queneau’s specific allusion to Gide, nevertheless, concerns a character different from the central ones that we are considering.

14. During the novel, most of Gatsby’s actions depict him as an especially well-dressed 1920s urban criminal. David E. Ruth, who points out the similarities between his subject, the image of the criminal as created in the media in the 1920s, and the fictional character of Gatsby, doesn’t go into the numerous contradictions inherent in his reading of Gatsby as the product of a predominantly urban culture (85–6). Comparing different contemporary views of the criminal, Ruth claims, on the contrary, “Subtler hints of racial determinism would persist in moralistic accounts of Italian and Jewish gangsters in the late twenties and early thirties. Casting lawbreakers as members of minority ethnic groups remained a powerful cultural tool for exposing the perils of urban diversity. This use of the criminal is unsurprising among a native-born population only beginning to shed its xenophobia about ethnically different whites” (28–9). Ruth then goes on to explore the often factually ambiguous frameworks for these criminals, frameworks which were invented by the media in order to portray the new 1920s mentality and lifestyle. In my opinion this historic tendency classifies the fictional Gatsby not only as a criminal but also as one of a series of cultural icons, both real and fictional, who have been made more palatable, at least in the eyes of public and the media. Ruth’s observations can thus explain the anomie which I feel surrounds the Gatsby character, as well as the ambiguous nature of the Fitzgerald hero.

15. Equally, elsewhere, of Tom Buchanan, in a passage surprisingly reminiscent of Faulkner: “Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season [. . .] And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force [. . .] That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan” (144).

16. Emphasis added for the passage beginning “ A dim shape. . . .”

17. In “Errata” Queneau (1987) plays down the influence of Descartes’ “Discours sur de la Méthode” on his first novel, however.

18. One reason for including Faulkner's *Sanctuary* in this grouping is the attention Fitzgerald apparently paid to crime stories in the press. In *The Great Gatsby* in fact he transposes some real life incidents concerning criminals as can be noted when he reports remembering "the time my wife was arrested on [the] Queensborough Bridge on the suspicion of being the 'Bob-haired Bandit'" (1963a 330). In the novel, Gatsby is stopped by a "frantic" policemen just before he and Nick drive over this same bridge (66–7).
19. Just as the name Étienne Marcel the name of this character can also be considered an historical allusion— to Peter the Great of Russia.
20. Godard provides an outline of different positions taken by Queneau's critics such as Calame (1981) and Simmonet (1978). Jean-Yves Pouilloux (1991) summarizes well the relative difficulty of justifying this approach to reading Queneau's texts: "Most of the echoes that we have found are part of the commonplace expressions of classically-based literary culture [. . .] They have the style of a summary destined for high school students" 'La plupart des échos que nous avons repérés font partie des "lieux communs" d'une culture littéraire classique[. . .] Ils ont l'allure de résumé à l'usage des classes secondaires' (108). Pouilloux, however, does admit that "these borrowings might not be due to hazard, but systematic and systematically organized, programmed" 'ces emprunts soient non aléatoires, mais systématiques, et systématiquement organisés, programmés' (94). Pouilloux compares this situation to Georges Perec's novel, *La vie, mode d'emploi*, which is dedicated to Raymond Queneau (95). Queneau and Perec were both members of OULIPO, an association of writers founded in 1960.
21. Berman (11n6) points out the fact that the lawn jumps over a timepiece in this passage. However, Fitzgerald's use of a plural here ("sundials") allows the reader to suppose that the description of the garden contains a rhetorical model or plan, as well as a pictorial image.
22. Concerning a truly comprehensive reading of the novel, we think that the central feature of Ernestine's "vision of the world" (quoted above and below) has essentially been overlooked, even by Berry (1991).
23. Angenot (1982) compares the logic of pamphleteers to the philosophical use of enthymemes because of the presence of a liberal dose of implicit reasoning where "whatever is the essential is left unsaid." 'l'essentiel est ce qui n'est pas dit' (173). Through the use of these "shortened" or telegraphic syllogisms the pamphleteer is seeking after universals which Angenot can trace back to the Aristotelian idea of topics, i.e. arguments that rely to a large extent on probability in their reasoning.

24. Queneau's prose is dark comedy, especially in the novel *Le chiendent*. This style of representation can compare to Watteau's painting, *Pierrot*, depicting different members of a theatrical troupe in a bucolic setting during the 1700s. In the painting some of the members of the troupe are deliberately made to appear to be more naive than the others. The fact that Queneau's characters display certain comic attributes that they have inherited from characters or situations in other novels constitutes a philosophical attitude toward the technique of the novelist. This parodying exploitation was immediately seized upon by readers. After evoking the possibility of a "crime novel" in another Queneau novel, *Pierrot mon ami*, Camus (1942) then describes it as a crime novel "where nothing is explained" 'un roman policier où rien n'est expliqué'. Camus is reminded of James Ensor's painting, *Christ Entering Brussels*, where masquerade is integrated into the composition.
25. Queneau (1965) noted about Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* that "any question of origins loses itself in the bizarre galaxies" 'toute question d'origines se perd vers d'étranges nebuleuses' (133).
26. Calame also studied the relationship, in Queneau's novel *Les fleurs bleues*, between flowers and language, on the one hand, and between language and rhetoric, on the other.
27. The choice of proper names seems especially symbolic, and poetic. See Barthes (1964) for the terms symbolic, paradigmatic and syntagmatic.
28. This nurture image is repeated and made more explicit elsewhere where it is once again Nick who describes how Gatsby might "suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder" (107).
29. A possible allusion to Novalis' novel *Henry von Ofterdingen* has often been remarked.
30. Flowers form a paradigm when used in this way. The language of flowers is, of course, a central motif of certain episodes in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1913), the first novel in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. This novel, translated into English in 1922 as *Swann's Way*, could have provided a common source for both Fitzgerald's and Queneau's use of a language of flowers.
31. Myrtle is actually the name of a flowering shrub.
32. In a letter from 1934 Fitzgerald (1966) described exactly how he first saw Gatsby: "He was perhaps created on the image of some forgotten farm type of Minnesota that I have known and forgotten, and associated at the same moment with some sense of romance" (529). Fitzgerald's difficulty in creating the character of Gatsby,

nevertheless, leads him to produce some curious observations, which are, of course, credited to Nick Carraway, although they are due to a “sense of romance”. One example of Nick’s curious comments concerns the West: “I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom, and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners . . .” (167). This is curious since they come from the region of the Midwest. On this point, Henry Nash Smith in his study of the Agrarian ideal finds it useful to quote Hamlin Garland when he wrote, albeit in 1892, that “All of the associations called up by the spoken word, the West, were fabulous, mythic, hopeful . . .” (288). So Nick’s “West” is, in fact, the American frontier.

33. Notice the use of the plural form, “republics.”
34. The garden in *The Great Gatsby* and the idyllic country scenery in *Le chiendent* are metaphors or metaphoric images. Along with a second chain of metaphors, the images of flowers, the images of the garden form a paradigm that speaks to us about the association of Eden with an almost Biblical story of primal transgression.

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