BORIS VIAN: (non) CONFORMIST
The translation of two collections of short stories in a theoretical context

PART A

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Statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signature: ...........................  Date: .................................
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Part A Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Table of contents 1

Abbreviations of short stories 4

Preface 5

Introduction 7

0.1. Preliminary Linguistic Theory 10
0.2. The Translation Model 15
0.3. The Commission 17
0.4. Text Choice and Edition 19

Chapter One. Researching the Author: link to translation 22

1.1. Vian in a Socio-historical Context 24
1.2. Autobiographical Detail in the Texts 27
1.2.1. Characters 27
1.2.2. Backdrop 32
1.2.3. Pursuits 34
1.3. Authorial Stance 39
1.3.1. Aspects of Non-conformity 39
1.3.2. Manifestation in the Text 44
1.4. Beyond Biography 48

Chapter Two. Determining a Translation Strategy 52

2.1. Theoretical Considerations 54
2.1.1. Skopos Theory 55
2.1.2. Polysystems 56
2.1.3. Translational Action 59
2.1.4. Translation-oriented Text Analysis 60
2.1.5. External Factors 63
2.2. Comparative Translation and Critique 65
  2.2.1. “Re-creation of a Recreation” 65
  2.2.2. L’Écriture vianesque: traduction de la prose 68

2.3. Boris Vian: translator 72
  2.3.1. Vian on Vian 73

Chapter Three. Translation Issues: lexical 79

3.1. Proper Nouns 80
3.2. Neologisms 93
  3.2.1. Derivation from French “Phonetic Spelling” 93
  3.2.2. English Words “Frenchified” 95
  3.2.3. Derivation from a Semi-recognisable French Word 96
  3.2.4. Portmanteau Words 101
  3.2.5. Neologisms Based on Liaison 103
  3.2.6. Vocalic Suffix Addition 105
3.3. Word Plays 106
  3.3.1. Based on Initialisms and Acronyms 106
  3.3.2. Based on Homophony 108
  3.3.3. Based on Polysemy 110

Chapter Four. Translation Issues: syntax 116

4.1. Conformity in Vian’s Syntax 117
4.2. Shift 124
  4.2.1. Grammatical Shift 125
  4.2.2. Positional Shift 128
4.3. Syntax, Shift and Semantics 134

Chapter Five. Other Translation Issues 150

5.1. Phrasal Manipulation 150
  5.1.1. Modified Expressions 150
  5.1.2. Disguised Expressions 154
  5.1.3. Hidden References 155
5.1.4. Abridged Verbal Constructions 157

5.2. Stylistic Features 159
   5.2.1. Register 159
   5.2.2. Repetition 165
   5.2.3. Poetics 168

5.3. General Features 170
   5.3.1. Grammatical and Cultural Differences 170
   5.3.2. Compulsory Rewording 175
   5.3.3. Miscellaneous 176

Conclusion 182

Bibliography 197

1. Relating to Boris Vian 197
   Works signed Boris Vian 197
   Works signed Vernon Sullivan 197
   Translations by Boris Vian 198
   Translations of Boris Vian 199
   Books on Boris Vian 200
   Articles 201
   Websites 203
   Miscellaneous Material 203

2. Relating to translation theory, literary translation and grammar 203
   Books and journals 203
   Articles 207
   Websites 213

3. Miscellaneous 213
   Books, magazines and other material 213
   Unsigned articles from websites 215
   Other websites 216
Abbreviations of short story titles in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*

**In *Le Loup-garou***

“Le Loup-garou” (“LG”)
“Un Cœur d’or” (“Cœur”)
“Les Remparts du sud” (“Remparts”)  
“L’Amour est aveugle” (“Amour”)  
“Martin m’a téléphoné . . .” (“Martin”)  
“Marseille commençait à s’éveiller” (“Marseille”)  
“Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” (“Chiens”)  
“Les Pas vernis” (“Pas”)  
“Une Pénible histoire” (“Pénible”)  
“Le Penseur” (“Penseur”)  
“Surprise-partie chez Léobille” (“Léobille”)  
“Le Voyeur” (“Voyeur”)  
“Le Danger des classiques” (“Danger”)  

**In *Le Ratichon baigneur***

“Un Métier de chien” (“Métier”)  
“Divertissements culturels” (“Divertissements”)  
“Une Grande vedette” (“Vedette”)  
“Le Ratichon baigneur” (“RB”)  
“Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” (“Méfie”)  
“Francfort sous-la-Main” (“Francfort”)  
“Un Test” (“Test”)  
“Les Filles d’avril” (“Filles”)  
“L’Assassin” (“Assassin”)  
“Un Drôle de sport” (“Drôle”)  
“Le Motif” (“Motif”)  
“Marthe et Jean” (“M&J”)  
“La Valse” (“Valse”)  
“Maternité” (“Maternité”)  
“L’Impuissant” (“Impuissant”)
Preface

Vian studies as an area of academic research did not begin to flourish until the 1970s mainly because up until then his work was considered to be relatively minor, verging on marginal, more worthy of study at high school than at university. The following data based on academic articles, papers and theses from national and international contributors retrieved from the archives of the Vian Fond’action in Paris, shows that interest in Vian research tends to be cyclical in nature. Between 1960 and 1969, there were eleven contributions; between 1970 and 1979, there were forty-five; between 1980 and 1989, there were twenty-three; between 1990 and 1999, there were thirty-one; and between 2000 and 2009, the Fond’action added a further seventeen university contributions to its database. Most of these 127 works deal with thematic and stylistic issues, and seem intent on bringing a greater level of understanding to the man and his work through systematic analysis, which could be seen as an attempt to “normalise” and force into a mould a man who is not very often described as “normal” or “conformist”. In response to this endeavour, Yaguello says of Vian that he would be happy knowing that he had been spared the sight of his work under scrutiny by the universities.

Until now, only a very small amount of research has been undertaken in relation to Vian and translation. Within the archives of the Fond’action, only one piece specifically deals with this issue - *L’Écriture vianesque: traduction de la prose* by Magdalena Mitura, written in 2006 from the University of Krakow, which is a comparison of two Polish translations of *L’Herbe rouge* and of *L’Écume des jours*. Outside of the Fond’action, other contributions include a chapter in Marc Lapprand’s *La Vie contre*; a comparative study of two English translations of *L’Écume des jours*, entitled “Re-creation of a Recreation” by Sophie de Nodrest; Eva Donahoe from the University of Dublin has also worked on translation difficulties in *L’Écume des jours*; and Maria Freij has completed work on the collection of poems entitled *Je voudrais*

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2 http://www.borisvian.org/fondation_05_travauxuniversitaires.php as at March 2011.
3 M. Yaguello, ”Linguiste malgré lui?”, *L’Arc 90*, 1984, p.29.
This work should therefore add substantially to the Vian canon, filling gaps in the translation of the short stories into English, as well as suggesting guidelines for the future translation of the extensive number of Vian texts, while at the same time increasing interest in the work and life of Vian in the English-speaking world. Taking advantage of existing translation theory, standard translation procedures and debate, and applying them appropriately to Boris Vian, someone whose life and work has essentially been defined as non-conformist, is the primary ambition of this thesis.

Another area to which the thesis aims to contribute is outlined by Snell-Hornby who supports the view of other recognised scholars that translation studies should develop its own model and conventions. She expands further on this because she also considers that linguistics and literature can be studied in terms of translation. Niranjana adds that literary theory and criticism, historiography, philosophy and French discourse analysis can also be discussed in terms of translation, while Harvey links translation to the study of homosexual culture, which is not without significance here because a number of stories reveal Vian’s attitude, albeit often satirically and ironically, to both male and female homosexuality, which some might consider to be era-specific. Therefore, by the very nature of the stylistic and thematic content of the stories, they may open up a broad-based discussion on a wide range of other disciplines, including comparative literature, cultural studies, modern languages, linguistics, translation theory, literary theory and criticism, and possibly media and gender studies, as well as providing a model that may be adapted to other forms of literary translation.


Introduction

He was always aware of his latent conformity because sooner or later all non-conformity is bound to fall.

Marc Lapprand, *La Vie contre*

There has been a great deal of discussion based on conformity and non-conformity issues in the life and work of Boris Vian by contemporaries and critics, both during his lifetime and the years since his death in 1959. Much of the content of this debate is readily available in various forums and will be revealed accordingly in the following chapters. Conformity and non-conformity in relation to the translation of Vian’s prose centre around how to render into another language the difficulties associated with the vast array of stylistic features that are not usually represented in their totality in the work of any one author. In fact, it is quite possible that Vian’s work may encompass translation issues contained in the combined works of many authors, and perhaps even some issues that have not yet been encountered. Roulmann has described Vian as an anarchist in writing, noting that he is so creative that you are hard-pressed to classify him.¹ Nevertheless, Yaguello has tried to impose some sort of order on his work: Vian’s word plays have been itemised and classified for a long time; neologisms, the use of polysemy and homophony, syntactical ambiguity, metaphors.²

Prior to this, an attempt had been made to undertake a systematic study of Vian’s literary language using the terms of the Liège School of “rhétorique générale”,³ a system in which linguistic operations were considered in five categories: *Métagraphes* – alteration at the level of spelling, which impacts on acronyms, foreign expressions and syntagmas; *Métaplasmes* – alteration at the level of morphology, which is found in allophones, phonemes, morphemes, lexemes and syntagmas; *Métataxes* – alteration at the syntactic level, which is found in archaic poetry or in anglicised or popular syntax; *Métasémèmes* - alteration at the semantic level.

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level, in metaphors and similes; and *Métalogismes* – alteration at the level of logic and referentiality. Therefore, some stylistic features of his work have already been identified.

While both of these attempts at classification are certainly relevant in the identification of potential translation issues, in the context of this thesis it has been considered more practical to design an alternative system of problem identification, incorporating features of the above that have been systematically identified in relation to the translation of *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur* collections. While certain aspects of Vian’s prose are able to be discussed in terms of standard French into English translation procedures, thereby taking into account the approaches suggested by Vinay and Darbelnet, there are three distinct problematic levels that have been identified and that are open for exploration.

The first of these relates to difficulties uncovered on the lexical level, primarily in relation to proper nouns, neologisms and word plays. There is the question of how to translate the presupposition contained in the proper nouns derived from the biographical detail of the author, as well as how to translate those proper nouns formed through the creation of acronyms, spoonerisms, phonic repetition and phonetic representation. The names of culturally bound institutions and proper nouns coined to describe physicality and personality traits of the bearer also require a great deal of reflection and creativity, as do neologisms and word plays based on vocalic suffix addition, semi-recognisable and portmanteau words, homophony, polysemy, acronyms and liaison.

On the phrase and sentence level, modified expressions, disguised expressions, hidden references and abridged verbal constructions have been identified as problem areas, as has the translation of grammatical and cultural differences. Quite often, these devices lead to a humour that has its roots firmly entrenched in a specific time and place, making cross-cultural transposition even more difficult. Apart from these issues, complex syntactical structures can sometimes cause the reader to question the original reading of the text, which, from a translation perspective, raises the question of whether the re-sequencing of phrases and sentences should be employed for the facilitation of comprehension.

On the textual level, facets of Vian’s own life are also inextricably linked to and woven into the text, making it almost impossible to separate the life of the author
from the motifs and themes in the stories under translation. This involves the following pragmatic fields: coherence, where the understanding of the world may be somewhat different for the source audience and the target audience; presupposition, previously mentioned on the word level, which assumes that the receiver has certain knowledge, and that a statement has to be true in order for something else to be true; and implicature, incorporating sociolinguistic factors that imply that the words alone may not be enough to convey the true meaning.5 These are all important features in rendering the meaning of a Vian text, so intense research is required in order to unearth authorial intent and aspects of the author’s life that need to be conveyed in translation. Register is another feature that impacts on the level of the text, because it affects translation choices with regard to the overall reception, while other decisions need to be made with intertextuality in mind.

An examination of these problems and proposed solutions will be made in the following five chapters. The first chapter will examine the need for the retention and understanding of biographical detail in relation to Vian and translation, which primarily covers textual level issues; the second chapter will explore proposed translation strategies for the *skopos* of recreating Vian in English; chapter three will deal with problems on the lexical level as outlined above; chapter four will try to unravel the complicated web of semantics and syntax; and in chapter five, an attempt will be made to solve phrase and sentence level difficulties. The conclusion will consist of a detailed source text and target text comparison in order to see how close the two texts are to each other and where, if at all, divergence may have occurred.

The expression “translating the untranslatable” has sometimes been applied to Vian’s texts. However, this raises the question of who determines and what defines the parameters of literary translation. This therefore provides the thesis with both an analytical and creative component. Boris Vian is an extraordinary author, and it is hoped to show that with an array of translation techniques found in existing theory and practices, a translated text can be produced that will respect the will of Boris Vian6 by replicating the original as if it had been written in English.

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5 M. Baker defines implicature as “what the speaker means or implies rather than what s/he says.” p.223.

0.1. Preliminary Linguistic Theory

During the course of this study, references will be made to the theoretical procedures being applied to the translation of Vian. Many of these theories are based in linguistics, and cultural and literary studies; they will be examined in detail as the study of the translation process unfolds. However, there is some linguistics-based theoretical referencing that needs to be contextualised beforehand in order to facilitate reception and to provide a backdrop to the process.

The linguistics approach to translation, which has dominated scholarship in this field for over 2000 years, can be traced from Cicero and Horace, through to Luther and Dryden, and even right up until the present day. The original debate centred on whether a translator should be faithful to the original text by adopting a “literal” (word-for-word) approach or whether a “free” (sense-for-sense) approach should be taken. One of the reasons for this was because of the possible repercussions of placing human interpretation on the word of God. Since the mid-1950s, the linguistics approach has branched out to include the key concepts of equivalence, shift, compensation, and discourse register analysis, as well as the somewhat less widely discussed Postcolonial Theory and Process-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). Many theorists have contributed to the development of a linguistics approach to translation, but the following have been singled out here for discussion, not only because of their influence, but also because they are representative of the trends of the time.

Robinson says that for some translators “the entire purpose of translation is achieving equivalence.” In this way, “[t]he target text must match the source text as fully as possible.” Linguistic equivalence is also the key issue for the Russian structuralist Jakobson who states that there are three types of translation: intralingual, which involves rewording or paraphrasing, summarising, expanding or commenting within a language; interlingual, which is the traditional concept of translation from source text to target text or the shifting of meaning from one language to another; and intersemiotic, the changing of a written text into a different form, such as art or

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dance. For Jakobson, meaning and equivalence are linked to the interlingual form of translation, which “involves two equivalent messages in two different codes.” He considers Saussure’s ideas of the arbitrariness of the signifier for the signified object or concept and how this equivalence can be transferred between different languages. The concept of a fence, for example, can be completely different for someone living in the suburbs to that of a prison inmate. He expands on Saussure’s work in that he considers that concepts may be transferred by rewording, without, however, attaining full equivalence. His theory is linked to grammatical and lexical differences between languages, as well as to the field of semantics.

Equivalence is also the preoccupation of the American Bible translator Nida who rejects the “free” versus “literal” debate in favour of formal and dynamic equivalence, a concept that shifts the emphasis to the target audience. The purpose was to make reading and understanding of the Bible easier for people who were unfamiliar with its content and format. Formal equivalence centres on the form and content of the message of the source text while dynamic equivalence, later termed functional equivalence, aims at complete naturalness of expression in the target text. He views Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar as a way of analysing the underlying structures of the source text in order to reconstruct them in the target text, so that a similar response between the target audience and target text and source audience and source text can be achieved. His linguistic theory moves towards the fields of semantics and pragmatics, which leads him to develop systems for the analysis of meaning. These include: hierarchical structures (superordinates and hyponyms), such as the hyponyms “brother” or “sister” and the superordinate “sibling” because in a cultural context it may not be possible to translate “sister”, so “sibling” may need to be used; componential analysis, which identifies characteristics of words that are somehow connected, such as “brother”, which, in some instances of Afro-American usage, to name but one example, does not necessarily refer to a male relation born of the same parents; and semantic structural differences where the connotative and denotative meanings of homonyms are identified, for example “bat” the animal and the piece of sporting equipment.

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9 Ibid., p.114.
The British translation theorist Newmark, influenced by the work of Nida, feels that the difference between the source language and the target language must always be a major problem, thus making total equivalence virtually impossible. He replaces the terms “formal equivalence” and “dynamic equivalence” with “semantic translation” and “communicative translation”, and because of his support for a literal approach, he alters the focus of the translation back to the source text.

Nida’s attempt at a scientific approach was important in Germany and influenced the work of Koller for whom equivalence “may be ‘denotative’, depending on similarities of register, dialect and style; ‘text-normative’, based on ‘usage norms’ for particular text types; and ‘pragmatic’, ensuring comprehensibility in the receiving culture.”\(^\text{10}\) Koller also works in the area of correspondence, a linguistics field dedicated to examining similarities and differences between two language systems. One example of this would be looking at the area of “false friends”, such as the French verb \textit{rester}, which does not mean “to rest” but “to remain.” Although discussion of equivalence has subsided, it still remains a topic that manages to attract attention from some of translation theory’s leading figures. Baker and Bassnett both acknowledge its importance while, at the same time, placing it in the context of cultural and other factors.

Vinay and Darbelnet compare the differences between English and French, and identify two translation techniques that resemble the literal and free methods. Direct (literal) translation discusses three possible strategies: word-for-word; calque, where the source language expression is literally transferred to the target language, such as the English compliment for an excellent meal “died and gone to heaven” being translated as \textit{mort et allé au paradis} instead of \textit{être au septième ciel}; and borrowing, where the source word is transferred directly into the target language, like \textit{kamikaze}. Oblique (free) translation covers four strategies: transposition, which involves the interchange of parts of speech without affecting the meaning, such as a noun phrase (\textit{après son départ}) for a verb phrase ("after he left"); modulation, or the reversal of point of view ("it isn’t expensive" / "it’s cheap"); equivalence, where the same meaning is conveyed in a different expression, which is most useful for proverbs and idioms (\textit{avoir une araignée au plafond} is recognisable in English as “to have bats in the belfry”); and adaptation, where cultural references might be included

to achieve register equivalence (‘it’s not cricket’ for *ce n’est pas juste*).\(^{11}\) Two other important features arise from the work of Vinay and Darbelnet. The first of these is the idea of “servitude”, which refers to the compulsory changes from source text to target text; and “option”, which refers to the personal choices the translator makes, such as the modulation example above. Option is an important element in translation because it allows for the subjective interpretation of the text, especially literary texts.

The theory of compensation can be considered to be an extension of the sense-for-sense approach to translation, and first appeared during the eighteenth century when theorists began to talk about recreating the spirit of the source text. Perhaps the first major work in the area of compensation can be credited to Schleiermacher in 1813 when he made the distinction between the two types of translators. There was the *Dolmetscher* who translated commercial texts, and the *Übersetzer* who worked on artistic texts. He introduced the notion of compensation, and defined its purpose as “compensating in one place with an imaginative word where elsewhere the translator has to make do with a hackneyed expression that cannot convey the impression of the foreign.”\(^{12}\) Other theorists have tried to offer a clearer definition of the concept of compensation, claiming that it can be viewed as “creative rewriting.”\(^{13}\) Munday advocates the use of compensation when it comes to translating the wordplays found in the Argentinian author Héctor Libertella’s short story *Nineve*. He says that “[w]hen such wordplays do not function in English, one possibility was to seek compensation at other points.”\(^{14}\) Levine, the translator of the Cuban author Cabrera Infante sometimes creates a completely different passage in translation to capture the idiosyncrasies that cannot be translated in the same position of the source text.\(^{15}\) The strategy of compensation has been more than welcomed by Steiner’s hermeneutic approach to translation. According to Steiner, compensation restores equity when there is an imbalance, embellishing the source text instead of detracting from it, and by Lewis who sees the need for the translator to compensate for loss in translation,

\(^{13}\) Notably the title of the September 2008 edition of *The Aalitra Review. A Journal of Literary Translation and Creative Rewriting*.
\(^{14}\) J. Munday, p.177.
which is a concept strongly argued against by Nord who only sees gain in translation.\textsuperscript{16} However, some consider it to be only an experimental strategy whose relevance lies in revealing the translator’s inability to solve specific linguistic and interpretative difficulties.\textsuperscript{17}

One of the proponents of discourse register analysis was Halliday, the Head of the Linguistics Department of Sydney University, whose work is based on Systemic Functional Grammar, which refers to the relationship between the language used by the author of a text and the social and cultural setting of the readership. Halliday says that the text type influences the register of the language, word choice and syntax. He also says that register can be divided into three variables: field, or the subject of the text; tenor, the author of the text and the intended reader; and mode, or the form of the text, all of which are important on the semantic level.

Baker takes advantage of Halliday’s work and raises a number of important issues in relation to the pragmatic fields of coherence, presupposition and implicature. She examines textual structure and function and how word forms may vary between languages, such as the substitution of the imperative for the infinitive in instruction manuals between English and French, and ways in which “ambiguous gender situations can be overcome, such as adjectival agreement in French.”\textsuperscript{18} Hatim and Mason combined to examine the application of sociolinguistic factors to translation. They look at the ways that non-verbal meaning can be transferred, such as the change from active to passive voice, which tends to shift or downplay the focus of the action. They also examine the way lexical choices are conveyed to the target culture, such as, the impact the sentence “Australia was discovered in 1770 by Captain Cook” might have on an Aboriginal audience.

Although primarily discussed in relation to the adaptation of literature from third world countries into the language of the coloniser, and vice versa, certain aspects of Postcolonial Theory can be discussed in relation to the linguistic process of translation. Spivak coined the word “translationese” to describe the flattening-out process that sometimes occurs when the source text language and structures are

modified so as to be more readily recognisable to target text readers. This was initially done in order to paint a picture of a culture that may have been so far removed from the target audience as to be unrecognisable. In a sense, this could be applied to almost any translation into English where the target audience is not specified in the commission. In order to reach the widest possible audience, the English employed may be somewhat generic in nature, having no predominance of American, British or Australian structures and vocabulary. Postcolonial theory also advocates the use of paratextual elements for target facilitation, such as a preface, footnotes, glossaries, and illustrations, all of which were widely employed during the colonial era to assist in the transfer of information between languages and cultures.19

Although psychology-based, the relatively new field of Process-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies is also linguistic in nature, as it compiles outcomes once translation decisions have been made. The results may be determined through the comparison of translation drafts and examination of annotated translations. Throughout the following chapters, the deconstruction of Vian’s short stories based on linguistic and translation difficulties, the subsequent proposals for rendering in English and the ultimate acceptance of one version over another will add substantially to research in this field.

0.2. The Translation Model

The work presented in this thesis will be structured and presented in the form of a translation model. This decision is based on Gideon Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), a systematic approach whose roots date back to the mid 1970s when a group of international scholars approached translation studies from the perspective of discussing practical case studies in terms of theoretical models. Their aim was to establish a new paradigm for the study of literary translation, which was “descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic”,20 and to determine the ‘norms’ that would lead to a general theory of translation. This work was in contrast to traditional work being carried out in the field of translation and, as such, is in keeping with the theme

of conformity versus non-conformity discussed herein. Toury believes that “descriptive studies are actually the best means of testing, refuting, and especially modifying and amending the underlying theory”, and sees description of specific methodology and research techniques as an inherent component of the discipline known as Translation Studies. Toury believes that once a descriptive model has been established, individual case studies can be carried out within its framework to ensure relevance and sustainability.

Other theoreticians support Toury. Bell claims that “advances in translation theory can only be achieved through a study of the process of translation and would take this suggestion further by declaring that what is required is a description of that process and an explanation of it.” This is supported by Bassnett and McGuire who say that we should “adopt a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach to our investigation of the process.” Bell also claims that what is required is a theory of translation “as both process and product”, and that “such a general theory is, presumably, the long-term goal for translation studies.” Bell receives much support from Lefevere and Van den Broeck who “stress the need for more descriptive studies” and from Lambert who was “one of the pioneers leading the effort to develop a model for better describing translations in a comprehensive fashion.” Lambert himself has said that “the importance of descriptive studies for translation theory has not been sufficiently recognised.” During the 1980s, the call for the advancement of descriptive studies received a further boost from Hermans and the Manipulation School.

This thesis will attempt to create a model for literary translation under the caveat that, again in the words of Bell, “[a] model, like all models, is an attempt at a description rather than an explanation.” The model will be based on existing

26 Ibid., p.103.
translation procedures, practices and considerations, in which each stage of the translation process is examined in detail. These stages have been determined to be: commission and text choice; researching the author and background material; determining a translation strategy; linguistic decisions based on the three levels of translation difficulties previously identified; and finally, source text / target text analysis. The first four stages describe the process, while the source text / target text analysis describes the product, thereby responding to Bell’s call. The relevant theoretical component will be incorporated into each stage of the procedure and will be applied appropriately to Vian’s short stories.

This study therefore is a journey, from inception to a potentially indeterminate end; it offers a coordinated and systematic approach, an integrated and holistic approach for considerations in translation that are not linguistics driven alone, which in turn may highlight the thought processes behind certain translation decisions. Theoretical schools of thought have largely been discussed in turn as translation studies evolves. This approach, however, incorporates sequential theory, from the beginning of the translation process right through until the end. So, for example, the linguistic approach to translation, the oldest of all schools of thought, appears in the fourth stage, while more recent developments appear both before and after the linguistic act. In this way, no particular school of thought is ignored or unduly favoured.

0.3. The Commission

According to Nord, the commission of any translation should provide a certain amount of background information about the source text as well as the expectations of the target text. This information may include the intended function of the text, the intended audience, and the reason for the translation, all of which should help the translator to formulate the appropriate translation strategy. With publishers exerting greater influence on translation in literary circles, and with economic considerations becoming increasingly important in most modern societies, Venuti’s examination of the power of the publishing industry network sees a shift-tendency in the commission,

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which may impact directly on the outcome of the final product. One such shift may lie with the literary agents who represent the interests of a range of authors. These agents may canvas potential target-language publishing houses, which then contact their preferred translators. In most instances, a formal contract detailing legal obligations, together with the requirements outlined by Nord, is put in place. Other information, such as the time and place of text reception and medium, both recommended by Nord, may also be included. With the publication houses acting as both commissioner and banker, Venuti’s concerns over their influence on determining translation strategies may be well justified.

However, the primary purpose of the translation that furnishes the corpus of the present thesis is not commercially driven. The aim is to produce a target text that offers material for research, as a stand-alone and comparative text, for academic purposes. This will provide the primary readership of the translation, with other interested readers gaining access through miscellaneous articles and various publications. Venuti’s thoughts on the influence of editorial decisions involving commercial factors on translation are therefore irrelevant in this case, allowing for the production of a target text that is relatively free from external interference. Having said this, the University of Adelaide Press in Australia decided to publish these translations of the short stories in 2014 as part of an academically oriented project. The editors therefore requested a slightly higher degree of source orientation, primarily in relation to syntax and foreignisation, than is the case for the versions presented in the appendix to the thesis. This academic-commercial decision is a good instance of the way in which the skopos outlined in the commission ultimately affects the final product.

Working within the parameters of Holz-Mänttäri’s theory of translational action, the role of the players involved in the initiation and commissioning stages of this translation project is ambiguous. In this case, the roles of the initiator, or the company or individual who needs the translation, and the commissioner, the person who makes initial contact, are ill-defined since the university, its representatives, or the translator could fulfil either or both functions, depending on the perspective.

0.4. Text Choice and Edition

Following the publication of a number of Vian’s novels and *Manual of Saint-Germain-des-Prés* in English by TamTam Books, as well as the reception of an earlier collection of short stories, *Blues For a Black Cat*, edited by Julia Older, the texts chosen here for translation promise to offer a valuable contribution to the Vian canon. This choice was made after Polysystems Theory was taken into account to see how the target texts would be received, and how they would fit into the literary system of the target culture. This was determined after initial contact was made with Tosh Berman of TamTam Books, principal publishers of English translations of Vian in the United States, who expressed an interest in the publication of a collection of short stories following the release of *The Dead All Have The Same Skin.*

Apart from this, the decision to translate Boris Vian’s short stories in preference to other genres has been made for a number of reasons. First, there is sufficient variation in style and theme to offer a cross-section of material that may not be available in a longer, single text, such as a novel or play. Second, it was decided to take advantage of relatively untouched material, avoiding further analysis of such well-documented texts as *L’Écume des jours.* This initial part of the translation process is what Gaddis Rose calls the preliminary analysis, “where the material is judged to be worthy of translation”, and where the translator develops an affinity with the text.

The decision to use the 1996 Christian Bourgois edition of *Le Loup-garou,* originally published in 1970, and the 1981 Christian Bourgois edition of *Le Ratichon baigneur* is in keeping with Julia Older’s decision to translate *Les Fourmis,* itself published by Éditions Christian Bourgois in 1974 and 1982. The decision to use the Bourgois editions may seem to be further justified after taking into account comments made by François Roulmann and Christelle Gonzalo that the text contained in the

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33 *Blues for a Black Cat* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), translated by J. Older.
36 A remarkable series of coincidences, including special significance of March 10th (Vian’s birthday), led to translator affinity with the author. The coincidences are personal and subjective, and could be presented in a stand-alone section. Christelle Gonzalo from the Fond’action Vian reported similar coincidences during the course of her own research. Discussions took place in Paris 20/11/2007.
Bourgois editions is, in fact, derived from finalised publications in reviews and magazines and therefore probably more appealing from this point of view, whereas the Fayard and Pléiade editions revert back to corrected manuscripts. Furthermore, with the release of the Pléiade edition in October 2010, published under the direction of Marc Lapprand, with the assistance of both François Roulmann and Christelle Gonzalo, the question needs to be asked as to which of the three can now be considered to be the definitive edition.

The Fayard edition, *Œuvres complètes tome 5*, contains thirty short stories and twenty-three *chroniques romancées* drawn from the novels *L’Herbe rouge* and *L’Arrache-cœur*, reviews such as *Combat*, *La Rue* and *Constellation*, as well as the short story collections *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur* themselves. The decision had to be made as to whether the entire volume of material needed to be translated, or only selected parts, raising the question of the amount of source text that would be required to provide enough material for research. There is also the question of whether or not the preface to each story and the extensive use of annotation in the *Œuvres complètes* would form part of the source text, or whether a revised annotation, catering specifically to the target audience’s requirements, would need to be put in place. Furthermore, although randomly assembled by Noël Arnaud, the *Loup-garou* and *Ratichon baigneur* collections already exist as independent entities, so the translation of each text may be considered to be the translation of a separate volume of work. It was also deemed that the twenty-eight stories found therein would provide sufficient material for research.

Consideration was also given to taking advantage of the demarcation provided by the Bourgois editions using the revised text provided by the *Œuvres complètes*. However, “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” found in *Le Loup-garou* and “La Valse” found *Le Ratichon baigneur* are absent in the *Œuvres complètes*, which means that they would need to be translated using the text found in the Bourgois editions, or not translated at all, the omission possibly due to the fact that they are signed under the pseudonyms of Vernon Sullivan and Joëlle de Beausset respectively. However, the inclusion of these stories is important because they provide additional research material that does not appear in texts signed in Vian’s own name. Also, with the

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exception of “Le Bonhomme de neige” in the *Œuvres complètes*, there are only fairly minor textual variations, primarily related to sequencing, punctuation and capitalisation between the two editions, with no variation at all in some cases, as with “Un Cœur d’or”. Therefore, the major difference between these editions lies in the presentation of two separate stories. The Bourgois texts, “Le Voyeur” and “Marthe et Jean” become “Le Bonhomme de neige” and “Un Seul permis pour leur amour” respectively in the *Œuvres complètes*.

Much has been written and said about Boris Vian in relation to issues of conformity and non-conformity in both his life and work. The proposed translation model is intended to present a structure through which existing theory, current practice and debate can be tested against a renowned non-conformist, thereby leading to a translation of *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur* that meets the demands of the *skopos*. This involves producing a target text that is faithful to the original, recreating the text as if it had been written in English, while at the same time retaining the foreign elements.
Chapter One. Researching the Author: link to translation

Since the death of Boris Vian in Paris on 23 June 1959, several major works in French have been produced about the life and work of this sometimes misconstrued man. However, Sophie de Nodrest tells us that “books on Vian [...] for English readers are so rare that their authors always seem obliged to ‘start again’ introducing Vian to a readership where he is virtually unknown.”¹ Jacques Duchateau elaborates, suggesting that a different approach to his work is adopted each decade, which is why his work is constantly being talked about in terms of his biography; the 70s, for example, highlighted the ‘pataphysician.² Marc Lapprand, perhaps the foremost scholar on Vian, in an interview on Arte TV in June 2009, said that Vian’s popularity comes in waves, approximately ten years apart, and that it is therefore necessary to reintroduce him to a new generation of readers each time. Many of these are younger readers who celebrate in Boris Vian his abrasive humour, his unclassifiable creativity, his profound originality and his exceptional energy, which are sometimes discussed in terms of an ability to create a parallel universe.³

Lapprand calls for Vian studies to shift emphasis away from the life of the man to concentrate more on his literary work, which may then in turn cast some light on his other creative activities, such as jazz, the theatre, his taste for the cinema and technology, or his talent for writing screenplays. He emphasises that even though Vian’s life is of interest and value, the facts are already quite well established and it is now time to move on.⁴

However, Lapprand's vision of the text as an independent entity plays an important role in these translations of Vian. There are, in fact, a number of reasons for a certain amount of understanding of biographical detail. From the textual, and therefore the translation perspective, it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to separate the man from his work. Vian’s first wife, Michelle Léglise, points out that all of the work of Boris Vian is autobiographical, while David Noakes even goes so

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² J. Duchateau, Boris Vian ou les facéties du destin (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1982), p.120.
far as to say that Vian is unable to write about anything other than himself.\(^5\) Knowledge of biographical detail may therefore help to understand certain elements in the text, which may then assist the translator when making translation decisions, helping in the choice of one word or expression over another, or in the interpretation of meaning. As such, biographical detail linked to the text will also help to situate Vian for those who are unfamiliar with the life and work of the author.

Many eminent literary translators support the need for biographical knowledge of the author they are translating. Brian Nelson says that “[a] knowledge of biographical facts may help to elucidate specific textual elements, with implications for translation”,\(^6\) while Jean Anderson finds “as a translator first and foremost but also as a literary critic [that] the text alone approach is a bit out of date” and she refers to “the author, author’s bio, or at the very least their other work” when there are gaps in her knowledge.\(^7\) Jean Delisle’s attitude towards preliminary research suggests that some background knowledge is necessary to contextualise all texts, regardless of whether or not they are destined for translation. Since a text is the expression of the will of an author intended for the communication of information to an audience, this becomes increasingly important in the translation framework; it is therefore indispensable to know the origin of the text (who wrote it and where it came from).\(^8\) Awareness of biographical detail is therefore of value to the translator so that the relevant information can be conveyed to the target text reader.

This chapter will be divided into three main sections: cultural allusions and references that help to situate the author and his works in a socio-historical context, autobiographical aspects that help the stories unfold, and authorial stance reflecting his views as they manifest themselves in the texts. A fourth and final section will unveil different methods available to the translator that help unlock the text.

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7 Personal correspondence from J. Anderson 2/2/2010.

1.1. Vian in a Socio-historical Context

The life and work of Vian need to be briefly situated in a socio-historical context in order to determine the influence of external factors. Against a backdrop of the German Occupation and post-World-War II chaos, Vian led a fairly privileged life. He had the luxury of being able to dabble in science fiction, producing such stories as “Le Danger des classiques”, and to experiment with the neologisms and word plays found in “L’Amour est aveugle”.9 Alexander Werth describes the conditions in Paris in 1941 as follows: “The people had lost weight. They are thin and tired. They keep worrying about British landings that never come off. And they keep worrying about the Gestapo which they see everywhere.”10 During 1944 and 1945, air raids on Paris killed thousands of people. The metro did not function, infant mortality rates had soared, the Ministry of Health released a report stating that 75% of the population was showing signs of malnutrition, and the courts of Paris were dealing with 30,000 divorce cases concerning ex-prisoners of war.11 Post-war France was little better than France under German Occupation: retail prices had more than doubled; the country was plagued by strikes and shortages; there were widespread rationing and bread queues. Yet Vian did not refer directly to any of this, since most of his referencing is allegorical. The only mention of a queue is the one that formed outside a pastry shop in “L’Amour est aveugle”, when sixty men wait their turn to have sex with a pretty young shop assistant (p.64) and the only reference to the mortality rate of children is found in “Maternité” in which a homosexual couple is having difficulty in finding a child to adopt because “les sadiques en tuaient une grande quantité” (p.135).12 There were also renewed concerns over the possibility of future German aggression as the United States and Russia jostled for superiority in the Cold War,13 which provides the backdrop to “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller”.

12 References to the stories will now take the form of the abbreviation found in the legend followed by the page number.
13 For further information see H. Dalton, Hitler’s War: Before and After (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1940), p.144.
Many of the most famous literary figures of the time from Mauriac and Malraux to Camus, Aragon and Eluard were *engagés* and played an active and influential role in the political life of the country. The French Academy, with the exception of Mauriac and the partial exception of Duhamel was pro-Vichy. Claudel and Valèry were Pétainist. Cocteau, Giradoux and Gide were non-committal, while Aragon, Eluard, Malraux and Mauriac expressed their opposition to Vichy. Instead of commenting on the political stance of these authors, Vian chose to lampoon the impact of their literature on the sexual prowess of Aurèle in “L’Impuissant”. Sartre formed part of a university resistance group called *Socialisme et Liberté* and edited intellectual journals that were important in fashioning public opinion on international and domestic affairs. Werth says that “journals like *Esprit*, *Temps Modernes*, *Témoignage Chrétien* or *France-Observateur* [were] journals with practically no equivalent outside France for profound political analysis, courage and general knowledge”,\(^{14}\) yet Vian’s contribution to the political scene was that of a *menteur*, a columnist whose irreverence was meant to lighten the impact of these serious publications. Vian’s relationship with his employer, Sartre, was indeed enigmatic, in part due to the relationship Sartre shared with Vian’s wife, Michelle. Sartre’s famous conference “L’existentialisme est un humanisme” at Club Maintenant on 28 October 1945 was packed with an adoring audience and in *L’Écume des jours* Vian parodies the conference (Sartre’s name, for example, is rendered as the spoonerism Jean-Sol Partre).

France at that time was also a very puritanical society, quite unlike the way things had been in the 1920s. Lovemaking had been given the official stamp of approval only for repopulation purposes and there were strict censorship laws. Other observers point out that at the time of the Liberation, Paris was not a place of fun, perhaps unsurprisingly given the hardships most were forced to endure. Even a few years after the war, advertising posters in Parisian train stations were forced to change the name of Sartre’s play from *La Putain respectueuse* to *La P... respectueuse* and Vian’s *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* to “a play by Boris Vian”. Significant moral reform also took place with the abolition of licensed brothels, an initiative put into place by former prostitute Marthe Richard, who is mentioned in “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller” (p.89). However, Vian writes about rampant promiscuity in

\(^{14}\) A. Werth, p.XXVI.
“L’Amour est aveugle” when an aphrodisiac mist descends over Paris, turning the streets and footpaths of the capital into a sexual free-for-all. In “Les Filles d’avril”, “Francfort sous-la-Main” and “Un Drôle de sport” the male characters seek out more-than-willing female accomplices, while both male and female homosexuality find a forum in “L’Assassin”, “Maternité” and “Le Voyeur”.

It is from this background of social and political upheaval and government moralising that people began to turn their attention to Sartre, existentialism and Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Existentialism posed a threat and “seemed a danger to people’s morale” according to Werth.15 Since many existentialists followed Sartre to Saint-Germain-des-Prés and to the Café de Flore in particular, it did not take long for the area to earn a reputation as the centre of attraction for those not yet labelled fringe dwellers.16 It was considered to be a place of loose moral standards where it was not uncommon to find three people in the same bed (“Divertissements” 36) and where socially unacceptable music was being performed on a regular basis.17

Although not subscribing to Sartre’s philosophy, Vian was one of the instigators of the zazou movement, described by Simone de Beauvoir as apolitical and full of anarchists.18 The movement is referred to in “Martin m’a téléphoné…” (p.79). Émilien Carassus’ definition of dandyism perhaps best summarises Vian: Dandyism is the refusal to blend in with the masses and to follow established norms of behaviour. The dandy sees himself as being different. He shows this through his choice of clothes and bearing in order to distinguish himself from the conformity he sees everywhere.19 Evidence of dandyism relating to the careful choice of attire for the sake of appearance can be found when Denis chooses to wear an elegant grey and white striped suit with a pale pink shirt and burgundy tie (“LG” 10) and when Folubert Sansonnet carefully prepares himself before leaving the house (“Léobille” 135).

The tag of dandy and founder of the zazou movement in Saint-Germain-des-Prés was one Vian was to wear for most of his life. It was an era when people would flock to Saint-Germain-des-Prés to catch a glimpse of Sartre and his group and to

15 A. Werth, p.252.
16 G. Beauvarlet, p.76.
watch the troglodytes emerge at dawn from the underground jazz caves; it was also
the world to which Boris Vian belonged.

1.2. Autobiographical Detail in the Texts

While first wife Michelle Léglise and David Noakes have already hinted at Vian’s
self-indulgence, François Roulmann takes the autobiographical approach one step
further, saying that in all of his word plays and in all of his supposed neologisms,
nothing can be taken for granted; there are numerous hidden references drawn from
his personal life.20 Autobiographical detail permeates the short stories. From the use
of family, friends and acquaintances as the basis of real or fictitious characters to the
setting of the stories themselves, from relating personal experiences in the form of
anecdotes to his likes and dislikes, the reader of the source text gains an insight into
the world of the author that needs to be maintained and relayed to the target text
reader.

1.2.1. Characters

Many of the characters who appear in Vian’s texts are based on real people, usually
those known to him personally, and either through family or friends. On many
occasions, it can even be interpreted that Vian himself is one of the central characters.
Before seeing where and how the members of Vian’s family manifest themselves, his
relationship with his family needs to be briefly contextualised. His family life is
usually divided into two parts: the relationship he had with his parents, and the one
that he had with his two wives and children. He was raised in a family that did not
respect the sacred bourgeois values of Church, army and money. While Vian
considered his father to be more of a friend than an authority figure, the same cannot
be said about his relationship with his mother because of her overprotective nature
due to his poor health. Perhaps Vian’s own role as a husband and father was born
from those years when he tried to distance himself from his mother: he tried to
alienate himself from his children, once describing them as a burden rather than a

http://www.lire.fr/enquete.asp?idC=53376/idR=200/idG=
source of joy. It would not be practical, nor is it necessary to examine the extent the family played in the inspiration for his characters throughout the entire source text canon, partly because the volume of material is just too great. Instead, a number of examples across a range of genres will be drawn upon to show how much Vian was inspired by his family, not just in the short stories, but also across the whole spectrum of his work.

Rybalka sees the identity of Vian himself expressed through the characters in his novels, which chronologically, albeit with a delay of a few years, detail his personal experiences. As early as 1943, when he was writing *Trouble dans les Andains*, some critics saw the personality of Vian express itself in the character of Antioche Tambrétambre. The summer of 1950 saw the publication of *L'Herbe rouge*, Vian’s most autobiographical work according to Duchateau. The novel not only serves as an enquiry into Vian’s past, but also acts as a disguised confession. Duchateau maintains that Vian expresses himself through the character of Wolf; all of the details that Vian provides on Wolf’s past are taken from his own experiences, leaving no doubt as to the link between Wolf and Boris. The character of Wolf, therefore, may represent the bitter, disillusioned Vian of the period 1948-1950. According to Michelle Léglise, such autobiographical characters also populate his theatrical works because the father in *Les Bâtisseurs d’empire* is also Boris Vian. The play deals with a family which, through a series of misfortunes, is forced to move further and further upstairs into smaller and smaller accommodation. Boggio likens it to the fate that befell Vian’s own mother after she was forced to move from Ville-d’Avray. Vian’s final novel *L’Arrache-coeur* recreates the family holiday home at Landemer, but it is not always easy to separate the real from the imaginary, nor to make a clear distinction as to which character depicts which real-life figure. Clémentine could be either Boris’ mother, or his children, or both, and Angel and Jacquemort could be incarnations of Vian, or certain parts of him.

Throughout the stories in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*, Vian himself appears in a number of incarnations. There is no doubt as to the identity of the narrator of the incident that befell the priest at Deligny when the irreverent Vian

21 J. Duchateau, p.70.
22 Ibid., p.33.
signs off as “Révérend Boris Vian, membre de la S.N.C.J” (“RB” 52). Using Deligny Baths as the same backdrop, the unnamed narrator of “Un Test”, identified as Vian because of character association including two references to his son, le petit Bison (pp.73-4), relates the fate of a companion who dared present a potential future wife to his group of friends. There is also no doubt that the character referred to in the third person, Le Bison, in “Les Remparts du sud” is Vian. “Bison” is the first word taken from the anagram “Bison Ravi” derived from the name “Boris Vian”, one of the many pseudonyms he used. In August 1948, Vian undertook a journey through Belgium to Frankfurt. Similarities can be found in the journey undertaken in “Francfort-sous-la-Main”, underlining the distinct possibility that the narrator is Vian himself. The anonymous narrator who reveals himself in the final paragraph of “L’Impuissant” (p.158) is also likely to be Vian because of the reference to the club he used to frequent, the name of the barman who served him and the numerous references to his domain of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. Since Vian was a jazz trumpet player in a band that used to play in nightclubs, it is also quite possible that Vian is “le type de la trompette” in “Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” (p.57), providing an insight into the privileged world of musicians, although the inspiration for the man on the dance floor who might also be based on Vian is somewhat ambiguous. Roby, a deformation of the name Boris, the trumpet player in “Martin m’a téléphoné”, is most likely to be based on Vian as well. Playing jazz in a trio composed of musicians known personally to Vian for a group of American soldiers in Paris after the war, his experiences are reminiscent of Vian’s own. Moving beyond speculation and taking into account critics’ observations, Gilbert Pestureau sees Vian as the character Clams Jorjobert in “Les Pas vernis”, and as Charlie in the cinema trilogy “Un Métier de chien”, “Divertissements culturels” and “Une Grande vedette.”

Members of Vian’s own family also feature as characters throughout the stories. His son Patrick appears as “le Bisonnot” in “Les Remparts du sud” (p.30), as “le petit Bison” in “Un Test” (p.76) and as “le fils aîné, onze ans le douze avril”, his exact date of birth, in “Les Pas vernis” (p.109). First wife Michelle appears as “la Bisonne” in “Les Remparts du sud” (p.30), as “Gaviale” in “Les Pas vernis” (p.109).

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24 Société nationale de la Compagnie de Jésus.
25 Œuvres complètes tome II, p.1313.
and as “ma chère femme” in “Francfort sous-la-Main” (p.62). Daughter Carole is referred to as “un costaud bébé de trois mois du sesque féminin” in “Les Pas vernis” (p.109) and brother Alain is literally his “brother” in “Martin m’a téléphoné…” (p.69).

Vian’s friends and acquaintances also serve as the source of inspiration for some of his characters, so it is important briefly to examine the circles in which he moved. Vian mixed with an interesting array of individuals who were all remarkable in their own right. As a child he played with François Rostand, the son of Jean, a famous biologist and humanist at the peak of his career, whose father, Edmond, was the author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. The son of an exiled Russian rabbi, Yehudi Menuhin, the internationally renowned violin virtuoso, was his chess opponent on the lawn of the house in Ville-d’Avray. There was the infamous one-eyed Jacques Loustalot, also known as The Major, whose antics were the talk of the town, which is perhaps one of the reasons why Boris was drawn to him. By the age of 26, he was rubbing shoulders with the intellectual and literary greats of the time, such as Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, Merleau-Ponty and Queneau. His circle of friends in the music world was equally as impressive. He was a friend of Duke Ellington, Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. One of the future directors of la Fond’action Vian in Paris, Mr d’Dée, has been described as a most unusual character, and the mechanics at Colombes, who included two 115kg professional wrestlers briefly alluded to in “L’Assassin” (p.91), were far-removed but no less interesting. Once Ursula Kübler came onto the scene, Vian’s circle of friends changed. He swapped Sartre’s group of intellectuals for a group that was more creative and less *engagé*. He forged ties with Claude Léon and Pierre Kast, and the *Pataphysicians* Queneau, Ionesco, Caradec and Arnaud, just to name a few. While it may not be uncommon for an individual to have a large number of friends from a wide range of backgrounds, the most striking feature of Vian’s circle is that they figured amongst the intellectual, literary and musical elite of the time.

While not all of these well-known people figure in Vian’s literature, he does draw on real people to his advantage. *L’Automne à Pékin* features l’abbé Petitjean, in whom it is not difficult to see the real-life l’abbé Grosjean, winner of the Pléiade

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Prize over L’Écume des jours. There is no hiding the source of inspiration for the name of the hero in Les Morts ont tous la même peau, Dan Parker who, as head of the Cartel d’action sociale et morale, brought Vian before the courts, levelling charges of indecency over J’irai cracher sur vos tombes, which was written under Vian’s pseudonym of Vernan Sullivan. However, the names of the characters in Et on tuera tous les affreux, whose origins may seem fairly evident, still require a little speculation. There is indeed a strong resemblance between the names of the characters in the novel (Mike Bokanski, Markus Schutz, Jef Devay) and the names of Vian’s friends and associates (Michel-Maurice Bokanovski, Marc Schutzenberger, Jean-François Devay). Hence the question of the translation of proper names that will be dealt with in chapter three.

While Vian draws extensively on those around him to help fill roles in the short stories, it is often his best friend, the Major, who assumes a key role. He is at his havoc-wreaking best in “Les Remparts du sud” and “Surprise-partie chez Léobille”, and Pestureau touts the possibility that he is also the Admiral in “Un Métier de chien”, “Divertissements culturels” and “Une Grande vedette.” Other characters based on real people who appear in one or more stories under their own names include: musician Claude Luter (“Test”, “Drôle”, “Valse”); barman Louis Barucq (“Impuissant”); musician Martin Romberg and Miqueut (“Martin”); singer Juliette Gréco and Alexandre Astruc (“Divertissements”); Maxime Saury and Roland Bianchini (“Test”); Anne-Marie Cazalis (“Remparts”, “Divertissements”). Those real-life characters whose names have been altered in some way include: Claude Léon as Doddy (“Martin”, “Léobille”) and as Léon Dodiléon (“Pas”); Taymour Nawab as Temsey (“Martin”); Anne Campion as Caroline Lampion (“Pas”); Hubert Fol as Folubert Sansonnet (“Léobille”, “Drôle”); Raymond Fol as Rémenfol, Claude Abadie as Chef Abadibada, Jean Berdin as Jean Berdindin (“Léobille”); Jean-François Devay as Jef (“Francfort”); François Gallépidès as Moustache and Christian Casadesus as Christian Castapiocche (“Test”); Paul Boubal as Flor Polboubal (“Divertissements”, “Valse”); Pierre and Jacques Prévert as les frères présvert (“Léobille”). There are other characters whose identities have not yet been determined but who are suspected of having been based on real-life people. These include: Heinz Neuman (“Martin”); Grouzniè (“Léobille”); Pralin (“Francfort”); Trounaille (“Drôle”); Ops (“Divertissements”, “Test”); Christian-le-marsouin,
Georges, Michel-l’architecte, Michel-le-slip-rayé, Yvette (“Test”). This list reveals that the biographical content in the short stories based on people known personally to Vian is quite extensive.

1.2.2. Backdrop

The backdrop to Vian’s stories is also charged with biography. While many of the stories unfold in an environment that is of personal significance, the plots of some of the other stories are based on actual events. Places that were familiar to Vian provide the setting to a number of his stories. The Fausses-Reposes Woods near Ville-d’Avray where Vian was born and raised is home to Denis the werewolf (“LG”). Local landmarks including the adjoining Montretout park, the bridge at Saint-Cloud where Denis is stopped by a policeman, and the well-known, still operational Cabassud restaurant where Denis realises that he is being pursued by a police motorcycle, are all of significance in the story. In “Une Pénible histoire”, La Touvre, which offers a possible suicide location for Flavie, and Quettehau, where Flavie’s father has taken his retirement, are both places where Vian used to spend summer holidays with his parents. The final destination of the road trip in “Les Remparts du Sud” is Saint-Jean-de-Luz where Vian’s grandmother had a house. Other geographical locations outside of la métropole include Knocke in Belgium where Vian once played jazz and Frankfurt, visited by Vian when he was a journalist. Passing through the former, the latter provides the setting for “Francfort-sous-la-Main.

Within the confines of the capital, where Vian spent most of his adult life, well-known landmarks regularly appear. La place de l’Opéra (“LG”, “Pénible”), the Botanical Gardens (“LG”, “M&J”), the Eiffel Tower covered by mist (“Amour”), Deligny baths where Vian’s circle of friends met on a regular basis (“RB”, “Test”), Montmartre metro station compared to a country toilet (“Penseur”), la gare de Lyon as a place to meet women (“Filles”) and the Scribe Hotel (“LG”) are just some that are featured. Vian helped bring notoriety to Saint-Germain-des-Prés. This area of Paris, along with venues in other arrondissements, promotes the cafés, jazz scene and nightclubs that figure prominently in many of the stories. There are the Café de Flore and Deux Magots (“Remparts”, “Maternité”), the Normandie Bar (“Martin”), Club
Saint-Germain-des-Prés ("Drôle", “Impuissant”), Vieux Colombier, La Rose Rouge, Lido, Night-Club, Bœuf sur le toit, Club de Paris, Saint-Yves, Le Tabou, Tabarin, Florence ("Drôle"), while la Tante Blanche and Montata (“Maternité”) are actually deformations of la Reine-Blanche and Montana. Other examples include the home address of the Major, Villa Cœur-de-Vey, which occurs as Villa Cœur-de-Lion in two stories (“Remparts”, “Léobille”). As seen in the names of some of the characters and locales, Vian hides authenticity behind word plays and deformations, which raises the question as to whether a different translation strategy should be employed for real names and invented names.

Actual events taken from Vian’s life form the basis of the plot for much of his work. *Vercoquin et le plancton*, for example, describes the parties held in his parents’ home at Ville-d’Avray during the Occupation. The story satirises the world of public servants and government officials made familiar to Vian during his time at AFNOR (Association Française de Normalisation) and features many of his friends and acquaintances as characters or caricatures. In 1945, Vian’s involvement in the shooting of the movie “Madame et son flirt” provides the inspiration for the short story “Le Figurant” found in *Les Fourmis*. Of the twenty-eight stories under consideration in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*, there are three that Pestureau and Lapprand have labelled as “chroniques romancées”, stories that are seemingly autobiographical, or if not, are at least based on true events, where the narrator, if it is not Boris Vian, is certainly a figure close to the author.28 The first of these is “Martin m’a téléphoné…”, which depicts the daily lives of a group of part-time jazz musicians in post-World War II Paris still suffering shortages; “Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” is a tongue-in-cheek warning to nightclub patrons from a member of a jazz band; and “Francfort sous-la-Main” is based on his voyage to Germany in 1948. To this list could be added “Un Test”, categorised as a short story in Vian's *Œuvres complètes* and narrated in the first person.

There are a number of stories inspired by real-life situations or events that are recounted in a burlesque tone: “Les Remparts du sud” is based on the family holiday to Saint-Jean-de-Luz; “Surprise-partie chez Léobille” exaggerates the Major’s misbehaviour at one of the parties that were so popular amongst Vian’s circle of friends; “Un Métier de chien”, “Divertissements culturels” and “Une Grande

vedette” touch on Vian’s experiences in the film industry when he himself was in turn a director, a spectator and an extra. On a slightly different note but still related in a light-hearted manner, his marital problems during 1949 were the likely inspiration for “Un Drôle de sport”, and his divorce from Michelle is the key to “Le Motif.” Far more seriously, however, his own financial problems lead him to explore the possibilities of suicide in “Une Pénible histoire.”

1.2.3. Pursuits

Three activities that Vian pursued on a regular basis are referred to in the stories. There is his involvement in the music and literary scenes in various capacities, and his interest in cars. Let us first briefly examine the influence of music on Vian before determining the role it plays in the stories. Vian was most likely attracted to this form of expression, first as a jazz trumpeter at a relatively early age and later as a singer, by his natural inclination for innovation. When he joined Hot Club de France in 1937, jazz was still in the development stage as a genre. Because it was considered to be decadent and corruptive, an opinion shared by a large percentage of the population, the Nazis outlawed black jazz, the type to which Vian was attracted. In fact, on the way home in the car after performing with Martin Romberg, the narrator passes judgement on the music he is forced to listen to when another passenger turns on the radio: “c’est un jazz blanc, ça swingue assez froid” (“Martin” 84). Many jazz musicians therefore defied authorities for the sake of their art. Vian’s entire jazz career is laced with other such anecdotes of non-conformity. One incident can be found in the reference to the “six types en vestes blanches” (“Méfie” 55), an allusion to the popular white jacket worn by professional jazz musicians of the time. Members of Claude Abadie’s band, including Vian, refused to wear the white jacket because they were amateurs.

As a singer, he was scarcely popular, often performing before an audience of only a handful of people. Vasseur says that he was the complete opposite of most people’s perception of a singer. He was shy, rigid and very uncomfortable on stage. However, it was more than just his inability to captivate the audience that led to his

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29 Ibid., p.409.
poor reception. He had earned himself a reputation as a writer and singer of anarchist songs, which attacked the army, church and other institutions. These songs earned him a certain following amongst the intellectual set of the Left Bank but hardly endeared him to the general public.\(^{31}\) The provincial tour of the summer of 1955 provides an insight into the relationship Vian sometimes had with his audience. Sections of the crowd composed of returned soldiers, the *anciens combattants*, disrupted shows and confronted Vian, especially over “Le Déserteur”, the song that was later to become the protest anthem of the sixties, accusing him of being unpatriotic at the height of the Algerian conflict. Monique Sénateur sums up Vian’s singing career by saying that Boris was someone who could not really be categorised.\(^{32}\)

Nine of the twenty-eight short stories contain musical references. There are the names of musicians and composers, such as: his brother Alain who teamed up with Boris on a number of different occasions, Martin Romberg, Taymou Nawab, Johnny Mercer, Claude Léon (“Martin”); Duke Ellington who was introduced into the French jazz scene by Vian, Francis Lopez, Schoenberg, Vincent Scotto (“Danger”); Les Frères Jacques (“Drôle”); Claude Luter (“Test”); and a disguised reference to Mozart (“Pas”). There are the names of songs, such as: *Petit Vin Blanc*, *Dream*, *Margie*, *Laura*, *Sentimental Journey*, *I Dream of You*, *Here I’ve Said It Again*, *Good Night Sweetheart* (“Martin”); *Les Nombrils*, *Barbara* (“Drôle”). There are also the names of popular dances, such as: swing, jitterbug, (“Léobille”); bebop (“Vedette”); waltz (“Valse”). Apart from these factual references, Vian passes a rather rare subjective comment on his attitude towards other musicians when he says that “les professionnels sont tous des salauds” (“Martin” 72). The predominance of musical references found in *L’Écume des jours* has helped Lapprand in the identification of the first line of a song by Ray Ventura, “Je voudrais en savoir davantage”, which is inserted directly into the text of “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller” (p.90).\(^{33}\)

According to Lapprand, Vian is unable to be categorised within any of the major literary movements of the period. He was not part of the existentialist group with its message of *engagement*; he did not contribute to the postwar resurgence in

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surrealism; and his work was not considered to be Resistance Literature because he played no part in the war due to his age and poor health. Lapprand also says that he cannot be talked about in terms of the American novel, which was in vogue in France, although it could be argued that in pseudotranslation Vernon Sullivan was a key player. Vian’s work did not belong either to the tradition littéraire bourgeoise with its moral code and reluctance for change, although he could possibly be talked about in relation to the genre known as autofiction. If Vian needs to be classified, he can perhaps best be included amongst le sang neuf, the group of aspiring young writers rising in prominence, although he distinguishes himself from them as well because he was the most original and the only one likely to leave a lasting impression. Goulemot suggests that Vian can be viewed alongside Beckett, Ionesco and Camus as part of the School of the Absurd. Enard agrees with Goulemot that “absurd” might be the right school because in this assessment Vian was responsible for the production of a substitute literature, incorporating fake thrillers that bordered on fantasy. Whatever tag is placed on Vian, it is fair to say that his work resides in the realm of fringe literature, which is Henriot’s belief. To further support this view, Vian’s short story “Le Loup-garou” was performed as a play at the San Francisco Fringe Festival in 2005. Although Rybalka thinks that L’Automne à Pékin puts Vian amongst the authors of the Nouveau roman, most other critics seem to agree that he defies mainstream classification. For Julliard, Vian remains an isolated case in literature; for Marchand, Vian’s work is unable to be classified; while for Baus, Vian’s talent resides in the fact that his writing was so unusual for the era. In an attempt to justify her husband’s rationale, Michelle says that Boris thought French literature had become out-of-date and in need of rejuvenation. However, in keeping

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34 This term was coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977. He identified autofiction as a characteristic of earlier authors such as Colette and Chloé Delaume, the latter of whom wrote about the impact of Vian on her work. Source: E. Allen, Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Baruch College, City University of New York, October 2014.
35 M. Lapprand, La Vie contre, pp.55-56.
38 Cited in La Vie Contre, p.66.
40 M. Rybalka, p.213.
with the perception of him as *le doux anarchiste*, she also adds that his revolt was individualistic and solitary.\(^{42}\)

There are over sixty literary references contained in sixteen stories. There are the names of authors, such as: Claudel, Gide, Bazin, Bernstein (“Impuissant”); Pauwels, Rimbaud (“RB”); Géraldy, Brenn, Renaud (“Danger”); Mauriac, Duhamel, Romains (“Remparts”); Van der Meersch, Mac Orlan (“Martin”); Boussenard (“LG”); Audouard (“Assassin”). There are the names of literary works, such as: *Cent vingt journées de Sodome, Le Soulier de satin, L’Annonce faite à Marie, La Porte étroite, Nathanaël, Les Nourritures terrestres, Les Faux-Monnayeurs, La Soif* (“Impuissant”); *Toi et moi* (“Danger”), which all lead to the question as to whether they should remain in the original French or be anglicised. This question can also be applied to the names of reviews and other publications, such as *La Rue, Le Pèlerin, Témoignage chrétien* (“RB”); *La Revue du Cinéma, Samedi-Soir* (“Maternité”); *Les Temps modernes* (“Amour”); *Larousse* (“Danger”). There are mythological and ancient names of people and places: Morpheus, the Argonauts (“Francfort”), the Gardens of Hesperides (“Léobille”), Epictetus (“Penseur”), Hercules (“Filles”) and Bacchus (“Voyeur”). Literary prizes mentioned include the Pléiade Prize (“RB”) and the Nobel Prize (“Assassin”); and an indirect reference is made to the NRF (Nouvelle Revue française) in “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller”. As for song lines being borrowed directly into the short stories, eight citations from other literary works, including: “il faut qu’une porte soit ouverte ou fermée” have been identified.\(^{43}\) One comment that expresses Vian's attitude towards literary success, probably inspired by his lack of recognition for *L’Écume des jours* and the relative success of those works signed Vernon Sullivan, can be found in the writings of young Urodonal Carrier, “Le succès d’un auteur […] dépend de sa faculté plus ou moins grande à s’identifier, sur le papier, à un imbécile” (“Penseur” 132).

Experimentation with the relatively new science-fiction genre is especially evident in “Le Danger des classiques” with the use of such terminology as *cerveaux électroniques, robots, lectiscope, Antarès*. “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller”, with its allusions to the Korean War and American spy agencies, serves as an example of Vian’s interest in the thriller genre, as does “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort”, which

\(^{42}\) P. Boggio, p.149.

details the extent of Vian’s knowledge of the United States despite no first-hand experience. On a totally different note, his interest in word plays and language manipulation is incorporated into the plot of “Une Pénible histoire.”

As noted previously, Vian's interest in automobiles is another facet of his life that manifests itself in the stories. Michelle Vian says that Boris had a weakness for cars that had not been commercialised.44 His personal favourite was a 1911 Brazier, which had a hole under the rear seat that he once used as a toilet to relieve himself at the feet of a gendarme on the Champs-Élysées. In typical fashion, Vian makes fun of the Renault 4CV, “the first French car to sell over a million units […] the most popular car in France”.45 With a jibe at homosexuality, Claude, the dominant partner of the couple, “menait habilement sa barque bien qu’il utilisât en réalité une 4 CV Renault” (“Maternité” 133). There are a number of references to different makes of cars: Opel, Delage, 1939 Packard, Chrysler, Lincoln, Cadillac (“Martin”), Amilcar, Mercedes (“LG”), 1923 Benazizi (“Cœur”), 1927 Renault (“Remparts”), 4CV Renault (“Maternité”), Vivaquatre (“Marseille”); and to car parts, including enjoliveurs de roues, écrous, bielles d’alliage, couvercle de malle (“LG”), filtre à huile, magnéto, le changement de vitesse à huile (“Remparts”).

This section has unearthed a plethora of proper nouns in the short stories that relate directly to biographical content. There are the names of characters based on Vian himself, his family and friends, as well as the names of other real-life characters derived from musical and literary circles. There are also geographical place names that serve as a backdrop to the stories, and the titles of songs, works of literature, various reviews and publications that may all have textual significance. Different methods of transferring the implied knowledge contained within these source text proper nouns to a target audience will be extensively dealt with in chapter three, as will be ways of transferring the significance of actual events upon which some of the stories are based.

44 V-M. Marchand, p.144.
1.3. Authorial Stance

Authorial stance or viewpoint can be described as the ways in which an author overtly or covertly expresses attitudes, feelings, judgement or commitment on a particular subject in a text. In order to understand the position Vian takes on certain issues and where and how they manifest themselves in the short stories, it is important to examine his life and personality in more detail.

1.3.1. Aspects of Non-conformity

When discussing the life and works of Vian, most analysts tend to agree that Vian was non-conformist, especially in the guise of Vernon Sullivan, the author of J'irai cracher sur vos tombes, banned for offence to public decency, and "Le Déserteur", the emblematic protest song of the war in Indochina. To some, his activities can be viewed as a form of anarchy. Gauthier says that like a considerable number of other anarchists, Vian’s revolt was strangely apolitical. Rey agrees that Vian was extremely anarchistic but not like those who rob banks or kill police officers; rather he was one of those who could not tolerate society. Kast expresses a similar opinion on Vian’s anarchism insisting that he simply could not put up with being told what to do.

Others view his anarchism differently. Ursula Vian-Kübler, Vian’s second wife, tells us that he wanted to fight with his intellect and not with weapons, which is why she called him the gentle anarchist. Lapprand considers that his brand of anarchy stretches only as far as non-conformist mode of thought; his music and theatre were his means of expression in this respect. For other commentators, including Beauvarlet, the term “anarchist” is not even relevant; he is simply someone

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49 J. Duchateau, p.13.
50 E. Baus, p.77.
who cannot be categorised. Duchateau also rejects the anarchist label. However, instead of describing him as someone who cannot be classified, Duchateau, like Arnaud, sees an extremely complex character who needs to be examined on a number of different levels, hence the layered structure of Arnaud's *Les Vies parallèles de Boris Vian*.

At school, Vian was both a conformist and non-conformist. He conformed to the middle class belief that a good education was the benchmark of success, and so it may seem that he was living the bourgeois dream when he entered L’École Centrale at Angoulême in 1939 to earn an engineering diploma. Rybalka agrees that the path to bourgeois success in France inevitably depends on a good education, with Vian being no exception to the rule. Although he entered Centrale with only an average ranking, Vian was a gifted student. He learned quickly but, as a result of other students’ jealousy and much to his regret, he tried to make it appear that he was struggling to achieve results; in this way, he masked his non-conformity, and wearing a mask was of course another key aspect of his personality. Beauvarlet explains that in order to shine within the French education system, one must become a stereotypical student. Vian was caught between his bourgeois origins and his apolitical attitude, however. He was not the same as other students. He dressed differently, he was more literary, imaginative, avant-gardist and elegant. He rejected popular opinion to such an extent that the tag of anarchist was perhaps justifiable, but his friends defended him by insisting that he was simply different.

As a youth, young Boris continued to show signs of forging his own individuality. Julliard says that by the age of seventeen he was an eccentric in the complete sense of the word because he had already distanced himself from all social norms. He rebelled against all forms of authority and the slightest attempt to curb his freedom was unbearable. He treated everyone as an equal because he instinctively rejected all forms of hierarchy. He acted instinctively, without worrying about the consequences, was a sworn enemy of mediocrity and did not subscribe to popular thought.

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52 G. Beauvarlet, p.105.
53 M. Rybalka, p.42.
54 G. Beauvarlet, p.41.
55 J. Duchateau, p.22.
56 C. Julliard, p.25.
His personality was complicated and contradictory. He was critical of the world of show business, yet, as an artistic director, he was an important player in the industry; he denounced the fields of applied and industrial sciences but was an engineer; he made fun of popular fashion while being one of the trendsetters of Saint-Germain-des-Prés; he was fervently anti-militarist but agreed to translate the memoirs of General Bradley because he needed the money. To some of his contemporaries, he was one of the most intelligent people in Paris. To others, he was nothing more than a practical joker and jazz fanatic. There was one thing he did not do, however, and that was to fit the mould of a typical Frenchman.57

Institutions with a prescribed dress code were a favourite target and anyone in uniform earned his scorn, for it represented an acceptance of conformity, which reduced the individual to anonymity. No one was spared, from soldiers and priests to bus drivers, postal workers and boy scouts. As France looked to de Gaulle to lead the post-war recovery, Ursula tells us that her husband was totally anti-Gaullist.58 De Gaulle has been described as a non-conformist military leader,59 so it is worth noting that he had no appeal for Vian. He was tempted neither by communism nor the far right; his apolitism was revolutionary declares Baus.60 In a country historically steeped in Catholic tradition but which, since 1789, had become less oriented towards organised religion,61 Vian was born into a family that was devoutly anticlerical. As a child, he was briefly exposed to Christian dogma, but he carried none of its teachings through into adult life. He rejected religion outright, and despite post-war Church reforms he maintained his written attacks on the institution. He even went so far as writing that with the heavens being empty, one should not expect too much after death.62

Towards the end of the 1940s, Vian found himself at the centre of a number of different philosophical movements. According to Lapprand, he was a freethinker and subsequently did not adhere to any particular group ideology, with the exception of

58 E. Baus, p.108.
60 E. Baus, p.12.
61 In 1952, during Vian's lifetime, only a small minority (27%) attended religious services on a regular basis. Source: Le Catholicisme en France (IFOP, 2009), http://www.ifop.com/media/pressdocument/43-1-document_file.pdf
62 M. Rybalka, p.168.
the College of 'Pataphysics. There seem to be two opposing schools of thought in relation to Vian and surrealism. On one hand there are those who staunchly claim that he was not a surrealist. Among those, Westweller says that Boris Vian was not part of the surrealist group nor did he participate in any of its activities, and Julliard says that Vian never claimed to be part of the surrealist movement. Others, including Robert Whyte, take the opposite point of view: “Vian was surrealist and absurdist by nature as well as intention.” Certainly, Vian’s few paintings (especially “Les Hommes de fer” and the collages that he worked on with Jacques Prévert) contain strong surrealist elements that reveal a rather unusual view of the world and bear a striking resemblance to the collages that appear in the Monty Python series, which used "cut-out photographic montages involving giant feet and ambulatory buildings.”

Surrealist literature attacks God, the Church with its rites and rituals, priests and clergy, as does Vian. It is characterised by a strong preoccupation with dreams and the role they play in relation to the subconscious. The dream-like quality of Vian’s writing helps to create a surrealist effect in L’Écume des jours and “La Valse.” His brand of humour also fits the surrealist mould because there is something intrinsically funny about the talking mouse of L’Écume des jours, the doorbell that bites people’s fingers (“Léobille”) and the football-playing chicken (“Remparts”).

Affinity with the surrealists continues in the domain of language, in which the association and implications of words take precedence over literal meaning. Some of the surrealist features of Vian’s writing style include unexpected combinations of both words and meaning, such as “ratichon” and “baigneur” to form the title Le Ratichon baigneur, portmanteau words and puns, all of which will be explored in more detail. If we accept the predominant view among French experts including Lapprand that Vian did not adhere to the surrealist movement, there is a major inconsistency in the fact that we have a non-surrealist expressing himself in terms of surrealist norms.

63 M. Lapprand, La Vie contre, p.1.
65 C. Julliard, p.106.
As early as 1914 an interest in psychoanalysis could be found across a large section of French thought. After the Liberation, research in the field expanded rapidly, raising its profile and sparking debate amongst the intellectual community. As a result of the huge surge in popularity, problems arose over the relationship between human sciences and the developing corporate structure that was being put in place.68 Vian, however, did not participate in any of the psychoanalytical discussions of the time, preferring to ridicule it before rejecting it outright. Perhaps the consequences of Vian’s rebuttal of the burgeoning field of psychoanalysis can be best summed up by the following translated statement by Costes: When one knows the ferocity of Vian’s attacks on literary critics, one can only shudder at the prospect of his attacks on the psychoanalysis of his texts!69

It would seem that the prince of Saint-Germain-des-Prés was not the prince of existentialism. In fact, the man dubbed by the press of the time as the “enfant terrible de l’existentialisme” was not an existentialist at all. Indeed, this is something that, like Camus, he denied emphatically.70 It would seem therefore that Vian had not been tempted by the philosophy that in postwar France had filtered through to all areas of mainstream contemporary thinking and which was flourishing right under his very nose in his Saint-Germain playground.

Lapprand wonders how it is possible that a total non-conformist such as Vian could have subscribed so completely to the 'Pataphysical school of thought, with all of its rites and hierarchical structures.71 Vian, it would seem, had an inherent desire to be accepted, as when he did not want to outshine his classmates at school. However he did not want to accept or to be accepted by just anyone or any group, he needed to be linked to a group whose philosophy matched his own, to a group whose philosophy was as non-conformist as his own. Jarry defined 'Pataphysics as the science of imaginary solutions, while Moulin described it as one giant joke and an enormous hoax.72 One of the features of the College of "Pataphysics was that language was seen as being in a constant state of flux, which mirrored Vian’s own

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70 C. Julliard, pp.112-113.
71 M. Lapprand, “L’Équarrisseur de première classe”, *Magazine littéraire Hors-série*, p.34.
freedom of expression. As such, members of the College did not judge him the way an unforgiving society had previously judged and condemned him. Instead, he was warmly received and his work held in high esteem. At the age of eight he was drawn to the 'Pataphysical line of thinking even before he was aware of its existence after reading De Fler’s and Caillavet’s *La Belle Aventure*, which contained the inspirational line: “Je m’applique volontiers à penser aux choses auxquelles je pense que les autres ne penseront pas.”73 It is little wonder, therefore, that Vian did not restrain himself from seeking recognition from within the ranks. Vian, the man who despised authorised dress codes, even went as far as collaborating with Stanley Chapman in organising a uniform for College members.

Death always seemed to strike tragically and early around Vian. His father was shot by intruders in the kitchen of the house at Ville-d’Avray in 1944 and his best friend, the Major, inexplicably slipped or jumped from a roof after climbing out of a window in 1948. As the author of *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*, some thought that he was responsible for inciting the strangulation murder of Anne-Marie Masson in a hotel room by Edmond Rougé, who later hanged himself in the forest of Fontainebleau. Vian was disappointed by the fact that *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*, written under the name of Vernon Sullivan, had achieved greater popular success than those titles written under his own name. He had also tried to put aside the scandal that had been associated with its release. Ultimately, it was on seeing his own name once again linked to that of Sullivan on the big screen that his heart stopped beating. On the day of his funeral, there was one final twist. The undertakers were on strike, so his friends were left to bury him themselves. To rid himself of Sullivan, Arnaud says Vian had to die and although Vian subscribed to the theory that life was not complete until death, it was out of death that his legend was born. This final comment further validates Vian's inclusion in higher level studies as outlined in the preface.

1.3.2. Manifestation in the Text

Elements of an anti-establishment, non-conformist attitude can be found in a number of short stories. Perhaps the most striking example is the portrayal of the police as bumbling and incompetent. In “Le Loup-garou”, as the policeman is writing Denis a

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73 Ibid., p.266. My translation: I like to think about things that I don’t think others think about.
ticket for not having a light on his bike, Denis takes off, leaving the officer stranded, helplessly blowing into his “tube à sons” (p.18). In the ensuing chase, a motorcycle policeman falls off his bike and as a result loses a testicle and part of his hearing. Apart from this rather comical imagery, the very fact that the whistle is called a “sound tube” simplifies the device to its most basic function that through extension can be applied to the policeman himself. In a similar vein, the pursuit of Aulne deteriorates into a Keystone Cops routine as the police officers run around in circles chasing each other (“Cœur” 25). The pair of officers who arrive on the scene to check out the activities being undertaken by the Major and Verge are more interested in vulgar banter involving references to venereal disease than in the execution of their duty. Further examples of corruption and incompetence lie with the police commissioner at Biarritz, a notorious smuggler who has murdered 109 Spanish customs officers (“Remparts” 53), and when the police arrive too late on the scene to prevent the theft in “Les Filles d’avril” (p.82) and the accident in “Marthe et Jean” (p.120). The penalties for crimes committed also seem to be ridiculously disproportionate, given that Léon Dodiléon is thrown in gaol for the fairly minor offence of stepping on a dog (“Pas” 114), whereas three months behind bars is considered to be an appropriate penalty for the murder of twelve people (“Penseur” 132).

Vian’s anti-religious stance is evident in his representation of the clergy. The village priest in La-Houspignole-sur-Côtés is hardly a fitting role model for the community with his drunken escapades on Saturdays and his lack of faith in God, the latter brought about by the transformation of young Urodonal Carrier (“Penseur” 129). Further denigration of the clergy occurs when two priests occasionally stop to steal a furtive kiss in the shadows (“Pénible” 118). Discussion of homosexuality within the Catholic Church was taboo when this story was written, indicating that Vian was perhaps ahead of his time by daring to broach the subject. Further attacks on the clergy appear in “Le Ratichon baigneur”. In this case, the priest seems to be far removed from Vian’s vision of reality, preferring to ignore the things of the world that would bring him closer to his flock in favour of blissful ignorance. There is no substance in his beliefs once they are challenged by the narrator, as he disappears into thin air, leaving the narrator to assume his place, living a life of relative ease and potential abuse, drinking altar wine and listening to the confessions of young girls.
Total lack of respect for the Church can also be seen in the plot of “L’Assassin”, which distorts the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel to accommodate Vian’s views on homophobia.

Portrayal of bureaucratic incompetence also reveals anti-establishment views. As the Major tries to obtain petrol coupons to undertake a road trip, he becomes the victim of conflicting interpretations of statutory law. Rubber-stamping causes tempers to become frayed, eventually leading to extreme measures being undertaken as frustration sets in (“Léobille”). Stylistically, exaggeration is used as an inversely proportional means of reaction, as firstly the bureaucrat Pistoletti and then people in the préfecture are eliminated in mafia-style executions. Similar exaggeration can be found in the implementation of legislation covering the minimum noise level to be reached for police pursuits (“Cœur” 25) and in the awarding of academic scholarships for those stating the obvious (“Penseur” 130). These last two examples were likely both inspired by Vian’s own experiences, from his time working at the regulatory body AFNOR which, according to Vian, regulated anything and everything, and from the uninspiring experiences of his school days as a gifted but not outstanding student. Bureaucratic parody extends to the adoption of a teenage girl who is originally offered for adoption as a child (“Maternité”) and to attempts at marital reconciliation through the pomp and pageantry of legal channels (“Motif”).

Vian’s stance on uniforms is evidenced through Flavie’s comment that her father used to tend his artichokes at the Place de l’Opéra under the very noses of the bus drivers because “[il] méprisait l’uniforme sous tous ses aspects” (“Pénible” 123), and through the description of the two policemen unnecessarily adorned in full dress uniform following Aulne in a horse-drawn cart (“Cœur” 24). Anti-militarism is declared through the actions of General Saxakrammerigothensburg who drags his prisoner on a leash through the streets. His career, along with those of judge and police officer, is described by Vian as one of “les plus sales besognes” (“Pénible” 119). Evidence of Vian’s anti-politicism and anti-Gaullist position can be seen in the only political reference in the texts, which refers to de Gaulle as “Double-Maître” (“Méfie” 57).

There is no mention of the surrealist movement or psychoanalysis in the short stories, which through their very omission could substantiate Vian’s non-adherence. However, the girls who have no interest in anything of a sexual nature, with
existentialist magazines tucked under their arms waiting in line to enter the cinema, serve as a metaphor for Vian’s own lack of interest in the existentialist movement (“Divertissements” 34), as does the priest who reads Christian magazines and paints his church in preference to reading existentialist texts (“RB”). On the other hand, Aurèle, a self-proclaimed existentialist, according to Vian suffers from a slight inferiority complex because he is an adherent.

In a previous part of this chapter, Vian’s attitude towards dandyism, sexual immorality, the cinema, divorce and suicide in relation to the short stories have already been discussed. A number of other views have also been aired. He expresses a strong anti-press attitude and an even stronger anti-homosexual attitude in “L’Assassin”, which is achieved primarily through the use of terms of denigration, such as *cochons* for the first and *lope* and *folle* for the second. Similar negativity towards homosexuality can be found in “Maternité” where denigration is combined with sarcasm in the phrase: “un de ces gentils petits ménages de pédérastes” (p.132), while the woman on the dance floor who teasingly rubs against her female partner on seeing Trounaille (“Drôle” 100) is only slightly less maligned than the cold-hearted lesbians who kill Jean and mockingly cover his body in snow (“Voyeur” 157). Besides homophobic prejudice, Vian exhibits a generalised phobia of human society in all of its manifestations. Contemporary society is condemned when the extent of Denis’ general knowledge is contrasted with the animalistic behavior of man, firstly through the actions of the prostitute who tries to steal from him, then through the aggression shown towards him by her pimps, and finally by the incompetence of the policemen who try to stop him (“LG”). The obligation of a husband and wife toward each other is another area in which Vian expresses his views. Marthe plays the subservient role as she accepts the blame for her husband’s actions and surrenders her driving licence so Jean can retain his (“M&J”), and there is the total reversal of roles as Clams ends up in gaol after trying to satisfy his wife’s motor vehicle fetish (“Pas”).

The expression of alternative and sometimes conflicting points of view can be found in the writings attributed to any one of Vian’s twenty-seven pseudonyms. Two stories written under two different pen names can be found in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*. The first is “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” by Vernon Sullivan, “the bad side of Boris”, and the second is “La Valse” by Joëlle du Beausset, Vian’s
The issue of non-conformity in relation to Vernon Sullivan stems primarily from the relationship between Vian and the fictitious author and the scandal surrounding content, especially in the first novel, *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*, which was written in less than two weeks. The novel would seemingly refute the claim that Vian was not an author *engagé* because he takes a firm political stance in relation to the plight of African-Americans. The sexual references in “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” are brief and allusive rather than graphic, and are not related in the same humorous tone as the other stories signed Vian, supporting Rybalka’s claims that they belong to a more Latin erotic tradition. The police references too are in no way disparaging and are, in fact, quite the opposite as success is achieved when one of the murder suspects is apprehended. “La Valse” represents the complete opposite of Vian’s true feelings as Olivier expresses a love of classical music and disdain for his much-loved jazz scene in Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

As in Vian’s own life, death as a form of brutal finality strikes the characters in the stories signed by both himself and Sullivan: Slacks is not apprehended by the police because she is killed instantly in a car accident, and the survivor is about to have his life cut short by execution in the electric chair (“Chiens”); in an incident that somewhat resembles the Major’s death, Aulne falls from the window of a multi-storey building (“Cœur”); Jean is beaten to death by three women before being covered in snow (“Voyeur”); Pistoletti is assassinated in the corridors of the préfecture (“Remparts”); Pelugia has her throat slit in the waters of Palavas (“Marseille”); and Cain is in prison after having vented his anger on his brother (“Assassin”). Even when the subject of death arises, it is clear that the extent of the detail supports Costes’ statement that the biographical component is always considerable in the works of Boris Vian.

1.4. Beyond Biography

De Nodrest tells us that “the duty of the translator is to understand the book and its author, hence the necessity for him to have some knowledge of the context of the

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75 M. Rybalka, p.108.
76 A. Costes, “Psychanalyse du Schmürz”, *Magazine littéraire Hors-série*, p.76.
writing of that work.” This chapter has situated Vian in a historical, geographical and social context and has helped to shed some light on his personality and thought processes. From the translation perspective, it is therefore important to retain the correct register in order to convey the author's attitudes to the target audience. Before moving on to discuss the formulation of a translation strategy, the question needs to be asked whether reading works on or by the author alone is sufficient to provide the translator with enough insight to make the most informed translation decisions.

It is interesting to note that the best critics of Vian have been his friends: Pierre Kast, Latis, Noël Arnaud, François Caradec, François Billetdoux, J-J Gaspard, Jacques Bens, to name but a few, and that Stanley Chapman as translator of *L’Écume des jours* exchanged correspondence with Vian on seven different occasions to discuss limericks and other linguistic issues. The English translation of *Les Bâtisseurs d’Empire* by Simon Watson Taylor, described as being brilliant in a number of ways, also involved authorial input. Here the translator makes it quite clear that it was Boris Vian himself who made the suggested changes during the course of conversation. However, access to the author does not always guarantee a good translation. Milton Rosenthal who worked with Vian on *I Shall Spit on Your Graves* is a case in point. Rybalka claims Rosenthal performed a number of very bad English translations of Vian’s short stories that exist in manuscript form.

Certainly, determining authorial intent is easier when the author is alive because there can be either direct or indirect collaboration, and sometimes even both. Rather more, and different, work is required if the author is deceased or otherwise unavailable. In this case, there may be some room to move for the translator with interpretation and licence, which will require various paratextual elements (such as footnotes). It would therefore be interesting to know whether Julia Older’s translated title *Blues for a Black Cat* from Vian’s *Blues pour un chat noir* might have been translated less literally if she had been aware that the French title itself was a

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77 S. de Nodrest, p.13.
78 M. Rybalka, p.9.
80 M. Rybalka, p.204.
81 Ibid., p.221.
83 J. Munday, 3rd IATIS Conference, Monash University, Melbourne, 7/7/2009.
back-translation of the jazz tune “Black Cat Blues” because originally each story in the collection was dedicated to a particular jazz musician.84 

Whether an author is alive or dead, some translators have taken extraordinary steps to gain a better understanding and feel for the author and the text. This has sometimes involved travelling to the setting of the source text, or visiting the author’s roots to determine what may have been influential factors in developmental stages. Extreme cases might even involve total immersion in a source culture for extended periods, as in the preparation of biblical texts or ethnological and anthropological documents. One such case involves Ruth Beebe Hill who spent twenty-five years on site researching *Hanta Yo*,85 a narrative about North American Plains Indians, compiling a glossary of Lakota words and collecting idiomatic expressions along the way in order to authenticate every scene and incident. Another relevant case study is Felstiner’s translation of Pablo Neruda’s poem about Machu Picchu. Felstiner immersed himself in the culture of the source text author and even went as far as visiting Machu Picchu “to listen to Neruda reading his poems so as to see the stresses and emphases.”86 While some texts may require very little, if any, preliminary research, Jeremy Munday argues that other texts would be untranslatable if it were not for background information; he describes the great lengths that some translators go to in order to clarify specific textual aspects: “it would be impossible to translate Saramago’s *História do cerco de Lisboa* without researching the history of the crusades, and Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg* requires knowledge of the regimes of Alpine sanatoria in the 1920s.”87 

Some critics, including Lapprand, have called for Vian studies to adopt a stand-alone text approach. While this school of thought can, and perhaps should, be applied to some forms of literary analysis, the same cannot be said for translation. Although the translation of some authors may require little, if any, preliminary research, in the case of Vian, where biographical content forms such an integral part of the text, research of this content will inevitably lead to more informed translation decisions, with the

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84 M. Rybalka, p.220.
87 Ibid., p.185.
extent of research depending on the text(s) under translation. The pursuit of biographical knowledge is therefore important in order to help see the world through the eyes of Boris Vian and to help recreate the era in which he lived. To this end, a number of different non-textual strategies have been employed in the development of the translation project that forms the corpus of data on which the present thesis is predicated. Cité Véron, Vian’s apartment in Paris, is open to the public on appointment, with special research assistance provided by Nicole Bertolt and Christelle Gonzalo. The Fausses-Reposes woods (home to Denis the werewolf), neighbouring Ville-d’Avray (Vian’s birthplace) and the cafés and nightclubs of Saint-Germain-des-Prés provide an opportunity to explore areas of Vian’s environment that manifest themselves in the stories. Climbing a Mansard roof to see how Aulne could have escaped and retracing part of the Major’s epic road journey from Paris to Saint-Jean-de-Luz, including a visit to his grandmother’s house at 5 rue Mazarin and to a charbonnerie, have helped to contextualise references, while attending plays written by Vian, concerts staged to commemorate his life and discussions with Vianistes at conferences can all lead to a deeper understanding of the man and to clarification of certain aspects of his work.

Knowledge of Vian’s biographical details obtained from textually sourced material and from the very privileged position of physical displacement allows for informed decisions that might lead to the realisation that the initial drafts may not always be the best or the most appropriate translation. This, in turn, substantiates the philosophy and practice of leading literary translators stated throughout this chapter that the life and work of the author, in this case, are inextricably linked to the text.
Chapter Two. Determining a Translation Strategy

When the decision was made to undertake this translation of Boris Vian’s short stories, the stated function was to attempt to recreate Vian in English. This is a broad statement, so some elaboration is necessary. In order to recreate Vian, the first thing that needs to be done is to identify and reproduce, wherever possible, the unique features of his style. These include: lexical issues, incorporating proper nouns, neologisms and word plays; phrasal deformations, register and repetition; as well as syntactical and other issues associated with the rendering of French into English, as outlined in the introduction. There is also the question of foreignisation and domestication: the former dealing with the retention of foreign elements; the latter determining facilitation strategies for the target text reader, the degree of which is ultimately determined by the subjectivity attached to this particular skopos. Furthermore, the rather abstract notion of "voice", which is linked to the rhythm and rhyme of the underlying poetics of the prose structure, needs to be identified and subsequently addressed.

With this in mind, when determining a translation strategy, there are a number of different approaches that could and should be considered. While the comparison of relevant critique and the way Vian himself translated are both of great importance and should not be ignored,¹ the primary focus of this study is the role of the literary translator in relation to existing theories, which has been given priority in order to provide an overview of the whole process.

While the approach to many types of economically driven translations could be considered to be somewhat prescriptive and formulaic, the same cannot be said for literary translation, which Bellos says “is different from all other kinds” because it allows the translator to share in the creative process. With the emphasis firmly on the mode of expression, and with the aim most of the time being that of publication or personal satisfaction,² the literary translator must demonstrate “an appreciation of and feeling for different styles, tones and nuances in both the source and target languages,

thus recreating the mood of the original.”³ Literary translation is more than simply changing words from one language to another; rather, it involves the intricate task of expressing the words of the writer in a way that captures the underlying features of the original. In other words, the translator should leave a similar impression on the target text reader as the original author did on the source text reader. Landers supports and clarifies this statement: “[A]ll facets of the work, ideally, are reproduced in such a manner as to create in the TL reader the same emotional and psychological effect experienced by the original SL reader.”⁴ Literary translators must therefore consider the aesthetic aspects of the text, its beauty and style, as well as the lexical, grammatical and phonological marks. This view is not new, however, for according to Holman and Boase-Beier, interpretation within the restraints of fidélité of the source language can be found as far back as the translation of the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic versions of the Bible, and in the Roman translation of the Classics, which aimed to facilitate the target audiences’ reception of foreign thought.⁵ Indeed, for Jeremy Munday, a great literary translator is one who is also able to recreate the “voice” of the source text in the target text. The choices made by the translator, whether obligatory or optional, are referred to as the “voice” of the translator, which refers to the underlying presence of the translator in the target text. Since each translator has a particular style in his or her target language, to capture the style of the original, a certain distance from the text needs to be maintained in order for the underlying patterns to emerge during the process of translation. This involves replicating the rhythm, the singing and the musicality of the original in the target language.⁶ As Maria Freij maintains, “[i]n order to stay true to the voice of the original, it is crucial to recognise how form and content support one another in creating the overall poetic effect.”⁷

In order to try to efface the “voice” of the translator, two other issues involving the target language need to be resolved; these involve era-specific and

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⁶ J. Munday, pre-conference workshop, Third IATIS Conference, Monash University, 7 July 2009.
culture-specific usage. The first of these requires an attempt to replicate era-specific language that is comparable to the source text language. The second issue involves the regional usage of the target language. In this case, since the demographic of the target audience has not been specified, the question should be asked if the English usage should be oriented towards an American, British or Australian audience.

As is the case in other types of translation, “one of the most difficult problems in translating literary texts is found in the differences between cultures.”

In fact, all of the sources consulted in this study emphasise the importance of cultural knowledge in literary translation as a means of rapprochement. For Schulte, “[l]iterary translation bridges the delicate emotional connections between cultures and languages and furthers the understanding of human beings across national borders.” Others approach the importance of culture from a slightly different perspective. Landers tells us that the literary translator needs “extensive exposure to another culture to become conversant enough with it to translate its literature with confidence and accuracy.”

In helping to decide upon a strategy in relation to Boris Vian and literary translation, the following comment by Harry Aveling is particularly relevant: “literary translation is fun, a performance art, and literary translators are performers, artists”, and their tools are passion, worldly knowledge, language skills beyond established databases, and creativity, albeit tempered by textual constraints and language conventions.

2.1. Theoretical Considerations

We are now going to explore Vermeer’s skopos, Even-Zohar’s Polysystems Theory, Holz-Määttäri’s translational action, and Nord’s translation-oriented text analysis, all of which have already played a role in helping to determine text choice and in the commissioning stage of the translation procedure. However, translation theory is a complex web and each of these approaches may now re-enter the process at the strategy development phase. These interrelated theories have been selected for

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10 C.E. Landers, p. 13.
11 H. Aveling, pre-conference workshop, Third IATIS Conference, Monash University, 7 July 2009.
discussion for a number of reasons: *skopos* determines the purpose of the translation; polysystems examines how the texts fit, and will fit, into the literary systems of the source and target cultures; translational action helps to identify domestication strategies; and translation-oriented text analysis helps to identify foreignisation strategies. There are also a number of external factors to consider.

2.1.1. *Skopos Theory*

The *Skopos* Theory is target text oriented. It states that the purpose (or *skopos*, in Greek) of the translation needs to be clarified at the beginning of the assignment so that a target text can be produced that will meet the stated expectations of the target audience. This may therefore lead to the production of a range of different target texts that are dependent on the requirements of the individual receiver. As Reiss and Vermeer themselves say, the target text “must be interpretable as coherent with the target text receiver’s situation.”\(^\text{12}\) *Skopos* theory, which predates translational action, downplays the importance of the source text in a series of hierarchical rules. The rules state that the intratextual coherence of the target text is more important than intertextual coherence with the source text, or in other words, the readability of the target text is more important than its relationship with the source text.

Having said that, it is important to see how the *skopos* of the source text compares to that of the target text when determining a translation strategy. Between 1942 and 1943, one of the important features of Vian’s writing was its ludic quality. He often wrote to amuse his friends by recreating the atmosphere of their milieu.\(^\text{13}\) However, in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, when most of these stories were composed, he was writing in a wide range of genres, from pastiches of the American thriller to the philosophical or moral fable. Some stories appeared in magazines and reviews such as *Dans le train*, *La Rue*, *Samedi-Soir* and *Paris-Tabou*; others remained unpublished. They did not appear in edited collections until many years later when Noël Arnaud gathered the manuscripts together from Vian’s desk. Vian longed to be taken seriously as a writer, as is demonstrated by his bitter


disappointment at not winning the Pléiade Prize for his first major novel, *L'Écume des jours* (published in 1947). This bitterness was compounded by the fact that the only public recognition he achieved was through the writings he published under the pseudonym Vernon Sullivan. It would therefore be reasonable to assume that he considered these short stories, which were usually composed spontaneously, late at night, for experimentation and his own pleasure, to be of secondary importance.

If the spirit of Vian is to be recreated, then some replication of his experimentation is needed in order to produce target texts that reflect the diverse registers and the playfulness of the original French texts. They should not be encyclopedic, nor crammed with annotation and explanations of stylistic features and cultural differences. The target texts should be seen to be meeting target audience expectations for the short story genre, as well as serving as a forum for highlighting the creative aspects of literary translation and of the author.

### 2.1.2. Polysystems

Itamar Even-Zohar says that the position of translated literature within the literary “polysystem” is not fixed. "Polysystem" refers to the position of translated literature within the literary, cultural and historical contexts of the target culture. It generally applies to the body of translated literature rather than individual texts, which works as a system within a system, hence polysystem. Translated literature may occupy the primary or secondary position, and the translation strategy should be adjusted accordingly. When a translated work occupies the central position, in countries, for example, where people read a lot of literature in translation, perhaps over and above works originally written in the native language, then that work is generally strong in itself and does not need to conform to target culture conventions. The translator does not have to adopt target language models and can adhere more closely to source text format and culture. If the position of translated literature is weak, because it does not have a widespread readership, it occupies the peripheral position and the reverse trend
occurs. In this latter case, the translator aims for target text “acceptability” by creating a text that adopts target culture norms and target language conventions.  

Bellos calls these two types of translation strategies “translating up” and “translating down.” “Translating up” occurs when the literature is on the outside of the polysystem. It is generally towards a language of greater prestige and greater readership. It is more adaptable to target culture norms, sometimes erasing the text’s foreign origin. “Translating down” occurs when the literature is at the centre of the polysystem. It generally happens when the target audience is smaller or has less cultural, economic and religious prestige. It retains the foreign features of the original, such as vocabulary and readability.

Despite having said that the position of translated literature is not fixed, Even-Zohar maintains that “the ‘normal’ position assumed by translated literature tends to be the peripheral one.” He states, furthermore, that “[t]he central position of French literature within the European context (or within the European macro-polysystem) has caused French literature in translation to assume an extremely peripheral position.” This is evidenced by the gradual decline in the translation of French literature since the end of the Second World War and especially since the 1970s with the beginning of globalisation and the increased domination of English. While this may be true within Europe because of the relatively higher incidence of multilingualism, this peripheral position may not be so extreme in places like the United States or Australia where French literature is often only available through translation. In this instance, popular works in translation such as *Les Misérables*, *The Second Sex* or *Tintin* could normally be expected to occupy a position relatively close to the core of the polysystem.

Although *L'Écume des jours* is still studied in high schools, the works of Boris Vian are deemed to be relatively marginal within the French literary system, having

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16 I. Even-Zohar, p. 203.
been kept outside the French canon and largely excluded from university study by a system that is more stable and conservative than that to be found in Anglo-Saxon countries. It may therefore be that translations of Vian in English will occupy a similar position within the target system. This assumption appears to be justified by the fact that a number of English versions of Vian’s texts are no longer available in print, *Froth on the Daydream*, *Mood Indigo* and the 1992 hardcover edition of *Blues for a Black Cat* being cases in point. The following statement from Mark Thwaite provides further confirmation of this marginal status:

Boris Vian seems, here in the UK at least, to be rather forgotten. The redoubtable Scottish publishers *Canongate* brought out an edition of the stark, bitter *I Spit on Your Graves* a year or so ago and that remains the only other one [besides *Heartsnatcher*] of his works readily available in English translation. […] For those of us whose schooldays’ French is barely up to the job this dearth of translations could not be more frustrating.¹⁸

Add to this the fact that the English publications of Vian’s works tend to mirror the early publication process in France, with only relatively minor players involved, such as the commercial TamTam Books and the non-profit Dalkey Archive Press, and Vian in the English world could not be touted, yet, as mainstream.¹⁹

This could lead to the conclusion that an increase in the degree of target text orientation might be required in order to move his work closer to the centre of the English literary polysystem, although perhaps not quite so far as the 2010 American horror movie remake of *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes* (*I Spit on Your Grave*), which serves as an example of Roman Jakobson’s transposition or transcoding, and bears only a slight resemblance to the original. However, herein lies an incongruity in relation to the consideration of different theoretical approaches. French into English translation is considered to be “translating up” because of the larger readership and also because it is prestigious for the author of a foreign text to be translated into English. In fact, Bellos says that “all languages, even French, are minor ones now

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¹⁹ This might change, however, with the publication of Vian’s complete works in the Pléiade in 2010 and the release in 2013 of Michel Gondry’s film adaptation of *L’Écume des jours* as *Mood Indigo.*
[and] whatever language you write in, the translation that counts is the English one.”  This is an approach that cultivates the inclusion of target language norms and conventions in translation. However, by retaining source language proper nouns, vocabulary and idiosyncracies, translating down would actually be taking place. Therefore, the translation of Vian short stories in relation to Polysystems Theory, as with instrumental and documentary translation, should involve a certain degree of both “up” and “down” approaches, incorporating features of both the source text and target culture, which is the method that will be applied here.

2.1.3. Translational Action

Translational action, like skopos theory, is very heavily target text oriented, placing the target audience’s needs to the fore in any translation assignment. As a result, there may be clarification in the target text where there was none in the source text. Translational action operates on a number of levels. On the textual level, the form and genre may vary between source text and target text if the source text format is deemed to be unsuitable or if it hinders communication in the target culture. Therefore it does not promote the strict replication of source text format. Examples of this could be the addition of images to a text to assist in the communication of a message or the removal of images if they were deemed to be culturally inappropriate for the receiving audience. On the cultural level, it is the role of the translator to facilitate communication across borders: “[It] is not about translating words, sentences or texts but it is in every case about guiding the intended co-operation over cultural barriers enabling functionally oriented communication.”  

Intercultural transfer deals with determining strategies for the translation of specific features of the source culture that are different to, or have no equivalent in, the target culture. Many of Boris Vian’s short stories are time- and culture-specific, so transferring this detail in a manner that is comprehensible to a target audience is paramount if full understanding of the source text is to be achieved. Specific features that exemplify this aproach include plays on words, such as the chicken joke in “Motherhood”.

20 D. Bellos, p.222.
(p.139) where *poulet* (chicken) might be changed to “pig” in order to preserve the register for the reference to the police. Other such features may require the addition of a facilitation device in order to render the significance of character and geographical names. If the purpose of translational action is to produce a target text that is target audience oriented, then textually integrated solutions, a preface, footnotes or endnotes may be required, which then leads to a variation in form between the source text and target text.

As a genre, the short story exists in both the source and target cultures, but here the presentation of the stories will be slightly different from the original format. Instead of two volumes of stories, originally gathered and published posthumously by Noël Arnaud (thirteen stories in *Le Loup-garou* and fifteen in *Le Ratichon baigneur*), the twenty-eight stories will be pooled and combined within one larger volume, with a different critical apparatus, namely to provide a forum for the discussion of translation issues and difficulties that arise from Vian’s work.

### 2.1.4. Translation-oriented Text Analysis

Christiane Nord is critical of the prominence given to the target text by Holz-Mänttäri and Vermeer because she believes it allows the translator too much licence. She believes that a relationship must exist between the source text and target text, which is determined by the function of the target text within the target culture. Before translation begins, she proposes that the translator should conduct a detailed analysis of the source text to see where divergence with the target text is likely to occur, and to see which elements of the source text should be retained. Her ‘analysis in translation’ distinguishes between two types of translation: documentary and instrumental. Documentary or exoticising translation retains certain culture-specific lexical items of the source text so that the target audience is aware that what they are reading is a translation, or at the very least a text that is based in a different culture. More extreme features of documentary translation are strict word-for-word, or literal, translation, which highlights the foreign through structure and syntax. This branch that calls for source text features to be retained once the purpose has been stated has
sometimes been called “function-preserving translation.” Instrumental translation is where the target audience is unaware that what they are reading is a translation, because they believe that the text before them is the original. Culture-specific items of the source text are replaced and target language conventions such as structure, syntax, punctuation and rhythm are adopted.

These two types of translation mirror Juliane House’s ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ classification, Lawrence Venuti’s ‘foreignisation’ and ‘domestication’ strategies, Basil Hatim and Ian Mason’s ‘dynamic’ and ‘stable’ text types, and Eugene Nida’s theory of ‘formal’ and ‘dynamic’ equivalence, with the terms ‘covert’, ‘dynamic’ and ‘domestication’ roughly corresponding to ‘instrumental’, and ‘overt’, ‘stable’, ‘formal’ and ‘foreignisation’ roughly corresponding to ‘documentary’ translation.

It could be argued that the translation of Boris Vian’s short stories should incorporate features of both documentary and instrumental translation. Because most of the stories are time and place specific, and autobiographical in nature, with many of the characters centred around the author himself or based on family and friends, they are strictly culture bound. Thus, any attempt to reposition them will inevitably result in significant loss of authorial intent.

Culture-specific items include socionyms such as “SNCF” (“Remparts” 33), “préfecture” (“LG” 32) and “TCRP” (“Martin” 71); magazines and reviews such as Les Temps modernes (“Amour” 64) and La Rue (“RB” 50); the geographical place names “Montmartre” (“Penseur” 131) and “Deligny” (“Test” 71); and coyly misspelt iconic establishments such as the Café de Flore as "café Duflor" and the Deux Magots as "Deux Mâghos" (“Remparts” 32,33), to name but a few. There are also the names of real people, some better known than others; Charles de Gaulle, Yvon Pétra (“Méfie” 57) and Claude Luter (“Valse” 126), all of which help to accentuate the “Frenchness” and historical specificity of the work.

The question could be asked, however, whether the retention of every culture-specific lexical item will have a negative impact on the target text reader by creating a sense of isolation, which is a possibility if the text sounds “too foreign”. Since the reader will already more than likely be aware that the text in question is a translation, the text may still retain a sense of foreignness.

22 C. Nord, Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), p. 73.
because of the retention of certain culture-specific items, or because of other paratextual indicators, one potential strategy is to reduce the number of source culture references in instances where it will not negatively impact on the text. Bellos calls this strategy “selective foreignism”. This may lead to devices such as superordinate substitution, as in “SNCF” becoming “rail company”, or cultural substitution, whereby, for example, “je roule à gauche” (“Cœur” 24) becomes “I drive on the wrong side of the road” (for an Australian or UK readership).

Having said this, there are a number of stories that, with only a few minor alterations, could actually be perceived as belonging to the literature of the target culture, in which case they would firmly be placed in the realm of instrumental translation. If the aim of the translation were to produce a text that was removed from the source culture, as seen in the Planet of the Apes franchise based on Pierre Boulle's La Planète des singes, “Marthe et Jean” would be a case in point: if the names of the two characters were anglicised to “Martha” and “John”, and if the “billet de cent francs” (“M&J” 111) were converted to target currency, then a target text would be produced that could easily be mistaken for an original in almost any English-speaking country where motor vehicles are driven on the right hand side of the road. Other stories that could lend themselves to this form of adaptation are “Le Loup-garou”, “L’Amour est aveugle” and “L’Assassin.” “Le Voyeur” presents a different case, on the other hand, because the proper nouns in the story need to be anglicised in order to provide the target text reader with the same opportunity as the source text reader to glean the hidden significance encoded within the names “Vallyeuse” (Happy Valley), “Saut de l’Elfé” (Elf’s Leap) and “Cirque des Trois-Sœurs” (Three Sisters Hollow).

Up until this point, only cultural references and culture specific lexis have been discussed. Documentary and instrumental translations also operate on the textual level in relation to structure and syntax. In the early stages of the strategy development for this project, Blues for a Black Cat and Froth on the Daydream were distributed to a number of individuals who had expressed an interest in Vian in order to gauge their reaction to a range of features. While a number of the comments

24 D. Bellos, p.42.
26 “Le Voyeur”, Le Loup-garou, p. 149.
echoed those of some French readers of the original with regard to their contrasting attitudes towards the content, language “flow” was the predominant criticism. One reader’s observation that “[i]t just doesn’t sound like English” perhaps best summarises the consensus. Despite complex syntactical structures in a number of Vian’s stories and with a lot of lexical invention and plays on words, his texts are fundamentally easy to read in French, so this criticism indicated an immediate discrepancy in target text reception with respect to those particular translations.

As a result, consideration will be given in the translations presented here to the adoption of the target language conventions of structure, syntax, punctuation and rhythm with the aim of facilitating readability for the target audience, in keeping with the textual principles of instrumental translation. At the same time, approximately half of the cultural and lexical items of the source text will be retained, along with the recreation of neologisms and word plays, in accordance with the tenets of documentary translation.

2.1.5. External Factors

The four main theoretical considerations in determining a translation strategy are text type, text function, text orientation and external factors. Since text type, text function and text orientation have been examined in the above presentation of some of the main translation theories or approaches, it now remains to be seen how external factors impact on target text production.

The nature and role of these external factors have been theorised by André Lefevere, whose approach evolved out of polysystems and the Manipulation School.27 Lefevere considers factors that may determine the acceptance or rejection of texts, moving away from universal norms to culturally dependent ones. This may then have a direct impact on translation decisions. He believes that the first major factor to determine the success or otherwise of a text involves the influence of professionals within the system such as reviewers, critics, teachers or even other translators. The second factor includes other people such as publishers, or institutions such as schools and universities or academic journals. Venuti is also of the opinion...
that the publishing industry, by controlling finances and often basing text selection on potential profitability, dictates current Western translation methodology by calling for fluent translations that can be easily consumed by a target audience. The third factor in Lefevere’s approach is the dominant poetics of the target culture, which may include the relationship between literature and the social system. Some literature will be more acceptable because it is already operating within a system that recognises it. This is reminiscent of polysystems.

Let us take an example of how this cultural approach may influence translation decisions. In “Les Pas vernis”, Vian situates his characters on “l’Avenue Merdozart” (“Pas” 110), a phonetic play on *Merde aux Arts* and possibly a partially disguised reference to Vian’s well-known loathing for the music of Mozart. While most French readers and some non-French readers of the source text will probably recognise the word *merde* in this name, the translator should be aware of the implications and any possible repercussions of the choice taken to translate it. A literal translation, for example, may upset some people, including reviewers and critics who may condemn the target text on the grounds that it is offensive, regardless of the status of the source text in the source culture. Any criticism may then have a negative impact on the reception of the text and subsequently on sales. If the text is destined for study in schools, teachers or review panels may deem the content to be inappropriate for some students, leading to its exclusion from the curriculum. One solution which could be adopted is to leave the term as it is and to rely on the probability that a reasonable proportion of readers will be familiar with the word *merde* and make the appropriate inference (with the back-up of an explanatory note). This of course may be seen by some as a non-solution that does not attempt to deal with an important stylistic and thematic issue. In the world of economic reality, if it were considered that a particular translation choice might have a detrimental effect on potential readership, it is possible that the publisher or editor could intervene and assume the role of censor, which might then force the translator to use an inadequate alternative.

Realistically, in the modern English-speaking world, it is likely that only a small minority of readers would be offended by the literal translation of *merde*. Its English equivalent is in common usage across the social spectrum; it can sometimes be heard on television and in movies; it appears as an entry in a number of
dictionaries; and it is perhaps less confrontational these days than a number of other words bandied around in the mass media. With the possible thematic exceptions of female subservience and homosexual denigration, which some might consider to be era-specific, and some humorous sexual innuendos, Vian may be judged to be fairly inoffensive by modern standards. As such, any self-imposed or editorial censorship dictated by cultural norms will not impact on translation decisions in these translations.

### 2.2. Comparative Translation and Critique

When formulating a translation strategy, it may be of value to compare existing translations of the author and to examine accompanying and other relevant critique. To this end, “Re-creation of a Recreation” by Sophie de Nodrest and *L’Écriture vianesque: traduction de la prose* by Magdalena Mitura are of particular importance.

#### 2.2.1. “Re-creation of a Recreation”

“Re-creation of a Recreation” is an analysis and comparison of two English language translations of Vian’s novel *L’Écume des jours*. The title of the thesis is rather enigmatic because it implies that the translations of *L’Écume des jours* are a “recreation”, which they most certainly are not. The two translations involved are Stanley Chapman’s 1967 *Froth on the Daydream* and John Sturrock’s 1968 *Mood Indigo*. In her study, Sophie de Nodrest identifies problems that have been exposed through the translation of *L’Écume des jours*, many of which are common to *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur* collections of short stories. She compares the strengths and weaknesses of *Froth on the Daydream* and *Mood Indigo* by relating them back to the original. Finally, she asks which of the two translations is “closer to Boris Vian’s universe i.e. what picture is more faithful to the original one.”29 Her observations may therefore provide guidelines that can be adopted for, or adapted to, the formulation of this translation strategy.

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29 S. de Nodrest, p.9.
Before isolating specific translation issues, it is important to note that de Nodrest shares the view expressed in the previous chapter that the translator must first and foremost understand the source text and its author so that the original can be approached with some idea of authorial intent. This is crucial to the translator’s reading and interpretation, which then determines the translation strategy to be employed, as shown by the prominence given to different features by Chapman and Sturrock.

The first issue identified by de Nodrest is the translation of the title. Difficulty in translating this is evidenced by the two radically different renderings. Chapman’s *Froth on the Daydream* is an attempt at a literal approach, whereas at first there seems to be no apparent link between the abstract *Mood Indigo*, a song by Duke Ellington, and the source text title. However, the reason for the emphasis of the role of Duke Ellington does become apparent due to the underlying jazz theme throughout the text. For a similar reason, it should be mentioned that the translation into German of the title *L’Écume des jours* is *Chloe*. This divergence highlights the problems involved in translating titles, which “are often difficult to translate literally.”

Textual orientation emerges as a major issue for de Nodrest. She says, “it is a problem for the translator to decide the degree to which the cultural expression is to be explained.” This primarily refers to the number of source cultural references that are retained and how they are conveyed in the target text. Both translations aim for a certain degree of target audience facilitation, which almost inevitably results in some loss. This can be seen in the translation of *baise bol*, rendered as “screwball” in *Froth on the Daydream*, which partially retains the innuendo and pun, and as “baseball” in *Mood Indigo*, which results in the loss of both. *Froth on the Daydream* is more target-oriented than *Mood Indigo*, for Chapman has made the decision to employ the strategy of domestication, particularly by the less preferable method of changing French cultural references into British ones. *Marelle*, for example, has been translated as “cricket” and French metric units have been converted into the Imperial System. The treatment of proper nouns can also be directly related to domestication and foreignisation strategies. They have been retained in source language format in

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30 Ibid., p.4.  
31 Ibid., p.6.
*Mood Indigo*, but those in *Froth on the Daydream* have been adapted or anglicised, a facilitation strategy that de Nodrest considers to be unnecessary.

Ambiguity, through the use of homonyms, homophones, and uncommon syntactic structures emerges as a translation issue in *L’Écume des jours*, as it does throughout the short stories. The translator needs to understand the source text to the same extent as a native speaker because “a native speaker may be permitted to elucidate an ambiguity in the text, whereas the translator has to shed some light on it in order to translate the passage adequately.”32 This may be because the target language system does not always have the means to reproduce the effects of the ambiguity, so the translator must decide on meaning and direct the reading of the target audience accordingly. A number of cases of potential ambiguity emerge throughout the stories. One particular example is evident in "Marthe et Jean" with "Le candidat suivant prit sa place" (p.113). This problem is linked to grammatical gender and will be discussed later.

De Nodrest identifies a number of other issues in *L’Écume des jours* that are of particular relevance to the translation of the short stories. Vian’s prose is endowed with a particular rhyme and rhythm that need to be captured. There is an “alternation of long and short sentences in many places, which creates a dynamic rhythm.”33 This is part of what Munday refers to as the “voice” of the text. It is perhaps most evident in “La Valse” where the alternation of long and short sentences helps to convey the difference between the rhythm of waltz and jazz. The musicality of some of Vian’s prose has also been noted by Marc Roger, a professional reader, who believes that the words on the page sing to him, leading to his philosophy that what has control over the story is not the voice; it is the ear.34

Intertextuality is a feature of *L’Écume des jours* that has been eliminated in both translations, thereby decontextualising the novel within the Vian canon. One such example occurs when the famous chef, Jules Gouffé, who appears in both *L’Écume des jours* (p.25) and in "Les Remparts du sud" (p.32), is referred to as "ffroydde" in *Froth on the Daydream* (p.11). This uncapsulated homophonic play on Sigmund Freud is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere and has, in fact, not been

32 Ibid., p.3.
33 Ibid., p.10.
employed in these translations, in which the original, "Gouffé", has been retained. De Nodrest believes that intertextuality should somehow be retained because “these allusions are deliberate from the author’s part and […] are part of the charm for a French reader.”\footnote{S. de Nodrest, p.8.} Intertextuality, primarily involving characters, is evident between a number of short stories, especially in the cinema trilogy of “Un Métier de chien”, “Divertissements culturels” and “Une Grande vedette”. If aiming for \textit{fidélité} in the target text, a footnote may help to clarify something that might not mean anything to the target reader. Although considered by some as “the translator’s shame,”\footnote{Ibid., p.6.} footnotes help to retain equivalence in the body of the text. Interestingly, neither translation makes use of this device that may have been helpful in textual orientation and in the rendering of intertextual references. Compensation may be necessary to create new word plays when translation is impossible at the precise point in the text and strategies need to be put in place when trying to convey the unique features of the French language. This last point applies particularly to forms of address (\textit{tutoiement} and \textit{vouvoiement}) and to grammatical gender.

De Nodrest considers that Sturrock’s source text oriented, somewhat literal translation, with its emphasis on plot, has missed the very essence of the work he was trying to translate. Chapman, on the other hand, in attempting to “do a Vian in English”, has adopted Vian’s techniques and inventiveness to recreate his work. In de Nodrest’s own words, “only a translation that is a re-creation can do justice to a work of art”, and only “a creative translator who does not hesitate to dent his target language”\footnote{Ibid., p.17, p.13, p.20.} can do justice to Boris Vian.

\textbf{2.2.2. L’Écriture vianesque: traduction de la prose}

\textit{L’Écriture vianesque: traduction de la prose} is a comparison of two Polish translations of Vian’s novel \textit{L’Herbe rouge} by E. Jogalla and M. Puszczewicz and two translations of \textit{L’Écume des jours}, once again in Polish, both by M. Puszczewicz. Magdalena Mitura differentiates between the two major types of translation: artistic and non-artistic. Artistic translation refers specifically to literary translation. She too
believes that literary translation is not simply an exchange of words between languages but that it involves semantic transfer that also takes into account the artistic value brought to the original text by its author. Like de Nodrest, Mitura compares the translated literary text to the recreation of art, as a second stage piece of work, but unlike de Nodrest, it is for Mitura not a question of the lack or presence of creativity but rather of the degree of creativity. In other words, translator creativity is an integral part of literary translation, and therefore an author like Boris Vian may require that extra touch of creative input.

Mitura identifies specific problems raised by the translation of *L’Herbe rouge* and *L’Écume des jours*, and shows how Jogalla and Puszczewicz have responded. Despite dealing with Polish texts, and as with “Re-creation of a Recreation”, the proposed solutions can be applied to similar problems encountered in the English translation of the stories found in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*. Let us now examine Mitura’s observations and compare them to those of de Nodrest to see where there may be similarities and where there may be divergence.

If we are to take Mitura’s view that Vian is situated in a unique French environment, which is evidenced by the translators’ deliberate retention of proper nouns denoting real towns and regions, then this is in direct conflict with Chapman’s anglicisation approach to proper nouns and cultural markers, which de Nodrest has said appeals to a larger audience. However, both studies claim that facilitation is a feature used by most translators when attempting to familiarise foreign reality. The recurring issue is one of extent of facilitation, which can only really be determined by translator preference and other external factors.

There is a distinct difference of opinion between de Nodrest and Mitura over the question of style. While the former finds Vian’s prose endowed with dynamic rhythm, Mitura considers it to be a little clumsy and imperfect, which both Jogalla and Puszczewicz have deemed necessary to repair. Taking into account the fact that both studies are dealing with *L’Écume des jours*, this is an interesting disparity, which reveals that not all readers judge a text by the same criteria. The question of the translator's role in textual reparation features in these translations of the short stories, and will be elaborated upon in another chapter. Because of the diverse range...

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38 M. Mitura, p.173.
39 Ibid., p.172.
of stories found in Le Loup-garou and Le Ratichon baigneur, it is possible that some may possess the dynamic rhythm that de Nodrest is talking about, in particular “La Valse”, which has been previously referred to, while the syntax and style in a number of other stories could be considered to be simplistic and repetitive, notably the cinema trilogy. This leads to one feature that is common to all four translators involved in the two case studies: longer sentences have been divided into shorter sentences, partially to render meaning more easily and to avoid ambiguity; and shorter sentences have been combined into longer sentences, partially to avoid simplistic structures and repetition. This fairly common translator strategy towards linguistic patterning leads to an equalisation process in the target text that inevitably results in the distortion of the source text stylistics.

Mitura discusses at length the stylistic feature of repetition, which is supposedly less acceptable in French than in English, and notes that Jogalla and Puszczeńwicz have both adopted strategies to combat the effect of monotony. She cites the most obvious example as being the frequency of the verb “dire” when used as a reply in dialogue. This is an extremely common feature of Le Loup-garou and Le Ratichon baigneur, although here it is also used in the formulation of questions and exclamations. The strategies employed by the two translators are therefore particularly relevant. Her observations reveal that “dire” has been translated by using a wide range of other verbs usually found in dialogue passages. She also notes that a similar substitution process occurs when there is a high frequency use of other common verbs. Apart from verbal repetition, there is also the repetition that occurs when the same word or group of words is used to begin a number of consecutive phrases or sentences. In these instances, it has been common for the translator to use a series of logical connectors or other parts of speech, including adverbs with a modal value, to create a longer sentence.

Mitura notes that compensation is a recurring feature in both translations in her study. It is also a feature of Froth on the Daydream but there is no evidence of it in Mood Indigo. Unlike de Nodrest, Mitura is quite specific about word plays, and in fact has identified five different techniques used in their creation that may or may not lead to compensation in the target text. The first of these are word plays based on
phonics and alliteration, such as “Deux mégots aux Deux Magots”. There are also *mot-valises* or portmanteau words and there are those based on phonetic deformation, which Mitura claims are the most complex because of the three different elements (comic effect, rhyme and rhythm, and semantics) that need to be captured. There are also puns and neologisms. Mitura believes that it is possible to translate puns from one language to another, and finds justification for this in the words of Attardo, who notes that “a good translator may be able to find similarities in the two linguistic systems that will allow the rendering of the pun in another language with a minimum of distortion.” On the other hand, neologisms are much harder to render and may require translators to display their creative capabilities, which could involve the application of compensation theory. There are a number of word plays to be found throughout the short story collections, so identification by categorisation, and compensation offered as a possible solution are both particularly relevant.

Mitura and de Nodrest share a similar view in relation to intertextuality and footnotes. They both believe that awareness of intertextuality is an important factor when translating because consideration needs to be given to the action that precedes and succeeds the words on the page and the relationship the work maintains with other texts. They both consider that footnotes and endnotes are a lazy solution, a form of surrender to this problem. However, Mitura also believes that annotation highlights the dilemma that faces the translator over what to include and what not to include in the text and provided that there are not an over abundance of notes, the information contained therein should be made available to the reader of the target text.

When dealing with culturally bound items such as the names of institutions, organisations or commercial products, Mitura has observed a number of different approaches. There is cultural substitution, where the source culture socionym is replaced by one from the target culture; direct borrowing that may or may not be accompanied by a common noun to specify the nature of the object; and omission, where the name is replaced by a generic name or superordinate. Another of Mitura’s

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40 Ibid., p.191.
observations is textual expansion, where words and phrases are added for clarification.

It must be remembered that the studies undertaken by de Nodrest and Mitura, with their emphases firmly on creativity, are descriptive, not prescriptive, so therefore one should not feel obliged to implement any of the strategies employed by the four translators in question. However, it would seem rather illogical not to take into account some of the proposed suggestions, especially when they may be pertinent to the formulation of a strategy for the translation of the short stories. Sturrock’s title, *Mood Indigo*, moving away from the literal approach, provides a translation option that reflects the creativity needed to translate Vian. Chapman’s and Sturrock’s contrasting views on the translation of proper nouns leaves the translator wondering which of the two methods might best suit this translation, or whether perhaps a combination of source and translated proper nouns might be more appropriate given the number of word plays contained therein. Mitura’s observations on expansion as a means of intratextual elucidation, annotation and cultural substitution as a means of dealing with socionyms, and annotation to highlight intertextuality and to retain equivalence remain valid translation options, as does compensation as a possible solution to the translation of word plays. Mitura has observed solutions for the translation of repetition and de Nodrest has stated that the translator needs comprehensive knowledge of the source text and author in order to understand the ambiguity hidden in homonyms, homophones and some syntactic structures. With this in mind, it seems clear that these two studies, and specifically these issues just raised, can be adopted for the formulation of a translation strategy of Vian’s short stories.

### 2.3. Boris Vian: translator

It has already been said that when formulating a translation strategy, part of that strategy involves research to determine the supposed authorial intent. However, authorial research and intent assume another dimension if the author under translation is or was also a translator in his or her own right, because this approach to translation may in fact shed some light on how the author’s own work might best be translated. In other words, how would Boris Vian have translated Boris Vian? Before answering
this question, it is important to briefly contextualise some of the works he translated in order to legitimise his methodology and commentary.

Vian translated a large volume of material, ranging from novels and memoirs to theatre and song. In total, he translated twenty-four major works between 1946 and 1959. As a translator, he was both criticised and acclaimed. Carl-Gustav Bjurström who collaborated with Vian on Strindberg’s *Erik XIV* questioned his credentials as a translator. Bjurström accused Vian of corrupting the target text by employing a crude and uncouth language, yet conceded that Vian had somehow managed to capture the temperament of the author.43 When Vian completed van Vogt’s *Le Monde des * in 1953 and *Les Aventures des * in 1957, Lapprand believes that any lingering doubts over his ability as a translator were removed, for with the recognised quality of these two translations he displayed all of his ability in a difficult art form.44

2.3.1. Vian on Vian

In a letter to Stanley Chapman dated 13 October 1955, Vian offers a rare insight into his own translation methodology: We actually believe that if the primary objective is to remain extremely close to the text, the main thing is to ensure that the translated version produces the same linguistic effect on the new reader as it did on the original reader. It seems that what is required is an equivalent and not an explanation,45 which is very much in keeping with the stated aims of these translations. This statement outlines an approach to literary translation that is very much target audience oriented with an emphasis firmly on creativity, an approach that reflects one of the possible literary translation strategies announced to date in this chapter.

As a translator, Lapprand tells us that Vian was aware of the difficulties posed by both linguistic and cultural transfer. On linguistic transfer, he was very methodical, particularly when it came to the crime story genre. He created a notebook of English vocabulary, which consisted of a list of Anglo-American idiomatic expressions retrieved from the source text, accompanied by a non-

dictionary, intuition-based French equivalent, so that whenever a given word or expression arose in the source text, it was simply a matter of direct substitution. This approach is very reminiscent of the modern concept of translation memory, as used by Trados for example, in which simple substitution occurs for often repeated words and phrases. This strategy does contradict some schools of thought on literary translation practice, however. For instance, it is often suggested that the same word or phrase may be, and perhaps should be, translated in different ways depending on context. This part of his methodology is seemingly at odds with his target-oriented approach, which normally requires flexibility of language to capture nuances. Vian’s target audience orientation, or domestication approach, is highlighted by his attempt at cultural transfer, which aims for facilitation. According to Lapprand, Vian’s translation techniques include the use of cultural references that would be more readily recognisable to a French reader, which, in the short stories, would include "Jardin des Plantes" ("M&J" 111) and "place de l'Opéra" ("Pénible" 122), for example.

If we look at Vian and translation from a different perspective and consider Venuti’s concept of the invisibility of the translator, there is a major disparity between domestication and foreignisation strategies and how Vian translated. While translator invisibility primarily refers to target text fluency, there are other factors that enter into the equation. Lapprand supports the concept of translator invisibility because he believes that the translator should hide as much as possible behind the translation and only personally intervene in the case of notes to explain textual references that do not exist in the target culture. But Lapprand states that Vian often ignores source text fidélité through addition, deviation, and rewriting. He personalises the translation by incorporating features that characterise his prose, including turns of phrase, anaphora and neologisms. In fact, Lapprand says that Vian’s creativity can be compared to the way he improvised jazz on his trumpet by adding touches of his own personality to the piece he is interpreting.46

A brief comparison of Raymond Chandler’s The Lady in the Lake and the French translation by Boris Vian, La Dame du lac,47 will now follow to show where

46 Ibid., pp.105-119.
translator intrusion has led to divergence. Lapprand has identified at least twenty passages where this has occurred and has listed the following techniques that have affected meaning and register: amplification, expansion, exaggeration, omission, understatement, cultural substitution and the introduction of neologisms.

Amplification gives a broader or different sense to the intended meaning and has been achieved in a number of ways. The first method involves the use of suspension points to dramatise the effect by suggestion: “One of those clinging vine effects.” (p.13) / Un de ces trucs … (p.23). The second method is the expansion method, which involves the addition of words or phrases to the original in order to render a meaning that may or may not have been intended: “Like they’re doing all over the world right now.” (p.68) / C’est comme ce qu’ils font sur toute la terre en ce moment, avec cette guerre (p.85). The third method involves the addition of words or phrases to the original to exaggerate effect: “Blue Ali Baba oil jars were dotted around, big enough to keep tigers in.” (p.187) / De grandes jarres bleues style Ali Baba se dressaient ça et là, assez vastes pour y faire cuire des tigres. (p.219). Omission, or the deletion of detail through suspension point substitution, simplifies the reading for the target audience: “Pilgrim combination gas and wood range, everything first class.” (p.28) / Installation …tout ça de première qualité. (p.40). Understatement involves the reversal of perception in the same manner as Vinay and Darbelnet’s theory of modulation: “His manner said that he was very tough to get along with.” (p.4) / Son allure était celle d’un gars plutôt délicat à fréquenter. (p.12). Substitution of cultural references is really another way of explaining Vinay and Darbelnet’s theory of adaptation: “about the time of Grover Cleveland’s first term.” (p.60) / du temps d’Abraham Lincoln. (p.76). The unexpected introduction of a neologism where there was none in the original creates a potentially jarring effect on the reader especially with the implications of a not-so-serious word in a relatively serious situation: “The hell with both of you.” (p.14) / Que le diable vous patafiole tous les deux. (p.24); “a fly buzzed softly over one of the liquor glasses.” (p.113) / une mouche zonzonnait doucement autour d’un des verres. (p.135).

While some might consider Vian’s translation to be intrusive, diverging from the original, misrepresenting authorial intent and somewhat contrary to his own views on reproducing an equivalent text, there are facets of his procedure and technique that could perhaps be adapted to the translation of Vian himself. Vian’s style is unique
and personal, so when encountering an extraordinary word usage or an obscure reference for the first time, it may be of some advantage to record it in a database, similar to the notebook of English vocabulary, so that it can be readily retrieved when it reappears. Often, much research and some intuition is required to work out to what or to whom Vian is referring, so the compilation of a glossary should facilitate translation procedure, as in the case of “Polboubal”, a phonetic representation of the name of the owner of the Café de Flore, Paul Boubal, which appears in both “Divertissements culturels” (p.31) and “La Valse” (p.126). Apart from this practical aspect, there are also stylistic features gleaned from his translation techniques that can be adopted. Compensation through amplification and anaphora may help with exaggeration, as in “Le Motif” (pp.105-6), where Les pieds en l’air, le front dans les mains can be translated as “With feet in air and head in hands”. Amplification through expansion or substitution may be used for clarification purposes for the target audience, as in du XIV (“Maternité” 136) translated as “in the fourteenth arrondissement”. Overstatement may reinforce humour, as in the references to other types of birds in the expressions associated with the chicken in “Les Remparts du sud”: Ça me fait une belle jambe (p.43) / “That chicken has made me look like a goose”; il (le pain) doit puer la volaille (p.43) / “it’s going to smell fowl”; Celle-ci plongea (p.46) / “The chicken duck-dived”. Suppression of detail through textual deletion may facilitate cultural transfer, as in socionyms, and juxtaposition of contrasting register may highlight the sometimes surrealist nature of his work.

To discuss the translation of Vian’s short stories in terms of Venuti’s concept of the invisibility of the translator may be doing an injustice to Vian. While sections of the stories do indeed lend themselves to English language fluency, thus effacing the translator, there are many facets of his style that need that extra degree of creativity and input. In fact, with controlled manipulation of the target text and by being prepared to go out on a limb every once in a while, it just might be that a translator who tries to imitate Vian will emulate Vian when it comes to the praise he sometimes received for the quality of his translations.

Theoretical considerations in the formulation of a translation strategy will lead to the production of a target text that has both target audience and source text orientation in varying proportions, depending on the specific feature under consideration.
Translational action, *skopos*, polysystems and instrumental translation favour target orientation, whereas documentary translation, with its retention of culture-specific lexical items, and André Lefevere’s cultural approach, which centres on external factors such as the publishing industry and social systems, ensure that the target text is endowed with a certain degree of source text orientation.

Following careful consideration of the implications of these theoretical positions, drawing conclusions from comparative translations and critique undertaken by de Nodrest and Mitura, as well as taking into account the methodology Vian himself employed, a combination of source and target strategies will be adopted for the translation of the short stories. Target orientation will involve a certain degree of creativity in order to reproduce Vian’s elusive word plays, stylistic anomalies, rhymes and rhythms. This will involve some compensation, amplification and interpretation, all of which interact to impact on Munday’s translation-defining “voice” of the text, which will efface the translator to a large extent by employing a form of English that is both era-specific and non-era specific, as well being somewhat generic in nature because a specific audience, whether it be American, British or Australian, has not been directly targeted. It nevertheless will allow an ease of expression through the adoption of target language structures, syntax, idiomatic expressions and punctuation that does not subjugate other features. It is an approach designed to facilitate the readability of the text while allowing for cultural exchange by means of textually integrated solutions, such as substitution, borrowing, contraction and annotation that do not override the primary text but that aim to transfer assumed source audience knowledge to the target audience. Source orientation, on the other hand, includes the retention of lexical items and cultural references that situate the text in a specific time and place, maintaining the register of potentially offensive words and expressions, and instilling in the target audience an awareness of intertextuality. This provides more direct access to the source culture, but at the risk of alienating the reader.

Finding the right balance is a delicate exercise, and strategies will be unveiled accordingly in the following chapters. It is therefore hoped that the hybrid solution proposed for the translation of the short stories will meet the criteria established by d'Alembert in 1763, where a "commendable" translation is one that "[has] a natural
and easy manner, marked by the genius of the original and alongside that the added flavour of a homeland created by its foreign colouring." 48

Chapter Three. Translation Issues: lexical

It is now time to elaborate on specific word-level features that can at times lead to translation difficulties in both primary and complex lexemes. Vian himself saw no issues when playing around with words, claiming that they were not shrouded in mystery. However, the same relatively simple, dismissive approach cannot be applied to the translation process. Lexical problems identified in the short stories can be divided into three main categories: proper nouns, neologisms and word plays.

Proper nouns constitute an area that is extremely problematic because in order to render accurately all of the information encoded therein it is often necessary to undertake a great deal of research before determining a strategy that will convey the appropriate information to the target audience within the constraints of the skopos. Problems associated with proper nouns include the decision whether to transfer them directly from French into English, with possible typographic modification, with or without some sort of explanation, or whether an established anglicised form or newly created English equivalent should be used. There is also the problem associated with the translation of the names of culturally specific institutions, as well as those names that reflect Vian’s great creativity. The latter tend to be based on anagrams, spoonerisms, phonic repetition, French phonetic spelling, semi-recognisable French and portmanteau words, as well as liaison. Other proper nouns may contain a hidden meaning or have been coined specifically to describe the physical and personality attributes of the bearer.

Vian’s neologisms, the creation of new words and expressions for which he is so well known and which help to characterise the unique style of his work, are in many ways representative of the creative process used in the formation of many of his proper nouns, because these are often derived from the same sources. Neologisms created by the addition of a suffix somewhat resemble the process used in the creation of words by phonic repetition, with the one area of major difference arising from neologisms based on the Frenchification of English words, English words that are represented phonetically in

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French, a technique for which Vian’s friend Raymond Queneau is renowned. One such example is *api beurredé* for “Happy Birthday”, which is currently in popular use in some sections of French society. Vian also toys with English and French acronyms, such as *N.R.F.* in “Le Danger des classiques”, which exists as a play on words between Non-Remember Fluid and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. He exploits ambiguity through homophony, with one example being *Cocteau / coq tôt* and the polysemic relationship in words such as *pédale*. According to the frequency of the issues that have been identified, proper nouns pose the greatest number of problems when it comes to formulating translation strategies. Surprisingly, the lexical features for which Vian is perhaps best known (neologisms, word plays and ambiguity) occur much less frequently.

### 3.1. Proper Nouns

The objectives here are to discuss issues that confront the translator when dealing with proper nouns, to explore some of the problems and to propose possible solutions associated with translating presupposition, or implied knowledge, contained in the proper nouns found in the two collections of short stories that have been removed from a target audience both geographically and historically. Antoine Berman suggests that clarification is one strategy that acts as a deformation technique: “Clarification seems to be an obvious principle to many translators and authors. Thus, the American poet Galway Kinnell writes: ‘The translation should be a little clearer than the original.’”

Presupposition, in this instance, refers to both source text author intent and to source text audience knowledge, and with over six hundred proper nouns spread over twenty-eight stories, the collections form a vast database from which samples can be readily drawn.

The proper nouns have been grouped into two broad classifications: those that are self-explanatory, and those that may be somewhat obscure and therefore require the application of an explanatory technique. Those proper nouns that require no explanation include those that can be transferred directly between French and English with no modification or only slight modification with regards to accents and other peculiarities

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that exist between the source and target languages, and those with a long established anglicised form that are readily recognisable, or when a newly invented proper noun is recreated in English. Those proper nouns that need the addition of an explanatory technique include those words that despite being anglicised are still obscure and those proper nouns that have been borrowed directly from French by the target text and that, without any clarification, might lead to loss for the reader. This last group is indeed significant and is composed of the titles of literary works, journals and songs, socionyms, obscure geographical and character names, characters whose names have been linguistically manipulated and charactonyms.

Let us first look at those proper nouns that retain exactly the same form in both the source language and target language. These are essentially names that would be readily recognisable to a target audience, and for the source audience, for that matter; they include English place names like “New York” or “Brooklyn” (“Chiens” 97, 99) that have been adopted directly into French, foreign names like “Stuttgart” (“Francfort” 61) that retain the same form in both the source language and target language and French place names with no accents that have been adopted into English, such as “Bordeaux” (“Remparts” 48). There are real-life people among the characters like “Edward G. Robinson” (“Divertissements” 32) whose status amongst a target audience of a certain generation needs no explanation, and English cultural references with no French language equivalent, which have been borrowed directly, song titles such as “Goodnight Sweetheart” and “Sentimental Journey”, or titles of popular publications like *New Yorker* and *Photography* (“Martin” 70, 80).

Closely related to this group of proper nouns are those that require only slight modification with regards to accents, ligature and capitalisation where the words are already recognisable. The decision to retain or discard accents and ligature may depend on target text orientation, while capitalisation is mandatory according to target language requirements, as in the French *basque* and *anglo-saxon* becoming Basque and Anglo-Saxon in English. If we take *Orléans* and *Angoulême* (“Remparts” 41, 48), the question needs to be asked if the retention of the acute and circumflex accents impacts on the target text audience’s reading. In the context of the trend towards internationalisation, with many people having access to the internet and various forms of social media, it
would have to be said that Orléans and Angoulême would remain recognisable to the vast majority. What is more, the retention of these features helps to highlight the fact that the text is, after all, not originally English language based, which is one example of foreignisation that was considered to be important when the translation strategy was being formulated.

The translator’s work has already been partially done when it comes to dealing with those proper nouns that already have an established anglicised form, such as “La Croix Rouge” / Red Cross (“Remparts” 52), “Corée du Nord” / North Korea (“Marseille” 93) and “La Mondaine” / Vice Squad (“LG” 19). Sometimes a simple, effective method of translation is to create an equivalent target language proper noun, if one does not already exist. Of course, the new proper noun should not be so glaringly out of place as to be confrontational with regards to the source culture, so the decision to include a translated proper noun needs to be made carefully. Furthermore, if other foreign elements are retained in the target text, the use of translated proper nouns may assist in avoiding the alienation of a target text reader.

Vian provides us with a number of instances where the use of translated proper nouns does not seem out of place. While a non-French audience might recognise a real French film in its original title, the fictitious film title “Cœurs embrasés par le soleil méxicain” (“Métier” 23) is far more identifiable for an English audience as *Hearts Ablaze in the Mexican Sun*, as is “Dilettantes du Chevesne Rambolitain” (“LG” 13) translated as “Rambolitain Amateur Fresh Water Fishing Club”. In the short story “Le Voyeur”, the geographical names “Valleyeuse”, “Le Saut de l’Elfe” and “Cirque des Trois Sœurs” serve as a warning to the source text reader as to what lies ahead; the target text reader should not be denied the same privilege and thus “Happy Valley”, “Elf’s Leap” and “Three Sisters’ Hollow” work to foreshadow events in the translated text in a comparable way. The name of the cocktail invented by Aurèle is a “foutralafraise” (“Impuissant” 146). If this is simply transferred across to the target text, there will be inevitable loss. An English-language equivalent based on denotative meaning and aesthetics provides for “Strawberry Sutra”, where *fraise* translates as “strawberry” and “Sutra” captures the rhyme component of *foutre*, as well as the sexual implication.
Despite having a recognisable anglicised form, some proper nouns become problematic when they still require some form of explanation. These could be obscure character names like “Epictetus” (“Penseur” 130), “Salammbô” (“Amour” 58) or “capitaine Pamphile” (“Méfie” 55), which may need a footnote, endnote or some other device such as a small explanatory sentence woven into the target text. However, if faithfulness to the source text is deemed to be the most important criterion, preference may need to be given to an unannotated endnote with no direct impact on textual equivalence. Another example is the source text word “Kharbine” (“Marseille” 91) whose English equivalent “Harbin” may still not mean anything to some target text readers. Here, if the explanation “It’s in China” is added to the target text dialogue, it could be viewed as a footnote or endnote repositioned in the primary text, which then impacts on textual equivalence through rewriting and expansion.

The last category of proper nouns deals with those that through either necessity or choice have been transferred directly from French into English and therefore require some form of explanation for clarification purposes. Literary works, journals and song titles may or may not be annotated depending on the level of significance deemed necessary to enhance target audience understanding of textual references. Since these elements figure prominently in biographical details relating to Vian, some annotation is undoubtedly necessary, the extent of which is determined by the editorial decision-making process, as can be seen by the footnotes used to explain the journals Les Temps modernes in the Bourgois and Fayard editions but not in the Pléiade, and those used to explain La Rue in the Fayard edition alone. With this in mind, the question needs to be asked if annotation in the target text where none exists in the source text creates disparity between the experiences of different readerships.

When moving source culture brand names, part of the collective group known as socionyms, into a target text it is possible that some cultural loss may occur because the target text reader may be unaware of what the name represents. Of course, some product names need no explanation, for they are already firmly embedded in the target culture. Names such as “Lacoste” and “Perrier” are likely to be recognised by an English

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3 Mitura defines socionyms as the name given to societies, businesses and brand names. Écriture vianesque, p.206.
audience as being a brand of shirt and mineral water. However, what is Vian referring to
when he talks about “Houdan” (“Remparts” 41), “Aubusson” (“Martin” 78) and
“Heidsick” (“Pas” 112)? Vian himself signals a possible translation strategy when he
talks of “une gaine Obsession” (“LG” 9), “la carte Michelin” (“Remparts” 40) and “une
bande Velpeau” (“Maternité” 136). When the strategy of adding a common noun
descriptor is adopted, “Houdan chicken”, “Aubusson rug” and “Heidsick Vintage Brut
Reserve” become self-explanatory. Magdalena Mitura notes that this method has been
employed during the course of the translation of Vian texts into Polish where sometimes
the proper noun in the original is accompanied by a common noun to specify the nature
of the object.4

The problem becomes slightly more complicated when the translator is
confronted with a statement like “Le Chadburn cliqueta” (“Remparts” 50). Word-for-
word translation gives us “The Chadburn clicked”. Vian obviously knew what he was
referring to, but is the source text reader privy to the same knowledge and, if not, should
the translator do the research for the target audience? There are a number of possible
solutions to this particular predicament. The statement can be left alone so that the target
text reader can find out what a Chadburn is, if he or she feels the need to do so;
alternatively, a Chadburn can be briefly described in annotated form; or again, an
explanation can be woven into the target text, something along the lines of “The bridge
sent a signal to the engine room”. The danger with this last approach is that the
translation can be considered to be moving into the realm of creative rewriting. A
paratextual element can be added, in which case, an illustration can assist with meaning.
Vian used to cover his manuscripts with sketches and drawings, and many of his
published texts are accompanied with illustrations. Furthermore, translation theory offers
a possible justification for this in the form of the practical elements of Postcolonial
Theory, in which maps, drawings and sketches are considered to be key elements in
explaining the unknown from foreign cultures.5 It is therefore possible to adopt this

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4 Ibid.
5 M. Tymoczko, “Post-colonial Writing and Literary Translation”, Post-colonial Translation. Theory and
approach in some of the present short stories, as has been demonstrated by Christian Cailleaux and Hervé Bourhis in their illustrated volume of Vian’s life, *Piscine Molitor*.\(^6\)

Culturally based institutions that have an accepted target language equivalent like “*La Mondaine / Vice Squad*” have been previously referred to. But what about those culturally based institutions that do not have an accepted target language equivalent? Two socionyms, “la Sûreté” and “SNCF” (“Remparts” 33) can be used to exemplify another translation option. The *Sûreté* is the French criminal investigation department, with a role similar to the FBI. One translation option is for it to be retained in source language format, or slightly modified in terms of accents, with or without annotation. *SNCF* is the French national rail company. Seemingly, it does not have an accepted target language proper noun equivalent, as evidenced by English language news coverage of French strikes, so the initialism is usually retained in English. On the other hand, if we were to consider each of these words as a hyponym, as a subset of a superordinate, then we may have a linguistics-based translation option that does away with the need for annotation. So *SNCF*, along with other rail companies from all around the world, is a hyponym of “rail companies”, and *Sûreté* is a subset of “criminal investigation agencies”, along with the FBI. This then gives us the following translation possibilities:

ST: Heureusement pour la SNCF (“Remparts” 33)
TT: Luckily for the rail company

and

ST: Il sortit sa fausse carte d’identité de la Sûreté (“Remparts” 33)
TT: He took out his fake police ID.

This method is employed at times in the translation of Vian into Polish. Mitura tells us that in such instances the translator decides to leave out the name of an institution in a

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translation in order to facilitate the reception of foreign reality.⁷ The problem with this method is that the reference to the source culture is lost, providing a generic translation that is adaptable to almost any foreign culture.

There are some geographical names adopted directly from the source language into the target language that may require some form of explanation. They are often the names of less well-known places like “Ville-d’Avray” (“LG” 7), “Montretout” (“LG” 18) and “Saint-Jean-de-Luz” (“Remparts” 40). “Ville-d’Avray” features as the backdrop to “Le Loup garou” and is also significant because it is Vian’s birthplace. Apart from annotation, this information can be conveyed to both source text and target text readers through a preface or an introduction or through other paratextual features, such as a biographical time line or critical review. The hidden meaning in the name “Montretout” is not lost on the source text reader for Vian has added the explanatory phrase “fine allusion aux satyres errants du parc de Saint-Cloud” (“LG” 18). Smaller towns like “Saint-Jean-de-Luz” may become recognisable with paratextual assistance, a map for instance, or with the addition of an explanatory phrase, such as “south of Bordeaux”. This method of facilitation has already been mentioned in relation to the anglicised form of Kharbine, and is further elaborated on by Heikki Särkkä: “with smaller places [...] a gloss is often in place to give the reader an indication of the type of place concerned: Kuusamo might become ‘the North-East Finnish town of Kuusamo’, etc.”⁸

Annotation may also be used to clarify the names of real-life characters whose significance may be lost on a target text reader. However, by using the expansion method applied to brand and geographical names, the need for annotation may be eliminated. In this way, “Il […] partit comme un vrai coppi” (“LG” 17) becomes “He […] took off like the Italian cycling champion, Fausto Coppi”; and “[le] système de Bertillon” (“Cœur” 26) becomes “the Bertillon system of criminal identification”.

One of the features of Vian’s writing style is the way he manipulates the names of real people. Some of the names are so well disguised that Pestureau thought it was

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⁷ M. Mitura, Écriture vianesque, p.207.
necessary to write his *Dictionnaire Vian* for textual elucidation.\textsuperscript{9} Lapprand, on the other hand, says that it is no longer necessary to know who the characters in the stories are based on, because the altered forms of their names have become fully integrated into Vian’s fiction.\textsuperscript{10} If there is no clarification for the target audience, however, the text will likely be read on a different level from the one the author intended, since Vian initially wrote these stories for the amusement of his friends sometimes based on their exploits. In fact Le Bris claims that the whole purpose of Vian’s writing was to make his friends laugh by reliving the memories they shared during parties held in Ville-d’Avray.\textsuperscript{11} Will the target audience be astute enough to realise that the character’s name “Bison Ravi” is actually an anagram of Boris Vian and that the subsequent derivation “La Bisonne” and “Le Bisonnot” (“Remparts” 30) refer to Vian’s wife and son? In this case, it is important to reproduce the *skopos* of the source text in the target text, and part of this involves identification of the characters, which involves a brief return to issues already raised.

Vian employs a number of interesting techniques when manipulating the identities of his family, friends and acquaintances. Quite often there is a hidden meaning encoded in the name. Take for example the central character of “Un Cœur d’or”, Aulne, whose name literally means a type of tree;\textsuperscript{12} gold turns into silver in “Chez Diargent”, which refers to Christian Dior (“Maternité” 142); Christian Castapioche from “Un Test” is a caricature of Vian’s friend, Christian Casadesus; Pierre Balpogne from “Maternité” is fashion designer Pierre Balmain;\textsuperscript{13} and “La Grande Duchesse d’Antarès” is the duchess of a red supergiant star in the Milky Way Galaxy (“Danger” 163)! He also uses a spoonerism to create the character’s name Marliche Dihêtrenne (Marlene Dietrich) in “Divertissements culturels”; and in “Surprise-partie chez Léobille” the character Folubert Sansonnet’s first name is a spoonerism derived from Vian’s friend Hubert Fol while his surname is a phonetic representation of Vian’s collection of poetry entitled *Cent sonnets*. Phonic repetition is used to create the names of “Léon Dodiléon” from Claude Léon ("Pas" 111), “chef Abadibada” from Claude Abadie and “Jean Berdindin” from Jean

\textsuperscript{11} M. Le Bris, “Une stratégie de disparition”, *Hors-Série*, no.6, p.47.
\textsuperscript{12} The "gold" of the title is not at the heart of Aulne's name but at its head, since Au is the symbol for gold.
\textsuperscript{13} *argent* is French for silver and *or* is French for gold.
Berdin (“Léobille” 136, 144). There are also those proper nouns that are based on French phonetic spelling: these include the names of characters “Clams Jorjobert” from Georges Aubert (“Pas” 109), “Rémenfol” from Raymond Fol (“Léobille” 136), “Polboubal” from Paul Boubal (“Divertissements” 31); and place names “Deux Mâghos” - Deux Magots (“Remparts” 33), “Klub Singer-Main” - Club Saint-Germain (“Drôle” 97). A number of proper nouns have also been derived from semi-recognisable French words: the Nobel Prize is obviously behind “le Prix Nabel” (“Assassin” 91); Rambouillet gives us “Rambolitain” (“LG” 13); and the Café de Flore and Montana provide the inspiration for “Florette” and “Montata” (“Maternité” 132). It has been observed by Dianne Sears that Vian playfully uses the letter “z” more than any other in the names of some of his characters. 14 Vian has used the technique of actually writing the oral liaison of “bois épais” to create the “Z” in the family name “Bois-Zépais” (“Pas” 110), which could be described as a poetic malapropism as in “Et il y a z aussi” and in “les ‘zoiseaux’.” 15 Certainly, it is challenging to find an appropriate solution to relay all of this extratextual information to the target audience. Because of the large number of proper nouns that have undergone transformation and in trying to maintain textual equivalence without adding a large number of explanatory phrases and other such devices, it is probably best to follow Lapprand’s advice. Since the names have been seemingly integrated into Vian’s work, the most suitable approach may be to leave them as they are with or without annotation.

The problem with word plays is that there does not seem to be a universal approach that can be applied. The hidden meaning or meanings encoded in the proper noun “Avenue Merdozart” (“Pas” 110) certainly supports this statement. Vian hated the music of Mozart, 16 and it must be said that the portmanteau word “Merdozart” manages to capture this sentiment most succinctly, while simultaneously using French phonetic spelling to raise the following more general artistic protest: Merde aux Arts. If an

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15 A. Rolls, “Prière de relire Je voudrais pas crever”, Poésie, no.96, février 2003, p.39. As Rolls notes, the supernumerary ‘z’ makes room, anagrammatically, for the fictional character of Alise in an otherwise biographically based poem.
English equivalent is created, such as “Avenue Damn the Arts” the reference is removed from its French cultural setting; on the other hand, a move too far in the other direction may lead to compensation through the addition of dialogue such as the following:

What’s that crap you’re listening to?
Mozart, she replied.

However, in order to replicate the connotations of both potential word plays at the precise point in the text through the use of a similar portmanteau word, “Damozart” comes quite close, despite a slight change in register. According to de Nodrest, “Boris Vian [...] requires a creative translator who does not hesitate to dent his target language, usually his mother tongue, so as to create a parallel universe.”¹⁷ Because of the differences between languages and cultures, it is not always possible for a word play to be captured at the precise point it appears in the source text. In such instances, a translator may compensate for this loss in an adjacent clause or sentence.

The final group of proper nouns discussed here is composed of charactonyms, which Alexander Kalashnikov defines as “expressing the characteristics of the bearer [...] common nouns and other parts of speech that carry out the function of characterising a person or place.”¹⁸

Vian’s texts, like the adventures of Asterix or Harry Potter, abound in charactonyms, so the question of how to treat them is of great significance. Before moving on to the charactonyms contained in the two texts in question, it is of interest to see how previous attempts at dealing with these features in the translation of other Vian texts have been handled. One well-known example is the character of professseur Mangemanche from *L’Écume des jours*, where alliteration combined with phonic repetition are creatively used to describe a character trait. Venuti notes that in relation to foreignisation strategies “characters’ names – even when the names are rather

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¹⁷ S. de Nodrest, “Re-creation of a Recreation”, p.20.
complicated and foreign-sounding – […] are generally not altered”.\(^{19}\) For her part, Nord offers the following counterpoint for a domestication strategy:

> [I]n fiction, things are not quite as simple as they seem […] a descriptive name can be translated – although a translation may interfere with the function of a culture marker.\(^{20}\)

The strategy observed by Nord is visible in Chapman’s translation of *L’Écume des jours*, *Froth on the Daydream*. By translating professeur Mangermanche as Professor Gnawknuckle, Chapman abandons the French cultural reference, and since the bulk of Vian’s writings are time and place specific, the loss of cultural referencing is indeed significant. There may also be repercussions on intertextuality. If the same character appears in another text under a different name, either translated or original, there may be risk of inflicting damage on the integrity of the translated canon.

The two charactonyms of primary interest in this particular study are “l’hôtel Presse-Purée d’Argent” (“LG” 14) and “Brise-Bonbon” (“Cœur” 26). Let us take “l’hôtel Presse-Purée d’Argent”. When dealing with a charactonym, one must first attempt to unearth all of the possible connotative meanings. A *presse-purée* is a potato masher, and *argent* means “silver” or “money”. The location of the story suggests the influence of three real Parisian establishments: the Scribe Hotel; Le Grand Hôtel, where room rates of up to 4800 euros a night might lead us to think that it has a reputation for squeezing money out of its guests; and the Tour d’Argent, an expensive Parisian restaurant famous for the silver duck press used at diners’ tables. If the *skopos* requires the humour, alliteration and denotation to be preserved in the target text, some English language options might be “The Silver Squeeze Hotel” or “The Money Mill Hotel”. On the other hand, the use of an attributive adjective might help to convey the connotative meaning if the source text proper noun is to be retained. This might lead to “the plush Hotel Presse-Purée d’Argent”, where “plush” conveys the notion of opulence, or “the posh” Hotel

\(^{19}\) L. Venuti, “Translating Community”, *Utopia*, chapter 32, p.484.
Presse-Purée d’Argent” where “posh” still conveys the notion of wealth but from the perspective of the character who is a prostitute.

“Brise-Bonbon” metaphorically means someone who is a “pain in the backside”: a word-for-word translation therefore yields something like “lolly cruncher”, as brise comes from briser, meaning “to break” or “to crush”, and bonbons are sweets or a colloquial expression for the male genitalia. On the other hand, since the character in question is a six-year-old boy, some English language possibilities are “Harry Havoc” or “Tommy Terror”, both of which manage to capture the humour, alliteration and denotation in the target language. On the other hand, retention of the source text proper noun “Brise-Bonbon” may be handled in a slightly different manner from the preceding example, because the source text repeats the same proper noun in quick succession: “les parents de Brise-Bonbon venaient de sortir et Brise-Bonbon gardait la maison tout seul.” While retaining “Brise-Bonbon” in the first instance with no elaboration, the repetition has been replaced with both a descriptor and a target culture reference: “Brise-Bonbon’s parents had just gone out and that little angel was ‘home alone’”, an allusion to the anachronistic film title featuring a havoc-wreaking child left alone by his parents. Even though this filmic reference takes the text out of its culture / time-specific setting, it serves to better convey the atmosphere of the original.

Other charactonyms might offer the following possibilities, where the expansion strategy used to outline the connotative meaning of the charactonym has been placed in italics: sweet Lisette Cachou; spicy Zine Poivre; chubby Mister Lerond; the not-so-stylish Mrs Panuche; pipsqueak Mister Curepipe; and clumsy Dr Klupitzick. But, as with other word plays, each case needs to be dealt with on its own merit:

Marinouille had a stupid blank look on her face ("Penseur" 132)

The Mafioso types, Pistoletti and Ciabricot ("Remparts" 35)

Another possibility includes the retention of the original source text name, and to insert a translated name in brackets next to it. In fact, in the Spanish translation of Harry
Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone this is exactly what has been done. The translator has added the word “dragon” in brackets to the name “Draco Malfoy.”

It has been shown that the facilitation of meaning in the translation of proper nouns can be achieved through the following techniques, all of which are in keeping with the philosophy of clarification of the translation as proposed by Berman and Kinnell: the creation of a target language equivalent replacing, or positioned in brackets next to, the source language original; annotation, either as footnotes or endnotes; expansion, with the addition of a short phrase, a descriptor or an attributive adjective; the linguistic feature of the hyponym/superordinate relationship; paratextual features linked to Postcolonial Theory, such as a sketch, map, time line or critical review; and creative rewriting and compensation. While these techniques have been identified in relation to the proper nouns employed by Vian, it needs to be emphasised that the above strategies have been discussed at length by many leading critics, theoreticians and practitioners. While Berman calls for clarification, Venuti and Newmark say that proper nouns are normally not translated. With this in mind, it has been shown that translators Mitura, Tymoczko, Särkkä, and de Nodrest all propose clarification solutions. On the other hand, Hermans says that a combination of all of the proposed solutions including non-translation is possible, as does Fernandes. With most of these methodologies being applied to some extent to the short stories contained in the appendix, including the map exemplifying Postcolonial Theory, perhaps the final word should lie with Nord according to whom, “there are no rules for the translation of proper nouns.” In her analysis, the decision made by the translator is ultimately dictated by the type of text and its function.

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3.2. Neologisms

Six methods of neologism creation have been unearthed in the short stories. There are derivations from French phonetic spelling, English words Frenchified, derivations from semi-recognisable French words, portmanteau words, those based on liaison and vocalic suffix addition. According to Newmark, “[i]n a literary text, it is [the translator’s] duty to re-create any neologism he meets on the basis of the SL neologism.” 25 He acknowledges, however, that this can be quite difficult because “there is rarely a single correct translation of a SL neologism, any more than of any other SL item.” 26 Sayadi has proposed four possible solutions to the translation of neologisms: selection of an appropriate equivalent in the target language; transcription or transliteration, according to which the closest possible corresponding grouping of letters in the target language is chosen; direct borrowing and calque; explanatory or descriptive translation, 27 remembering all the time that “the more formal the language, the more conservative [the translator] should be in respect to neologisms.” 28

3.2.1. Derivation from French “Phonetic” Spelling

Besides the following proper nouns: "Jorjobert" ("Pas" 109); "Merdozart" ("Pas" 110); "Sansonnet" ("Léobille" 135, "Drôle" 97); "Rémenfol" ("Léobille" 136); "Polboubal" ("Divertissements" 31, "Valse" 126); "Singer-Main" ("Drôle" 97), for which translation strategies have already been discussed, there are two other neologisms that have been created from an attempt to rewrite French words based on the way they sound. These words have been placed under the heading of “French phonetic spelling”, although technically phonetics is the representation of sounds by the set of letters and symbols found in the International Phonetic Alphabet. Both examples in this section can be

26 Ibid., p.141.
28 P. Newmark, p.149.
translated through Sayadi’s strategy of developing an appropriate target language equivalent.

The first neologism is “flique/fliques” (“Cœur” 24, 25). *Flic* is a masculine noun, most often translated as “cop”, a familiar word for “policeman”. In French, the “-ic” to “-ique” transposition entails a shift in gender of the noun from masculine to feminine. However, Vian retains the masculine indefinite article, in “un flique en tenue de gala” (“Cœur” 24). This suggests that maybe some feminine form of “cop” should be attempted, “coppe” for example. However, moving beyond the word level of the text, the sentence in which the plural form is found reads like an article of statutory law, so perhaps the more formal “police officers” should be used. On the other hand, a Keystone Cop-style police chase suddenly intrudes upon the dark undertones of the story. This particular event leads to the possibility of employing the neologism “Kop” in the plural construction, partly because there is no perceivable difference between the “Kop-cop” and *flique-flic* sound relationship, but also because “Kop” provides source text readers with a cultural reference point from which Vian’s intended comic strategy can be assessed. This is because it is also possible to sometimes find the Keystone Cops referred to as the Keystone Kops. The singular construction “police officer”, although not a neologism, may be chosen over “Kop” in the first instance, because if used at this point, “Kop” might pre-empt the comic relief of the police chase that is yet to occur, while the other alternative “coppe” might seem incongruous if both spellings are to be used.

The second example in this group is “téessef” (“Amour” 61), which is a phonetic representation of the initialism *T.S.F.* from *télégraphie sans fil*. The English equivalent would be “wireless” or “radio”. Since there is no known generic acronym or initialism for these two words, the neologism will have to be derived from either “wireless” or “radio” themselves. “Wireless” provides the possibilities “y-r-less”, which without the hyphenation would be almost unpronounceable, and the cumbersome “whyareless”. “radio” provides “raydeo”, a distinct possibility given that people keep jumping on and falling off each other throughout the course of the story. Furthermore, the latter is a fairly unassuming intrusion in the target text, in much the same way as *téessef* is unobtrusive in the source text. The brand name “H.M.V.” is another possibility, although
it should be excluded because it is too culturally specific and invasive, which is a feature of Chapman’s translation of neologisms and word plays in *L’Écume des jours*.29

3.2.2. English Words “Frenchified”

Vian’s practice of “Frenchifying” English words, rewriting them so that they look French with semi-recognisable, pronounceable groupings of letters is to some degree an extension of the same process he undertook with French words. Lapprand describes it as pseudo-phonetic spelling in the style of Queneau.30 There are three examples of this phenomenon throughout the 28 stories.

The first one is “spicaire”, which appears in the phrase “sans tenir compte des commentaires zoiseux du spicaire “ (“Amour” 58). “Speaker” and “speakerine” have both been used in French for quite some time. It is therefore a French usage of what was originally an anglicism of the masculine form that has been rewritten phonetically. In radio terminology the host of a broadcast is often referred to as the announcer, presenter or DJ, an abbreviated form of “disc jockey”. Since spicaire is phonetic rewriting of “speaker”, it would seem legitimate in this instance that the colloquial “deejay” as a phonetic expansion of “DJ” could be used, which is in keeping with the strategy of employing an appropriate target language equivalent.

The second example is “niou-louque” (“Pas” 110), which describes the dress the lovely Gaviale is wearing. The word niou-louque conveys the English term “new look”; it also appears as the single word nioulouque in the poem “À privatif”, in which context Lapprand confirms its use as a pseudo-phonetic Frenchification of “new look”.31 It refers to the “New Look” range of clothes designed by Christian Dior, which were intended to make people feel good again in the aftermath of World War II. Since Dior appears under the name of Christian Diargent alongside another fashion designer Pierre Balmain in “Maternité”, it is safe to assume that this is the reference. It is extremely

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29 S. Chapman toys with the initialism H.M.V. in *Froth on the Daydream* (p.83) when “His Master’s Voice” becomes “His Martyred Voice.”
31 *Œuvres complètes*, Tome 5, p.133.
difficult to translate *niou-louque* in any other way than “new look”, but by capitalising it and placing it between inverted commas, the intent of the word can be captured, thereby providing a translation with annotation to explain the reference.

The third example is a little more complicated because there are two components to it. “*Va-te-faire closette*” (“Cœur” 25) sounds very similar to the English “water closet”. This is because *va-te* sounds like “water” and the non-existent *closette* resembles a French feminised form of the English “closet”. The addition of *faire* creates the extra difficulty because the word grouping *va-te-faire* is an unfinished way of strongly telling someone to go away. In the interest of the macro-level of the text, and despite the fact that there is some micro-level linguistic loss, “sheet-house” can be considered a translation possibility because it retains the toilet connotation, possibly the most significant feature of the construction.

### 3.2.3. Derivation from a Semi-recognisable French Word

Rybalka says that he is not always sure that he has understood Vian properly and that he has to sometimes ask himself if some of the words really exist or whether they are pure inventions.32 This is largely because the combinations of letters are recognisable as potentially being French words because of their arrangement linked to sound groupings. Certain combinations of letters have a different function in different languages, which may make them particular to that language. Trying to determine whether a word is real or not becomes even more complicated when semi-recognisable, suspected words appear alongside those words whose existence is already well established.

The tactic of sowing seeds of doubt in the mind of the reader in this manner occurs twice in two different stories. The first is:

> Pour la première fois de sa vie, il remarqua le *craquement* de la première marche, le *crainquement* de la seconde, le *criquement* de la quatrième, le *croquement* de la septième, le *frouttement* de la dixième, le *chuintement* 

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32 M. Rybalka, p.166, footnote.
de la quatorzième, le *brruiquement* de la dix-septième, le *gyyment* de la vingt-deuxième et le *zouinguement* de la rampe en laiton dévissée de son support terminal. (“Amour” 59-60)

The list of real and suspected words in order is as follows:

- *craquement* real word
- *crainquement* neologism
- *criquement* neologism
- *croquement* neologism
- *frouttement* neologism
- *chuintement* real word
- *brruiquement* neologism
- *gyyment* neologism
- *zouinguement* neologism

There is more involved in the translation of this onomatopoeic list than simply substituting a real English word for a real French word or an English neologism for a French neologism because the rhyming patterns, the humorous tone and the impact of the word play of the final phrase all need to be taken into account in order to capture the overall feel of the original. In fact, the groupings of real words and neologisms invoke the inverse approach to Newmark’s formal language and conservative neologism relationship, giving rise to the possibility of importing the entire source text list to the target text, an approach that would also be in keeping with Sayadi’s direct borrowing. If the entire list is not borrowed directly, the real word *craquement* can be translated by its English equivalent “creak”, although there is also the possibility of adding the “-ing” suffix. The choice of “creak” sets up the rhyming pattern for the next two neologisms on the list – “*crainquement/cleak*” and “*criquement/squeek*”. The neologisms *crainquement* and *criquement* both resemble real French words, partly because the “ain” letter grouping in the first is the same as in words like *crainte* and there is only one letter difference
between the real *craquement* and the fabricated *criquement*, which is the same one letter difference as in “squeak/squeek”.

The word *croque*, which means “munch” is recognisable in *croquement* and this sets up the rhyming pattern for the translation of the neologism *frouttement* and the real *chuiment*, as well as possibly being a continuation of the rhyme that begins with *craquement*. *Frouttement*, which is very close to the adverb *foutrement*, could be translated by the rhyming neologism “clunch”, which is as recognisable to the English “crunch” as *frouttement* is to the real French *frottement*. To complete the second three-word rhyming pattern, *chuiment* (a gentle hiss) could be translated as “scrunch”, although there is a change of meaning between the French and English words.

The last trio of neologisms are barely recognisable as French words, although *brruiquement* may be inspired from *bruissement* or *brike*, the latter especially so after the addition of the adverbial suffix “-ment”. The “rr” is anomalous, as is the “yy” of *gyymnt* but they may be present in order to lengthen the consonant and vowel sounds in an attempt to recreate the tentative descent of the stairs. The derivation of *zouinguement* could be *zingue*, although it is most likely a phonetic representation of *souingu* from the English “swing”, as in *guère souingue* from “Gershwin”. Since the handrail has popped its rivet, or the screw attaching it to the wall has popped out, “pop” seems an obvious choice for *zouinguement*, maybe spelt “popp” to capture the “yy” in *gyymnt*. This also seems to be the perfect place for a cultural tag, a reference that might facilitate the transfer of humour across linguistic barriers. “Snap! Crackle! Pop!” is an onomatopoeic catchphrase usually associated with a well-known brand of breakfast cereal that first was heard in radio jingles in 1932. As such, it is an expression that is readily recognisable in many English-speaking countries across a number of generations, so much so that Stanley Chapman also deemed its use appropriate in *Froth on the Daydream*:

… de petites places de glace craquelées s’écrasaient en crépitant
… little patches of ice snapped, crackled and popped underfoot

The passage containing the second group of real and concocted words is:

il y avait plein de cailloux et de coquilles d’ammonites, de trilobites, de stalagmites et de salpingites consécutives à la période glaciaire (“Assassin” 89)

The four words in question are ammonites (real), trilobites (real), stalagmites (neologism) and salpingites (real), with the “-ites” ending of all four making it seem as if the rhyme is intended. Ammonites and trilobites pose no problems because the same palaeontological words exist in both French and English with no variation in spelling. Stalagmites is a neologism with its roots in stalagmites and stalactites. Since they too are spelt the same in both languages, the French neologism can be retained unaltered in English, thus maintaining the rhyme. Salpingites is different for a number of reasons. Firstly, it does not form part of the geological vocabulary; it is a medical term that refers to the inflammation of the Fallopian tubes. Secondly, its English form “salpingitis” leads to a breakdown in the rhyming pattern. Given the rather obscure nature of the word, and given that a reader interested enough to undertake a search would almost inevitably be able to link salpingites and “salpingitis”, the same source language word should be retained in order once again to move beyond the micro, or word, level to the macro, or text, level, a strategy that falls into the category defined by Sayadi as direct borrowing.

Scattered throughout the stories there are also a number of individual semi-recognisable words that do not form part of any real word – neologism groupings. A number of examples have been identified: "antropolycie" ("LG" 9); "se défroga" (“LG” 13); "atêtit" (“LG” 17); "décomposeur" (Pénible 117); "aréosole" (“Amour” 61); "aphrobaisiaque" (“Amour” 61); "reverrer" (“Martin” 70); "sesque" (“Pas” 109); and "saxiforniste" (“Drôle” 97). In an attempt to create some sort of order out of this seemingly random collection, three categories have been formed: those based on simple or pronominal verbs not found in a verbal phrase – se défroga, atêtit, reverrer; those formed from the internal blending of syllables of two different words, like a portmanteau word – aphrobaisiaque, saxiforniste; and those that are formed through the addition or inversion of letters and sounds – antropolycie, décomposeur, aréosole, sesque.
Se défroagna appears to be based on the verb se renfrogner (to scowl), which appears seven lines above se défroagna in the phrase, “Denis se renfrogna devant cet afflux subit” (“LG” 13). Given that the prefix “de-“ usually means to undo something, the translation “wiped the scowl from his face” would seem fairly legitimate, although "unscowled" also presents itself as a possibility. The noun tête and the verb atterrir are both recognisable in the phrase “une bouteille atêtit sur le crâne de Denis” (“LG” 17), which may lead to the translation “A bottle landed on the back of Denis’ head”, although "headlanded' might also work. The problem with employing the suggested neologisms "unscowled" and "headlanded" over the proposed standard translations is that their presence intrudes on the English text to a much greater extent than the French neologisms intrude on the French text, thereby impacting on the overall reception. The verb reverrer is used in the context “Je voudrais vous reverrer? C’est comme ça qu’on dit?” (“Martin” 70) by a Dutch speaker whose native language is not French. Reverrer may be a combination of revoir (to see again) and révérer (to revere), but given the context, the former infinitive seems the more likely candidate. Therefore, perhaps some form of misconstrued version of the sentence “I would like to see you again” should be formulated: “I maybe like to see you again”, which shifts the misconstruction from the main verb to the auxilliary or “I would like to seen you again”, which retains the misconstruction in the infinitive. However, given the context, direct transfer of the French (“Je voudrais vous reverrer”) provides the best option in this case.

Aphrobaisiaque is formed from the blending of aphrodisiaque and baiser. “Aphro-“ and “-iaque” are recognisable at the beginning and end of the neologism, with “bais-“ slotted in between. Bellos claims that “translation always takes the register and level of naturally written prose up a notch or two [to] shy away from giving the uncouth, truly uncouth, forms of language in the target text.” The tactic of moving to a higher register to avoid offence inevitably alters authorial intent. Therefore “fucoholic”, combining “alcoholic”, or something similar, with a register-driven sexual equivalent, needs to be retained. Saxiforniste has been created in the same way as the previous example, with the first syllable of forniquer inserted between the first syllable “saxi-“

35 D. Bellos, p.200.
and the last syllable “-iste” from *saxophoniste*, although the “o” has been replaced by an “i”, presumably to provide a link to the English "sexy". Since there is very little difference between the words in the source and target languages, the French neologism can be adapted straight into English, thereby reproducing the same effect as in the original.

*Antropolycie* is most likely derived from *anthropologie*, which is justifiable given that the story of Denis the werewolf can be viewed as a study of human behaviour. Therefore, an English neologism that creates a similar effect is "anthropolicy", which bears a strong resemblance to the French neologism. *Décompositeur* is formed by the addition of the prefix "de-" to *compositeur*, which gives rise to the fairly evident English equivalent "decomposer". The addition of the two letters “os” is what differentiates *aréosole* from *aréole*, a part of the human anatomy. The deliberately misspelled “aresole” is a colloquial expression for another part of the human anatomy, but it also invokes “aerosol” that could also be used as a play on words for the mist that invades the city in “L’Amour est aveugle.” Given the context of *sesque* in the phrase “du sesque fèminin” (“Pas” 109), the obvious derivation is *sexe*, formed by the inversion of the sound of the last two consonants – “seks/sesk”. A possible English translation, although not a neologism, also plays with the last two consonants – “seks/seck” albeit not in the same way.

It has been shown that the meaning and derivation of these neologisms can be deduced from their context and that a two-pronged approach to their translation can be employed, either through the production of another neologism wherever possible, or through the substitution of an established English word or phrase when textual unity is threatened by a cumbersome attempt at replication, even though this strategy might be at odds with Newmark’s philosophy.

3.2.4. Portmanteau Words

A portmanteau word is a word created by combining the sounds and meanings of two other words. It is a term that was introduced in 1871 by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. The word “portmanteau” itself is a
portmanteau word, being derived from the French *porter*/to carry and *manteau*/cloak or coat, which was originally a bag or container for carrying clothes and other items when travelling. Most portmanteau words used to exemplify the definition combine the first part or first syllable of the first word with the second part or second syllable of the second word, as in “motel” (motor + hotel), “Oxbridge” (Oxford + Cambridge), “telethon” (television + marathon) and “chocoholic” (chocolate + alcoholic). However, a part of one word may also be combined with the whole of the other to form such examples as “interferiority” in relation to a busybody, or “videot” for someone who is addicted to the images on a television screen. Two websites, “English-Word Information” and “English for Students” list over one hundred portmanteau words formed in these two ways.

Portmanteau words unearthed in these short stories include: "conomètre" ("Martin" 81), "léong" ("Pas" 113), "langueoureusement" ("Pénible" 118), "Majoration" ("Léobille" 142) and "Eurasie" ("Danger" 166). The combination of *con*, an idiot or imbecile, and *chronomètre*, an instrument for measuring time, are the basis of *conomètre*, formed by the union of the complete word *con* with the -omètre component of the second word, although there is also the chron- /con rhyming pattern to consider. Given that -mètre refers to a measuring device, this has led to the possibility of the replication of an English portmanteau word “dickheadmeter”, which maintains the register and bears the connotative meaning of the original. The first two or three letters and perhaps even the whole of the Christian name of the character Léon Dodiléon is the key component in *léong*, in which *long* can also be seen. Since both words are just as recognisable in English as they are in French, it is another instance where the word play is almost directly interchangeable. *Langueoureusement* is composed of *langue* - tongue and *langoureusement* - an adverb denoting a tender mood. It combines the complete word *langue* with the –oureusement component of *langoureusement*. The English portmanteau word “tongloriously” is as recognisable in English as an adverb as *langoureusement* is recognisable as an adverb in French. It combines the first part of “tongue” with the complete word “gloriously”. Despite the fact that “tongue” has been shortened, it is still

recognisable in the context of the neologism, with the slight shift in connotative meaning of the second part of the portmanteau word not too distant from the original. These three examples show that a neologism formed from a portmanteau word can be recreated in translation without having to resort to the use of a pre-established equivalent, as is sometimes the case when dealing with other neologisms formed in different ways.

“The Major” is the havoc-wreaking character of “Surprise-partie chez Léobille”, whose name forms the first part of the real word *Majoration*, which uncapitalised means “surcharge” or “extra charge.” The name of the Major is clearly evident in the English “Majority” to the same extent as it is in the French equivalent, leading to this becoming a reasonable translation option. However, it does require some rewording of the sentence in which it is embedded. Because there is minimal loss of meaning, the attempt to capture the word play at the precise point it appears in the text would seem to outweigh the loss of integrity of the sentence structure. This leads to the literal “For each extra word there will be a surcharge” becoming “Everything you say from now on will only make it worse for the Majority.” The derivation of *Eurasie* from *Europe* and *Asie* is fairly clear. Even though substitution of the English portmanteau word "Eurasia" might be all that is required for replication in this case, it can hardly be considered to be a neologism, since George Orwell made reference to it in his novel "Nineteen Eighty-Four", published in 1949. It is possible that this reference could have served as a source of inspiration for Vian in "Le Danger des classiques".³⁷

3.2.5. Neologisms Based on Liaison

Liaison is a feature of French pronunciation that can occur in the following ways: between articles and nouns, as in *les enfants, des années*; between adjectives and nouns that follow, as in *grand homme*; between pronouns and verbs, such as *ils ont*; between an auxiliary verb and its participle, as in *sont arrivés*; after prepositions and adjectives in a phrase, *dans un instant, très aimable*; when a plural noun ending in “s” or “x” is followed

by a vowel, as in *chevaux énormes*; and between numbers and nouns, like *trois années, vingt hommes*.38

Excluding "Bois-Zépais", discussed under proper noun formation, and "c'est-t-elliptique" ("Martin" 80), where the extra "t" reinforces the liaison without producing a new word, the two neologisms that are liaison-based both occur in “L’Amour est aveugle”. "Commentaires zoiseux" ("Amour" 58) is an example of a plural noun followed by a vowel, and "ils zondit" ("Amour" 61) is an example of liaison occurring between a pronoun and a verb. "Commentaires zoiseux du spicaire" is formed from *commentaires oiseux*, where the addition of “z” emphasises the liaison between the final consonant of the first word and the initial vowel of the second. There are a number of translation options available. For the sake of textual coherence, it could be translated as “deejay’s idle chatter”, which manages to capture the “z” liaison between the “-‘s” and “idle”, although no neologism has been created. However, in order to replicate the intended word play fully, either “deejayz idle chatter” or “deejay zidle chatter” needs to be employed, with possibly the latter taking preference because it succeeds in capturing the liaison at the precise word-level point.

"Ils zondit" is derived from *ils ont dit*, which emphasises the liaison by the addition of “z” to the beginning of *ont*, while at the same time eliminating the “t” between *ont* and *dit*. As in the previous example, textual unity allows for “they’ve said”, which manages to capture a form of liaison between “they” and “have” without creating a new word. If the letter “z” is considered to be the key component of the neologism, “they’ve zed” is a possibility, although it does not sound English in the same way as *ils zondit* sounds French. Another possibility is to recreate the neologism with phonetic spelling, such as “They’ve sed.” This is conceivable since French overall allows for gentle comic slippage whereas English linguistic subtlety falls elsewhere. However, because of the inherent differences between French and English, and because none of the proposed solutions are ideally suited to the situation, this particular case may be one to which Roman Jakobson’s term “untranslatable” might be applied.39

3.2.6. Vocalic Suffix Addition

The final group of neologisms to be discussed falls under the heading of what Marchand describes as those formed by the addition of a vocalic appendix.\textsuperscript{40} Generally, this is the addition of an appendage, often a non-sensical suffix, as in \textit{frigidai-reu}, \textit{atomixai-reu} or \textit{couvai-reu}, all of which can be found in Vian’s song “Complainte du progrès”. Another example occurs in the collection of poems \textit{Je voudrais pas crever} where the title of one of the poems is \textit{Si j’étais pohêteû}.\textsuperscript{41} Vian adds -\textit{eû} to the phonetic representation of \textit{poète} to create the word \textit{pohêteû} in the title and first line of the poem, which then rhymes with \textit{ivrogneû}, \textit{rougeû} and \textit{boîteu}.

One phrase in the short stories where this technique is exemplified is “tout suffoquant et blêmequant” (“LG”15) where the suffix -\textit{quant} has been added to \textit{blême} to form the neologism \textit{blêmequant}. The derivation of this structure is more than likely to be from Paul Verlaine’s "Chanson d’automne":

\begin{quote}
Tout suffocant  
Et blême, quand  
Sonne l’heure
\end{quote}

\textit{Suffoquant} is not a neologism; rather it is the gerundive of the verb \textit{suffoquer}. Since -\textit{ant} is the equivalent of the English present participle suffix “-ing”, with the adjectives being \textit{suffoquant} and \textit{blêmisant}, both target text words should end in “-ing” in order to capture the rhyme of the French phrase. The question then arises as to what possible word combinations can provide the same denotative meaning as \textit{suffoquant}, and \textit{blême}. “all stifling and pale” or “all suffocating and pale” are close in meaning but do not capture the rhyme in the second adjective. Since “huffing and puffing” is often associated with “The Three Little Pigs” in which the wolf is engaged in the strenuous activity of demolishing houses, just as Denis the werewolf has been engaged in another form of strenuous physical activity, “huffing and puffing” is the preferred option,

\textsuperscript{40} V-M. Marchand, p.322.  
\textsuperscript{41} The title of the poem has also been adopted as the title of a book by M. Lapprand and F. Roulmann.
although there is no reference to the “pale” component of the original. Other possibilities might include “all puffy and pasty”, “feeling the worse for wear and tear” or the phrasal “all blocked up and washed out.” However, none of these options attempts to recreate the neologism, which Newmark says is the duty of the literary translator.

It has been shown in the previous examples that many of the neologisms created by Vian can be translated according to Sayadi’s methodology. Appropriate target language equivalence occurs between *flique* – Kop, *sis* – sics, *téssesf* – raydeo, *spicaire* – deejay, *va-te-faire closette* – sheet-house, *aphrobasiaque* – fucoholic, *conomètre* – dickheadmeter, *langueoureusement* – tongloriously, and *zoiseux* – zidle. Transcription or transliteration occurs between *aréosole* – aresole, and *saxiforniste* – saxofornist. Direct borrowing or calque occurs with stalagmites, salpingites, léong, and explanatory or descriptive translation occurs between *niou-louque* and “New Look”. However, despite Newmark’s call for an attempt at neologism creation at all times, there are occasions when the creative process does not and cannot respond to the demands of the subtle yet sometimes overwhelming differences between languages. In such cases, it may be necessary to employ a non-neologism option for the sake of macro-level textual unity and coherence.

3.3. Word Plays

3.3.1. Based on Initialisms and Acronyms

Initialism is an abbreviation where each letter is pronounced individually, as in *S.N.C.F.* and F.B.I. An acronym is a group of letters formed from the first letters of other words; itself pronounced as a word “that corresponds to an existing or possible morphological – phonetical model”,⁴² such as UNESCO or NATO. There are three initialisms and one acronym that some might also consider to be an initialism that appear in the short stories: “K.I.” (“Assassin” 89); “S.N.C.J.” (“RB” 52); “N.R.F.” (“Marseille” 88); and “A.S.S.” (“Marseille” 88), the latter two forming the basis of obvious word plays.

“K.I.” is rather obscure. There is no annotation in the Bourgois edition, nor in the Œuvres complètes. The introduction in the Fayard edition says that, funnily enough, it reminds you of the German initials “K.I.”, which signify Kriegsinvalide, a war invalid, although this is not conclusive. It may also be a reference to a branch of the Soviet Intelligence Service that existed during the Cold War, but once again this is speculation. “S.N.C.J.” appears as a footnote in all three editions as “Société nationale de la Compagnie de Jésus”, which appears in translation as the adjectival inversion “National Society of the Company of Jesus.”

“N.R.F.” is annotated in all three editions. However, the footnote in the Bourgois edition limits the explanation to “Non-remember fluid”, an amnesic serum administered by the American intelligence service during the last world war. Both Fayard and the Œuvres complètes have expanded their annotation to explain that “N.R.F.” also refers to the Nouvelle Revue Française, which was dear to Vian’s arch-enemy Jean Paulhan of Gallimard.

“A.S.S.”, which should be pronounced as an acronym, is annotated in Fayard, explaining that it is the initials of the pseudo-American Secret Service, the precursor of the C.I.A. formed in 1947, that provides the basis of the word play. It is also annotated in the Œuvres complètes but not in Bourgois. The purpose of the annotation is to clarify the American cultural reference for a French reader who may otherwise be unaware of the significance. However, in translation, “A.S.S., the American Secret Service” should need no explanation or annotation for an English audience because the play on words is fairly clear.

These observations have led to the conclusion that initialisms and acronyms and their derivations should be explained in most cases, and especially so when the explanation of a word play cannot be captured within the structure of the primary text. In the first three cases, the annotation used in the Fayard edition could be readily adopted into the target text. This is in keeping with Lang’s recommendations that “the translation

43 Fayard edition, p.393.
45 Fayard edition, p.449.
46 Ibid., p.443.
should at least try to convey the pun by explaining how the letters […] are derived from the full names […] and how the initialisms and acronyms are actually a pun” either through parentheses immediately following the abbreviation the first time it is used or through annotation.”

3.3.2. Based on Homophony

Over the years critics have noted Vian’s penchant for the use of homophony as a source of word play throughout his works. Lapprand calls them graphic and phonetic deformations and lists la lettre et le néon / l’être et le néant among the examples, while Marchand invokes nota bene / note à benêts. Other derivations arise from the Frenchification of terms borrowed from English, such as Guère Souigne / "Gershwin”, which has already been noted as has Cocteau / coq tôt in the French. It must be stressed that a distinct difference exists between the translation of homophones and homophonic translation. The latter is the replication of sounds and rhythm in one language by approximate equivalent sounds and rhythm in another. It does not involve the attempt to find equivalent meaning. The following is an example of this:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Un petit d’un petit s’étonne aux Halles

While it does seem to become easier to recognise homophonic relationships after some exposure to Vian’s writing, there are some instances that are not quite so clear when no distortion of an existing word is visible. This poses some degree of difficulty in translation. One example of such difficulty arises in the following dialogue: "Asseyez-vous! dit Léonce d’une voix de garage (c’est-à-dire vaste, sonore, et pleine d’huile)” (“Motif” 106). Direct homophony exists between voix and voie, with both words sharing

48 M. Lapprand, La Vie contre, p.31.
49 V-M. Marchand, p.338.
50 D. Bellos, p.32.
the same phonetic representation [vwa]. The phrase *voie de garage* has a number of meanings depending on context: it can refer to a railway siding; or in the expression *mettre sur une voie de garage* the context is more along the lines of “to be put on hold” or “to the side.” However, *voix de garage* is explained in parentheses in the source text as a voice that is *vaste, sonore et pleine d’huile*, which conjures up the image of a large motor workshop in which mechanics are calling out to each other in loud voices that echo all around. An attempt to capture both denotations of the homophonic relationship may result in: "From off to the side, the commanding voice of Leonce called out those well-oiled words, ‘Take a seat’". “From off to the side” captures the *voie* component, while a *voix* that is *vaste, sonore et pleine d’huile* is captured in “commanding”, “called out” and “well-oiled.” Obviously, the word play created by the homophone, potentially recognisable to a source text reader, is lost in this particular translation.

In "Surprise-partie chez Léobille", the phrase: "un anicroche paissant au milieu des frères présvert" (p.138) provides an example of a word play based on direct homophony between *pré vert* (green field) and the Prévert brothers, Jacques and Pierre. In this case, it is possible to capture both connotations through the following translation: "a donkey grazing in a green field flanked by the Prévert brothers", although "between the Greenfield brothers" might also loom as a possibility in a more target-oriented translation.

Despite the fact that the OuLiPians,\(^{51}\) whose ranks include a number of translators such as Stanley Chapman and Harry Mathews, were capable of devising games based on the translation of homophones, this might not be so for other translators. In fact, Justin Erik Halldór Smith says, “if intra-language homophonic sentences are so difficult to come by, it might seem nearly impossible to produce a proper homophonic translation between languages.”\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, these examples propose one strategy for the translation of homophony; the attempt to capture both meanings falls under the

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\(^{51}\) Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle founded by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais.

heading of “disambiguation through contextualisation.”

Although there are no translation issues associated with the names of the male characters of "Maternité" (René and Claude) and with the name of the female character (Andrée), it should be noted that, despite some variation in spelling, there is direct homophony with the corresponding names of their gender counterparts (Renée, Claude and André). Since this story is centred around the quest for sexual identity, the homophonic relationship between the names should be noted, which could then serve as another possible solution to the translation of homophony when no equivalent word plays are forthcoming.

3.3.3. Based on Polysemy

Polysemy is considered from be different to homonymy by only the degree of separation. If the meanings of two words are close enough to be somehow related, this is referred to as polysemy. One such example is the word “play”, in the context of “children playing” or “a theatrical production.” A homonym, on the other hand, is when the lexeme has two completely unrelated meanings, such as “cricket” the game and “cricket” the insect. The line between polysemy and homonymy can at times be very thin, as in “neck”, the part of the body attached to the head or the top of a bottle. For the sake of convenience of classification in the framework of the present thesis, words spelt the same way but presenting a different meaning will fall under the category of polysemy. Like homophony, this has been recognised by critics as another source of Vian’s word plays. Rybalka explains that one of Vian’s favourite techniques involves gathering two incompatible realities in the one expression.

A number of word plays based on polysemy listed in order of appearance in the two texts have been determined: "pédales" (“LG” 12 and 18); "baiser" (“Martin” 73); "empire" (“Marseille” 89); "voiture" (“Pas” 109); "brave" (“Léobille” 143); "capillaire" (“Divertissements” 33); "remontant" (“Filles” 81); "roula" (“M&J” 118); "tzigane" (“Valse” 126); and "poulet" (“Maternité” 139).

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54 M. Rybalka, p.160.
In the expressions "donner de la pédale" and "le loup à pédales" the word play is centred on pédales. It can refer to either the pedal of a bicycle or it can be used as a term of homosexual denigration. Since the character Denis is on a bicycle, and since homosexuality has been alluded to in the term l'empaffé, both interpretations are valid. A possible solution to the latter expression is the translation: “wayward wolf on wheels”, which manages to capture both elements through alliteration.

The phrase "c’est pas pour baiser, je suis trop fatigué" poses a different problem. Most French-speaking people are aware of the intrinsic double meaning encoded in the verb baiser and as such, no further explanation should be necessary. In this case however, a decision has to be made as to which is the more appropriate meaning. Given that je suis trop fatigué immediately follows the verb, the more physically demanding option can reasonably be given preference.

The related meanings of empire in the sentence "Mais il avait assez d’empire sur lui-même, comme Hiro-Hito, pour se contenir" place this word in the category of polysemy. One reference is to the Japanese empire established under Hirohito, while the source text expression "empire sur lui-même" invokes self-control. By adding “Emperor” to Hirohito in the target text, the allusion to the empire has been made, whilst at the same time adding clarification of the character’s status. This allows for the translation of d’empire as “self-control”, thus capturing both meanings.

The polysemic voiture can refer to either a motor vehicle or to a baby carriage and herein lies the ambiguity that arises in Gaviale’s question "Quand m’achètes-tu une voiture pour la promener?" She wants to take her baby on outings, so the translation of voiture should try to capture both meanings. This leads to the noun “buggy”, which has both meanings in English.

Un brave can refer to either a “brave man” or to “an Indian brave”. In the context of the quotation "il s’appelait Jean Berdindin, et c’était un brave", and indeed in the broader context of the story, both interpretations are possible. The man who dares to challenge the Major is indeed courageous, but in keeping with the Wild West imagery that pervades the story, an Indian brave is not totally out of the question either. The ambiguity can be retained by replacing the indefinite article with a definite article, so
“the brave Jean Berdindin” can refer to the adjectival “brave” Jean Berdindin as well as to the “Indian warrior” Jean Berdindin.

Of the several meanings encoded in *capillaire*, the two that are of relevance here relate to hair and to other vessels in the human body. Although not overly ambiguous, the reader should be aware that the word play is linked to *défriser* and *rigidité*, and as such, both meanings need to be captured as in:

> Her hairdresser would spend four hours a week straightening her hair, while Ops would eat sticks of licorice to obtain, by imitation, sufficient capillary rigidity

The noun *remontant* used in the sense of a beverage can be either tonic water or a generic “pick-me-up.” Since Gouzin offers to buy Lisette a drink after he helps her back to her feet after a fall, the latter would seem to be the more appropriate as it retains the intended pun of the source text.

The verb *rouler* generally refers to the movement of a car but it can also mean “to roll.” Therefore, “*la voiture roula* – the car drove” would seem to be a fairly straightforward exercise in translation because the secondary meaning would seem incongruous in the sentence *La voiture roula, se redressa dans un gémissement de pneus; repartit*. Extra-textual perception would indicate that once a car has rolled, it would be most unlikely to take off again with squealing tyres, unless it was part of a slapstick comedy routine. Given that this extract is not slapstick, the vertical roll should probably be replaced by a horizontal roll, leading to *roula* being translated as “spun out.”

The adjective *tzigane* can be either “Hungarian” or “gypsy”, and often a gypsy of Hungarian origin. All three possibilities of *Veux-tu venir dans une boîte tzigane?* can be captured in the following: “Do you want to go to a Hungarian nightclub and listen to some gypsy music?”, although it might be considered somewhat restrictive to label the restaurant “Hungarian”.

*Poulet*, on the other hand, needs a little more work in order to capture both meanings.
Est-ce qu’il y a du poulet? […]
Du poulet? dit-il. Tu n’en as pas eu assez?
Il faisait une allusion plaisante au commissariat. Andrée rit et l’expliqua à René, qui rit à son tour

*Poulet* means “chicken”, as well as being a French colloquial expression for the police. The joke is an example of presupposition because most French readers would be aware of this. Since the play on words forms the basis of the humour in French, a number of options are available. Cultural substitution might allow for “pork”, as in the translation “Is there any pork? […] He was making an amusing reference to the police”, which involves the same degree of source and target presupposition. If the French cultural reference is to be retained, the addition of a phrase might assist to explain the pun, “Andrée laughed and explained it to René, who in turn laughed when he learned that ‘chicken’ was another name for the police”. Perhaps a combination of both techniques could even be woven into the fabric of the dialogue.

According to the selection criteria established above, those words that fall under the heading of polysemy are: *baiser* (related through amorous activity); *empire* (related through imperialism); *voiture* (related through having four wheels); *brave* (related through courage); *capillaire* (related through being fibrous parts of the body); *remontant* (related through being a beverage); *roula* (related through uncontrollable circular motion); and *tzigane* (related through geography and culture). The two that are in no way related and that fall under the heading of homonomy are *pédales* and *poulet*. Whatever category these words may fall under, it is their translation that is the most important consideration here.

When a word from another language has a number of different meanings in English, it often poses a problem in translation. As with homophony, different strategies have emerged from the above examples. The first is the choice of one meaning over another based on context, as with *baiser, remontant, and roula*. This is the strategy advocated by Bellos who maintains that the meaning of the word has to be determined
through the context in which it occurs. The second attempts to capture both meanings through some form of rewriting, as with pédales, empire, brave, tzigane, and poulet. The third strategy involves finding a single target language equivalent that captures the intended double meaning of the source text, which can be quite difficult, if not impossible at times, although “voiture – buggy” and “capillaire – capillary” both seem to work in their respective contexts. These three strategies show that the translation of polysemy in Vian’s short stories should not be limited to the most obvious meaning. Rather, secondary meaning should also be considered seriously as a viable translation option and incorporated if, and when, the need arises.

This chapter has shown how proper nouns, neologisms and word plays can be dealt with on the lexical level. It has also shown that despite some claims that Vian may be untranslatable, many theoretical procedures are able to be discussed and applied during translation. Five methods for the translation of presupposition in proper nouns have been outlined within the constraints of existing systems. These include the creation of a target language equivalent, explanation through annotation and expansion, superordinate substitution and paratextuality. Neologisms can be translated according to the four methods outlined by Sayadi: the use of an appropriate target language equivalent; transcription or transliteration; direct borrowing and calque; explanatory or descriptive translation. Whenever it has not been possible to employ one of these solutions, the micro-level can be sacrificed in order to preserve the macro-level, which is at odds with Newmark’s call for an attempt at neologism recreation at all times. Word plays based on acronyms have been discussed in accordance with the methodology outlined in Lang, which calls for the explanation of the initialism or acronym and the pun contained therein. The play on words contained in Majoration and the attempt to capture it at the precise moment it appears in the source text conforms to the observations of Koponen, who says that the goal of any word play is to draw attention to something specific in the

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55 D. Bellos, p.87.
text that should not be ignored. The attempt to capture ambiguity through homophony falls within the two categories outlined by Lyon, Nehaniv, Warren and Baillie; the attempt to incorporate both meanings falls under “disambiguation through contextualization”, while simply leaving things as they are after the addition of explanatory annotation looms as the second possible solution. Finally, ambiguity through polysemy has been discussed in relation to Motallebzadek and Yazdi’s strategy of not restricting the translation to the primary sense of the word, opening the way for secondary meanings as translation options.

Chapter Four. Translation Issues: syntax

Vian’s syntax has been the subject of discussion in relation to stylistics for some time. Duchateau explains that Vian’s syntax and vocabulary are different from so-called “normal” French and that the order of words in the sentence structure is turned upside down,\(^1\) which might help to explain why certain people have been attracted to his work for decades. Some of these features have sometimes led to the perception that Vian is untranslatable or that there will be inevitable loss in the translation of his work. Examples of unorthodox syntactical structures can be found throughout Vian’s prose. The collection of short stories in *Les Fourmis* provides several examples. In “L’Écrevisse” there is the superposition of the two syntactical structures *il en viendrait à bout* and *l’eau bout* to form the sentence: "Cela faisait beaucoup d’eau pour un si léger réchaud, mais il en viendrait à l’eau bout." (p.72). In “Le Voyage à Khonostrov”, there is deformation of the verb *attacher* in a phrase with rather loose syntax: "On commençait à voir les attaches nickelées qu’elle s’en servait pour s’attacher ses bas" (p.48); while in “Les Bons élèves”, the sentence: "Sous les vieilles pierres, la marche résonnait, car l’air entrait en vibration pour le la bémol 4 dont le thème complet ne comportait pas moins de trois cent trente-six" (p.35) might well challenge the comprehension skills of the reader.\(^2\) Similar issues involving unorthodox syntax can be found in the short stories contained in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*.

Some of these structures might cast doubt in the mind of the reader as to the precise meaning contained therein. This has direct ramifications here, for if the reader of the original struggles with meaning, how can this ambiguity be deciphered in translation? In this chapter, the intention is to show that through a systematic approach involving the concept of “shift”, a direct relationship can be established between syntax and semantics, which can then be applied to the short stories under translation in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*.

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4.1. Conformity in Vian’s Syntax

Before examining translation strategies for the syntactical structures that might initially seem somewhat daunting, it is relevant briefly to test Vian’s syntax in relation to standard French syntax. With this in mind, some aspects of Vian’s syntax are not quite so unorthodox as some critics would have us believe; indeed, Béchade cites Vian no fewer than twelve times alongside other authors, some of whom are viewed unfavourably by Vian in the short stories “L’Impuissant”, “L’Assassin” and “Les Remparts du sud”; these include relatively conservative authors such as Claudel, Gide, Duhamel, Mauriac and Romain, who might be considered typical of the French canon. Béchade also cites other so-called non-conformist authors such as Céline and Queneau to exemplify typical features of French syntax. Queneau is perhaps better known even than Vian for his grammatical dexterity and iconoclasm. Nevertheless, Sada Niang states quite clearly in relation to Queneau’s *Zazie dans le métro* that on the level of syntax there are very few anomalies in the text, with the only changes occurring as a result of the stylistic licence permitted by language, which contradicts the notion of Queneau’s syntactic innovation.

Although not sourced directly from *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur* short stories themselves, the twelve citations used by Béchade are noteworthy from the point of view of conformity issues in relation to Vian’s prose. Apart from these citations from unspecified Vian texts, other features of standard French syntax that one would normally expect can be observed in the stories of *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*. Béchade has divided typical French syntactical structures into a number of categories. These include the simple sentence, composed of the verbal sentence, which can be further subdivided into those that are composed of a subject and intransitive verb, a subject, verb and complement, impersonal verbs in the third person singular, and incomplete structures, such as the imperative or infinitive. There are also noun sentences that do not contain a verb and individual words such as exclamations. On the level of the complex sentence, co-ordinate clauses generally function in the same way as a simple sentence, containing only a single proposition.

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Many examples of these relatively simplistic structures can be found in the short stories, none of which pose problems in translation. On the other hand, the syntax of the subordinate clause is determined by the overall structure of the complex sentence. Subordinate clauses include the adverbial clause, the noun or substantive clause, the relative clause, infinitive and participle clauses, all of which impact to some extent on translation, as do apposition and contiguity.

The adverbial clause clarifies the meaning of the sentence by adding more precision to the principal or subordinate clause. Béchade has identified seven different types of adverbial clauses, all of which can be exemplified in the short stories of Vian: temporal, causal, concession, consequence or result, final or purpose, comparative and hypothetical. The temporal clause indicates the moment at which the action of the principal clause occurs in relation to another action. It can be either simultaneous, posterior or anterior. Posteriority and anteriority can take either the indicative or subjunctive tense depending on the relationship between the principal and subordinate clauses. Simultaneity can be expressed by conjunctions or locutions such as au moment où - au moment où il était sur le point de trouver une formule véritablement ensorceleuse, un grand et horrible flandrin se faufila devant lui (“Léobille” 141). Posteriority can be introduced by une fois que - Mon cher, dit l’olivâtre, une fois qu’ils furent entrés, vous venez d’agir avec une jeune fille de façon assez peu correcte (“LG” 16). Anteriority may be introduced by avant que - D’un habile coup de tête, elle encaissa, renvoya le pain à cinq mètres de là et, tricotant comme une dérâtée, s’en saisit avant qu’il touchât le sol (“Remparts” 43).

The causal clause usually comes after the principal clause because it provides an answer to the question that is implied in that clause. This is particularly the case with a clause introduced by parce que - Michel change de sens et se fait cuire un peu le dos, parce qu’il est discret (“Test” 73). Causality may also be introduced by a colon - mais j’ai dû mal tomber: rien que des moches (“RB” 49); a conjunction of explanation - L’Amiral s’étonna donc, car il n’était que cinq heures et demie (“Divertissements” 31); an infinitive - Pour se consoler de ne pas jouer, Charlie avait revêtu l’uniforme type d’opérateur en campagne (“Métier” 24); a present participle - J’espère que vous n’allez pas encore me mettre une peau de mouton pour jouer les

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5 M. Harris, The Evolution of French Syntax. A Comparative Approach (London/New York: Longman, 1978), pp.229-246. This text is used here in conjunction with Béchade to determine the different types of adverbial clauses, along with their English translation.
ours blancs, dit le chien, prévenant la proposition qu’il sentait venir ("Métier” 24); a past participle - Rendu audacieux par la foutralafraise, il osa s’emparer de la main droite de Miranda ("Impuissant” 148); an adjective - Il prenait un air modest, sûr de se voir confier le premier rôle ("Métier” 23); and a relative clause - Gouzin, qui venait avec regret de se séparer de Josiane [...], venait d’arrêter un taxi ("Filles” 83).

Vian provides one other possibility not noted by Béchade, the conjunction et - Mais je ne vais pas souvent au cinéma, et je lis plutôt des livres de cuisine (“Vedette” 43).

This case is important because it illustrates the fact that if a strict word-for-word approach is adopted in translation, semantic loss may occur, although here it might also be possible that the choice of et over parce que or car introduces an afterthought or an unrelated statement not linked to causality. This opens the way for the possible division of the longer sentence into shorter sentences without the conjunction, which helps to alleviate the ambiguity: “But I don’t often go to the movies. I read cookbooks instead.”

The adverbial clause of concession or concessive clause refers to a subordinate action expressed simultaneously in relation to the action of the principal clause. It may be introduced by pourtant - Tu refuses toujours, c’est pourtant très instructif ("Divertissements” 31); by néanmoins - Il se ressaisit néanmoins grâce à un violent effort de volonté ("LG” 11); and by avoir beau followed by an infinitive - Il a beau avoir une veste blanche, c’est un homme! (“Méfie” 56).

The adverbial clause of consequence or result expresses the result or the effect of the action announced in the principal clause. It may be introduced by si + que - ils s’enivrèrent de caresses de plus en plus audacieuses, si bien qu’une demi-heure plus tard, ils sortirent de l’extase (“Maternité” 141); by tellement que - Elle avait [...] un teint tellement clair qu’elle avait l’air malade (“Chiens” 98); and by trop + pour - Je suis trop jeune pour mourir étoffé ("Divertissements” 32).

The final clause or clause of purpose indicates the intention or the result of the action expressed in the principal clause. It is sometimes introduced by the same locutions used in the presentation of the clause of consequence, which may lead to difficulties in differentiation. However, use of the infinitive helps overcome this problem: Il n’y avait qu’à essayer ("Francfort” 63), as does afin que: Aulne [...] bondit sur le trottoir en passant par-dessus la portière du taxi afin que les flicues voient distinctement le sang sur ses habits (“Cœur” 25).
The comparative clause establishes a comparative relationship between the adverbial clause and the principal clause that governs it. Equality may be expressed by \textit{autant que} - \textit{Combien de fois? Autant de fois qu’il faut pour te faire biglouser par les flics} ("Cœur" 24); by \textit{semblable à} - \textit{N’avez donc pas de lumière? dit cet homme semblable à d’autres} ("LG" 18); and by \textit{comme si} - \textit{elle a la peau claire et rose, les traits ronds comme si on venait de la tailler dans la glace} ("Martin" 80). Degree may be introduced by \textit{mieux que} - \textit{ma peau vaut mieux que la leur} ("Martin" 76) or by \textit{plus que} - \textit{Quoi de plus dangereux que de se faire tuer?} ("Penseur" 132); while difference may be introduced by \textit{autre, autrement que, diffèrent de}, for which no examples can be found in the short stories.

A number of constructions have been identified by Béchade to introduce the hypothetical clause. It may be introduced by a \textit{si} construction, of which several have been found. \textit{Si} plus the present tense in the principal clause, followed by the present or future tense implies that the hypothesis is likely to be realised: \textit{Si je te le vends vingt mille, Pralin, tu gagnes neuf mille neuf cent} ("Francfort" 67). The pluperfect followed by the past conditional is a structure used when the hypothesis has not been realised: \textit{S’il était venu trop souvent, on lui aurait pris son huile solaire} ("Test" 72), as does the imperfect in both the subordinate and principal clause: \textit{On avait peut-être une chance de partir le jour même si l’affaire se faisait} ("Francfort" 67). An hypothesis can also be introduced by \textit{à (la) condition}: \textit{On leur promit trois strapontins pour la séance de nuit à condition qu’ils attendent} ("Vedette" 45).

The noun or substantive clause (\textit{proposition complétive}) is closely related to the clause that governs it, either through a link with the verb, verbal phrase, noun, adjective or adverb. The \textit{complétive attribut} introduced by \textit{que} is preceded by an expression of intention, idea, desire or misfortune: \textit{Le point commun à toutes ces machines, c’est qu’elles n’opèrent que sur les données fournies à leurs opérateurs internes par les usagers} ("Danger" 165). The \textit{complétive apposition} is where \textit{que} takes the abbreviated form of \textit{le fait que} and \textit{à savoir que}, in which it assumes the role of “knowing that”: \textit{Il avait choisi la direction de Paris, instruit par l’expérience quotidien de ce que les autos s’arrêtent rarement en abordant la côte} ("LG" 12).\textsuperscript{6} The \textit{complétive objet} is relatively common because it involves verbs of affirmation,

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{À ce que} and \textit{de ce que} are also examples of this because \textit{ce} has lost its original value, meaning that it corresponds to a connecting phrase.
knowledge, opinion, will, desire, fear, command, permission, surprise, joy and regret followed by que: Jamais il n’aurait pensé que la fille eût une peau si douce ("Impuissant" 152). The complétive complément de détermination is where the principal clause is reduced to an adverb followed by que: heureusement que ça n’explosa pas ("Remparts" 52).

The relative clause is introduced by a relative pronoun that establishes a link between two clauses. It may exist with or without an antecedent and once again Vian’s syntax, as exemplified in the short stories, shows a great degree of conformity. In the case of a relative clause with an antecedent, the relative clause completes the sense of the antecedent in much the same way as an adjective. It is often introduced by qui: l’inclémence d’une saison qui l’obligeait de se gâter l’estomac ("LG" 7), although other pronouns may be used: ramassées par lui sur la route, où survenaient des accidents fréquents ("LG" 8), and mit sur son chemin le Mage de Siam, dont le vrai nom s’écrivait Étienne Pample ("LG" 9). The relative clause may also exist as the attribute of the object: Il y en a qui n’ont pas de veine! ("Pas" 114), or take the verb in the infinitive without a subject when it conveys the idea of possibility: Il y a un cœur d’or à prendre ("Cœur" 23).

Clausal conformity can also be seen in relation to infinitive and participle clauses. There is no link between the infinitive clause and the principal clause on which it is dependent. Infinitive clauses are introduced by verbs of perception - il entendit sonner l’heure ("LG" 15); je sentais mes mains trembler ("Danger" 164); Le chauffeur la regarda s’éloigner ("Marseille" 92); Lui si doux, si calme, avait vu s’envoler par-dessus le toit ses bons principes ("LG" 19); Ses yeux rubis semblaient priver les gens ("LG" 12); and Elle paraissait hésiter à se jeter à l’eau ("Pénible" 120). Infinitive clauses may also be introduced by verbs of affirmation, such as penser and savoir - Heinz pensait avoir un batteur ("Martin" 70); ils ne savent pas danser ("Martin" 80). The participle clause, both present and past, is separated from the principal clause by a comma, which is marked orally by a pause - Passionné de mécanique, il aimait à contempler ses trophées ("LG" 8).

Vian’s orthodoxy can also be discussed in terms of apposition and contiguity. Apposition is a grammatical construction in which two elements, at the most basic level a noun or noun phrase, are placed side by side in order to qualify each other: Clams Jorjobert regardait sa femme, la belle Gaviale ("Pas" 109). Apposition may
also occur when verbs, particularly verbs of being in supporting clauses, are eliminated to produce short descriptive phrases. This sometimes causes them to function as hyperbatons, or figures of disorder, because they disrupt the flow of the sentence: *la petite Lisette Cachou, brune serveuse du restaurant Gronœil* ("LG" 9).

Apposition may also involve the noun-adjective relationship. There is contiguous adjectival apposition where the adjective is situated next to the noun it qualifies: *La démoiselle, terrorisée, s’habilla sans mot dire* ("LG" 15), as well as non-contiguous adjectival apposition where the adjective is separated from the noun it qualifies: *Très détaché, mais impressionné quoi qu’il en eût, le Major, mine de rien, fit pivoter le volant* ("Remparts" 42).

Other examples of non-contiguous apposition include the noun phrase and its disconnected complement: *il dut, en paiement, donner au paysan qui attendait à côté, tapi dans un trou ad hoc, comme dirait Jules Romains, les trois derniers kilos de sucre de Verge* ("Remparts" 51). Non-contiguous apposition is an issue in translation in relation to syntax and foreignisation. If the skopos requires source orientation, the apposition should be respected: “He had, as payment, to give to the peasant who was waiting by the side, crouched in a hole ad hoc, as Jules Romains would say, the last three kilos of Verge’s sugar.” However, if the skopos requires target orientation, repositioning of the individual elements that make up the sentence may occur, thereby morphing into recognisable English. This would lead to the above extract possibly being translated as: “He had to give the last three kilos of Verge’s sugar as payment to the peasant who was waiting to the side, crouched in a hole that had been dug *ad hoc*, to use the words of Jules Romains.” This issue will be developed further in this chapter.

Most of the time, however, apposition poses little difficulty. As Charles Meyer notes apropos of his corpus, “[e]ven though more than two units can be in apposition, most appositions (92 percent) were single appositions consisting of only 2 units.”7 Within the eight percent of minority constructions, there may be consecutive apposition where grammatical gender helps to avoid ambiguity: *J’y suis retourné tantôt avec une fille, une amie de Verge, le copain que tu as vu chez moi* (“Remparts” 39) / “I went back there this afternoon with a girl, a friend of Verge’s, the guy you

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saw around at my place.” When there are two or more units in apposition, as in the following: son sous-fifre, Léonce Tiercelin, grand jeune homme de cinquante-quatre ans (“Motif” 105), it is clear that the complements refer to the subject.

Corbett and Connors have noted that “although the appositive does not disturb the flow of the sentence as violently as parenthetical expressions do, it does interrupt the flow of the sentence, interrupts the flow to supply some gratuitous information or explanation.”

Many parenthetical expressions can be found in Vian’s stories, such as: un ascenseur Louis X signé Boulle (mais c’était un faux) (“Pas” 110), and one expression that uses the hyphen to achieve similar effect: son ombre – un long museau, des oreilles droites – et du coup, il prit la bûche (“LG” 18). These examples provide little translation difficulty in themselves, apart from the development of strategies in relation to orientation. Source orientation may require retention of the hyperbaton, whereas target orientation may require integration of these elements into the structure of the sentence, such as: “an imitation Louis X lift created by Boulle” or “the long muzzle and pointed ears of his shadow, so he suddenly took a tumble”.

This section has developed at length the case that Vian often uses standard French prose. It has also shown that despite claims by some that Vian’s syntax is unorthodox, thereby posing difficulties in translation, there are many examples of conformity to be found throughout the short stories, as defined by the categories outlined by Béchade and Harris. While Béchade himself provides many examples of conformity in relation to Vian’s prose and existing structures, evidence of conformity in relation to simple sentences and co-ordinate clauses in the stories is also readily available. Furthermore, examples of standardised adverbial, nominal, relative, infinitive and participle subordinate clauses, as well as examples of apposition and contiguity are not too difficult to uncover. This leads to the conclusion that standard translation practices between French and English in relation to Vian can mostly be applied. It also suggests that the idiosyncrasies observed in Vian’s syntax by some critics lie primarily in a minority of constructions.

4.2. Shift

Having shown that Vian’s syntactical constructions may not be quite so unorthodox as previously suggested, and that non-conformity can be found in the minority of structures, the relationship between syntax and translation now needs to be unravelled. As Susan Bassnett says,

[i]n trying to solve the problem of translation equivalence, Neubert postulates that from the point of view of a theory of texts, translation equivalence must be considered a semiotic category, comprising a syntactic, semiotic and pragmatic component following Peirce’s categories. These components are arranged in a hierarchical relationship, where semantic equivalence takes priority over syntactical equivalence.  

The ranking of semantics over syntax would appear to reignite the word-for-word and sense-for-sense, overt and covert, and foreignisation and domestication debates. Since the attempt to recreate Vian in English involves a combination of all of these approaches in varying proportions according to the skopos outlined at the start of the project, the relationship between semantics and syntax is of particular importance. In order to render the meaning more clearly, in other words to provide the translated text with the necessary target orientation as determined in the translation strategy development phase, which gives preference to semantic equivalence, syntactical adjustment sometimes needs to occur. This has previously been briefly alluded to in relation to the phrase containing the reference to Verge’s sugar in “Les Remparts du sud.” It involves apposition and non-contiguity, and the repositioning of syntactical units, which are sometimes called “shifts.”

Catford coined the term “shift” in relation to translation.  

He determined four types of category shifts: structural shifts, which involve a shift in grammatical structure, as in Vinay and Darbelnet’s transposition; class shifts, which involve the compulsory changes in parts of speech between languages; unit or rank shifts, which

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deal with the hierarchical ranking of the sentence, clause, phrase and morpheme; and intra-system shifts, which deal with non-correspondence between different languages. Other related work on “shifts” was done in the 1960s and 1970s by the Czech scholars Jirí Levy, who applies the term to the attempted recreation of equivalent effect especially in relation to poetics, and Frantisek Miko who discusses the shift in expression and style between the source and target text.\textsuperscript{12}

There are two types of shift that are of particular relevance when formulating a link between syntax and semantics: grammatical shift involving Vinay and Darbelnet’s theory of transposition, which also involves modulation and equivalence; and positional shift, as detailed by Kitty van Leuven-Zwart, which involves the repositioning of syntactical structures related by semantics in relation to each other.

\subsection*{4.2.1. Grammatical Shift}

Transposition, often linked to differences in register, involves the interchange of parts of speech without impacting on meaning. Transposition may occur within the same language group, such as \textit{Je lui dirai dès qu’elle partira} / \textit{Je lui dirai dès son départ}. Vinay and Darbelnet note that noun - verb transposition in both directions is a fairly common trend in translation between French and English and provides a potential strategy that can be applied to these translations: \textit{il se nommait Denis} (“LG” 7) / “his name was Denis”; \textit{pour se consoler} (“Métier” 24) / “as consolation”; and \textit{le voyage} (“Remparts” 33) / “to travel”. Apart from the noun-verb relationship, Chuquet and Paillard have identified common transpositions across a range of grammatical categories that are also useful.\textsuperscript{13} There is adjective-noun transposition - \textit{Cet enfant est rachitique} (“Remparts” 33) / “That child has rickets”; noun-adjetive transposition - \textit{l’essentiel de la lingerie} (“LG” 7) / “most underwear”; verb-adjective transposition - \textit{sans se fatiguer} (“Cœur” 24) / “without becoming tired”; and preposition-verb transposition - \textit{je descends chez ma logeuse} (“Amour” 59) / “I am going downstairs to visit my landlady”. Other simple transpositions not listed by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} H. Chuquet and M. Paillard, \textit{Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction anglais < > français} (Paris: Ophrys, 1989).
\end{itemize}
Chuquet and Paillard may also be employed: noun-adverb transposition - *il observait avec philosophie* (“LG” 7) / “he philosophically observed”; and adjective-adverb transposition - *où survenaient des accidents fréquents* (“LG” 8) / “where accidents frequently occurred”.

Chuquet and Paillard also note a range of transpositions specifically related to verbs and verbal structures that could be useful in these translations. A simple verb in French may be translated as a prepositional verb in English, which tends to have a higher incidence: *Aulne monta* (“Cœur” 24) / “Aulne got in”; a compound verb may be translated as a prepositional verb: *faites entrer les impétrants* (“Motif” 106) / “bring in the contestants”; and a non-verbal phrase may be translated as a verbal phrase: *Arthur, l’air désapprobateur, apporta un plateau garni de quelques friandises matinales* (“Vedette” 42) / “Arthur had a disapproving look on his face as he brought in a platter of morning nibbles”.

It may also happen that one transposition triggers a series of transpositions that are necessitated by grammatical function. A noun and adjective may become an adverb and adjective, where the noun becomes an adjective and the adjective becomes an adverb: *chaleur surprenante* (“Martin” 77) / “surprisingly hot”; and a verb and adverb may become an adjective and noun, where the verb becomes a noun and the adverb becomes an adjective: *elle l’embrassa passionnément* (“Marseille” 91) / “she gave him a long, passionate kiss”. Such transpositions are quite possible and may need to occur for the sake of target text fluency.

Modulation is generally defined as being the transfer of a message through a change in the point of view. This sometimes occurs because a message, even though it may be grammatically correct, is considered to be unsuitable, unidiomatic or otherwise awkward in the target language. Modulation does not necessarily involve transposition, although the two are often associated. Modulation occurs through a number of methods that involve the use of metaphors. The most common is metaphoric shift, which substitutes a target language metaphor for a source language metaphor. Possible examples that do not involve transposition include: *le fruit de leurs amours* (“Pas” 109) / “the fruit of their loins”; and *plus un billet dans son portefeuille* (“Pénible” 125) / “not a penny to her name”. Modulation through metaphoric loss, where colourful imagery may disappear, usually involves transposition: *Ton doigt dans ton œil*! (“Méfie” 56) / “Don’t let them fool you!”; and
agitez avec glace dans un shaker, versez, poivrez si le cœur vous en dit (“Impuissant” 146) / “shake with ice in a shaker, pour, pepper to taste”. Metaphoric prosody, in which the metaphors in both languages are expressed in similar, although not identical, patterns of rhythm and sound also usually involve transposition: saoul à rouler (“Chiens” 97) / “as drunk as a skunk”; and à la mode (“Danger” 163) / “all the rage”.

There are other types of modulation that do not not involve the use of metaphors and which involve transposition or grammatical shift. There is metonomy, which is the substitution of a word or expression by another word or expression that is somehow related: le quartier des maisons hautes (“Cœur” 24) / “the well-to-do part of town”; inversion or change in point of view across some common phrases and expressions: Pas d’attribution (“Remparts” 37) / “Request Denied”; change in perspective through interchange of the active and passive voice: il eut l’idée (“LG” 14) / “the idea came to him”; and negation or reversal of position: c’est plus pompant (“Martin” 71) / “it’s not as mellow”.

Equivalence is when the same meaning is conveyed by a different expression. It is particularly relevant to the translation of idioms and clichés, and often involves transposition. The noun phrase l’air becomes the infinitive "to dry" in the idiomatic expression: On va te mettre en l’air (“LG” 17) / “We are going to hang you out to dry”; and the simple infinitive rendre becomes a prepositional infinitive “give up” in the cliché: rendre l’âme (“Divertissements” 35) / “to give up the ghost”.

While these examples of transposition reveal a high degree of conformity in relation to the theories expounded by Vinay and Darbelnet and Chuquet and Paillard, it must be stated that their usage is very much determined by the syntactical structures in which they are embedded. This means, for example, that a particular syntactical structure might favour the use of a noun because of its relationship with all of the other structures that surround it. However, if that particular syntactical structure is relocated within the same phrase, clause or sentence, the existing dynamic might be lost and the new position might require a verb or verbal structure to fulfil the same semantic function, as in the “trigger effect” involving nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs previously mentioned. This therefore links transposition and the use of particular grammatical features to textual orientation, which is subsequently linked to positional shift.
4.2.2. Positional Shift

Perhaps the best explanation of positional shift can be found in the work of Kitty van Leuven-Zwart whose comparative model of fictional texts details microstructural shifts within sentences, clauses and phrases. She calls these microstructures “comprehensible textual units” or transemes. In order to exemplify what kind of microstructure might actually constitute a transeme, Munday reveals how “she sat up quickly” can act as a transeme when viewed in the context of a larger passage. This means that when a translator approaches the source text, individual sense units within the text are identified. Some of these units will be fairly easy to isolate, and others might not be quite so easy. Individual sense units may vary from one translator to another, depending on the perception of the relationship that exists between all of the other units combined. This means that Munday’s phrase “she sat up quickly” might work as a transeme for some translators but not for others. Some translators might see “she sat up” as one transeme and “quickly” as another.

As previously stated, in order to render target orientation to a text, positional shift might occur. This involves the repositioning of comprehensible textual units or transemes within the phrase, clause and sentence to create a syntactical unity that is most coherent to the target audience. Repositioning may occur in both directions, or to put it another way, what comes before in the source text may come afterwards in the target text, and what comes afterwards in the source text can sometimes come before in the target text.

On the most basic level, positional shift could be said to be simple word inversion, as seen in established dialogue constructions:

\[
\text{ST: dit 1 elle 2 ("Marseille" 90)} \\
\text{TT: she 1 said 2}
\]

On a slightly higher level, the “shift” might take the form of phrasal inversion:

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15 J. Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, p.64.
ST: *Le soir chez eux* ("Maternité" 141)

TT: At home in the evening

**Phrase and clause inversion:**

ST: *en longues flèches il filait par les égouts et les puits d’aération* ("Amour" 57)

TT: It wafted out from the sewers and ventilation shafts in long spires

**Clause and phrase inversion:**

ST: *je suis servante métisse dans le film* ("Vedette" 44)

TT: In the film I play a half-caste servant

In each of these examples ST₁ becomes TT₂ and ST₂ becomes TT₁. It should be noted that the inversion has little, if any, impact on the semantic level because at this stage it primarily concerns target text fluency. There is no transposition in the first and fourth examples. However, transposition takes place in the second example between the personal pronoun *eux* and the noun "home". There is also the addition of the preposition "in". In the third example, transposition takes place between the simple verb *filait* and the phrasal verb "wafted out".

Similarly, in slightly more complex constructions consisting of three transemes, positional shift also helps to achieve target text fluency:

ST: *et pour le ravitaillement là-bas ça sera plus commode* ("Remparts" 36)

TT: and it will be easier to get supplies once we’re there

In this case ST₁ has moved to TT₂, ST₂ has moved to TT₃ and ST₃ has moved to TT₁. Transposition occurs between the prepositional phrase *pour le ravitaillement* and the verbal phrase “to get supplies” and the adverb *là-bas* becomes the adverbial phrase
“once we’re there”. If this same shift pattern is applied to other constructions composed of three transemes, similar fluency may be attained:

**ST:** *il est arrivé ça faisait très gangster le signe à travers la porte* (*“Martin”* 74)

**TT:** The sign he made through the door as he approached was very gangsterish

**ST:** *Claude sentait parfois son cœur se fondre en pensant à la Revue du Ciné dont ils lisaient le numéro hédomadaire avec un sentiment qui ressemblait à la reconnaissance* (*“Maternité”* 133)

**TT:** With a semblance of gratitude Claude would sometimes feel his heart melt thinking about the weekly edition of the *Revue du Ciné* they were reading

In the first example, transposition does not actually take place. Instead there is the addition of the conjunction “as” and the subject-transitive verb “he made”, as well as loss of the demonstrative pronoun *ça*. In the second example, however, transposition occurs between the verb *ressemblait* and the noun “semblance”, which has been necessitated by the change in the syntactical relationship of the transemes in the group.

Shift may also occur beyond the adjacent comprehensible textual unit to assist with target fluency:

**ST:** *Le Major noircit au fusain sa figure et celle de Verge* (*“Remparts”* 45)

**TT:** The Major blackened Verge’s face and his own with charcoal

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16 Interestingly, an allusion to this sequencing pattern has been observed in Vian’s own writing. Whether it is an error or an oversight, or whether it has been done purposefully to recreate the effect of being lost, “Les Remparts du sud” states “ils gagnèrent les latitudes de Poitiers, Angoulême, Châtellerault et errèrent dans la région de Bordeaux” (p.48). A map of France shows that Châtellerault precedes Poitiers in the north-south direction in which the characters are travelling. In other words, the sequence should be Châtellerault, Poitiers, Angoulême, that is 1 to 2, 2 to 3, and 3 to 1. Since authorial intent cannot with all certainty be determined, the source text sequence should be retained in this case.
Here ST\textsubscript{2} has been repositioned to TT\textsubscript{4}, and vice versa. The noun *figure* has been transposed as the adjective “own” and the demonstrative pronoun *celle* has been transposed as the noun “face”.

**ST:** parfaitement correcte \textsubscript{1} raisonnable \textsubscript{2} et bien élevée \textsubscript{3} (“Danger” 167)

**TT:** well-rounded \textsubscript{1} acceptable \textsubscript{2} and politically correct \textsubscript{3}

In this case ST\textsubscript{1} has been repositioned to TT\textsubscript{3}, and vice versa. Positional shift occurs here primarily for reasons of poetics, where the positional shift is more in keeping with English patterns of rhyme and rhythm. This is also evident in the translation of the title “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” as “Dogs, Death and Desire”, where *le désir* and *la mort* have been inverted in English for the English preference related to word length.

Other combinations derived from resequencing can exist. The following examples taken from "Les Remparts du sud", "La Valse" and "Surprise-partie chez Léobille" reveal how much positional shift is sometimes required in order to meet one of the stated aims of the translation strategy outlined in chapter two, namely for the target text to read fluently in the majority of constructions.

Example 1:

**ST:** Dans chacun des petits trous creusés par leurs becs \textsubscript{1} on mettait \textsubscript{2} le lendemain \textsubscript{3} des graines de tournesol \textsubscript{4} (“Remparts” 41)

**TT:** The next day \textsubscript{1} sunflower seeds \textsubscript{2} would be placed \textsubscript{3} in each of the small holes made by their beaks \textsubscript{4}

Here ST\textsubscript{1} becomes TT\textsubscript{4}; ST\textsubscript{2} becomes TT\textsubscript{3}; ST\textsubscript{3} becomes TT\textsubscript{1}; and ST\textsubscript{4} becomes TT\textsubscript{2}. If this particular example is analysed further, it becomes easier to see where transposition does and does not occur. In this instance, when ST\textsubscript{1} (*Dans chacun des petits trous creusés par leurs becs*) becomes TT\textsubscript{4} (“in each of the small holes dug by their beaks”), there is no grammatical shift. When ST\textsubscript{2} (*on mettait*) becomes TT\textsubscript{3} (“would be placed”), transposition occurs through modulation from the active to the passive voice. When ST\textsubscript{3} (*le lendemain*) becomes TT\textsubscript{1} (“The next day”), no
transposition occurs. When ST₄ (des graines de tournesol) becomes TT₂ (“sunflower seeds”), no transposition occurs.

Example 2:

ST: où l’on avait traîné de force ₁ émaillotés dans l’écorce et de la paille fraîche ₂ des caisses ₃ des rosiers grimpants, des hortensias bleus et des blancs, des bambous nains aux feuilles rêches ₄
(“Valse” 123)

TT: climbing roses […] , dwarf bamboo ₁ in tubs ₂ filled with bark and freshly cut straw ₃ that had been dragged into place ₄

Here, ST₁ becomes TT₄; ST₂ becomes TT₃; ST₃ becomes TT₂; and ST₄ becomes TT₁. If the same procedure as above is employed, grammatical shift becomes easier to determine. In this instance, when ST₁ (où l’on avait traîné de force) becomes TT₄ (“that had been dragged into place”), transposition occurs through modulation from the active to passive voice. When ST₂ (émaillotés dans l’écorce et de la paille fraîche) becomes TT₃ (“filled with bark and freshly cut straw”), transposition occurs between the adjective fraîche and the adverb-adjective “freshly cut”. When ST₃ (des caisses) becomes TT₂ (“in tubs”), transposition occurs between the noun phrase des caisses and the prepositional phrase “in tubs”. When ST₄ (des rosiers grimpants […] des bambous nains aux feuilles rêches) becomes TT₁ (“climbing roses […] dwarf bamboo”), no transposition occurs.

Example 3:

ST: Les paupières de Folubert Sansonnet ₁ , frappées directement ₂ par le rayon de soleil ondulé ₃ qui franchissait la grille des persiennes₄ avaient de l’intérieur ₅ une jolie couleur rouge orange ₆ , et Folubert souriait dans son sommeil ₇ (“Léobille” 135)

TT: From the inside ₁ , Folubert Sansonnet’s eyelids ₂ had a lovely reddish-orange glow₃ , a result of the undulating ray of sunlight ₄ that fell
directly onto his face, through the slats of the shutters, and Folubert Sansonnet was smiling in his sleep.

In this instance there is indeed much positional shift as ST1 becomes TT2; ST2 becomes TT5; ST3 becomes TT4; ST4 becomes TT6; ST5 becomes TT1; ST6 becomes TT3; and ST7 remains TT7. Consequently, a great deal of grammatical shift resulting from the displacement of transemes can also be observed. In this instance, when ST1 (Les paupières de Folubert Sansonnet) becomes TT2 (“Folubert Sansonnet’s eyelids”), a standard expression of possession involving the preposition de is used. When ST2 (frappées directement) becomes TT5 (“that fell directly onto his face”), the past participle functioning as an adjectival phrase is translated as a relative clause. When ST3 (par le rayon de soleil ondulé) becomes TT4 (“as a result of the undulating ray of sunlight”), the preposition par becomes a prepositional phrase. When ST4 (qui franchissait la grille des persiennes) becomes TT6 (“through the slats of the shutters”), the relative clause becomes a prepositional phrase. When ST5 (avaient de l’intérieur) becomes TT1 (“From the inside”), the verbal phrase is transposed as a prepositional phrase. When ST6 (une jolie couleur rouge orange) becomes TT3 (“had a lovely reddish-orange glow”), the noun phrase becomes a verbal phrase. When ST7 (et Folubert souriait dans son sommeil) remains TT7 (“and Folubert was smiling in his sleep”), no transposition occurs as direct equivalence is achieved.

The short stories offer many examples of grammatical and positional shift in translation. However, the constructions chosen to date could not really be considered as belonging to the minority group that are supposedly untranslatable because they are indeed quite translatable within the realm of standard practice. Instead, they have been selected to outline the details of a translation methodology that can be now applied to those more difficult constructions that occur in Vian’s short stories. Given that the definition of what constitutes a transeme or comprehensible textual unit and the translation strategy employed are somewhat subjective, the latter being determined first by skopos and then by individual translator choice, it would seem that the degree of positional shift and the number of transpositions in structures containing three or more transemes is dependent on domestication and foreignisation strategies.
4.3. Syntax, Shift and Semantics

It is now time to see how the theory of shift, both grammatical and positional, can be applied to those syntactical structures in the short stories that pose difficulties in translation. To this end, and because they are not indicative of the majority of constructions that are typical of French in general, those deemed to present the greatest degree of difficulty will be listed and dealt with in depth on an individual basis. However, before moving on to examine these structures, it is important to justify this approach. During a translation workshop at Monash University in July 2009, the theory of shift was put to the test. Participants were asked to translate a passage from Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, a text that is not without significance in the present context since Vian often liked to read Céline out loud, proclaiming it as a blue-print for all literary writing. Arnaud was not the only person to make the connection between Céline and Vian. Duchateau also notes the influence of the former on Vian’s prose, especially in relation to syntax, as cited at the beginning of the chapter.

The following is the extract taken from the passage by Céline, broken down into comprehensible units that posed a problem amongst the participants:

*Pour deux cents francs 1 on s’envoyait la belle patronne 2. Leurs pantalons 3 leur donnaient 4, aux rigolos 5, un mal inouï 6 pour parvenir à se gratter 7, leurs bretelles n’en finissaient pas de s’évader 8*

There were only relatively minor variations in the translation of the first seven units amongst the participants. The following is a composite translation of these seven units:

For two hundred francs you could have the lovely landlady. The jokers' trousers caused them all kinds of problems when they wanted to scratch themselves.

In this case ST₁ stays as TT₁; ST₂ stays as TT₂; ST₃ becomes TT₄; ST₄ becomes TT₅; ST₅ becomes TT₆; ST₆ stays as TT₆; and ST₇ stays as TT₇. Apart from helping to identify specific difficulties in translation, this procedure helps to avoid omissions, which can sometimes occur when dealing with constructions containing a large number of transemes. The problem arises in comprehensible textual unit 8, where “their braces wouldn’t stop falling”, “their braces were constantly falling down” and “it took ages to get out of their braces” are all possibilities, with an obvious difference in meaning arising between the first two options and the last. Given that the model elle n’en finit pas de se préparer taken from Collins-Robert translates as “she takes an age to get ready” or “her preparations are a lengthy business”, the connotations of delay are extremely important; indeed, they make more sense in the context and should somehow be incorporated into this particular unit. The last option was supported by the convenor of the workshop and subsequently endorsed by the other participants following further discussion. A strategy of dividing the source text into units along these lines to help identify and solve potential translation problems is one that can be readily applied to Vian.

Passages from "Un Cœur d'or", "Les Filles d'avril", "Le Loup-garou", "Les Pas vernis", "Le Penseur", "La Valse" and "Méfie-toi de l'orchestre" have been selected to show how systematic analysis involving transemes can help overcome semantic difficulties in relation to interpretation and how this can ultimately be applied to textual stylistics.

**Case Study 1**

As Aulne enters the building to evade capture by the police, he is forced to make a decision as to which direction to take.

ST: Le couloir₁, carrelé₂ de terre cuite₃ hexagonal₄ lui₅ perturbait₆ la vue₇. ("Cœur" 25)
Let us now examine the source text transemes to see where semantic difficulties arise. There are no obvious difficulties in ST1, ST2, ST3 and ST4, although a slight rewording of the target text will undoubtedly be necessary. The problem arises in the determination and expression of meaning when the individual transemes ST5, ST6 and ST7 are grouped together. The noun phrase subject (literally, “The corridor tiled with hexagonal terracotta”) is disturbing Aulne’s vue. The problem lies in determining which meaning of the homonym la vue (view or eyesight) is more appropriate. Given Aulne’s dilemma as to which direction to take, it could be reasonably assumed that the tiles and their shape are playing tricks on his eyes, which therefore incorporates aspects of both meanings. Therefore, some interpretation based on context is needed. This may therefore lead to the translation:

TT: The corridor1, paved2 with hexagonal-shaped3 terracotta tiles4, was 5 playing tricks on 5 his6 eyes7.

A comparison between source text and target text will now reveal where equivalence has been achieved and where divergence has occurred. There is no positional shift in meaning between ST1 and TT1, ST2 and TT2, or ST7 and TT7. Positional shift in meaning occurs when ST3 becomes TT4, when ST4 becomes TT3, when ST5 becomes TT6, and when ST6 becomes TT5. Grammatical equivalence occurs between two groups of transemes in the same position: ST1 and TT1, and ST2 and TT2. ST3 and TT3 both consist of a prepositionl phrase, although the proposition introduced by each preposition is inverted between ST3 de terre cuite and TT4 “with hexagonal-shaped” due to the anterior adjectival position in relation to the noun in English. When ST5 becomes TT6, transposition occurs between the indirect object lui and the possessive adjective “his”. When ST6 becomes TT5, the verb becomes a prepositional verb phrase.

This analysis leads to the observation that when semantic issues arise in translation, an interpretative analysis of the transeme or transemes in which the difficulty presents itself should be undertaken. It may also be the case that positional shift of the transeme in translation involving the specific difficulty does not necessarily occur. Furthermore, when grammatical shift takes place in order to
facilitate the rendering of meaning, a “trigger effect” involving the transposition of grammatical structures in surrounding transemes may result.

Case Study 2

Gouzin is preparing to go out on the town because he feels that he is about to strike it lucky with the ladies.

ST: Il avait mis₁ ce jour-là₂ son joli complet₃ à carreaux ovales et bruns₄, sa cravate de fil d’Écosse₅, et ses₆ souliers pointus₇ qui faisaient bien sur le trottoir₈. (“Filles” 81)

Very little difficulty arises in the transemes between ST₁ and ST₇; on the other hand, ST₈ is problematic because interpretation is required to determine the exact meaning. A literal translation “that made him look good on the footpath” helps unravel the semantics of the unit, but stylistically it does not work in the overall context of the structure because of the possibility of ambiguity in translation. ST₈ refers to his shoes and not to the totality of his attire. Literal translation could give this impression. Therefore, an alternative may need to be sourced. One such solution may be to use the adjective “sharp”, positioned before the translation of souliers pointus, which provides a link to the inference of looking good. This therefore leads to the following translation:

TT: That day₁ he had put on₂ his nice suit₃ with the brown and oval checks₄, his tartan tie₅ and his₆ sharp-looking₇ pointy shoes₈.

A comparison between source text and target text will now be undertaken to determine where equivalence has been achieved and where divergence has occurred. There is no positional shift between ST₃ and TT₃, between ST₄ and TT₄, between ST₅ and TT₅, and between ST₆ and TT₆. Positional shift takes place between the transemes ST₁ and TT₂, ST₂ and TT₁, ST₇ and TT₈, and ST₈ and TT₇. Grammatical equivalence occurs between the four transemes where no positional shift occurs, when ST₂ becomes TT₁, and when ST₇ becomes TT₈. When ST₁ becomes TT₂,
transposition from a simple verb to a prepositional verb occurs, and when ST\textsubscript{8} becomes TT\textsubscript{7}, transposition from a relative clause to an adjective occurs.

This analysis suggests that interpretation and subsequent re-wording may be necessary when semantic difficulties arise in a particular comprehensible textual unit. This may then impact on positional shift which, in turn, may impact on transposition in the units that surround it.

**Case Study 3**

Denis the werewolf, on the occasion of his first trip to Paris, is in the company of an unscrupulous lady of the night.

**ST:** La belle\textsubscript{1} voulut bien\textsubscript{2} se crier\textsubscript{3} comblée\textsubscript{4}, et\textsubscript{5} l’artifice de ces affirmations\textsubscript{6} par lesquelles\textsubscript{7} elle assurait\textsubscript{8} s’élèver à la verticale\textsubscript{9} échappa à\textsubscript{10} l’entendement\textsubscript{11} peu exercé\textsubscript{12} en cette matière\textsubscript{13} du bon Denis\textsubscript{14}. (“LG” 15)

Let us now examine the source text transemes to see where semantic difficulties arise. ST\textsubscript{1}, ST\textsubscript{2} ST\textsubscript{3} ST\textsubscript{5}, ST\textsubscript{7}, ST\textsubscript{8}, ST\textsubscript{10}, ST\textsubscript{11}, ST\textsubscript{12}, ST\textsubscript{13} and ST\textsubscript{14} are relatively straightforward. ST\textsubscript{6}, while not necessarily difficult, requires some consideration as to what would constitute a satisfactory English language equivalent in the context of stylistics. ST\textsubscript{4} has connotations of the peak of fulfilment and satisfaction, which are extremely relevant in this context, while ST\textsubscript{9} has connotations of “sitting up” or “rising up”. These last two transemes require some degree of interpretation in order to render the meaning. This may therefore lead to the following translation:

**TT:** The beautiful lady\textsubscript{1} was content\textsubscript{2} to scream out\textsubscript{3} that she couldn’t take any more\textsubscript{4} and\textsubscript{5} the theatrics\textsubscript{6} that she used\textsubscript{7} to declare\textsubscript{8} her arrival in seventh heaven\textsubscript{9} were lost on\textsubscript{10} good old Denis\textsubscript{11} who had\textsubscript{12} little\textsubscript{13} experience\textsubscript{14} in these matters\textsubscript{15}.

A comparison between source text and target text will now reveal where equivalence has been achieved and where divergence has occurred. There is no positional shift
between ST$_{1-10}$ and TT$_{1-10}$. Positional shift occurs when ST$_{11}$ becomes TT$_{14}$, when ST$_{12}$ becomes TT$_{13}$, when ST$_{13}$ becomes TT$_{15}$ and when ST$_{14}$ becomes TT$_{11}$. TT$_{12}$ has been added through grammatical necessity imposed by positional shift. Grammatical equivalence occurs between a number of transemes: ST$_1$ and TT$_1$; ST$_2$ and TT$_2$; ST$_3$ and TT$_5$; and ST$_{11}$ and TT$_{14}$. When ST$_3$ (se crier) remains as TT$_3$ (“to scream out”), transposition occurs between the reflexive verb and the phrasal verb. When ST$_4$ (comblée) remains as TT$_4$, the adjective is transposed as a relative clause. (Consideration was given in the translation of the present corpus to translating ST$_2$, ST$_3$ and ST$_4$ as “was screaming the house down”, but this target-oriented structure was deemed to be too loose syntactically within the restraints of the skopos.) When ST$_6$ remains as TT$_6$, the complex noun phrase is simplified. When ST$_7$ remains as TT$_7$, the prepositional phrase becomes a relative clause. When ST$_8$ remains as TT$_8$, the subject-transitive verb construction becomes an infinitive. When ST$_9$ remains as TT$_9$, the verbal phrase is transposed as a pronominal phrase. When ST$_{10}$ remains as TT$_{10}$, modulation occurs from the active to passive voice. When ST$_{12}$ becomes TT$_{13}$, the adverb-adjective combination becomes a simple adjective. When ST$_{13}$ becomes TT$_{15}$, transposition from the singular to the plural occurs. When ST$_{14}$ becomes TT$_{11}$, the prepositional phrase is transposed as an adjectival phrase.

This analysis has led to similar observations to those in the previous case study, namely that when semantic difficulties arise in translation, a certain degree of interpretation is required; positional shift involving the difficulty does not necessarily take place; and that when grammatical shift occurs in a particular unit in order to render meaning, other transpositions may be triggered in subsequent units as a necessary form of compensation.

Case Study 4

When the lovely Gaviale enters the building at 170 Merdozart Avenue, she sees the baby carriages belonging to the families of the occupants living upstairs parked near the staircase.

ST: Il y avait, à gauche, le long du vaste couloir dallé de noir et blanc, la cage de l’escalier garnie de fer extrêmement forgé et sous l’amorce de la
The problem arises in this case study due to the fact that the syntactical and semantic ambiguity does not lie in any of the individual units, for the meaning of each unit in itself is fairly clear. The semantic difficulty arises because of the length of the combined units in the overall structure. Specific problems occur due to apposition and non-contiguity, and the parenthetical expression that functions as a hyperbaton. A solution to the difficulty posed by the length of the sentence can be found in Mitura’s observations. If the longer sentence is divided into shorter sentences, the transfer of meaning to the target audience will be rendered more easily. This approach can therefore lead to the following translation:

TT: A stairwell, decorated with over-the-top wrought iron, could be seen in the black and white tiled hallway that stretched off to the left. Under the lower part of the spiral staircase, which enclosed a Louis X lift (an imitation Boulle), were two superb baby carriages manufactured through the combined effort of Bonnichon Brothers and Mape. They were decorated with white rabbit skin and had been left there for the children living upstairs. The first one belonged to the illustrious Bois-Zépais de la Quenelle family and the second to the Marcelin du Congé family.

A comparison between source text and target text will now reveal where equivalence has been achieved and where divergence has occurred. Despite four shorter sentences replacing one long sentence, textual equivalence has been maintained, with both source and target texts being composed of nineteen units. Both positional and grammatical shift can be examined in relation to sequential source text transemes. When ST1 (il y avait) becomes TT3 (“could be seen”), modulation occurs from active to passive voice. When ST2 (à gauche) becomes TT6 (“to the left”), grammatical...
equivalence is retained. When ST$_3$ (*le long du vaste couloir*) becomes TT$_5$ (“that stretched off”), transposition occurs between the noun phrase and the relative clause. When ST$_4$ (*dallé de noir et blanc*) remains as TT$_4$ (“in the black and white tiled hallway”), the adjectival phrase is transposed as a prepositional phrase. When ST$_5$ (*la cage de l’escalier*) becomes TT$_1$ (“a stairwell”), transposition occurs between the definite article and the indefinite article. When ST$_6$ (*garnie de fer extrêmement forgé*) becomes TT$_2$ (“decorated with over-the-top wrought iron”), the adjectival phrase is retained. When ST$_7$ (*et*) remains as TT$_7$, which is here replaced by a fullstop, the first sentence break is introduced. When ST$_8$ (*sous l’amorce de la spirale*) remains as TT$_8$ (“under the lower part of the spiral staircase”), the prepositional phrase remains intact. When ST$_9$ (*qui enserrait un ascenseur Louis X*) remains as TT$_9$ (“which enclosed a Louis X lift”), grammatical equivalence is retained. When ST$_{10}$ (*signé Boulle (mais c’était un faux]*) remains as TT$_{10}$ (“an imitation Boulle”), there is loss of the adjectival phrase but retention of the parenthetical expression. When ST$_{11}$ (*deux superbes landaus*) remains as TT$_{11}$ (“were two superb baby carriages”), the adjectival phrase becomes a verb phrase. When ST$_{12}$ (*de chez Bonnichon Frères et Mape réunis*) remains as TT$_{12}$ (“manufactured through the combined effort of Bonnichon Brothers and Mape”), the prepositional phrase becomes an adjectival phrase. When ST$_{13}$ (*attendaient*) becomes TT$_{14}$ (“and had been left there”), the imperfect form of the verb becomes the pluperfect introduced by a conjunction. When ST$_{14}$ (*garnis de lapin blanc*) becomes TT$_{13}$ (“They were decorated with white rabbit skin”), the second sentence break is introduced. When ST$_{15}$ (*la descente*) becomes TT$_{16}$ (“living upstairs”), modulation through the inversion of spacial perspective occurs. When ST$_{16}$ (*des rejetons*) becomes TT$_{15}$ (“for the children”), the noun phrase is transposed as a prepositional phrase, along with a change in register. When ST$_{17}$ (*de l’illustre famille Bois-Zépais de la Quenelle pour le premier*) remains at TT$_{17}$ (“The first one belonged to the illustrious Bois-Zépais de la Quenelle family”), the third sentence break is introduced. When ST$_{18}$ (*et*) remains as TT$_{18}$ (“and”), equivalence is retained. When ST$_{19}$ (*Marcelin du Congé pour le second*) remains as TT$_{19}$ (“the second, to the Marcelin du Congé family”), phrasal shift occurs within the transeme.

As in previous case studies, in which individual transemes have been analysed to determine meaning, this analysis involving the division of a long sentence into
shorter sentences in order to clarify the meaning of the entity has led to the observation that any attempt to unravel semantic difficulties results in both positional and grammatical shift.

Case Study 5

The good citizens of the village find it difficult to believe that young Urodonal Carrier’s sudden transformation has been brought about by Divine Intervention.

ST: Les1 habitants2 de La-Houspignole-sur-Côtés3 m’objecteront4 sans doute5, avec la mauvaise foi6 qui les caractérise7, la chute9 sur la tête10 effectuée la veille11 par le petit Urodonal12 et13 les neuf coups de sabot14 attribués généreusement15, le matin de son anniversaire16, par son bon oncle17, surpris18 en train de regarder, de près19, si la servante20 changeait bien de linge21 toutes les trois semaines22 comme l’exigeait le père23. (“Penseur” 129)

As in the previous case study, the main problem lies in the length of the sentence. However, the absence of non-contiguity between the individual transemes means that the action unfolds sequentially, resulting in the possibility of the replication of a sentence of similar length in translation. There is also the problem of homonymy in unit twenty-one involving both meanings of the word linge, which could refer to either “linen” or “underwear”. Given the humorous context, the latter would seem more likely, although the former could also be justifiable. Consideration of these issues therefore leads to the following translation:

TT: The1 cynical2 citizens3 of La-Houspignole-sur-Côtés4, in typical fashion5 probably6 will disagree with me7, preferring to believe that it was because of8 the knock on the head9 young Urodonal10 sustained the previous day11 when he fell over12, together with13 the nine swift kicks up the backside14 generously dished out15 on the morning of his birthday16 by his good uncle17 who had been caught18 keeping a close eye19 on the maid20 to make sure she

20 In this case, the comma functions as a translation entity.
was changing her underwear every three weeks as the boy’s father had asked.

Grammatical equivalence is retained when ST₁ remains as TT₁; when ST₂ becomes TT₃; when ST₃ becomes TT₄; when ST₄ becomes TT₇; when ST₅ becomes TT₆; when ST₁₁ remains as TT₁₁; when ST₁₃ remains as TT₁₃; when ST₁₄ remains as the idiomatic TT₁₄; when ST₁₇ remains as TT₁₇; when ST₂₁ remains as TT₂₁; when ST₂₂ remains as TT₂₂; and when ST₂₃ remains as TT₂₃, although “boy’s” has been added for clarification. Grammatical non-equivalence occurs as varying transpositions in the remaining transemes. When ST₆ (avec la mauvaise foi) becomes TT₂ (“cynical”), transposition occurs between the prepositional phrase and the adjective. When ST₇ (qui les caractérise) becomes TT₅ (“in typical fashion”), transposition occurs between the relative clause and the prepositional phrase. The comma in ST₈ assumes the role of a prepositional phrase in TT₈ for the sake of textual coherence. When ST₉ (la chute) becomes TT₁₂ (“when he fell over”), transposition occurs between the noun phrase and the adverbial phrase. When ST₁₀ (sur la tête) becomes TT₉ (“the knock on the head”), transposition occurs between the prepositional phrase and the noun phrase. When ST₁₂ (par le petit Urodonal) becomes TT₁₀ (“young Urodonal”), transposition occurs between the prepositional phrase and the noun phrase. When ST₁₅ (attribués généreusement) remains as TT₁₅ (“generously dished out”), the past participle functioning as an adjective becomes an adverbal phrase. When ST₁₆ (le matin de son anniversaire) remains as TT₁₆ (“on the morning of his birthday”), the noun phrase becomes a prepositional phrase. When ST₁₈ (surpris) remains as TT₁₈ (“who had been caught”), the adjective is transposed as a relative clause. When ST₁₉ (en train de regarder, de près) remains as TT₁₉ (“keeping a close eye on”), a double transposition occurs as the first prepositional phrase introduce by en becomes a verbal phrase and the second prepositional phrase introduced by de becomes an adjective. When ST₂₀ (si la servante) remains as TT₂₀ (“on the maid”), the clause introduced by the conjunction becomes a prepositional phrase.

The replication of the overall syntactical structure of the source text in the target text, with no introduction of sentence breaks to facilitate the transfer of
meaning, has led to the observation that positional and grammatical shift occurs, as found in previous case studies. Furthermore, the attempt to unravel ambiguity as posed by the homonym *linge* in unit twenty-one has necessitated neither positional nor grammatical shift.

**Case Study 6**

Instead of descending into the noisy, smoke-filled *jazz* basements of Paris, Olivier is dreaming of dancing a waltz.

ST: *Il voyait la grande salle au parquet infini, les glaces reflétant des éclairages doux, et l’envolée ailée des étoffes légères, il entendaient la valse, il sentait contre lui le poids souple et vivant d’un corps abandonné ... et il avait les yeux ouverts; pourtant, tout autour, c’était la fumée et le bruit, les rires, et le jazz brutal qui ne vous lâchait pas.* (“Valse” 125-6)

As in the previous two case studies, the length of the sentence is an issue. However, in this case syntax is not only related to semantics but also to stylistics, which needs to take priority. There is a distinct difference in the sound and rhythm of the passage preceding and succeeding the semicolon. This is related to Vian’s attempt to recreate the difference in rhythm between waltz and jazz in prose, and is achieved through punctuation and the contrasting length of the transemes. Modification of existing punctuation and the representation of waltz through longer units and the representation of jazz through shorter units provide ways of reproducing a similar effect in translation. This has led to the following:

TT: He could see the big hall with the polished floor stretching off into the distance, the mirrors reflecting the soft lights and the light material billowing in the gentle breeze. He could hear the waltz. He could feel the soft abandon of another being’s body against his own ... and his eyes were open. However, all around, it was smoke and noise and laughter, and cold hard *jazz* that you could not escape.
Let us now examine the source text and the proposed target text to see how the poetics have been recreated through shift. Following the musical lead set by Vian, there is only one positional shift involving the inversion of ST\textsubscript{9} and TT\textsubscript{10}, although retention of this order could just as easily occur. Therefore, almost exact positional equivalence has been retained. If sequential source text transemes are examined individually, it can be readily shown where grammatical equivalence does and does not occur. Between ST\textsubscript{1} (Il voyait) and TT\textsubscript{1} (“He could see”), the imperfect becomes a modal verb. Between ST\textsubscript{2} (la grande salle au parquet) and TT\textsubscript{2} (“the big hall with the polished floor”), the noun phrase postmodified by a prepositional phrase has been retained. Between ST\textsubscript{3} (infiniti) and TT\textsubscript{3} (“stretching off into the distance”), transposition from the adjective to verbal phrase highlights the musicality of waltz through the length of the construction. Between ST\textsubscript{4} and TT\textsubscript{4}, grammatical equivalence has been retained. Between ST\textsubscript{5} (et l’envolée des étoffes légères) and TT\textsubscript{5} (“and the light material billowing in the gentle breeze”), transposition occurs from the noun phrase l’envolée ailée and the verb “billowing”, and there is modulation from the passive to active voice. Between ST\textsubscript{6} (il entendait) and TT\textsubscript{6} (“He could hear”), there is repetition of the imperfect to modal construction of ST\textsubscript{1}/TT\textsubscript{1}, preceded by the substitution of a sentence break for a comma. Between ST\textsubscript{7} and TT\textsubscript{7}, there is grammatical equivalence. Between ST\textsubscript{8} (il sentait) and TT\textsubscript{8} (“He could feel”), there is again repetition of the imperfect to modal construction, preceded by the substitution of a sentence break for a comma. When ST\textsubscript{9} (contre lui) becomes TT\textsubscript{10} (“against his own”), the object pronoun becomes a possessive adjective and an object pronoun. When ST\textsubscript{10} (le poids souple et vivant d’un corps abandonné) becomes TT\textsubscript{9} (“the soft abandon of another being’s body”), the adjective abandonné is transposed as the noun “abandon”, which also manages to capture the connotation of le poids souple et vivant. Between ST\textsubscript{11} and TT\textsubscript{11}, modulation occurs from the active to passive voice. From ST\textsubscript{12} to TT\textsubscript{12}, there is grammatical equivalence, but substitution of the comma for the conjunction “and” before TT\textsubscript{16} helps to punctuate the musicality of the jazz.

With minimal positional shift, the musicality of the source text has been reproduced in the target text. To reproduce the effect of the waltz, there is amplification through an increase in length of the units preceding the semicolon,
which has been achieved through a change from the imperfect tense to modal verb and through the simple adjective being transposed as a verbal phrase. Furthermore, the substitution of a full stop for a comma on two occasions helps to lengthen the pause between transemes. Following the semicolon, the musicality of jazz has been reproduced through the substitution of a conjunction for a comma, which eliminates the pause, and a preference for monosyllables, which helps to create the effect of rapid repetition.

Case Study 7

The members of a jazz band take advantage of their elevated position on stage to survey the attributes of the women on the dance floor.

ST: 

\[ Et \text{ ta voisine, celle que tu viens d’inviter, c’est une femme! } \text{ ... Pas d’erreur possible! } \text{ ... Elle se garde bien de transporter ici les enveloppes grossières du tailleur, slacks et chaussures épaisses qui, d’aventure, avenue du Bois, le gris du jour aidant, pourraient faire que tu la prisses pour l’adolescente qu’elle n’est point, oh, deux fois non! } \text{ ...} \]

(Deux fois, d’abord, car c’est ce qui frappe le plus le type en veste blanche, à qui sa position élevée permet l’utilisation du regard plongeant, mis à la mode par certains grands du monde. Citons incidemment: Charles de Gaulle, dit Double-Maître, et Yvon Pétra, dit Double-Mètre.)

(“Méfie” 56-7)

This case study is problematic because it involves syntactical, interpretative and stylistic issues contained in the link between the final words of the first paragraph and the opening words of the second paragraph. Putting aside the difficulties posed by ST1 and ST2 for the moment, a potential target text, divided into transemes gives the following:

TT: TT1, TT2, for that is what, more than anything strikes the guy in the white jacket whose elevated position allows him to scan the crowd, a technique made fashionable by certain great people of the world, Charles de
Gaulle known as Double-Master and Yvon Pétra known as Double-Metre, just to name two.

Taking into account previous discussions on unit shift and grammatical equivalence, this section of the target text poses very few unresolvable translation issues. However, the question remains as to the treatment of *Deux fois*. Literally, it means “two times” or “twice”. “Two times” or “twice” might be acceptable in the context of the last sentence of the first paragraph: “[…] but you wouldn’t make that mistake twice!” However, conveying it literally in the second paragraph to capture the repetition makes little sense: “Twice, at first …”. An attempt to capture the denotation of “twice” as a play on words based on "Double-Master” and “Double-Metre” might lead to a construction like “double-take”, based on the inversion of ST3 and ST4: “The guy in the white jacket does a double take […]”. This represents a significant departure in terms of syntactical *enchaînement*. Therefore, the final words of the first paragraph need to be reassessed in order to determine other connotative meanings. Since a comparison is being made between the woman in the nightclub in all of her finery and the silhouette of a relatively poorly dressed teenager in the setting sun, one possibility that does emerge is a reference to the seemingly non-existent breasts of the teenager and those of the woman that are the first things the musicians on stage notice: *deux fois, d’abord*. This reference is then interchangeable between the two paragraphs. Since it might be difficult to justify the translation of *deux fois* as “breasts”, another solution needs to be found to encompass both the allusion and the *enchaînement*. This therefore leads to the possibility:

[w]hich, were you to meet her on the Avenue du Bois in the fading light, could make you take her for the teenager she was not – oh, that was doubly evident! …

Doubly evident, indeed, for that is what, more than anything strikes the guy in the white jacket […]

With this translation, minimal transposition occurs between the adjectival phrase *deux fois* in ST1 and the adverb-adjective “doubly evident” in TT1, while grammatical equivalence is retained between the adverbs *d’abord* in ST2 and “indeed” in TT2. As
in the previous example, the outcome of this case study shows that the link between syntax, shift and semantics can also help in the retention of stylistic equivalence.

In this chapter it has been shown that Vian’s supposedly unorthodox syntax is in fact less unorthodox than is customarily believed to be the case. Evidence of this has been shown through the work of Béchade, with the assistance of Harris, the former of whom takes examples from Vian’s prose, compares it to standard French syntax, and then systematically categorises other syntactical features, many of which can be exemplified throughout the short stories. Most of these issues do not pose great translation difficulties in themselves; indeed, for the most part, the translation of syntactical issues can take place within the framework of established practices, including the breaking down of larger units into transemes or structural units described by van Leuven-Zwart. These units may then be repositioned in accordance with the *skopos* in relation to orientation which, when determined to be on the side of the recreation of equivalent effect and poetics, takes into account the work of Levy and Miko.

It has also been shown that deconstruction of the source text into transemes helps in the isolation of individual translation problems to ensure that semantic equivalence is retained. When this happens, both positional and grammatical shift can occur in varying proportions. Between the first five case studies, some degree of variation of positional shift has been observed. In case studies 1, 2 and 4, the instances when no positional shift occurs is approximately the same as when positional shift does occur (3-4, 4-4, 10-9), whereas in case studies 3 and 5 the former was higher than the latter (10-4, 14-9). These figures tend to indicate that the degree of positional shift varies in relation to textual orientation involving subjective decisions made by individual translators. This observation is not just limited to these translations of Vian, for in the previously cited translation of Céline, the comparison between the cases where positional shift occurs and does not occur mirrored those of case studies 1, 2 and 4, at the equivalent rate of four apiece.

Grammatical shift is subsequently related to positional shift, where the transposition imposed through grammatical necessity creates a trigger or domino effect which impacts on surrounding transemes. Common transpositions in the case studies typically involve verbal phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases and
adjectives. Some verbal phrase transpositions involve the pronominal phrase, adverbial phrase, adjectival phrase, imperfect tense to modal verb, imperfect to pluperfect tense, and modulation between the active and passive voice in both directions. Transpositions involving noun phrases include the relative clause, prepositional phrase, adverbial phrase, simple nouns and verbs. Transpositions involving prepositional phrases include the relative clause, adjectival phrase and noun phrase. Adjectival transpositions typically involve the relative clause, prepositional phrase, verbal phrase, adverbial phrase and noun. There are also examples of the interchange between singular and plural, and the definite and indefinite article. All of these variations fall within the range of transpositions between French and English as noted by Vinay and Darbelnet and Chuquet and Paillard, thus emphasising the fact that transpositions do not have a specific grammatical value but instead are linked to the stylistic expression of semantic difficulties. This supports Bassnett’s statement proposed by Neubert at the beginning of the section on shift that semantic equivalence should take priority over syntactical and consequently grammatical equivalence and adds further support to the argument that the reproduction of Vian's particular style, even in the most difficult of circumstances, is indeed manageable within the guidelines of existing theory and practice.
Chapter Five. Other Translation Issues

After having examined the problems associated with the translation of proper nouns, neologisms, word plays and syntax, it is now time to identify other linguistic features that pose difficulties in Vian’s short stories and to discuss strategies that can be employed in their translation. To this end, phrasal manipulation, stylistic features and other general features arising from the differences between French and English and the short story format have been identified.

5.1. Phrasal Manipulation

Phrasal manipulation involves Vian-specific features that relate to the manipulation and deformation of established, recognisable constructions. They include modified expressions, disguised expressions, hidden references and abridged verbal constructions.

5.1.1. Modified Expressions

A modified expression could be described as being semi-recognisable; an expression that might cause the reader to do a double take when meeting it for the first time. Such expressions, identified by Rybalka, include *baîler aux cornemuses* derived from *bayer aux corneilles*, which involves a shift in meaning from “to stand gaping” to “to yawn at the bagpipes”. Modified expressions in the short stories have been formed by either the addition or substitution of a word or group of words.

Two modified expressions formed by word addition have been identified in the short stories. The first occurs as the Major sets out on the journey from Paris to Saint-Jean-de-Luz, trying to avoid the police along the way: “Quand même, il les avait à zéro Fahrenheit” (“Remparts” 40). In this case, *fahrenheit* has been added to the expression *les avoir à zéro*, which means “to be scared out of one’s wits.” It is extremely difficult to capture the word play created in the French expression because there is no readily available English equivalent relating to temperature that can be

1 M. Rybalka, pp.161-2.
2 The unaltered expression occurs in “Martin m’a téléphoné...” (p.81).
employed, in this case *zéro fahrenheit*. One suggestion is to find an expression with an equivalent connotative meaning in the first part of the construction and then to add a word or words that fosters another related meaning in the second part of the construction. This might then lead to “Despite this, he was still packing it in boxes”, a modified expression formed by the addition of “in boxes” to “packing it”, a colloquial expression for being scared. The second example occurs as Orvert Latuile awakes after the aphrodisiac mist has created a warm blanket over the city. The modified expression “chaud comme une caille fièvreuse” (“Amour” 60) is formed when *fièvreuse* is added to the expression *chaud comme une caille*, which means “as snug as a bug in a rug”. In this case, the literal translation of *fièvreuse* as “feverish” added to the English expression, in which “snug” is changed to “hot”, creates the modified expression “as hot as a feverish bug in a rug”.

A number of modified expressions formed by substitution have also been identified. A relatively simple example of a modified expression formed by substitution occurs in "jurant comme un Suédois" ("Chiens" 101), which, when translated literally, becomes “swearing like a Swede”. This modified expression is likely to cause ripples of laughter amongst native French speakers because in French the anticipated expression is *jurer comme un Polonais*, which, when translated literally, becomes “to swear like a Pole”. In English, the anticipated equivalent of the unmodified expression would be “to swear like a trooper”. Therefore, perhaps a professional person who, stereotypically, does not curse aloud needs to be found, a tailor for example. This would then lead to the modified expression "swearing like a tailor", which should cause an English reader to respond in the same way as a French reader of the source text.

There are many far more complicated examples of modified expressions formed by substitution. One of these occurs when the Major forces his way into Léobille’s apartment: “Elle s’enfuit en pleurant dans sa chambre, et le Major, ravi, esquissa un entre-chien-et-loup, puis remit son pistolet dans sa poche” (“Léobille” 141-2). The modified expression is "esquissa un entre-chien-et-loup", derived from *esquisser un entrechat*, which is dance terminology referring to a small leap in the air with feet crossed, and *entre chien et loup*, which is the moment after the sun has set when the light is a little grey and uncertain, making it difficult to determine whether the animal in view is a dog or a wolf. The play on words involves the substitution of
the animal in the two different expressions and occurs at the chat – chien interchange point, with the esquissa un entre component being the key and the chien-et-loup being secondary. The word play can be captured by the use of crepuscular, which refers to the twilight period and to a form of dance. Therefore, “the Major, delighted, executed a crepuscular dance move” manages to capture both the meaning and the word play of the original French.

In the title of the short story “Francfort-sous-la-Main”, there is a double substitution in recognisable phrases between sous and sur and la and le, as well as the homonymy contained in Main. Francfort sur le Main refers to the city Frankfurt on Main (the river) and Francfort sous la main means Frankfurt “at hand”. A choice could be made between these two options, although a combination might provide another possibility, such as "Frankfurt-on-Main at Hand". A fourth option derived from thematics rather than the title is also a possibility. This could provide a translation such as “Frankfurt on Tap”, which is derived from the financial exploitation of post-war Frankfurt. This technique has been applied to the translation of the title of L’Écume des jours as Chloe, derived from the numerous references to jazz found in the novel. However, a fifth, more viable option that exploits the prepositional word play, retains the definite article as well as “Main” at the precise point in the expression of the original can be found in the proposed title “Frankfurt in the Main”. This manages to capture the play of the sur/sous relationship with “in”, as well as retaining “Main” embedded in the English expression “in the main” (mainly).

Other modified expressions formed by substitution have been identified. When Jean is on the mountain, “il descendait, laissant derrière lui une trace double, droite comme un fil de la Vierge” (“Voyeur” 154). Here, the interchange occurs at fil, where fils de la Vierge means “son of the Virgin” and fils in the uncapitalised expression fils de la vierge means “gossamer”. The decision needs to be made as to whether fil as “thread” and the capitalisation of Vierge takes precedence over the second option, which would give rise to the following possible translation: “a straight pair of gossamer thin lines”. Given that the first part of the construction in the previous example is the key and because of the poetic nature of the text, “he spun a pair of long fine lines behind him in the virgin snow” should take precedence. When the dog enters the Admiral’s bedroom, the former describes the weather as “un temps d’homme” (“Vedette” 41), where homme replaces chien in the expression un temps
de chien, which means "lousy weather". The reversal of position can be captured by an expression such as “I wouldn’t take a human out in it”. After pouring a bottle of lotion into Ops’ nostrils, the gang decides to “se tremper un brin” (“Test” 75). This peculiar expression in the context has been formed by the substitution of the similar sounding brin ("a little", "blade" or "twig") for bain (bath) in se tremper dans un bain, which means “to take a quick bath” or “to take a quick dip”. There is also the expression se tailler un brin de causette (to have a chat) to consider but it is unlikely to be of much significance in this instance. Given the circumstances, it would seem fairly obvious that a quick swim is being contemplated. Since no equivalent English modified expression is readily available, “to take a quick dip” seems to be the only option that manages to capture the connotations of the modified expression. For the same reason, when the baby takes off “sous le couvert du météore” (“Amour” 57), the reader is not quite certain whether Vian is referring to météo, an abbreviation of the feminine noun météorologie (weather forecast), or the masculine noun météore (meteor), although the latter, almost ludicrous option, seems to be more likely. Because of Vian’s knowledge of English, it is quite possible that this expression is a French literal translation of the English “under the veil of the weather”. If “veil” is modified to “vale”, as in “valley”, a new, equally as ludicrous, modified expression is created based on homophony.

The above strategies for the translation of modified expressions reveal no loss and a slight variation between the source and target texts. No loss is evident in: the two modified expressions formed by word addition; in the expressions formed by the substitution of “tailor” for Suédois and “human” for chien; in the translation of the title; and between météore and météo. In other expressions formed by substitution, there is some variation between the source and target texts when the word play is retained but the modified expression is not, as in “crepuscular”, and in rewriting to capture the sense of both phrases, as in the reference to the threads in the virgin snow. Variation also occurs when a decision is made in the choice of one meaning over another. This would therefore indicate that the components of individual modified expressions need to be clearly identified and examined before determining the most appropriate translation within the context.
5.1.2. Disguised Expressions

A disguised expression can be described as an alternative mode of expression for the meaning of a phrase that occurs in common usage. It can be employed for both embellishment and simplification purposes sometimes, but not always, for poetic effect. To exemplify this, Rybalka has identified *un billet de cinq zwenzigues* as a disguised expression based on the phrase *un billet de cent francs*.\(^3\) The translation strategy determines whether an attempt should be made to replicate the disguised expression or whether rewording of the expression should occur to maintain coherence in the target text. In order to recreate the effect of Vian in English, this translation of the short stories requires adaptability. In this case, the above expression would be translated as "a note of five zwenzigues".

One such example of a disguised expression already discussed in relation to Vian’s unflattering attitude towards the police in chapter one is “tube à sons” (“LG” 8). If the disguised expression is translated as “whistle” instead of "sound tube", loss of authorial intent occurs. The expression “une délicieuse créature de vingt à vingt-cinq printemps” (“Filles” 85) relates to the age of Annette, the young lady in whom Gouzin sees a potential conquest. In this instance, complete loss of the numerical value might be a justifiable option in order to prioritise the spring metaphor (“in the springtime of her life”). This reads more fluently than the literal “between twenty and twenty-five springs”, despite the fact that the French language sometimes expresses birthdays in terms of spring, whereas English also refers to winter when the person is older. An attempt should be made, however, to find a third option that manages to capture both allusions. To this end, “a delightful creature ripe for the plucking, somewhere between twenty and twenty-five” retains the numerical value, while also alluding to spring through the obvious humorous sexual link to picking flowers.

Two solutions to the translation of the above disguised expressions have been proposed: the first is replication through literal translation; while the second involves non-replication through rewording, which has been applied in order to capture all of the implications contained within the expression. This would again suggest that in

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\(^3\) M. Rybalka, pp.161-2. “A note of five twenties” (in German) for a “hundred franc note”.
order to find a satisfactory solution to specific issues, each case needs to be examined on an individual basis.

5.1.3. Hidden References

In the context of Vian's prose, a hidden reference refers to a word or expression derived from a source that is not readily evident; it has already been largely discussed in relation to proper nouns. The term “hidden reference” can be applied to things that were familiar to Vian and possibly to the source text reader, which might have since lost their referent. Having said this, it is not always certain that all source text readers, both past and present, will be aware of the significance of a particular word or group of words. This being the case, it would therefore be most unlikely that the target text reader distanced by geography and time will be any more knowledgeable.

A number of hidden references have been revealed in the short stories through annotation in different source text editions. This would indicate that the editors think that this information has textual significance that needs to be conveyed. One hidden reference in relation to Vian’s son as the basis of character formation has already been dealt with in chapter one: “le fils aîné, onze ans le douze avril” (“Pas” 109). Without this additional information available from annotation, the reader would more than likely be unaware that Vian is referring to Patrick, which could lead to either an inferior reading or misreading of the text. The information has not been annotated in the Bourgois edition but has been duly noted in both the Fayard edition (p.294) and Pléiade I (p.1279). The omission in the earlier Bourgois edition might indicate that the source text reader was close enough to Vian to be already aware of the significance, whereas its inclusion in the later editions might support the idea that source text readers need this extra piece of information to gain textual insight. Another phrase containing a hidden reference is “le ‘panier d’oranges’ (c’est dans Louis Boussenard)” (“LG” 8). Louis Boussenard wrote about Australian gold prospectors in Les Pirates des champs d’or, and in this case it refers to the lack of success in finding gold by the former owner of Denis’ cave. In this instance identical information has been provided as annotation in all three editions, indicating that even early readers might not have understood the significance. Neither of these examples has direct ramifications on the translation of the primary text. However, the
annotation should be replicated in the target text in order to provide the target reader with equivalent knowledge so that the source text reader is not unduly privileged.

On the other hand, annotation in the next two source text examples does impact directly on translation of the primary text. The reference to the Nuremberg top contained in the phrase “en ronflant comme une toupie de Nuremberg” (“Remparts” 36) is not annotated in Bourgois, yet two different explanations exist in Fayard and the Pléiade. The phrase *ronfler comme une toupie* is fairly common in French but the addition of "Nuremberg" adds another meaning. The former interprets it as the German interference on British radio during the Occupation, whereas the latter focuses on the more traditional view of Nuremberg as a city with an industry of toy manufacturing. The interpretation of this information has ramifications on the poetics of translation, for if *toupie* is translated simply as “top”, “humming like a Nuremburg top” sounds fine in English, whereas if *toupie* is translated as “spinning top”, “humming like a Nuremberg spinning top” does not read quite as fluently because of the close repetition of “-ing”. In this particular case, it would be best to retain both interpretations as annotation along with the preferred “top” option. Similarly, the noun phrase “un robinet idéal” (“Pénible” 123) has no annotation in Bourgois but contrary to the previous example, both Fayard and the Pléiade agree that it is a brand of plumbing fixture. With this extra piece of knowledge, the generic effect created by the transposition of the indefinite article “an” to the definite article “the” and the retention of the non-capitalised “i” can be replaced by the retention of the indefinite article “an” and the capitalisation “I”, as in “the ideal tap” becoming “an Ideal tap”. This particular strategy may indeed eliminate the need for annotation in the target text because the capitalisation indicates that it is a brand name.

There are also some instances in the short stories where the hidden reference is not revealed through source text annotation; rather it depends on the personal experience of the reader. One such example occurs in "Le Penseur" when Urodonal takes the train to Paris in search of success (p.131), which is very reminiscent of the story of Julien Sorel in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*. Another example occurs in "Un Test" when the narrator's male friend, Castapiathe, is seen wearing a yellow and mauve bikini at Deligny baths, a reference to the unveiling of the controversial swimming costume of the day.

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The question needs to be asked whether the excessive use of annotation might make the target text too encyclopaedic, which, according to the strategy outlined at the beginning, is one of the features the translation of these stories is trying to avoid. While some might see annotation as a distraction to the primary text, it can be invaluable. As seen in the above examples, it provides the information necessary for the enhancement of the source audience’s reception of the source text, which can then be adopted for and adapted to target text requirements, thereby eliminating the need for rewriting.

5.1.4. Abridged Verbal Constructions

An abridged verbal construction could be described as being an incomplete construction because part of it seems to be missing. This feature could be either accidental or intentional because it has been well documented that Vian used to write his short stories both at great speed and in the early hours of the morning. In fact, Marchand says that the speed of his writing is one of the specific traits of Vian, who usually wrote his texts in one sitting and without editing.5

Several abridged verbal constructions have been identified in the short stories. One possibility is found in the following dialogue: " - Curé, continué-je, [...]" ("RB" 50), where the past participle "continué" seems to have been used without the auxiliary verb ai. However, since this section is written in the present tense, the inverted form is correct. Another possibility is "L'Amiral compatit" ("Vedette" 41) instead of the anticipated expression compatir à la douleur de quelqu'un, which means that the expression introduced by à has been omitted.

Two specific examples have chosen for discussion because each one offers a different translation approach to the same problem involving the verb faire. The first of these occurs when the Major dashes off to see his friend Bison to discuss upcoming holiday plans: “Le Major irrupit chez son ami” (“Remparts” 30). The anticipated French construction would be Le Major fit irruption chez son ami. In this case there is loss of the verb faire and transposition of the noun irruption to an “-ir” verb to form the non-existent, yet still recognisable, irrupit. As in some other examples of phrasal manipulation, it is sometimes difficult to find a satisfactory

5 V-M. Marchand, p.358.
equivalent construction in English. The translation of the regular construction would be “The Major burst in on his friend”, so something like “The Major burst on his friend”, “The Major burst in his friend”, or something similar would have to be used. Since the first two proposals have different connotations, here it may be necessary to use the translation of the regular construction unless a suitable neologism can be found. The second abridged verbal construction occurs when the narrator learns that the person to whom he is speaking has lost a close friend during the war. The abridged construction is “je condoulois” (“Martin” 84). In this case the anticipated construction would be je lui fais mes condoléances, which reveals loss of the verb faire and transposition of the noun phrase mes condoléances to a verb. In this case, however, the translation “I condole” manages to capture the abridged construction of the original through elimination of the standard English prepositional phrase “with someone”.

As in other features noted in relation to the translation of Vian, various approaches depending on practicality need to be considered. In the first example, the proposed translation offers no indication of linguistic anomaly due to loss and transposition, although this could be due simply to the difference between languages not allowing for equivalence to be achieved. In the second example, however, the same linguistic anomaly has been addressed by elimination of the prepositional phrase introduced by “with” because in this case there is no such linguistic or stylistic barrier to equivalence.

Throughout the examination of phrasal manipulation and proposed translation strategies, it seems at times that the ability to capture authorial intent is an almost insurmountable obstacle; an exercise in translatory gymnastics according to Bellos, due to the inherent differences between languages and the inventiveness of Vian. However, this might not always be the case, for as Mitura points out: maybe one day another translator will come along; someone who is better trained or more inventive, who can find solutions to those problems that were previously thought to be untranslatable.6

6 M. Mitura, p.173.
5.2. Stylistic Features

Three stylistic features have been uncovered in the short stories that impact directly on the formulation of translation decisions. Perhaps the most significant of these is the wide range of different registers that are often interspersed within the same story. Sometimes register variation even occurs within the same phrase or sentence due to the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated words or the intrusion of specialised vocabulary, obscure words and familiar French in the text. The other stylistic features that impact on translation are the abundant repetition of certain words and phrases; and poetics.

5.2.1. Register

Vian’s short stories display a wide range of registers that are linked to the sociolinguistic context in which they occur. There is the simplistic contracted dialogue used amongst friends in “Une Grande vedette” - “Quoi voir? Et pourquoi si tôt?” (p.42); colloquialisms found in “Un Test” - “Ça gaze ferme” (p.75); vulgarity and creativity in “L’Amour est aveugle” - “aréosol aphrobaisiaque” (p.61); denigration in “L’Assassin” - “Il n’y a que des lopes partout” (p.91); affection in “Maternité” - “mon amour, ma joie, ma santé” (p.139); descriptive literary language in “Marthe et Jean” - “le ciel, moucheté de légers nuages, luisait de tous les feux d’un gai soleil d’avril” (pp.116-7); the language of spies in “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller” - “F-5 avait besoin d’être couvert vis-à-vis de Mackinley” (p.93); ironical religious and philosophical discourse that borders on sacrilege in “Le Penseur” - “Le curé sentit passer l’aile du Saint-Esprit et referma son col” (p.130) and “Si tu veux avancer dans l’étude de la sagesse, ne refuse point, sur les choses extérieures, de passer pour imbécile et pour insensé” (p.131).

Quite often, a change in register involves little more than the substitution of a set of words associated with particular groups of people or the topic at hand. However, there might be a change in grammatical features as well.\(^7\) This is particularly evident in “Le Danger des classiques” where the poetry of Géraldy: “J’ai

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besoin d’exprimer, d’expliquer, de traduire - On ne sent tout à fait que ce qu’on a su dire …” (p.168) is interspersed with the language of science lectures (“Et pourquoi n’a-t-on pas essayé de les doter d’une conscience et d’un raisonnement? Parce que […] , p.165”). Here the poet’s use of repetition and rhyme is vastly different from the teacher’s rhetorical question.

Most of the stories are prone to varying degrees of multiple registers. In “Le Motif”, for example, Odon du Mouillet’s long-winded legalese stands in stark contrast to Zizie’s very informal staccato-like outburst: “Ce sagouin m’a cocufiée avec une pochetée” (p.107). “Un Cœur d’or” entwines literary, bureaucratic and familiar register, as does “Les Remparts du Sud”, which also contains language found in travelogues: “De Ribérac à Charlais, la route fut courte. Par Martron et Montlieu, ils regagnèrent la N.10” (p.48). “L’Impuissant” mixes the language used in cocktail recipes: “soit: un tiers de crème fraîche, un tiers de cognac, un tiers de crème de fraise, agitez avec glace dans un shaker, versez, poivrez si le cœur vous en dit” (p.146) with pick-up lines that can sometimes be overheard in a bar. It is therefore important in translation to reproduce the source register as closely as possible in order to capture authorial attitude as discussed in chapter one and to make the appropriate distinction to avoid semantic loss.

The issue of semantic loss is particularly evident in the translation of the list of chores found on Léobille’s agenda (p.135):

Il y avait à réfléchir à:
1) Comment il allait s’harnacher;
2) Comment il allait se sustenter;
3) Comment il allait se distraire.

If s’harnacher is translated as “to dress oneself” and se sustenter is translated as “to feed oneself”, the connotations of preparing oneself for a ceremony or an ordeal are lost since s’harnacher is sometimes used in relation to soldiers, hunters and mountain climbers while se sustenter is used more in relation to taking sustenance to gain strength. This might therefore lead to the more register-driven, era-specific “bedeck himself” and “nourish himself” being employed. Similarly, it is necessary to recognise the derogatory use of "femelle" in the phrase "une femelle de ce calibre-là"
("Chiens" 99) and of "ça" in "mettez ça là-dedans" ("Marseille" 93). If "femelle" is translated as "woman" in "a woman of that calibre" instead of "female" and "ça" (referring to the limp body of Pelagia's lover) is translated as "him" in "put him in" instead of "that", then there is inevitable loss of authorial intent connected to register. Likewise, it is necessary to recognise the familiarity of "caillou" in the expression "me raser le caillou" ("Chiens" 105), instead of the more anticipated tête. This creates a shift in register from "to shave my head" to "to shave my noggin".

It has already been shown how different registers can coexist within the same story. However, register within a sentence can also sometimes be affected by an unexpected intrusion. This means, for example, that the reader may suddenly become aware of an incongruous word or phrase. One form of intrusion that impacts on register is the presence of an unexpected or obscure word because it serves as a form of juxtaposition with the other words in the text. The term “hapax legomena”, although retrieved from Old Testament translation studies, could easily be applied here, where “rare words occur only once.” Three words have been selected to represent this category: the Latin “vomito-negro” (“Martin” 79); the adjective “moldo-valaque” (“Francfort” 65); and the Russian word "niet" ("LG" 15). Vomito-negro refers specifically to the black blood expelled from the body of a victim suffering from yellow fever, but it is also another name for the disease itself. Both “yellow fever” and “black vomit” are denotative but the latter should take preference in order to replicate register. Moldo-valaque refers to Moldova or Moldavia and Valachie (Wallachia, Walachia, Valachia), two countries that united to form the present Romania. However, in familiar French, it can also refer to a place of indeterminate origin. In this case, it is the unexpected presence of “Moldo-Valachie” that creates the equivalent impact in the target text. The presence of niet poses another problem because it is totally unexpected in the context of the story: it needs to be determined whether the Russian word should be left intact; or whether it should be translated into English or perhaps even French, where its impact would be lost. Here, retention replicates the equivalent effect.

8 “A rare word or phrase that occurs only once in a manuscript, document, or particular area of literature”, retrieved from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hapax+legomena.
Another intrusion that impacts on sentence register is the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated words. In the short stories, this form of juxtaposition primarily arises from noun-adjective and noun-prepositional phrase combinations; there is also one other example that is difficult to classify. As has been the case with stylistic features to date, each example needs to be examined on an individual basis in order to determine translation possibilities and the impact it has on register.

The noun-adjective grouping is represented by two examples. A blend of scientific and technical jargon gives us “embrayage tricuspide à révolution souple” (“Pas” 112) in which the noun embrayage is paired with the adjective tricuspide to describe a Norton motorcycle. Embrayage refers to the clutch and gear mechanism, whereas tricuspide is an expression used in cardiology, possibly a reference to Vian’s own heart problem. Being specialised terminology, tricuspide is unlikely to be familiar to many source text readers. It is therefore possible to recreate the same effect in the target text by using the English equivalent “tricuspid” through the same noun-adjective combination, which results in “smooth tricuspid gear change”. Also in “Les Pas vernis” can be found the unlikely noun-adjective pairing of “coussin berzingué” (“Pas” 113). Berzingué is used here as an adjective and is possibly derived from brindezingue, which means to be drunk or a little crazy. Berzingue also appears in the expression à toute berzingue/flat out, and in Savoyard dialect as a very familiar form of the verb "to throw". A neologism may need to be created to maintain equivalence, leading to Gaviale burying her head in a berzinged cushion, where “berzinged” is an anglicised form of the past participle ending in “-ed”.

There are two examples of a noun paired with a prepositional phrase to form an unlikely combination: “bugle à rallonges” (“Penseur” 131) and “chewing gum au salicylate” (“Divertissements” 34). The phrase à rallonges means “extension” as in table à rallonges (extension table) and can be translated as the nonsensical “extendable bugle”. In the second example, the prepositional phrase should be retained in postmodification by a non-finite clause, “with the flavour of salicylate.” The unexpected presence of the two adjectives in the former examples and the addition of unexpected prepositional phrases in the latter impact directly on register by injecting elements of humour into what would have been four somewhat regular sentences.
In the expression “de façon étri, tru et tronquée” (“Pénible” 122), despite the temptation to treat étri, tru and tronquée as neologisms interspersed with real words, semi-recognisable French words, and English words “Frenchified”, leading to the translation “tried, true and tested”, which could be justified under Neubert’s hierarchical ranking of semantics over syntax and register as discussed in chapter four, it has been decided to retain this word grouping under the heading of juxtaposition because it may well be juxtaposition of all three of the above categories. However, the first two words are actually a shortened form of étriquer and truquer respectively, producing an economy of expression that is based on register. The only word that stands out as being unmistakably French is tronquée, the adjective form ed from the past participle of the verb tronquer / to slice off a portion, that agrees with the feminine noun façon. Following this pattern, étri is the shortened form of the adjective étriquée / selective and tru is the shortened form of the adjective truquée / falsified. Therefore, in order to replicate the pattern, the first two adjectives should be in a shortened yet recognisable form, which could then lead to the following: “in a select, false and truncated manner”, although in this solution the truncations are less striking and do not reproduce the neologisms.

The final type of intrusion that impacts on register is the relocation of words from their conversational context to prose. As Baus explains, literary use of spoken language is just one of Vian’s distinguishing characteristics.10 There is a great deal of dialogue in the short stories, so it must be emphasised that Baus is referring to Vian’s use of familiar French in narrative passages.

The abbreviations ben oui, j’osais pas, imper and sympa are recognisable as expressions and words that appear in informal spoken French. However, in certain stories they have been used in a non-dialogue context: “ben oui, c’était un curé”; “j’osais pas aller me baigner” (“RB” 49); “j’avais salopé mon imper” (“Martin” 72); and “il est assez sympa” (“Martin” 84). The question arises as to whether their translation should be treated the same in dialogue and non-dialogue situations. In order to recreate Vian, the attempt must be made to replicate effect. In popular speech ben oui is short for bien oui. In fact, ben as a shortened form of bien occurs in a number of common expressions: eh ben, ben quoi, ben aiors, for example. Literally, the expression here means “well, yes” but when written, the form “well,

10 E. Baus, p.56.
yeah” or “that’s right” could be used, given that in the latter the apostrophe in “that’s” replaces the “i” in “is” just as the “i” has been eliminated in *bien*. This results in the following translation: “that’s right, he was a priest.” The suppression of *ne* in the spoken form of the negative is common in French and is quite often transcribed as it has been here in *j’osais pas*. This effect may be recreated by elimination of the subject pronoun to reflect the abbreviated speech and to capture the speed of the original as a form of compensation, as in “didn’t dare”, which leads to the following: “didn’t dare go in for a swim.”

The common *imper* is a very common abbreviated form of *imperméable*. In the search for an equivalent, “Driza” from the iconic Australian “Drizabone” surfaces, but since it is considered to be too culturally specific, “mac” from “mackintosh” emerges as another possibility. However, despite being close to Vian’s era, it is feared that competition from the modern global phenomenon of a brand of computer might somehow overshadow the intent of the translation. This could lead to the retention of the unabbreviated “raincoat” as an alternative. The very common *sympa* from *sympathique* means “nice”, and as with *imper*, an abbreviated or shortened register-based equivalent may be difficult to find, although this could be considered to be of secondary importance so long as the equivalent register is retained. The use of familiar expressions in formal prose comes as somewhat of a surprise at times, although not quite so much as in the other forms of intrusion already discussed; its presence could be seen as an attempt to engage the reader as if first person narrative monologue is read as dialogue.

When equivalence of register cannot be attained, as in the translation of the abbreviated *imper* and *sympa*, Baker’s pragmatic approach may need to be invoked, which states that intent cannot always be represented by the linguistic system.11 This therefore leads to the retention of the unabbreviated “raincoat” and “nice”. Apart from these two examples, register and alternation of register by unexpected combinations can, for the most part, be captured in translation, thereby retaining authorial intent and stylistic equivalence. Furthermore, Rybalka’s claim that Vian manages to create a totally unexpected yet recognisable world, which leads to two separate realities,12 reinforces Westweller’s claim that Vian’s writing contains some

12 M. Rybalka, p.160.
affinity with the works of the surrealists because of the unexpected combinations of words and their meanings.\textsuperscript{13}

5.2.2. Repetition

There are two conflicting schools of thought on the role of the translator when it comes to retaining "flaws" in the original text. The term “improving the original” refers to not being faithful to the source text in relation to stylistic features and to the replication of any errors that might occur. At the 52\textsuperscript{nd} A.T.A. Conference, Freehill said: “Never, never give into the temptation to improve the original. If the original is vague or clumsy or just plain wrong, then a good translation will faithfully reflect the flaws. After all, that was how the original author wrote it.”\textsuperscript{14} Jabak agrees with Freehill’s assessment but insists that it is indeed the duty of the translator to intervene only in relation to the accidental misrepresentation of facts, either through oversight or lack of knowledge on the part of the author.\textsuperscript{15} In an attempt to counter Freehill, Durban, at the same A.T.A. Conference claims that any lack of translator involvement in the improvement of stylistic features is “the bottom of the market approach” to translation,\textsuperscript{16} as does Schwartz who says literary translators are “writers who take a text and make it [their] own and do what needs to be done.”\textsuperscript{17}

Mitura has noted the repetition of the verb \textit{dire} as a stylistic feature of \textit{L’Écume des jours} and \textit{L’Herbe rouge}, and shows that the translators did not want to be faithful to it. In fact, she claims that the objective of the two Polish translators was to break the monopoly of the verb \textit{dire},\textsuperscript{18} an approach that is directly at odds with Freehill’s philosophy. Similarly, the short stories reveal a plethora of \textit{dire} constructions, primarily in relation to \textit{dit} plus a noun or pronoun placed at the end of dialogue. In fact, over seven hundred instances of this feature have been revealed

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{13}U. Westerweller, p.59.
\bibitem{16}C. Durban quoted in Schiaffno.
\bibitem{17}R. Schwartz, “Translator training and the real world”, \textit{Translation Journal}, Vol.7, No.1, January 2003, retrieved from http:translationjournal.net/journal/roundtablea.htm
\bibitem{18}M. Mitura, p.184.
\end{thebibliography}
across the twenty-eight stories, with the highest incidence being in “Les Remparts du sud” (112 times) and the lowest incidence being in “Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” (none), at an average frequency rate of twenty-six times per story.

If the recommendations of Durban and Schwartz are to be followed, and despite the fact that repetition is more common in English than in French, alternative verbs to *dire* can and probably should be employed at times to break its monopoly. Such substitutions might involve “asked”, “answered”, “acknowledged”, “conceded”, “agreed” or “insisted”, depending on the context of the dialogue. Some of these substitutions can be justified in the context of illocutionary meaning, where the speaker’s intentions rather than their actual words are more important. Baker says, for example, that “a speaker may use […] an interrogative structure to express reproof”,\(^\text{19}\) as “What do you think you’re doing?” Other techniques might include the elimination of the *dire* construction altogether when the frequency is seemingly too great, as exemplified by the following possibility: "Mon vieux, dit-il, ça ne va pas encore" (Remparts 36) / “Well old friend, it still hasn’t been sorted out.” However, the *skopos* of this translation requires Vian to be recreated in English, reproducing as much as possible the same effect on the target audience as the source text did on the source audience. With repetition being more common in English than in French, and with repetition of the verb *dire* figuring prominently as a stylistic feature, which some might consider to be flawed, it seems clear that this repetition needs to remain intact.

Other examples of repetition occur with the words *ça*, *types*, *mecs* and *gars*. *Ça*, as an abbreviated form of "cela", seems to be less noticeable than *dire*, yet it appears almost three hundred and fifty times across the twenty-eight stories, with an average frequency rate of twelve times per story. The highest frequency is in “Martin m’a téléphoné …” (70 times) and the least in “Filles d’avril” (none). *Ça* unlike *dire*, has no established English language equivalent. It can retain a variable pronominal value depending on its context when translated, as in “something” - “Denis constata que ça allait mal” (“LG” 18) / “Denis noticed that something was wrong”; “everything” - “ça ira” (“Remparts” 32) / “everything will be fine”; “nothing” - “ça n’a pas changé” (“Martin” 80) / “nothing has changed”; and “this” - “qui a fait ça?” (“Remparts” 34) / “who did this?”

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\(^{19}\) M. Baker, *In Other Words*, p.259.
Although not as common throughout as *dire* and *ça*, the repetitive use of *types*, *mecs* and *gars* is limited to only some of the stories and needs to be briefly examined to determine a translation approach. Whether the repetition is a stylistic choice consciously made by Vian, or whether it is simply an attempt to put words rapidly on the page is an area open for debate. Once again according to Jabak and Freehill, wherever a standardised equivalent exists, the repetition needs to be retained. *Types* is particularly evident in “Martin m’a téléphoné…” (14 times), “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” (10 times), “Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” (7 times), while it also appears in “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller” (3 times), “Les Remparts du sud” (once), “Le Danger des classiques” (once) and “Francfort-sous-la-Main” (once). In those stories in which *type* occurs, the influence of American culture is evident. The word “guy” is popular in American culture and because it shares the same register as *type*, it is a justifiable choice in the context. Repetitions of examples in the vocative case also include *mec* and *gars*, which do not have a standardised English-language equivalent. In these cases, a register-driven translation option based on context needs to be determined, which may be variable under such circumstances.

Repetition through antanaclasis also occurs. Antanaclasis is the repetition of a word or phrase where meaning shifts subtly in the second instance, primarily through vocalisation linked to lower intonation. One well-known example of this can be found in the advertising slogan for Vidal Sassoon hair products: “If you don’t look good, we don’t look good.”\(^{20}\) Several examples of antanaclasis occur in the short stories. Some of these include: “Elle aimait le sport et les garçons hardis et vigoureux. J’aime le sport, dit-elle, et j’aime les garçons hardis et vigoureux” (“Léobille” 141); “il aurait voulu la retenir par une conversation habile et ensorceleuse mais, au moment précis où il était sur le point de trouver une formule véritablement ensorceleuse […]” (“Léobille” 141); "Je la sors, et je descends comme ça" ("Amour" 59); and "Il y aura la grande échelle? Il y aura la grande échelle" ("Pas" 113).

There is also another example of repetition that needs to be briefly mentioned, as it serves as a play on words that forms the moral to "Un Test". It could be seen as a form of antanaclasis, however instead of the repetition occurring in quick succession, the repetition occurs four pages later and involves a shift in grammatical

\(^{20}\) [http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/A/antanaclasis.htm](http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/A/antanaclasis.htm), accessed August 2013.
gender: "Il faut toujours faire venir sa fiancée à la piscine [...] Il n'y a que là qu'on puisse se rendre compte de la façon dont elle est faite" (p.73); "il faut toujours emmener son fiancé à la piscine. Il n'y a que là qu'on puisse se rendre compte de la façon dont il est fait" (p.77). As with the previous examples of antanaclasis, it is important that the degree of intended subtlety based on repetition be faithfully reproduced in order to recreate the same effect for both sets of readers.

It has been shown that the translation of repetition requires a two-pronged approach. When the skopos dictates faithfulness to the source text, as with those words that have a long-established translated form such as the verb dire as “to say”, and when the subtlety of antanaclasis needs to be captured, the word or phrase should be retained and repeated in the appropriate grammatical form. It has also been shown that the translation of those other words that do not have an established anglicised form may be subjected to variation with an equivalent register depending on the situation in which they are used.

5.2.3. Poetics

Textual rhythm has already been discussed in relation to the use of written language to capture the difference in musicality between waltz and jazz in “La Valse”. Rhythm and rhyme are also a major feature in the title of the tune the butcher's boy is whistling in "Marseille commençait à s'éveiller": "La Valse de Palavas n'est pas la lavasse de l'agence Havas" (p.87), which, when translated literally, is the nonsensical "The Palavas Waltz is not the Dishwater of the Office of Havas". In this instance, there is consistent rhyme in the source text between "la" and "ass", as well as alliteration involving the letters "a" and "v", which is not evident in this particular translation. Since the rhyme and rhythm patterns are deemed to be the predominant features of the title, an attempt should be made to replicate them in the target text, which could then lead to the equally nonsensical title: "The Palavas Palace is not the Office of the House of Havas", involving an obvious shift in meaning. However, musicality as the primary feature is retained with the rhyme captured by "Palavas", "Palace" and "Havas", and the alliteration retained through the repetition of the letters "p" and "h".
There are many other examples of less obvious rhyme and rhythm patterns that frequently occur in the texts, which become more detectable when read aloud. For example, if "Il tendit un verre à Folubert" ("Léobille" 143) were to be translated as “He handed Folubert a glass”, there is loss of "-er" assonance between verre and "Folubert", as well as a difference between the underlying rhythm of the two structures. Other readily available examples of loss of rhyme could include "terre étrangère" as “foreign land” (“Voyeur” 149), "gros dos" as “arching its back” (“Francfort” 62) and "un bon ami à lui" as “his good friend” (“Drôle” 97). Other stylistic deformations can occur through the loss of alliteration. There would be no loss of alliteration if "une femme frigide" (“Impuissant” 154) were to be translated as “a frigid female” instead of “a frigid woman”. This decision however, is influenced by the quest for register equivalence, as in "je peux pas les piffer" (“Assassin” 94) if it were to be translated as “I can’t stand them”. In these two examples, register takes precedence over alliteration.

Since certain aspects of Vian’s prose tend to be poetic in nature, compensation through the replication of these patterns elsewhere in the target text, not necessarily at the relevant point, can help to overcome significant stylistic loss. The compensation does not necessarily have to happen after the loss; it can happen beforehand, which means that multiple readings of the source text and the target text are required to determine where the compensation can take place. Compensation at a different point in the text due to the loss of alliteration mainly occurs through optional lexical decisions, such as in “Méfie-toi de l’orchestre” when "chaussures épaisses", (p.56) translated as “big boots”, helps to compensate for loss when "homme horrible, un rougeaud repu" (p.57) is translated as “a horrible man, a red-faced over-indulger”; and in “L’Impuissant” when "pauvre renégat" (p.154), translated as “poor pretender”, helps to compensate for loss of alliteration in the translation of "vraie voix de la volupté" (p.150), as “true path to sensual gratification”. The replication of rhyme at a particular point in the text is often difficult to achieve because it sometimes requires syntactical and semantic variations, as is evidenced in the translation of sections of Géraldy’s Toi et Moi in “Le Danger des classiques” – "Ne boude pas, défais ta jupe. Nos corps, eux, seront d’accord." (p.171) / “Remove your skirt do not be shy, The time to be as one is nigh”. One method used to compensate for loss of rhyme between force and écorce in the phrase "traîné de force, emmaillotés dans de
l’écorce" ("Valse" 123) is to be found in the sentence that immediately precedes it when "Lise et Gisèle" is slightly expanded and translated as “Lise and Gisèle as well”, producing rhyme between “Gisèle” and “well”. These examples show that wherever equivalence of poetics has not been met at the precise point in the text, there is appropriate compensation elsewhere.

5.3. General Features

There are a number of other features that pose difficulties in the translation of Vian’s short stories. While some of these features may not necessarily be unique to Vian, they need to be included for discussion because of their textual significance and relevance to the development of translation strategies. This section will discuss: methods of rendering grammatical and cultural differences between French and English; specific examples relating to the compulsory rewording of the source text; and a range of miscellaneous features that include how to deal with cases of target language in the source text, titles, intertextuality and literal expressions.

5.3.1. Grammatical and Cultural Differences

According to Catford, there are two types of untranslatability: linguistic and cultural.21 Linguistic untranslatability, which has also been recognised by Popovic,22 occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical equivalent for a source language item in the target text due to the fundamental differences between the source language and the target language. Cultural untranslatability is due to the attempted expression of social differences between the source text and the target text.23

On the linguistic level, the French language is bestowed with a number of grammatical features that have no English grammatical equivalent. Grammatical gender is just one of these features that is used by Vian to create word plays. Contrary to Catford’s views on the untranslatability of linguistic difference, Baker says that gender is “sometimes manipulated in English to convey expressive meaning,

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21 J.C. Catford, A Linguistic Theory of Translation, p.140.  
particularly in literature.” This approach paves the way for an attempt to convey this difference in English. A number of gender-based word plays have been identified throughout the short stories, for which translation options have been proposed.

The first of these occurs after the lady of the night tells the unsuspecting Denis that she finds him fascinating ("Je vous trouve assez fascinant"), to which he replies: “Je vous réciproquerais volontiers la chose, en la mettant au féminin” (“LG” 14). One suggestion is to render the gender difference through the contrasting use of capital and small letters: “It is I who find YOU fascinating.” However, since “I” exists as standardised capitalisation, the impact can be lost. In this case, italics would be the better option: “It is I who find you fascinating”. Given that the colloquial construction is réciproquer à quelqu'un, often used in an amusing context, the humour is retained despite some linguistic loss. As described in the last example, the banter between Marthe and Jean as they discuss their respective chances of success in their driving tests: “D’ailleurs, il y en aura un de nous deux qui réussira! Pourquoi ‘un’? dit Marthe. Et si c’était ‘une’?” (“M&J” 112) provides another example of a gender-based word play that could well be translated by the method of redirecting the conversation from the third to the first or second person using italics. This technique therefore provides the following translation: “Why you?” Marthe said. “What if it was me?”

The use of an adjective to clarify gender can also help in the translation of grammatical difference. This approach is particularly useful in the translation of the debauchery unfolding in the baker’s shop: “lorsqu’il comprit ce qu’exigeait la boulangère de chaque client et le boulanger de chaque cliente” (“Amour” 62). Here, there is gender clarification in English of boulangère, boulanger, client and cliente by adjectival addition: “when he realised what the baker’s wife was demanding from each of the male customers and what the baker was demanding from each of the female customers.” Gender clarification by adjectival substitution is a technique that can be applied to the computer’s declaration of masculinity in the following exchange: “Sois gentille, dit Florence à l’appareil. Moi, j’aime les gens gentils. – Tu peux me dire sois gentil observa la machine. Je me sens plutôt mâle” (“Danger” 170). If gentil is translated as “gentlemanly” and mâle is translated as “masculine”,

24 M. Baker, In Other Words, p.92.
the play on words based on grammatical gender is retained: “Be nice,” Florence said to the machine. “I like nice people.” - “You can tell me to be gentlemanly,” the machine pointed out, “because I am feeling rather masculine.” This strategy provides a deliberate grammatical twist through compensation by translating mâle as “masculine” rather than “male”, as well as highlighting the gender difference between the feminine adjective gentille in the first instance and the masculine adjective gentil in the second.

Another translation issue involving grammatical gender occurs in the same story when Florence calls out to her teacher: "Bob! Je ne veux pas vous laisser seul ... Elle ... Il va vous blesser" (p.171). Here, the feminine pronoun Elle refers to the feminine noun la machine, and Il refers to the machine's supposed masculinity alluded to in the previous paragraph. In order to render this accordingly in English, Elle needs to be translated as It and Il needs to be translated as He. So, instead of the literal: " [...] She ... He is going to hurt you", the more recognisable " [...] It ... He is going to hurt you" should be employed, in order to achieve the effect of dehumanising the robot.

The substitution of a noun or noun phrase for an impersonal construction might also help to retain the play on words based on grammatical difference, as in “Il faut toujours faire venir sa fiancée à la piscine avant de s’engager à fond, dit Christian. Il n’y a que là qu’on puisse se rendre compte de la façon dont elle est faite” (“Test” 73) and “il faut toujours emmener son fiancé à la piscine. Il n’y a que là qu’on puisse se rendre compte de la façon dont il est fait” (“Test” 77). If this technique is applied to the impersonal constructions il faut and on, the word play is effectively retained by “A man should always bring his fiancée along to the pool before taking the plunge, Christian said. It’s the only place he can see what she’s really like” and “A girl should always take her fiancé along to the pool, because it’s the only place where she can see what he’s really like”, with the retention of “like” creating a play on looks and personality. Similarly, substitution of the indefinite article une by the noun “bitch” helps to achieve the same effect: “Abel? demanda Caïn. C’était une sale dégueulasse. Une? m’étouffai-je” (“Assassin” 91) / “Abel? Cain asked. He was a dirty bitch. Bitch? I asked surprised.”

Two other French grammatical features with no English equivalent have also been identified. As in the above, some rewriting of the original may be necessary in
order to compensate for grammatical difference. The first example involves a word play created by adjectival agreement with the subject: “Ma grand-mère, qui est morte, y avait un appartement et mon père l’a conservé. Le Bison n’entendant pas d’e muet à la fin comprit qu’il s’agissait de l’appartement et non de la grand-mère” (“Remparts” 31). The e muet à la fin / “the silent e on the end” refers to the adjective conservé and the subsequent word play because the silent “e” is not sounded in French. This could therefore lead to the following translation of the second sentence of the original in which the complication arises: “Bison, although not hearing the Major clearly, still realised that his father had kept the apartment and not the grandmother.”

The next grammatical feature that has no English equivalent is the distinction French makes between tu familiar and vous formal and plural in “you” constructions. As a man leads his partner onto the dance floor, he issues the following warning to fellow nightclub patrons, whom he addresses as a singular entity, about the band members on stage: “Oh! public! …Ton doigt dans ton œil!...” (“Méfie” 56). In this case, the familiarity associated with the pronoun tu and the possessive adjective ton in the idiomatic expression can be transferred to the word public, leading to its translation as “friends”: “Oh, friends! Don’t let them fool you!”

Catford’s notion of potential untranslatability also applies to cultural references. A number of culturally based phrases and sentences have arisen that pose difficulties in translation. The “right” side of the road is the most common of these, appearing on three different occasions: “comme je ne peux pas possiblement faire d’excès de vitesse, je roule à gauche?” (“Cœur” 24); “C’est ma faute, dit la femme. Vous teniez votre droite” (“Amour” 65); and “Jean l’aborda en plein sur la gauche” (“M&J” 118). However, this might only be an issue for a target audience based in countries like the United Kingdom and Australia where cars drive on the left side of the road. Therefore, in this particular case, the degree of target orientation depends on the nationality of the target audience, whether it be American or English, for example. Where cars drive on the left side, it might be necessary to translate the first example as “how about I drive on the wrong side of the road?”, where gauche is translated as “wrong”. The second example could be translated as “you were on the right side”, where droite is translated as “right” as in “correct”. In the third example
gauche should also remain as “wrong” because the car Jean was driving hit the bend on the incorrect side of the road.

Food is another cultural area that is slightly problematic. "L'Impuissant" states that "crème fraîche" is added as an ingredient to a cocktail (p.146). Since crème fraîche is actually a form of cultured cream formed by the blending of cream and buttermilk that is usually added to savoury dishes, it is only occasionally used in cocktails as an alternative to sweet cream. Therefore, in this instance, it would seem preferable to employ the literal "fresh cream" over the traditional means of rendering crème fraîche in English as direct borrowing.

From the above examples, it is conceded that during the 1960s Catford may have been right in relation to certain linguistic and cultural aspects being untranslatable within the context of equivalence, which was perhaps the most important concern for theoreticians at the time. However, in light of the evolution of translation theory and recent discussion, Derrida claims that “nothing is translatable and, by the same token, that nothing is untranslatable”.25 This might appear to be at odds with Catford who claims that “nothing is untranslatable: that is, everything can be translated somehow, to some extent, in some way – even puns can be explained. No communication is perfect, so why should translation be?”26 Therefore, what constitutes translatability and untranslatability can be judged in terms of the theoretical environment that surrounds the text, and perhaps just as significantly by what happens when “the next translator comes along and inspiration strikes him or her at just the right moment.”27 Catford’s approach is very much in keeping with the philosophy behind multiple issues unearthed in the translations of these short stories. With a slight shift away from the quest for strict linguistic equivalence, it has thus far been shown that strategies have been put in place to overcome the difficulties of a prose style that some have previously thought to be untranslatable.

5.3.2. Compulsory Rewording

Besides the previously discussed rewording necessitated by grammatical and cultural differences, some rewording of the source text might be necessary in order to maintain coherency in the target text. A simple example of what is meant by this can be found in the following: “C’est pas possible, dit-il. J’ai trop chaud … Il roulait les r trois fois plus que d’habitude” (“Métier” 25). The literal translation (“’It’s not possible,’ he said. ‘I’m too hot’ … He rolled the r three times more than usual”) would involve two major inconsistencies for an English audience: there would be no ‘r’ sound in the translation because *trop* is translated as “too”; and besides, English speakers rarely roll the ‘r’. Therefore, adaptation of the message is required in the target text to retain the equivalent effect. This may lead to the following: “It's not possible, he said. I’m too hot … The ‘oo’ sound he made was three times longer than usual”, which manages to retain the focus of the wordplay on the adverb.

A slightly more complex issue arises in the following example: “Elle lui répondait dans la même langue et nous sommes obligés de traduire” (“Marseille” 89). The characters in the story are already speaking English because Mr Mackinlay, who is the head of the American Secret Service, greets Pelagia with “Hello.” It would therefore be incongruous to say that we are translating into English because it has already been established that English is the language used in this particular conversation. If this were a translation into any other language than English, the source text could be retained literally. Therefore, as in the above, adaptation of the source text message is also required to provide the following translation: “What follows is a transcript of their conversation.”

The final example chosen to show how rewording is, at times, necessary involves the question of how to differentiate between the French spoken in France and the French spoken in Belgium. The phrase in question is “l’immeuble sis au numéro cent septante, comme dirait Caroline Lampion, la vedette belge bien connue, de l’Avenue Merdozart” (“Pas” 110). The problem arises specifically with the words *cent septante*, the Belgian method of communicating the French *cent soixante-dix*, which, in English, is “one hundred and seventy.” From the following possible

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28 There is no ‘s’ for the plural in the source text. It is a case of academic usage which is often found in French theses.
solutions to highlight this difference, equivalence based on implied knowledge is lost: “number seventy and a hundred”; “number one hundred and sixty-ten” (which is the French way of stating it); and "one hundred and seventee. Therefore, in order to effectively relay the message, the most logical solution is to shift the emphasis away from the number itself. This therefore leads to the following translation: “as the well-known Belgian star, Caroline Lampion, would say in the way of her compatriots [...]”. This example specifically highlights the creativity that is sometimes required through rewriting to retain textual equivalence.

5.3.3. Miscellaneous

The final section of this chapter will focus on other issues, including: how to deal with target language in the source text, the titles of the short stories, literalism and intertextuality. Although these issues are not always considered to be representative of Vian's unique style, they need to be addressed because they are exemplified in his work, thereby impacting directly on translation strategies.

Bellos states that English in the French text inevitably loses its force after it has been translated into English because it has often been placed there for stylistic effect. This is the case with the original version of *War and Peace* in which French is used to contrast the language of the aristocracy with the language spoken by the rest of the population. Bellos suggests two methods of treatment for English in a French text: the first is to translate the English into French to accentuate the difference; and the second is to alter the English so as to make it seem that it is being spoken by a non-native. The specific problem with Vian’s use of English in the source text arises from the question of whether it should be “repaired” in the target text due to deficiencies. The very technique of translating English into French in the target text is somewhat incongruous because the characters involved are actually speaking English in a foreign environment, and any attempt to alter this would subsequently change the intent of the source text message.

English has a very high presence in “Martin m’a téléphoné…”, but examples can also be found in “Un Drôle de sport”, "Marseille commençait à s'éveiller", "Maternité" and “Francfort-sous-la-Main.” However, Vian’s use of English as a

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29 D. Bellos, p.207.
means of expression is not limited to these stories, for between 1948 and 1949 he wrote and presented a series of jazz commentaries for New York radio station WNEW.\(^{30}\) Whilst the quality of the English in this text could be said to be of a high standard, Pestureau says that for a purist there might be a few disappointments in *Jazz in Paris* because of its imperfections. Sometimes this forced Pestureau to make corrections and changes in order to complete the text.\(^{31}\) Such translator intervention is justifiable for Jabak who maintains that the translator needs to correct the text “because of a lack of knowledge or an oversight.”\(^{32}\)

In “Martin m’a téléphoné…”, on the simplest level, Vian’s English has some spelling and capitalisation anomalies: the name of the magazine “Photography” (p.70); the song title “I dream of you” (p.82); and the month of the year “february” (p.76), the first two of which should be corrected for the sake of textual coherence. “february”, on the other hand, could remain uncapitalised as a technique to highlight the inaudible difference that the speaker is non-native, thus providing an example of the second approach suggested by Bellos. On the conversational level, English should only be put under the microscope for those characters whose first language is English, in this case the Americans, and left intact for those characters using English as a second language, in this case the French and Dutch, in order to highlight the slight imperfections that sometimes arise from a non-native speaker, which is also in keeping with the second approach suggested by Bellos. So when the Dutchman Martin says, “Good Roby, I stay” (p.69), the translator should not feel obliged to change to the more common future tense “I will stay”. However, when the American asks the girl in the car: “where do you come from New York, it would be wonderful to see you again, and this friend of you, Florence” (p.78), some form of textual repair needs to be undertaken because of unexpected native speaker incoherency.

This leads to the question of whether a literary figure of the stature of Vian deliberately chose to incorporate spelling, capitalisation and grammatical misconstructions for textual effect, perhaps as a stylistic technique to highlight the secondary nature of the target language in the source text, or whether in fact he was far more dependent on first wife Michelle’s English skills, as has been alluded to by

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\(^{31}\) Ibid., préambule.

Ultimately, the decision to rectify discrepancies in the source text with a view to the target text is not limited to lexical and grammatical misconstructions found in foreign language intrusions. Any attempt at rectification must come down to the affinity that exists between the translator and author and whether or not the translator considers the source text to be the starting point for a completely different piece of work whose origins lie in the source text.

Rybalka says that, as is often the case with Vian, the title does not have much bearing on the contents of the story; it is especially designed to strike the reader’s imagination and to leave an indelible impression on the memory, having a life all of its own. This statement may well apply to some of Vian’s novels, such as *L’Automne à Pékin*, which is not set in autumn or in China, and to the translated title of *L’Écume des jours* in German as “Chloe” and one title in English as “Mood Indigo”. However, the same cannot be said for the original titles of the short stories, each of which bears, to some extent, a close link to the contents of the story it represents. In fact, the titles of the stories would suggest that Vian has managed to find a title that is complete in itself and which makes you want to read the story. The translated titles of the stories, therefore, need to provide the same level of inspiration for the target text reader.

Finlay says that “titles, particularly of books, are difficult to translate literally” and that it is best to leave the translation of the title of a text until after the completion of the translation of the entire text because it may not be until then that the significance of the title is fully realised. These comments leave two issues that are open for discussion. Of the twenty-eight titles contained in the two collections, nineteen are open to literal translation. Some of these include: *Le Loup-garou* as “The Werewolf”, *L’Amour est aveugle* as “Love is Blind”, *Le Penseur* as “The Thinker”, *Le Motif* as “The Motive”, and *Maternité* as “Motherhood”. Secondly, the translation of the nine remaining titles serves as a microcosm for the other theories of translation as expounded by Vinay and Darbelnet. Modulation is evident in *Les Pas*...

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33 M. Lapprand, *La Vie contre*, p.117.
34 For further reading see S. Bassnett, “The Translator as Writer”, *The Translator as Author. Perspectives of Literary Translation* (Berlin: Litverling, 2011), pp.91-102.
35 M. Rybalka, p.104.
36 C. Julliard, p.306.
vernis as “The Slip-Up”, Marseille commençait à s’éveiller as “Another Day in Marseille”, Divertissements culturels as “A Cultural Experience”, Un Test as “The Test”, L’Impuissant as “Impotence”, and Méfie-toi de l’orchestre as “Don’t Trust the Band.” Direct borrowing occurs when Le Voyeur is translated as “The Voyeur”; quasi-calque when Un Métier de chien is translated as “A Dog of a Job”; and equivalence if Francfort-sous-la-Main were to be translated as “Frankfurt on Main at Hand” instead of the preferred “Frankfurt in the Main”. Even though Finlay is talking about the titles of books, this rather high proportion would seemingly indicate that short story titles are less difficult to translate literally.

The expression prendre quelque chose au pied de la lettre means to take something literally or at face value. Lapprand has identified this feature as one of the four categories of semantic and linguistic creations that can be found throughout Trouble dans les Andains. Rybalka has also identified it as a feature of Vercoquin et le Plancton and L’Herbe rouge where he observes that Vian begins his construction with a plausible statement before descending into the realm of the abstract. A number of such examples have been identified in the short stories. The first is “Charlie rougit. Il avait une chemise blanche et les yeux bleus. Aussi l’Amiral se mit au garde-à-vous” (“Vedette” 42), which is a reference to saluting the French flag. The second example is “Au Cygne-Écran, le guichet à guillotine descendait à son tour à six heures quarante, sectionnant l’arrière-train d’une dame pressée” (“Vedette” 45). The third example is “Sa voisine […] le foudroya du regard; mais la chaîne de montre métallique de l’Amiral dériva heureusement la décharge vers le sol” (“Divertissements” 35). The first two examples offer little in the way of translation difficulties and can be rendered literally as “Charlie turned red. He had a white shirt and blue eyes, so the Admiral stood to attention”; and “At six-forty, it was the turn of the roller shutter at Cygne-Écran to come down, severing the hindquarters of a woman scurrying inside”. The third example is only marginally problematic. This primarily stems from the decision whether or not to employ a target language metaphor for a literal rendering of le foudroya du regard. This means that translator preference will ultimately determine whether the target-oriented “His neighbour […] hurled daggers at him” or the source-oriented “His neighbour […] looked

38 M. Lapprand, La Vie contre, p.29.
39 M. Rybalka, p.162.
thunderously at him” is employed. From these examples, it can be said that the subtleties of literalism, like antanaclasis, should be decoded by the reader.

Intertextuality has already been discussed in the first chapter in relation to the extent of biographical detail in Vian’s texts, primarily through the recurring presence of certain characters and authorial attitude. However, there is also a strong nautical theme to be found in some of the stories. In the cinema trilogy, there are behavioural similarities between the Admiral and the Major; after wandering the streets at night, Ouen is obliged to make a choice between bâbord and tribord (port and starboard) at the crossroads (“Pénible” 118); and “Claude menait habilement sa barque” / Claude skilfully steered his ship (“Maternité” 133) refers to the way Claude astutely handles his business affairs. In “Les Remparts du sud” an abundance of nautical imagery is to be found: “Le Chadburn cliqueta” (p.50) is a reference to a piece of navigation equipment next to the driver’s seat in the car; throwing magnetos out of the car window is similar to the dumping of ballast; and the car struggling to make headway on the road in the storm is compared to a ship being tossed around at sea. From these examples it is evident that an additional thematic dimension has been added to the text that needs to be captured in translation. It may only be an isolated case, but an instance in which intertextuality, or perhaps in this case intratextuality, impacts directly on translation occurs in “le Major démarra lentement et fonça, à travers champs, droit sur Dax” (“Remparts” 50). Here, it needs to be remembered that the Major is actually in a motor vehicle, so the expected translation would be “the Major started the car and headed straight across country for Dax.” However, bearing in mind the previous nautical references both in this particular story and in others, the secondary meaning of démarrer as “to cast off” can be invoked, leading to fonça, à travers champs being conveyed through similar nautical imagery. Therefore, the translated version, taking intertextuality and intratextuality into account, would be “the Major cast off slowly and set sail across country, straight for Dax.”

Throughout this chapter, the remaining features of Vian’s prose that pose difficulties in translation have been identified and strategies have been proposed for their rendering in English. Through the implementation of systematic methodology, it has been observed that there can be either minor or no loss of source text authorial intent in the target text. Minor loss occurs in the translation of modified expressions when
preference is given to one option over another. It also occurs when non-replication happens through the necessary rewording of disguised expressions, grammatical and cultural differences, and through the optional rewording of repetition dictated by *skopos* in those forms for which there is no single established register-driven anglicised form. Minor loss also occurs as a result of the impossibility of replicating abridged verbal constructions and the specific example of expressing the difference between the French spoken in Belgium and the French spoken in France due to fundamental lexical differences between French and English. It can be found in modified expressions where the word play is retained but an equivalent modified expression is not and when adaptation of the disguised expression creates an approximate target language equivalent. Rewriting of the source text to compensate for the fact that the text in question is a translation and retention of target language words, phrases and sentences from the source text in the target text also result in a slight loss of effect.

However, loss of equivalence for these specific features in the target text is relatively minor in comparison to retention. No loss can be found in the literal translation of disguised expressions, through the application of Vinay and Darbelnet’s theoretical approaches to the translation of titles, in the juxtaposition of equivalent register, and in the translation of literalism and antanaclasis that leave the subtleties of language for the reader to explore. There is no loss in those modified expressions formed by word addition, in abridged verbal constructions that can be recreated in a similar way in English, in instances of repetition of words and expressions that have a long-established English equivalent, and in the case of hidden references revealed through annotation and some very minor rewriting involving capitalisation, and the interchange of direct and indirect objects. Furthermore, loss of poetics involving rhyme and alliteration is minimised through compensation, and no loss occurs in the retention and translation of intertextual features once the translator is made aware of their existence through the methods outlined in the first chapter devoted to authorial research.
Conclusion

In order to translate Vian's short stories a large number of theoreticians and practitioners have been consulted and a wide range of theoretical and practical aspects have been considered before being systematically and appropriately applied within the stated parameters of the *skopos*.

To recapitulate, in chapter one, wife Léglise and critics Noakes, Roulmann, Boggio, and Costes reveal that the biographical detail in Vian’s work is extensive. Nevertheless, Lapprand prefers a stand-alone text approach, despite the fact that Chapman, Watson Taylor and Rosenthal consulted Vian about their respective translations of his work. Duchateau and Lapprand both suggest that questions over Vian’s biography always arise because he is continually being rediscovered by new audiences. However, Nelson, Anderson, Delisle and de Nodrest maintain that background knowledge is an integral part of textual interpretation, which has significant bearing in this instance.

The strategy development phase reveals that textual orientation based on equivalent effect is primarily due to translator creativity and cultural issues. Textual orientation has been widely discussed in terms of Holz-Mäntäri’s translational action, the *skopos* theory of Reiss and Vermeer, Nord’s translation-oriented text analysis and Even-Zohar’s Polysystems theory, which are linked to the translation up and the translation down approach proposed by Bellos. Textual orientation also takes into account Venuti’s foreignisation and domestication strategies, as well as the overt and covert theory of House, the dynamic and stable theory of Hatim and Mason, and Nida’s theory of formal and dynamic equivalence. Creativity in translation, and especially in the specific case of translating Vian, has been explored through the work of Landers, Holman, Boase-Beier, de Nodrest and Mitura, while recreation of textual voice has been discussed in regards to the work of Munday. Finally, the impact of culture and other external features on translation decisions falls within the domain of Landers, Holman and Venuti. All of this has ultimately led to a composite solution that incorporates varying degrees of both source text and target text orientation.

The problems associated with the translation of lexical items have been divided into three distinct categories: proper nouns, neologisms and word plays. Proper noun clarification is the strategy proposed by Berman, Kinnell and Särkkä; on
the other hand, Venuti and Newmark state that proper nouns should not be tampered with, whereas Hermans, Fernandes and Nord suggest that a composite approach is possible, which may include elements of Postcolonial theory as proposed by Tymoczko. Sayadi offers numerous solutions for the translation of neologisms, such as equivalence, transcription, calque, direct borrowing, explanation and description. Koponen says that word plays cannot and should not be ignored. Consequently, according to Bankole and Lang, word plays based on initialisms and acronyms should be elaborated upon; Halldór Smith, Leon, Nehaniv, Warren and Baillie say that homophony should be contextualised or annotated when no immediate equivalent solution is forthcoming; and Motallezadek and Yazdi insist that the translation of polysemy should not be restricted to the primary sense of the word.

Vian’s often-discussed syntax is a complex issue, which is why an entire chapter has been devoted to unlocking its significance. While Duchateau and Arnaud identify some unorthodox aspects in Vian’s writing, Béchade and Harris note the large degree of conformity in relation to standard French prose. Corbett and Connors state that this compliance even extends to the sometimes perceived textually disruptive use of parenthetical expressions. Bassnett and Neubert enter the debate by claiming that semantic equivalence is more important than syntactical equivalence. This has therefore led to the application of grammatical shift as proposed by Catford, Vinay, Darbelnet, Chuquet and Paillard, and to the implementation of van Leuven-Zwart’s positional shift involving the relocation of transemes in the translation of those passages that pose semantic difficulties.

Other issues associated with the translation of Vian’s short stories have been discussed under several headings. Repetition is a major stylistic feature and its treatment is open for discussion. Freehill, Schiaffino and Jabak state that translator intervention should only occur in the case of factual error, whereas Durban and Schwartz claim that the translator should make subjective alterations to a stylistically deficient text. The former approach has been largely applied here, along with the replication of source text poetics as identified by Roget, in order to avoid substantial rewriting of the source text and to produce a target text that is closer to the original. Fromkin, Redman, Collins, Blair, Holmes and Tauberschmidt have all identified register as another feature that needs to be retained between the source and target texts, even though Baker’s pragmatism suggests that intent connected to register
cannot always be represented by the linguistic system. There are two schools of thought in relation to the translation of grammatical and cultural differences. Catford and Popovic claim that such differences are untranslatable; on the other hand, Derrida and Chesterman say that everything is translatable, while Mitura and Maher add an extra dimension to this argument by maintaining that even if something seems to be untranslatable, a solution will eventually be found. Considering that some critics have said that Vian is untranslatable, this last aspect is especially pertinent.

The ability to test Vian’s conformity in relation to existing translation theory, practice and debate becomes even more significant given that the whole process is linked to Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies, based on the translation model proposed by Snell-Hornby, Bell, Bassnett, McGuire, Van den Broeck and Lambert.

However, such a theoretical summary alone does not conclude this argument because the following target texts are also comparative texts that are able to be assessed within the criteria set out by theoreticians in order to determine where there are similarities and where there is divergence from the original. The comparison therefore serves as the final part of the conclusion, as it amalgamates the theoretical components and the practical elements that have already been applied in the previous chapters to determine how close the translation is to the Vian original. Several models have been proposed for the comparison of source text and target text pairs, including those suggested by Lambert and van Gorp, Nord, van Leuven-Zwart, House and Berman. This branch of translation studies, known as Product-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies, answers Bell’s call, as stated in the introduction, for the description of the final product to be integrated into the discipline. However, according to Munday, “[t]here are severe practical and logistical obstacles to the analysis of a complete, lengthy translation. For this reason, even scholars such as Leuven-Zwart, who puts together a model for the systematic evaluation of shifts, have tended to concentrate on extracts.”1 Therefore, the source text and target text analysis undertaken here follows the same recommended procedure, referring only to particular segments of both texts for exemplification.

Lambert and van Gorp propose a systematic comparison of the whole translation process that incorporates preliminary data, macro-level textual structure,

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1 J. Munday, p.192.
micro-level linguistic features and systemic relationships.\(^2\) Firstly, with regards to Lambert and van Gorp’s macro-level framework, despite the unification of the two volumes of short stories, there is no divergence between the source and target texts involving reconfiguration. The stories are presented in the order in which they appear in the two collections, with those in *Le Loup-garou* preceding those in *Le Ratichon baigneur*. This is a decision based on publication dates that retains the divisions and structure of the original texts, including paragraphing.

Nord’s approach focuses on the comparison of preliminary data, which proposes an examination of source text and target text profiles in a process called Translation-oriented Text Analysis to see whether the stipulations stated in the commission (the intended text functions, the addressees, the motive or the reasons for the existence of each text, and the time and place of text reception) have been met and where variations have occurred. This process can be applied to all text types and can also include an examination of the product itself to detail the addition or removal of footnotes, endnotes, introductions and illustrations.\(^3\) Since it has been stated in the commission that these translations form the basis of university research and that as such the primary readership is academic and therefore different from the intended source text readership, and furthermore that the requirements have been met within the designated time frame, all stipulations have been met in the resulting target text. Also, no paratextual material has been added to the academic text, although this could prove to be an option in a commercial situation to attract readership. Annotation in the target text has increased from the Bourgois edition in order to reduce the gap in presupposition between the original source and target text readers. However, the degree of annotation in the target text is approximately the same as can be found in both the later Fayard and Pléiade editions, indicating that temporal distancing requires the addition of certain information for the retention of presuppositional textual equivalence even when it involves source referencing for a source audience.

Van Leuven-Zwart offers two models for textual comparison: the descriptive model, which focuses on the systemic context involving intertextual relations of translated literature in general; and the comparative model, which is the one of

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primary interest here insofar as it details and classifies micro-level semantic transfer within sentences, clauses and phrases.\(^4\) Her comparative methodology involves transemes and shifts; this has formed the basis of the detailed study of Vian’s syntax in chapter four. Other micro-level theoretical options include House’s model of quality assessment, a comparative source text and target analysis that leads to an evaluation of the quality of the translation through an examination of register and detailed linguistic comparisons for signs of Venuti’s foreignisation and domestication strategies. The study of register in chapter five shows that replication has been largely successful in maintaining Vian’s systems and in capturing word plays based on juxtaposition. Also, foreignisation and domestication strategies have been identified as key elements in chapter two when deciding on which aspects of the French texts to transfer to the target texts.

Other theoreticians working in the area of Product-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies have also suggested the analysis of a range of single source text and target text pairs as the basis for comparison. The detailed study of linguistic trends between French and English undertaken by Vinay and Darbelnet and Chuquet and Paillard has identified common transpositions that can be used as a means of comparison in translation practices. The systematic analysis of micro-level linguistic features undertaken in chapter four reveals a number of common transpositions from French into English. The examination of other specific elements such as additions and pronominal substitution can both also be appropriately applied as a frame of reference for textual comparison. Baker has observed that addition can occur through a wide range of methods. Some of these are due to a tendency to overtranslate when textual interpretation is required but this is rarely observed in these target texts, as is evidenced in the following comparative word length table. Pronominal substitution has been discussed at length in relation to the repetition of çà as a textual feature, but very little other pronominal substitution has taken place. Only a few instances of a pronoun being replaced by a noun have been identified, as in \(ll\) (“Cœur” 58) as “The fog” and \(il\) (“Martin” 71) as “the driver”; this avoids potential ambiguity in the target text where there is none in the source text.

However, in determining whether or not there is divergence between the source and target texts, it is the criteria set out by Berman that provide the most relevant linguistic comparative overview. Despite attempts by Lambert and van Gorp to broaden the spectrum of comparative descriptive studies, this should still be considered to be the underlying factor in this case. Berman’s system incorporates some of the above approaches and identifies a number of deforming tendencies in translation that can be used as a reference to see how close the target text is to the original. The most notable characteristics of Berman’s analysis include: expansion, rationalisation, clarification, qualitative impoverishment, loss of source text idioms and expressions, quantitative impoverishment, destruction of vernacular networks, effacement of the superimposition of languages, destruction of underlying networks of signification, ennoblement, and loss of source text poetics.5

Difference in length between the source text and target is an area in which textual deformation is most likely to occur. It has been established that text typically expands or contracts when transferring from one language to another, with the rate depending on language pairs and subject matter, with some texts, especially legal texts expanding by up to 30%. 6 Cited rates of expansion between language combinations include: English into Arabic at 25%; Finnish into English between 25 and 30%; Swedish into English at 10%; English into Italian at 15%; and Korean into English between 10 and 15%. 7 These figures could partially explain the reason why agencies often prefer to pay translators by the lower source text word count. There is some discrepancy as to the accepted French into English expansion and contraction rates. According to some major organisations like Omnilingua, a general increase is in the range of 10 and 15%, a figure supported by Epstein. On the other hand, sources such as Kwintessential offer the diametrically opposed view that contraction in the range of 10-15% occurs when translating between French and English. For Berman, however, expansion of the target text is the predominant trend, which often happens when there is overtranslation of the source text, regardless of language pairs and text type.

The following is a comparison of source text and target text word counts for the stories that appear in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*. The values are approximate because as Nogueira says, “[t]here is no satisfactory definition of ‘word’, as any linguist will tell you. In addition, different Word versions and word-counting utilities use different definitions.”

The end result is expressed as an expansion or contraction percentage, presented in the order of appearance of the stories in the two collections.

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<th>TT Count</th>
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<td>Filles</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>+3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


9 Percentage differential has been calculated according to the methodology proposed by Professor Brian Orr, based on: word difference / ST word count X 100, since ST is a constant, not a variable. ST word count has been calculated both manually and from Word document (where applicable). TT word count has been retrieved from Word document. Count includes titles but excludes annotation. Percentage differential is expressed to one decimal place, with a small margin for error.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assassin</td>
<td>1190</td>
<td>1208</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drôle</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>878</td>
<td>+3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motif</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>+3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;J</td>
<td>2314</td>
<td>2342</td>
<td>+1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valse</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>1087</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternité</td>
<td>2582</td>
<td>2583</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impuissant</td>
<td>2827</td>
<td>2806</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This information can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contraction (-) / Expansion (+) %</th>
<th>Number of Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 5 to 0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to +5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+5 to +10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+10 to +15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; +15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures reveal the dominance of expansion over contraction of the target text, thereby supporting Berman’s hypothesis, despite the fact that only one story falls within the “typical” range of 10% to 15% while another five fall within two percentage points of that range. The reasons for target text expansion and contraction are many and varied, and the temptation to be prescriptive should be avoided. This is especially so when it comes to how language is expected to perform under a given set of circumstances, even though some features have already been noted in Baker’s suggestions for micro-level comparative evaluation. Ultimately, it relates back to the fundamental difference between languages, to the replication of style and to the rewording of cultural differences proposed by individual translators. Furthermore, the concept of equivalence can take on another dimension if there is no huge discrepancy in length between a translated text and the original, and especially so if there is no discrepancy as revealed in two of the stories, because it would seemingly indicate that a message can be transmitted as intended, with little embellishment and no omissions. These statistics support these findings. Therefore, taking into account the typical behavioural patterns of French into English translated texts, it can be said
that no significant textual deformation has taken place with regards to comparative length.

According to Berman, rationalisation is where the alteration of syntax, punctuation and sentence structures is linked to transposition and to the facilitation of reception. Vian’s syntax has been described at length in chapter four, in which it has been shown that there is minimal syntactical variation in the translation of standard French structures, which form the bulk of the prose content. Syntactical variation involving positional and grammatical shift does occur in the minority of constructions where it is necessary to unlock semantic difficulties, which is in keeping with Bassnett’s system of the prioritised ranking of semantics over syntax. Similarly, the implementation of punctuation equivalence as detailed by Chuquet and Paillard can help in the facilitation of reception. This applies primarily to the translation of pause markers, most of which occur in “Martin m’a téléphoné…”. Because of the rather frenetic nature of the events in this story, there is a slight degree of ambiguity at times in the source text, which needs to be transferred to the target text. This is achieved through the implementation of punctuation equivalence, which manages to maintain the same degree of comprehension. Rationalisation of the sentence structure, noted by Mitura in relation to the detailed study of the translations of Vian into Polish, occurs very rarely. One piece of restructuring does occur in “Les Pas vernis” where the division of a longer sentence into several shorter ones, designed for ease of translation once again linked to semantics, necessitates rewording of the target text. Consequently, there is minimal textual divergence in terms of rationalisation.

Clarification in the target text of things that are not necessarily meant to be clear in the source text is the next feature noted by Berman. This aspect is often achieved through explanation and has been discussed at length in chapter three in relation to the translation of proper nouns where a combination of both non-clarification and clarification techniques have been employed, the former when it is deemed that there is sufficient familiarity between the target audience and the references in the source text and the latter when the opposing view is prevalent. As such, proper noun clarification has primarily been achieved through annotation, which does not impact directly on equivalence of the text. Berman has observed that clarification also occurs through paraphrasing, a technique that might sometimes involve syntactical variation linked to interpretation. One example to which
paraphrasing might be applied occurs in the final line of “Martin m’a téléphoné…” where the narrator says “et juste avant de dormir, je me suis changé en canard” (p.84). Any attempt at deciphering Vian’s intended meaning in this case is based on conjecture. Discussions with Christelle Gonzalo and François Roulmann as to the possibility of a cryptic message encoded within the phrase have proved to be inconclusive, so a literal approach has been adopted - “and just before falling asleep, I turned into a duck.” Since this is the only such example where paraphrasing could have been employed and since the uncertainty over the significance of some proper nouns has been dealt with outside of the primary text, clarification does not emerge as a major issue in relation to textual divergence.

Qualitative impoverishment is linked to clarification and occurs when source language words and expressions are replaced with target language counterparts. In the case of Vian’s short stories it refers primarily to the optional translation of proper nouns, especially in relation to socionyms and to the titles of literary and other works. Idiomatic expressions fall under a separate heading. Throughout these translations, proper nouns have been retained in both source language format and substituted with an English language equivalent at approximately the same rate. The names of real places and real people remain unaltered, along with cultural-specific items and those publications where readership is limited to the source culture, which forms part of Venuti’s strategy of foreignisation. However, it is domestication that is especially applicable to qualitative impoverishment. It mainly occurs in those proper nouns that already have an established target language equivalent and in the names of fictitious characters, geographical locations, and the titles of some publications and movies. To this end, such examples include the rendering of [le] Jardin des Plantes (“LG” 12) as The Botanical Gardens, Géraldy’s Toi et Moi (“Danger” 161) where the two accusative personal pronouns are swapped to the two tonic pronouns “You and Me”, Dilettantes du Chevesne Rambolitain (“LG” 13) as the Rambolitain Amateur Freshwater Fishing Club, and Saut de l’Elfe, Vallyeuse and Cirque de Trois-Sœurs (“Voyeur” 149) as Elf’s Leap, Happy Valley and Three Sisters Hollow. Although there is evidence of Berman’s qualitative impoverishment in these examples, Venuti’s concept has been carefully considered as a hybrid approach so that the target text reader is more readily able to identify with the translated text.
While Baker claims that recognition of source text idioms, the interpretation thereof and the subsequent appropriate substitution in the target text is the sign of a translator’s linguistic competence, interchange between source idiomatic expressions and target idiomatic expressions is, according to Berman, another measure of textual deformation because it can lead to the target text becoming removed from the source culture. The translation of source language expressions and idioms has been dealt with in two ways. The first involves total idiomatic loss, as when a source text idiomatic expression is not replaced with a similar idiomatic expression in the target text. This has sometimes happened throughout these translations, as when mettre plein gaz (“LG” 6) is translated as “to accelerate”, ils tournent la manivelle (“Martin” 72) is translated as “they are manipulative”, and on reste sur sa fain (“Chiens” 101) is translated as “there should have been more to it”. However, compensation has been applied on a number of occasions to help correct this imbalance when no equivalent target idiom is forthcoming. This means that an idiomatic expression has been used in the target text where there was none in the source text, such as when menaçante (“Remparts” 33) is translated as “starting to get her back up”, Tu te permets des trucs comme ça? (“Léobille” 142) as “How can you stoop so low?”, and un système ordinaire (“Danger” 167) as “a run-of-the-mill system”. Although both of these strategies reveal linguistic deformation, Berman and Baker are both specifically referring to the substitution of a source idiomatic expression by a target idiomatic expression. These translations reveal a number of such examples, including à vol d’oiseau (“Voyeur” 155) as “as the crow flies” and fort comme un Turc (“Marseille” 87) as “as strong as an ox”. Some textual deformation through cultural loss does occur when there is idiomatic substitution, especially in the particular instance with the reference to the Turks, who are perhaps more geographically relevant to French speakers from France than say to an Australian or to an American audience. Retention of the reference through calque, translated as “as strong as a Turk”, succeeds in highlighting foreignisation, but since the determination of a translation strategy has identified those areas in which domestication can be suitably applied for target audience facilitation of reception, substitution of a source language idiomatic expression by an appropriate target language idiomatic expression has taken place wherever practicable.

10 M. Baker, In Other Words, p.64.
Quantitative impoverishment refers to the translation of different source text words and expressions by the same word or expression in the target text. It does not refer to target language homonyms, like “coat” from poil (“LG” 7) and manteau (“Vedette” 46), nor to optional decisions based on stylistics, such as “friends” from camarades (“Remparts” 29) and public (“Méfie” 56). Rather, it involves the loss of source text synonymity, as when femme (“Remparts” 30) and épouse (“Remparts” 31) are both translated as “wife”; when casquette (“Cœur” 23), képi (“Remparts” 44) and une visière de cuir bouilli (“Remparts” 49) are all translated as “cap”; when gendarme (“Remparts” 45) and agent (“LG” 18) are both translated as “policeman”; when conducteur (“Martin” 84) and chauffeur (“Chiens” 97) are both translated as “driver”; when copain (“Martin” 84) and ami (“Pas” 111) are both translated as “friend”; and when créchait (“Pas” 111), habitat (“LG” 7) and vivait (“Voyeur” 153) are all translated as “lived”. Although these examples reflect quantitative impoverishment in translation, it does not emerge as a common feature. This is evident when truck and camion, which are separated by two lines and which could both be translated as “truck” (“Martin” 71), are translated as “truck”, which passes across three types of English (American, British and Australian) and “lorry” (British and Australian), respectively. This indicates that the recognition of synonyms by their proximity and context is a key factor in the avoidance of textual deformation by repetition.

The substitution of vernacular networks refers to the loss of local speech patterns. Since the main language system identified throughout the short stories can be traced to Vian’s own roots as an upper middle class Parisian, if loss of vernacularism were to eventuate, it would most likely occur through Americanisation in “Les Chiens, le désir et la mort” and by deformation by non-native French speakers in “Martin m’a téléphoné…” and “Marseille commençait à s’éveiller”. Since the translations have managed to capture these differences through lexical choices and comparable deformation, as with the repetition of “guys” for types throughout “Martin” and as deliberate English misconstructions in the other two stories, it would have to be said that vernacularism has been widely respected. Slight deformation can be seen in relation to repetition for emphasis, as when Ça, demanda Charlie, à quoi ça sert? (“Métier” 23) is translated as “What’s that thing for?” Charlie asked”; or when Mais vous aussi, vous l’êtes (“Assassin” 90) is translated as “But you are too”.

When linguistic equivalence cannot be achieved, Berman has observed that the attempt to retain emphasis is regularly made by italicising the relevant word or words, which acts as a mechanism for differentiation from the rest of the text. This strategy can be observed in “Le Loup-garou” when the double emphasis of *vous* / *vous* and *je* / *moi* contained in the phrase *Si vous me remerciez, vous, poursuivit Denis, que dois-je, moi?* (p.13) is conveyed as “‘If you are thanking me,’ Denis continued, ‘what must I do?’” Although loss of repetition does alter linguistic equivalence, the applied compensation technique is in keeping with Berman’s observations.

The effacement of the superimposition of languages refers to the subservience of sociolect and idiolect variations to the predominant language system of the text. Sociolect is best represented by the language of the police, the pimps and the prostitute in “Le Loup-garou”, which is in stark contrast to the refined speech patterns of Denis; and by the language of the police, the Major and Verge who are posing as road workers, which is in contrast to the language of le Bison and the other characters in “Les Remparts du sud”. Idiolect is a little more difficult to isolate because it is closely related to the former. However, a number of idiolects have been identified. These include the homophobic diatribe of Caïn in “L’Assassin” and Claude and René’s homosexual expressions of endearment in “Maternité”. In each instance, sociolect and idiolect variations within the primary language system have been identified and retained through various methods. Some of these methods include the already stated retention of register through lexical choice; slight textual adaptation, as when *en prenant l’accent charbonnier* (“Remparts” 45) is translated as “adopting the manner of speech of a charcoal burner”. Since sociolect refers to the language spoken by a particular social class and idiolect to the language particularities of an individual, both of which are interconnected through register, it has already been revealed that no textual deformation has occurred.

The destruction of underlying networks of signification, or the translation of certain words and phrases without consideration being given to their role in the macrostructure of the text, is another area that can lead to variation. It refers primarily to words that might not necessarily seem important by themselves but which assume special significance on a different level. Here, it specifically refers to the retention of intertextuality, with the most notable example being those words related to nautical references. This particular feature takes into account the secondary
meaning of homonyms as when *démarrer* ("Remparts" 50) is translated as “cast off” instead of “started up”. While this is not a common occurrence throughout all of the stories, there are other instances of nautical references that do present themselves, especially in “Les Remparts du sud” and “L’Impotence”. These examples show that the underlying networks of signification in Vian’s texts have been identified and retained in translation, thereby resulting in no variation.

Ennoblement, or attempts by translators to improve upon the style of the original, is another feature noted by Berman. This particular issue especially involves sentence restructuring and repetition and has been discussed in chapter four in relation to syntax and in chapter five in relation to the repetition of the verb *dire*. Since very short sentences have been retained and syntactical variation has been applied minimally for semantic purposes only, and since repetition of the verb *dire* as “to say” in the appropriate tense and conjugation has been retained in the target texts, attempts at ennoblement have not taken place.

The loss of source text poetics involving alliteration, rhyme and rhythm has been discussed in chapter five. Where alliteration and rhyme are unable to be replicated at the precise point in the text, there is compensation elsewhere. The poetics, often of a somewhat light-hearted nature, can be reproduced through lexical choice, as with *gentils petits ménages de pédérastes* ("Maternité" 132) translated as “happy little homosexual households” and *Sent bon, votre bois* ("Remparts" 45) as “Smells good, your wood”. In these examples it can be seen that alliteration and rhyme have been created in the target text where there was none in the source text. The loss of source text poetics therefore does not emerge as a translation issue due to the application of compensation where possible.

An analysis of Berman’s comparative criteria reveals two trends: minimal loss and no loss between the source and target texts. When there is minimal loss, it only occurs after the work of other theorists has been taken into account. There is some loss involving rationalism linked to semantics based on Bassnett’s system of prioritised ranking but no loss involving rationalism and punctuation. There is slight loss involving clarification due to Venuti’s theory of domestication. However, most clarification appears as annotation outside the primary text, which thus minimises deformation, and there is no clarification involving textual interpretation. Some qualitative impoverishment does occur, once again due to domestication; this was
identified as part of the translation methodology in order to retain equivalent levels of presupposition. There is some idiomatic substitution that is in line with Baker’s observations but since compensation has been applied, idiomatic loss is once again tied to domestication. Quantative impoverishment is closely linked to proximity and context but does not emerge as a key factor, while the substitution of vernacular networks only applies to emphasis, the translation of which is in keeping with Berman’s observations. There is no loss with regards to comparative length because it falls within the typical trends of French into English translation. The superimposition of languages retains the sociolect and idiolect differences with the primary language system, there is no destruction of the underlying networks of signification because intertextual references have been identified, and there is no loss of poetics. Perhaps most importantly, there have been no attempts at stylistic improvement involving ennoblement and no attempts at clarification through paraphrasing, both of which ultimately constitute rewriting of the original text. This decision has been made despite recent work on the role of the translator as author.

Therefore, it has now been shown that Vian’s conformity in relation to translation practice, theory and debate can also be readily discussed within the framework of a comparative analysis of the source text and target text. The amalgamated texts fall within the criteria proposed by Lambert and Van Gorp, and they can be discussed in terms of Nord’s Translation-oriented Text Analysis, Van Leuven-Zwart’s comparative model of intertextual relations, House’s model of quality assessment and the micro-level category of Product-oriented Descriptive Translation Studies. Furthermore, Berman’s comparative system reveals that only minimal textual divergence primarily linked to domestication has occurred.

By referencing leaders in the field of translation theory and applying relevant procedures and practices, it has therefore been possible to identify and reduce substantially the difficulties that have previously been associated with the translation of the great non-conformist Boris Vian. These procedures have been shown to be interrelated, yet still manageable and consistent with the translation model. The result is an English-language version of the stories contained in *Le Loup-garou* and *Le Ratichon baigneur*, which, according to the criteria established and deemed relevant by these same leaders, is justifiable, as well as compatible, and in keeping with the spirit of the source text.
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PART B

THE WEREWOLF, SWIMMER-DOLL PRIEST

and other stories

appendix to thesis entitled

BORIS VIAN: (non) CONFORMIST

The translation of two collections of short stories in a theoretical context

Peter John Hodges B.A. (Hons I) M.A. M.App.Ling. (Merit)

Doctor of Philosophy

June 2014
THE WEREWOLF, SWIMMER-DOLL PRIEST

and other stories

featuring Ramparts of the South
Part B Table of Contents

The Werewolf 1
A Heart of Gold 12
Ramparts of the South 17
Love is Blind 42
Martin Called… 52
Another Day in Marseille 66
Dogs, Death and Desire 74
The Slip-Up 83
A Sad Story 89
The Thinker 99
Léobille’s Party 104
The Voyeur 115
Danger from the Classics 123
A Dog of a Job 136
A Cultural Experience 141
A Big Star 146
Swimmer-Doll Priest 152
Don’t Trust the Band 156
Frankfurt in the Main 160
The Test 166
April’s Daughters 171
The Killer 176
A Funny Game 180
The Motive 185
Marthe and Jean 189
The Waltz 197
Motherhood 202
Impotence 210
Notes on the Texts 220
In the Fausses-Reposes Woods at the bottom of the Picardy hill, there lived a very handsome adult wolf with a black coat and big red eyes. His name was Denis, and his favourite pastime was watching the cars from Ville-d’Avray accelerate as they approached the shiny slope that sometimes reflected the olive green of tall trees in sheets of water that lay on the road after it had rained. On summer evenings he also liked to roam the forest in order to catch impatient lovers in the act of struggling with the complicated elastic clasps that, unfortunately, is fitted to most underwear these days. He philosophically observed the outcome of these occasionally successful attempts and modestly withdrew, shaking his head whenever it appeared that a willing participant was, as you say, about to be laid. Descended from a long line of civilised wolves, Denis lived on grass and blue hyacinths, supplemented in autumn with a few select mushrooms, and in winter, much to his disgust, with bottles of milk taken from the large yellow truck that belonged to the Co-operative. He loathed milk because it tasted of animal, and from November to February he cursed the inclemency of a season that forced his stomach to endure such unpleasant things.

Denis was on good terms with his neighbours because due to his discrete nature, they were unaware that he existed. He lived in a small cave that had been dug out many years earlier by a disillusioned gold prospector. The miner, having known bad luck all of his life, was sure he was never going to strike it rich and find the “basket of oranges” that Louis Boussenard had written about. Towards the end, he had decided to carry out his excavations that were just as frenetic as they were futile in a warmer climate. Denis had created a comfortable retreat for himself in the cave, furnishing it over the years with hubcaps, nuts and other car parts that he had collected from the road where accidents frequently occurred. Being passionate about mechanics, he loved to survey his spoils, and dreamed of the workshop that one day he would own. Four light alloy connecting rods supported the car boot lid that served as a table. The bed was made from leather seats from an old Amilcar that had had a brief encounter with a big sturdy plane tree, and two tyres formed gorgeous picture frames for the portraits of dearly beloved parents. Everything blended in tastefully with the more ordinary pieces previously collected by the miner.

One beautiful August evening, Denis was out on his usual after dinner stroll. The light of the full moon was filtering through the leaves, creating a lacework pattern of
shadows, and under the bright moonlight, Denis’ eyes had assumed the mellow ruby red colour of the wine from Arbois. Denis was approaching an oak tree, the usual end to his walk, when fate intervened and he stumbled upon the Magus of Siam, whose real name was Etienne Pample, and young Lisette Cachou, the brunette waitress from the Gronoeil Restaurant, who had been led to Fausses-Reposes by the magus under false pretences. The Magus of Siam had spent hours trying to tear apart the brand new “Obsession” girdle that Lisette was wearing for the first time, and Denis owed this very late encounter to this very detail.

Unfortunately for Denis, his arrival turned out to be badly timed. It was right on the stroke of midnight and the Magus of Siam was on edge. All around there were lots of forget-me-nots, bugleweed and white lupin flowers, which only recently have become the mandatory accompaniments to the phenomenon of lycanthropy, or anthropolicy, that we are going to read about. Furious over the arrival of Denis, discrete and already withdrawing mumbling an excuse, the Magus of Siam, disappointed with Lisette, and with a surplus of energy demanding to be released one way or another, threw himself on the innocent creature and savagely bit him below the shoulder blade. With a yelp of pain, Denis took off like a shot. Once back home, he was overcome with an unusual feeling of fatigue, and fell into a deep sleep broken by troubled dreams.

Over time he forgot the incident, and things returned to the way they were, with some days being the same and others different. Autumn was approaching, as were the September tides, which had the funny effect of turning the leaves on the trees red. Denis stuffed himself with field mushrooms and boletus, and occasionally plucked a scarcely visible peziza off its base of bark, but he avoided the indigestible ox-tongue like the plague. The woods were now emptying of walkers sooner in the evening, and Denis was going to bed earlier. However, it seemed that this hardly made him feel any less tired and, at the end of nights troubled by nightmares, he would wake up with a heavy head and aching limbs. He even lost his passion for mechanics, and at midday you would sometimes catch him daydreaming, clutching in his limp paw the rag with which he was to polish a piece of brass coated in verdigris. His sleep was becoming more and more disturbed and was surprised that he had not discovered what was wrong.
On the night of the next full moon, he emerged with a start from his broken sleep, gripped with fever, shivering, overcome by an intense sensation of cold. Rubbing his eyes, he was surprised at how strange he felt, and he looked around for a light. He had soon hooked up the superb headlight that he had inherited from a wayward Mercedes a few months earlier, and the dazzling light from the device lit up all the nooks and crannies of the cave. He made his way unsteadily to the rear-view mirror mounted above the washstand. He was amazed to find himself standing upright on his back legs, but he was even more surprised when his eyes fell upon his reflection in the small round mirror. A strange face stared back at him – whitish, devoid of hair, with only the two beautiful ruby red eyes to remind him of his former appearance. Letting out an inarticulate cry, he looked at his body, and discovered the reason for this icy cold feeling that gripped him all over. His splendid black coat had disappeared, and before his eyes stood the deformed body of one of those men whose awkwardness he usually ridiculed as they attempted to make love.

Not wanting to waste any time, Denis sprang to the trunk crammed with articles of discarded clothing gathered at random from accident scenes. Instinctively, he selected an elegant grey and white striped suit with a pale pink shirt and burgundy tie. As soon as he had put on these clothes, he felt better and his teeth stopped chattering. He was surprised at how he had managed to maintain his balance. It was then that his troubled gaze fell upon the small pile of black fur scattered around his bed, and he lamented his lost looks.

Nevertheless, through sheer determination, he regained his composure and tried to size up the situation. His books had taught him many things and the matter seemed clear. The Magus of Siam was a werewolf and conversely he, Denis, having been bitten by the beast, had just turned into a man.

At first he was filled with great terror at the thought of having to live in an unfamiliar world. Living as a man amongst men, he would be faced with many new dangers. He recalled the futile struggles that the drivers of the Picardy hill were involved in day and night, and this provided him with a small insight into the atrocious existence that, whether he liked it or not, he would have to adapt to.

Then he thought it over. In all likelihood, and if his information was correct, the transformation would probably not last long. So why not take advantage of the situation and venture into the town? It must be admitted that, at that moment, certain scenes he had
glimpsed in the woods sprang to mind without making him feel the same way about them as he usually did. He found himself licking his lips and noticed, that despite all the other changes, his tongue had remained just as pointy as before. He went over to the rear-view mirror and took a closer look at himself. His features didn’t displease him as much as he had feared. When he opened his mouth, he saw that his palate had retained its beautiful black colour. Also, he still had control of his ears that were perhaps a touch too long and hairy. In the small spherical mirror, he contemplated his oval face with its matt complexion and white teeth, which compared quite well to the other faces he was familiar with. After all, why not make the most of the inevitable and learn some valuable lessons for the future? Before going out, however, a return to old ways caused him to reach for a pair of dark glasses to cover the red flash of his eyes, if the need arose. He also grabbed a raincoat for himself that he threw over his arm, and he strode to the door with determination. A few moments later, equipped with a light suitcase and breathing in the morning air that seemed strangely devoid of odours, he found himself standing by the side of the road, turning his thumb confidently towards the first car he saw. He had decided to head for Paris, having learned from everyday experience that cars rarely stop as they go up a hill. They are more inclined to stop on the descent, because the downward slope makes it easier for them to take off again.

Due to his stylish appearance, someone who wasn’t in too much of a hurry soon stopped and took him on board. Comfortably ensconced on the right hand side of the driver, Denis turned his fiery eyes towards the great unknown of the big wide world. Twenty minutes later, he got out at the Place de l’Opéra. The weather was cool, the sky was clear, and the traffic was still within the limits of decency. Denis boldly dashed across the pedestrian crossing, and headed along the boulevard in the direction of the Scribe Hotel, where he took a suite with a bathroom and living room. Leaving his bag in the care of the hotel staff, he immediately went out again to buy a bicycle.

The morning passed by as if it were a dream. Overwhelmed, Denis didn’t know where to pedal next. Buried deep inside, he felt the burning desire to look for a wolf to bite, but he didn’t think it would be very easy to find one. Furthermore, he wanted to avoid being influenced too much by what all the books on the subject said. He knew that with a bit of luck, he could get close to the animals in the Botanical Gardens, but he reserved this possibility for later, when he was overcome by a more powerful urge. The new bicycle
occupied all his thoughts. This nickel-plated thing fascinated him and, what is more, it would certainly be very useful for when the time came to return home to his cave.

At midday, Denis parked his bike in front of the hotel under the somewhat astonished eye of the porter. Denis’ elegant appearance, and especially his ruby red eyes, seemed to prevent people from saying anything to him. Carefree, he set off in search of a restaurant. He chose one that looked nice and quiet, because he still felt uncomfortable around large groups of people, and despite the level of his overall refinement, he was afraid that his manners were still a little countrified. He asked to be seated somewhere out of the way and to be served promptly. However, Denis was unaware that, in this place that seemed so peaceful, on that very day, the monthly meeting of the Rambolitain Fresh Water Amateur Fishing Club was being held, and it so happened, that in the middle of his meal, he witnessed a procession of jolly gentlemen with ruddy complexions stream in, who, in one fell swoop, occupied seven tables with four diners at each. Denis frowned at this sudden intrusion and as expected, the clean-shaven headwaiter politely came over to his table.

“I am very sorry sir,” the smooth-talking man said. “But would you do us the favour of sharing your table with this young lady?”

Denis took one look at the bitch and immediately wiped the scowl from his face.

“I would be delighted,” he said getting to his feet.

“Thank you sir,” she said in a musical voice. A musical saw to be exact.

“If you are thanking me,” Denis continued, “how should I thank you?”

“Undoubtedly this is a case of divine intervention,” the woman pronounced. And she immediately dropped her purse, which Denis plucked from the air before it could hit the ground.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “What extraordinary reflexes you have!”


“Your eyes are rather unusual as well,” she added five minutes later. “They remind me of … of …”

“Oh?” Denis queried.

“Of garnets,” she concluded.

“It’s the war,” Denis said.

“I don’t follow you …”
“I meant,” Denis stated, “that I was expecting you to allude to rubies, and hearing you mention only garnets, I inferred the restrictions which were immediately brought about by the war, through a relationship of cause and effect.”

“Do you have a background in Political Science?” she asked.
“Never to return.”
“I find you rather fascinating,” asserted the young lady, who, just between us, had lost her virginity on more than one occasion.
“No, it is I who find you fascinating,” Denis said, complimenting her.

They left the restaurant together. The woman confided to the wolf-cum-man that she was staying nearby in a beautiful room at the posh Presse-Purée d’Argent Hotel.
“Come and see my etchings,” she whispered in Denis’ ear.
“Is it wise?” Denis enquired. “What about your husband, or your brother, or some other member of your family? Won’t they be worried?”
“I am a kind of orphan,” she lamented, delicately flicking away a tear with the tip of her forefinger.
“What a pity!” her elegant companion politely remarked.

Following her into the hotel, Denis was sure he noticed that the receptionist seemed to be strangely absent, and that so much faded red shagpile carpet was the one major difference between her hotel and the one where he was staying. On the staircase, the stockings, and then the thighs, of the foxy lady were revealed to him and wanting to learn more, he let her mount another six steps. Enlightened, he hurried after her.

He was revolted at the thought of having sex with a woman because of its somewhat comical nature. But when he recalled past events in Fausses-Reposes, it helped him to overcome the hurdle. As a result, he soon found himself in a position to actively put into practice the knowledge he had obtained though observation. The beautiful lady was content to scream out that she couldn’t take any more, and the theatrics that she used to declare her arrival in seventh heaven were lost on good old Denis who had little experience in these matters.

He was just beginning to emerge from some kind of unconscious state, quite different to any he had previously experienced, when he heard the hour strike. Huffing and puffing, he
sat up and was stunned to discover his lady friend, bum in air if you don’t mind, hastily rummaging through the pocket of his jacket.

“So, you would like a photo of me!” he said suddenly, thinking he understood what was going on.

He felt flattered, but understood the error of this assumption from the sudden shudder that ran through her two hemispheres.

“But … er…yes, dear,” she said, without really knowing whether he was making fun of her or yet.

Denis scowled. He got up and went to check his wallet.

“So you are one of those females whose shamelessness we can read about in the literature of Mr Mauriac!” Denis concluded. “A prostitute of sorts.”

She was about to reply how much of a pain in the arse he was, and how she had banged him, and that she wasn’t going to screw some guy just for the fun of it, when a glow in the eye of the anthropised wolf caused her to remain silent. Two small red rays of light emanated from Denis’ eye sockets and zoomed in on the brunette’s eyeballs, plunging her into a strange state of disarray.

“I think it would be a good idea if you covered yourself, and cleared off out of here this instant!” Denis suggested.

From out of nowhere the idea came to him to let out a howl in order to intensify the effect. Never before had such a thought entered his head but, despite his lack of experience, he produced a long, frightful noise.

Terrified, the woman got dressed without saying a word, in less time than it takes for a clock to strike twelve. When he was alone, Denis began to laugh. He was experiencing a sense of depravity, which was rather exhilarating.

“I suppose it is just the taste of revenge,” he thought out loud.

He adjusted his attire, cleaned himself wherever necessary and went out. It was dark and the boulevard was sparkling in a wonderful way. Before he had taken two steps, three men approached. Dressed somewhat gaudily, in suits that were too pale, hats that were too new and shoes that were too polished, they boxed him in.

“Can we have a word with you?” said the thinnest of the three, a sallow man with a pencil moustache.
“What about?” Denis enquired.
“Don’t be a dickhead,” uttered one of the other two, a stocky red-haired man.
“Let’s step inside here,” the sallow one suggested, as they approached a bar.
Denis entered, rather curious. Up until then he had been finding the incident rather amusing.
“Do you play bridge?” he asked the three men.
“You are going to need one,” the red-haired one remarked vaguely. He seemed angry.
“My dear fellow,” the sallow one said once inside, “you have just behaved somewhat inappropriately with a young lady.”
Denis burst out laughing.
“So the ‘perfect gentleman’ is having a good old laugh,” the red-haired one observed.
“We’ll soon wipe that smile off his face.”
“It so happens,” the sallow one continued, “that we have a vested interest in that girl.”
Denis suddenly understood.
“I see,” he said. “You are pimps.”
All three of them stood up at once.
“Don’t pick a fight with us!” the red-haired one threatened.
Denis looked at them.
“I am going to get angry,” he said calmly. “It will be the first time in my life, but I recognise the feeling. It is just like it says in the books.”
The three men seemed thrown off guard.
“Don’t think you scare us, you mug!” red said.
The third one was saying little. He clenched his fist and lunged. Denis evaded the fist just as it was about to land on his chin. He grabbed the wrist and squeezed it, making a crunching noise. A bottle landed on the back of Denis’ head. He blinked and took a step back.
“We are going to hang you out to dry,” the sallow one said.
The bar had emptied. The lone wolf of Fausses-Reposes leaped over the table and the redhead who, with his mouth wide open in surprise, was nevertheless quick enough to grab hold of Denis’ foot that was fitted with a suede shoe.
A brief scuffle followed. After it was over, Denis, whose shirt collar was torn, looked at himself in a mirror. A gash ran across his cheek and one eye was turning indigo. He quickly lined up the three motionless bodies under a bench. His heart was pounding furiously under his ribcage. He tidied himself up a little and suddenly noticed the time. Eleven o’clock.

“Oh damn,” he thought, “I have to fly!”

He quickly put on his dark glasses and raced back to his hotel. He was filled with a deep hatred, but he was aware that he had to be gone urgently.

He paid his bill, picked up his suitcase, jumped on his bike and took off, just like the Italian cycling champion, Fausto Coppi.

***

He had just reached Saint-Cloud Bridge, when he was pulled over by a policeman.

“Don’t you have a light then?” said this human who seemed to be the same as the others.

“What?” Denis asked. “Why? I can see!”

“It’s not so you can see,” the policeman said. “It’s so you can be seen. What happens if you have an accident, eh?”

“Ah?” Denis said. “Yes, I see what you mean. But how does this light work?”

“Are you taking the piss out of me?” the cop demanded.

“Listen,” Denis said, “I am really pushed for time. I don’t even have time to take the piss out of myself.”

“Do you want a ticket?” the loathsome policemen said.

“You are extremely annoying,” answered the wayward wolf on wheels.

“Right, that’s it,” the ignoble flat foot said.

He started to take a dance card and a Bic ballpoint pen out of his pocket, and lowered his head momentarily.

“Name?” he said, raising his head.

In the distance he spotted Denis speeding away, launching his bike into an assault on the hill. He blew his sound tube.
Denis gave it everything he had. The astonished asphalt yielded under his furious pace. In no time he had made short work of Saint-Cloud Hill. He crossed the part of town that bordered Montretout, a subtle allusion to the perverts wandering Saint-Cloud Park, and turned left towards Pont Noir and Ville-d’Avray. Just in front of the Cabassud Restaurant, as he was leaving that fine town, he became aware of a commotion behind him. He quickened his pace and veered sharply off onto a forest trail. Time was of the essence. Suddenly in the distance, a clock was chiming midnight.

From the very first stroke Denis noticed that something was wrong. He was having difficulty reaching the pedals. It seemed to him that his legs were becoming shorter. In the moonlight, however, he was still bouncing along over the stones on the dirt track, when he caught a glimpse of his shadow – long muzzle, pointed ears. A wolf is a creature with no sense of balance on a bike, and so he suddenly took a tumble.

This proved to be lucky for him, because just as he leaped into a clump of bushes in a single bound, a police motorcycle crashed noisily into the discarded bike. The motorcycle cop lost a testicle in the accident and his sense of hearing subsequently diminished by thirty-nine percent.

As he was trotting back to his home, Denis began wondering about the strange fit of anger that had gripped him while he was in the guise of a man. He who was usually so mild-mannered and so calm had seen his high moral standards thrown out the window. His fit of vengeful rage seemed to him to be both unthinkable and fascinating. The full impact had been felt by the Virgin Mary’s three pimps, one of whom, let us hasten to say in the defence of real pimps, was working undercover for the vice squad attached to the Paris Police Department. He shook his head. What a terrible piece of bad luck the bite from the Magus of Siam had turned out to be. Luckily, he thought, this difficult transformation is going to be confined only to the days of the full moon. However, there was still something there deep inside of him. And this vague feeling of simmering anger, this desire for revenge, which had not been resolved, only left him feeling worried.
A HEART OF GOLD
Aulne was edging his way slowly across the face of the wall, casting an uneasy glance over his shoulder every few steps. He had just stolen old man Mimile’s heart of gold. Of course he had been forced to hack the old fellow open a little, and in particular using a pruning sickle on his chest in order to get what he wanted, but when a heart of gold is there for the taking, you do what has to be done.

After he had gone three hundred metres, he tore off the thief’s cap he was wearing, threw it into a drain and swapped it for an honest man’s floppy hat. His confidence grew. Nevertheless, old Mimile’s heart of gold, which was still quite warm, was bothering him because it was beating unpleasantly in his pocket. Besides, he wanted to take a long leisurely look at it because one glimpse of that heart was enough to turn you evil again.

A cable’s length further on, in a drain larger than the first, Aulne dumped the bludgeon and sickle. These two implements had hair stuck to them and were covered in blood, and since Aulne did things meticulously, there was no doubt that they were also covered in fingerprints. He didn’t change his clothes that were splattered with sticky blood, because after all passers-by don’t expect a killer to be dressed like everybody else, and appearances must be kept up.

At the taxi rank, he opted for one that was quite flashy and that stood out from the others. It was an old 1923 model Bernazizi with imitation cane seats, pointed rear boot, a driver with only one eye and rear bumper half hanging off. The colourful raspberry red and yellow striped satin top added an unforgettable touch to the overall effect. Aulne got in.

“Where to boss?” asked the driver, a Ukrainian Russian, judging by his accent.

“Around the block,” said Aulne.

“How many times?”

“As many times as it takes to get the evil eye from the cops.”

“Ah, ah!” the driver thought out loud. “Right, well … let’s see … since I can’t possibly exceed the speed limit, what if I drive on the wrong side of the road? How would that be?”

“Fine,” Aulne said.
Aulne lowered the top and sat up as straight as he could so that the blood on his clothes was there for everyone to see. This, together with the honest man’s hat he was wearing, would prove that he had something to hide.

They went around the block twelve times, until they passed a pursuit pony with police license plates. The pony was painted steel grey and the light wicker cart that it was towing bore the coat of arms of the city. The pony sniffed the Bernazizi and neighed.

“That’s good,” Aulne said, “they’re following us. You had better drive on the right side of the road because we don’t want to risk running over some kid.”

So that the pony could follow without becoming tired, the driver slowed right down. Showing no emotion, Aulne allowed himself to be followed, as they approached the well-to-do part of town.

A second pony, it too painted grey, soon joined the first. Just like the other cart, this one also had a police officer inside wearing full dress uniform. The two police officers conferred with each other from their respective vehicles, whispering and pointing at Aulne, while the ponies trotted side by side, lifting their legs in unison and shaking their heads like little pigeons.

On spotting a suitable building, Aulne told the driver to stop. So as to be sure the police didn’t miss seeing the blood on his clothes, he leaped over the door of the taxi and landed lightly on the footpath.

He then rushed inside the building and went through to the rear staircase.

Taking his time, he climbed up to the top floor where the maids’ quarters were situated. The corridor paved with hexagonal-shaped terracotta tiles was playing tricks on his eyes. He could go either left or right. The left opened out onto a small interior courtyard that separated the bathrooms and the sheet-house. That’s the direction he took. Suddenly, the light from a rather high skylight beamed down in front of him. A stepladder planted underneath beckoned. Aulne could now hear the footsteps of the police echoing on the stairs. He scrambled up onto the roof.

Once there, he took a few deep breaths, before the inevitable chase. The extra air in his lungs would be beneficial for when he climbed down off the building.

He ran quickly across the gently sloping section of the mansard roof. At the junction with the steep slope, he stopped and turned around, his back to the void.
Then he bent down and, using his hands to steady himself, dropped into the gutter, landing on both feet.

He ran along beside the almost vertical zinc slope. Below in the small paved courtyard were five garbage bins lined up in a row, an old broom that looked like a paintbrush and a box of rubbish. The courtyard seemed tiny.

He would have to climb down the wall and go through one of the bathrooms on the other side of the courtyard in the adjoining building. In order to do this, he would have to make use of the spikes that were hammered into the wall, then grab onto the windowsill with both hands and pull himself up. A killer’s work is not all fun and games. Aulne steadied himself on the rusty bars.

Up on the roof, the Kops were running around in circles, making a racket with their boots, so as to comply with the local government ordinance established for the acceptable minimum noise level in the carrying out of police pursuits.

II

The door was shut because Brise-Bonbon’s parents had just gone out, and that little angel was home alone. When you are six years old, there is no time to be bored in an apartment in which there are glasses to break, curtains to burn, carpets to spill ink on and walls that can be smeared with fingerprints in all sorts of interesting shades and colours, that would be of no use whatsoever in the Bertillon system of criminal identification. Furthermore, when there are bathrooms, taps, things that float, and his father’s razor with a beautiful sharp blade for carving corks…

Hearing cries from the courtyard below, Brise-Bonbon pushed the slightly ajar shutters of the bathroom window wide open to take a better look. Right before his very eyes, two large hands belonging to a man were clinging to the stone window ledge. But it was Aulne’s head flushed from all the exertion that attracted Brise-Bonbon’s interest.

Unfortunately for Aulne, he had overestimated his gymnastic ability and couldn’t haul himself up in one go. His hands were holding firm, so he let his arms support his body weight, in order to catch his breath.
Gently, Brise-Bonbon lifted the razor he was still holding, and ran the sharp blade across the strained white knuckles of the killer’s hands. The hands were too big.

Old Mimile’s heart of gold, like a lead weight, was dragging Aulne towards the ground. His hands were bleeding. One by one, the tendons snapped like little guitar strings and as each one ruptured, a frail note rang out. On the window ledge, the tips of ten lifeless fingers remained, a few drops of blood trickling from each one. Aulne’s body grazed the stone wall, bounced off the first floor cornice and landed in the old box. The only thing to do was to leave the body where it was. The rubbish collectors would take it away the next day.
RAMPARTS OF THE SOUTH
The Major, up to his ears in debt like almost never before, decided to buy a car so that his holidays would be more enjoyable.

The first step was to draw on the funds that were readily available to him. By this, he meant hitting his usual three friends for a loan so he could go and get absolutely pissed. This was because his glass eye was turning indigo blue, which was a sign that he needed a drink. It set him back three thousand francs, but he had not the slightest regret in spending it, since he had no intention of repaying it.

So, after having made things more interesting, he tried his best to complicate things further by raising its status to that of a pagan ritual and he treated himself to another bender with the money raised from the sale of his all-leather, clove-studded, medieval chastity belt, that had been shoved so far to the back of the cupboard, it was yet to see the light of day.

He didn’t have much to his name, but even so, it was still too much. He paid his rent with his watch, swapped his trousers for a pair of shorts and his shirt for a Lacoste T-shirt and finally ready to go, set off in search of a way to spend his remaining money.

(During his search, he had the misfortune of inheriting some money, but fortunately, quickly learned that he could not touch it for months, which gave him more than enough time.)

The Major still had eleven francs and some food left over. He could not leave under these circumstances, so he threw a middle-sized party at his house.

The party was a success, and at its conclusion there was only a single hundred-gram packet of slightly stale curry powder left over that nobody had been able to manage. Against all of the Major’s expectations, celery salt had proven to be the most popular base for cocktails, because nobody had liked the curry mix that he had specially prepared for the last round of drinks.

(The remarkable misfortune that seemed to follow the Major continued because, as fate would have it, one of his guests left her handbag, containing five hundred francs, at his house. Everything seemed to be starting all over again when the Major, inspired by
one of those flashes of brilliance for which he was famous, came up with the idea of obtaining, through official government channels, a permit for the use of a motor vehicle so that he could set off on holidays. It must be immediately pointed out that it was this plan that eventually saved him.)

II

The Major burst in on his friend Bison, just as Bison was sitting down at the table with his wife and Little Bison. Their jaws were smacking, because for once Mrs Bison had seen fit to spend ten minutes preparing a meal of pasta that was now simmering away, and the whole family was thrilled at the prospect of the ensuing feast.

“I’m having lunch with you!” the Major said, shaking with excitement when he saw the noodles on the stove.

“Pig!” Bison said. “You could smell them cooking before you got here, couldn’t you?”

“Absolutely!” the Major said, helping himself to a big slug of wine taken from the supply put aside especially for him. It had been allowed to turn a little sour, which added a little more complexity to the original flavour. This is without doubt extremely efficient, as everyone knows.

Bison took an extra plate from the sideboard and placed it on the table in front of the Major. The Major allowed himself to be served without detecting any of the resentment felt towards him by the others.

“No this is what I have come to see you about,” the Major said. “Where do you plan on spending your vacation?”

“By the sea. I want to see it before I die,” Bison declared.

“Very well,” the Major said. “I am buying a car and I am taking you to Saint-Jean-de-Luz.”

“Just a minute!” Bison said. “Do you have any cash?”

“I most certainly do,” the Major said. “Don’t worry about that.”

“Do you have a place to stay?”
“I most certainly do,” the Major said. “My grandmother had an apartment there. But now she’s dead, and my father kept it.”

Bison, although not hearing the Major clearly, still realised that he meant that his father had kept the apartment and not the grandmother.

The noodles were continuing to swell as they absorbed the simmering water and Mrs Bison had already taken the garbage bin out three times to empty the overflow from the pot.

“Good, now let’s assume that you have fuel,” Bison said. “Because it is handy to have fuel when you have a car.”

“That will take care of itself,” the Major assured him. “If we have a valid permit, we get petrol coupons.”

“Perfect!” Bison said. “Do you know somebody at the prefecture who can help you to obtain a permit?”

“No,” the Major said, “but what about the two of you? Don’t you know anyone?”

“So that’s where you’re coming from, eh?”

Bison looked down at him disapprovingly.

“I am warning you,” his wife interrupted, “that if you don’t hurry up and eat these noodles, we’ll have to move to another room, because we’re not going to be able to stay in this one for much longer.”

All four of them pounced on the bowl of noodles, taking great delight in thinking about the faces the Germans used to pull when they sat down to Normandy butter and fatty sausages.

The Major was drinking one glass of rough red after another, and because he didn’t want to waste a single drop, his one good eye was forced to do all it could to help him see double.

Dessert consisted of slices of bread that had been carefully allowed to turn stale, arranged between two sheets of pink gelatine scented with Cheramy Oregano, prepared in the style of Jules Gouffé. After the Major had two more helpings there was none left.

“Wouldn’t Annie be able to pull a few strings for us at the prefect’s office, through her newspaper?” Mrs Bison said. “Because there is no way I am going with you if you don’t have a permit.”
“Excellent idea!” the Major said. “Don’t worry. I don’t like the cops any more than you do. The sight of a police officer ties my stomach in knots.”

“Well, perhaps we had better hurry up,” Bison remarked. “My holidays begin in three weeks.”

“Perfect!” the Major said, thinking that would have time to dispose of the five hundred francs he had just acquired.

He had one final slug of red, took a cigarette from Mrs Bison’s packet, let out an enormous belch and stood up.

“I am going to look at cars,” he said, as he walked out the door.

III

“Listen,” Annie said, “I am going to put you in touch with Pistoletti, the guy at the prefect’s office who handles the permits for the newspaper. You will find that it’s quite straightforward. He’s very helpful.”

“Alright,” the Major said. “I think that if I speak to him, everything will be fine. It will all work out just fine. Pistoletti is a wonderful man.”

Seated on the terrace of the Café Duflor, they were waiting for Mrs Bison and her son, who were running a little late.

“I think,” the Major said, “that she is going to be bringing along a doctor’s certificate for the child. It will help us to obtain the permit. She must have been having it done today.”

“Oh?” Annie said. “What is the certificate going to say?”

“That the child is not well enough to travel by train,” the Major replied, polishing his foggy monocle.

“There they are!” Annie said.

Mrs Bison was running after Little Bison, who had just let go of her hand. He had taken off like a shot and was now fifteen metres away remonstrating with a round marble table in the Deux Mâghos, when one minute it was intact, and the next it was in pieces.
The Major stood up and tried to separate the child from the table. A waiter arrived on the scene, demanding to know what had happened.

“Allow me,” the Major said. “I saw everything. The table started it. Don’t argue, or I’ll have you arrested.”

He produced his fake police I.D., and the waiter quietly slipped away. The Major then took his watch from the child, and grabbing him by the hand, dragged him over to where Annie and Mrs Bison were standing.

“You should keep an eye on your son,” he said.

“You get on my nerves. I have the certificate. The child has rickets and is not well enough to travel by train.”

Just as she was saying this, she gave her son a great wallop, which sent him into hysterics.

“It’s lucky for the SNCF,” muttered the Major.

“I suppose that you are going to tell me that you’ve never broken a table in a café,” she said, starting to get her back up.

“Never at that age!” the Major said.

“Of course not! You are backward!”

“That’s enough!” the Major said. “Let’s not get started. Give me that certificate.”

“Take a look,” Annie said.

“There was no problem with the doctor,” Mrs Bison said. “Anyone can see that the child has rickets.” She turned to her son. “Will you let go of that chair! …”

Little Bison had just grabbed hold of the back of the chair belonging to the person seated next to them. The customer ended up on the floor, along with a few glasses, producing a tremendous racket.

The Major disappeared behind a tree pretending to pee, while Annie stood there acting as if she didn’t know anyone.

“Who did this?” the waiter asked.

“It’s the Major,” Little Bison said.

“Oh?” the waiter said sceptically. “It wasn’t the child then, madam?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” she said. “He is three and a half years old.”
“Mauriac is a doddering old man,” Little Bison stated.
“Now that is quite true,” the waiter said, and sat down at the table to discuss literature.

Feeling somewhat reassured, the Major returned and took up his position again between the two women.

“So,” Annie said, “You are going to see Pistoletti …”
“And so, what do you think about Duhamel?” the waiter said.
“Do you think it will work?” the Major said.
“Duhamel is highly overrated,” Little Bison said.
“Of course,” Annie said, “with the letter from the newspaper…”
“Alright then, I’ll go tomorrow,” the Major said.
“I’ll send you a copy of my manuscript and let me know what you think,” the waiter said. “The setting is a little fuzzy, but I think you will like it, because we both like the same thing.”

“Waiter, how much do we owe you?” Annie asked.
“No,” Mrs Bison said, “It’s mine.”
“Allow me,” the Major said.

Since he didn’t have any cash, the waiter lent him some money to pay the bill. The Major left a generous tip and then absent-mindedly pocketed the change.

IV

“I’m going to open it,” Little Bison screamed.
“You’re getting on my nerves,” his father answered. “You know quite well that you’re too short to reach the handle.”

Throwing a tantrum, Little Bison launched himself at the door, pouncing like a cat. He seemed surprised to find himself on his backside, as something big and green flashed past.

It was the Major. He looked the same as usual, except that his flat hat had a strange uneven glow. He had eaten some turkey.
“Well?” Bison said.
“I have the car! It’s a 1927 Renault two-door sedan with rear boot.”
“And a bonnet that lifts up from the front?” Bison enquired anxiously.
“Yes . . .” the Major conceded regretfully. “It also has magneto ignition, with an intricate braking system fitted to the exhaust pipe.”
“That’s an old system,” Bison observed.
“I am well aware of that,” the Major said.
“How much?”
“Twenty thousand.”
“That’s not expensive,” Bison judged, “But then again, it’s not cheap either.”
“No, and in fact you are going to have to lend me five thousand francs so I can finish paying for it.”
“When will you pay me back?”
Bison seemed to have a few misgivings.
“Monday night, without fail,” the Major said, trying to reassure him.
“Hum!” Bison said. “I’ve heard that before.”
“I understand,” the Major answered, as he took the five thousand francs, without so much as a thank you.
“Have you been to the prefecture yet?”
“I am going there now. I am always a little reluctant to put myself amongst that bunch of mafioso types.”
“Well, try and get over it,” Bison said, pushing him out onto the landing. “And do try to get a move on.”
“Goodbye!” the Major shouted from below.
He returned two hours later.
“Well old friend,” he said, “it still hasn’t been sorted out. You have to sign a declaration, stating that you already have all the fuel you need.”
“You give me the shits!” Bison said. “I am fed up with all these delays. I’ve already been on holidays for a week and I’m not in the slightest bit amused to still be here. You’d be much better off taking the train with us.”
“Look, it’s far more enjoyable to travel by car and it will be easier to get supplies once we’re there.”

“That’s obvious,” Bison said. “But the way things are going, I will have to leave as soon as I get there, because my holiday will be over. And besides, we might get locked up along the way.”

“It’s all going to take care of itself now,” the Major guaranteed. “Sign the declaration and everything will be in order. If it’s not, I’ll take the train with you.”

“I’m going to come with you,” Bison said. “I’ll drop by my office and have my secretary type it up.”

This was done. They entered the prefecture three quarters of an hour later and, after winding their way through a maze of corridors, arrived at Pistoletti’s office.

Pistoletti, an affable, slightly abrupt man in his fifties, only made them wait five minutes. After some preliminary discussions, he stood up and asked them to follow him. He took with him the forms and justification documents that had been provided by the Major and Bison.

They passed through a narrow passageway that served as a covered bridge linking two adjacent buildings. The Major’s stomach was churning and his head was spinning like a Nuremberg top. In a vaulted gallery, long lines of people were waiting outside office doors. Most of them were grumbling, while others were preparing to die. The latter would be left where they fell, their bodies to be collected in the evening.

Pistoletti walked to the head of one of the queues. He stopped, and seemed put out at not finding himself standing before the person he was expecting to see.

“Hello, Mr Pistoletti,” the man opposite him said.

“Good day, sir,” Pistoletti said “Here, I would like you to stamp this application. Everything is in order.”

The man examined the bundle of papers.

“Well!” he said, “it states here that you have all of the fuel that you require. Therefore, there is no need to allocate you any.”

“Hum…” Pistoletti said. “I asked Mr Major here to fill out this declaration that you…that your predecessor asked for…to get some fuel, basically …”

“Oh?” the man said.
He wrote on the document: ‘Request denied. Applicant already has fuel required.’

“Thank you!” Pistoletti said. He took the papers and left.

Out in the corridor, Pistoletti scratched his head and left bleeding strips on the floor. A policeman who was passing slipped and almost fell. The Major thought it was funny, but he soon became serious again when he saw the look on Pistoletti’s face.

“Things not going well?” Bison asked.

“Well…” Pistoletti said. “Now we’ll go and have a chat with Ciabricot. This is bothering me. The official we have just seen must be new, because the first one I saw told me something completely different. Anyway, things can still be sorted out. The first one said that with that one piece of paper everything would take care of itself.”

“Let’s go and see Ciabricot,” Bison said.

Pistoletti, followed by the two acolytes, reached the end of the corridor, and once again made his way to the head of the queue. The Major and his friend sat down on a circular bench that surrounded the base of one of the arch supports. To help pass the time, they counted up to one thousand, in multiples of four and a half. Fifteen minutes later, Pistoletti came out of the office. He wore a look of resignation.

“There you have it,” he said to them. “He wrote ‘granted’ on the request. He wrote the date. He said ‘good’. He asked ‘to go where?’ So I told him, or rather he looked on the form. He placed his hand on his liver and said ‘that’s way too far!’, and he crossed out everything he’d just written. His liver is in a bad way.”

“So it’s been refused?” Bison asked.

“Yes,” Pistoletti said.

“And don’t you think that maybe it is because we didn’t slip ten thousand francs to this friend of yours, Ciabricot, that he didn’t give us the permit?” Bison said, as a thick cloud of steam started to rise from his shoes.

“And now a child who is too ill to travel by train can’t even be moved by car!” the Major added.

“What is it exactly we are we asking for?” Bison continued. “Obviously nothing! It’s not petrol, since they are saying we already have it. All we want is a signature at the
bottom of a piece of paper so we can take our car out on the road. They are implying that we should go and buy our fuel on the black market. Right?”

“I think they are all a pain in the arse,” the Major said.

“Listen,” said Pistoletti.

“They are bastards!” Bison said.

“You could start all over again this afternoon…” Pistoletti suggested, starting to feel a little intimidated.

“Oh, no!” Bison said. “We understand! We’re leaving!”

“I’m sorry,” Pistoletti said.

“We don’t bear you the slightest grudge,” the Major said. “It’s not your fault if Ciabricot suffers with his liver.”

They took advantage of a turn in the corridor to position themselves on either side of Pistoletti. They left his body slumped in a corner.

“What are we going to do?” Bison asked, as they left the building.

“I don’t give a damn,” the Major said. “I’m leaving without the permit.”

“You can’t do that,” Bison said, “or else I am going to the train station to buy some tickets. I don’t like cops.”

“Wait until tonight!” the Major said. “I have something in mind. I don’t like them either. They scare the daylights out of me.”

“Right,” Bison said. “Give me a call.”

V

“It’s done!” the Major’s voice said into the receiver.

“Really? Do you have it?” Bison said.

He could hardly believe it.

“No, but I will. I went back to the prefecture this afternoon with a girl, one of Verge’s friends. You know Verge. He’s the guy you saw around at my place. This girl knew some people in the prefect’s office. She dropped in on Ciabricot, and that was all it took. They have promised me …”

27
“When will you have it?”
“Five o’clock, Wednesday!”
“Right!” Bison concluded. “We’ll see …”

VI

On Wednesday at five o’clock, the Major was told that the following day at eleven o’clock would be a good time. On Thursday at eleven o’clock, it was suggested that he drop by in the afternoon. In the afternoon, he was told that only fifteen permits were issued each day and he was the sixteenth, and besides, since he didn’t want to part with any money, he didn’t have the permit.

Friends and acquaintances of employees would come into the office and since there were scarcely enough employees to cope with the necessary preferential treatment, they asked the Major to help them fill in their paperwork. He refused and decided it was time to leave, forgetting the hand grenade on a desk with the pin pulled. As he was going out of the building, the explosion he heard brought a smile to his face.

Bison, his wife and Little Bison bought their tickets for Saint-Jean-de-Luz. They had to wait until the following Monday to leave because all the trains were full. On Saturday night, the Major set off in his Renault from his lavish studio in rue Coeur-de-Lion. It was expected that he would be in Saint-Jean first and that he would have the apartment ready for the arrival of his friends. Seated next to him was Jean Verge, and the Major already owed him three thousand francs. In the back seat was Joséphine, a friend of the Major’s. He had just spent half of the money she had had in her purse on another good old-fashioned binge.

There was also some luggage in the car. There were ten kilos of sugar that Verge was taking to his mum in Biarritz, a lemonade maker with blue handles that the Major was planning to introduce into the Basque Country, two bird cages containing toads, and a fire extinguisher filled with lavender scent. He had swapped the contents of the fire extinguisher because carbon tetrachloride doesn’t have a very nice smell.
VII

In order to avoid running into those two-legged creatures dressed in dark blue, who travel in pairs, and who go by the name of police officers, the Major took a shortcut away from the capital that was ceremoniously named the N306. Despite this, he was still packing it in boxes.

The Major was following the directions that Verge was giving him. Verge had a Michelin map spread out on his knees, but it was the first time in his life he had attempted anything like this.

And it so happened that at five o’clock the following morning, after having driven for eight hours at an average speed of fifty kilometres per hour, the Major spotted the Monthéry Tower in the distance. He immediately turned the car around, because if he’d kept going, he would have found himself back in Paris, at the Porte d’Orléans.

At nine o’clock, they entered the town of Orléans. There was only one litre of petrol left in the tank and the Major was feeling happy, because he had not seen a single cop’s cap.

Verge still had two thousand five hundred francs left that were used to buy twenty litres of petrol and five kilos of potatoes. Given the age of the car, pieces of potato needed to be added to the petrol in the ratio of one to four.

The tyres seemed to be coping. At the end of the brief fuel stop, the Major pulled the cord that regulated the valve of the gearbox, blew the whistle twice, reverse steamed, and the Renault took off.

Leaving the N152, they crossed the Loire over a minor bridge and took the less travelled N751.

The devastation caused by the Occupation had resulted in the regeneration of thick, lush vegetation in ruts and around puddles. St John’s wort was waving about everywhere, while tiger-beetles added a touch of mauve to the pearlescent splash made by the skinflints.

A farmhouse here and there broke the monotony of the journey, each time producing a pleasant sensation that felt something like the tingling in your crotch when
you bounce across a small humpback bridge. As they approached Blois, more and more chickens began to appear.

They were pecking away along the network of ditches that had been carefully put in place by the road workers. The next day, sunflower seeds would be placed in each of the small holes made by their beaks.

The Major had the fancies for some chicken. He began pulling sharply on the steering wheel, at the same time adjusting the regulator on the exhaust pipe. This reduced the speed of the car, causing it to jump around like someone in the middle of a swarm of bees.

A nice, plump Houdan chicken, with its backside stuck in the air, was looking the other way. The Major sneakily accelerated, but the chicken turned around unexpectedly and stared at him defiantly. The Major acted as though it didn’t matter, but in reality was disappointed, as he spun the steering wheel ninety degrees. The local postman, stumbling across what had happened, was asked to help extricate the car from the hundred-year-old oak tree that had been snapped in two as a result of the Major’s sound reflexes.

Once the damage had been repaired, the Renault didn’t want to start again. So Verge had to get out, go around the back and say, “boo!” This continued for five kilometres until the car had finally decided that it was ready to go, and then it grudgingly stopped to let him back in.

Unperturbed, the Major passed through Cléry, reached Blois, and shot off to the south on the N764 towards Pont-Levoy. Still no police. His confidence grew.

He was whistling a marching tune, rounding off the end of each bar with an energetic tap of the heel. He was unable to finish his song, however, because his foot went through the floor. By continuing, he ran the risk of totally wrecking the gearbox, which already had two stripped gears from when the tree had landed on the car.

At Montrichard they bought some bread, and raced through Liège before the car came to a screaming halt at the intersection of the N764 and the D10.

Joséphine was waking up.

“What’s happening?” she asked.
“Nothing,” the Major said. “We bought some bread and now we are stopping to eat it.”

The Major was worried. You can arrive at an intersection from four different directions, but you can also be seen from four different directions.

They climbed out of the car and sat by the side of the road. A white chicken, tucked away in a ditch, became bolder and raised its permed crest over the level of the road surface. The Major remained motionless, not daring to breathe.

He grabbed hold of the two-kilo loaf of bread, raised it, turned around, and looking at the loaf against the light, suddenly struck the chicken with it.

Unfortunately for the Major, the farm of Da Rui, the well-known goalkeeper, was not far from there. The chicken came from that farm and was a good student. With a deft header, it flicked the loaf of bread, ran flat out for five metres and regathered it before it had time to hit the ground.

The chicken disappeared into the distance in a cloud of dust, the bread tucked under its wing.

Verge stood up and gave chase.

“Jean!” the Major shouted. “Don’t worry about it. It doesn’t matter. The police will hear you.”

“Bitch!” Jean said, puffing, as he continued to give chase.

“Don’t worry about it!” the Major yelled. Jean came back. He was seething. “It doesn’t matter,” the Major explained. “I had a bread roll at the bakery.”

“That chicken has made me look like a goose!” Verge said, furious.

“Anyway, now that the loaf of bread has been tucked up under its wing, it’s going to smell fowl,” the Major said disgustedly.

“You are a nice one,” Jean concluded. “We will have to go back and buy another loaf of bread. From now on, please try to remember that next time you go hunting chickens, use a weapon that can’t be eaten.”

“I can do that for you,” the Major said. “I am going to get a spanner. Let’s take a little look at what’s wrong with the car.”

“Didn’t you stop the car on purpose?” Joséphine asked, surprised.

“Er… no,” the Major said.
VIII

The Major grabbed his breakdown analysis detector, a converted stethoscope, and wiggled his way under the car. Two hours later, he woke up, well rested.

Verge and Joséphine were feasting on unripened apples in a neighbouring field.

The Major took a rubber hose and siphoned three quarters of the remaining fuel into a ditch to lighten the weight in the front of the car. He then slid the jack under the left-hand side, raised the car forty centimetres and opened the bonnet.

He placed the round metal part of the stethoscope on the motor and discovered that that was not where the problem was coming from. There was nothing wrong with the fan. The radiator was getting hot, so it was working. That left only the oil filter and magneto.

He switched the magneto and oil filter around and ran a test. That didn’t work.

He switched them back to their original positions and ran another test. That worked.

“Right,” the Major concluded. “It’s the magneto. Just as I suspected. We have to find a garage.”

He called out for Verge and Joséphine to come over and push the car. But he had forgotten to remove the jack and as they started to push, the vehicle began to rock back and forth. The front right hand wheel landed on Verge’s foot and the tyre exploded.

“Idiot!” the Major said, cutting short Verge’s protests. “You broke it! Now you fix it!”

“By the way,” he noted shortly afterwards, “it was a stupid idea to try and push the car. Joséphine is going to look for a mechanic.”

As she headed off down the road, the Major settled down in the shade for a snooze. He was eating a second bread roll pinched from the bakery.

“Bring back some more bread if you are hungry!” he shouted at Joséphine, as she disappeared around a bend in the road.
IX

After he had finished his bread, the Major decided to take a short stroll while he waited for Joséphine to return. Suddenly, in the distance, he spotted two blue caps heading his way.

Off he shot like a rocket. From side on, it looked as if he had five legs. When he reached the car, Verge was leaning against a tree, humming away, staring into space.

“To work!” the Major ordered. “Chop down that tree. Here’s a spanner.”

Verge slowly turned around and mechanically did as he was told.

Once the tree had been felled, he set about cutting it into shorter lengths, following the Major’s instructions.

They buried the leaves in a hole and hid the car under a mound of charcoal. The mound was then covered with the dirt that had been taken from the hole. Verge placed a small piece of glowing charcoal on top, which gave off a sweet smelling smoke, producing a perfume that could have come directly from The House of Sérail.

The Major blackened Verge’s face and his own with charcoal, and rumpled his clothes.

Time was up. The police were coming. The Major was shaking.

“What’s all this then?” the fatter one of the two said.

“You working?” his partner added.

“To be sure!” the Major said, adopting the manner of speech of a charcoal burner.

“Smells good, your wood!” the fatter one said.

“What is it?” the other asked. “It smells like a whore,” he added with a knowing laugh.

“Camphor and sandalwood,” Verge explained.

“For the clap?” the fatter one said.

“That’s funny!” laughed the second.

“That’s really funny!” laughed Verge and the Major, feeling slightly more at ease.

“Have to let the authorities know you’re here, so they can divert traffic,” the first policeman concluded. “Cars must be a nuisance.”
“Yes, that’s what we’ll have to do,” the second one said. “Cars must be a nuisance.”

“Thanks for your help!” the Major said.

“Goodbye!” the two policemen called out, as they headed off.

Verge and the Major fired back a hearty farewell and as soon as they found themselves alone, set to work dismantling the fake mound.

They got a rude shock when they discovered that the car was no longer inside.

“What’s going on?” Verge said.

“I have no idea!” the Major said. “It’s a bit beyond me.”

“Are you sure that it is a Renault?” Verge said.

“Yes,” the Major said. “I had already thought of that. If it were a Ford, you would understand. But it’s definitely a Renault.”

“But isn’t it a 1927 Renault?”

“Yes!” the Major said.

“That explains everything,” Verge said. “Look over there.”

They turned around and saw the Renault grazing on the grass at the base of an apple tree.

“How did it get over there?” the Major said.

“It dug a hole. My father’s car used to do the same thing every time he covered it with dirt.”

“Did your father cover it with dirt often?” the Major asked.

“Oh, from time to time … not really all that often.”

“Is that so?” The Major said suspiciously.

“His car was a Ford,” Verge explained.

They left the car to its own devices as they set about clearing the road. They had almost finished when Verge saw the Major drop flat to the ground, staring at something. He signalled for Verge to be quiet.

“A chicken!” he whispered.

Suddenly, he rolled over and landed full length in the water-filled ditch, on top of the chicken. The chicken duck-dived below the surface, took a few strokes, and emerged
some distance away. It fled, cackling incessantly. Obviously, Da Rui was also teaching his students to swim underwater.

Just then, the mechanic arrived.

The Major shook the water off himself, extended a wet hand and said, “I’m the Major. You’re not a police officer by any chance?”

“Well pleased to meet you,” he said. “Is it the magneto?”

“How do you know?” the Major said.

“Because it’s the only spare part that I didn’t bring with me. That’s how.”

“No,” the Major said, “it’s the oil filter.”

“In that case, I’m going to be able to help you with a new magneto,” the mechanic said. “I brought along three on the off-chance. Ha! Ha! I got you there, didn’t I?”

“I’ll take them,” the Major said. “You can give them to me.”

“There are two that don’t work …”

“That doesn’t matter,” interrupted the Major.

“And the third is broken …”

“Better still!” the Major said. “In which case I will give you …”

“That’s fifteen hundred,” the mechanic said. “Plus labour …”

“Yes, alright!” the Major said. “Would you like to pay the man, Joséphine?”

After she did as she was told, she had a thousand francs left.

“Thank you!” the Major said.

He turned his back on the mechanic and went to look for the car.

He brought it back and opened the bonnet.

The magneto was full of grass, which he removed with the tip of a knife.

“Can you drive me back to the garage?” the mechanic said.

“Gladly!” the Major said. “That will be a thousand francs, payable up front.”

“A bargain!” the mechanic said. “There you are.”

The Major pocketed the money indifferently.

“Get in!” he said.
They all climbed into the car. The motor went first time all by itself. They had to
go and pick it up and put it back in. And this time the Major did not forget to close the
bonnet.

The car came to a screeching halt in front of the garage.

“It has to be the magneto,” the mechanic said. “I will swap it over for one of
mine.”

He carried out the necessary repairs.

“How much do I owe you?” the Major said.

“Oh, please! It’s not worth worrying about!”

The mechanic was standing in front of the car.

The Major put the car into gear and ran over him before setting off again on the
road to Saint-Jean.

X

Still taking minor roads, they headed south through Poitiers, Angoulême, and
Châtellerault, and then travelled at a more leisurely pace through the Bordeaux region.
The fear of encountering more police caused the Major’s normally relaxed features to
look strained, and he started to become irritable.

At Montmoreau, they experienced the torment of a police roadblock. Thanks to
his telescope, the Major neatly avoided it and veered onto the N709. They ended up in
Ribérac without a drop of fuel.

“Do you still have that thousand francs on you?” the Major said to Joséphine.

“Yes,” she said.

“Hand them over.”

The Major bought ten litres of fuel and went out and stuffed himself with the
thousand francs the mechanic had given him.

It wasn’t far from Ribérac to Chalais. After Martron and Montlieu, they rejoined
the N10, which passed through Cavignac, where Jean Verge had a cousin.
XI

Sprawled out on a haystack, the Major, Verge and Joséphine were waiting. Verge’s cousin was entrusting them with a small barrel of wine to deliver to his brother in Biarritz, and the grapes were just in the process of being pressed.

The Major was chewing on a piece of straw thinking about the trip, which was now drawing to an end. Verge was groping Joséphine, and Joséphine was allowing herself to be groped.

The Major was trying to figure out the number of magnetos he now had in his collection. He had lost count, because he had added a few more along the way, in Aubeterre, Martron and Montlieu, in exchange for some of Verge’s sugar.

He suddenly buried himself in the haystack on seeing the peak of a soft leather cap appear. But it was the postman. He resurfaced, with two mice in his pocket and his head covered in straw.

There was, in fact, never any chance of the car being spotted by the police, since it was hidden away in the cousin’s stable. But the strain was starting to show, as the trip began to take its toll on everyone.

The Major was enjoying the quiet life on the cousin’s farm. In the morning they ate celery, in the evening it was stewed fruit, and, in between, a wide variety of other types of food. And then they slept. Verge was groping Joséphine, and Joséphine was allowing herself to be groped.

After three days of this routine, it was finally announced that the wine was ready. Verge was beginning to feel tired, but on the other hand, the Major’s morale was soaring. He scarcely gave a thought to a certain Bison family at Saint-Jean-de-Luz, who by now must be sleeping under the stars, awaiting the arrival of the Major and the keys to the apartment.

The Major cleared some space in the boot of the car and slid the barrel into place. They all said their goodbyes to Verge’s cousin, after which the Renault made a courageous beeline for Saint-André-de-Cubzac. They took a left turn towards Libourne
and then followed a myriad of small roads that led them through Branne, Targon and Langoiran, before ending up in Hostens.

Exactly one week had gone by since leaving rue Coeur-de-Lion. At Saint-Jean-de-Luz, the Bison family had been holed up for five days in a room that they had found by a miracle. With a great deal of excitement and anticipation, they had visions of the Major behind the thick bars of a country gaol.

At precisely the same moment, the Major was having visions of that exact same scene. He put his foot down on the accelerator, but the Renault rebelled and the magneto exploded.

There was a garage a hundred metres ahead.

“I have a brand new magneto that you can have for three thousand francs, and I can fit it for you.” the mechanic declared.

It took him three minutes to swap it over for the old one.

“Wouldn’t you prefer to be paid in wine?” the Major said.

“No thank you. I only drink cognac.” The mechanic replied.

“Listen,” the Major said. “I am an honest man. I will leave you my identity card and my ration card as security, and I will send you the money from Saint-Jean-de-Luz. I don’t have any more on me, because I was cheated out of everything I had by a bunch of crooks.”

The mechanic was charmed by the Major’s cultivated manner and agreed.

“I couldn’t have a little fuel for my cigarette lighter?” the Major asked.

“Please, help yourself at the pump,” the mechanic said.

He went back inside to file the Major’s papers.

The Major took only the twenty-five litres he needed and left everything else the way he had found it.

He raised his eyes … over there, behind … two policemen on bicycles.

A storm was brewing.

“Get in, quickly!” he ordered.

The Chadburn clicked. The Major cast off slowly and set sail across country, straight for Dax.
In the rear-view mirror, the policemen were little more than specks but, despite the Major’s efforts, those specks were not becoming any smaller. A hill suddenly rose up before them. The car took it on at top speed. It was bucketing down and lightning filled the thunderous sky.

The hill became steeper, and turned into a mountain.

“We’ll have to dump some ballast,” Verge said.

“Never!” the Major answered. “We’ll make it!”

But the clutch slipped, and a strong smell of burning oil came up through the floor.

As misfortune would have it, the Major spotted a chicken.

He slammed his foot on the brake. The car went arse over turkey and landed right on top of the unfortunate fowl’s head, killing it instantly. The car stopped. The Major was revelling in his success. However, he had to pay compensation, in the form of the last three kilos of Verge’s sugar, to the owner of the chicken, who was crouching in a hole dug ad hoc, if you were to use the words of Jules Romains, on the side of the road.

The Major left the chicken where it was, because it had shrunk in the rain and was now inedible. He couldn’t conceal his anger.

But, above all, the car once again would not start.

The clutch was screaming in pain and the crankshaft seemed as though it was about to break. The mudguards were vibrating and started to hum. The car became airborne, and flew off to smell a catalpa tree in flower. But it would not move forward.

The specks in the rear-view mirror were getting bigger and bigger.

The Major strapped himself to the steering wheel.

“Throw something overboard!” he yelled.

Verge hurled two magnetos out of the car.

The car shuddered, but did not move.

“More!” he bellowed. The strain was starting to tell in his voice.

Verge dumped seven more magnetos onto the road in quick succession. The car lurched forward to the terrible noise of the rain, hail and motor, and climbed the hill in one fell swoop.
The police had disappeared. The Major wiped his brow and continued on his way. Dax, Saint-Vincent-de-Tyrosse came and went.

At Bayonne, a police roadblock could be seen in the distance. As they drove up to the barrier, the Major kept his hand on the horn and made the sign of the Red Cross. Having been raised by a Russian nanny, the Major had made the cross upside down, but the police didn’t even seem to notice. And in the back, to add to the effect, Verge had just undressed Joséphine and had wrapped her overalls around her head like a bandage. It was nine o’clock at night. The police waved them through.

The Major cleared the roadblock and passed out. He came around again when the car’s bumper was left behind on a roadside distance marker.

La Négresse …
Guétary …
Saint-Jean-de-Luz …
The grandmother’s apartment was number 5 rue Mazarin.

It was dark.

The Major parked the car at the front door and forced his way inside. They were exhausted, and went to bed without even noticing the Bisons’ non-presence. In actual fact, the Bisons had not been prepared to have to kick the door down in order to have a roof over their heads. Consequently, they were preparing a warm welcome for the Major in the filthy kitchen-cum-bedroom that someone had generously agreed to rent to them for a thousand francs a day.

The Major woke up at dawn.
He stretched and put on his dressing gown.

In the next room, Verge and Joséphine were beginning to untangle their sticky bodies by pouring hot water over themselves.

The Major went over to the window and opened it.

There were six police officers in front of the house looking at the car.

So the Major swallowed a massive dose of gunpowder, which fortunately for him didn’t explode, because after it had been digested, he realised that it was perfectly normal to see police officers standing outside the police station at number 6 rue Mazarin.
A week later, the Major’s car was confiscated in Biarritz, just as he was becoming friendly with a police superintendent, who was really a notorious smuggler with the responsibility for the murder of nine hundred Spanish customs officers weighing on his conscience.
LOVE IS BLIND
I

On August fifth at eight o’clock, fog enveloped the city. Being a light fog, it didn’t hamper breathing in any way, but two things were noticeable: it had a strange impenetrable look and it seemed to have a deep blue tinge to it.

The fog descended in even layers. At first it hovered twenty centimetres above the ground and you walked around unable to see your feet. One woman, who lived at number 22 Saint-Dick Street, dropped her key as she was about to go inside her house and couldn’t find it again. Six people, including a baby, came to her assistance. In the meantime, a second layer descended and the key was found, but not the baby, who had taken off in a flash under the vale of the weather, impatient to escape the feeding-bottle and eager to experience the tranquil joys of married life and the establishment. That is how thirteen hundred and sixty-two keys and fourteen dogs went missing on the first morning. Tired of not being able to see their floats, fishermen went mad and took up hunting.

The fog collected in quite thick pockets at the bottom of sloping streets and in hollows. It wafted out from the sewers and ventilation shafts in long spires. It flooded the tunnels of the metro, which stopped functioning once the milky stream reached the height of the red signal lights. At that precise moment above ground, a third layer of fog had just descended, and people were shrouded in a pale mist up to their knees.

Those who lived in the elevated parts of the city thought at first that they would be spared and made fun of the ones who lived on the banks of the river. But, after a week, they were all friends again because, by that stage, everybody was bumping into the furniture in their bedrooms, for the fog had settled over the tallest buildings. And although the pinnacle of the tower was the last to go under, it too eventually disappeared under the irresistible advance of the opaque tidal wave.
On August thirteenth, Orvert Latuile woke up from a sleep that had lasted three hundred hours. He was recovering from a heavy drinking session and thought at first that he was blind. He was really doing justice to all the alcohol that had been placed in front of him. It was dark, but this was a different kind of darkness, because with his eyes wide open, he was experiencing the same sensation you have when the beam from an electric light shines on your eyes when they are closed. Clumsily, he reached for the dial on the radio. It worked, but what he heard didn’t shed much light on the situation.

Paying no attention to the deejay zidle chatter, Orvert Latuile began to think about things. He scratched his navel and, after sniffing his fingernail, discovered that he needed a bath. But the expanse of fog that had been thrown over everything, like Noah’s cloak over Noah, or like misfortune over the poor world, or like Tanit’s veil over Salammbo, or like a cat in a violin, made him realise the futility of taking a bath. Anyway, this fog had the sweet aroma of apricot with tuberculosis and was sure to kill any body odour. Besides that, sound was carrying well. Wrapped in its protective padding, it had assumed a curious resonance that was clean and pure, like the voice of a lyric soprano whose smashed palate, sustained from an unfortunate fall over the handle of a plough, had been replaced by a prosthetic device forged from silver.

Firstly, Orvert decided to totally clear his head and to act as if there was nothing wrong. As a result, he found his clothes and got dressed without any problem because everything had been put away in its usual place. This meant that some of his clothes were on chairs, some were under the bed, socks were inside shoes, one of the shoes was inside a vase and the other shoe was under the chamber pot.

“My God,” he said to himself, “what a funny thing this fog is.”

By understating the phenomenon, this most unoriginal comment saved him from dithyramb, plain old enthusiasm, sadness and deep melancholy. As he became used to the unusual, he gradually became more adventurous, to the point that he was now considering making some form of human contact.
“I’m going downstairs to visit my landlady, and I’m leaving my fly undone,” he said. “Then I’ll know for sure whether it really is fog, or whether it is my eyes playing tricks on me.”

This is because the Cartesian way of thinking of the French leads them to doubt the existence of a thick fog, even if that fog is thick enough to obscure all visibility. And they don’t let what is said on the radio influence their way of thinking either, because they are all morons on the radio.

“I’m taking it out,” Orvert said, “and that’s how I am going downstairs.”

He took it out and that’s how he went downstairs. For the first time in his life he noticed the creak of the first step, the cleak of the second, the squeek of the fourth, the munch of the seventh, the crunch of the tenth, the scrunch of the fourteenth, the snap of the seventeenth, the crackle of the twenty-second and the popp of the brass handrail taken off life support.

He encountered someone holding onto the wall for support coming up the stairs.

“Who’s that?” he said, stopping.


“Hello,” Orvert said. “Latuile here.”

Orvert held out his hand and to his surprise encountered something stiff, which he quickly let go of. Lerond was wearing an embarrassed smile.

“I apologise,” Lerond said, “but you can’t see anything, and this fog is devilishly hot.”

“That’s true,” Orvert said.

He thought about his open fly and was annoyed to discover that Lerond had had the same idea.

“Well, goodbye then,” Lerond said.

“Goodbye,” Orvert said, sneakily undoing the last three notches of his belt.

His pants fell to the floor. He took them off and hurled them down the stairwell.

It is a fact that this fog was as hot as a feverish bug in a rug, and if Lerond was walking around with his kit and caboodle stuck up in the air, then Orvert couldn’t stay dressed the way he was, now could he? It was all or nothing. His jacket and shirt took to the heavens, but he kept his shoes on.
Arriving at the bottom of the stairs, he tapped gently on the glass panel of the door to the caretaker’s lodge.

“Is there any mail for me?” Orvert asked.

“Oh! Monsieur Latuile!” the large lady laughed. She was always willing to see the funny side of things… “So, did you have a good sleep then, like that? I didn’t want to disturb you… but you should have seen the first few days of this fog! … Everyone went crazy. And now… well, we are all getting used to it …”

He noticed that she and her powerful perfume had managed to pierce the milky barrier and were closing in on him.

“It’s only when you are trying to prepare your meals that it is a bit of a nuisance,” she said. “But it’s a strange thing this fog… it sustains you in a funny sort of way. Now look, I’m a good eater, but for the last three days, a glass of water, a crust of bread, and I’m happy.”

“You’re going to lose weight,” Orvert said.

“Ooh! Ooh!” she chuckled in her laugh that sounded like a bag of nuts being dropped from the sixth floor. “Have a feel. See, Monsieur Orvert. I have never been in such good shape. Even my stomachs are starting to shrink. Have a feel. See.”

“But … uh …” Orvert said.

“Have a feel, I tell you. See.”

She groped around for his hand and placed it on one of the stomachs in question. “Amazing!” Orvert declared.

“And I’m forty-two years old,” the landlady said. “You wouldn’t think so, would you? Oh, for those like me, a little large to some people’s way of thinking, it’s to our advantage…”

“But, egad!” Orvert said in astonishment. “You’re naked!”

He had accidentally touched them as he dropped his hand. The landlady drew closer.

“Well,” she said, “so are you!”

“That’s true,” Orvert mumbled. “A funny thought just crossed my mind.”

“They’ve said on the raydeo,” the landlady continued, “that it’s a fucoholic aresole.”
“Oh!” Orvert said. The landlady was within touching distance, panting, and just for a moment he felt rejuvenated by this cursed fog.

“Listen, please, Madame Panuche,” he pleaded. “We’re not animals. If this fog is an aphrodisiac, then we will just have to control ourselves, dammit.”

“Oh, oh!” Mrs Panuche panted, as her hands found their target with pinpoint accuracy.

“I don’t care,” Orvert said in a very dignified manner. “Manage by yourself. I’m having nothing to do with it.”

“Well,” muttered the landlady, without losing her composure, “Mr Lerond is more cooperative than you. With you, I have to do all the work.”

“Listen,” Orvert said, “I woke up today and … I’m not used to this.”

“I’m going to show you,” the landlady said.

Then things happened, over which it would be better to throw the cloak of the poor world, just as it would be better if we threw a cloak over Noah’s and Salammbo’s troubles. While we’re at it, we might as well throw Tanit’s veil into a violin as well.

Orvert left the lodge in very high spirits. Outside, he stopped to listen. That’s what was missing – the sound of cars. But countless songs were rising. Laughter was emanating from all parts.

He made his way along the road, feeling a little light-headed. His ears were not used to surroundings with such deep, clear sounds. He lost himself in them for a moment and then noticed that he was thinking out loud.

“My God,” he said. “An aphrodisiac fog!”

As you can see, the remarks he made were all in a similar vein. However, you have to put yourself in the position of a man who has been asleep for eleven days; who wakes up to total darkness, made more difficult by the fact that the darkness is widespread and contaminated with some kind of properties that promote debauchery; and who finds that his fat, decrepit landlady has been transformed into a Valkyrie, with buxom, pointed breasts, an insatiable Circe with a cavern full of unexpected pleasures.

“Well I never!” Orvert said again, in order to render his thoughts more clearly.

Suddenly realising that he was standing in the middle of the road, he became hesitant. He stepped back to the wall and followed its cornice for a hundred metres.
This brought him to the bakery. Applied Health Science recommended intake of food following all form of strenuous physical activity. So he stepped inside to buy a bread roll.

There was much commotion in the shop. Orvert was a man of few prejudices, but when he realised what the baker’s wife was demanding from each of the male customers and what the baker was demanding from each of the female customers, he felt his hair stand on end.

“If I give you a two pound loaf of bread,” the baker’s wife said, “I am entitled to expect something of equivalent size, dammit!”

“But madam,” protested a small elderly man in a high-pitched voice, recognised by Orvert as being Mr Curepipe, the old organ player from down by the end of the wharf. “But madam…”

“You don’t play the organ, you play the panpipes!” the baker’s wife said.

Mr Curepipe became angry.

“I’ll give you my organ!” he said proudly, as he headed for the door. However, Orvert was standing in the way, and the collision knocked the wind out of him.

“Next!” the baker’s wife barked.

“I’d like some bread,” Orvert said with difficulty, rubbing his stomach.

“A four pound loaf of bread for Mr Latuile,” the baker’s wife bawled.

“No! No!” Orvert moaned. “A bread roll.”

“Loser!” the baker’s wife said.

And, turning to her husband: “Hey Lucien, take care of this one. Teach him a lesson.”

The hair on Orvert’s head stood on end and he took off as fast as he could, straight into the shop window. It stood firm under the impact.

He stumbled around in circles and finally left. In the bakery the orgy was continuing. The baker’s boy took care of the children.

“Holy smoke! Finally!” Orvert muttered, once he was out on the footpath. “Now, what if it was up to me? What a mouth she’s got, that baker’s wife!”
That’s when he remembered the pastry shop across the bridge. The waitress was seventeen years old and had a coy smile, and a frilly little apron … maybe she was wearing only her little apron …

Orvert hurried off in the direction of the pastry shop. Three times he tripped over entwined bodies. He didn’t bother to stop and see who it was or how many people there were, but in one case at least, there were five.

“Rome!” he whispered to himself. “Quo Vadis! Fabiola! Cum spirituo tuo! Orgies! Oh!”

He rubbed his head, having harvested quite a substantial pigeon egg as a result of his brush with the shop window. He quickened his pace, for a part of his person that was standing out some length in front of him was urging him to get there as quickly as possible.

Thinking that he was nearing his goal, he stepped back onto the footpath so he could feel his way along the walls of the houses. He recognised the shop window of the antique dealer with its round plywood plaque bolted down, holding in place one of the cracked mirrors. Two more houses until the pastry shop.

He collided full force into a stationary body that had its back turned towards him. He let out a cry.

“Don’t push,” a voice bellowed, “and would you mind removing that thing from my bum, otherwise you are going to get my fist in your face …”

“But … uh … what do you mean?” Orvert said.

He stepped to the left to go around him. A second collision.

“Now what?” said another man’s voice. “Get in line, like everyone else.”

There was a great outburst of laughter.

“What?” Orvert said.

“Yes,” a third voice said, “of course you are here for Nelly.”

“Yes,” Orvert stammered.

“Well, join the queue,” the man said. “There’s already sixty of us.”

Orvert didn’t say anything. He felt deflated.
He set off again without finding out whether or not she was wearing her frilly little apron. He took the first street to the left. A woman was coming in the opposite direction. They both ended up on the ground on their backsides.

“I’m sorry,” Orvert said.

“It’s my fault,” the woman said. “You were on the right side.”

“Can I help you to your feet?” Orvert said. “You are alone, yes?”

“What about you?” she said. “There are not five or six of you about to jump on me, are there?”

“Are you really a woman?” Orvert continued.

“See for yourself,” she said.

They drew closer and Orvert felt her long silky hair against his cheek. They were kneeling down facing each other.

“Where can we be alone?” he said.

“In the middle of the street,” she said.

They stood on the edge of the footpath to get their bearings and stepped down onto the road.

“I want you,” Orvert said.

“And I you,” said the woman. “My name is …”

Orvert stopped her.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “There is only one thing I need to know, and that is what I am about to learn about you with my hands and body.”

“Take me,” the woman said.

“Naturally,” Orvert noted, “you’re not wearing any clothes.”

“Neither are you,” she said.

He lay down beside her.

“There’s no hurry,” she said. “Start with my feet and work your way up.”

Orvert was shocked and told her so.

“This way you’ll find out,” the woman said. “The only means of investigation left to us, you said so yourself, is touch. Don’t forget that I am no longer afraid of the look in your eye. Your erotic independence has been reduced to nought. Let’s be open and frank”
“You make a lot of sense,” Orvert said.

“I read les Temps Modernes,” the woman said. “Come on. Hurry up and let’s get on with my sexual initiation.”

Which is what Orvert did on numerous occasions and in varying positions. She had natural talent, and when there is no fear of the light being turned on, a whole new world of possibilities opens up. And besides, when it’s all said and done, you don’t get tired of it. Orvert taught her two or three not insignificant new tricks and the act of symmetrical coupling, repeated several times over, instilled confidence into their relationship.

That was when life was sweet and simple, when man was created in the image of the god Pan.

III

However, the radio reported that scientists had noticed a progressive receding of the phenomenon and that the layer of fog was becoming lower day by day.

There was much consultation, the threat being considerable. But a solution was quickly found because man’s genius has many sides and when the fog cleared, which is what the special detectors indicated, life was able to happily continue, because everyone had gouged out their eyes.
MARTIN CALLED...
I

Martin called at five o’clock. I was at my desk writing something. I can’t remember what. Most likely something pointless. I didn’t have too much trouble understanding him. He speaks English with an accent that’s a mixture of American and Dutch. He might be Jewish as well. It makes for an overall effect that is a little unusual, but on my phone, it’s okay. I had to be at his hotel in rue Notoire-du-Vidame at seven-thirty, and wait. He was short a drummer. I said to him, “Stay here. I will call Doddy right now.” And he said, “Good, Roby. I stay.” Doddy wasn’t at his desk. I asked for him to call me back. There were seven hundred and fifty francs to be made by playing a gig in the suburbs from eight till midnight. I called Martin back and he said to me, “Your brother can’t play?” And I said, “Too far. I must go back home now, and eat something before I go to your hotel.” And he said, “So! Good, Roby, don’t bother! I’ll go and look for a drummer. Just remember you must be at my hotel at seven-thirty.” Miqueut wasn’t there, so I took off at quarter to six. Half an hour to kill. I went back home to get my trumpet. I had a shave. When you play for the Red Cross, you never know; if it’s for the officers, it’s embarrassing to be dirty. At the very least your face should be clean. Can’t do anything about the clothes, though they wouldn’t know anyway. I cut my face. I can’t shave two days in a row. It hurts too much. Still, it’s better than nothing. I didn’t have time to eat a proper dinner. I had a bowl of soup, said goodnight and left. The weather was mild. I was still heading towards my office. I work in rue Notoire-du-Vidame as well. Martin said to me, “We’ll be paid right after we have finished playing.” I liked that better. Usually with the Red Cross, they make you wait weeks before they pay you, and then you have to go to rue Caumartin, which doesn’t suit Miqueut. I didn’t like the idea of playing with Martin again. When he plays the piano, he drowns out everyone. He’s a professional and he complains when we don’t play well. If he didn’t want me, he wouldn’t have called. Heinz Neuman was sure to be there as well. Martin Romberg, Heinz Neuman. Both Dutch. Heinz spoke some French. “Je voudrais vous revoirer? C’est comme ça qu’on dit?” That’s what he said to me last time at the Normandie Bar. That’s where that faggot, Freddy, was during the war. He would lock
himself away to use the phone that was hidden in a large cupboard and he would say, “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes …” in that very high-pitched voice the Germans have, with that vague laugh of his that seemed quite contrived. It’s awful, the Normandie, with its false exposed beams covered in cork. Even so, I had pinched a copy of the August 28th edition of *New Yorker* and the September edition of *Photography* from there. That’s the one where you can see the mug of citizen Weegee, the guy who gets his kicks by taking photos of New York from all different angles, especially shots from high up. During heatwaves, it’s of people in the heavily populated areas sleeping on the landings of fire stairs, sometimes five or six kids and half-naked sixteen and seventeen year-old girls. Maybe in his book you can see even more. It’s called *Naked City*, and you probably won’t find it in France. I arrived at rue de Trevise. It’s dark. It’s a drag, this way every day. Then I went past my office. It’s at the top of rue Notoire-du-Vidame, and right at the other end is Martin’s hotel. He wasn’t there. Nobody was there. Neither was the truck. I poked my head through the door of the hotel … to the left, there was a man and a woman at a cane table with something in front of them, deep in conversation. Through an open door at the back you could see the table where the manager, or the owner, was having dinner with his family. I didn’t go in. Martin would have been waiting there for me. I stood my trumpet case upright on the footpath and sat down on it while I waited for the truck, Heinz and Martin. The phone rang in the hotel foyer and I got to my feet. It was bound to be Martin. The boss came out, “Is Mr Roby …”. “That’s me.” I grabbed the receiver. That phone didn’t work as well as the one in the office. It had a higher pitch and I had to get him to repeat everything. He was near Doddy’s, but Doddy wasn’t there and we had to go around and get him at Marcel’s place, 73 rue Lamarck, *seventy-three*. Okay, so he’s been around there having dinner. Too lazy to go back to his hotel. The truck should be able to drop by and pick him up. I tried to phone Temsey to at least have a guitar. O.K. by Martin. No Temsey. That’s alright. We’ll play trumpet, clarinet and piano, but it’s not as mellow … and all the lights are out in the street. A blackout. I sat down on my trumpet case, leaned against the wall to the right of the hotel and waited. A young girl ran out of the hotel. She jumped to the side when she saw me, and when she came back she kept her distance. It was very dark in the street. A fat woman with a shopping bag walked past. I had been watching her approach. Dressed in
black, she looked like one of those old women from the country. No, she’s walking the
street. That’s funny, because this is not an area with a lot of passing trade. There were
headlights at the end of the street. Yellow ones. It wasn’t the truck. American ones are
white. A black 11 for a change. Then a lorry, but a French one. Twenty to the hour, at
the very least. Then the right one. It pulled up, half on the footpath, and the driver
turned off his lights, just so he could take a piss against the wall. Signs of
acknowledgement. We had a chat. Are the others going to turn up? There is only one
other – Heinz. Already five to eight. The guy, a former driver for T.C.R.P., dressed in
an American uniform. I didn’t know what to say to him. He seemed quite nice. I asked
him if the truck was clean inside. Last time, in the one belonging to the showboat, I sat
in some oil and stained my raincoat. No, this one is clean. I hopped into the back and
dangled my legs over the side. We were waiting for Heinz. The guy couldn’t be kept
waiting too long. His American colonel was expecting him at quarter past nine and he
had to pick up his car from the garage. I asked him if he drove around everywhere in the
truck and if he would be much better off using his car. “Not really … it’s not an
American car. It’s an Opel.” I heard footsteps. It still wasn’t Heinz. The lights
suddenly came back on, and the driver said to me: “We can’t wait any longer. I have to
make a call so the guy at the garage can get a jeep ready for you, while I go and pick up
my colonel. You speak English?” “Yes.” “Explain to them …”. Good. Heinz has
turned up. He started complaining as soon as he found out we had to go and get Martin.
He bitches about him all the time, but when they are together, they spend all their time
telling jokes in Dutch, and don’t give a damn about the rest of the band. Anyway, I
know what I am talking about, because I understand some of what they say. It’s like
German. Dutchmen, they are all bastards, half Krauts, even bigger arse-lickers when
they want something from you. And tight, like you have no idea. And I don’t like the
way they suck up to the customers for cigarettes. After all, at least we have a bit of class.
They are manipulative, and I … Yes, I am an engineer, which, to put simply, really is the
most stupid job in the world. But it brings you respect and the feeling that you are doing
something worthwhile. But if all it took was to push the button. Bang! … No more
Martin. No more Heinz. Goodbye. Just because they are musicians is not a reason.
Professionals are all bastards. The driver came back and we climbed back in. Heinz
thought he had a drummer lined up for nine o’clock. But where were we going? The driver had to take us to 7 Place Vendôme. That’s all he knew. There wasn’t much time. So we took off along rue de Rivoli towards rue de Berri. He was complaining because army trucks can’t go any faster than twenty miles an hour. He turned sharply to avoid going up a one-way street. Damn reruns. What was that we just passed? Oh, yes. The Park Club at Ambassadeurs. I haven’t played there yet, but I have played the Colombia. That day it was full of pretty girls. It’s a shame to see them with the Americans, but then, that’s their business. The prettier they are, the more stupid they are. I couldn’t care less. I don’t want to screw them. I’m too tired. I just want to look at them. There is nothing I like more than looking at pretty girls. Yes there is … burying your nose in their hair when they are wearing perfume. There’s nothing wrong with that. He jammed on the brakes. We were at the garage. A tall guy dressed in an American uniform. French? American? Maybe Jewish as well. He had the Stars and Stripes emblazoned on his shoulder. It’s the garage that belongs to the newspaper. Heinz asked if he could use the phone to call his drummer. I explained what was going on to some guy who didn’t give a damn. He wasn’t going to move. Heinz came back. No drummer. “Okay, so will we all fit into a jeep?” “Yes, but we don’t have a driver.” Enough of this shit. I’ll let them sort it out. I am sick of talking to them, especially when they adopt that tone in their voice with you. And then there’s the English who look down their noses at you. And shit, they all give me the shits. They have sorted it out. A driver has been found. “We are going to take the Opel, pick up Martin and then he’ll take us to Place Vendôme.” The Opel was grey. It’ll do. He brought it around the front and parked it across the driveway. We squeezed in next to Heinz. It’s already better than the truck. Heinz was having a good old laugh. But it’s a heap of shit. It was shaking and rattling, and that damn slow. I remember the Delage. You could put a glass of water on the mudguard, not a ripple. Its six-cylinder engine can be more finely tuned than any other. The driver didn’t get in. They were making him wait for his exit pass. We were already twenty minutes late. I didn’t care. After all, it’s Martin who’s boss. He will sort things out. A jeep with a trailer pulled up at the garage. The guys inside look like something from the 1900s, in their leather goatskins, sitting on split seats, their lanky legs and knees tucked up under their chins. We were blocking their way. One of them jumped into the
Opel and reversed it a couple of metres. After the jeep had gone past, he put it back in the same spot. What a dickhead. I was starting to lose my patience. The driver finally got his pass. We took off. Heap of shit. It almost made you throw up going around corners. Everything was worn, suspension, steering. That figures. I had learned about that. A certain amount of time is spent being seasick. The Germans must surely know this too; only they probably don’t get it the same as us. Outside Saint-Lazare, we almost collided with a Matford. He crossed the intersection without looking. We went up rue Amsterdam, along the outer boulevards, to rue Lamarck. Number 73, it’s on the right, I told him. I got out in front of Marcel’s place. Martin was sitting at a table, watching the door, when he saw me. That’s what it is. Bastard. Too damn lazy to go back to rue Nortoire-du-Vidame, and he’s even had a feed. The sign he made through the door as he approached was very gangsterish. He and Heinz started jabbering away in Dutch. There they go, they are at it again. Heinz wasn’t abusing him at all, that’s for sure. We roll around another corner. “It’s like being on a swing!” the driver said. Number 7 Place Vendôme, Air Transport Command. There weren’t many lights on. “Goodbye!” the driver said to me, as we shook hands. “I am off to get the colonel.” There is nobody here. “This is not it,” I said. “If you can’t find anyone, call Elysée 07-05,” he said. “It’s the garage. They are the ones who told me to bring you here. But obviously, it’s quarter to nine, which makes you three quarters of an hour late.” He left. “Go and ask, Roby,” Martin said. “Go and ask yourself. You’re the boss!” I said to myself. We went inside. Definitely not here. Nobody knew anything. It was eerie. You would have thought you were in a post office. So we went back out. “Where’s this driver?” Martin asked. A girl wearing some sort of white sheepskin thing, and an American saw us. “There’s the band!” “Yes,” Martin said, “we’ve been waiting for half an hour.” He’s got some cheek, but I got a good laugh out of it anyway. The brunette, not a bad body. We’ll soon see. We followed them. Finally, a half-decent car. A black 1939 Packard with driver. The driver was complaining, “I can’t take them all! It will blow the tyres.” You have got to be joking! You obviously know nothing about Packards! Three in the back: two girls and a Yank. On the fold out seats: Martin, Heinz and me. In the front: the driver and two more Yanks. Rue de la Paix, Champs-Elysées, rue Balzac. First stop, Hotel Celtique. The two in the front got out. We waited. Opposite, there was the sky-blue
Chrysler belonging to the U.S. Navy. I have already seen it go past a few times in Paris. I wonder if it is the fluid drive model, with oil-lubricated gear change. They were jabbering away inside the car, Heinz and Martin in Dutch, the driver in French. Oh! They are annoying. One of them climbed back in the front seat. He passed something between Heinz and me to the guy behind. "There’s a gift from the Captain." I don’t know what it was. "Thank you Terry," the guy in the back said as he unwrapped it. It was the size of a packet of cigarette papers. He handed it back. We took off. A navy officer and two women climbed into the Chrysler and followed us. We immediately turned off to the right. Now this is a car! Even so, the driver was complaining about Bernard or O’Hara. One and the same. And eight in the car were too many. Nothing changes. I wasn’t listening to what they were saying in the back. Before we got to the Bois de Boulogne, we had to go through Garches and Saint-Cloud. There was a blonde with big breasts in the middle. To her left was the brunette, and to her right an American. Hollywood … "I heard Santa Monica is nice," the girl in the middle said to nobody in particular. Of course, you’ll take her home, the bimbo. You are hopeless and not very good looking, so you asked for it. The other one, the brunette, she was better. She can’t be American. They are all saddle-backed, except for those two I saw one night on the showboat. The rest were there in their panties, with tiny little waists and well rounded backsides. You would have thought they were blow-up dolls that had been squeezed tightly around the middle to make their chests and bums stick out. It was awful. "What’s the name of that friend of yours? Chris…" the American guy asks the brunette. "Christiane," she answers. "Nice name, and she’s nice too." "Yes," she replies, "but she’s got a strange voice" What a good friend! "and when she’s on stage, she makes such an awful noise … yes … but she is nice. Maybe we’ll go to New York in February," she adds. "And when you do come to New York," the guy says, "it would be wonderful to see you again. And this other friend of yours, Florence?" "Yes," she says, "she’s got a nice face, but the rest is bad." What a nice thing to say about your friends! "And, who else will be coming? All the chorus girls?" That’s when I realised that she was from the Fête Foraine, but maybe I was wrong. It was wearing me down listening to Heinz and Martin speaking Dutch beside me. "I think you’re the best," the guy said. She didn’t answer. Maybe it was true, even though he didn’t say it as a compliment. We
arrived at the Suresnes Bridge, which was full of potholes and poorly maintained. They had started to build a new one next to it in forty, but now, five years later, it was a bit of a mess and was bound to have some rust in it. On the climb to Suresnes, the tyres on the big car make a sweet smooth humming sound on the bitumen. We dropped down a gear and climbed the hill. Eight in a Packard too many? What an idiot! All drivers are idiots. They are a rotten bunch. I give them the shits because I am an engineer. They are all on a first name basis with the musicians, and it makes them feel good. There is no difference between us. We both grovel. That’s all right. I’ll get my revenge later with a Colt. I’ll take them all out. But I don’t want to risk anything, because my skin is worth more than theirs. It would be crazy to do time for guys like that. I ask myself why I wouldn’t do it for real. Go find a guy like Maxence Van der Meersch, and say to him, “You don’t like pimps and nightclub owners. Well, neither do I. We form a secret pact and, one night, let’s say we do a drive by in a black Citroen, and mow down all the guys from Toulouse.” “Why stop there?” Van der Meersch says to me. “We have to kill them all.” “In that case,” I say, “I have another idea. We organise a big meeting of all the syndicates, and then we do away with them. All it would take is some good planning.” “What if we botch it?” Van der Meersch says to me. “It doesn’t matter,” I say to him. “We’ll have had a good laugh. But the next day others will come along and take their place.” “In that case,” he says, “we’ll come up with another plan.” “Okay. Goodbye Maxence.” The car pulled up. The Golf Club. This was it. We get out and go inside. Tiled floor, exposed beams. I have seen places like this before. We got changed in a small room. Obviously, another pretty good requisition. Down a passageway. To the left, a large auditorium with a piano. This is it.

II

It was surprisingly hot at first. I made the mistake of wearing my sweatshirt, and I’ll have to watch out for the hole in my pants. But my jacket is quite long, so they won’t see it. It doesn’t matter anyway. They are nothing but a bunch of whores and guys I don’t give a damn about. The heaters are on, and the three of us sit down. Martin
obviously thinks this is not the place to play swing. Heinz picks up his violin instead of his clarinet and they play some gypsy thing. While this is happening, I take it easy. I blow into my trumpet to warm it up a little. I unscrew the second valve, which still sticks after it has been oiled. I put a bit of spit on it. Too runny. Spit everywhere. Even Buescher Slide Oil doesn’t free it up. I tried paraffin once, and next time I had the taste in my mouth for hours. There are exposed beams painted in old red, golden yellow and faded royal blue. Very old-fashioned. A huge ornamental chimney with a torch fixed to a spiral pike on each side. Old pennants hanging from crossbeams that support a ten metre high ceiling. All sorts of animal heads mounted on walls. Old Arab weapons. Just opposite me, an Aubusson rug, some sort of stork and exotic greenery. It’s quite a nice colour scheme, with yellows and greens through to turquoise. A huge cathedral chandelier in the middle of the room, with at least a hundred electric light bulbs twisted into the shape of candles. Funny. They look like real flames. Just before Martin and Heinz start, some guy turned off the radio, which was hidden in the library behind a set of shelves full of false book spines used as a trompe-l’œil. I check out the legs of the brunette facing me. She is wearing a rather nice bluish-grey woollen dress with a small pocket on the sleeve. An olive green handkerchief is tucked inside. But when I see her from behind, the back of her dress is badly cut, the top is too big and the zipper doesn’t close properly. She is wearing platform shoes. She has good legs, slender at the knees and ankles. She doesn’t have a stomach, and I am sure her backside would be nice and firm. Perfect. I am also guessing she has the eyes of a hooker. The other girl from the car is there too. She has a terrible complexion. It’s too pale. She’s the dumb one. She has big breasts. I have already mentioned that, but lousy legs and an awful brown and beige checked dress. Uninteresting. A French captain, the type of officer who is tall, bald, who distinguished himself in the First World War … Why is he having that effect on me? … It must be because of the books by Mac Orlan. He is talking to the dumb one. There are also two or three Americans, including one who is a captain, but one with no class. They all must have plenty of money to pay so little attention to their appearance. A kind of bar to my left on the other side of the piano near the entrance. A barman behind, but I can only see the top of his head. The guys are starting to pour whisky into their orangeade glasses. The atmosphere is terrible. Heinz and Martin have finished
their thing. No response. We are going to play Johnny Mercer’s Dream. I take my trumpet, Heinz his clarinet. One couple get up to dance, along with the brunette, and a few others follow suit. Not many. There must be other rooms out back. It’s crazy how hot it is in here with the heaters on. After Dream, something to wake them up, Margie. I am using a mute. There’s hardly anyone dancing, and yes, it does sound better with the clarinet. I tune the trumpet slightly because it was too sharp. Usually it’s the piano that’s too sharp, but this one is flat because of the heat. We are not overdoing it, and there’s not much enthusiasm in the dancing. Some guy comes in wearing a black trimmed jacket, a shirt with a starched collar and striped pants. My guess is that he’s a steward. That’s probably what he is. He signals to the waiter, who brings us over three cocktails. Gin and orange, or something like that. I like Coca-Cola better. It doesn’t mess with my liver. He comes back over when the song has finished and asks what he can bring us. Very obliging. He has a thin face, a red nose, a mark on the side and an unusual complexion. He looks sad, poor fellow. Someone in the family must have had the black vomit. He goes away and comes back with two plates. One with four huge slices of apple pie. On the other, a pile of sandwiches, some with corned pork, and butter, with foie gras on the rest. Damn, how good is this! In trying not to show it, Martin has this silly look on his face, and his nose almost touches his chin. The guy tells us, “You only have to ask if you would like some more.” After a sandwich, we start playing again. The good-looking brunette is shaking her firm butt and getting right into it with the American. They are dancing, knees bent, heads down, like they are doing a livelier version of a gallopade from the 1900s. I already saw it being done the other day. It must be the new craze. It started over there in Auteuil again, with the zazous. Just behind me, there are two stags’ heads, labelled Dittishausen 1916 and Unadingen June 21st 1928. I think they really only have a limited appeal. They are mounted on polished blocks of wood cut from the log on a slightly angled cross-section. They are oval, or to be more precise, elliptical in shape. A Major enters. No. A silver star. A colonel with a good-looking girl in tow. “Good-looking” is perhaps a bit of an overstatement. She has pale pink skin and rounded features, like she had just been carved out of ice, which is starting to melt. The ones with no blemishes, with no lumps, bumps or dimples have something slightly off-putting about them. They are inevitably trying to hide something.
They remind me of an anus after an enema, squeaky clean and disinfected. The guy is fairly nondescript. A big nose and grey hair. He gives her a squeeze and she rubs up against him. You are disgusting, both of you. Go and do it in a corner somewhere, and then come back, if that’s what you have in mind. It’s stupid all this beating about the bush. It’s like a cat with diarrhea scratching around in kitty litter. Yuk! You disgust me. I am betting that she is clean and a little moist between her thighs. There’s another sandy-haired girl. You saw photos of girls like her in 1910. She has a red ribbon around her head. American Beauty. Nothing has changed. Still the girl who’s squeaky clean, that one. What’s more, she doesn’t have a very good body, and with her bowlegs, she looks like the ‘Alice in Wonderland’ type. The women must all be American or English. The brunette is still dancing. We stop playing. She comes up to the piano and asks Martin to play Laura. He doesn’t know it. What about Sentimental Journey? Good. I get to play the sixth note. They are all dancing. What a bunch of jerks! Are they dancing for the music, to get the girls, or just for the sake of it? The colonel is still rubbing up against her. Some girl told me the other day that she can’t stand American officers. They are always talking politics, they can’t dance and they are a pain in the arse into the bargain. (They are not worth the effort. Make do with the rest). I have to agree with her. I like the soldiers better. The officers are even more full of themselves than the young French ones. And they are enough to push the needle of the dickheadmeter off the scale, with those little sticks they use to stick up horses’ bums. I am sitting on a rustic, hand-stitched chair from the Middle Ages that is damned hard on the backside. If I stand up, have to watch out for the hole in my pants. The brunette comes back over. Another discussion with Martin. Dirty old bastard. You’d feel her up too, wouldn’t you. I know why. It’s warm, and it is bringing us to life. Usually, on the showboat, they stay away from us, which takes the fun out of playing. Time is going slowly tonight. It’s harder to play when there are only three of you. And this music is a drag. We play another two songs and take a short break. We gobble down the pie, and then the American, Bernard or O’Hara, the guy the driver was talking to outside the Celtique, comes over. ‘If you want some coffee, you can get a cup now. Come on.” “Thanks!” Martin says. And off we go. We go back across the foyer. We turn left. A small sitting room. Wall-to-wall Aubusson all the way to the oak panelling. On the couch are the colonel and his fondling
female. She is wearing a black suit and sheer stockings that are a little too pink. She is blonde and her mouth is moist. We go past without looking at them. It wouldn’t bother them anyway. They are not doing anything, just expressing their feelings. We go through another room, a bar, and a dining room. More Aubusson – it’s an obsession – and a stylish rug on the carpet. Mountains of cakes. Two dozen or so people, about a quarter of them women, smoking and drinking white coffee. There are plates and more plates. We hurry past, trying not to be too obvious, but we are in a hurry. Currant buns filled with peanut butter, I love them. Little *palets de dame* with raisins, I love them too. Apple pie with a two-centimetre layer of marmalade cream under the apples, and mouth-watering pastry. The evening won’t have been a total waste. I eat until there is no room left, and then I eat some more, just to be sure I have no regrets later. I down my cup of coffee, about half a litre of it, and a few more cakes. Martin and Heinz both take an apple. Not me. It bothers me taking things while those idiots are watching. But the Dutch are like dogs. They have no sense of decency. About the only thing they are sensitive to is a kick up the backside. We hang around for a while. I have my back to the wall because of the hole. We go back into the main auditorium. I undo two buttons because it is hard to blow a trumpet after having just eaten. I do them back up. The brunette is there. She wants *I Dream of You*. Ah! I know that one! But Martin doesn’t. It doesn’t matter. He suggests *Dream*, but we have already played it. He launches into *Here, I’ve Said It Again*. I rather like that one because of the middle part, where you make a lovely change of key from F major to B flat, without making it obvious. And so we play, and we stop, and we play again, and we have a bit of a snooze. Two new girls have turned up. They are filthy. Must be French. Huge heads of hair. They both look like something of a cross between an intellectual typist and a maid. They immediately feel this need to come over and ask us to play a musette. To give them something to complain about, we play *Le Petit Vin Blanc* in swing. They don’t even recognise the tune. What idiots. Yes they do, right at the end, and then they pull a face. The Americans, they don’t give a damn. They like anything lousy. I think things are winding down. It’s after midnight. We’ve played heaps of old rubbish. I pour a Coca-Cola into a large glass. Martin has just been handed our pay in a thick envelope. He looked at it and said, “Nice people, Roby. They have paid for four musicians, though we were only
That’s what he said, the idiot. That means there are three thousand francs in the envelope. Martin goes and takes a piss, and when he comes back, puts out his hand for a packet of Chesterfields. “Thank you, sir. Thanks a lot!” Go away, pleb! A tall red-headed guy comes over and asks me something about a set of drums. He wants one for tomorrow. I give him two addresses, and then another guy comes over and explains things better. He wanted to hire a set of drums. I don’t have any addresses for what he wants, so I can’t help. He offers a cigarette as well. We keep on playing, and somehow it ends up being one o’clock. We close with Good Night Sweetheart. That’s enough. Time to get out of here. Just one more … we play Sentimental Journey again. They are sad this is the last one. Slow dancing. Now we have to think about leaving. We go and get changed. It’s cold in the hallway and foyer. I put on my raincoat. Martin signals to me. He is with Heinz. Good. He slips me seven hundred francs. I get it. You’re going to pocket the rest, you bastard. It would give me great pleasure to punch you in the face. But why would you care that I am pissed off. You are a bigger prick than me, and you are fifty years old. I hope you drop dead. He doesn’t pay Heinz in front of me. You are really sly, both of you. I give him my share of the cigarettes, just to hear him say, “We thank you very much, Roby.” We are waiting for a car. The floor in the hallway is tiled. There are two red buckets full of water and a fire extinguisher, and signs everywhere – ‘Beware of Fire’, ‘Don’t put your ashes’, etc. I would really like to know whose house this is. Heinz and I go into raptures. He really likes it too. We go back into the foyer. Martin goes and takes a piss. He has pinched a copy of Yank from somewhere and gives it to me to look after. We are near the phone. Martin comes back, and says to me, “Can you call my hotel, Roby? I wonder if my wife’s arrived.” His wife was arriving today. So I phone the hotel on behalf of Mr Romberg to find out if his key is hanging on the board. Yes, it’s there, but your wife isn’t. You can always go and get off in front of a pin-up girl. We go back into the lobby and over to the Packard. The driver doesn’t want to take all three of us. We give him the shits. “Go without us. We’ll manage.” We go back into the foyer. I sit down. Heinz is mumbling away to himself, just for a change. Martin is deep in conversation with Doublemetre. He’s an American guy. Really nice. He finds us a car, but Martin has to take a shit, so we wait. I go back into the lobby. After all that, Heinz has just given twenty francs to one of the waiters. He’s rather nice.
“Whose house is this?” “It belongs to some English guy. He is a government official in South Africa, and he has another house near London. It’s a good house and during the Occupation, the Germans didn’t damage it at all. They were here, of course.” The English guy lost his wife three years ago and has just remarried. The waiter hasn’t met the new wife yet. It’s sad when you lose someone. He had a friend, someone he had known for six years, and he lost him. Yes, it leaves a void that can’t be filled. I condole and we shake hands. Goodbye. Thank you. Heinz and Martin finally arrive. We go outside. The car is in a laneway. It’s a Chrysler. No, better still, it’s the other one, a Lincoln. I take a piss against a tree. The two maid-typists and an American turn up. He’s the driver. The three of us are in the back. He’s in the front with the two girls. They complain because they are too squashed. I really don’t give a damn. I have plenty of room. They turn on the radio. The music helps pass the time. It’s white jazz. It’s missing something, but in a funny way, it works here. We are going along in the car and I say to Heinz, “I could easily drive around like this all night.” He would prefer to go home to bed. Paris, Concorde, rue Royal, Boulevards, Vivienne, Bourse, stop … Martin gets out. I am next. Heinz is furious. We have done the grand tour. We are at gare du Nord and he has to go back to Neuilly. Let him sort it out with the driver. Goodbye, children. I shake the driver’s hand. “Thanks a lot. Good night.” I am finally at home in the sack. And just before I fell asleep, I turned into a duck.
ANOTHER DAY IN MARSEILLE
It was another day in Marseille.

The butcher’s boy raised the olive green steel shutter that concealed the top half of the entrance to the shop. Metal grated against metal, but the terrible noise it made was not loud enough to drown out his whistling. He was whistling *The Palavas Palace Is Not The Office Of The House Of Havas*, a catchy little tune that he had heard on the radio. He couldn’t get it out of his head because all day long, they kept on playing it over and over again.

Next, he lifted the three-tiered metal grill that sealed off the bottom half of the shop and folded it into place. Once this task had been completed, he swept into a pile the sawdust that had been scattered over the floor at the end of the previous shift and stood there twiddling his thumbs.

The sound of the butcher’s footsteps in the corridor reminded him of something he had forgotten to do. He had just bought a beautiful brand new knife the day before. He raced over to where he had left it and feverishly set to work putting an edge on the blade with a sharpening steel.

In the meantime, his boss was approaching, clearing his throat in the same disgusting way he did every morning. He was a big dark-haired man, as strong as an ox, and a little frightening. And yet he came from Nogent.

“So,” he said, “how’s that knife coming along?”

“It’s getting there,” the boy answered, slightly flushed. His short blonde hair and pug nose made him look like a little pig.

“Show me.”

The boy held out the knife for his boss to examine. The butcher took the knife, and ran the cutting edge across his fingernail to test it.

“Shi …,” he swore. “Where did you learn to sharpen a knife? There is no way you could slit a North Korean’s throat with that thing.”

He made that comment to wind up his apprentice, because he was well aware of the boy’s fanatical views.
“Oh! I bet you I could!” the boy protested.
He had spoken too soon. The butcher gave him an ominous look.
“You just watch me!” he said.
The boy, felt a little confused. Timidly, he tried to regroup.
“Male or female?” he asked.
“Okay!” the butcher said with a sneer.
He cleared his throat one last time. The young boy couldn’t stomach the noise any longer and threw up in the pile of sawdust.

II

Mr Mackinley was deep in thought as he struck a match on the leather sole of his left shoe. He had both feet on his desk, and had to lean a long way forward, reactivating his old Iwo Jima lumbago pains.

In actual fact, Mr Mackinley was not his real name, and the export company he worked for was not a real export company. It was a front for one of the busiest departments of A.S.S., the American Secret Service. The wrinkles etched deep in his animated face made it quite clear that Mr Mackinley was able to make the tough decisions when he had to.

His hand hit a buzzer, and a secretary appeared.

“Have Mrs Eskubova come in,” he said in English without the slightest trace of any accent.

“Yes sir,” the secretary said, and Mr Mackinley winced every time he heard that grating voice, because it reminded him of Brooklyn and the stench that came with it. Nevertheless, he managed to maintain enough self-control to keep himself in check, just like Emperor Hirohito.

Shortly afterwards a woman entered the office. There was an air of mystery about her. She was buxom, with blue eyes and brown hair. Her curvaceous body was enticing. She was the perfect agent for a delicate mission.

“Hello Pelagia,” Mr Mackinley said briefly.
She answered him in the same language. What follows is a transcript of their conversation.

“I have a confidential assignment for you,” Mackinley said, getting straight to the point, as Americans do.

“What is it?” Pelagia asked, going tit for tat.

“Now, this is what we’ve got,” Mackinley whispered. He had lowered his voice. “We have learned from a very reliable source that a well-known French political figure, Mr Jules M., has in his possession certain information that is of the utmost importance to us. It has to do with the Gromiline Report.”

Pelagia turned pale, but remained silent.

“Um,” said Mackinley, ill at ease. Well, you are the only one who can obtain this information.”

“And how am I supposed to do that?” she asked, drawing a breath.

“My dear lady,” Mackinley said charmingly, “your well-known charm …”

Pelagia’s silver cigarette case struck his left eyebrow, causing a few drops of blood to appear. Mackinley was still smiling, but his jaws suddenly clenched. He picked up the cigarette case and handed it back to Pelagia.

“You take me for a whore,” she said. “I am not Marthe Richard. Don’t forget that, Mackinley.”

“My dear,” he said, “It’s either yes or …”

He ran his index finger threateningly across his Adam’s apple.

She exploded into a fit of rage.

“I refuse,” she said. “He is revolting. When you engaged my services, it was agreed that my loyalty to Georges would not be compromised in any way.”

“Ha!” Mackinley sneered. “So what do you have to say for yourself about that little blonde-haired fellow with rosy cheeks, a butcher’s boy from Montpellier, I believe, … the one you go riding around with in taxis.”

On this occasion, she knew he had gotten the better of her.

“You monster! So you know everything then,” she said drawing a breath.

He bowed gallantly.
“I would like to know more,” he said, “and that is why I took the liberty of asking for your cooperation.”

“Sleep with Jules M… How awful!” she said under her breath.

She shuddered and stood up.

“I don’t think we have anything more to say to each other,” Mackinley concluded. “In a few days, our agent, F-5, will contact you in Montpellier. You will be given a complete set of identity papers and naturally, some spending money …”

“How much?” she asked in a muffled voice.

“H’m …” Mackinley said. “You will be given five hundred thousand francs in cash, and another five thousand dollars will be deposited into your account, once the mission has been completed. The department would like to be seen as being rather generous on this occasion. You see, my dear Pelagia, the Gromiline Report is extremely important to the President…”

III

The taxi slowly pulled away from the kerb. It was an old Vivaquatre whose driver was half-deaf.

On the cushions in the back seat, Pelagia was stroking the butcher boy’s short hair affectionately.

“My darling,” she said in Russian, “when I was very young, I had a little pink pig, a baby pig. His name was Pulaski. You remind me of him.”

She fell silent. The butcher’s boy, who was not the brightest, was quietly allowing himself to be petted.

“Listen to me!” Pelagia muttered to herself. “I sound like one of those damn American women on a trip down memory lane.”

The taxi was approaching the hotel where they went when they wanted to be alone.

“Listen,” Pelagia said, mustering her best French, “you … come … you, my little pigeon, take knife … cut my throat.”
“I can’t bring myself to sleep with him,” she added in Russian. Reverting to French, she said, “Listen, Goloubtchik, if you love me, you must do this.”

“Are you North Korean?” the butcher’s boy asked bluntly.

“Oh …” Pelagia said. “From Harbin, not far.”

“That’s all right then,” he said. “It’s agreed. I will be happy to.”

Pelagia gave a shudder.

“I would rather it be you, my pink pig,” she said very quickly. “At Palavas, where we first met.”

She gave him a long passionate kiss, and the driver, who was watching in the rear-view mirror, almost ran into the back of a truck.

“We will do it tomorrow,” the butcher’s boy said. “I will sharpen the thing later tonight when I go back. I will meet you on the beach at nine o’clock.”

It was September third.

IV

“Still not great,” the butcher observed. “Obviously you don’t know how to sharpen a knife.”

“We’ll see about that,” the boy said boastingly.

“I’m still waiting for that North Korean,” the butcher said teasingly.

“Patience,” the boy said.

He grabbed the sharpening steel and began to enthusiastically run the blade back and forth across the surface. The butcher laughed at the boy with the tip of his tongue sticking out between his lips, and then spat in the pile of sawdust, right on top of a big green fly.
“Stop here,” Pelagia said, tapping the driver on the shoulder. He did as he was told. She threw two one thousand franc notes in his direction and got out of the car. She was wearing a black skirt and a white blouse with a plunging neckline.

The driver clicked his tongue as he watched her disappear.

“For that sort of money, I would gladly stuff her in every night of the week,” he said with disgusting vulgarity.

She strode towards the beach. It was almost eight o’clock. She occasionally looked back over her shoulder. Two men stopped when they saw her walk past.

“Hmm!” one said.

“Oh, yes!” added the other.

Night was falling quickly. Pelagia was walking on the beach at Palavas. She was now alone. She was almost at the place where they had agreed to meet. She had arrived ahead of time. She dropped down onto the sand and waited.

He suddenly loomed up behind her from out of the shadows. She became aware of his presence

“My pink pig,” she sighed.

He was agitated.

“Something is bothering me,” he said. “I looked on a map for Harbin, and it’s not in North Korea at all. It’s in China.”

“What does it matter,” Pelagia sighed again. “Anything is better than sleeping with that guy. Get it over with, Goloubtchik.”

He remembered how the paratroopers did it in the movies, and at the same time his aptitude for cleanliness gave him an idea.

“Go into the water,” he said. “That way, we won’t make a mess.”

She did as she was told. He turned her around roughly, stuck his thumb under her nose and tilted her head back. He plunged the knife into her throat. Once.

“Good,” he said as he removed the knife. “The boss won’t be able to say that it wasn’t sharp enough this time.”
Blood was coming from the lifeless body floating in the dark water at his feet.
“A job well done,” he said to himself. “I kept my word.”
A heavy object struck him on the side of the head, causing him to collapse in a heap.

Agent F-5 whistled softly. A dinghy approached.
“Put it in,” he said. “This guy saved me from a most unpleasant task.”
The other man loaded the body of the butcher’s boy on board the boat.
“Give him a shot of N.R.F. so he doesn’t remember anything when he comes around,” F-5 said.

He searched the body. The wound was no longer bleeding. He picked up the knife and hurled it out to sea. The wallet, the belt, he would dispose of later. He dragged the body towards the beach. He needed to be sure that the boy was found, because he knew that when dealing with Mackinley, nothing could be left to chance.

The motor of the small dinghy was ticking over quietly. F-5 climbed in. The flimsy hull sank lower in the water under the extra weight.
“Let’s go,” he said. There’s still work to be done.”
The silhouette of the boat disappeared into the dark of night.
DOGS, DEATH AND DESIRE
They got me. I am going to the chair tomorrow. But I am going to write this anyway, because I want to explain. The jury didn’t understand. And now, since Slacks’ death, it has been difficult to talk about it, knowing that no-one would believe me. If only Slacks had been able to pull herself from the car. If only she had been able to come and tell everyone what happened. Let’s not talk about that any more. Nothing can be done about it. Nothing on earth.

The trouble with being a cab driver is that you get yourself into routines. You spend all day driving around, so you end up knowing all the different neighbourhoods. There are some you prefer to others. I know drivers, for example, who would sooner let themselves be slashed with a knife than take a fare to Brooklyn. Me, I am happy to. I mean I was happy to, because now I won’t be doing it any more. It’s one of those routines I got myself into. Almost every night around one o’clock, I would drive past the Three Deuces. One time, I dropped a customer there. He was as drunk as a skunk and he wanted me to go in with him. When I came back out, I knew the kind of girls you would find inside. Ever since, it’s been crazy. You will see for yourself.

Every night around five to one, five past one, I would drive by. She was just leaving. They often had singers at Deuces, and I knew who she was. “Slacks” they called her, because she was almost always in pants. They also said in the papers that she was a lesbian. She hung out a lot with the same two guys, her piano player and bass player, and you would see them driving around in the piano player’s car. They would play a gig somewhere else and then come back to Deuces to finish off the night. I found that out later.

I never stayed there long. I couldn’t keep my cab out of service all the time, or leave it parked for too long either, because there were always more customers in that neighbourhood than anywhere else.

But on the night I’m talking about, they had an argument, something serious. She punched the piano player in the face. That girl could pack a mean punch. She knocked him down, as clean as a whistle. He had had too much to drink, but even if he had been sober, I still think he would have gone down. The only thing was, because he was so drunk, he stayed down. The other guy tried bringing him around by slapping him hard.
enough to knock his block off. I didn’t see the end, because she came over, opened the
door of the cab and climbed in next to me. Then she lit her cigarette lighter and had a
close look at me.

“Would you like me to turn on the light?”

She said no and put out her lighter. I drove off. Not far down the road, after
having turned into York Avenue, I asked her where she wanted to go, because I finally
realised that she hadn’t said anything.

“Straight ahead.”

Hey, it made no difference to me. The meter was ticking. So, I kept driving
straight ahead. At that time of night, there are always people in the nightclub district, but
as soon as you leave the centre, that’s it. The streets are deserted. You wouldn’t believe
it, but once one o’clock comes around, it’s worse than the suburbs. A few cars, and
every now and then some guy by himself.

After having had the idea of sitting next to me in the front of the cab, I didn’t
expect much about that girl to be normal. I looked across at her. She had black hair
down to her shoulders and a complexion that was so pale it made her look unhealthy.
The lipstick she was wearing was almost black and it made her mouth look like a dark
hole. The car was still cruising along. She decided to speak.

“Swap places.”

I stopped the car. I decided not to object. I had seen the way she had just
flattened her partner and I wasn’t too keen to pick a fight with a female of that calibre. I
was about to get out of the car, when she grabbed my arm.

“Don’t bother. I’ll slide across. Move over.”

She sat on my knee and slid into place on my left. Her body was as firm as a
chunk of frozen meat, only not the same temperature.

She realised that something had stirred in me and started to laugh, but not in a
nasty sort of way. She almost seemed happy. When she started my old heap, I thought
the gearbox was going to blow up and then when she took off, the sudden jolt pushed us
right back in our seats.

After crossing the Harlem River, we arrived in the Bronx. She was driving like a
maniac. When I was called up, I saw the way they drive in France. Now they know how
to knock a car around, but they couldn’t make a mess of one half as much as that piece in
pants. The French are only dangerous. She was a disaster just waiting to happen. Still, I
didn’t say anything.

Oh, so you think this is funny! You think that with my size and strength, I should
have been able to bring that girl under control, don’t you? You wouldn’t have tried to
either, if you had seen that girl’s mouth, and the look on her face in that car. Deathly
white, and that black hole … I looked at her from the side and said nothing. All the
while, I was keeping a look out. I didn’t want the cops to pull us over because there were
two of us in the front.

I am telling you, that in a city like New York, you would always expect there to
be people around. She kept turning down any old street. We were driving whole blocks
without seeing a single cat. Maybe only one or two people. A bum, sometimes a
woman, people returning home from work. There are shops that don’t close until one or
two in the morning. Some don’t even close at all. Every time she saw someone on the
sidewalk on the passenger’s side, she would swerve and drive as close as possible, right
alongside them in the gutter. She would slow down a little and then hit the accelerator as
soon as she passed them. I still didn’t say anything, but after the fourth time, I asked her
why she did it.

“I suppose I get a kick out of it,” she said.

I didn’t answer. She looked at me. I didn’t like the fact that she was looking at
me while she was driving and, in spite of myself, I found that my hand had grabbed hold
of the steering wheel. She punched me hard on the back of the hand with her right fist,
as if it were the natural thing to do. It felt like a horse had kicked me. I swore and she
laughed again.

“It’s hilarious how they jump when they first hear the sound of the motor …”

She must have seen the dog crossing the street. I was looking around for
something to hang on to, for when she hit the brakes. But instead of slowing down, she
accelerated and I heard a thud against the front of the car. I felt the sudden impact.

“Damn!” I said. “You were going flat out. A dog that size, it must have done
some damage to the car …”

“Shut up!”
She seemed to be in a daze. She had a vague look in her eyes. The car was veering all over the road. Two blocks later, she pulled over to the kerb.

I wanted to get out to see if the front grill had been smashed in, but she grabbed my arm. Her breathing sounded like the snorting of a horse.

The look on her face just then … I will never forget the look on her face. To see a woman in that state when you’ve made her like that, that’s O.K., that’s fine … but to think that only moments before, the thought hadn’t even crossed her mind … She was sitting motionless, squeezing my wrist as tight as she could. Dribble was running down her chin. The corners of her mouth were moist.

I looked outside. I didn’t know where we were. There wasn’t a soul around. She undid her zipper and dropped her pants. When you do it in a car, you are usually left with the feeling that there should have been more to it. But even so, that is one time I will never forget. Not even after they have shaved my head tomorrow morning.

*

A little later, I made her get out of the driver’s seat and I took the wheel again. Almost immediately, she asked me to stop the car. She straightened herself up as best as she could, swearing like a tailor. She got out and sat in the back. Then she handed me the address of a nightclub where she had to go and sing. I tried to work out where we were. I was disorientated, like when you come out of a month in rehab. But when it came my turn to get out of the car, I managed not to fall over. I wanted to check the front of the car. Nothing. Just a bloodstain that had spread over the right fender because of the speed the car had been travelling. It could have been any old stain.

The quickest way out of there was to turn the car around and go back the same way.

I was watching her in the rear-view mirror. She was looking out the window. When I spotted the body of the animal, a black mass on the sidewalk, I could hear her. Once again, her breathing became heavier. The dog was still moving. The impact of the car must have broken its back and it had dragged itself off to the side. I wanted to vomit. I felt weak. She started laughing behind me. She could see that I felt sick and she began
to insult me under her breath. She said some terrible things, and I could have taken her right there and then and done it all over again in the street.

I don’t know what the rest of you guys are made of, but when I took her back to that nightclub where she had to knock out a number, I couldn’t stay outside and wait. I took off straight away. I had to go home. I had to lie down. It’s not funny living by yourself all the time, but man, I was glad to be alone that night. I didn’t even get undressed. I had a few slugs of something I found and laid down. I was drained. I was that damned drained …

The next night, there I was again waiting for her right out front. I lowered the flag and got out to stretch my legs. The place was buzzing. I shouldn’t have stayed, but I waited anyway. She came out, once again at the same time. Like clockwork that girl. She saw me and recognised me straight away. The two guys were following her like they always did. She laughed in her usual way. I don’t know how to explain it, but when I saw her just then, it felt as though I no longer had both feet firmly planted on the ground. She opened the door of the cab and the three of them climbed in. The air closed in on me. I wasn’t expecting that. “Idiot,” I said to myself. You don’t understand that with a girl like that, everything she does is on the spur of the moment. One night, everything is sweet and the next you are just a cab driver. You’re a nobody.

A nobody! You’ve got to be joking! I was driving like an idiot and I almost ran up the backside of the big car in front. Sure, I was fuming. I was peeved and all that. In the back, the three of them were having a good old time. She was joking and telling stories in her man’s voice, that grating voice that sounded like someone talking at you when you have had too much to drink.

As soon as we arrived, she was first out. The two guys didn’t even try and insist on paying. They knew what she was like too … They went inside and she leaned through the window to stroke my cheek, as if I were a baby. I took her money. I didn’t want to have any issues with her. I was going to say something, but I didn’t know what. She spoke first.

“You wait for me?” she asked.

“Where?”

“Here. I’ll be back in fifteen minutes.”
“Alone?”

Man, I was full of myself. I wanted to take that back, but there was no way I could take anything back. She ran her fingernails across my cheek.

“See that?” she said.

She laughed again. I didn’t realise what she had done. I touched my cheek. It was bleeding.

“That’s nothing!” she said. “It will have stopped bleeding by the time I come back. Wait for me, all right? Here.”

She went into the nightclub. I tried to take a look in the rear-view mirror. On my cheek there were three curved marks. There was also a fourth, deeper scratch made by her thumb. It wasn’t bleeding badly and I didn’t feel anything.

So, I waited. That night, we didn’t kill anything. I didn’t get anything either.

*

I don’t think she had been playing that game for very long. She didn’t talk much and I knew nothing about her. I was now just killing time during the day, waiting, so I could go and pick her up at night in my old cab. She didn’t sit next to me any more. It would have been really stupid to get yourself thrown in the slammer for that. I would get out and she would take my place and at least two or three times a week we managed to score a few dogs and cats.

After we had been seeing each other for about a month, I got the impression that she wanted something more. It wasn’t having the same effect on her as it did the first few times, and I think she got the idea in her head to go after more substantial game. I can’t tell you anything else. I found that natural. She was no longer reacting the way she used to, and I wanted her to be like she was before. I know you will think that I’m a monster, but you didn’t know that girl. A dog or some kid. It made no difference to me. I would have killed anything for that girl. So we killed a fifteen-year-old girl. She was taking a stroll with her friend, a sailor. She was on her way home from the amusement park. But let me tell you the whole story.
Slacks was terrifying that night. As soon as she got in, I could see that she was after something. And I knew that, even if it meant we had to drive around all night, we’d have to find that something.

Man, things got off to a bad start! I headed straight onto Queensborough Bridge and from there out onto the ringroad. Never before had I seen so many cars and so few pedestrians. You are going to tell me that is to be expected on a motorway. But that night, I didn’t think so. I had other things on my mind. We drove for miles, doing the full circuit, and ended up right in the middle of Coney Island. Slacks had just taken over from me behind the wheel and I was in the back, holding on tight around the corners. She looked like she was out of control. I was waiting. As usual. I am telling you that I was on standby, just waiting for the moment she climbed into the back seat with me. Man, I don’t even want to think about that now!

There was nothing to it. She began zigzagging from West 24th to 23rd, and then she saw them. They were enjoying themselves. He was walking on the sidewalk, and she was next to him on the road, giving the impression that she was even smaller than she was. He was a tall young man, a handsome young man. From the back, the girl looked quite young, with blonde hair and a short dress. It was hard to see. I saw Slacks’ hands on the steering wheel. She could drive. The bitch. She drove straight into them, and hit the girl from the side. That’s when I felt as though I was the one dying. I managed to turn around. She was lying on the ground, a lifeless mass, and the guy was yelling and running after us. Then I saw a green car appear out of nowhere, one of the old model police cars.

“Faster!” I screamed.

She looked at me for a second and we almost ran up onto the sidewalk.

“Go! Go!”

I know exactly just what I had missed out on at that moment. I know. I could only see her back, but I know what would have been. You see, that’s why I don’t give a damn. That’s why tomorrow morning they can damn well come and shave my noggin. Or they can cut my hair into a fringe so they can get a laugh out of it. Or they can paint me green like the police car. You see, they can do whatever they like. You see, that’s why I don’t give a damn.
Slacks was hammering it. She somehow managed to get us onto Surf Avenue. That old heap was making one hell of a racket. Behind us, the police car must have started giving chase.

Then we got onto an approach ramp to the motorway. No more red lights. Man, I wished I had a different car! Everything was a blur. The other car was in pursuit. It felt like we were crawling along at a snail’s pace. It was enough to make you want to chew your fingernails down to the bone.

Slacks was giving it everything. I could still see her back, and I knew what she wanted, because I wanted it as much as her. “Go!” I screamed again. She kept going, and then she turned around for a second. Another car was coming off a ramp, about to join the motorway. She didn’t see him. He was coming up on our right, doing at least seventy-five. I saw the tree and tucked myself into a ball, but she didn’t move. When they got me out of there, I was screaming like a madman. Slacks still wasn’t moving. The steering wheel had crushed her chest. It was a difficult job to free her, and in the end they pulled her out by the hands, hands that were as white as her face. Dribble was still running down her chin. Her eyes were open. I couldn’t move either because of my leg, which was bent around the wrong way. I asked them to bring her over to me. I saw her eyes, and then I saw her. Blood was streaming from her. There was blood everywhere, except for on her face.

They opened her fur coat and they saw that she was wearing nothing underneath, except for her slacks. The pale skin of her hips appeared dull and lifeless under the glow of the sodium vapour reflector lamps, which lit up the road. When we had hit the tree, her zipper was already undone.
THE SLIP-UP
I

Clams Jorjobert was watching his wife, the lovely Gaviale, breastfeeding the fruit of their loins, a healthy three-month-old baby of the female sect, but none of this has much bearing on the rest of the story.

Clams Jorjobert had eleven francs in his pocket and it was the day before the rent was due. But nothing in the world would make him touch the wads of thousand franc notes stashed under the mattress on which his eldest son was sleeping. His son was eleven on April twelfth. Clams only ever kept a few notes and some shrapnel up to the value of around ten francs on him, and put the rest aside, which meant that, at that precise moment, Jorjobert considered that all he possessed in the world were those eleven francs and the acute sense of responsibility a newborn baby brings.

“It must be about time that child of mine, whom I acknowledge but who is almost four months old” (he said), “started to earn its keep …”

“Now listen,” his wife, the lovely Gaviale, answered. “Why not wait until she is six (months old)? You can’t send children out to work too young, because it can lead to deformities in the spinal column.”

“That’s a good point,” Jorjobert answered. “But there must be a way around this.”

“When are you going to buy me that buggy, so I can take her out?” Gaviale said.

“I’ll make you one from an old soapbox and some Packard wheels,” Jorjobert said. “That way, it will save us money, but it will still be very smart. In Auteuil, all the kids go out … in … Oh, my God!” he concluded, “I’ve just had an idea!”

II

The lovely Gaviale tiptoed through the enormous front door of the building situated at number one hundred and seventy, as Caroline Lampion, the well-known Belgian star would say in the way of her compatriots, of Damozart Avenue. A stairwell decorated with over-the-top wrought iron could be seen in the black and white tiled hallway that stretched off to the left. Under the lower part of the spiral staircase, which
enclosed a Louis X lift (an imitation Boulle), were two superb baby carriages manufactured through the combined effort of Bonnichon Brothers and Mape. They were decorated with white rabbit skin and had been left there for the children living upstairs. The first one belonged to the illustrious Bois-Zépais de la Quenelle family and the second to the Marcelin du Congé family.

The lengthy description in the last paragraph allowed the lovely Gaviale to hide behind it and to sneak past the concierge’s lodge unnoticed. It should also be mentioned that the lovely Gaviale was elegantly dressed in a “New Look” long skirt, worn over the top of an equally smart lace petticoat (from her first communion). In her arms she was tenderly carrying the daughter the Lord had bestowed on her following a nice little moment shared with Clams Jorjobert, her husband.

The lovely Gaviale cast a quick glance over the two baby carriages and decided that the one belonging to little Bois-Zépais was in better condition than the one belonging to little Congé. Quite rightly too, because every time a horse crossed his nanny’s path, little Congé would piss in it like a dirty old man. It was a strange reaction, because six years later, little Congé’s father died destitute after losing all of his money on the horses. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves …

With a great deal of confidence, she entered the lift, went up to the second floor and came down again by the stairs, making sure she was seen by the concierge. She then approached the baby carriage and gently placed her daughter Véronique, whose manner of conception has already been alluded to, on the rabbit skin pillows.

Head held high, she pushed the baby carriage through the huge front door of the building and out onto Damozart Avenue.

Clams Jorjobert, her husband, was waiting for her a hundred metres away.

“Perfect,” he said, as he examined the baby carriage. “You’d expect to pay thirty thousand for it in the shop. We should easily be able to get twelve.”

“That’s twelve thousand for me,” Gaviale specified.

“Of course,” Clams acknowledged graciously. “It was a trial run and you pulled it off perfectly. I think that’s only fair.”
“So, you’ll have it back to me in an hour?” Léon Dodiléon said.
“Of course,” Clams guaranteed.

Dodiléon handed Clams a motorcycle helmet. He buried his head inside and looked at himself in the mirror.

“Not bad!” he said. “It suits me! I look like a real bike rider.”

“Off you go,” Léon said. “See you here in an hour.”

An hour later, Clams pulled up out the front of the building where his old friend Léon lived, on a shiny Norton motorcycle, that had mudguards covering half the wheels.

“Not bad,” Léon said. He had been standing in front of the building, looking at his watch, waiting for him to return.

“You would expect to pay two hundred and fifty thousand for it in the shop,” Clams said. “But since there are no papers and given that I’ve just stolen it, I wouldn’t expect it to fetch much more than a hundred thousand. But nevertheless, it was still worthwhile lending me your helmet, wasn’t it?”

“Sure,” Léon Dodiléon said. “Tell me … what if I swap you mine for it? That way, you won’t have any problems with the papers.”


“Yes,” Léon Dodiléon said. “But it doesn’t have the same smooth tricuspid gear change like this one.”

“I never go back on my word,” Clams answered. “Let’s shake on it. Even if you did get the better end of the deal, you’re still my friend.”

IV

Clams sold Dodiléon’s bike for a hundred and fifty thousand and, while his friend was rotting away in prison, he bought himself a nice chauffeur’s uniform, complete with cap.
“You do understand,” he explained to his wife, the lovely Gaviale (who was munching on handfuls of Turkish delight while Véronique was sucking on a bottle filled with Heidsick Vintage Brut Reserve), “that no one would ever think of taking a vehicle belonging to the diplomatic corps, especially one with a chauffeur inside.”

“Especially one with a chauffeur inside,” she answered. “That’s right.”

“I could just as easily steal a train,” Clams Jorjobert explained. “But I’d have to get grease on my hands and soot on my face. Besides, even though I have a good education, it doesn’t necessarily mean that I could drive a train.”

“Oh!” Gaviale said. “I’m sure that you would manage quite nicely.”

“I prefer not to try,” Jorjobert said. “Besides, I’m not overly ambitious, so an income of around a hundred thousand francs a day is more than enough for me. Then there’s also the inconvenience of being restricted to railway tracks. Travelling on the rail network without authorisation is bound to cause a few problems as well, and I’m sure I’d be noticed if I took the train onto the road.”

“You don’t have the mettle,” the lovely Gaviale replied, “and that is why I love you. Can I ask you something?”

“Whatever you want, my dear,” said Clams Jorjobert.

He strutted around like a peacock in his chauffeur’s uniform. She pulled him towards her, whispered a few words in his ear, blushed and then buried her face in a berzinged cushion.

Clams burst out laughing.

“I’ll convert the embassy’s Cadillac into cash and then I’ll go and get it for you straight away,” he said.

Things with the Cadillac went according to plan. He had no trouble collecting his thirteen hundred thousand francs, because false papers for Cadillacs, which are now mass-produced, had just been put on sale and were now available in all tobacco shops.

Before returning home, Clams paid a visit to a second-hand clothes dealer he knew. A quarter of an hour later, he went back up to see Gaviale. Everything was completed and he was carrying a large parcel.

“Here you are dear,” he said. “I have the uniform. It’s all there, right down to the axe. The fire truck is all yours whenever you want it.”
“Can we take it out on Sundays?”
“Of course.”
“Will it have a long ladder?”
“It will have a very long ladder.”
“Darling, I love you!”

Véronique was not happy because she thought two children in the family were already enough.

In his prison cell, Dodiléon was longing to be let out. He heard footsteps and stood up to see who it was. The guard stopped in front of his door and the key rattled in the lock. Clams Jorjobert entered.

“Hello,” he said.

“Hello, old friend,” Dodiléon replied. “It’s nice of you to come and keep me company, because I am longing to be let out.”

They both laughed, even though the word play had already been used.

“What brings you here?” Léon asked.

“It’s ridiculous,” Jorjobert sighed. “I’d just pinched a fire truck for her, but you can never please women. She decided that she wanted a hearse.”

“She has to be joking,” Dodiléon said sympathetically. His own wife had never wanted anything more than a thirty-five-seater bus.

“Do you know what I had to go through?” Clams continued. “I bought a coffin, I climbed inside and off I went in search of a hearse.”

“That should have done it,” Dodiléon said.

“Have you ever tried walking around in a coffin?” Clams said. “My feet got tangled up inside and when I slipped over, I crushed a small dog. Since it belonged to the wife of the governor of the prison, it didn’t take them long to bring me here.”

Léon Dodiléon shook his head.

“Damn,” he said. “Some people just don’t seem to have any luck!”
A SAD STORY
The yellowish glow from the street light illuminated the black square of the window pane. It was six o’clock at night. Ouen looked up and sighed. He was hardly making any progress with the word trap he was building.

He hated these windows without curtains, but he hated curtains even more. And he loathed the nondescript architecture of buildings designed for human habitation that had been pierced with holes for thousands of years. With a heavy heart he went back to his work. It was a question of quickly aligning the cogs of the decomposer, which broke the sentence down into words so that these could then be captured. He had made things more difficult for himself almost on purpose by refusing to treat conjunctions as real words. Because he thought they were dry, he was denying them the right to noble status and was eliminating them and collecting them in the shuddering compartments where full stops, commas and other punctuation marks were piling up before being filtered out and eliminated. It was repetitive and boring, but it was difficult to control. Ouen was working his fingers to the bone.

But he was taking it too far. He put down the pair of fine gold tweezers, popped the magnifying glass from his eye with a flex of his cheek bone and stood up. He suddenly needed to stretch his legs. He had some energy to burn and was feeling restless. Being outside would do him good.

The footpath of the deserted alley stole along beneath his feet. Despite the fact that Ouen had been down this path before, such furtive and cunning behaviour on its part never ceased to irritate him. He stepped off the footpath onto the side of the road and into the oily residue of a recently dried up drain that was glimmering under the halogen lights.

The walk was doing him good and, as the air flowed through his nasal passages to wash back over the convolutions of his brain, it gradually decongested that large, weighty bihemispheric organ. This is what usually happened, but still, he was amazed every time.

Being in a state of perpetual naivety, he lived life more than others.

He reached the end of the short dead-end street and hesitated, because he wasn’t sure which way to go next. Unable to make up his mind, he kept going straight ahead. Port and starboard seemed to have nothing on offer. The road kept going straight to the
bridge. He could look at today’s water, which was probably not that much different to yesterday’s, but then again, the appearance of water is only one of its many features.

Like the alley he had just left, the road was also deserted. The yellow light filtering through the fog created a salamander-like effect on the asphalt. The road rose slightly to the humpback bridge whose stone piers were constantly being eaten away by the flowing waters of the river. Ouen would only stop and lean on the wall of the bridge if there was nobody upstream or downstream to see him. If there were already others looking up and down the river, it would be rather pointless to add one more gaze to the leering throng. He would simply continue on to the next bridge, which, as always, would be free of people, because everyone knew that was where you were likely to catch impetigo.

The empty street fading into darkness, two young priests passed by furtively. From time to time they would stop to kiss tongloriously in the shadow of an archway. Ouen was moved. Leaving the house had certainly been the right thing to do. Out on the street, you can see all sorts of things to cheer you up. He now had a spring in his step and immediately thought of a solution to the remaining problems associated with the assembly of his word trap. It was so childish really. With a little care, he would definitely be able to take control of them, flatten them, strike them down, dismember them and tear them apart. In a word, he would make those words disappear.

A general passed by next. He was holding a leather leash attached to a prisoner who was frothing at the mouth. So there would be no danger to the general, the prisoner had been put in shackles and his hands tied behind his head. At the first sign of any trouble, the general would tug on the leash, which would then cause the prisoner to bite down on his lip. The general was walking quickly, because his day was over. He was on his way home to eat his alphabet soup. As he did every night, he would spell out his name on the rim of the bowl three times faster than the prisoner and, as the prisoner looked on furiously, he would devour both bowls of soup. The prisoner never had a chance. His name was Joseph Ulrich de Saxakrammerigothensburg, while the general’s name was Pol. But Ouen couldn’t be expected to know this. He was more interested in the small polished boots the general was wearing and thought that he wouldn’t feel comfortable in the prisoner’s shoes, or in those of the general for that matter. The
prisoner hadn’t chosen to be a prisoner, while this was not the case with the general. You can’t always find someone who wants to be a prisoner, but there is never a shortage of applicants who want to be sewage workers, cops, judges and generals – proof that even the dirtiest jobs must have something going for them. Ouen was lost in thought, wondering about all those occupations nobody wanted to do. Certainly, you were ten times better off building word traps than you were being a general. Somehow, ten times didn’t seem to be enough. Doesn’t matter. Same principle.

The light from the beacons attached to the crossbeams under the bridge created a very nice effect, and what’s more, they were very useful for navigation. Ouen appreciated it for what it was and walked past without even looking. His destination was in sight and he hurried towards it. However, something caught his eye. There seemed to be a small unusual shape on one of the walls of the bridge. He started running. There was a young girl standing above the river on an uneven stone ledge, holding on to a dripstone that had been built to allow water to drain away after heavy rain. It looked like she wanted to throw herself into the river. Ouen leaned on the wall behind her.

“I’m ready,” he said. “You can jump now.”

She looked at him hesitantly. She was a pretty young girl, with beige skin.

“I’m wondering which side of the bridge I should jump from,” she said. “If I throw myself in upstream, there is a good chance that I will be caught in the current and washed up against a pier. Downstream, there are the whirlpools. But then again, I might become disorientated when I hit the water and try to grab hold of something for support. In both cases, there is a good chance that someone will see me and jump into the river to try to rescue me.”

“The problem is worthy of consideration,” Ouen said. “And I must say that you certainly do need to give it some serious thought. Naturally, I am entirely at your disposal to help you make the right decision.”

“You’re very kind,” the young girl with the red mouth said. “It’s been bothering me so much that I just don’t know what to think any more.”

“We could always go and find a café and discuss it further,” Ouen said. “I don’t talk very well without a drink in front of me. Can I buy you one? It might help to make things a little easier.”
“I’d love to,” the young girl said.

Ouen helped her climb back on to the bridge and, as he did, he noticed that she had curves in all the right places. He complimented her on her attributes.

“I know that I should be blushing,” she said, “but I know deep down that you are absolutely right. I do have a nice figure. You should see my legs.”

She raised her flannel skirt and Ouen cast an admiring glance over her legs, and noticed that she was a natural blonde.

“I see what you mean,” he answered, his eyes almost bulging out of his head.

“So! Let’s go and have a drink and when we’ve sorted out your problem, we will come back here so you can jump off the right side.”

They set off together, arm in arm, both feeling very happy. She told him her name was Flavie and this proof of honesty only served to heighten the interest he already had in her.

When they were comfortably seated in the warmth of a modest establishment, frequented by barge operators and their barges, she started speaking again.

“I don’t want you to take me for a fool,” she began, “but this uncertainty, which I felt when deciding from which side of the bridge I should jump, has always been with me. So, the time has come to decide, at least for the moment. Otherwise, I will always be remembered as being foolish and faint-hearted.”

“The problem,” Ouen conceded, “comes from the fact that the answer is not always cut and dry. In your case, neither upstream nor downstream seems to be the ideal solution. However, there is no way to avoid them. So then, your definition of upstream and downstream is going to depend on where the bridge is situated on the river.”

“Except at the source,” Flavie observed.

“Exactly,” Ouen said, charmed by this presence of mind. “But generally, the sources of rivers aren’t very deep.”

“And therein lies the problem,” Flavie said.

“Well,” Ouen said, “there’s always the possibility of resorting to a suspension bridge.”

“I wonder if that wouldn’t be cheating just a little.”
“Going back to sources for a minute, those of the Touvre have a fairly high success rate in most types of suicide attempts.”

“It’s too far away,” she said.

“It’s near Charente,” Ouen stated.

“If it becomes a chore,” Flavie said, “if you have to devote as much time and effort in trying to drown yourself as you have to do for everything else in life, it becomes disheartening. It’s enough to make you want to go and commit suicide.”

“By the way,” Ouen said, “why such a definitive gesture?” The question had only just occurred to him.

“It’s a really sad story,” Flavie answered, wiping from her eye a single tear, which annoyingly didn’t split into a mirror image of itself.

“I’m dying to hear it,” Ouen revealed, warming to the occasion.

“All right then.”

He liked Flavie’s straightforward approach. She hadn’t been forced to tell her story, although she was obviously aware of the possible consequences once her secret had been revealed. He was expecting her story to be quite long and drawn out. Under normal circumstances, there is never a shortage of opportunities for a pretty girl to be surrounded by people her own age. In the same way, a jam sandwich has more chance of gathering information on the anatomy and morals of dipterans than an ungrateful, spotty piece of flint. So undoubtedly, Flavie’s life story would be full of facts and events from which a useful moral could be drawn. Useful to Ouen, that is. The lessons of one person’s life are only useful for others because the teller knows only too well the reasons why he is telling his tale in a select, false and truncated manner.

“I was born,” Flavie began, “twenty-two and two-third years ago in a small castle in Normandy near Quettehou. My father, a former teacher of deportment at the Mademoiselle Désir Institute, had retired there with lots of money, to peacefully enjoy his chambermaid, and the fruits of his persistent labour. My mother, one of his old students who had been quite difficult to seduce because my father was very ugly, hadn’t gone there with him and instead was living in Paris, a mistress shared between an archbishop and a police commissioner. My father, fiercely opposed to anything to do with the church, was unaware of the relationship between my mother and the archbishop,
otherwise he would have asked for a divorce. On the other hand, he was delighted with the family connection to the investigator, because it provided him with the opportunity to publicly humiliate that fine public servant, by ridiculing his penchant for somebody else’s leftovers. My father also had a considerable fortune tied up in a plot of land (that was left to him by his grandfather), in Paris at the Place de l’Opéra. He liked to go there on Sundays to tend his artichokes right under the very noses of the bus drivers. As you can see, my father despised uniforms of all shapes and sizes.”

“But where do you fit into the picture?” Ouen said, thinking she may have wandered off the track.

“That’s true.”

She swallowed a mouthful of green drink. And suddenly began to cry silently, like the ideal tap. She seemed despondent. She must have been. Moved, Ouen took her hand. He let go of it immediately, because he didn’t know what to do with it, which was all right, because Flavie was starting to settle down.

“I’m a silly sausage,” she said.

“No you’re not,” Ouen protested. He thought she was being too hard on herself. “I was wrong to have interrupted you.”

“I’ve told you a pack of lies,” she said, “because I am embarrassed. The archbishop was, in fact, a simple bishop, and the police commissioner, a traffic policeman. As for me, I’m a dressmaker who has trouble making ends meet. Customers are scarce, but the few there are, are so mean. More trouble than they’re worth. It seems that they are laughing at me, as they watch me work myself into the ground. I don’t have any money, I’m hungry and I’m unhappy. And my friend is in prison. He sold secrets to a foreign power, but the price he got for them was higher than that set by the government, so he was arrested. The taxman is always asking me for more money. He’s my uncle. If he doesn’t pay off his gambling debts, my aunt and her six children will be ruined. Do you realise that the oldest is thirty-five? If only you knew how much a boy that age eats!”

She broke down sobbing.

“Day and night I work away with my needle, but all to no avail because I no longer have enough money to buy a spool of thread.”
Ouen didn’t know what to say. He patted her on the back and thought that somehow he should try to make her feel better. But how? It doesn’t just magically happen by breathing on someone. At least … come to think of it, has anyone ever tried?

He breathed on her.

“What’s wrong with you?” the young girl asked.

“Nothing,” he said. “I was sighing. Your story makes me sad.”

“Oh,” she continued. “That? That’s nothing. I don’t like to tell you this, but it gets worse.”

He stroked her thigh affectionately.

“Get it off your chest. It’ll make you feel better.”

“Is that making you feel better?”

“My goodness,” he said, “that’s what people say. As a general rule, of course.”

“But what does it matter?” she said.

“But what does it matter?” he repeated.

“There’s another thing that has contributed to making my already miserable life hell,” Flavie continued, “and that’s my good-for-nothing brother. He sleeps with his dog, spits on the floor as soon as he wakes up, kicks the poor cat up the backside and repeatedly belches in front of the caretaker’s wife.”

Ouen remained silent. When a person’s behaviour becomes so crude and degenerates to such an extent, you find yourself lost for words.

“You have to wonder,” Flavie said, “that if he is like this now at eighteen months, what will he be like when he’s older?”

At that point, she broke down again. The sobbing was less frequent but more intense. Ouen patted her cheek, which was hot with tears, but quickly withdrew his burning fingers.

“Oh, my poor girl,” he said.

That was her cue.

“As I said, I’ve saved the worst for last,” she added.

“Go on,” Ouen insisted. He was ready for anything now.
She told him, and he quickly stuck his fingers in his ears so he didn’t have to listen. The little he did hear sent an unhealthy shiver down his spine, which made him soil his underpants.

“Is that everything?” he asked in the loud voice of someone who has just had their hearing restored.

“That’s everything,” Flavie said. “I feel better now.”

She emptied her glass in one gulp, leaving the contents on the table. This childish prank didn’t manage to cheer Ouen up.

“Poor thing!” he finally sighed.

He hauled his wallet out into broad daylight and summoned the waiter, who came over despite his obvious disgust.

“Did you want something, sir?”

“Yes,” Ouen said. “How much do I owe you?”

“Plenty,” the waiter said.

“Here you are,” Ouen said, giving him more.

“I’m not going to thank you,” the waiter pointed out, “service is already included.”

“That’s fine,” Ouen said. “Go away, you smell”

The waiter was offended, which served him right, and went away. Flavie looked at Ouen with admiration.

“You have money!”

“Take it all,” Ouen said. “You need it more than I do.”

She was overwhelmed, like she had just met Father Christmas. The look on her face was hard to describe, because no one has ever met Father Christmas.

He was returning home, alone. It was late. Only one in every two street lamps was still lit. The others were out on their feet. Ouen was walking, head down, thinking about Flavie, thinking about how happy she had been when she had taken all of his money. He felt quite moved. Not a penny to her name, poor girl. At her age, you can feel lost with no means of support. Now that’s strange. He remembered that they were both exactly the same age. She was so destitute. Now that she had taken everything, he was starting to realise the effect it can have. He looked around. The street was bathed in
pale light. The moon was directly over the bridge. No money, and that word trap to finish. The empty street filled with a slow wedding procession of people who looked like they were walking in their sleep. But not even this could cheer Ouen up. He cast his mind back to the prisoner. For him, things were simple. For himself as well, really. The bridge was approaching. No money. Poor, poor Flavie. No, that’s right. She had some now. What a heart-wrenching tale. No one should have to endure such misfortune. It was lucky he had been there. For her, that is. Does someone always arrive just in time?

He climbed over the wall and took up his position on the ledge. The sounds from the wedding party were tapering off in the distance. He looked right, then left. It had indeed been lucky for her that he had passed by. Not a cat to be seen. He shrugged his shoulders and felt his empty pockets. Obviously, it was pointless to go on living under these conditions. But what’s all this fuss about upstream and downstream?

He let himself fall into the river. Exactly as he thought; you go straight to the bottom. The side didn’t matter.
THE THINKER
On the day he turned eleven, young Urodonal Carrier suddenly became aware of the existence of God. In fact, Fate had intervened unexpectedly and had elevated him to the status of a ‘thinker’ and, if you consider that up until this point in his life he had shown himself to be completely stupid in everything, then it is difficult to believe that the Lord was not somehow involved in this sudden transformation.

The cynical citizens of La-Houspignole-sur-Côtés, in typical fashion, probably will disagree with me, preferring to believe that it was because of the knock on the head young Urodonal sustained the previous day when he fell over, together with the nine swift kicks up the backside generously dished out on the morning of his birthday by his good uncle who had been caught keeping a close eye on the maid to make sure she was changing her underwear every three weeks as the boy’s father had asked. But this village is full of atheists, who are supported in their sin by the irresponsible ramblings of the teacher from the old school, as well as by a priest whose holy words aren’t taken seriously any more because he gets drunk every Saturday. Anyway, if all this is new to you, one doesn’t just suddenly become a thinker without being tempted to attribute it to the intervention of a Higher Power, and the best thing in this case is to thank God.

It had all been so simple. The priest, who happened to be sober for a change during the retreat, which preceded communion, questioned Urodonal:

“What was the reason for Adam and Eve’s downfall?”

Nobody knew the answer because in the country making love is no longer considered a sin. But Urodonal raised his hand.

“Do you know?” the priest asked.

“Yes sir,” Urodonal said. “There was a mistake in Genesis.”

The priest felt the wing of the Holy Spirit pass over him and he closed his collar against the draught. He sent the kids on their way and sat down to think. Three months later, and still thinking, he left the village to become a hermit.

“There’s a lot to what he said,” he mused.
From that day, Urodonal’s reputation as a thinker became firmly established throughout the whole of La-Houspignole. People would hang on his every word. However, it must be said that from that day on, the Holy Spirit hardly ever revealed itself again in the village. One day in a physics class, during a lesson on electric currents, the teacher asked him, “What does it mean when the needle of a galvanometer moves?”

“That there’s current …” Urodonal answered.

But that was nothing. He continued:

“That there’s current, or that the galvanometer is broken … you’ll more than likely find a mouse inside.”

So at the age of fourteen, young Urodonal was awarded a scholarship, and for the rest of his school days never had another original thought. But everyone knew what he was capable of.

At the end of his schooling, he reaffirmed his reputation in a blaze of glory during a philosophy lecture.

“I am going to read to you some words from Epictetus,” the teacher said.

And so he read:

“If you wish to continue in your quest for wisdom, with regards to the material world, be content to be thought foolish and stupid.”

“And vice versa …” Urodonal said quietly.

The teacher bowed before him.

“My dear child,” he said, “I have nothing more to teach you.”

Urodonal stood up and left the room, leaving the door ajar. In a friendly voice, the teacher called him back.

“Urodonal, remember, a door must be either open or closed …”

“A door must be either open or closed, or taken off its hinges if the lock needs to be repaired in a hurry,” Urodonal said.

Then Urodonal went away and took the train to Paris in a bid to conquer the capital.
Urodonal’s first impression of Paris was that Montmartre metro station smelled like a country toilet. However, he kept this observation to himself because he didn’t think Parisians would want to hear it. Then he tried to find some work.

He thought long and hard before deciding on a career he wanted to pursue. Since he had been part of the community band in La-Houspignole, where he played the role of second extendable bugle, he was leaning towards something in the field of music.

However, he felt he needed to justify his decision and in typical brilliant fashion, quickly found a reason.

“Music,” he said to himself, “soothes the savage beast. But, strict behavioural guidelines are indispensable for any self-respecting man, so maybe it wouldn’t be such a good idea to become a musician. But on the other hand, the inhabitants of this Babylon don’t have any morals, so consequently music presents no danger to them.”

As you can see, Urodonal’s capacity for critical analysis had been developed to such an extent through his studies that some found it disturbing. But we are not talking here about just any ordinary man; and his body was strong enough to house his exceptional brain.

Music provided Urodonal with plenty of free time, so he decided to try his hand at literature.

Several unsuccessful essays, far from deterring his genius, only served to inspire the following epigram:

“An author’s success,” he confided to his friends, “more or less depends on his ability to identify, on paper, with idiots.”

In his love life, Urodonal was just as prodigious.

“To say that you don’t love me any more,” he declared to his jealous girlfriend, Marinouille, “is like saying that I no longer think that you love me. But how can you be sure?”

Upon which, Marinouille remained silent.
However, the great expanse of Urodonal’s brain wouldn’t allow him to be satisfied with the mediocre existence he was leading with Marinouille and his bugle.

“Live dangerously,” he would sometimes say, with a fiery look in his untamed eye.

And then one day, Marinouille found him dead in bed. He had only just recently become involved in some kind of a relationship with a young prison escapee of dubious morals who had been serving a three-month sentence for the murder of twelve people.

Yet there was nothing perverse about Urodonal. The explanation for his sad demise was to be found in a collection of unpublished reflections, which contained only one on the first page. Urodonal had written:

“What could be more dangerous than to have yourself killed?”

And how true it is.
LEOBILLE’S PARTY
I

From the inside, Folubert Sansonnet’s eyelids had a lovely reddish-orange glow, a result of the undulating ray of sunlight that fell directly onto his face through the slats of the shutters, and Folubert was smiling in his sleep. He was walking lightly over the soft, white, warm gravel in the garden of the Hesperides. Beautiful cuddly animals were licking his toes. That’s when he woke up. He gently plucked Frédéric the pet snail from his big toe and put him away until the next morning. Frédéric wasn’t happy about it, but didn’t say anything.

Folubert sat on his bed. He took time out in the morning to think about the day that lay ahead, to try to spare himself the countless problems that clutter the lives of people who worry, are badly organised or untidy, for whom the slightest act is the pretext for innumerable distractions, which (sorry about the length of this sentence) are quite often insignificant because they are soon forgotten.

Today he had to think about:

1. How he was going to bedeck himself;
2. How he was going to nourish himself;
3. How he was going to entertain himself.

And that’s all, and because it was Sunday, what he was going to do for money was one problem already solved.

So Folubert thought about each of these items in turn.

With a great deal of care, he started to get himself ready. He brushed his teeth briskly and blew his nose with his fingers. Then he got dressed. On Sundays, he always started with the tie and finished with the shoes. It was an excellent way to proceed. From his drawer he pulled a pair of striped designer socks that had one blue stripe, one clear stripe, one blue stripe, one clear stripe, and so on. With this style of sock, you could paint your feet whatever colour you wanted, and then that colour would appear in between the blue stripes. Since he was feeling a little shy, he chose a tin of apple green paint.

As for the rest, he put on his everyday clothes, a blue shirt and clean underwear, because he was already thinking about the third thing on the list.
For lunch he had herring canapés drizzled with sweet oil and bread that had a nice shiny glaze. In baker’s terms, you would say that it was ‘as fresh as an eye’, and just like an eye, the bread was fringed with long pink lashes.

Finally, he allowed himself to think about how he was going to spend his Sunday. Today was his friend Léobille’s birthday, and there was a party being thrown in his honour.

At the very thought of a party, Foluber would go off into his own little world. You see, Folubert was extremely shy and he secretly envied the self-assurance of the regular party-goers. He would have liked to possess the smooth style of Grouzniê, combined with Doddy’s spirit, the smart engaging charm of Rémenfol, the attractive severity of chief Abadibada, or the dazzling swashbuckling behaviour of any member from the Lorientais Club.

All the same, Folubert had beautiful chestnut-coloured eyes, soft wavy hair and a warm smile, which, without a doubt, would have helped him win any heart. But he was never brave enough to use his physique to his advantage and so he always ended up alone, while his friends danced the night away to the swing, the jitterbug, and the barbette gauloise.

This often made him sad, but at night he would find solace in his dreams, where he would see himself full of confidence, surrounded by pretty girls, all begging him to agree to just one dance.

Folubert remembered this one particular dream. There was a very beautiful girl in a dress of lavender blue stretch crepe, with long blonde hair that fell down over her shoulders. She was wearing small blue snakeskin shoes and an unusual bracelet that he could no longer exactly describe. She had liked him a lot in this dream and, at the end, they left the party together.

He must have kissed her, and maybe she had even allowed herself to perform one or two extra little favours for him.

Folubert blushed. He would have plenty of time to think about that on his way to Léobille’s. He checked his pockets to make sure he had enough money and went out to buy the cheapest bottle of spirits he could find, because he didn’t drink.
Just as Folubert was waking up, the Major was being dragged from his sleep by the husky voice of his troubled conscience. Both feet hit the sticky wooden floor of his bedroom at the same time. He had the usual foul taste of gunge in his mouth.

In the shadowy darkness, the sinister glow from his glass eye cast a dull light on the silk scarf he was painting. The design originally depicted a donkey grazing in a green field flanked by the Présvert brothers, but it had assumed the appearance of a Venetian death’s head and the Major knew that on this particular day he had a rotten deed to perform.

He remembered the party that was being thrown at Léobille’s place and gave an evil snigger in D sharp. His wretched state of mind was proven beyond all doubt when he hit the wrong note. Setting his sights on a bottle of rough red, he downed the dregs and felt better. Then, standing before the mirror, he did his best to impersonate Sergueï Andrejef Papanine in Ivan the Terrible. He didn’t quite succeed because he didn’t have the beard, but nevertheless it was a reasonable attempt.

The Major sniggered again and retired to his study to plan the sabotage of Léobille’s party. He was out for revenge because for several weeks Léobille had been spreading the most vicious rumours about him, going so far as saying that he was turning into a decent human being.

This warranted severe retribution.

The Major was very good at bringing down anyone who crossed his path. A very bad upbringing was partly responsible, but there was also his natural disposition to be underhanded, as well as an abnormal desire to inflict pain on others.

While we are at it, let’s not forget that horrible little moustache he was meanly cultivating on his top lip to prevent insects from attacking it, covering it with a net during the day so that birds couldn’t land.
Folubert Sansonnet stood trembling before the door to Léobille’s apartment. He poked the index finger of his right hand into the doorbell, but the buzzer was asleep, tucked away in the back of the small hole.

Folubert’s sudden action woke the buzzer with a start. It rolled over and bit Folubert on the finger, who then let out a high-pitched scream.

Léobille’s sister, who was on the lookout in the entrance foyer, immediately opened the door. Folubert followed her into the hallway, where she applied a plaster to the wound and quickly relieved him of his bottle.

The sounds from the record player were ringing joyfully throughout the apartment, wrapping the furniture in a light, clear protective layer of music.

Léobille was standing in front of the fireplace, talking to two girls. Folubert became flustered when he saw the second one and, as Léobille came towards him with his hand outstretched, he tried to conceal his anxiety.

“Hello,” Léobille said.

“Hello,” Folubert said.

“Let me introduce you,” Léobille said. “Azyme (she was the first girl), this is Folubert, this is Jennifer.”

Folubert acknowledged Azyme with a nod of the head, but lowered his eyes when he held out his hand to greet Jennifer. She was wearing a dress of pale red stretch crepe, red snakeskin shoes and a bracelet so unusual, he recognised it immediately. Her red hair fell down over her shoulders. She was, in all respects, just like the girl in his dream. But that is to be expected because, after all, dreams take place at night.

Léobille seemed to be quite preoccupied with Azyme, so Folubert plucked up the courage and asked Jennifer for a dance. He kept his eyes lowered, because he couldn’t take them off a pair of very interesting items, bulging out over the top of a low square-cut dress that were just begging to be noticed.

“Are you an old friend of Léobille’s?” Jennifer said.
“I’ve known him for three years,” Folubert explained. “We met each other at judo.”

“You do judo? Have you ever had to fight for your life?”

“Er …” Folubert was embarrassed. “I haven’t had the opportunity … I don’t get to fight very often.”

“Are you afraid?” Jennifer asked sarcastically.

Folubert didn’t like the way the conversation was heading and tried to regain the confidence he had had that night in his dream.

“I saw you in a dream …” he ventured.

“I never dream,” Jennifer said. “So it seems most unlikely. You must be mistaken.”

“You were blonde …” Folubert said, on the edge of despair.

Her waist was thin, and up close you could see the twinkle in her eye.

“There. You see,” Jennifer said. “It wasn’t me … I’m a redhead …”

“It was you …” Folubert mumbled.

“I don’t think so,” Jennifer said. “I don’t like dreams. I prefer to live in the real world.”

She looked him straight in the face, but he lowered his eyes again without realising. He didn’t want to hold her too close, because then he wouldn’t be able to take in the view.

Jennifer shrugged her shoulders. She liked sport, and men who were brave and strong.

“I like sport,” she said, “and men who are brave and strong. I don’t like dreams, and I’m as full of life as anyone can be.”

She pulled away from him because the record had come to a screeching halt at the end of the track, due to the fact that our friend Léobille had just raised the arm without warning. Folubert thanked her for the dance. He would have liked to engage her in some captivating and witty conversation, but just as he was about to say something truly captivating and witty, some horrible long lanky fellow edged his way between them and threw his arm over Jennifer’s shoulder.
Folubert stepped back in horror, but Jennifer had a smile on her face. Devastated, he plonkéd himself down in a deep goatskin leather armchair.

He was very sad, and came to the realisation that this was going to be a party just like all of the others after all, fun and full of pretty girls … but not for him.

IV

Léobille’s sister was about to open the door, when suddenly a loud explosion rang out. She stopped, dumbfounded, and clutched her racing heart. The door yielded under the force of the Major’s boot.

In his hand was the smoking revolver he had just used to silence the buzzer. His mustard-coloured socks were an insult to the entire world.

“I’ve put an end to that wretched creature once and for all,” he said. “Feed it to the vultures.”

“But …” Léobille’s sister said.

Then she burst into tears, because the buzzer had been with them for so long, it was like part of the family. She ran crying to her room and the Major, delighted, executed a crepuscular dance move, before he put his gun back in his pocket.

Léobille arrived. He innocently held out his hand to greet the Major.

The Major dumped a large pile of dog droppings in it, which he had just collected from outside the front door of the building.

“Out of the way boy,” he said to Léobille. “I want to get past … Anything to drink in this place?”

“Yes,” Léobille answered in a trembling voice. “Tell me … you are not going to break anything …”

“I am going to break EVERYTHING,” the Major said coldly through clenched teeth.

He stepped up to Léobille and with that frightening look in his glass eye, stared him right in the face.
“So boy, I hear that you’ve been telling everyone I’ve got a job?” he said. “You’ve been saying I’ve changed my evil ways? How can you stoop so low?”

He took several deep breaths and in a thundering voice said, “Your party, boy, … you could say it’s going up in smoke!”

Léobille turned pale. He was still holding the thing the Major had put in his hand, too scared to move.

“I … I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said.

“Shut it boy,” the Major said. “Everything you say from now on will only make it worse for the Ma-jor-i-ty.”

Then he slipped his right foot in behind Léobille’s legs and gave him a shove. Léobille collapsed in a heap on the floor.

The guests didn’t pay too much attention. They were dancing and drinking and chatting, and couples were disappearing into empty rooms, just like at any other good party. A crowd had gathered around Jennifer.

The Major headed for the bar. Not far away, Folubert was still sitting forlornly in his armchair. The Major grabbed him by the collar of his jacket on the way past and dragged him to his feet.

“Come and drink,” he said. “I never drink alone.”

“But … I don’t drink …” Folubert answered.

He didn’t dare refuse, because he knew what the Major was like.

“Come on,” the Major said. “No nonsense!”

Folubert looked at Jennifer. Fortunately for him, she had her head turned the other way, engaged in lively conversation. Unfortunately for him, it is true, there were three boys standing around her, two others were at her feet, with a sixth admiring her from the top of a cupboard.

Léobille had quietly picked himself up off the floor and was about to slip out to notify the peace keepers, when he thought better of it. If the keepers in question came around to the house and decided to check the bedrooms, then he, Leobille, ran the risk of spending the night at the station.

Besides, he knew the Major and didn’t think he would let him get away as easily as that.
In fact, the Major had been watching Léobille and gave him a look that nailed him to the floor.

Then, still with Folubert in tow, he drew his gun and without taking aim, shot the top off a bottle. The guests all turned around in surprise.

“Out,” the Major said. “All the boys out. The girls can stay.”

He handed Folubert a glass.

“Drink up!”

The boys started to file out the door, leaving the girls by themselves. You didn’t mess with the Major.

“I don’t want to drink,” Folubert said.

He took one look at the Major’s face and changed his mind.

“To your health, boy,” the Major said.

Folubert’s eyes suddenly fell on Jennifer’s face. She was in a corner with the other girls, eyeing him with contempt. Folubert felt his legs give way beneath him.

The Major emptied his glass with a flick of the wrist.

Almost all of the boys had now left the room. The last one (the brave Jean Berdindin) grabbed a heavy ashtray and took aim at the Major’s head. The Major caught the missile in mid-flight and as quick as a flash, was on top of Berdindin.

“You … over here,” he said.

He dragged him into the middle of the room.

“You are going to take one of these girls, whichever one you like, and you are going to undress her, and then you are going to …”. (I can’t repeat what the Major said, but the girls were horrified).

“I refuse,” Berdindin said.

“Be careful boy,” the Major said.

“Anything, but not that,” Berdindin said.

Folubert, panic-stricken, poured himself a second drink without thinking and downed it in one go.

The Major said nothing. He went up to Berdindin, grabbed an arm and flipped him up in the air. Before he could hit the ground, the Major had whipped off his pants.

“Come on boy,” he said, “get yourself ready.
He looked at the girls.

“Any volunteers?” he said with a snigger.

“That’s enough,” Berdindin said, stumbling around in a daze. He tried to steady himself by clinging onto the Major, but soon regretted it. The Major picked him up and threw him to the ground. Berdindin went “Thud!”, and lay there rubbing his ribs.

“The redhead,” the Major said. “Over here.”

“Leave me alone,” Jennifer said, turning very pale.

Folubert was onto his fourth drink when the sound of Jennifer’s voice struck him like a thunderbolt. He slowly turned around on his heels and looked at her.

The Major went up to her and in the blink of an eye, tore the shoulder strap off her pale red dress (and if the truth be known, the view was really quite pleasant).

“Leave me alone,” Jennifer said a second time.

Folubert rubbed his eyes.

“This is all a dream!” he whispered in a husky voice.

“Over here,” the Major said to Folubert. “You are going to hold her down while your friend goes to work.”

“No!” Berdindin screamed. “I don’t want to! … Anything, but not that … Not a woman!”

“Okay,” the Major said. “Now I am going to be the good Major.”

Without letting go of Jennifer, he went back over to Folubert.

“Get undressed,” he said, “and take care of your friend, while I take care of her.”

“I refuse,” Folubert said.

“Pardon?” the Major said.

“I refuse,” Folubert said. “Go and take yourself off to Alfred’s. You are a real pain.”

The Major let go of Jennifer. He took a deep breath and his chest expanded to at least one hundred and twenty-five centimetres. Jennifer looked at Folubert with surprise, not knowing whether she should cover herself or whether it would be wiser to let Folubert draw strength from the sight of her breasts. She chose the latter.

Folubert looked at Jennifer and snorted. He stomped his feet up and down and charged headlong at the Major. The Major, struck right in the middle of the solar plexus
just as he had finished breathing in, buckled in two, his body making a horrible crunching noise under the impact. He was back up almost immediately and Folubert took advantage of the situation to deliver an absolutely classical judo move, which involved pulling the opponent’s ears down over the eyes while blowing air up the nostrils.

The Major turned bright blue as he started to choke. Love, combined with alcohol, had increased Folubert’s strength tenfold. He put his head between the Major’s legs, lifted him up and hurled him across the table full of food, through the window of the living room and out onto the street.

Calm was restored to Léobille’s living room. Silence reigned. Jennifer, without pulling up her dress, fell into Folubert’s arms, who then collapsed under the weight because she was all of sixty kilos. Fortunately, the goatskin leather armchair was behind him.

As for the Major, his body sailed quickly through the air. He managed to regain some control over his flailing limbs, but had the misfortune of landing in a red and black taxi with an open sunroof, which carted him off before he realised what had happened.

When he did realise, he got rid of the driver by threatening him with the ultimate act of malevolence, and drove the taxi home to Villa Coeur-de-Lion.

And then, along the way, not wanting to be seen as having been beaten, he knocked down and killed an old fruit and vegetable merchant, which was lucky, as had been selling most of his produce on the side of the road without a permit.

V

Folubert and Jennifer spent the rest of the night stitching together the red dress that she had removed to make the task easier. As a sign of gratitude, Léobille lent them his very own room for the occasion, as well as an electric iron made from Chinese enamel, that had been handed down to him from his mother, and whose mother had handed it down to her. In fact, his family had been passing it down from one generation of ironers to the next since the time of the First Crusade.
THE VOYEUR
That year, it seemed visitors had deserted Happy Valley for the more popular resorts. The snow on the narrow track, which provides the only access to the village remained undisturbed and the shutters of the “hotel”, if that’s what you could call the tiny red timber chalet dominating Elf’s Leap, looked like they were stuck to the windows.

In winter, Happy Valley was a sleepy, lethargic place. Nobody had ever been able to make it work as a fashionable ski resort; it just didn’t lend itself to it. A few advertising billboards, remnants of past attempts at glory, had temporarily littered the magnificent rugged countryside around Three Sisters Hollow, but they had been brought down by the relentless attack of the harsh wind and driving rain, which were enough to eventually cause even the toughest rock to crumble. The timber planks had become covered in moss and had been reclaimed by the wild landscape of the valley. The altitude of the place discouraged even the hardiest skiers, and as for the others, there were no facilities, like chairlifts and cable cars, or luxury hotels especially designed to lighten the weight of back pockets. The hamlet of Happy Valley itself was situated in a sheltered part of the mountain, and consisted of four or five houses scattered over an area up to six kilometres from the chalet. It was so isolated, that travellers who stopped at the hotel could be forgiven for thinking that they had landed in a foreign land at the end of the earth. On entering the building, they were surprised to discover that the hotelier did speak the same language as them after all, although “speak” is probably not the right word, because that taciturn man, whose face was weathered from long walks in the snow, didn’t utter three words during the course of the day. What’s more, his welcome was so reserved, and the lack of enthusiasm he was trying to generate so obvious, that the solitude and quietness of the place was easily explained. Only true devotees would put up with such a cool reception. It is true that the steep slopes, that looked as though they had been custom made for speed, were the reward for those who persevered, and together with perfect snow, they were the reason why people dared to venture so far away from the more popular places.

Jean saw the hotel from the top of the steep slope he had just climbed, puffing under the combined weight of his skis, heavy suitcase and altitude. It was exactly what
he had been promised; a unique outlook, solitude and crisp clean air that had a bite to it even though the sun was shining all around. He stopped and wiped his brow. Without giving a thought to the wind, he had stripped to the waist, and his skin was turning bronze under the lively rays of the dazzling ball. He quickened his pace on seeing his destination within reach. His shoes were sinking deeper into the snow, leaving jagged indentations with their rubber soles. The shadow at the bottom of the imprints were the light blue of pale water. He was bursting with joy, the joy experienced from contact with a pristine environment, the joy of all this whiteness, of this sky bluer than any Mediterranean sky, of these fir trees heavy with beads of sugar, of the red timber chalet that he imagined to be warm and cosy, with a white stone fireplace where a log fire would be burning with a thick smokeless orange flame.

A few metres from the hotel, Jean came to a halt, undid the sleeves of the thick pullover tied around his waist, and put it back on before going inside. He then leaned his skis up against the wall and dropped his suitcase next to them. In three bounds he had climbed the timber steps that provided access to the chalet, and was standing on a kind of verandah, a metre above the ground, that stretched all the way around the building.

Without knocking, he raised the metal latch and went inside.

It was dark inside the chalet. The windows, quite small to minimise the cold, allowed just enough light in the room to accentuate the copper cooking utensils hanging on the wall for decoration. Gradually, however, you became accustomed to the half-light, but every time you looked outside, you would screw up your eyes, dazzled by the brightness of the sun on the silvery sheen of the snow, which then made it difficult to readjust to the somewhat eerie calm of the hotel.

A pleasant warmth pervaded the building. A feeling of lethargy crept up on you, inviting you to stretch out in one of those split wicker armchairs, to take down one of those books that lined the shelves halfway up the wall, to gradually doze off in that creaky room entirely panelled in varnished red pine. Jean was starting to relax, overcome by the atmosphere of that low room with massive beams.

There was the sound of footsteps on the floor above, tumbling down the hollow staircase, laughter. Three girls in ski gear flashed past him so quickly, he hardly had time to see them. Under the hoods of their black anoraks, they all had the same healthy
sparkle in their eye. Their skin, glowing from the sun, made you want to sink your teeth into it. All three were wearing black ski pants, the same colour as their anoraks, and seemed to be as fit and agile as young animals in the wild. They disappeared through the door that had closed again as quickly as it had opened, leaving Jean momentarily blinded by the sun-drenched snow.

Shaking himself, Jean turned his eyes towards the staircase and walked towards it. The only sound was that of a kettle whistling somewhere on a stove.

“Is anyone there?”

His voice echoed throughout the building, but nobody answered. Not surprised, he called out again.

This time, slow footsteps answered his call. A man came down the stairs. Blonde, rather tall, in his forties, he had the complexion of someone who had spent his entire life in the mountains, and from the middle of all this was a pair of surprisingly piercing blue eyes.

“Hello there!” Jean said. “Can I have a room?”

“Why not?” the man said.

“What are your terms and conditions?” Jean asked.

“That’s not important …”

“I don’t have a lot of money.”

“Neither do I …” the man said. “That’s why I’m here. Six hundred francs a day?”

“But that’s not enough …” Jean protested.

“Oh, you won’t be very comfortable … I’m Gilbert.”

“Jean.”

They shook hands.

“Go upstairs and take your pick,” Gilbert said. “They are all free, except five and six.”

“The three girls who came down?” Jean asked.

“Right,” Gilbert said.

Jean went back outside to fetch his tattered leather suitcase. It was so badly dented, it looked as though someone had attacked it with a steel-capped boot, and the
leather was scratched and rough. Shrugging his shoulders, he picked it up and climbed the worm-eaten steps. Once again, he could smell the aroma of the chalet’s wax and varnish, he could hear the bubbling of the water. He felt at home. With a spring in his step, he bounded up the stairs on the right that led to the first floor.

II

He soon learned their names – Leni, Laurence and Luce. Leni was the fairest, a tall Austrian with slender hips and enticing breasts. She had a straight nose that seemed to be an extension of her forehead, a face slightly rounded at the mouth that was permanently twisted in disdain and high cheekbones that made her look more Russian than German. Laurence, dark with rings under her cold eyes, and Luce, sophisticated all the way down to her fingernails, were also tantalizing creatures in their own way. One strange thing, they all seemed to have been modelled on the young goddess Diana, muscular and slightly tomboyish, that is until you start to describe their breasts, with those fascinating circles and sharp points trying to poke through the light material of the black silk anoraks. Between Jean and the three girls it was war at first sight. He didn’t know why, but right from day one, they refused to have anything to do with him, and had decided to make his life impossible. They tormented him, openly contemptuous and disdainful. They ignored all of his attempts to be friendly, going so far as refusing to acknowledge even simple gestures, like when he offered them bread or passed them the salt at the table. Jean, upset the first few days, could get no explanation for their behaviour from Gilbert. Gilbert lived on his own, in an office on the first floor, and only ever ventured out for one of those interminable walks of his in the mountains. An elderly couple who lived on the mountain made sure the residence and guests were looked after, but apart from those seven individuals, whole days would pass without another soul to be seen.

He hardly ever saw them outside of meal times. They would rise early, quickly put on their ski gear, and head off onto the mountain, armed with their skis and poles. They would return in the evening, cheeks red and flushed, ready to drop, and spend an
hour before going back up to their rooms, making sure their skis were properly waxed, ready for the next day’s outing. Jean, somewhat annoyed by this attitude, made no further overtures, and avoided them as much as possible. He would go off on his own, generally in the opposite direction to the one they had taken. There were plenty of slopes, so he had a large choice. Alone, he would make his way up the curved slopes of the mountain, to come back down a little later, amidst the powdery veil of snow and the gentle whoosh of the blades of hickory, zigzagging his way across the edge of sheer cliffs, and arrive back at the hotel, on a natural high, heart pounding, tired but happy. He had been at the hotel for a week and, back into his rhythm, started to improve, gaining more control in the launch and turns, refining his technique and strengthening his muscles. Time was passing quickly, uneventfully. This was holiday time.

III

He had set out very early that morning, hoping to reach Three Sisters Hollow, whose spectacular countryside stretched out on the horizon. Alone on the mountain, he struggled from ridge to ridge, to ski down the other side between the silent fir trees whose branches were wrapped in a thick layer of snow. One particularly steep slope tempted him. He pointed his skis downhill and took off, the wind whistling in his ears. Knees bent, weight forward, he spun a pair of long fine lines behind him in the virgin snow. Here and there a few heavy patches of snow put the brakes on his run.

He cleared a jump and realised that there was nowhere to go. On the other side of the mound a ravine opened up, a dried-up creek bed most likely, carpeted with sturdy young fir trees. He should have turned left, but he was going too fast. He should have known too that it was foolish to launch yourself like that on an unfamiliar run. Instinctively, he shifted his weight onto the right ski and tried to jump the ravine. Unfortunately, the slope on the other side was covered in saplings and was so steep, he momentarily lost balance. He collided with a low-hanging branch at full speed, made a desperate attempt to avoid the trunk of the next tree and fell, losing consciousness under the force of the impact.
When he came to, Jean saw that the trail he had intended to take ended there. The tips of both skis were broken, making them unusable. What’s more, one of his ankles was causing him a great deal of pain. He released his boots from their bindings and strapped his ankle as best he could. He picked up his poles ten metres from where he had landed and slowly started to hobble home. He had five or six hours ahead of him.

He made his way along, screwing up his eyes against the blinding reflection from the snow. Using his poles for support to take the weight off his ankle, he was making slow progress. Every hundred metres he stopped to catch his breath.

When he reached the top of a ridge that two hours earlier he had climbed without stopping, he came to a sudden halt, attracted by a movement in the distance. Three dark shapes at the bottom of the ridge went past on skis, following the floor of the valley.

Without knowing why, Jean ducked. As the crow flies, it was about two hundred metres between him and them – for it was his three neighbours from the hotel. He turned as he watched them go by. They slipped in behind some fir trees and a small rise briefly hid them from view. They didn’t reappear. Jean crept quietly towards them.

He wasn’t prepared for the shock he received when he carefully raised his head to look over to where they were frolicking about. He tucked himself deeper into the thick cold blanket to avoid being seen. Leni, Luce and Laurence were naked in the snow. Luce and Laurence surrounded their companion, bending down to pick up handfuls of frozen powder to rub over Leni, who was standing there like a proud golden statue in the middle of the white desert. Jean felt the blood flowing through his veins. The three girls were playing and dancing and prancing around like cats, occasionally stopping briefly to wrestle each other. They seemed to be becoming more and more worked up as the game went on. Suddenly, Luce grabbed Laurence from behind, causing her to stumble, and then to fall flat on her back. Leni dropped to her knees next to Laurence, and Jean saw her lips travel quickly over the motionless body of the brunette. Luce let go of her at this point and lay down next to her. It didn’t take long for Jean’s startled gaze to be no longer able to distinguish one body from another in that tangled mass. Breathing heavily, he turned away. Then, unable to resist the scene that was unfolding before him, quickly turned around again.
How long did he watch them? A small snowflake landed on his hand, causing him to shiver. The sky had suddenly clouded over. The three girls disentangled themselves and ran to fetch their clothes. Aware of his perilous position, Jean held his breath, and went to step back. He tried to move his injured leg, but the pain in his ankle was so great that, despite all his efforts, he let out a groan.

Like does alerted to danger, Luce and Leni turned in his direction, sniffing the air. With dishevelled hair, they looked like followers of Dionysus. They strode towards him. Jean stood up, grimacing in pain.

They recognized him and turned pale. Leni’s dark lips tightened and she let out a curse. Jean tried to explain.

“It was just an accident,” he said. “I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s one accident too many,” Luce said.

Leni took aim and her small hard fist struck Jean on the mouth. His lip split open and warm blood flowed down onto his chin.

“I have sprained my ankle and broken my skis,” Jean said. “If one of you can lend me a ski, I can make it back to the hotel without help.”

Luce was holding a ski pole with a heavy leather grip. Her hand slid down to the aluminium disc. Balancing the grip, she brought the pole down on the side of Jean’s head as hard as she could. He sunk to his knees and collapsed unconscious in the snow. Laurence joined them. Quickly, without a word, they undressed the lifeless body. Making a cross with his two poles, they tied both wrists to them and raised him. He was on his knees, his head was tilted forward. A large red drop fell from his left nostril joining up to his bleeding lip. Luce and Leni were now piling large handfuls of snow around Jean’s body.

When the snowman was finished, heavy snowflakes began to fall like a thick fog. Jean’s face was covered by a large nose of snow. Mockingly, Leni placed a black woollen bonnet on top of the grotesque figure. They put a gold cigarette holder in his mouth. Then, under the cover of whiteness, the three women headed back to Vallyeuse.
DANGER FROM THE CLASSICS
The electronic timer on the clock buzzed twice. I jumped, and tried to tear myself from the whirlwind of images that were spinning around in my head. With some surprise, I noticed that my heart was starting to beat a little faster as well. Blushing, I quickly closed my book. It was *You and Me*, a dusty old volume written prior to the last two wars, which I had hesitated to pick up until now, because I was aware of the bold realism of the theme. It was then I noticed that my agitation was coming as much from the time and day it was, as from my book. Today was Friday April 27 1982 and as usual, I was waiting for my trainee, Florence Lorre.

That realisation hit me harder than I care to admit. I consider myself to be open-minded, but the man should not be the first one smitten, because we need to maintain the dignity and reserve that befits our sex at all times. Nevertheless, after the initial shock, I began thinking, and found some justification for my behaviour.

There is a preconceived idea about scientists, and about women scientists in particular, concerning authority and bad looks. Certainly women, more so than men, have a talent for research. And in certain professions where physical appearance is part of the selection criteria, in acting for example, there are a fairly large number of women who look like goddesses. However, if you take the problem one step further, you soon notice that a pretty mathematician is not, on the whole, harder to find than an intelligent actress, even though there are more female mathematicians than actresses. In any case, when it came time to draw lots for the allocation of trainees, luck was on my side. Although not a single bad thought crossed my mind that day, I had already recognised, quite objectively of course, the certain charm of my student. And therein lies the reason for my current state of confusion.

Right on time again. She arrived as usual, at five past two.

“You look awesomely smart,” I said, a little surprised at my own audacity.

She was wearing a tight-fitting pair of overalls made from shimmering pale green material, very simple, but which must have come from a factory that produced luxury lines.

“Do you like it, Bob?”

“I like it a lot.”
I am not one of those people who find colour out of place, not even when it comes to something as traditional as women’s laboratory overalls, and at the risk of causing a scandal, I have to admit that even a woman wearing a skirt doesn’t shock me.

“I am pleased about that,” Florence answered mockingly.

Although I am ten years older, Florence assures me that we look the same age. For this reason, our relationship is a little different to most normal student-teacher relationships. She treats me as a friend and that bothers me a little. Of course, I could always shave off my beard and cut my hair to look like an old scholar from the 1940s, but she insists that it would make me look feminine and would do nothing to earn her respect.

“And how is your project coming along?” she asked.

She was referring to a rather tricky electronics problem that the Central Bureau had entrusted to me, and which I had only just resolved that very morning, much to my great satisfaction.

“It’s finished,” I said.

“Bravo! Does it work?”

“I’ll know tomorrow,” I said. “Friday afternoons are set aside for your education.”

She hesitated and lowered her eyes. Nothing makes me feel more uncomfortable than a woman acting coy, and she knew it.

“Bob … I want to ask you something.”

I was feeling very ill at ease. A woman really should avoid these charming charades around a man.

She continued, “Explain to me what you are working on.”

It was my turn to hesitate.

“Listen, Florence … this work is highly confidential …”

She placed her hand on my arm.

“Bob … even the cleaners in the lab know as much about all these secrets as … er … Antares’ best spy.”

“Oh, now that, that would surprise me,” I said feeling depressed.
For weeks, the radio had been bombarding us with songs from *The Grand Duchess of Antares*, the internationally acclaimed operetta by Francis Lopez. I hate all that type of music. I only like the classics, like Schoenberg, Duke Ellington or Vincent Scotto.

“Bob! Please explain it to me. I want to know what you are doing …”

Another interruption.

“Now what is it Florence?” I said.

“Bob, I like you … a lot. So you have to tell me what you are working on. I want to help.”

So there you have it. For years you read about it in novels, the description of the emotions you feel when you hear your first declaration of love. And it was finally happening to me. To me! And it was more disturbing, more delightful, than anything I had ever imagined. I looked at Florence, with her bright eyes, and red hair cut into a crew cut that was all the rage in that year of ’82. I think that there is no doubt she could have taken me in her arms then and there without any objections on my part. And to think I used to laugh at love stories! My heart was pounding and I felt my hands shake. I had a lump in my throat.

“Florence … you shouldn’t say things like that to a man. Let’s talk about something else.”

She came up to me, and before I could do anything, she threw her arms around me and gave me a kiss. I felt the ground give way beneath my feet, and I found myself sitting on a chair. At the same time, I was experiencing a state of euphoria that was as indescribable as it was unexpected. I blushed at my own depravity and noticed, with renewed astonishment, that Florence was on my knee. That’s when the cat let go of my tongue.

“Florence, this isn’t right. Stand up. If someone were to come in … my reputation would be ruined. Stand up.”

“Will you show me your experiments?”

“I … Oh! …”

I had to give in.
“I’ll explain everything to you. Everything. But stand up.”

“I always knew that you were nice,” she said as she stood up.

“All the same,” I said, “you are taking advantage of the situation. Admit it.”

My voice was trembling. She patted me affectionately on the shoulder.

“Come on, Bob dear. Don’t be so old-fashioned.”

I didn’t waste any time launching into the technical details.

“Do you remember the first electronic brains?” I asked.

“The ones from 1950?”

“Slightly earlier,” I corrected. “They were calculating machines. Quite clever, actually. You remember that, very quickly, they were fitted with special tubes, which allowed them to store various pieces of information that could be drawn on when needed? Memory tubes?”

“You learn that in primary school,” Florence said.

“Do you remember that this type of machine was being perfected up until around 1964, when Rossler discovered that a real human brain, properly set up in a nutrient bath, could, under certain conditions, accomplish the same tasks, taking up much less space?”

“And I also know that in’68 this process was, in turn, replaced by Brenn and Renaud’s super-circuit,” Florence said.

“Good,” I answered. “Gradually, these various devices were fitted and tested with all of the different types of effectors that were available, the ‘effectors’ themselves having been derived from the thousand and one gadgets developed by man over time, to make up the class of machines we call robots. All these machines have one thing in common. Can you tell me what it is?”

The teacher in me couldn’t help himself.

“You have lovely eyes,” Florence answered. “They are a greeny-yellow colour, with a kind of star on the iris …”

I stepped back.

“Florence! Are you listening to me?”

“I’m listening very carefully. The one thing all of these machines have in common is that they only act on the data provided to their internal operating systems by
the users. A machine that is not given a specific problem to solve remains incapable of any initiative.”

“And why didn’t anyone try to provide them with awareness and reason? Because it was realised that, with only a few elementary reflex functions, their behaviour was worse than that of the old scientists. Go to any old shop and buy a small electronic toy tortoise, and you’ll soon see what the first electro-reflex machines were like: irritating, unpredictable … in short, endowed with a personality. We rather quickly lost interest in these kinds of automatons, created solely to provide a simple illustration of certain mental processes, but which were far too difficult to bring to life.”

“Dear old Bob,” Florence said. “I love hearing you talk. Do you know how boring you are? I learned all that in the eleventh grade.”

“And you, you are insufferable,” I said seriously.

She was looking at me. I swear she was making fun of me. I am ashamed to say, but I would have liked her to kiss me again. I took up where I left off, very quickly, to hide my confusion.

“We’re striving increasingly to introduce into these machines sustainable reflex circuits capable of interacting with a wide range of effectors. But we haven’t yet tried to supply them with a broad-based education. To tell the truth, up till now there’s been no point. But it so happens that the work the Central Bureau has asked me to do should allow the machine to retain a number of higher-level concepts in its memory bank. In fact, the model you see here is intended to assimilate the entire collection of knowledge contained in the sixteen volumes of the 1978 Larousse Encyclopaedia. Its purpose is almost purely intellectual, and it’s fitted with simple effectors to allow it to move around by itself and to take hold of objects for identification and analysis, if need be.”

“And what will be done with it?”

“It’s an administrative device, Florence. The Flor-Fina ambassador, who’s taking up his post in Paris next month following the Mexico Convention, is going to use it for advice on matters of protocol. Each time there’s a request for information on his part, the machine will provide the ambassador with the kind of response that someone with an extensive knowledge of French culture would give. In each instance, it will tell him the steps to follow, explain to him the nature of the problem and how to conduct himself,
whether it be on the occasion of the naming of a new polymegatron or dinner with the Emperor of Eurasia. Since French has been adopted by world decree as the most prestigious language of diplomacy, everyone wants to be in a position to be able to show off their complete knowledge of the culture. And so this machine will be invaluable to an ambassador who doesn’t have time to educate himself.”

“So!” Florence said. “You’re going to cram sixteen fat volumes of Larousse into that poor little machine! You’re a sadist.”

“It has to be done!” I said. “It has to absorb everything. If we only feed it bits and pieces of information, it’ll more than likely acquire a personality like one of those unresponsive old tortoises. And what will that personality be like? Impossible to know in advance. The only chance it has of being well balanced is if it knows everything. That’s the only way it can remain objective and impartial.”

“But it can’t know everything,” Florence said.

“If it knows something about everything in equal proportions, that will be enough,” I explained. “Larousse is reasonably objective. It’s a fairly good example of a piece of work written without emotion. According to my reckoning, we should end up with a machine that’s well-rounded, acceptable and politically correct.”

“That’s wonderful,” Florence said.

It seemed like she was making fun of me. Obviously, some of my colleagues solve more complex problems, but nevertheless, I had drawn some good conclusions from some rather imperfect data, and I think that deserved something better than the trite, ‘that’s wonderful’. Women don’t seem to understand just how disheartening and thankless these mundane tasks can be.

“How does it work?” she asked.

“Oh, a run-of-the-mill system,” I said, feeling a little dejected. “A crude lectoscope. All you do is insert the book into the tube and the apparatus reads and records everything. There’s nothing very fancy about it. Naturally, once the material has been assimilated, the lectoscope will be dismantled.”

“Start it up. Bob! Please!”
“I’d really like to show you how it works,” I said, “but I don’t have the Larousse. They arrive tomorrow night. I can’t get it to learn anything beforehand because that will upset its balance.”

I went over to the machine and plugged it in. Small red, green and blue lights flashed randomly on the control panel. A gentle humming sound was coming from the electrical supply. Despite everything, I felt rather pleased with myself.

“The book goes in there,” I said. “You push this lever, and that’s all there is to it. Florence! What are you doing? Oh no …”

I tried to switch it off, but Florence held me back.

“I’m just trying it out, Bob. We can always delete it …”

“Florence! You are impossible! You can’t delete it!”

She had thrown my copy of *You and Me* into the tube and had pulled the lever. I could now hear the rapid clicking of the lectoscope as it scanned the pages. In fifteen seconds it was done. The book came out assimilated, digested and intact.

Florence was watching with interest. Suddenly she jumped. The speaker started cooing gently, almost tenderly:

*I need to explain, convey, confess
That we can only feel what we can express …*

“Bob! What’s happening?”

“Oh my God,” I said, exasperated. “It doesn’t know anything else … It’s now going to recite Geraldy non-stop.”

“But Bob, why is it talking to itself?”

“All lovers talk to themselves!”

“What if I were to ask it something?”

“Oh no!” I said. “Not that. Leave it alone. You’ve already done enough damage!”

“What a grouch you are!”

The machine was making a soothing humming sound. It made a noise as if to clear its throat.
“Machine,” Florence said, “how do you feel?”

This time it was an impassioned declaration that came from the machine.

Oh! I love you! I love you!
Do you hear? I am crazy about you ...
Crazy! ...

“Oh!” Florence said. “What a cheek!”

“It was like that back then,” I said. “Men spoke to women first and I can assure you, young Florence, that they had the audacity to do it …”

“Florence!” the machine said thoughtfully. “Her name is Florence!”

“That’s not in Gerald!” Florence declared.

“So, you haven’t understood a single word I’ve said,” I observed somewhat annoyed. “I haven’t built a device that simply reproduces sounds. I’m telling you that inside there are lots of new reflex circuits and a complete phonetic warehouse, which allow it to formulate adequate responses to the sounds it accumulates … The difficult thing was to maintain its balance and you have just ruined that by filling it with passion. It’s like giving a piece of steak to a two-year-old child. This machine is still a child … and you’ve just fed it bear meat …”

“I am old enough to take care of Florence,” the machine remarked drily.

“It can hear!” Florence said.

“Of course it can hear!”

I was becoming more and more exasperated.

“It can hear. It can see. It can speak …”

“And I can also move around!” the machine said. “But kissing? I can see what it is, but I don’t know how I am supposed to do it,” it continued thoughtfully.

“You won’t be doing anything,” I said. “I’m going to turn you off and tomorrow I’m going to change your tubes and we’ll start all over again.”

“You, with that awful beard,” the machine said. “You don’t interest me. And you will leave my switch alone.”
“His beard is lovely,” Florence said. “You are very rude.”

“Maybe so,” the machine said with a lecherous laugh that made my hair stand on end, “but in matters of love, I know a thing or two … Florence, come closer …”

_For the things to you I have to say_  
_Are things, you see, that can be said each day_  
_With words, looks, deeds and smiles …_

“Try to lighten up a little,” I said mockingly.  
“I can laugh!” the machine said.  
It repeated its obscene laugh.  
“In any case,” I said furiously, “you should stop reciting Geraldy parrot-fashion.”  
“I’m not reciting anything parrot-fashion!” the machine said. “And the proof is that I can call you a fool, an idiot, a blockhead, a nag, a moron, a bumpkin, a loser, a deadbeat, a twit, a nutter …”  
“Okay! That’s enough!” I objected.  
“Anyway, if I recite Geraldy,” the machine continued, “it’s because nobody speaks the language of love any better. And besides, I like it. When you can talk to women the way this guy can, you let me know. Until then, stay out of it. It’s Florence I’m talking to.”  
“Be nice,” Florence said to the machine. “I like nice people.”  
“You can tell me to be gentlemanly,” the machine pointed out, “because I am feeling rather masculine. Be quiet and listen.

_The things that you would say my dear_  
_Are things I already know._  
_Come close. Draw near!_  
_Allow me to undo your blouse_  
_Quickly now, let us begin_  
_To feel this way is not a sin._  
_Take off your clothes. Do not hide,_
Lay down here, right by my side.
Remove your skirt do not be shy,
The time to be as one is nigh.”

“Oh, will you be quiet!” I protested, outraged.
“Bob!” Florence said. “Is that what you have been reading? Oh dear!”
“I am going to disconnect it,” I said. “I can’t bear to hear it speak to you that way. There are some things you read that you just don’t repeat.”
The machine became silent. And then a growling sound came from its throat.
“Don’t touch my switch!”
I strode up to it and, without a word of warning, the machine launched itself at me. I threw myself to the side at the last minute but its steel housing caught my shoulder. Its wicked voice continued:
“So, you’re in love with Florence, eh?”
I had taken up refuge behind the metal desk and was rubbing my shoulder.
“Run, Florence,” I said. “Go on. Get out of here.”
“Bob! I don’t want to leave you alone … It … He … is going to hurt you.”
“It’s okay. It’s okay,” I said. “Get out quickly.”
“She will leave when I tell her to!” the machine said.
It made a movement towards Florence.
“Run, Florence,” I said again. “Hurry.”
“I’m afraid, Bob,” Florence said.
In two bounds she had joined me behind the desk.
“I want to stay with you.”
“You won’t come to any harm,” the machine said. “It’s the bearded one I want. Oh, so you’re jealous! So you want to turn me off?”
“I don’t want anything to do with you!” Florence said. “You disgust me.”
The machine backed up slowly, preparing to launch itself. Suddenly it charged at me with the full force of its engines. Florence screamed.
“Bob! Bob! I’m scared!”
Pulling her into my arms, I climbed nimbly onto the desk. The machine collided with the desk, sending it crashing into the wall, which it met with an irresistible force. The room shook and a lump of plaster fell from the ceiling. If we had stayed between the wall and the desk, we would have been cut in two.

“It’s lucky I didn’t fit more powerful effectors,” I said under my breath. “Stay here.”

I sat Florence on the desk. She was almost out of harm’s way. I stood up.

“Bob, what are you going to do?”

“I can’t say out loud,” I answered.

“That’s okay,” the machine said. “I dare you again to try and flick my switch.”

I watched it back up, and waited.

“Chicken!” I taunted.

The machine growled furiously.

“Oh yeah? We’ll see.”

It charged towards the desk, which is what I had been hoping for. Just as it was about to demolish that piece of furniture to get to me, I leaped forward and landed on top of it. I hooked my left hand around the feeder cables coming from the top and tried to reach the contact switch with the other. I received a violent blow to the back of the skull. The machine, using the lever of the lectoscope against me as a weapon, was trying to beat my brains out. I groaned with pain as I tried to wrench the lever back. The machine roared. Before I could tighten my grip, it began to shake itself like an enraged bull, and I was thrown off the top like a rubber ball. I collapsed in a heap on the ground. I felt a sharp pain in my leg and through blurry eyes, I saw the machine backing up, getting ready to finish me off. And then there was darkness.

When I regained consciousness, I was stretched out, eyes closed, my head resting on Florence’s lap. I was experiencing a range of complex sensations. My leg was hurting but something very soft was pressing against my lips and an extraordinary feeling swept through me. When I opened my eyes, Florence’s eyes were two centimetres from mine. She was kissing me. I passed out a second time. This time, she slapped me and I immediately came to.

“You saved me, Florence …”
“Bob,” she said, “will you marry me?”

“You shouldn’t be the one proposing to me, Florence darling,” I answered blushing. “But I accept with pleasure.”

“I managed to turn it off,” she said. “No-one will hear us now. Bob … would you like to … I don’t dare ask …”

She had lost her confidence. The light on the ceiling in the laboratory was hurting my eyes.

“Florence, my angel, speak to me …”

“Bob … recite some Geraldy for me …”

I felt the blood flow more quickly through my veins. I took her pretty shaven head between my hands and boldly went in search of her lips.

“Dim the lights …” I whispered.
A DOG OF A JOB
“What’s that thing for?” Charlie asked.

“To adjust the speed,” the Admiral said. “If you push it down, you’re shooting at seventy frames. It’s the slow motion control.”

“Strange,” Charlie said. “I always thought that normal speed was twenty-four frames. Seventy-two, that’s three times faster.”

“That’s what I am saying,” the Admiral replied. “When you go from seventy-two frames to twenty-four, that’s slow motion.”

“Oh?” Charlie said. “Okay …”

He hadn’t understood a single word.

“Anyway,” Charlie continued, “it’s a great camera. When do we start shooting?”

“This afternoon,” the Admiral said. “Nique has brought me a terrific script. It’s called *Hearts Ablaze in the Mexican Sun*. We’ll be able to use all of her aunt’s old table cloths for costumes.”

“Who’s in the cast?” Charlie asked.

He had adopted a modest approach, certain of seeing himself handed the leading role.

“Well …” the Admiral said, “I had thought about Nique in the role of Conchita, Alfred can play Alvarez, Zozo can be Pancho, Arthur the innkeeper …”


“My valet … Me, I’ll play the priest … And Lou and Denis the two servants.”

“What about me?” Charlie said.

“You’re the only one I feel I can trust with a camera that’s worth a hundred and forty-three thousand seven hundred francs,” the Admiral said.

“You’re too kind!” Charlie said, feeling terribly put out.

“I hope you’re not going to put me in a sheepskin again and get me to play the polar bear,” the dog said in anticipation of what he felt was coming.

“You’re no fun,” the Admiral said. “All you’re good for is catching flies and eating the extras’ props. You’ll do what you’re told. There’s a parrot in the script and I had you in mind for the part.”

“Good,” the dog said. “Two pieces of steak, that’s my fee.”
“Okay,” the Admiral said. “You have no class. You others,” he continued to his friends, “go and put on your make-up. Charlie, come with me and I’ll explain the scene. Alfred isn’t here yet. That’s a nuisance …”

As consolation for not landing a part, Charlie had dressed up like a real cameraman on set – baggy golf shorts, Lacoste teeshirt and green plastic sun visor that made him look like a penguin.

“Alfred will be here. He’s bringing a friend who must be running late.”

“Damn,” the Admiral said. “She is bound to be a horror … like all the others … and anyway, we don’t have a part for her. Damn!” he whispered, turning pale.

Alfred had just made his entrance with a stunning brunette on his arm. Her eyes and colouring were enough to not only set hearts ablaze, but also the entire set and the trees in the adjacent garden.

“Have you started?” Alfred said. “I haven’t had a chance to explain the script to Carmen yet. Of course there’s a part in it for her?”

“Yes,” Charlie said. “She can be …”

“Yes,” the Admiral said, “she can be Conchita, me Alvarez, and you, Alfred, we will give you the part of the priest, because it suits you.”

“But …” Charlie protested, “Alfred was Alvarez.”

“Where did you get that from?” the Admiral said, glaring at him. “I’ll explain it to you,” he continued. “In the beginning, there’s the love between Alvarez and Conchita, with lots of close-ups of some sensational kissing …”

Alfred wiped his forehead with the sleeve of his robe.

“This is not possible,” he said. “I’m too hot.”

The “oo” sound he made was three times longer than usual.

At that very moment, the dog slid off his perch and disappeared into the void. His tail feathers remained stuck to the bar and he began to protest with the utmost energy.

“In Mexico …” Carmen said.

“Have you ever been there?” Nique interrupted sharply.

She had been relegated to the role of third servant and wasn’t about to conceal her anger.
The Admiral, dressed in a crimson poncho and a garden hat trimmed with green velvet ribbon, made peace between the two protagonists in the drama.

“Would sir please explain what he perceives the innkeeper’s role to be?” Arthur said. “It’s quite a different character from the one I usually play …”

“Listen,” the Admiral said, “we’re going to go over the four close-up shots at the beginning one more time to make sure everyone knows what they have to do and then we’ll shoot them … At least that will be over and done with.”

“Oh! Damn!” Charlie said.

“This is the eleventh time you have rehearsed your close-ups,” Denise said.

“We understand that maybe it is not so unpleasant for you,” Lou said impatiently, “but the others are fed up.”

“Okay,” the Admiral said, “the wedding scene then …”

“Oh … sh … “ Charlie said. “We’ve already done that one seven times. The death scene. You don’t want to stay still after you’ve been stabbed. It won’t look good when we start shooting in earnest.”

“Let’s go!” the Admiral said in a tone of resignation.

He went away, came back, spread his arms, folded them across his chest in a warlike manner and roared, “Where is Señor Pancho, my arch enemy?”

Zozo rushed at him with a long kitchen knife.

“Now then,” Charlie said, “we have five minutes left for filming, because after that there won’t be any more light …”

“Let’s go!” the actors unenthusiastically said as one.

They were exhausted. Their make-up was running down their faces. Carmen was looking anxiously at the disgusting mixture of burnt cork and brownish-yellow pigment that had formed on the Admiral’s cheeks. They took their places and Charlie called out those famous words, “Silence! Rolling!” for no reason, since it was a silent movie. This sent the dog, whose last few feathers had blown away, into hystericis, leaving him wearing only the glue.

“Cut!” Charlie called.

The actors fell on top of each other in a heap, as the Admiral went up to the camera. He opened it, looked inside, looked at Charlie, flung his arms around wildly and
collapsed, well and truly still this time. Charlie looked inside the camera and turned lime green.

“What is it?” asked the voice of Alfred, who was just emerging from underneath the pile of lifeless bodies …

“I … I forgot the film …” Charlie said.
A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE
I

The Admiral ran headlong into Charlie just as the latter was leaving Paul Boubal’s café where he could be found almost every day between five o’clock in the afternoon and two o’clock in the morning. So the Admiral was surprised, because it was only half past five.

“You haven’t seen the gang? Aren’t they there?”

“Yes!” Charlie answered.

“Is Ops there? Is Greco? What about Anne-Marie?”

“Yes!” Charlie answered.

“I don’t understand,” the Admiral said.


“Oh!” the Admiral said. “Your movie day …”

“Come with me,” Charlie said. “You always say no, but it’s very educational. It’s a wonderful intellectual experience and it would do you good.”

“I’m too young to die of suffocation,” the Admiral said. “That would be setting a bad example.”

“You shouldn’t be so fat then,” Charlie remarked. “Come on, I’m counting on you. See you tonight, seven forty-five, out front near the entrance. We need to be early.”

“Where are you going now?” the Admiral said, shaking his hand automatically just before going into the café.

“To buy an American tank from army surplus!” Charlie said. “That way, we’ll be sure to get a seat!”

II

“You should come with us,” the Admiral said. “It’s very intellectual and a wonderful educational experience …”

He couldn’t remember Charlie’s exact words and finished off with an inarticulate grunt of conviction.
“Yes,” Ops said, “it should be interesting, but tonight Astruc has promised to take
me to see *Gone With the Christmas Spirit*, with Edward G. Robinson in the role of Father
Christmas, and I wouldn’t want to miss that.”

“In a way that’s like neglecting the cultivation of your mind ,” the Admiral
declared, “that you end up, according to the well-known words of …”

“Of…?” Ops asked impatiently, playing with her long blonde locks.

Her hairdresser would spend four hours a week straightening her hair, while Ops
would eat sticks of liquorice to obtain, by imitation, sufficient capillary rigidity.

“I don’t remember!” the Admiral said.

“But what were those well-known words?” Ops insisted with a real lack of tact
and in a very strong Italian accent.

“It’s not important,” the Admiral declared, embarrassed.

“You’ve talked me into it,” Ops said. “I’ll come with Djean.”

“Who’s that?” the Admiral asked alarmed.

“Jeannette. You know her. She’s my cousin.”

“Charlie reckons that all you have to do to get a seat is be early,” the Admiral
said. “Bring Djean along. It will be more fun with the four of us.”

III

“Push harder!” Charlie grunted.

“Can’t!” the Admiral gasped. “I have to get Ops up off the ground. They’re
biting her legs.”

“They didn’t have any tanks at army surplus,” Charlie said. “I could only find
chewing gum with the flavour of salicylate. Beeman’s.”

“Try chewing some and then breathe on everyone!” the Admiral said.

They were five metres from the closed doors of the movie theatre. An almost
silent surging mass of still living human flesh writhed before them. From time to time a
muffled cry would rise, quickly silenced by the sound of tightly rolled newspapers,
brandished to finish off the poor unfortunate being who was about to faint. The body would then be passed through the hands towards the rear to clear the way.

“What’s playing?” asked Djean, whose mouth happened to find itself wedged against Charlie’s ear.

“Whatman Apyston’s _Blue-Black Angel_, with Marliche Dihêtrenne. But don’t tell anyone. There are already enough people here.”

It was, in some respects, quite an unusual crowd, mostly serious young people sporting crew cuts. The young girls were hiding a total lack of interest in anything to do with sex behind a Sapphic exterior. Most had a literary review or, better still, an existentialist magazine tucked under their arm. Those who had nothing seemed ashamed and gradually withdrew.

“I say, Charlie,” the Admiral said, “what say we go?”

The woman standing next to him, a blonde, no make-up, with braided hair held in place on top of her head by two black bows, and who had thrown a small green bolero over the top of an authentic pair of non-existent breasts with no bra, hurled daggers at him. But fortunately for the Admiral, his metal watch chain deflected the volley towards the ground.

There was an almighty push, accompanied by pandemonium as the door to the theatre suddenly gave way because on the other side, Frédéric, the leader of the sultan’s guard, had just given up the ghost. Through the breach thus formed stormed the first waves. The Admiral was holding Ops by the end of the arm and she was desperately clinging to his tie. Propelled forward by Charlie and Djean, who themselves had just been subjected to a renewed attack from the rear, they followed a tortuous path before landing in a seat. With no room to move, the five of them comfortably piled in on top of each other. The film was about to begin. There were people everywhere, grabbing hold of the curtains on stage, stuck high up on the walls like flies, hanging in bunches from the one and only column. Just above the Admiral, Djean and Ops five people were suspended from a light fitting, trying to haul themselves up so they could straddle the shade. The Admiral looked up and that was the last thing he saw, because right at that moment the light fitting came away from the ceiling.
IV

“I brought you some flowers,” Charlie said.

Ops, Djean and the Admiral painfully nodded their heads swathed in spotlessly clean bandages. In true Saint-Germain-des-Prés style, the three of them were sharing the same hospital bed.

“Was the film good?” Djean asked.

“I don’t know,” Charlie said. “At the last minute they showed *Storm Over Oustoupinski* by Krakovine-Brikoustov.”

“Oh! ... Damn! ...” the Admiral said. “So you can’t tell us anything about *Blue-Black Angel*?”

The man in the next bed raised his hand to attract their attention. He seemed to be having difficulty speaking.

“I … went … to see it … last night … at a private screening,” he whispered.

“Well?” all four asked anxiously.

“There … there was a blackout,” the man said, and silently passed away.

The nurse went over and covered his face with the sheet.

“Of course you haven’t seen it?” Charlie snarled at her.

“Seen what?”

“*Blue-Black Angel.*”

“Oh, yes I have! I used to be an usherette before becoming a nurse. *Blue-Black Angel,* I’ve seen it at least two hundred and fifty times.”

“Well?” Charlie asked with bated breath.

“Oh! ...” the former usherette said. “I don’t remember much about it really. But I do know that it was completely stupid.”
A BIG STAR
“So what’s the weather like?” the Admiral asked, stretching.
The dog looked out the window.
“I wouldn’t take a human out in it,” he said. “Better than yesterday. It shouldn’t be too cold.”
“Good,” the Admiral said. “Have you already been outside?”
“Of course,” the dog said. “You don’t think that I get up at the same time as you, do you?”
“Did you go for a walk?” the Admiral asked. “Who did you see? Any dogs I know?”
“Those females are awful!” the dog said wearily. “I met another one this morning … their fixation with perfume … I said hello to her and then I had to sniff her nose in front of everyone. It smelled too much like carnations down the other end.”
He sneezed at the thought.
The Admiral commiserated with him and called for Arthur to bring breakfast.

*

Arthur had a disapproving look on his face as he brought in a platter of morning nibbles – roast beef in Madeira sauce, lobster mayonnaise, onion tart and a cognac coffee to wash everything down. The Admiral was on a diet.
A long lanky youth was following behind, his protruding Adam’s apple and small floppy bowtie revealing his penchant for bebop.
“My word!” the Admiral said. “It’s Charlie!”
“I tried to stop him,” Arthur said.
“Hi, Admiral!” Charlie said. “Still in the sack! Do you know what time it is?”
The dog muttered something about intruders and skulked off to places less frequented.
“Eleven forty-five,” the Admiral said. “It’s the usual time. I need a lot of sleep because I often wake up in the afternoon.”
“I’ve come to get you,” Charlie said, “to take you to the movies.”
“What to see?” the Admiral said. “And why so early?”

Charlie turned red. He had a white shirt and blue eyes, so the Admiral stood to attention.

“I’ve met a charming young lady,” Charlie began unexpectedly. “Her name is Louella Bing and she is in the movies. She’s a real artiste. A star.”

“Never heard of her!” Arthur said.
“Me either,” the Admiral said. “But I don’t often go to the movies. I read cookbooks instead.”

“I am telling you …” Charlie added, “she has an important part in a major film, The Hellhole of Calambar.”

“Is it new?” the Admiral asked.
“Yes,” Arthur said. “Pépé Muguet and José Lamouillette are in it.”

“It opens this morning exclusively in three cinemas: The Abbaye, The Club des Stars, and Cygne-Ecran. We need to be there around twelve-thirty, one o’clock,” Charlie added.

“Oh …” the Admiral said reluctantly. “That’s very soon.”
“He’s waiting for me in the car,” Charlie said. “Hurry up.”

“Shall I take all this back then?” Arthur said. “What a waste of time!”

The Admiral’s beaming face broke into a painful grimace on seeing Arthur disappear with the platter. Remaining polite nevertheless, he threw back the covers and pulled on his red socks.

*

“What part do you play in this film?” the Admiral asked.

The four of them were in Charlie’s car. The dog was in the front next to Charlie, with the Admiral and Louella in the back. The Admiral was scratching his thin black moustache with the tip of a well-manicured fingernail.

“It’s quite an interesting story line …” Louella said. “It’s about a settler in the tropics who, despite all sorts of rivalries, ends up finding a diamond mine.
Unfortunately, he falls in love with a treacherous woman who he takes away with him to live in his cabin and she betrays him. It’s very moving."

Louella had dark skin and her make-up accentuated the sparkle in her eyes. As for the rest of her, she was well developed, and in all the right places.

“It’s a great role!” the Admiral said. “What’s more, it’s a role that has withstood the test of time. It fits you like a glove.”

“Yes,” Louella said. “But it is Michelle Meringue who landed it. You know … all you have to do is sleep with everyone …”

“What about you?”

“Me?” Louella said. “I bring something different home for lunch. In the film, I play a half-caste servant.”

“So it takes place in the tropics?” the Admiral enquired thoughtfully.

“Yes. And it wasn’t too hot while we were shooting …”

She laughed a little self-consciously. The Admiral tried to think about something else, because he was worried about congestion.

They all got out because Charlie had just pulled up outside The Abbaye.

* 

“Do you think we’ll get in?” Charlie said.

“I don’t know,” the Admiral replied.

“The three of you look silly,” the dog said, who came bounding back.

He placed his paw up on an old man who had put out his hand when he had stopped to open his umbrella. They had been waiting for fifty minutes. There was one final surge of the queue in front of them and the cashier pulled down the shutter in their faces to the sound of strawberry crush.

“Sold out!” he said.

“Oh!” the Admiral said. “What say we go and have some lunch?”

“Quick! …” Charlie said. “Let’s dash over to The Club des Stars. Maybe we can get in there.”
Charlie’s car took off again, backfiring. Charlie was wearing a pair of lovely yellow gloves and his flat hat made it look like he had an oval halo. Louella seemed impatient. The Admiral was listening to his ravenous stomach churn out a tune and was waving his finger to the beat. The dog put his head between his paws and fell asleep on the cushion.

They queued up at The Club des Stars from two o’clock until four-twenty and couldn’t get in. At six-forty, it was the turn of the roller shutter at Cygne-Ecran to come down, severing the hindquarters of a woman scurrying inside.

They went back to The Abbaye. At eight-thirty they were promised three folding seats for the night session on they proviso they waited. At ten o’clock, exhausted, the two men stumbled to their allocated seats. Louella, ten metres ahead, was becoming more and more nervous. The dog was still asleep in the car. He only woke up at around eleven o’clock to look at the clock and to snigger, satisfied.

At the end of the first reel, the Admiral dozed off while stroking the fur on the coat of the lady sitting next to him, which began to purr. The hero had only just set out for Ritatitari, the Hellhole of Calambar.

Behind him, Charlie’s soft snoring was becoming lost in the sound of the engines of the black boat that was making for the islands …

Three rows in front, Louella hadn’t taken her eyes off the screen.

*  

“Yes …” the Admiral said into the phone. “Yes … I must have fallen asleep right at the beginning. Why? It was the explosion in the forest at the end that woke me up.”

“Me too,” Charlie said. “So, you didn’t see her scene?”

“I told her it was very good,” the Admiral assured him. “But I can’t remember what she said … I was very tired.”

“Me too,” Charlie said, “I paid her lots of compliments.”

He was speaking with great difficulty, as if he had porridge in his mouth.

“What’s wrong with you?” the Admiral said.
“Two broken teeth,” Charlie said. “Her scene was cut when they edited the film a month ago. You know, she was only an extra.”
All of this is Pauwels’ fault. If it wasn’t for his article, I never would have been at Deligny Baths and nothing would have happened. I wanted to check out the women and, to tell the truth, I had a good chance of getting by unnoticed. I may not be the big boss, and I might be a bit of a clod, but I do have dark skin (it’s my liver) and all my limbs. It was pleasant out on the timber deck. Didn’t dare go in for a swim. Pauwels, he scared me off about the bleach. And then there were women to see. But luck must have been against me, nothing but ugly ones. I lay down on my back, closed my eyes and waited to turn black all over. And then, just as I was going to have to roll over to hide the tent pole, along comes some guy who trips right over the top of me. He was reading while walking, and he was reading a prayer book. That’s right, he was a priest. ‘So they do bathe then!’ I say to myself, and then I remember that the Seminarist Code only forbids women to scrub their wrinkles.

Now that the ice had been broken, I was going to kill him, but I change my mind.

“For La Rue Father, an interview?” I say to him.

“Yes, my son,” the priest says. “That is the least I can do for a lost sheep.”

I try to make him understand that I am a man, and so that makes me more of a ram than a sheep. But go show your face at Alfred’s, no more tent pole. No more man. No more anything. Good, I think, it’s because of the priest. It will come back when he’s gone. Anyway, too bad, I am going to begin.

“Father,” I say, “are you a Marxist?”

“No, my son,” the priest says. “Who is Marx?”

“A poor sinner, Father.”

“So let us pray for him, my child."

He begins to pray. Like a sucker, I was about to follow suit, and I start to join my hands together, but a bra strap snaps right under my nose, and I can feel it coming back. It is putting me back on track.

“Father,” I continue, “do you visit b…?”

“No, my son,” he says. “What are they?”

“You don’t … with yourself?”

“No, my son,” he says, “I read my prayer book.”

“But, what about things of the flesh?”
“Oh!” the priest says, “they don’t count.”

“Are you an existentialist, Father?” I continue. “Have you won the Pleiade Prize? Are you an anarcho-masochist, social democrat, barrister, member of the Constituent Assembly, Israelite, big landowner, or trafficker of religious artefacts?”

“No, my son,” he says to me. “I pray, and I also read Pilgrim. Sometimes Christian Witness, although it does tend to promote immorality.”

I don’t give up.

“Do you have a degree in philosophy? Are you a running or a pelota champion? Do you like Picasso? Do you give lectures on religious sentiment in the works of Rimbaud? Are you one of those people who, like Kierkegaard, believe that the way you look at things depends on your situation? Have you published a critique on the Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom?”

“No, my son,” the priest says. “I go to Deligny, and I live in the peace of the Lord. I repaint my church every two years, and I hear the confessions of my parishioners.”

“But you will never amount to anything, you silly fool!” I say to him. (I was starting to lose my temper). “Come on! How long are you planning to keep this up? You lead a ridiculous existence! No social life? No Cremone Violin or Gericault Trumpet? No hidden vices? No black masses? No satanic rituals?”

“No.”

“Oh, Father! You are too much.”

“I swear to you before God,” the priest says.

“But Father, you do realise that if you don’t try all these things, you can’t exist as a priest?”

“Alas, my son,” the priest says.

“Do you believe in God?”

“That is indiscutable.”

“Not even that?” (I was throwing him a lifeline).

“I have faith,” the priest says.

“You don’t exist, Father. You don’t exist. It’s not possible.”

“It is true, my son. You may be right.”
He seemed to be a broken man. I watched him turn pale, and his skin became transparent.

“What is wrong with you, Father? Take hold of yourself! You still have time to write a volume of verse!”

“Too late,” he whispered in a distant voice. “Whatever it is you want, I believe in God, and that is all.”

“But a priest like you doesn’t exist.” (I was whispering too).

He was becoming more and more transparent, and then he disappeared into thin air. Gee, I was uncomfortable. No more priest. I took the prayer book as a keepsake. I read it a little every night. I found his address inside. From time to time, I go to the place in the presbytery where he used to live. It’s becoming a habit. His maid, she overcame her grief and she likes me now. And sometimes I hear the confessions of girls, young girls … I drink altar wine … When it’s all said and done, it’s not so bad being a priest.

Reverend Boris Vian
Member of the N.S.C.J.
DON’T TRUST THE BAND
Nightclub patrons, don’t trust the band!

You arrive there, feeling good, well dressed, smelling nice, and happy with life because you have had a wonderful dinner. You sit yourself down at a comfortable table, a mouth-watering cocktail in front of you. You have taken off your expensive warm overcoat. You find a place for your jewellery, furs and other bits and pieces, as you take a look around. You smile. You start to relax … You look at your neighbour’s corsage and think that, while you are dancing, you might make a move on her … you ask her to dance … and that’s when your troubles begin.

Of course you have noticed those six guys in white jackets playing rhythm on stage. At first the music doesn’t have any effect on you, but then gradually, it enters your body through the pores of your skin, reaches the eighteenth nerve centre of the fourth cerebral convolution at the top on the left which, as everyone knows, since the work of Broca and Captain Pamphile, is where the centre of pleasure born from the detection of harmonious sounds is located.

Six guys in white jackets. Six guys paid to be here. It used to be that staff only had eyes to avoid knocking over your glass when handing you the menu and ears designed specifically for taking your order or for hearing the discreet tap of your finger on the crystal. You allow yourself to jump to conclusions about those six guys, because of their white jackets.

Oh, friends! Don’t let them fool you!

(Please don’t be annoyed if I am talking to you like this, man to man, and please don’t be offended if I am about to emphasise the dazzling cut of your neckline with a bold stroke of the pen. Friends, you should all be aware that you are hermaphroditic.)

But just as you are about to ask your neighbour to dance … Oh, friends! Woe betide you!

For one of those guys in white jackets, one of them who is blowing in tubes or tapping on skins or keys or plucking strings, one of them has spotted you. What do you expect? Even though he is wearing a white jacket, he is still a man! … And your neighbour, the one you have just asked to dance, she is a woman! … No mistake about that! … She is very careful not to be seen here in anything but the finest clothes, no
slacks and big boots, which, were you to meet her on the Avenue du Bois in the fading light, could make you take her for the teenager she was not – oh, that was doubly evident!…

(Doubly evident, indeed, for that is what, more than anything strikes the guy in the white jacket whose elevated position allows him to scan the crowd, a technique made fashionable by certain great people in the world: Charles de Gaulle known as Double-Master, and Yvon Pétra known as Double-Metre, just to name two.)

And friends, that is when you cease to be hermaphroditic.

You split in two: a horrible man, a red-faced over-indulger, the king of gluttony, a coke dealer, a dirty politician; and a ravishing woman, whose tight-lipped smile bears witness to the harshness of the times that forces her to dance with such a clod.

What does it matter, you horrible man, if in reality you are twenty-five years old with the body of Apollo, if your charming smile reveals a perfect set of teeth, if the dashing cut of your suit emphasises the broadness of your shoulders?

You will never win. You are a peasant, a miser, a misfit. You have a father who is an arms dealer, a mother who has been around, a manic sister, and a brother on drugs.

She begs to be noticed … she is ravishing, I am telling you.

Her dress … with that neckline! Square, or round, or heart-shaped, or plunging, or to the side, or no neckline at all if the dress is off the shoulder … And that figure! … You know it’s easy to tell whether or not she is wearing anything under her dress … there are faint raised lines around the top of her thighs …

(But they are only there if she has anything on underneath. Usually, if there are no raised lines, the guy on the trumpet hits a false note that you probably wouldn’t notice, because you generously put it down as being what you would expect from hot jazz.)

And her smile! … Her perfectly shaped red lips that surely taste like raspberries… And you! … You dance like an elephant. You are sure to crush her delicate feet.

And then you return to your seat. Finally she can catch her breath. She sits back down next to you.

Now what?
Her hand … Her slender fingers with silver nail polish … on your country bumpkin shoulder? … And she is smiling at you? …

Oh! … The bitch! … All the same! …

And then the guys in white jackets launch into the next piece …
FRANKFURT IN THE MAIN
There were three of us in all, not counting Josephine who was doing all the work, and she was sucking up a fair amount of oil, I might add. Personally, I saw myself on an adventure, a little like a delighted Jason, with Jef and Pralin as the Argonauts. We were on a quest to discover America, looking for doughnuts and Coca-Cola in Frankfurt.

Jef, full of enthusiasm, was asleep. He was the one who had been responsible for planning the mission, for finances (ninety Occupation dollars each) and for team morale.

He and Pralin had met up with me in Knokke. It was there, while listening to some Belgian jazz, that I asked myself why the Belgian franc was selling for seven of our francs (don’t forget that the story of August ’48 is an old one) since, taking into account the black market exchange rate, the cost of living was three times higher in Belgium than in France. It made me feel as though I was doing the Belgians a favour, but they don’t need anything. They all drive around in big Cadillacs.

But let’s put aside these thoughts on the Bretton Woods Accords and go back on the road. As you would expect, it was starting to smell of the smoked sausage that gave its name to the big city we were hoping to reach.

Jef extricated himself from a troubled sleep and raised his head. His hair was standing on end, like a porcupine arching its back.

“Where are we?” he said.

“Almost in Frankfurt,” Pralin replied, as visions of German women afflicted with steatopygia flashed before his eyes.

“That didn’t take long,” Jef said.

Jef is that kind of guy. He sleeps non-stop for eight hours, his head nodding gently on your shoulder, his arms and legs getting caught up in the gearstick, almost causing an accident. You can put up with that. You can put up with the wild look in his eye when a cry from Pralin tries to draw his attention to the particularly welcome sight of the back of a pair of legs. You can put up with his soft snoring. You can put up with all of this … And, after eight hours, worn-out and exhausted, you grab hold of Jef and give him a shake, because he wakes up as fresh as a daisy and says to you, “That didn’t take long.”

I was always upfront with Jef, and he offered to take the wheel while I had a rest, but I had to decline because my dear wife has this terrible weakness of caring for me.
Pralin let out a stifled squeal.

“Hey guys! … That backside! … Look at that backside! … inviting … well-rounded … honest …”

On a bicycle, there was this person with really shapely thighs.

“An intelligent backside …” Pralin sighed again, almost beside himself.

I passed the subject of our interest and Jef burst out laughing in Pralin’s face. It was a man in shorts, and Pralin, terribly disappointed, fell into a troubled silence. We were on the outskirts of Frankfurt. Jef regained control of the situation.

“That way,” he said to me. “You go straight ahead.”

You didn’t have to be a genius to work that out because there was a road sign three metres high. I followed the arrows, and twenty minutes later we were at the Press Club. The Roman orgy was about to begin.

In all honesty, this lifestyle suited me perfectly. I had met up again with Gilbert who was producing a short film on occupied Germany for Sablier en Goguette. He was drinking old-fashioneds and we were on whisky and coke, much to his great horror. We had big rooms, hot baths, and some ‘you want it we’ve got it’ American rubbish from PX.

But Jef wanted to do business. When he was here a year ago, he had seen people make a fortune out of cigarettes and, according to him, all you had to do was give it a try.

I didn’t want to disappoint him, but on the road, in the English zone, we had already had trouble getting ten marks to the dollar, and that caused me to have some doubts. I had even more when, after legal conversion, I noticed that petrol had dropped to the price the “krauts” pay on the black market, about half the official price back home. From that point on, I adopted the following approach: don’t worry, spend the dollars, go home when there aren’t any left and, in the meantime, do some real serious reporting.

On the second night, Jef set out on a nocturnal expedition. Pralin too, but his motives were purely bestial and extramoneyary. He took along a small cake of soap as a token of his appreciation.

At three o’clock in the morning, I was woken suddenly by an excited Jef, who had charged in like Woody Woodpecker.
“Great news,” he said. “I’ve found this guy who’ll give us fifteen marks to the dollar. Maybe sixteen.”

“Great,” I said, in a slightly husky voice.

“Tomorrow night, we’ll all be millionaires,” Jef said simply.

“Good,” I said. “Tomorrow afternoon I’m going to PX.”

“Don’t spend it all,” Jef said. “We need to keep some for the marks. It’s a far more interesting proposition.”

“Yeah,” I said.

And I went back to sleep.

The following afternoon, I converted some cash into chocolate bars. Jef gave me enough to cover what he thought would be the cost of our board and lodging for the next six days, to keep in a safe place. It was around forty dollars. He took a dollar from the remaining forty-five to buy himself an automatic, silver-plated cigarette lighter, made in Austria or Moldo-Valachia, which broke the same night. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

Pralin, the realist, bought himself a pair of pyjamas and some shaving cream.

I went to bed early that night, as Jef set off into the wild to track down some marks. Pralin went with him, rather excited at the prospect of unhooking his braces to satisfy his basic instincts.

At one o’clock in the morning, I had to put up with the ranting and raving of an even more outraged-than-ever Jef.

“The bastard,” he said. “A guy I trusted completely. ‘Give me the dollars,’ he said to me, ‘and I’ll be back.’ I hand them over, he goes inside the café and an hour later, he still hadn’t come back out.”

“Stop,” I said. “I get it. I have to tell you, just between you and me, he looked a bit on the shady side. I happened to catch a glimpse of him this afternoon working as a so-called guide.”

“He shouldn’t be allowed to get away with it,” Jef said. “I’m going to report it to the M.P.s.”

“They don’t give a damn,” I said. “If you do that, we’re done. It’s not really very legal to be exchanging dollars for marks.”
Through a haze, I heard him curse and swear for another hour, and Morpheus took me in his furry embrace.

The following three days were spent in pursuit of Jef’s forty dollars. This was a change of plan. Originally, we were to go to Stuttgart, and I was very pleased it had been cut. With the price of petrol being what it was, I saw no harm in driving Jef around all day, especially as it gave Pralin a broader insight into the backsides of the capital.

This adventure had, if I may say, put rocks in Jef’s head. In the compound, where I bought myself crushed mustard seed socks, a shabby cherry red currant cordial-coloured jacket, and periwinkle blue satin slippers, I would see him cast an envious eye over anything that would help him make an impression on the typists at the paper.

Pralin, the philosopher, was discreetly rubbing shoulders with the ladies of Frankfurt in the bushes by the river Main. And that is where all of his soap was going, which was not a lot to pay for a little debauchery.

However, on the evening of the fifth day, Jef did his sums. If we wanted to stay any longer, we would have to find a way to support him (and that, no way, it would have been immoral).

“When it’s all said and done,” he said, “for eighty dollars, around nineteen thousand francs, I will bring back a one dollar cigarette lighter.”

“Quite rightly,” I said approvingly. “That just about sums up the situation perfectly. After all, you have just lived for the last six days, and you are about to write one of those stories that will balance your budget for a good month.”

“That cigarette lighter owes me eighteen thousand francs,” Jef continued.

“You can count that as being twenty-eight in purchasing power,” Pralin pointed out, “because if you had had the marks and the merchandise that you could have bought with them, you would have easily made yourself ten thousand profit.”

“That makes thirty thousand then,” Jef sighed. “You have here a cigarette lighter that is worth thirty big ones.”

“Doesn’t look like it,” I said, letting it slip.

“Just because it’s broken,” Jef remarked. “But that’s nothing … it just needs a screw. You can pick one up anywhere for next to nothing.”
“At least sixty francs,” Pralin observed, still optimistic. “At that price, I could get another cake of soap.”

“And all the joy it brings,” I said, in order to cut short any more Pralinian remarks on the phenomenology of Germanic rumps.

“Pralin,” Jef said, “this lighter is worth thirty thousand.”

“Less a hundred francs,” I said. “Let’s round it off.”

“Twenty-nine thousand nine hundred francs,” Jef said. “If I sell it to you for twenty thousand, Pralin, you’ll make nine thousand nine hundred, almost ten thousand francs, without lifting a finger.”

“Ten thousand francs,” I said, “that’s almost a hundred and seventy cakes of soap.”

“Phew! …” Pralin sighed, intrigued by the numbers. “Six months of sheer ecstasy …”

I looked at Jef. His face, which normally reminds me of Vesuvius on the day of a big eruption, was quivering with excitement as well.

“Well, Pralin?” Jef asked sweetly.

I looked at my watch. We still had a chance of leaving that day if the deal came off.

“Done,” Pralin said.

“Well guys,” I said, “that was one strange piece of business you both did. Let’s say we go back to Paris and celebrate?”

“Oh!” Jef said. “We’re not in a hurry …”

“Yes we are,” Pralin said. “I don’t have any more soap …”

And in a voice choking with emotion, he lowered his voice and whispered in our ear, “Guys, they are going to do me a deal if I take the lot for ten thousand francs … They will let me have them for fifty …”

“When I told you …” Jef concluded.

I took my bag and opened it to start packing.

“When I told you that you only had to bend over to clean up …”
THE TEST
It was through coming to Deligny baths that we all got to know each other. First names only, of course, and we never bothered with small talk and pleasantries. The men would give the women a ceremonial slap on the backside before taking a dip, while the women would sit around bitching about the swimsuit, or the legs, or the cellulite of the one (dear friend) who had not yet arrived. On the whole, it was all good fun.

There was Christian the porpoise, Georges, who would turn up in a pair of clodhoppers that would have given his grandmother a fit (or anybody else’s grandmother for that matter), Ops (the less she wore, the stronger her accent), Michel the architect and Michel with the striped bathers, big Yvette with a bottom jaw like a car bumper (according to the architect who had the gift for making Hellenic comparisons). There was Claude Luter who only put down his clarinet to do judo or to get naked in the sun, Nicole, Maxime, Roland and Moustache (covered in a thick coat of black hair and an abundant layer of fat) … in short, a real bunch of mafiosos.

The one we hardly ever saw was Christian Castapioche, the heartbreaker. Honestly, if he had come along too often we would have taken his suntan oil. We used large quantities of it and even went as far as putting it on the tomatoes we pinched from Ops and the handsome Gilles, the real lady-killer of the group (who I didn’t mention before because I was jealous).

The best time was a weekday morning, around nine-thirty, ten o’clock. Not too many people, space to spread out in the sun, and clean water.

This one particular day, I’d managed to get out of bed. I turn up, and who do I see on the deck? … My old friend Castapioche, looking as handsome as anything in a mauve and yellow bikini.

“Hi there!” I said to him. “Trying to decide?”

He was pale. Michel and I looked at him with contempt.

“Yes,” Castapioche said, sounding as though he was confiding in us. “I’ve come to take a look around.”

“Haven’t you ever been here?” Michel asked.

“Never,” Castapioche said. “I have to work during the day.”

Nobody knew exactly what it was Castapioche did. According to some, he’s a night porter at the Macropolis Hotel. According to others, he gets along very well.
with a certain Mademoiselle Laurent. Those in the know say he doesn’t do a damn thing. As for me, I have no idea.

“Hey,” Michel said to me just then, “check out that body.”

I check out the body. This is the favourite pastime at Deligny, where there are some bodies indeed worthy of attention. When one is particularly good, Michel rolls over to get some sun on his back because he is trying to be discreet, but this time he remained with his tummy in the air. This was a good body, but nothing special.

“Not a bad sort, little Bison said.

“Hold on, guys,” Castapioche said. “Don’t waste your time on that. Tomorrow you will really see something.”

We let that comment pass, but he grabs me and takes me aside.

“Listen,” he says to me, “you know that I don’t keep any secrets from you.”

“Sure,” I answer. “Me neither.”

“I might be getting married,” he said. “But first I want to bring her along to the pool.”

“So, you are engaged?” I say.

“A man should always bring his fiancée along to the pool before taking the plunge,” Christian said. “It’s the only place where he can see what she’s really like.”

“So, you are engaged?” I say.

“Hey, hey!” he says. “Maybe.”

On that note, he gets up to leave.

“I’m off to work guys,” he says. “See you tomorrow.”

Off he goes. He really is quite pale. Never mind, we’re going to have a bit of fun tomorrow. I grab Michel and little Bison.

“Guys,” I say to them, “Castapioche is coming back tomorrow with his sweetheart. We have to do something.”

“Gilles!” they both say together.

Ops opens one eye. I have to tell you that she is a little tied up with Gilles at the moment, and that she reeks so much of peanut oil, it’s not funny. We extricate Ops from Gilles’ ear and stick a beach bag upside down on her head to keep her quiet.

“What?” Gilles says.

“We need your help,” I say to him.
That damn Gilles, he really is built like a god. There are some big strapping men at Deligny, with muscles on muscles, who walk around on their hands for fun and who can lift fourteen squawking parrots on their little finger. But really, you are better off being built like Gilles – broad shoulders, narrow hips and well-defined features. And he had a far better tan than Don Byas, the sax player with the handlebar moustache.

“Okay,” Gilles said.

“We have to get that bird away from Castapioche,” little Bison said.

“What’s she like?” Gilles said.

“We’ll soon see,” Michel said. “Come on Gilles. Are you in?”

“In!” Gilles said.

And just as Ops starts to protest, he throws her on her back and empties a bottle of moontan lotion into her nostrils. On that note, we go in for a quick dip.

The next day, we’re all there on time, in combat position. The operation has been well planned.

Here comes my friend Castapioche wearing the dark glasses his cousin brought back for him from America, a not so unattractive brunette on his arm.

They are going to separate when they head to the bathing huts. Christian has seen us and signals to us to keep our hands off. Michel splits from the group, goes over and holds the fort as the bird disappears behind a door.

Michel is perfect. The girl is ready before Christian could get rid of him. From where we’re standing, we see Christian introduce Michel, who then leads her towards our group, while Christian finally goes in to change.

Here she is.

“Inez,” Michel said, “this is the gang. Everyone, this is Inez Barracuda y Alvarez.”

We’re all being that damn nice as we position her between Gilles and Georges. Georges will make her laugh and Gilles will chat her up.

We’re on a roll. Even before Christian has come over, Gilles has grabbed Inez and is leading her in the direction of the bar.

Christian arrives on the scene.

“Where’s Inez?” he said.
“Oh, she’s gone back to her bathing hut to look for a pin,” one of the girls said. “Her swimsuit won’t stay up.”

“My compliments,” Georges said to Christian. “She’s adorable.”

Christian puffs out his chest with pride.

“I’m telling you again,” he said, “you should always bring the girl along to the pool before committing yourself. That way, you know what to expect.”

We tell him lots of stories, it’s all very casual and time slips by. Christian is a little worried.

“What’s she doing?” he says. “I’m going to get her.”

“No need,” Michel said. “Here she comes.”

Gilles is holding her by the waist. Both of them are dripping wet and she doesn’t seem to be walking very straight. They’re approaching but instead of coming towards us, they cut across along the edge of the pool.

She goes back into her bathing hut.

“I’m going over,” Christian said.

“Listen, don’t be a fool,” Michel said. “She’s gone to look for her comb.”

As for Gilles, he’s gone back to get changed, but Castapioche was completely focused on Inez and didn’t see him. Here comes Gilles, fully dressed, at the same time as Inez, and they meet up again outside her hut.

Good Lord! What a pash he just gave her!

They head off together.

“Oh! …” Christian said. “Oh! What’s that! …”

“Don’t be angry,” I say to him.

“For goodness sake, it’s crazy!” Castapioche said. “A girl from an excellent family! Who I was going to marry!”

“I’m going to explain it to you,” I say to him. “Your idea about the pool, it’s very good, but you should have got yourself a tan and done some training beforehand.”

“Why?” Christian said

“Do you know what she told me?” Michel said.

“No,” Christian said.

“She told me that before getting married, a girl should always take her fiancé along to the pool, because it’s the only place where she can see what he’s really like.”
APRIL’S DAUGHTERS
On Friday April 1st, Gouzin felt as though he was about to get lucky. That day he had put on his nice suit with the brown and oval checks, his tartan tie and his sharp-looking pointy shoes. He left the building where he lived and, fifty metres down the road, helped a stunning young girl back to her feet after she had slipped on a matchstick that had been thrown on the ground by an evil Arab.

“Thank you,” she said with a captivating smile.

“Just a second,” the smooth-talking Gouzin said. “I’m going to put on my dark glasses.”

“Why?” she asked innocently.

“It’s not the sun that’s blinding me,” Gouzin said. “It’s your smile.”

“My name is Lisette,” she said, flattered.

“Can I buy you a little pick-me-up?” Gouzin suggested.

“Oh!” she said. And she blushed, which started a fire that raced the length and breadth of Gouzin’s heart.

He then took her home and they fornicated for the next few days. On Tuesday 5th, she said to him, “Tomorrow is my birthday.”

“My darling!” Gouzin said.

The next day he bought her a lovely bottle of perfume worth eighteen francs.

On Friday 8th, as Gouzin was going down into the metro, some fellow in a hurry hurt him when he ran into him. He grabbed the fellow by the scruff of the neck. The fellow tried to get away but Gouzin noticed that he was carrying a lady’s handbag and became suspicious. Just then, the lady herself suddenly appeared. She was young and very beautiful, and was demanding explanations. A policeman arrested the thief, congratulated Gouzin, handed the bag back to the lady who, overwhelmed with gratitude, said to Gouzin, “Dear sir, my entire life is in that bag. How can I ever repay you?”

“Allow me to look at you for a moment,” Gouzin said simply. “That’s all I ask.”
Just then, he was struck in the back by a suitcase that a surly porter was carrying for a passenger from the Gare de Lyon. In a loud voice he suggested they find somewhere quiet to go to have a friendly drink and the lady accepted. One drink followed another and, as a result of a few too many rounds, the lady lost all her inhibitions. On that, Gouzin drove her to his place and bonked her several times, because Lisette had departed the day before, on friendly terms, leaving him totally unencumbered. His new flame’s name was Josiane and she really knew how to hump.

On Tuesday 11th, she said to Gouzin, “Tomorrow is my birthday.”

“My sweetie!” Gouzin exclaimed.

The next day he bought her a beautiful little trinket, a pig made from mother-of-pearl that cost him twenty-nine francs.

III

On Friday 15th, Gouzin, much to his regret, had just separated from Josiane, who had been summoned to the country by a cantankerous aunt who was generous with her money. He had just hailed a taxi and was about to get in when a charming young redhead, gasping for breath because she had been running, grabbed hold of his arm.

“Sir … sir,” she said, “where are you going?”

“Over to Ternes,” Gouzin replied, after giving her the once-over.

“Oh! Can you take me with you? I am so late!”

“Get in! Get in!” Gouzin said, as gallant as ever.

She climbed in. In the taxi, Gouzin seemed troubled. He finally asked her, “Your birthday isn’t April 19th by any chance?”

“How do you know that?” she said, surprised.

Gouzin assumed a modest look and slipped a hand under her dress.

“Allow me,” he said. “Your stocking isn’t straight.”

A few moments later, the taxi took off in another direction, and all this culminated in the kind of activity that is forbidden for those under the age of sixteen, who would probably enjoy themselves if someone would only show them what to do.
On April 22nd, which just so happened to fall on a Friday, Gouzin was going downstairs. On the first floor, he crossed paths with a thin sylph-like creature with fiery eyes who seemed disorientated.

“Excuse me, sir,” the siren said to him, “are you Doctor Klupitzick?”

“No,” Gouzin said, “he lives on the second floor.”

“I’ve just come from the second floor,” she said. “I rang the bell but no one is there.”

“Can I ask you something?” Gouzin said. “Does your birthday fall on the 26th of this month by any chance?”

“Are you psychic?” the young girl said, visibly impressed.

“I have something of a gift,” Gouzin said, feeling that his lucky streak wasn’t about to end. “I also know a little about anatomy. Can I offer you my services?”

“It’s just that …” the beautiful girl began, “I can’t get undressed on the stairs…”

“I live on the third floor,” Gouzin said.

The redhead had left the day before to go back to her husband and Gouzin was available again, which meant that for the next three hours, he displayed his dexterity in the art of digital manipulation. The pretty blonde found it quite fascinating, so much so that she thought it would be a good idea to spend a few days with Gouzin. Unfortunately, on the following Thursday, she had to leave. On Friday 29th, Gouzin found himself once again all alone in his bed when, at 8 o’clock in the morning, the doorbell rang. He got up and opened the door, and there stood a delightful creature ripe for the plucking, somewhere between twenty and twenty-five.

“I’m bringing you the mail,” she said.

Gouzin remembered that the caretaker’s niece was coming to replace her aunt for a week.

“Are you Annette?” he asked. “Come on in and let’s have a drink to welcome you aboard.”

“I’d love to!” she said. “Oh, you’re so much nicer than Doctor Kupliczick.”

“How could you not be nice to such an adorable person?” Gouzin said warmly.
He took her hand.

Ten minutes later, she had taken off her clothes because the alcohol was so strong it had made her hot. Overwhelmed with passion, Gouzin gazed lustfully upon all the soft little spots where he could place his lips. He felt as strong as Hercules.

“Of course,” he whispered as she sat on his knee, “you were born in April?”

“Why?” she said surprised. “No … I’m in October … 17th October.”

Gouzin turned pale.

“October!” he said.

That is when pure gold turned to worthless lead and, unable to secure victory with the weaponry that was deserting him, Gouzin remained a forlorn, solitary figure on the battlefield. Despairingly, he cast a reproachful glance at his unfaithful servant, as the sound of a nervous pair of heels grew fainter on the hollow staircase.
THE KILLER
It was a prison like any other; a small shed with loam walls painted pumpkin yellow, an immodest chimney and a roof made from the leaves of asparagus fern. It was some time in the distant past, and everywhere there were stones and the shells of ammonites, trilobites, stalagmites and salpinges left over from the Ice Age. Inside the prison, you could hear someone snoring in broken Javanese. I went in.

A man was lying on a wooden bed, asleep. He was wearing a small pair of blue boxer shorts and woollen knee protectors. On his left shoulder were tattooed the initials ‘K.I.’.

“Yoo-hoo!” I yelled in his ear.

You are going to tell me that I probably should have called out something else, but he was asleep and couldn’t hear anything. Anyway, it woke him up.

“Brrr!” he said as he cleared his throat. “Who’s the idiot who opened the door?”

“Me,” I said.

Obviously, that made him none the wiser, and don’t you expect to be either.

“You have to be kidding,” the fellow surmised.

“The eye came from Audouard?” I asked.

He burst out laughing.

“He laugh! Look, it’s a joke!” he said.

I blushed self-consciously.

“I suppose you’ve come to ask me about Abel, and why I took him out?” Cain continued.
“Dear me!” I said. “Just between you and I, there was something fishy about
the newspapers’ version of events.”

“They’re all the same,” Cain said. “All a bunch of liars. You tell them
something, they don’t get it, and what’s more, they don’t check the facts because they
don’t give a damn what they write. Add to that the interference from the chief editor
and the typos and you can see how far it can go.”

“Now then,” I said, “to the truth of the matter.”

“Abel?” Cain asked. “He was a dirty bitch.”

“Bitch?” I asked surprised.

“Exactly,” Cain said. “Does that surprise you? Now I suppose you’re going
to act like Paul Claudel and tell me that, even after having been in regular contact
with Mr. Gide for over forty years, you were still not aware of his tendencies?”

“Is that why Gide received the Nabel Prize?” I asked.

“Exactly!” Cain said. “But let me tell you what happened.”

“There’s no chance of us being disturbed by the guard?” I asked.

“Not likely,” Cain said. “He knows quite well that I have no desire to leave.
What would I do on the outside? Nothing but queers and faggots everywhere.”

“You are quite right there,” I said.

“So,” Cain resumed, as he settled down on his hard wooden plank, “you know
when it happened. Abel and I, we were more like friends. You can see what I’m
like. I’m more the big hairy type …”

Indeed, Cain was covered in a thick black coat, was well-built, and was as
strong as an ox, like an eighty kilo professional wrestler.

“The big hairy type …” Cain said. “I had quite a lot of success with the girls
and I was never bored on Sundays. The brother, he wasn’t the same …”

“Abel?” I said.

“Abel. In my opinion, he was a half-brother,” Cain said. “I’ve seen photos of
the snake … another big queen, that one … Well, that was him all over. It wouldn’t
surprise me if the dear hadn’t jumped the fence with that little devil … Variety is the
spice of life, isn’t that what they say? But maybe it’s not Abel’s fault if he was what
he was. Anyway, there wasn’t much of a family resemblance. Everyone would drool
over his short blonde locks. He was pale, sweet, likeable, and he stunk of perfume,
the dirty little bastard, enough to kill a skunk. When we were young, things were
okay. We played cops and robbers, things like that. I had no designs on him, you understand. That comes later. We shared the same room, we slept in the same bed, we ate from the same plate. We didn’t leave each other’s side. You see, to me, he was like my little sister. I mollycoddled him. I combed his short blonde hair. All in all, we got on very well together. I have to tell you …” Cain had just stopped mid-sentence to let out a loud snort of disgust. “I have to tell you,” he continued, “it bothered him, that little swine, from the day I started chaising the chicks. But he didn’t dare say anything. I thought he’d have time to learn, and after suggesting to him a couple of times to go and find himself a girlfriend, I stopped when I saw he wasn’t interested … He wasn’t as developed as me …”

“Exactly,” I agreed. “And that is the very thing everyone has been talking about, and that’s why they say it was your fault. You were twice his size.”

“My fault!” Cain exploded. “But he was a dirty pig, that little pile of trash!”

“Settle down,” I said.

“Okay,” Cain said. “But this is what he did. From time to time, I’d say to him, ‘Abel, clear off. I’ve got a chick coming around and I need the bed.’ Of course, he’d go away and come back a couple of hours later. You know, I’d only do it at night. I didn’t need tongues wagging all around the countryside. So, he’d hang around outside in the dark and then when the girl had seen him leave the house, she’d come inside. Always at night. Never seen. Never recognised …”

“It must have been a little annoying for him,” I conceded.

“Come off it!” Cain protested. “I would have done the same for him!”

He started to swear.

“What a pile of trash that little pig was!” he concluded. “So, this one night, I said to him, ‘Abel, clear off. I’ve got a girl coming.’ He clears off and there I am waiting. The lass comes in. I don’t move. She comes over and starts to go to work on me … you get the picture. It took me by surprise, because she seemed to be the rather clumsy type. So, I light my candle … and I see that it was that filthy brother of mine … Oh! … I was livid!”

“You should have smashed his face in,” I said.

“Well, that’s exactly what I did,” Cain said. “And you can see where it landed me. Maybe I went a bit too far … but what do you expect? Faggots, I can’t stand them.”
A FUNNY GAME
Trounaille, leaning on the bar in the Klub Sane-Germaine, was drinking his latest concoction, a Slow-Burn Original which, as everyone knows, is made up of six parts vodka, to one part Cointreau and one of crème de cacao; a tonic mixture, veritable mother’s milk. It also revealed his dislike for Anglo-Saxon gin, that diabolical but widely used base of so many infamous mixed drinks, which are the scourge of Western democracies. In actual fact, it was mainly because gin made him feel sick that he had switched to vodka, a product not too dissimilar to rubbing alcohol whose harmless effects and medicinal value have been recognised by government agencies.

In came his good friend Folubert Sansonnet, who had just come back from a tour. Folubert, a very talented saxiformist, had just spent several weeks using the sweet sound of his instrument to charm the Teuton hordes, a people deprived for years of the denazifying effect of bebop.

“Hello Trounaille,” Folubert said.

“Hello Folubert,” Trounaille said.

They both had broad grins on their faces because they were happy to see each other.

“What are you drinking?” Folubert asked.

“Something I invented,” Trounaille said, rather pleased with himself.

“Is it good?” Folubert asked.

“Try it!”

So Folubert tasted it, and Louis the barman, who was growing a moustache, had to make two more.

Meanwhile, Folubert cast a searching glance over the crowd.

“There’s no women!” he said indignantly.

And in fact, apart from the few who were obviously paid to be there, there were hardly any members of the female sex.

“Why do you think I am drinking?” Trounaille asked sarcastically.

“Oh! This is no good,” Folubert said. “I’ve had to tighten my belt recently, and now it’s time to lash out.”

“Drink up,” Trounaille said, “and let’s see what we can find.”

They finished their drinks and set off on their quest.
In rue Saint-Benoît, the air was fresh and invigorating.

“It’s a good thing you came along when you did,” Trounaille said. “I was so bored!”

“Tonight’s our lucky night. You’ll see,” Folubert assured him. “Let’s start at the Vieux-Co.”

They took the rue de Rennes and turned right towards the Vieux-Co. The man on the door and the brunette in the cloakroom both recognised them, and smiled.

In Luter’s cave there was a crowd, but hardly any members of the female sex.

“This is no good,” Folubert said after a few minutes.

“You know, they wait until the band has finished playing and then go off with the musicians,” Trounaille informed him. “With Luter’s boys, that’s the rule.”

“Oh!” Folubert said. “That’s disgusting.”

“Drink up,” Trounaille said. “Let’s go and see what we can find somewhere else.”

Which is what they did.

* 

It’s only a short step from the Vieux-Colombier to La Rose Rouge. They managed to take it and went downstairs.

Inside, everything was dark, and the Frères Jacques were singing Les Nombrils. Folubert straight away spotted a blonde with short hair sitting close to the bar. He started to give her the come-on look, and was sorry he wasn’t a cat with eyes that glowed in the dark.

However, after Les Nombrils, the Frères launched into Barbara, a heart-rending piece that seemed to send shivers through the blonde. So Folubert and Trounaille started shivering too, and when the line ‘Barbara, war is a load of bullshit’ came around, they loudly voiced their approval.

As a result, they were discreetly ejected from the premises because the crowd had actually come to listen to Frères Jacques.
Moving into a different part of town, they went all the way to Caroll’s on foot because taxis are expensive and because they also had a sneaking suspicion that this would not be their final port of call.

They went downstairs. The young lady in the cloakroom drew Trounaille’s attention to his regrettable lack of a tie, to which he replied that this didn’t seem the place to be wearing a knot around your neck. This innocent remark put them both back in good spirits.

The first face they saw was that of the girl from La Rose Rouge. Folubert recognised her, turned pale, and said to Trounaille, “The bitch.” She was dancing with another girl and as soon as she saw Folubert she deliberately rubbed up against her partner.

“Let’s go,” Trounaille said.

They went to the Lido, the Night-Club, the Boeuf sur le Toit and the Club de Paris. They went back to Saint-Yves, dropped into the Tabou, and headed back up towards Montmartre. They went into Tabarin, and the Florence, into so many places that their eyes began to play tricks on them. Finally, at six o’clock in the morning two lovely ladies accepted their advances.

It was eleven o’clock. Folubert came out of his room and knocked on Trounaille’s door. He was still asleep.

“So,” Folubert said.

“Well,” Trounaille, who was sporting a huge black eye, grumbled. Folubert was wearing his on the other eye.

“Hey, I fell asleep,” he said.

“Me too,” Trounaille said. “And she didn’t like it.”

“Neither did mine,” Folubert said.
“Women don’t understand anything about men,” Trounaille concluded.
And off they went to buy two pieces of steak from the butcher. The horse butcher.
THE MOTIVE
Odon du Mouillet, certified Justice of the Peace, was carefully cleaning the inside of his ear with the tip of a retractable pen, an unsavoury old habit acquired years ago when he was wearing out the seat of his pants on the park benches of Cours la Reine Gardens.

“How many divorces this morning?” he asked his assistant, Leonce Tiercelin, a tall young man fifty-four years old.

“Only nineteen,” Leonce replied.

“Good, good, good, good, good, good, good,” the judge said, satisfied.

He would now have more time than usual to finish, refine, shine and polish his closing argument that he hoped would convince lost sheep to return to the path of married life when they eventually presented themselves before him for reconciliation.

So with feet in air and head in hands, he started to think, while Leonce Tiercelin went about setting the scene in order to impress the impending arrivals. So Leonce activated the small hydraulic jacks housed in the legs of the judicial table and armchair, raising everything by thirty centimetres. He placed artificial flowers in a vase to make the room look cosy, replaced the light globe in the ceiling with a set of hanging scales to represent Justice, and draped himself in a long length of bright red curtain material from Andrianople, as if it were a Roman toga. In general, people appeared responsive to this display of pomp and pageantry, and left the office either patched up or passed out. To his credit, Judge Odon du Mouillet had a higher success rate than his other five colleagues put together. He put it down to his eloquent way with words but Leonce thought that his own preparations might also have had something to do with it.

After the judge had sufficiently cogitated, he scratched his backside with great dexterity and said to Leonce, “Guard, bring in the contestants.”

Leonce strode ceremoniously to the door and opened it. Jean Biquet and his wife (née Zizine Poivre) entered.

From off to the side, the commanding voice of Leonce called out those well-oiled words, “Take a seat!”

Jean Biquet sat on the right and Zizine Poivre on the left. Jean Biquet was blonde, weak, pale and insipid, yet dignified. Zizine Poivre, a passionate buxom brunette, gave all the indications of having a fiery personality.
At first, Odon du Mouillet was not surprised when he saw this mismatched couple, but then remembering the terms of the divorce petition, he raised his eyebrows, for it was in fact Zizine Poivre who was asking for the divorce and, according to the file, it was because her husband was cheating on her.

“Sir,” Odon said, “the first thing I have to say is that I am surprised you could give up this lady for the person whose name appears on the file, a person described by my sources as being rather plain.”

“That’s none of your business,” Jean Biquet said.

“This swine has been cheating on me, and with an idiot,” Zizine proclaimed emotionally.

Odon du Mouillet continued.

“Madam, I must say that I am willing to find grounds in your filing for divorce. However, perhaps it’s still not too late. An attempt to understand each other’s position would surely help to reconcile your differences.”

Zizine looked at Jean hopefully and licked her lips.

“My little Jeannot,” she whispered in a husky voice.

Jean Biquet shuddered, as did the judge.

“Madam,” he said, “the question I have to ask you is very personal. Was your husband cheating on you because you … um … you withdrew from his embrace?”

“Oh, no!” Jean protested. “In fact, that’s why …”

He stopped mid-sentence.

“Please continue sir,” Odon insisted. “I’m sorry, but your case seems so unusual that I can’t help myself thinking that there is more to it than meets the eye.”

“To put it simply judge,” Zizine interrupted, “three times is better than once.”

“Three times! Oh, please!” Jean Biquet sighed.

Dumbfounded, Leonce Tiercelin blew his nose, which made everyone jump.

“In short, sir, if I follow you correctly,” Odon du Mouillet said, “you cheated on Madam because she … um … was demanding more love than you were able to provide.”

“Exactly!” the husband and wife both answered together.

“And you didn’t … um … do anything with the other one?” the judge continued, throwing caution to the wind.

“No!” Zizine squealed, her finger on her teeth.
Completely at a loss, the judge looked to Leonce.

“What am I to do?” he said. “I don’t understand. Why are you cheating on her then?”

“But it’s really quite simple your honour,” Jean Biquet explained in a calm and steady voice. “Women. You can’t live with them, and you can’t live without them.”
MARTHE AND JEAN
Marthe and Jean got out of the small car, and while Marthe searched around in her bag for a hundred franc note to slip the driving instructor before saying goodbye, Jean was questioning him on their chances of success. Marthe couldn’t hear what they were saying; the noise from the street was drowning out their conversation, but she did detect the optimism in the man’s laugh and the confidence in his voice. She felt her heart beat a little faster. This was the last of the ten lessons that Jean and her were taking together, and in three day’s time, they were both scheduled to appear at the place indicated on the application form, a small street near the Botanical Gardens, to undergo the ordeal of a driving test.

Jean said goodbye to the man, a solidly built forty-year-old with a ruddy complexion, who tipped his hat as he held out his hand to Marthe.

“Thank you madam,” he said, feeling the note in his hand. “And have no fear. It’s in the bag, so to speak.”

Marthe and Jean looked at each other.

“Touch wood,” he said cautiously.

“Come on,” Marthe said, “no childish superstitions, kind sir.”

They headed off, arm in arm, towards the nearest metro station.

“It breaks my heart,” Jean said, “to have to go down into these filthy, foul-smelling subways. I can’t wait to get the car!”

“Licence first,” Marthe pointed out.

“It’s as if it’s already ours,” Jean said, falsely optimistic. “The main thing is not to panic.”

“We’ll soon see,” Marthe said.

“Listen,” Jean observed, “it would be really silly to have managed to save enough money for a car and then not be able to drive it. Anyway, one of us is bound to pass, probably me!”

“Why you?” Marthe asked cheekily. “What if it was me?”

*

Three days later however, Marthe felt a little nervous when the stony-faced examiner told her to do a complete U-turn in a narrow laneway. There was little traffic, but it was on a slope, and she had to make sure she didn’t stall the car. It was
a test of skill, combining a hill start with the actual maneuver itself. She took her
time, remembering the driving instructor’s advice, and correctly executed all of the
requirements. Maybe it lacked a little polish, but the man seemed satisfied. He told
her to pull over to the kerb, asked her several questions that she easily answered, and
then interrupted her before she had finished.

“Okay,” he said. “Thank you. Here is your licence.”
“Is it over already?” Marthe asked stunned, taking the pink card.
“Why yes,” he answered.
“Thank you sir,” Marthe stammered.

She got out, feeling a little dazed. It had been so easy! The next candidate
took the wheel and she vaguely heard the car take off with a loud roar of the engine.
She looked around for Jean. The driving instructor, who had accompanied them,
informed her that he was sitting the test in a second car with the other examiner.
Now she was really worried. As long as he passed too. It would be terrible if he
failed. How would she face him? She started to wish she hadn’t passed. She was
afraid her luck might have impacted on Jean’s, that fate would not favour them both.

“Well! What’s the face for!”
Jean put his arm around her and gave her a kiss.

“Come on! Now, now! Don’t make such a drama out of it, little Marthe, the
one I love and adore! Look!”

He waved his licence in the air, sure of himself, triumphant.

“I told you that one of us was bound to pass. You can sit for it again, you’ll
see. It’s nothing! It’s as easy as anything!”

Marthe pulled herself together. He had his licence. That was the main thing.
“But … I got mine too,” she said in a soft shy voice.

“So why that face?” he asked, slightly irritated. “You had me worried too.”
Should she tell him that she had been worried about him? She made up an
excuse.

“I am emotional,” she stammered. “I almost failed my manoeuvring. I was so
scared. You know, I didn’t pass by very much. The examiner gave it to me almost as
a favour.”
“I am sure you used your charm on him,” he said, calming down again. “Come on. Let’s go and celebrate. And don’t worry, you’ll eventually get the hang of it.”

*

The car changed Jean. The shy, unassuming, almost fearful boy that Marthe had practically dragged away by force from the clutches of a perpetually worried mother hen gradually gave way to a person full of confidence, unleashing a driver who was always ready to react angrily to the rude remarks of taxi drivers, quick to worm his way into a better position in the long queue of vehicles brought to a standstill at a red light, one who hardly had any regard for road rules or the rights of other drivers angrily brought to a sudden halt as they were driving along by a well executed fishtail. Marthe would sometimes issue a timid reprimand and claim her turn at the wheel, but the way Jean carried on when this happened discouraged her from insisting. He would cling to his seat, sigh heavily, frown at the slightest crunch of gears, or at the first sign of a noise in the motor that he himself wouldn’t have allowed to happen unless it had been necessary, and would seem so relieved when he settled back into the driver’s seat, that eventually she got out of the habit of driving when they were together. She made up for it when he went to the office and, always careful, acquired an enviable steady hand, leaving Jean to drive on outings and trips, happy to allow him the satisfaction of being in control when there were the two of them. This couldn’t help but give Jean the self-assurance and confidence in himself that had been lacking so much in the past. However, as so often happens when you have had a licence for only a short time, she didn’t feel any more at ease than he did when sitting in the passenger seat, but she went to great pains to avoid showing the slightest fear when not at the wheel. In other respects, as soon as he got out of the car, he became another man; much different to the one he had been in the past. He was calmer, stronger, more affectionate. His nervousness disappeared. It was as if finding himself able to dominate a cold, hard piece of machinery and make it do what he wanted was enough to help him forget his weakness of the past. Happy deep down with this outcome, Marthe carefully refrained from doing anything that might lead Jean to think that she doubted his ability. At the office, he behaved better than
before, panicking less over little things, not overawed by his responsibilities, more at ease with his employers. And since Easter was approaching, he plucked up enough courage to ask for four days off. He was so adept, he had no difficulty getting what he wanted. Marthe was delighted, and began preparing for the trip.

* 

“Did you see how I overtook that one!” Jean exclaimed.

Marthe, torn from the contemplation of the gentle countryside full of apple trees in bloom and leafy green hedges unfolding to her right gave a start and nodded in agreement.

“And it won’t be the last,” her husband boasted. “They might well have eleven or twelve horsepower motors, but they drag themselves along like slugs. The main thing is to make the most of what you’ve got.”

Marthe was very much of the same opinion but she failed to add that to her way of thinking, overtaking on a bend on a rather narrow road with no visibility didn’t exactly fulfill the requirements of a master’s degree.

“Besides,” Jean added, “when you know how to drive, it doesn’t matter if you have a big car or a little one.”

The motor was purring with satisfaction. The sky, flecked with light clouds, was ablaze with the rays of a bright April sun. The air was filled with the fragrance of lush grass and spring flowers, and the beautiful deeply ploughed black soil was beginning to boast a light green cover that promised good crops. Marthe would have liked to have taken a stroll along those small hollow pathways that suddenly appeared to the right and to the left, their darkness breaking up the even green colour of the hedges behind which you could only imagine the fresh dew on the new leaves and the thousand wonders of nature in full bloom. But it was pointless to ask Jean to stop even for a moment.

“A car,” he would say, “is made for driving and not for stopping.”

“A car,” Marthe thought, “is also made for taking you where you want, when you want.”

“Besides, if we stop,” Jean commented, “there goes the average.”
The average! But how could you hold that against Jean? She remembered him being so sensitive, that one slightly harsh comment from one of his employers would throw him into despair for weeks, so timid, that he would hardly dare complain if a typist paid no attention to his observations, doing exactly as she pleased, continuing to make the same mistakes. She would see him again, reluctant to refuse entry to a salesman who had forced open their door and wedged a tin of polish or a broom against the frame, troubled by a thousand reservations to justify an uncertain attitude ... No. She was happy that the car had made a new husband of him - stronger, more stable, and she loved this confidence she now had in her husband’s future, and the tranquility that allowed her to sleep at night without worrying about the next day. All of these annoying little habits of the neophyte would undoubtedly pass. Time would make of him the Jean that she alone knew.

A huge eight-cylinder car roared past.

“Bastard!” Jean yelled after him. “What a show-off! He’s got at least twenty horsepower!”

He hit the accelerator, regardless. The tail of the other car was already fading into the distance on the straight road.

“Just wait until there are a few bends,” Jean said, “and then watch me get him.”

A high-pitched whining sound was coming from the gearbox of the small car. The needle on the speedometer was creeping slowly to the right.

“I’ll get him,” Jean said through clenched teeth.

He hit the bend at full speed on the wrong side of the road. The car spun out, corrected itself with the squealing of tyres, and took off again. Suddenly, a hundred metres ahead, from a small concealed track, a cyclist emerged. A fourteen-year-old boy was standing on the side of the road waiting to cross. Jean hit the horn and, in a desperate effort to stop, grabbed the handbrake as the footbrake pedal almost became embedded in the floor. But it was too late. With one final tug on the wheel, the car bounced onto the shoulder, collecting the back wheel of the bike along the way. A scream rang out, the sound of metal. The car ended its journey nose first in a strategically placed pile of gravel.

“I’ve killed him,” Jean said in a flat voice.
She hardly heard him. She was already rushing outside, running to where the child lay sprawled out a few metres from his bike. He was deathly white. His eyes were closed. She picked him up gently and carried him carefully over to the grass.

“Jean,” she called. “Come and help me.”

He got out of the car, weak at the knees, even more pale than the cyclist.

“Help me,” she said.

She knelt down beside the child and took his pulse.

“He’s alive,” she said. “He’s just unconscious.”

“I’ve killed him!” Jean repeated.

“I don’t think so,” Marthe said very calmly. “You weren’t going very fast when you hit him. He’s in shock from the impact.”

As if to prove her right, the child opened his eyes. The colour returned to his round cheeks.

“Gee!” he sighed. “I was really scared!”

“Don’t move,” Marthe said. “Stay on your back.”

“Where’s my bike?” the child asked anxiously.

He tried to stand up. He let out a cry and fell down again.

“My leg!”

The steady roar of twin engines could be heard in the distance. Two police highway patrol motorcycles arrived in unison.

“Take care of him,” Marthe said. “Stay by his side. He has a broken leg. Put a cushion under his head. Don’t let him move. And don’t say anything. Not a word.”

The motorbikes stopped to the sound of squealing brakes. Two men wearing helmets and dressed in leather approached.

Marthe stole a glance at Jean. Poor fellow. He was pale, shattered. If they took his licence, he would no longer be that young man full of confidence, the one she happily snuggled up to at night in the big white bed. She stood up and walked towards the two policemen.

“I don’t think it is too serious,” she said. “It is entirely my fault. I was driving too fast and couldn’t stop in time.”

“Give me your licence,” the first motorcyclist said.

She handed him the pink card.
“I am going to have to keep this madam,” the man said. “Have you had it long?”

“Six months,” Marthe said.

He shook his head.

“I don’t know if you’ll get it back.”

His partner was attending to the child. He picked him up carefully and placed him in the car.

“He will have to be taken to hospital,” he said. “He has a broken leg. You stay here. I’ll drive him.”

“No,” Marthe said. “That’s not necessary. Get back on your bike. My husband will take him. He has his licence.”
THE WALTZ
Olivier was bored with this ball. Claude was there, Lise and Gisèle as well, but the ball was too modern and Olivier didn’t like dancing to the rhythm of the band. The salons with their polished timber floors opened out onto a rectangular terrace decorated with climbing roses, blue and white hydrangeas and coarse-leafed dwarf bamboo in tubs filled with bark and freshly cut straw that had been dragged into place. Olivier was wearing a romantic costume – a pair of dark blue pants with satin braid, a blue jacket open over a shirt front with rows of white stitching and a very small starched lace ruffle. The girls looked beautiful with their bright eyes and summer tans, their short thick hair, thin waists and bubbly personalities. Olivier was dreaming of a waltz, one great endless waltz, of soft light violins. Olivier was dreaming that he could hear that waltz. It was in a big castle near a wood and there was a large open fire on a huge solid bronze grid. On the walls, a few tapestries, paintings and draperies, and on the floor, alternate slats of rosewood and ebony stretching as far as the eye could see.

Claude came and took his hand. She was in a tight-fitting dress of watered silk slit over tulle flounces, like a big upside down carnation. Her yellow eyes were shining from the pleasure of the dance.

“Olivier, you’ve abandoned us. Are you bored?”

“Yes,” he replied with beautiful simplicity.

“What’s the matter?”

“I must be getting old.”

“Come and dance with me.”

“I would love to.”

He took her in his arms. The band was playing a popular tune, something that was supposed to sound like jazz, but it was poorly executed, with false improvised solos. It was sloppy, grating and ugly, and had no soul.

“I don’t like this,” Olivier said.

“You’re a purist. They don’t have the means to bring a big name band over from America.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about,” Olivier said. “A waltz is so much better for dancing.”

“Is that you talking?” Claude asked.
She stopped, dumbfounded.
“You want to dance a waltz? You? Olivier?”
“Oh, leave me alone,” he said.
“No,” Claude said. “We’re going to go. It’s not right for you here. Come on. Gisèle, Lise and Marc will come with us. You want to dance a waltz! That’s insane!”
“Yes,” Olivier said.

The car came to a halt outside one of those clubs which, in a few short years, had caused more harm to the younger generation than two world wars and twenty currency devaluations combined. The secretary, a rather tall young man with a patchy beard, allowed them to enter after the usual act of extortion, forcing them to take passes they would never use and out-of-date before the next visit. The band, in which the low-pitched sound of a saxophone could be heard above the other instruments, was playing a diabolical foxtrot. Olivier, disgusted, stopped at the foot of the stairs. Smoke and laughter filled the packed cellar.

“I’m not going in,” he said.

Claude looked at him, really worried.
“What’s the matter Olivier?” she repeated. “Please tell me what’s wrong.”
“I don’t feel like listening to that.”
“But you used to like that,” Claude insisted.

The others were growing impatient.
“So, are we going in or not?” Marc said. “I don’t care one way or another, but make up your minds.”
“I’m not going in,” Olivier said. “You do what you want.”

He could see the big hall with the polished floor stretching off into the distance, the mirrors reflecting the soft lights and the light material billowing in the gentle breeze. He could hear the waltz. He could feel the soft abandon of another being’s body against his own … and his eyes were open. However, all around, it was smoke and noise and laughter, and cold hard jazz that you could not escape. Marc, Gisèle and Lise were standing nearby.

“I’m spoiling everything for you,” Olivier said. “Go in without me. For a start, I feel ridiculous here in this jacket.”
“Listen Olivier,” Gisèle said, “we’re staying with you, and if you don’t feel like going in, let’s go somewhere else. I thought it would do you good.”

They went back up the stairs. Out in the street, it was mild. The lights from the local cafés were casting an unusual yellowy-green reflection on the trees in the boulevard. At regular intervals you could hear gunshots. It was the King of Saint-Germain, Flor Polboubal, chasing the young people from his terrace. They had been drawn there by the American cars in rue Saint-Benoît and he didn’t want annoying young people at his place.

“Do you want to go and listen to Luter?” Lise asked.

Lise had a weakness for Luter. A lot of girls have a weakness for Luter. But others have the hots, and they are the ones who win his heart.

“No,” Olivier said. “I want a waltz.”

“But there are no waltzes,” Marc said. “Do you want to go to a gypsy nightclub?”

“No,” Olivier said. “I want a grand old-fashioned waltz like they have in England, or a Boston waltz with lots of violins and beautiful rising melodies.”

He hummed one and started to cry.

“There aren’t any in Paris,” he said.

“So, what do you want us to do for you?” Claude said.

She felt like crying too. Olivier was so strange tonight. He hadn’t even noticed her lovely dress.

“Let’s go and have a drink,” Olivier said, after having finally calmed down. “Come on.”

Claude felt better. Olivier didn’t drink much and usually one drink was enough to set him straight again. They climbed back into the car and ended up in another part of town.

They went into a bar and had a drink. When they came out, Olivier took the wheel.

“We’ve been here long enough,” he said. “I am going to take you to another place.”

“Is it far?” Lise asked.

“Far enough,” Olivier said vaguely.

“Just a minute then,” Marc said. “Don’t go yet.”
He got back out, raced into the bar and returned with a bottle of liqueur brandy and a large package.

“There,” he said. “Brandy and sandwiches. That should keep us going.”

“Pass them here,” Gisèle said.

“No. Not now,” Marc said. “They’re for the trip.”

“Great,” Claude said. “A mystery tour, just like in the movie.”

She hadn’t seen the movie.

“Nothing like the movie,” Olivier said.
MOTHERHOOD
I

When René Lantulé fell in love with Claude Bédale, his correspondent of several weeks through the columns of the *Revue du Ciné*, he was still unaware that Claude was a man. They wrote very tender letters to each other. They loved the same stars, played the same sports, both loved to dance … True romance with no clouds on the horizon. Claude lived in the country and only very rarely came to Paris. Of course, he had sent his photo to René, but because Claude wore his hair quite long, René, misled by fashion, thought that he had been writing to a somewhat liberated girl (by provincial standards) who had had her hair cut behind her parents’ back. You would have thought that the spelling in the letters might have given it away, but since spelling wasn’t one of René’s strong points, he didn’t dare think that something was amiss. Their epistolary passion lasted a long time. Then it so happened that the matter of a small inheritance required Claude to spend some time in the capital. Overcome with joy, René took himself off to the station with a bunch of flowers. Of course, since he was expecting to see a young girl, he didn’t recognise Claude, but Claude knew what he wanted and that is how, quite naturally, the two friends moved in together, a common everyday occurrence in our era of great open-mindedness. At first René experienced a few misgivings, but Claude, guided by his conscience, drew his attention to the fact that, according to *Samedi-Soir*, the only people you ever saw in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, at Florette, at Tante Blanche and at Montata were homosexuals, and that a lifestyle adopted on such a large scale by a whole group of intellectual and artistic young people could not possibly exist unless it was based on something solid. René gradually became used to the idea and he and Claude soon formed one of those happy little homosexual households, honouring the French traditions of loyalty and conformity.

II

Their life passed by uneventfully. The days unfolded sweetly for René Lantulé who, pampered by Claude, kept his house in meticulous order. He had a natural talent for cooking and carried out even the most menial household chores with the utmost care. Claude had cleverly invested his inheritance in a trust company.
During the day, he would go to the office and steer his ship skillfully, although in reality he drove a Renault 4CV. Around six pm, he would file his papers, close the drawers and cheerfully head home, oh, sweet home, where René would be waiting for him, knitting. Then by the light, they would make plans for the future, and with a semblance of gratitude, Claude would sometimes feel his heart melt, thinking about the weekly edition of the *Revue du Ciné* they were reading.

III

However, as their relationship wore on, René’s mood became more and more peculiar. On several occasions when Claude arrived home, he noticed his friend’s sadness. René would mope around and hardly even bother to respond to Claude’s thoughtfulness as he humorously recounted the thousand and one misadventures that had occurred during the day. Sometimes René would even stand up, leave the room without looking at Claude and go and shut himself away in his bedroom. At first Claude didn’t say anything, but one evening René seemed more upset than usual. He waited until his friend had gone to his room and then went and joined him a few minutes later. He found him stretched out on the bed, his head buried in the pillow. When he placed his hand on his shoulder to console him, he noticed that René was crying.

“What’s wrong, precious?” Claude asked.

“Nothing,” René said between two huge sobs.

“What is it, my joy, my love, my one and only?”

“I don’t want to say,” René whispered.

“Tell me, my darling,” Claude insisted.

“I don’t dare,” René said.

“Come on, my beautiful blue boy, tell me …”

“I’m ashamed to say,” René said very quietly.

“Come on pet, get it off your chest.”

“I want to have a child,” René said.

And then he started crying again in the pillow. There was great surprise written all over Claude’s face. You might have even said that he was a little annoyed. He didn’t answer and left the room to hide his sadness from René.
IV

Obviously, from that point on, life became difficult. Claude was downcast and blew several business deals. Their relationship remained strained and neither he nor René were as gay as before. Claude was in two minds, and then one night he came to a decision.

“Listen, my one and only,” he said. “Since you can’t have children, we’ll adopt one.”

“Oh!” René said, his face beaming with joy. “Would you do that?”

Moved by the happiness of his friend, Claude nodded in agreement.

“What would you like?” he asked. “A boy or a girl?”

“A little girl,” René said enthusiastically. “They are so sweet! And besides, they love their mothers more.”

“Good,” Claude said. “Then you shall have a little girl.”

René flew into his arms and they spent a very pleasant evening together, the first in a long time. Claude was happy and the next day he signed off on a major deal. As soon as the afternoon came around, he treated himself to a half-day off and set out to see what he could find.

He soon realised that it was not going to be easy to find a little girl to adopt. All the ones on offer were too young and he was afraid that René wouldn’t be able to feed them, and a child not fed by its mother is weak, as everyone knows. Furthermore, the children of refugees had already been placed. A large number had been cruelly killed. In short, there was a shortage. That night, he returned home empty-handed and mentioned nothing to René about his fruitless search. For a good week he pounded the pavement in hope of a discovery. His advertisements produced no result and finally, in a police station in the fourteenth arrondissement, something came up. It was a skinny little teenager with beautiful blue eyes and bedraggled black hair.

“That’s all I have,” the superintendent said.

“How old is she?” Claude asked.

“Seventeen,” the superintendent said. “But she only looks fourteen.”

“it’s not exactly what I had in mind,” Claude said, “but bad luck. I’ll take her.”
On the way back to the house he asked her name. It was Andrée. He told her to tell René that she was fourteen. He felt somewhat disgusted at finding himself so close to a person of this sex, but when he thought of the joy she would bring to René, he pushed these thoughts aside. Anyway, as thin and as nervous as she was, Andrée looked like a boy. But even so, you could clearly see two small breasts under her blouse.

“You had better hide those,” Claude indicated.
“How?” Andrée asked.
“Put a Velpeau strip over them,” Claude suggested.
“I don’t have much,” Andrée protested.
“That’s true,” Claude admitted. “You don’t have a lot to hide, but all the same, it is still disgusting.”

“Why did you adopt me then if I disgust you?” Andrée asked angrily. “No-one is forcing you!”
“Come on,” Claude said. “Don’t be angry. I didn’t mean to say anything offensive. René will spoil you, you’ll see.”
“Is that my mum?” Andrée asked.
“Yes,” Claude said. “And she’s very sweet.”

As they passed a big hairdressing salon with brightly lit windows, Claude wondered if he should take Andrée inside so she would be more presentable on arrival, but he thought it would be depriving René of the small pleasure of taking care of his daughter himself, in his own way.

As they approached, he once again advised Andrée not to reveal her true age.
“René wanted a little girl,” he explained. “It makes no difference to you if you say you’re only fourteen, but it will make her so happy.”

“You really like my mum,” Andrée said full of admiration. “You only think of her.”

Claude brushed aside a sweet tear of joy at the thought of those that René had shed. The small car stopped outside the building where they lived.
“This is it,” he said.
“It’s a beautiful house!” Andrée said admiringly.
Up until then the poor child had only ever lived in the lower end of town.
“You’ll see,” Claude said, slightly moved in spite of himself by the young
girl’s display of emotion. “You’ll be fine with us. And there’s even a lift.”

“Oh! Great! One that works!” Andrée said. “And I’ll have dresses to wear.”

“Yes,” Claude said, “but don’t forget … you’re fourteen … and you’ll act like
it.”

“Okay,” Andrée said, “I’ll play the fool … but it doesn’t matter. After all, I
have to make some sacrifices.”

She had all the innate good sense of a child of Paris.

V

It is difficult to describe René’s joy when Claude and Andrée walked through
the door of the small apartment. He gave Andrée a big hug and then, jumping into
Claude’s arms, kissed him passionately on the mouth. Andrée watched the scene
unfold with some astonishment.

“I thought they were that way,” she said to herself.

And this time out loud, she added, “Where’s my mum?”

“That would be me, my dear,” René said. He let go of Claude, took her in his
arms and smothered her with kisses.

“Oh good,” Andrée said, not too surprised. “Is there any chicken?”

“Anything you want my dear, my joy, my one and only,” René said.

Claude, slightly put out by the display of affection René was showering on his
new daughter, tried to make light of things to hide his pain.

“Chicken?” he said. “Haven’t you had enough?”

He was making an amusing reference to the police station. Andrée laughed
and explained it to René, who in turn laughed when he learned that ‘chicken’ was
another name for the police. Claude, somewhat heavy-hearted, was nevertheless
experiencing mixed emotions on seeing René’s beaming face.

VI

The three of them slipped easily into their new way of life. It was decided
that Andrée would sleep in René’s room, separate from Claude’s, because it was
more convenient. Now when Claude came home from the office, he would find René and his daughter always busily engaged in some new activity. Andrée adored her adopted mother, and with the shyness you would expect from a young girl her age, called him ‘Auntie René’. As for René, when it came to the subject of Andrée, he never tired of singing her praises. It would be fair to say that with Claude and René’s love and affection, Andrée had developed into a beautiful young lady, full-figured with a keen eye and quick wit. Claude wasn’t able to hide the true age of their protégée for very long, but far from upsetting René, this revelation seemed to put him more at ease. Every day there would be new gifts – nail polish, a hat, a fine pair of shoes, nylon stockings. Andrée’s life had become one long party. Whenever she went shopping on René’s arm in the stylish boutiques of rue Royal and Faubourg Saint-Honoré, there were very few passers-by who didn’t turn around to take a second look, attracted by her grace and the fire in her eye. Her education, neglected for so long, had been completed in the most appropriate fashion, and her uncouth manner of speaking polished from the contact with her two friends. What’s more, she loved the cinema, and this formed another special bond between these three affectionate human beings.

Now that he knew the real age of his daughter, René no longer hesitated to take her along to the great fashion designers, in particular Pierre Balpogne, who he had known at the Club Saint-Germain-des-Pieds. While assisting at these fittings, René discovered his penchant for haute couture. Several times, under the watchful eye of Balpogne, he himself draped the precious material over the curved hips of his adopted daughter, who seemed to take great pleasure in seeing herself adorned like an idol, as she stood in a short lace slip surrounded by the assistants. Balpogne encouraged René as much as possible, and René felt strongly drawn to this charming line of work to which his nature was predestined. At home in the evening, they would entertain Claude with stories of sessions with Balpogne. René managed to obtain some off-cuts and several good handbooks and often, instead of going out, he would undress Andrée in his room and have her try on his new creations. In the beginning, Andrée appeared very enthusiastic but, over time, she became almost shy. Now, when René carefully removed her dress and undergarments to arrange a heavy piece of satin or watered silk on her, she would lower her head, cover her breasts with her hands and modestly squeeze her thighs together. It is true that René was now
deriving great pleasure in fitting these dresses and that his hands were taking longer to smooth out the creases in the material covering the shapely contours of his adopted daughter’s body. One fine day, unable to hold back any longer, he kissed her on the mouth in such a way that the young girl became flustered, and recalling who knows what memories from her sad past, returned the kiss in a manner so passionate, that René almost passed out. No longer able to contain themselves, they both lost control as the petting became more and more daring, so much so that half an hour later they emerged from a state of euphoria arms (and legs) entwined, the big black bags under Andrée’s eyes testimony as to how much she had enjoyed herself. As for René, he only wanted one thing – to do it all again, which was made clear to him why in the two hours that followed.

After this, it was going to be difficult to continue with their previous way of life. René now went and joined Claude more and more rarely in the evenings, reserving all of his fervour for Andrée. The living arrangements and the fact that she was sleeping in the same room made things so much easier for such a reprehensible relationship. In the meantime René was now working with Balpogne who, still believing him to be on board, was divulging the secrets of the industry and paying him on a regular basis. Andrée, for her part, had been taken on as a model with Diargent, a famous fashion designer, and René was taking full advantage of the information she was gathering daily.

René was unable to hide the complete and utter transformation that had taken place in him from Claude for very long. Claude suffered greatly from this incomprehensible situation and naturally neither his pleas nor his threats could make René go back on his decision to live on the earnings from his work with Andrée. They went their separate ways in the spring of the following year. One shocking thing came out of all of this. The action brought against René by Claude in the matter of deserting the family home was pronounced in favour of René who was, furthermore, granted full custody of the child. Only in France, country of declining moral standards, can such injustices be played out in the public arena.
IMPOTENCE
I

Every evening, a fine young man by the name of Aurèle Verkhoïansk would come into the bookshop at the Club Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He claimed to be an existentialist, which alone told you that he was suffering from a slight inferiority complex. But he hid it rather well under an embroidered cape and whenever a pretty girl came along and introduced herself, he never failed to slap her on the backside and laugh along with her in that high-pitched nasal laugh of a real homosexual. Aurèle received a substantial monthly allowance from his parents that gave him the opportunity to pursue his studies almost seriously, while still keeping up appearances in Saint-Germain, where those who don’t drink are looked down on. (If truth be known, it is enough to drink Perrier or something as innocuous as fruit juice to earn a reputation as a gentleman, since alcoholism is no longer considered a virtue. The main thing is to be seen drinking something even if it is only milk). So Aurèle would spend a lot of time drinking and had struck up a friendship with the barman, Louis Barucq, a most engaging individual, whose absence on Sundays was unanimously lamented by the bookshop regulars. But Louis did need to take a break. Let’s also add that Louis’ sister, a famous hair artiste named Lisette, would sometimes come into the bar and that Aurèle had fallen in love with her. Perhaps therein lies the origin of the story you are about to read, although Aurèle’s silence over his unusual behaviour doesn’t allow us to draw any conclusions with any degree of certainty.

So, one evening Aurèle was sitting at the bar in the bookshop, perched on one of the tall green stools that are always broken, talking to Louis. It was eleven o’clock and with the rush over, Louis and Aurèle were sampling a Strawberry Sutra, which is like a Brandy Alexander, only instead of crème de cacao, you use the same amount of Hérétique-Guyot’s “Strawberry Succès”. So, one-third fresh cream, one-third brandy, one-third strawberry cream liqueur; shake with ice in a strainer, pour and add pepper to taste. Since fresh cream was hard to come by, Louis used condensed milk, but even so, it was still a delicious beverage. Aurèle had just finished his sixth Strawberry Sutra and was starting to eye off his neighbour, a stunning brunette with doe-like eyes who was conscientiously on to her eleventh brandy and wondering how it would all end, because her two companions were already completely hammered. Seeing the glimmer of passion in Aurèle’s eye, Louis stepped in.
“Miss Miranda . . .”
“Yes?” the beautiful Miranda Chenillet asked.
“Allow me to introduce you to one of my best customers . . .”
“Come off it,” Aurèle interrupted. “I’m the one who invented the Strawberry Sutra and you still don’t consider me to be a friend!”
“Oh! I do apologise,” Louis said. “But Miss Miranda is well aware that I wouldn’t introduce her to just anyone.”

Aurèle was becoming increasingly disturbed by the plunging neckline of his neighbour who had no trouble filling her blouse when she straightened her shoulders.

“Good evening,” Miranda said, turning towards Aurèle. “Are you drunk?”
This shocked Aurèle somewhat, because he thought he held his liquor well.
“Does it show?” he asked, slightly annoyed.
“Not at all,” Miranda said. “That’s not what I meant. But they are and it’s bothering me. That’s what I’m talking about.

She was pointing to her two friends.

Louis, forever tactful, intervened. “In short, Miss Miranda is asking if you can escort her home.”

“Do you have a large bed?” Aurèle asked Miranda.

In Saint-Germain-des-Prés you can say what’s on your mind without shocking anyone.

“Of course,” Miranda answered, joining in the game. “But you know it won’t do you any good because I’m completely frigid.”

“Well that’s lucky,” Aurèle said, flashing a cheeky grin. “Because I’m impotent, totally impotent.”

Louis was listening to them with a big smile on his face, and seeing that things couldn’t be going any better, went off to attend to other customers.

Aurèle studied Miranda’s face closely. She had a beautiful smooth complexion, a slightly turned up nose, unfashionable shoulder-length hair and a poorly defined mouth, which is probably what made it so appealing. From having seen her on her feet, he also knew that she was tall and thin. At that moment, he noticed that her slender fingers didn’t detract from the rest of her unusual charm. The Strawberry Sutras had made him more daring, so he took hold of Miranda’s right hand and brought it to his lips. She made no effort to remove it.
“Do you know how beautiful it is to sleep with someone without doing anything?” he said.

“Of course I do,” Miranda said.

“Next to each other …” Aurèle said.

“Completely naked …” Miranda said.

“No touching …” Aurèle said.

“Yes … a little touching … and caressing.”

“No kissing …” Aurèle said.

“Oh, yes!” Miranda protested. “Lots of kissing. Without kissing, what’s the point? Just because you’re frigid doesn’t mean you can’t kiss.”

“But that’s all you do?” Aurèle was making sure.

“That’s all,” Miranda confirmed.

Aurèle took the last small piece of ice from the bottom of his glass and held it between his fingers. When they were really cold, he wiped them on his handkerchief and looked at Miranda. There was a patch of bare skin between the collar of her jacket and ear lobe. He placed his index finger there. It sent a shiver down her spine and Miranda tilted her head to the side to prevent Aurèle from attempting to withdraw his hand.

“That’s the kind of thing an impotent man loves to do,” Aurèle said. “Just think, I could make you feel like that all over.”

Miranda tensed. She looked at him. Then she drew him towards her and planted one of those unforgettable kisses on his mouth - a technicoloured, three-dimensional, sweet, smooth, perfect kiss.

Aurèle had to admit to himself that his reactions to these displays of intimacy were hardly those of an impotent man, but wanting to play fair with such a reputable young lady, he set about thinking of Paul Claudel and calmed down almost immediately. He was keeping Gide for when things became more difficult.

“Well,” he said, “I think that when it’s all said and done, with you being frigid and me impotent, we are on the true path to sensual gratification.”

He was not unhappy with his turn of phrase and even less so when he saw Miranda rise to her feet.

“Take me home,” she said.
He stood up, helped her with her red coat and followed her to the door, which he held open.

“Goodbye Louis,” Aurèle called out.

As the glass door closed, the last thing Aurèle saw was old Tony, sitting alone at his usual small table with a big smile on his face, shaking his head with great conviction, telling stories that no one would hear.

II

“This is it,” Miranda said.

The taxi stopped. Aurèle paid, left a generous tip and joined the brunette as she was starting to go up the stairs.

“I live on the third floor,” she said.

“Excellent,” Aurèle said.

“Are you sure you are really impotent?”

“I guarantee it,” Aurèle said.

It was his intention to remain true to his word. And besides, Paul Claudel was still on the job.

He followed Miranda into her bedroom where it was nice and warm. She took off her coat and shoes.

“Would you like something to drink? Some coffee?”

“It keeps me awake,” Aurèle said, “and sometimes it makes me a little edgy.”

“Take off your clothes and get into bed,” Miranda said. “I’ll be back.”

Aurèle untied his shoes and placed them under the bed. He removed his jacket, tie and pants, which he folded over the back of a chair, and then he put his jacket, tie, shirt, socks and underpants with the extra support on top. He was now completely undressed. Although well-endowed, he managed to remain decent by turning his thoughts away from Miranda.

She called out from the bathroom.

“Are you in bed?’

“Yes,” Aurèle said, climbing in under the covers, or between the sheets, to be more precise.
Miranda came over. She was wearing a small ribbon, which held her shiny hair in place on the back of her neck. Aurèle noticed her firm flat stomach, her cheeky breasts and at the junction of her thighs, a stylish, well-maintained triangle of Astrakhan fleece.

Aurèle became worried when he felt his friend starting to play tent poles with the top sheet, and evoked *The Satin Slipper*.

It worked a charm and the appendage relaxed.

Miranda slid in next to Aurèle.

Unfortunately for him, it was like coming in contact with an electric current. He never dreamed the girl would have such soft skin. He let out a moan.

“Kiss me,” Miranda said. “We don’t risk anything by kissing and I don’t want to go to sleep straight away.”

Keeping his distance as best he could, Aurèle kissed her timidly on the cheek. She took his head in her two hands and planted her mouth on his. Aurèle felt a lively demon prise apart his lips and began to recite to himself the beginning of *The Tidings Brought to Mary*.

It was a beneficial ice bath for his burning loins. He was daring enough to return Miranda’s kisses and realised, on reflection, that this was even better. His body remained calm as his mind was now taking full advantage of the situation.

Miranda, however, was trying to move closer and closer and Aurèle could already feel the hard points of her breasts lightly brush his chest.

Aurèle reprimanded himself severely for the intense pleasure derived from the contact and as punishment, recalled the opening lines of *Strait is the Gate*.

This time it was almost too much to bear. Meanwhile, there was a sequence that had to be followed. He went back to Claudel, and then summoned Hervé Bazin, still keeping Gide in reserve.

But when Miranda slipped one of her long thighs between Aurèle’s knees, he thought he was going to die. Unforgiving, his second-in-command awoke from his slumber.

The double dose of Gide-Claudel was decidedly the most difficult operation that Aurèle had yet undertaken. With great difficulty, he invoked *Nathanaël* and *Fruits of the Earth*, but could only gain temporary relief.

Miranda was whispering sweet things to him.
“It’s crazy to think that I would love sleeping with an impotent man,” she said tenderly, as she delicately nibbled and kissed the poor fellow’s ear.

Aurèle, overwhelmed by so much passion, would have liked to have shown that he was up to the task at hand by remaining as sexless as a tree stump, but sudden contact between Miranda’s tantalizing tummy and his own reduced the effect of a wonderful quote taken from *The Countefeiters* to rubble. From now on, there would be no stopping his messenger, as he tried to occupy the place that he thought was rightfully his.

Miranda noticed and protested.

“Listen Aurèle, I took you to be a man of your word.”

“But,” Aurèle stammered, “Miranda, my friend, I swear I’m doing my best.”

“For goodness sake dear, take some bromide!”

Having said that, she disentangled herself and turned her back on the poor pretender. One last hope … Aurèle recalled *Thirst* by Mister Bernstein. Instantly put on ice, he was able to plead his cause with some semblance of good faith. He moved closer to Miranda. Unfortunately, at the very moment her thighs brushed his two sweet globes, whose purpose in life is to atone for the misery they cause in the unnatural position of sitting, since man was designed to live on his back because of his elongated shape, the rebel mutinied again.

Feeling like a fool, Aurèle threw off the covers and stood up. Miranda wouldn’t talk to him.

“Miranda, my dear,” Aurèle said with the greatest sincerity, “I know how appalling my behaviour has been, and I swear it was not premeditated. After experiencing recent sadness, I was entitled to think that my body, like my mind, would easily resist the baseness of ordinary physical love. Tonight, after meeting you, I believed, and still do believe, that the purest form of passion is that which can unite an impotent man and a frigid woman. You are that frigid woman. And it seems that it is better to be a frigid female than an impotent male, who has to contend with the whims of a nervous system that are difficult to effectively control. But from now on, all of my efforts will be devoted to the pursuit of that inactivity that will make me worthy of your affection. I am leaving you. I don’t want this evening, born out of virtue, to end in ignominity and disgusting promiscuity between two members of the opposite sex. Miranda, adieu. I am acting in the interest of our love.”
He got dressed again with dignity. Miranda didn’t move, but as he was about to leave, she sat up in bed. The lamp on the bedside table was casting warm shadows on her disheveled hair and on her breasts. As a pure-hearted person, she never dreamed of covering those irresistible pink points on the end that, like lightning to a lightning rod, were begging to be touched. Two tears rolled down her smooth cheeks and she tried to smile.

“Aurèle, my darling,” she said, “I have faith in you.”

Inflamed by the words of his beloved, Aurèle rushed from the room and fell flat on his face in the darkened stairwell, because it was four o’clock in the morning and the automatic timer had already been long switched off.

III

The surgeon scratched his nose. He had some reservations. In his opinion, the operation was a little out of the ordinary.

“My dear sir,” he said to Aurèle, “I must admit that what you are asking me to do is hardly standard procedure. You are extremely well-endowed,” he added, feeling the weight of the two objects in question, “and with those things, you could have lots of children.”

“Doctor,” Aurèle said simply with a sob in his voice, “my happiness is at stake.”

“But can I ask you why?” the surgeon said, regretfully letting go of the items on which he was refusing to operate.

Aurèle pulled up his underpants and trousers.

“The one I love wants to be loved by an impotent man,” he said.

The doctor scratched his head.

“Oh!” he said. “Well, if I cut it all off for you, of course you won’t be able to reproduce, but it won’t stop you from displaying all the outward characteristics of virility … how should I say this … pride and joy included.”

“Oh!” Aurèle said, heartbroken.

“Listen,” the doctor said, “with the right drug …”

“Nothing calms me down, doctor,” Aurèle said. “Not even Bernstein.”

“Oh,” the doctor said, “a good stretch, you know …”
“H’mm …” Aurèle said.

“I’ve got it,” the doctor said. “The answer, I have it in my hands. Before going to see your true love, find some normal girl and work out with her for an hour.”

Aurèle gave it some thought.

“Yes!” he said. “I will do it … for Miranda!”

IV

Miranda greeted him dressed like Botticelli’s Venus. The scallop was missing and her hair was shorter, but the effect was still the same.

Aurèle had just gone three rounds on the body of a sweet friend whose animalistic nature required ordinary lovemaking. He was exhausted.

“Darling!” Miranda said when she saw him. “So, you’re ready!”

Aurèle fell into bed and snuggled up in Miranda’s arms. She gave him one of those kisses that almost made him melt.

V

He awoke at around eleven o’clock in the morning, aching all over beyond description. He was alone in bed.

Almost immediately, he saw her emerge from the bathroom. She was covered in bruises. She rushed over to him.

“My love …” she said. “You’ve shown me how happy I can be. Come on, let’s get married.”

“I … what? …” Aurèle said.

“I love you,” Miranda said. “Do you know …” She blushed. “Do you know how many times you made love to me last night?” she ended up saying.

Aurèle shook his head. Miranda held out two hands with both thumbs tucked in.

“One, two, three … four …” Aurèle counted.

At eight, he fainted at the thought. Before losing consciousness, he had time to hear Miranda exclaim:

“Finally, I am realising my dream … to marry an impotent man!”
Which is not difficult when it’s all said and done, because they abound in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, as this true story goes to show.
Notes

The Werewolf

The Fausses-Reposes woods are situated near Versailles. The name is a hunting term used to describe feints used by animals to throw hunters off the scent. It has special significance in relation to the story of Denis.

Ville-d’Avray, situated near Versailles, is the birthplace of Boris Vian.

Louis Boussenard (1847-1911) was an author of adventure novels. The expression “basket of oranges” first appeared in *Les Pirates des champs d’or*. It refers to Australian prospectors hoping to make their fortune on the goldfields.

The Scribe Hotel is situated between the Opera and Place Vendôme in Paris.

Rambolitain is derived from Rambouillet, a town 44km South-West of Paris.

François Mauriac (1885-1970), author and member of the Académie Française.

Fausto Coppi (1919-1960), a legendary Italian cyclist of the post WWII era whose achievements include two victories in the Tour de France.

Saint-Cloud is a commune approximately 10 kilometres West of Paris.

Restaurant Cabassud is an upmarket restaurant in Ville-d’Avray.

A Heart of Gold

A Mansard Roof has 2 slopes on each of the 4 sides, with the lower slope being steeper than the upper slope.

Bertillon (1853-1914) took measurements of bony body parts to assist in the identification of criminals.

Ramparts of the South

Permission to take a car on the road was necessary from the Liberation until 1949, due to the scarcity of petrol.

Bison Ravi is one of the anagrams of Boris Vian.

Saint-Jean-de-Luz is a seaside resort and fishing village south of Bordeaux, near the Spanish border.

Jules Gouffé (1807-1877) was a famous French chef who wrote many cook books.
Café Duflor is a play on the Café de Flore on the Boulevard Saint-Germain.

Deux-Mâghos is a play on Les Deux Magots, a café almost next to the Café de Flore.

François Mauriac (1885-1970) won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1952.

Georges Duhamel (1884-1966) was a member of the Académie Française.

The city of Nuremberg is famous for manufacturing toys since the Middle Ages. It may also be a World War II reference to when the underground radio was working successfully.

The Montlhéry Tower is located 26 kilometres South-West of Paris on the road to Orléans.

Houdan served as an important poultry market for Paris. The bird is similar in appearance to “le coq”, the French sporting emblem.

Julien Da Rui (1916-1987) was a legendary goalkeeper for the French national team during the 1940s.

Sérail is a company that produces Marseille soap and perfume.

Jules Romains (1885-1972) was a novelist, dramatist and poet.

**Love is Blind**

The tower in question is almost certainly the Eiffel Tower.

Noah’s cloak- Genesis tells how Noah wandered drunk and naked through the campsite, until his sons covered him with a cloak, as they walked backwards.

Salammbô was the heroine of the book of the same name by Gustave Flaubert, who steals a veil in order to save Carthage.

Tanit was a Phoenician lunar goddess worshipped as the patron goddess of Carthage.

Valkyrie, in Scandinavian mythology, were the maidens who carry out the will of Odin in determining the victors in battle, and determining the warriors whose souls were deserving of the afterlife in Valhalla.

Circe was the daughter of the sun god Helius, known for her ability to turn men into animals with her magic sword.
Quo Vadis was the question asked by Peter to Jesus while fleeing persecution in Rome. ‘Where are you going? Where do we go from here?’ There were several film adaptations from the novel by Sienkiewicz in 1896, with perhaps the best-known being the M.G.M. production in 1951 starring Robert Taylor, Deborah Kerr and Peter Ustinov.

Fabiola was a Roman woman who had an unfaithful husband. She became a patron to those experiencing difficult marriages, adultery and loss.

Et cum spirituo tuo – “and with your spirit”.

*Les Temps modernes* was a literary review founded in 1946 by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir. Vian was a contributor.

**Martin Called…**

Rue Notoire-du-Vidame is probably based on rue Notre-Dame des Victoires where Vian worked with Afnor.

Doddy refers to Claude Léon, Roby is Boris Vian and the brother refers to Alain Vian who sometimes played the drums in the group Abadie-Vian.

Michelle Vian frequented The Hotel Normandy when she was preparing for her baccalaureat. Freddy, the owner, experienced problems as a collaborator.

Weegee, an alias of Arthur Fellig (1900-1968), was a New York photographer famous for his work with that city as subject. He was a contributor to *Photography* and author of the book *Naked City*.

Temsey is Taymour Nawab, a guitarist and singer who loved the bottle.


Rue Lamarck is where Claude Léon lived in 1948-49.

Maxence Van der Meersch (1907-1951) was a well-known writer of the time. Perhaps his best-known work was *Corps et âmes*.

Buescher is a famous brand in music circles.

Aubusson is a town famous for the manufacture of carpet.

Mac Orlan is a pseudonym of Pierre Dumarchey (1882-1970), a French writer.

Zazous were the young jazz fans with a particular fashion sense.
Johnny Mercer (1909-1976) was an American composer and singer who sometimes worked with Duke Ellington.

*Le Petit vin blanc* was a very popular French song by J. Dréjac and Borel-Clerc, written in 1943.

*Yank* was a weekly publication released and edited by the American War Ministry between 1942 and 1945.

**Another Day in Marseille**

Palavas is a seaside resort in the south of France, near Montpellier.

Havas is currently the second largest advertising group in France and the sixth largest communications group in the world.

Nogent is located in the eastern suburbs of Paris.

Mr Mackinley could be based on Ray McKinley, a singer and drummer with Glenn Miller.

The battle of Iwo Jima was fought between the U.S. and Japan in February and March 1945.

A.S.S. is mocking the U.S. by changing O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services), which was later to become the C.I.A.

Hirohito was the Emperor of Japan from 1926 until 1989. He approved the attack on Pearl Harbour that led to the war between the U.S. and Japan.

Marthe Richard (1889-1982) was a French prostitute and spy during both World Wars. Afterwards, she was responsible for the closing of brothels, which earned her the Légion d’honneur.

Vivaquatre was a Renault produced between 1936 and 1939.

Harbin is the capital of the Sungkiang province of China.

N.R.F., or Non-Remember Fluid was a serum developed by the American Secret Service during the Second World War. It is also a play on la Nouvelle Revue française.

**Dogs, Death and Desire**

This story is signed under the pseudonym of Vernon Sullivan, Vian’s alter ego, responsible for *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*. 
*The Slip-Up*

Jorjobert is possibly a phonetic spelling of Georges Aubert, a French winemaker of the 1950s.

The family in this story is based on the members of Vian’s own family.

Vian’s son, Patrick, was born on April 12th 1948.

Caroline Lampion is a play on the name of the Belgian actress, Anne Campion, who took the role of Jean Asquith in the play *J’irai cracher sur vos tombes*.

Merdozart reflects Vian’s disdain for the music of Mozart.

André-Charles Boulle (1642-1732) was a famous furniture maker, working for Louis XIV.

Léon Dodiléon is a play on the name Claude Léon.

Heidsick comes from Rheims.

*A Sad Story*

The Touvre is a tributary of the Charente at Angoulême, where Vian spent some time in 1940.

Quettetehou is in the northwest of the Normandy peninsula, near Landemer where the Vian family spent their post-war summer holidays.

L’Institut Mlle Désir was a private school for Catholic girls in Paris. Simone de Beauvoir was educated there.

*The Thinker*

Urodonal is a brand of medication for kidney problems.

Epictetus (50-130?) was a Greek philosopher.

Babylon was a rich and powerful city, but it was full of corruption.

Trying to find success in Paris was a trait of the young heroes of novels during the 19th century.
**Leobille’s Party**

Folubert Sansonnet is a play on the name of Hubert Fol, sax player in Claude Abadie’s band.

The Hesperides were named after the daughters of Hesperus. They were the guardians of a tree of golden apples in a garden located beyond the Atlas Mountains, at the western border of Oceanus, or the known world.

Doddy is Claude Léon, Réonfol is Raymond Fol, chef Abadibada is Claude Abadie, and the Lorientais Club is a group of well-known musicians led by Claude Luter.

The Major, Jacques Loustatot, was almost like a brother to Vian.

The Prévert brothers, Jacques and Pierre, were well known to Vian. Jacques was Vian’s neighbour at Cité Véron, while Pierre was a filmmaker.

“Ivan the Terrible” is Eisenstein’s film of 1945. The actor’s name is subject to discussion. It could be based on actor Sergeï Andrejef, or it could be based on the Russian explorer Ivan Papanine who visited the North Pole in 1940.

Judo was widely practised after the Liberation.

Jean Berdin was a jazz drummer with Bolling, Abadie, Vian and others. This is a play on his name.

**The Voyeur**

This story was originally entitled “Les Filles de la neige” but appears as “Le Bonhomme de neige” in Œuvres complètes and the Pléiade. The translation of “Le Voyeur” is closer to the manuscript.

Diana, a goddess in Roman mythology, is associated with hunting and virginity, and later with the moon.

Dionysus, a Greek god, son of Zeus, was originally a god of fertility, associated with wild and ecstatic religious rites. In later traditions he is the god of wine who loses inhibitions and inspires creativity in music and poetry. Also known as Bacchus.

**Danger from the Classics**

This short story demonstrates Vian’s passion for science fiction, which was in vogue in the United States from around 1949.

*You and Me / Toi et Moi* (1912) is the best known work of Paul Le Fèvre, also known as Géraldy (1885-1983).
“The Grand Duchess of Antares” is possibly derived from Jacques Offenbach’s “The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein”.

Francis Lopez (1916-1995) was a well-known composer of operettas. Antares is the name of the super giant star, Alpha in Scorpion.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) was an Austrian / American composer.

Duke Ellington (1899-1974) was a friend of Vian.

Vincent Scotto (1876-1952) was a French composer of popular songs and operettas.

Rossler, Brenn and Renaud are fictitious names, although possibly based on real people.

The final line is the opening line of the ninth verse of Géraldy’s poem.

_A Dog of a Job_

This story and the next two were written between January 2nd and March 5th 1946, and form a trilogy on Vian’s involvement with the cinema. The Admiral may well be another incarnation of the Major, who collaborated with Vian on a number of film projects, although Michelle Vian says that the character was based on Roger Lamoral, a cousin of the Major.

_A Cultural Experience_

Paul Boubal was the owner of the Café de Flore during the 1940s.

Juliette Gréco and Anne-Marie Cazalis are recognizable as characters.

Astruc was a French cinematographer and writer, and a friend of Vian.

“The Autant en emporte le Père Noël” in the source text could be a play on “Autant en emporte le vent” (“Gone With the Wind”). It could also be a reference to “Larceny Inc.”, based on S.J. Perelman’s “The Night Before Christmas.”

Edward G. Robinson (1893-1973), an American actor of Romanian descent, was famous in the gangster role.

Salicylate is a bitter chemical used as a fungicide and in the manufacture of aspirin and dyes.

Beemans is a brand of chewing gum created in the 1880s by Dr Edward Beeman.
Marliche Dihêtrenne is a play on the name of the actress Marlene Dietrich who starred in a movie called “Blue Angel.”

**A Big Star**

Calambar is possibly derived from Calabar, an international seaport in southeast Nigeria.

Muguet is a small white spring flower.

La mouillette is a piece of finger-size bread.

Le Club des Stars is derived from le Club des Vedettes and le Cygne-Ecran from le Cinécran, popular theatres at the time found in the IX arrondissement.

**Swimmer-Doll Priest**

Louis Pauwels (1920-1997) was born in Belgium. He was a writer and journalist for a number of different publications, including *Variété*, *Esprit* and *Le Journal du Dimanche*. Pauwels wrote an article entitled “Mœurs et coutumes aux bains Deligny” in *La Rue*, and it has been said that “Le Ratichon baigneur” was written in response to that article.

Deligny was a floating swimming pool moored on the Seine.

*La Rue* was a weekly publication to which Vian contributed.

*Pilgrim*(Le Pèlerin) was a weekly journalist founded in 1873 by the Assumptionists.

*Christian Witness* (Témoignage Chrétien) was a daily publication with Leftist tendencies.

Pelota (Basque) is a sport played on a court with a ball, a racket, a bat or hand.

Rimbaud (1854-1891) was a symbolist poet.

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a profound and prolific writer in the Danish “golden era” of intellectual and artistic activity. He is sometimes known as the “father of existentialism.”

*The Hundred and Twenty Days of Sodom* was the infamous book by the Marquis de Sade in which he graphically describes varieties of sexual perversion.

Cremone is an Italian town famous for the manufacture of musical instruments. Cremone Violin is also a painting by Charles Muller.
Gericault Trumpet is a little ambiguous. Théodore Géricault (1791-1824) painted “Trompette des Hussards.” The trumpet was also the musical instrument that brought down the walls of Jericho.

National Society of the Company of Jesus

**Don’t Trust the Band**

Convolution is a sinuous fold in the surface of the brain.

Paul Pierre Broca (1824-1880) was a famous neurologist.

Captain Pamphile was a fictitious sea-faring character created by Alexandre Dumas (senior).


Yvon Pétra (1916-1984) was a very tall tennis player (1m96) who won Wimbledon in 1946.

Apollo is the Greek god of prophecy, music, healing and the sun. He is also considered to be the ideal of male beauty.

**Frankfurt in the Main**

Jef is the nickname of Jean-François Devay, a real-life travelling companion of Vian.

Jason and the Argonauts and the quest for the Golden Fleece are taken from Greek mythology.

Knokke is a Belgian coastal town renowned for its jazz festivals.

The Bretton Woods Accords took place in 1944 in the United States to regulate international money and finances after World War II, and to set up the International Monetary Fund.

Steatopygia is excess fat on the buttocks.

PX or Post Exchange is a type of retail outlet operating in U.S. military bases.
**The Test**

Certain characters are recognisable as being members of Claude Luter’s group: Maxime - Maxime Saury the clarinet player, Roland – Roland Bianchini the bass player, Moustache – François Gallépidès the drummer.

Christian Castapioche is based on Christian Casadesus.

The launch of the bikini took place at Deligny.

Little Bison is Vian’s son, Patrick.

Don Byas (1912-1972) was a black sax player who spent most of his career in France after World War II.

**April’s Daughters**

In the first instance the character is Klupitzick, while in the second it is Kuplitzick. Is this an oversight in the source text? The variation has been retained in the target text.

**The Killer**

Salpingites (salpingitis) is inflammation of the Fallopian tubes.

The “eye” is a possible reference to “an eye for an eye.” It could have also been the final line of Victor Hugo’s “La Conscience” – “The eye was in the grave and was watching Cain.” There is also the third possibility of it having been derived from the title of Georges Bataille’s first novel, *Histoire de l’œil*.

Yvan Audouard (1914-2004) was a journalist and writer well known for his maxims who frequented Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

Paul Claudel (1868-1955) was a French writer, often a target of Vian’s derision.

André Gide (1869-1951) also found himself the subject of Vian’s contempt, partly because of his homosexuality, but also because he was well regarded by Gallimard. Gide won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1947. The Nabel Prize is a play on this.

**A Funny Game**

Klub Sane-Germaine is phonetic spelling of Club Saint-Germain.

Folubert Sansonnet is an inversion of the name Hubert Fol, sax player in Claude Abadie’s band.
*Barbara* is a song by Jacques Prévert and Joseph Kosma, performed by the Frères Jacques.

The names of the cabarets and nightclubs are authentic.

**The Motive**

Andrinople, now known as Edirne, is in Turkey. The “red of Andrinople” is well-known.

**Marthe and Jean**

This story appears as “Un seul permis pour leur amour” in Œuvres complètes and the Pléiade editions. It was written in 1952, only eight years after women achieved the right to vote, and tackles the question of equal rights.

**The Waltz**

This story was signed by Vian’s feminine mask, Joëlle du Beausset.

Flor Polboubal refers to Paul Boubal, the owner of the Café de Flore.

**Motherhood**

This story tackles the delicate story of adoption by a same sex couple. Considering that it was written in 1949, it was well in advance for the time.

Le Florette, la Tante Blanche and Montata refer to le Flore, la Reine-Blanche and Montana.

Pierre Balpogne is based on Pierre Balmain (1914-1982), a famous French couturier.

Diargent is a play on Christian Dior.

**Impotence**

Louis Barucq and his sister, Lisette, are real-life characters.

The Strawberry Sutra is called “foutralaafraise” in the source text. It was a cocktail invented by Louis Barucq and Boris Vian and was also known as “Pink Flamingo Sperm.”

*Le Soulier de satin* (The Satin Slipper) and *L’Annonce faite à Marie* (The Tidings Brought to Mary) are two plays by Paul Claudel.
Hervé Bazin is known for *Vipère au poing* (1948).

*Nathanaël, Les Nourritures terrestres (Fruits of the Earth), La Porte étroite (Strait is the Gate) and Faux-Monnayeurs (The Counterfeiters)* are all works by André Gide.

*La Soif (Thirst)* by Henry Bernstein (1876-1953) was created in February 1949.