

the radically altered, magical past of Susanna Clarke's novel allows the author to explore a number of still-relevant issues, including the uses and misuses of knowledge. Brown argues that the central philosophy of the novel is a Romantic version of gnosticism, in which knowledge of the universe is intertwined with understanding of the self, and the latter is dependent on giving up a false knowledge of separateness from and superiority to other beings and the universe. The novel's characters must unlearn many things, including their own history, in order to move forward.

Finally, in "Spells Out The Word of Itself, and Then Dispelling Itself: The Chaotics of Memory and The Ghost of the Novel in Jeff Noon's *Falling out of Cars*," Andrew Wenaus considers Jeff Noon's 2002 novel as an experiment in narrative "remixing": its haunted protagonist learns to sample and rearrange her own troubled and noise-corrupted history in order to move forward. Wenaus argues that Noon is doing the same thing to literary history: transforming narrative into a chaotic but open-ended version of itself in order to move literature into a post-structuralist, post-historical future.

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## The Mistress of Sp[[l]ices: Technovirtual Liaisons in Adolfo Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel*

Alf Seegert

What we see in the photographic image is not simply a copy of a referent but an emanation of the past that pursues its career independently of its original, making the photographic or filmic image something uncanny.

—Nicholas Daly

He who controls the sp[[l]ice, controls the universe!

—Baron Vladimir Harkonnen (my splice) (Lynch)

AS GEORGES MÉLIÈS DISCOVERED TO HIS ASTONISHED GLEE IN THE LATE nineteenth century, moving pictures do more than just record reality—they create one. Through stop-trick substitutions, multiple exposures, time lapses, and splices, celluloid becomes a portal translucent not only to the projector's bulb, but to the projections of the fantastic. For Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914–1999), such cinematic sleight-of-hand becomes so compelling that it promises to substitute the special effect for reality itself. In his fascinating 1940 novel *The Invention of Morel*, Bioy Casares literalizes the notion that "film is forever" by making cinematic recordings actually immortalize those captured on camera. He likewise makes appearances into potent realities. Two dissociated worlds, although temporally estranged, are spatially spliced together through layered projections—creating the illusion of two lovers immortalized in a virtual union, played back without end.<sup>1</sup> This Borgesian splicing of virtual and actual demonstrates the fantastical possibilities—and tremendous manipulative power—of the splice and the image overlay.

In the story, a fugitive seeks refuge on a deserted island that he eventually discovers is haunted by fleshly phantasms that play out fragments from their lives over and over again. These life segments were in fact recorded by Dr. Morel during a week on the island and now play back, endlessly projected in a technologically-mediated Nietzschean eternal recurrence. When the protago-

nist falls in love with one of these phantoms, he gets no response from her. Driven to desperation, his solution is to record and splice himself into her virtual world—killing himself in the process—so that if anyone were to observe the scene as it played, it would appear that the two actually interact, though she remains only aware (if aware at all) of the forever unaltered “script” as she initially played it out. Bioy Casares’s work of Latin American speculative fiction raises striking questions about our ability to embrace fantastical projections and attempt to achieve satisfaction from virtual liaisons with simulations that can never reciprocate the viewer’s desire.

### Solitude, Desire, and Textual Relations on the Island of Doctor Morel

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature . . . so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done. . . . Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden [world].

—Sir Philip Sidney

Whom *The Invention of Morel*’s protagonist is running from, and why, is not made clear (nor is his own name, so I will call him simply “the Fugitive” for simplicity) but the diary form of the novel and his choice of safe haven early on suggest that he seeks refuge in virtuality—specifically, in an epistolary form of identity. The Fugitive hides for several days inside one of the Persian rugs of an Italian merchant in Calcutta, enclosing himself in a woven textile for safety, even as he weaves his own self-contained yarn in a first-person diary account. This merchant provides not only the binding of a (text)ile, but also information on where the Fugitive might escape from the “real world”:

“There is only one possible place for a fugitive like you—it is an uninhabited island, but a human being cannot live there. Around 1924 a group of white men built a museum, a chapel, and a swimming pool on the island. . . . Chinese pirates do not go there, and the white ship of the Rockefeller Institute never calls at the island, because it is known to be the focal point of a mysterious disease, a fatal disease that attacks the outside of the body and then works inward.” (10)

With a stolen boat, the Fugitive somehow makes his way to this island, where he finds it glutted with dying plant life, a reproductive excess of vegetation

foreshadowing his concerns about unchecked “reproduction” later on. He finds no people, but only the ruins of the museum, chapel, and swimming pool mentioned by the rug merchant. Soon things change, however, and the Fugitive is initially unsure if he is hallucinating when a second sun appears in the sky and a boatful of holiday-goers disembarks onto the island, all dressed like tourists from the 1920s.

When I was finally able to sleep, it was very late. The music and the shouting woke me up a few hours later. I have not slept soundly since my escape; I am sure that if a ship, a plane, or any other form of transportation had arrived, I would have heard it. And yet suddenly, unaccountably, on this oppressive summerlike night, the grassy hillside has become crowded with people who dance, stroll up and down, and swim in the pool, as if this were a summer resort like Los Teques or Marienbad. (11)

To stabilize and account for such incongruous, erratic, and temporally disjointed perceptions, the Fugitive inscribes durable signs in his diary. His reliance on the diary as a stable reference point will, in fact, become crucial for understanding his more general valorization of the virtual throughout the text. For him, text is not only stable, but belongs to a realm of such transcendence that it exposes the evanescence of the mundane.

(Although I have been making entries in this diary at regular intervals, I have not had a chance to work on the books that I hope to write as a kind of justification for my shadowy life on this earth. And yet these lines will serve as a precaution, for they will stay the same even if my ideas change. But I must not forget what I now know is true: for my own safety, I must renounce—once and for all—any help from my fellow men.) (20)

Like Plato, the nameless Fugitive in *Morel* here identifies reality with that which endures without change and equates everyday existence with shadows, which are not only evanescent but also depend on an external source to cast them. But unlike Plato’s realm of invisible and purely “intelligible” Forms, the Fugitive’s unchanging real exists instead in the field of representation, specifically through his own permanent verbal inscriptions on the page. Artistic inscription, rather than dwelling two shadowy steps away from the real as an imitation of an imitation, becomes itself the Fugitive’s very basis for what counts as reality (recalling both Wilde’s aestheticism and Sir Philip Sidney’s notion that art creates a second, superior, “nature”).

This criterion of invariance becomes an exceedingly crucial point in *Morel*, for if it holds, then events occurring in the field of time become real only to the degree that they can be made stable and invariant. For the Fugi-

tive, waking life is a fearful shadow comprised of chaos and meaninglessness: suffering from a veritably Phildickian anxiety, he is uncertain how he made it to the island and of the epistemic status of what he thinks he sees. As a result, he considers himself to be “real” (and as a fugitive, “safe”) only to the degree that he remediates himself into a work of unalterable art: first through his diary, and ultimately through becoming part of Morel’s projection (with the projected images themselves being remediated back into the Fugitive’s own textual inscriptions).<sup>2</sup> The Fugitive’s very namelessness thus suggests an ontological failure—he lacks a *textual* identifier. Moreover, his unstated crime has exiled him from *symbolic exchange* as a participant within the social order. In addition, he is seeking escape from the *author-ities*. Does he flee these competing “authors” in order to compose a text under his sole jurisdiction? Was the narrator “framed” for a crime for which he now plays fugitive? And if so, is that perhaps why he now seeks to substitute a frame of his own?

But the diary is not enough. Despite his attempt never again to seek validation from other people, the Fugitive nonetheless craves human relationship. In particular, he is intrigued by one of the newcomers to the island, a dark-haired woman who sits alone near the shore to watch the sunset each day (he later discovers that her name is, significantly, Faustine). He soon falls in love with her and seeks to gain her attention, but she proves utterly indifferent to his advances. When the Fugitive sees Faustine walking with a “bearded man” whom he dislikes (later revealed to be the scientist Morel), the Fugitive starts to notice that their behavior together carries with it stylized repetitions from previous conversations. “I began to realize that the words and movements of Faustine and the bearded man coincided with those of a week ago. The atrocious eternal return” (41). At this point in the text the Fugitive does not yet realize that such repetition occurs because Morel and Faustine are being “replayed” from a recording. The palpability of their images is strikingly unlike any imagined “phantom”: the flower garden that the Fugitive plants to woo Faustine is demolished when Morel steps through it: the image, more palpable than actuality, obliterates the real. Such wanton indifference by the projections creates a crisis of identity for the Fugitive, who comes to recognize just how much the use of the word “I” demands an implicit “we” to secure it—he must first be recognized and called out by an “other” to exist for himself as a self in the first place. He becomes ever more desperate for Faustine and the other projections to register his own presence, but no matter what he does, the fleshly apparitions never respond. His desire “to make Faustine realize that she and I were all that mattered” (41) is of course impossible because of their separation by media, something akin to that of a cinema-goer who yearns for the celluloid image to come alive and reciprocate the viewer’s affections, as it does in Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Bioy Casares himself tellingly once claimed that he fell “deeply in love” with the silent film icon Louise

Brooks (qtd. in Beltzer).

The Fugitive’s power of imaginative projection becomes crucial here both as a parallel to Morel’s power to project images through technology and as an anticipation of the Fugitive’s use of Morel’s projector himself. Because of his inability to garner a response, he is ultimately driven to wonder if he might in fact be dead: “Now I understand why novelists write about ghosts that weep and wail. The dead remain in the midst of the living. It is hard for them, after all, to change their habits—to give up smoking, or the prestige of being great lovers” (53). Like a ghost severed from the material plane, his pain is that of being forced to witness others enjoying their communion with one another without experiencing any such reciprocation himself. “I was not dead until the intruders arrived; when one is alone it is impossible to be dead” (54).

Dead or not, ultimately the Fugitive recognizes that Faustine’s indifference will not be overcome by the flower garden-portrait he plants for her, for she ignores it and Morel blithely tramps through it. He receives final confirmation when he stumbles upon a presentation that Morel gives to the other phantoms, explaining why he has brought them to the island and asking for their pardon in the “abuse” he has inflicted on them.

[Morel] paused for a moment, rolling his eyes, smiling, trembling; then he continued impulsively: “My abuse consists of having photographed you without your permission. Of course, it is not like an ordinary photograph; this is my latest invention. We shall live in this photograph forever. Imagine a stage on which our life during these seven days is acted out, complete in every detail. We are the actors. All our actions have been recorded.” (66)

Morel then proceeds to explain just how his photographic invention works.

“With my machine a person or an animal or a thing is like the station that broadcasts the concert you hear on the radio. If you turn the dial for the olfactory waves, you will smell the jasmine perfume on Madeleine’s throat, without seeing her. By turning the dial of the tactile waves, you will be able to stroke her soft, invisible hair and learn, like the blind, to know things by your hands. But if you turn all the dials at once, Madeleine will be reproduced completely, and she will appear exactly as she is; you must not forget that I am speaking of images extracted from mirrors, with the sounds, tactile sensations, flavors, odors, temperatures, all synchronized perfectly. An observer will not realize that they are images. And if our images were to appear now, you yourselves would not believe me. Instead, you would find it easier to think that I had engaged a group of actors, improbable doubles for you!” (70)

The tactile quality and physical durability of Morel’s images speaks to

more than just his technological expertise. The narrator represents the virtual not as shadowy or insubstantial, but rather as pure durability that makes the “actual” world seem flimsy by comparison.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Beltzer reads *Morel* in this respect cinematically: “[I]n the dark we feel ourselves to be mere ghosts, lesser beings in the presence of screen grandeur. We know we matter less as real beings than the fictional beings before us.” When the Fugitive tries to move the images of a projected curtain, for instance, he finds it to be as unyielding as stone because the image can never be altered; recorded vegetation is likewise impossible to cut. In a triumph of Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra,” the spectral image not only usurps but becomes more physically palpable than its referent. The potential for the proliferation of such images makes the Fugitive emphasize repeatedly the doctrines of Thomas Malthus, which warn about the dangers of unchecked biological reproduction exhausting food supplies. In *Morel*, *mechanical* (or technical) reproduction threatens to displace all originals. As Walter Benjamin points out in his classic essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” the replicability of works of art results in a loss of *aura*. The on-demand availability of the copy usurps the authoritative, ritual function of the “original.” But in *Morel*, the fate of the *original* is worse than that. Whereas the monstrous power of the reproduced image on one hand recalls the mutant creations of Dr. Moreau (as discussed by Suzanne Jill Levine), it also channels Frankenstein, but with a decisive difference. Morel inverts the ontological hierarchy between “creator” and “creature,” for it is the original and not the work of artifice that becomes a hideous, doomed deformity. In the face of a timeless reproduced image, the contingent original withers, unable to compete with its inalterable offspring. Such figurative imagery is in fact made literal in *Morel*: although the full-bodied projections brim with life, the original 1924 visitors to the island when discovered later by a Japanese ship are found to be skinless, hairless, lacking nails—and of course, all dead.

#### **Morel’s Machine and Nietzsche’s Gramophone Record: Technologies of Eternal Return<sup>4</sup>**

Once it becomes clear that Faustine will never authenticate the Fugitive’s presence, he must decide how to respond to the persistent indifference of his beloved. The Fugitive had up until this point found consolation for his loneliness through the devices of self-inscription, namely his diary-writing: “Since I cannot escape, I continue with this monologue” (34). The value of the diary as refuge comes with a big caveat, however, for before long he comes to judge this artistic creation “no longer justifiable” (34). Deprived of dialogue and weary of monologue, the Fugitive opts for a technological alternative. To cure his isolation he uses Morel’s invention to create a simulacral relationship with Faus-

tine, artfully juxtaposing his and Faustine’s individual monologues. Splicing these images together as a crafty director/editor/performer, the Fugitive means to project the *effect* of mutuality and the semblance of intimate relations—and he eagerly shrugs off the crucial distinctions between such appearances and reality. Note the similar slippage from “I” into “we” that he contrives by snuggling up close to an incognizant Faustine: “The other nights I lie on a mat on the floor, beside her bed. It touches me to have her so close to me, and yet so unaware of this habit of sleeping together we are acquiring” (79). Whereas the machine’s inventor, Morel, had devised his invention to ensure that he would spend one week, over and over again, actually together with Faustine on the island, the Fugitive prepares to sabotage Morel’s machine by overlaying his own newly contrived part onto Morel’s original recording. He practices with extreme meticulousness so that he will not only look the part of Faustine’s lover but also possess a method actor’s precise frame of mind when the recording commences.<sup>5</sup> Such diligence is embodied in the Fugitive’s motto, *ostinato rigore*, which he takes from Leonardo Da Vinci (it translates roughly as “obstinate rigor”). But the term “ostinato” also carries with it the overtones of endless repetition (as in an *ostinato*, or persistently repeated pattern, in music). The connection to both Leonardo and music suggests that endless repetition can with rigorous work be rendered into a work of art. Nature repeats itself in cyclic rhythms; the artist, rather than merely conforming to such rhythms, creates them.

The Fugitive’s efforts are meant to fool not only observers, but himself—for if Morel’s machine documents his performance as a whole, mental states included, it will also capture his flaming passion for Faustine, calculated so as to be blissfully unaware of its one-sidedness. Morel himself had kept his experiment secret from his subjects to ensure that they would provide authentic performances, and in so doing allowed them to “live a life that is always new, because in each moment of the projection we shall have no memories other than those we had in the corresponding moment of the eternal record, and because the future, left behind many times, will maintain its attributes forever” (76). The Fugitive hopes thus to link himself and his beloved forever through a carefully crafted artistic inscription which possesses the capacity to “utter itself” endlessly, giving repeated life to both of them in the same way that the poem does in Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,  
Nor shall Death brag thou wand’rest in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow’st.  
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee. (19)

Achieving immortality via the work of art requires more parties than just the Fugitive and Faustine, however. Art demands an audience. As a consequence of his desire to create and inhabit such “eternal lines,” the Fugitive depends entirely on a third party to consummate visually his virtual relationship with his beloved. To the unsuspecting viewer of the projected images, Faustine and the Fugitive will seem to interact genuinely, the special effects being invisible to the observer, the editing seamless. “I hope that generally, we give the impression of being inseparable, of understanding each other so well that we have no need of speaking” (101). With her image under the Fugitive’s control, Faustine’s very failure to signify any relatedness to him paradoxically generates the very significance he intends it to convey—an intimacy so close as to need no overt expression at all. The technological uncanny is thereby drained of all its grotesquery: Faustine’s automatic responses are artfully reconfigured as endearing habits, however ersatz their application. In the same way that the Fugitive gives himself over to the image, reality itself is given over to virtuality—with one-sided virtual relationships subsuming the actuality of relation. Instead of construing virtuality as deficient fake (the Platonic model of *mimesis* in the *Republic*), it becomes the domain of fantastic possibility (the “golden world” of Sir Philip Sidney)—a means of actualizing fantasy so as to “one-up” brazen reality.<sup>6</sup> Enacting Burke’s conception of art (cf. Snook 49), the image created by the Fugitive refuses merely to mirror the given world and instead reflects his own internal reality, which he literally projects outward. Susan Sontag makes a similar point in *On Photography*, where she argues that the family photo, instead of documenting the family as such, in fact certifies and creates it (8). Likewise, the “pseudo-presence” of the one in the photograph uncannily mingles both presence and absence and thereby makes the beloved into a spectral figure, allowing the viewer to project his own desires upon it, and thereby “lay claim to another reality” (16). In consequence of the Fugitive narrator’s craft, Morel’s projection stops functioning as a flat documentary recorder and (à la Werner Herzog) instead becomes a window into a directorially contrived “ecstatic truth.” And as with Herzog’s so-called documentaries, there exists in the narrator’s projection no “in-film guide” that admits to its internal fabrications.

The immersive nature of the narrator’s machine-recording suggests that (in contrast to, say, “literariness” in Russian Formalism) the Fugitive does not want this work of art to wear its artistry on its sleeve. However, his use of the *diary* as a meta-textual commentary on the projected images complicates such a reading. The sophistication of his artistry must be so evident in the images as to be in fact invisible—like special effects in a film that one does not recognize as special effects. The diary in some ways parallels the “Director’s Commentary” on DVDs that allows an authorial voice to revel in revealing the tricks and the artistry undertaken for such a transparent “effect” on film. Adding a further complication, the Fugitive’s diary (the text of *Morel* itself) contains

footnotes by an ostensible editor, adding to the “reality effect” and which functions to, as one commentator puts it, “reinforce the artifice of the narrator as diarist” (Johnson). Beyond that, the editor even critiques the Fugitive’s account on certain points, underscoring its artificiality while reinforcing the impression that it must exist as a veridical document in order to be critiqued in the first place. Margaret Snook points out that this dual role makes the Fugitive into both “creator and critic” (45)—an ideal position from the point of view of, say, Oscar Wilde (cf. “The Critic as Artist”). This device moreover recalls the fabrications of Bioy Casares’s lifelong friend Borges: false (but dated and signed) historical documents that destabilize one’s sense of reliability, authorship or “authority” in a given text. In *Morel*, one is thus overtly led to question how, if at all, the text is moored to “reality.”<sup>7</sup>

The various modes of media inscription in *The Invention of Morel* themselves vary in their ability to compensate for the Fugitive’s desolate reality. Margaret Snook argues that the Fugitive’s garden—which he plants as “a pictorial representation of himself adoring Faustine” (46)—“may be interpreted as an attempt to overcome the temporal restrictions of prose” (47). The Fugitive is a writer but discovers that the only way to “capture” his experience to his satisfaction comes through pictorial media—ultimately, Morel’s projection machine. However, because even that machine only enters his audience’s awareness through his diary (i.e., the text of the novel), it is no simple matter to conclude which medium for him carries more representational weight. Pictorial media are often considered “timeless” because they can be apprehended all in a single moment rather than sequentially (cf. Snook 47), which suggests that the Fugitive might be using Morel’s machine in an effort to escape temporality altogether in a bid for immortality. But Morel’s machine records images in sequential motion, not as isolated frames, and in that respect comes closer as a medium to literature than it does painting or photography—perhaps indicating that, for the Fugitive, Morel’s cinematic machine is the perfect hybrid of visual and literary art?

In any case, because of its artistic potential, the prospect of dwelling inside an endlessly looping recording proves a source of comfort rather than horror to the Fugitive, who eagerly embraces the demon who visits in Nietzsche’s “thought of eternal recurrence”:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more.” . . . Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” (Nietzsche par. 341)

For the Fugitive, Nietzsche's "thought of eternal recurrence" not only bestows immortality upon life by endlessly replaying the record, but also creates the very possibility for life to become a work of art itself. When suitably "framed" as a techno-Nietzschean eternal recurrence, an everyday event can be transformed into a performance piece transcending serial narration or Shklovskian *fabula*. (For example, a particular sequence of notes might be recorded and later compiled into a score, record, or digital music file, becoming thereby tagged as "music" and not merely "sound data.") Transcending such constraint, life so artfully arranged and articulated—and bounded by the "frame" of the projected field—becomes a Shklovskian *syuzhet*, or plot. Morel himself suggests as much in his speech to his fellow visitors to the island: "For those who ask, 'Where are we going? Like the unheard music that lies latent in a photographic record, where are we until God orders us to be born?' Don't you see that there is a parallelism between the destinies of men and images?" (72).

In *Morel*, artistry asserts itself largely through the formal powers of framing, and less so through the "originality" of its content. In her essay "Bodies in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Wendy Ryden points out how critics have placed Morel in a godlike authorial role not only for his scientific prowess, but because his "week-long recording session echoes the seven-day creation schema of Genesis" (197). She goes on to insist, however, that "if Morel is playing God, he is a post-modern deity who can only re-present what already is" (197). The Fugitive, echoing the artifice-embracing Des Esseintes of Huysmans's Decadent novel *A Rebours*, out-performs Morel by artistically fabricating a new world, and not merely documenting an existing one. Through his intricate splicing of worlds, the Fugitive demonstrates his preeminence as an artist and author, in line with Borges's dictum: "works of art that try to be realistic fall into a grave error because art should not be an imitation of reality but rather an invention, a fiction" (qtd. in Snook 50).

By reframing himself as an image alongside Faustine, the Fugitive hopes to become immortalized as both author and inscription, director and cinematic character, remediated into self-inscribed "eternal lines" which will be blind to their own recurring performance.

A rotating eternity may seem atrocious to an observer, but it is quite acceptable to those who dwell there. Free from bad news and disease, they live forever as if each thing were happening for the first time; they have no memory of anything that happened before. And the interruptions caused by the rhythm of the tides keep the repetition from being implacable. (85)<sup>8</sup>

This "rotating eternity" is crucial not only thematically but formally because of how looping characters "interact" with other characters in the novelistic form. Lisa Swanstrom compares Morel's projections to the recording of a human

consciousness onto a read-only memory (ROM) construct, the so-called "Dixie Flatline" in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*. Like Faustine, the Dixie Flatline is already dead, his consciousness recorded into a computer's memory banks. He embodies E. M. Forster's conception of the (pun intended) "flat" character that undergoes no change in the novel but instead functions as a foil for the more "round" protagonist Case (unsurprising when you consider the Flatline's inability to form new memories). The Dixie Flatline and Faustine similarly function as "past characters" inserted through technology "into the present tense" (Swanstrom 1). As Swanstrom explains, in consequence of overlaying playback loops on a linear narrative, these characters in effect denaturalize linear time, and on the contrary "affirm Borges' concept of forking time, wherein a linear narrative is split into infinity and forward motion loses its place of privilege" (2). Because the character bound up in repeating loops is unable to alter its behavior in any way, the looping image becomes something stylized and idealized as a creature more (or less) than human. In the case of the Dixie Flatline, loop-identity has a dull and consigned quality to it because he is aware of his pre-programmed responses and of his inability to grow or acquire new memories—and as a result, his only desire is to have his program terminated, and die for real. But Faustine, who possesses no self-consciousness of her identity as an indelible image, instead attains an "authentic" silver-screen aura that forces her viewer to question the ontological durability of his own feebly singular existence. As one commentator puts it, *Morel* "[T]akes the inversion of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where the picture and not the man is subject to time, and inverts it again, so that the playback of a recording of events takes on greater reality than the continued existence of the subjects" (Waggish).<sup>9</sup>

### Faustine's Bargain

In tales of the fantastic, immortality always comes at a steep price. The Fugitive's desire to join his image with Faustine's proves, appropriately enough, a Faustian bargain in which Morel's invention indeed makes possible the artful contrivance of virtual relationships. But such "duplicitous" can never endure for long, for the simulacrum inevitably murders its referent. In Baudrillard's terms, there is "no room for both the world and its double" (Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* 34)—and in *Morel* technology literalizes this figure of speech. As Thomas Beltzer puts it,

It turns out that Morel's invention is a diabolical holographic recording device that captures all of the senses in three dimensions. It is diabolical because it destroys its subject in the recording process, rotting the skin and flesh off of its bones, thus gruesomely confirming the native fear of being

photographed and also, perhaps, warning of the dangers of art holding up a mirror to nature. (n.p.)

Like the 1:1 map that covers the whole world in Borges's story "On Exactitude in Science" (181), the bodily original finds itself shaded out by degrees, and ultimately gets pasted over by its representation. As a consequence, virtual life entails *actually* dying. In *Morel*, the Fugitive's living body (which he always considered a hindrance, anyway) obligingly fades and decays as it is "given over" to the image, hypostasizing the trope that the photograph steals the soul of the one photographed, here making the loss corporeal rather than spiritual. For the Fugitive, however, his own bodily death is an acceptable price in exchange for living forever as an image, for "The copies survive; they are incorruptible" (93). Dying becomes, in short, an opportunity rather than crisis: "The real advantage of my situation is that now death becomes the condition and the pawn for my eternal contemplation of Faustine" (100). Earlier, the Fugitive had similarly transformed the threat of death into an alluring prospect when the visitors first appeared, musing, "So I was dead! The thought delighted me. (I felt proud, I felt as if I were a character in a novel!)" (53)—an echo of Des Esseintes's zeal for textual self-enclosure in *A Rebours*.

As a fugitive from the real, the Fugitive reconfigures the liability of death into a virtual asset, but not without raising disturbing repercussions. The technological amplification of image-existence into eternity cuts off its bodily referent, and along with such amputation of the Fugitive's "original" body comes the amputation of any possibility of fleshly conviviality, resulting in what Marshall McLuhan calls "Narcissus as Narcosis." The Fugitive falls in love with his own self-enclosing projected image, becoming insensible to the call of the "other." Earlier in the book the Fugitive had been aghast at the prospect of living in a world consisting entirely of his own reflections: "I remembered that halls of mirrors were famous as places of torture" (64).<sup>10</sup> But ultimately he proves willing to trick himself into believing that Faustine's relationship with him is authentic rather than self-contrived. The Fugitive's embrace of artifice—admittedly exacerbated by his solitary condition on the island and the non-responsiveness of its inhabitants—thus makes him resort to the consolation of eternal autoerotic stimulation masquerading as intercourse. ("Faustine lives only in this image, for which I do not exist" [95].) Whether or not Faustine genuinely reciprocates his affections ultimately stops mattering, so long as he can instead generate the *effect* of her reciprocation in a medium of inscription that immortalizes their images in suitable juxtaposition. On viewing his own image moving around with Faustine, he declares, "I have almost forgotten that it was added later; anyone would surely believe we were in love and completely dependent on each other" (103)—a fetishization of an automaton gazed upon in accord with his contrivance rather than satisfying

the mutuality of erotic union. Rather than entering into a jointly inhabited world, the Fugitive makes an eternity out of what might be termed "chronic voyeurism" (cf. Ryden 200).<sup>11</sup> His fantastical union with Faustine is an emotional *trompe l'oeil*, a skewing of the viewer's perspective intended to make the Fugitive's isolated island appear like a peninsula united to the mainland. Both Fugitive and Faustine share the visual frame with the other, but do not thereby dwell together with it. Morel's name-association with H. G. Wells's Dr. Moreau would suggest that (at least for the narrator, if not the author) Morel's machine is indeed the diabolical handiwork of a mad scientist. The projected parade of simulacra here only yields a parody of genuine life, resulting in what Beltzer calls a "vivisectional splicing of the artificial and the real."

But even if Morel's invention of techno-art is genially accepted as compensating for every lack (the technotopian response of transhumanism, for example), the very end of the novel undermines any complacency that the virtual can do so sufficiently. Morel had in his speech explained that his machine compensated for all absences, not merely the spatial and temporal absences filled up by sonic and visual images. His recordings supposedly capture everything: touch, smell, texture, subjective emotions. However, for the Fugitive, the one absence he still cannot abide is his own non-presence for Faustine herself. Like the sculptor Pygmalion, the narrator fails to exist in the awareness of his beloved artwork, and he follows suit by praying for miraculous intervention so as to become truly present "for her." In the last sentence of the novel, he writes, "To the person who reads this diary and then invents a machine that can assemble disjointed presences, I make this request: Find Faustine and me, let me enter the heaven of her consciousness. It will be an act of piety" (103). The virtual consummation of his desire thus, sadly, brings only virtual fulfillment; the Fugitive's very identity becomes that much more simulacral because his "I" exists inside no "we." In this respect one wonders to what degree Morel anticipates ecocritical concerns over the unreciprocated technological gaze, the loss of the other that comes from staring only into those technological vistas that we ourselves project.<sup>12</sup> But the calculated self-awareness behind the Fugitive's one-sided longing, and Faustine's utter obliviousness to it, together render the novel into something more conceptually bewildering than tragic. Instead of showcasing eternal love, the Fugitive's willing inhabitation of an eternally repeating loop demonstrates how when God and reality fail, technology and fiction eagerly compensate, becoming "good enough."<sup>13</sup> If Hell is having to gaze forever at one's beloved without the beloved ever gazing back in return, then through Morel's invention one is able to attain not quite heaven, but perhaps the next best thing, a soothing image of heaven, the comfort of the mirage that one convinces oneself is the real thing staring back. The Faustian "catch," in the Fugitive's hands, feels no more incarcerating than the artfully carved frame does to a painter's masterpiece. Lost in the island desert of

the real, the Fugitive finds but one oasis: to gaze upon a beatific *fata morgana*, Faustine, mistress of splices.

### Notes

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1. *The Invention of Morel* (*La invención de Morel*) remains Bioy Casares’s most famous work, and was praised by Jorge Borges and Octavio Paz as a “perfect novel.” It earned Bioy Casares his first major literary prize, the Municipal Prize for Literature in Buenos Aires (Lockhart 29). In “Chronology of Latin American Science Fiction, 1775–2005,” Yolanda Molina-Gavilán, et al., call it “a key novel in Argentinian literature and one of the most influential sf novels written in Spanish” (384). In *Latin American Science Fiction Writers*, Darrell B. Lockhart calls *Morel* “a classic of Hispanic letters,” emphasizing that while Bioy Casares “wrote many subsequent texts of equal caliber, none has attained the status of this simple tale of a man on a deserted island” (29). Rachel Haywood Ferreira, in her study *The Emergence of Latin American Science Fiction*, calls it “a classic work of Argentine science fiction” (10). *Morel*’s influence has also been widely felt outside of Latin American literary circles, from the inscrutable arthouse film *Last Year At Marienbad* (1961), written by Alain Robbe-Grillet and directed by Alain Resnais, to Eliseo Subiela’s Argentine film *Man Facing Southeast* (1986), to the hit ABC television series *Lost* (2008).

2. By “remediate” here I draw from Bolter and Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, which construes remediation as the transforming of the contents of one medium into another (e.g., book into film, film into videogame, etc.). But I also mean to draw from the older sense of “remediation” as correcting a fault or providing a remedy. The transformation of the Fugitive into text immortalizes and fixes his identity, making him immune to the vagaries of time and circumstance.

3. The Fugitive’s potent conception of the virtual in fundamental ways reconfigures the relationship of the representation to its original, anticipating Jean Baudrillard’s concepts of hyperreality and the “precession of simulacra.” But it also has a striking contemporary parallel in fantastic literature in C. S. Lewis’s 1945 novel *The Great Divorce*. Lewis inverts standard tropes that construe angels and heaven as cloudy and insubstantial using similar imagery. In Lewis’s novel, celestial grass is instead sharp as steel blades to the evanescent footsteps of human beings, and even a leaf is too

weighty to lift. In the face of Lewis’s real, we are the ghosts, and “reality is harsh to the feet of shadows.” Douglas A. Anderson has recently shown Lewis’s indebtedness to Charles F. Hall’s 1938 short story “The Man Who Lived Backwards” (283). For a detailed account of *Morel*-like imagery in *The Great Divorce*, see Alf Seegert, “Harsh to the Feet of Shadows’: The Wild Landscape of the Real in C. S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* and William Faulkner’s *The Bear*” in Anna Slack’s anthology *Doors in the Air*.

4. The term “Nietzsche’s Gramophone Record” is from David Mitchell’s 2004 novel *Cloud Atlas*.

5. The Fugitive’s acts of epistemic self-sabotage bring to mind the repeated auto-manipulations of the amnesiac Leonard Shelby in Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento*. Leonard likewise attempts to create a recurrent, redemptive fiction to give meaning to a miserable actuality.

6. See Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, chapter 1.

7. Such destabilizing effects are perhaps most pronounced in the layered and competing documentary texts and editorial commentaries in Mark Z. Danielewski’s novel *House of Leaves*.

8. Intriguingly, whereas the cycles of nature are usually construed as dully repetitive by those who value the virtual foremost (e.g., Baudelaire, Wilde, and *Morel*’s narrator), here the natural variation in the tides provides welcome variation in a repeating cycle of art. With art as the new “nature,” nature fulfills the inverted role of artistic improviser.

9. The competing reality of image versus original can also be debated in terms of aura, in Benjamin’s sense. Wendy Ryden dedicates a lengthy inquiry into questions surrounding aura in *Morel* in her essay “Bodies in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Competing Discourses of Reality and Representation in Bioy Casares’s *The Invention of Morel*” (197).

10. Ryden reads the threat of endless reflections very differently than I do. She contends that “Multiple images are tortuous in the challenge they pose to the uniqueness of the originating subject, a torture especially acute for one who has declared his independent subjectivity by seeking hermitage on a remote island” (198). I would in contrast suggest that halls of mirrors torture largely because they give back to the subject precisely nothing but himself, over and over again to the exclusion of all else—denying all possibility for actual relationship with an “Other.” If the Fugitive were really seeking “independent subjectivity” on the island, then why is he so keen on gleaning a response from Faustine and the other visitors?

11. A 2008 news story shows how disturbing the consequences can be for using splicing technology to overcome the limits of possible (or morally/socially permissible) relations. A 57-year-old man was charged with ten counts of producing child pornography “using his work computer to superimpose sexual images of himself over otherwise innocent photos of an 11-year-old girl” (“Prosecutor”). The man allegedly used his computer to manipulate photos of the girl taken during the family’s trip to the beach, superimposing nude adult genitals over the girl’s bikini and combining those

images with photos he had taken of himself to appear as if he was having sexual relations with her. If convicted, he faces a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison. Under the Child Pornography Protection Act (CPPA), the simple representation of a child engaged in sexual acts—not necessarily the exploitation of an actual child filmed to create such an image—counts as criminal behavior.

12. See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* x.

13. On technology's supposed compensation for the failures of God and nature, see Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto*. On the capacity (or incapacity) of fiction to compensate for death, see Woody Allen: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying" ("I Don't Want").

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### Abstract

As Georges Méliès discovered to his astonished glee in the late nineteenth century, moving pictures do more than just record reality—they create one. Through stop-trick substitutions, multiple exposures, and splices, celluloid becomes a portal translucent not only to the projector's bulb, but to the projections of the fantastic. For Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares, such cinematic sleights-of-hand become so compelling that they promise to substitute a special effect for all of reality itself. In his 1940 novel *The Invention of Morel*, Bioy Casares represents two dissociated worlds that, although temporally estranged, are spliced together spatially through layered technological projections—creating the illusion of two lovers immortalized in a virtual union, played back without end. This Borgesian splicing of virtual and actual demonstrates the fantastical possibilities—and tremendous manipulative power—of the splice and the image overlay. In so doing, Bioy Casares raises striking questions about our ability to embrace fantastical projections and attempt to achieve satisfaction from virtual liaisons.

## Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willows* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)

Kate Macdonald

IN THIS ARTICLE, I DISCUSS THE LITERARY USES OF WITCHES AND WITCHCRAFT IN British fiction of the mid-1920s, in the social context of the contemporaneous interest in the occult. Almost nothing has been written about this significant cultural phase, in terms of the fiction produced as a response to it as part of 1920s society. The works I cite below are those novels most obviously relating to witchcraft from a survey of fiction published in 1926 and afterwards, and the most prominent popular works on the history and practice of witchcraft at the time. *Lolly Willows* (1926), by Sylvia Townsend Warner, and *Witch Wood* (1927), by John Buchan, are the only two of the group to remain in print, and their authors are the only ones to have received critical attention. The fact that so many works dealing with witchcraft were published in this period is itself enough to warrant investigation, yet I have found no scholarly work that explores this moment of literary history from this perspective. It is not clear why this phenomenon should have been so neglected: much attention has been paid to the fashion for the occult from the 1890s and the role of important literary figures such as W. B. Yeats in their devotion to Theosophy and similar cults, and a great deal of work has been done on Aleister Crowley and his associates. Yet the literary evidence, from popular and literary fiction of the period, has been ignored.

The evidence presented in this article will, I hope, show that fantasy and the occult were used in this period to make important sociological points on topical subjects. In these two novels by Warner and Buchan, witchcraft symbolizes non-conformity to society's norms. I use "non-conformity" rather than words like "resistance" or "rebellion," because non-conformity has a specifically religious meaning, and Warner and Buchan were both writing about belief. In both novels, the protagonists embrace non-conformity because this enables them to believe sincerely in their moral values that derive, certainly in the case of *Witch Wood*, less obviously so in *Lolly Willows*, from Christian