

ARTICLES – FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE

Rhythm across Borders: Free Verse between Cosmopolitanism and Statelessness in Valéry Larbaud's *Les Poésies de A.O. Barnabooth*

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This article reads the dynamic *vers libre* of Valéry Larbaud's *Poésies d'A. O. Barnabooth* (1913) as a rejection of literary and cultural nationalism, and an enthusiastic embrace of internationalism made possible by early twentieth-century developments in global transport networks, the tourism industry and the broadening of experiential horizons. In the character of Barnabooth, a sentimental young billionaire inclined to poetry, Larbaud indulges his fantasy of the rootless vagabond, stateless by birth, who roams unhindered. A voracious polyglot with no native language, Barnabooth is a translingual writer who in his poems in French expresses a commitment to transnationalism as multi-directional belonging, declaring himself 'un grand patriote cosmopolite'. While Larbaud's passionate cosmopolitanism has been dismissed as the dilettantish privilege of the wealthy elite, Barnabooth recounts his travels in striking polyphonic poems which allow diverse voices from around the world, as well as the noisy, dissonant soundscapes of global travel such as trains, boats, stormy seas, city streets and fragments of popular song to permeate the text. Poetic form emerges as a central feature of this opening up to the world, with *vers libre* providing a mobile, transnational verse capable of transcending tired national paradigms. Yet Larbaud's free verse includes numerous echoes of former national glories: fragments of the alexandrine appear fleetingly amid the poems' infinite rhythmic diversity, as the vestiges of late nineteenth-century nation-statehood resurface within this new, transnational mode of being. Larbaud's innovative textual forms capture something of the interplay between fragile national identities and the transient, unsettling experience of the endless voyage. The rhythmic fabric of his *vers libre* juxtaposes regular and irregular, national and international, enacting the central tension of his statelessness, between belonging and rupture, in which Barnabooth, 'ce cœur de vagabond', pursues his dream: 'Être un perpétuel évadé de tous les milieux'.

As the nineteenth century drew to an end in France, no poet came close to Victor Hugo in embodying the voice of the nation. As Graham Robb has shown in his excellent biography, Hugo's position as national poet owed as much to the careful stage management of his public image as it did to his voicing of the social and political values that would emerge victorious

after 1870. No sooner had the Second Empire fallen than Hugo, freshly returned from his self-imposed exile, was delivering rousing speeches on the streets of Paris; for years, his verse was recited spontaneously at gatherings of artists and republicans alike; on his eightieth birthday, thousands of admirers paraded past his house for several hours; and the sheer scale of his state funeral spoke of a national esteem enjoyed by no other writer. Not only was the spirit of republicanism concentrated in both his persona and his poetic voice, but as Mallarmé famously put it in 'Crise de vers', Hugo also seemed to embody the alexandrine, *le vers national* itself, in its most vibrant form. Robust, supple, endlessly energetic and with an unshakeable self-belief, 'il était le vers personnellement' (Mallarmé II: 205). In a perfectly symbiotic relationship between national identity, authorial voice and literary form, by the time he died, Hugo *was* the alexandrine, *was* French poetry, *was* the French Republic itself.

At the heart of this relationship lurks a central anxiety of late nineteenth-century French nationalism, with carefully orchestrated myths of monolithic nationhood, race, cultural history and identity proving uncomfortably flimsy in the face of the dynamic international pathways of nascent twentieth-century modernity. In poetry, too, as Jacques Roubaud demonstrates in *La Vieillesse d'Alexandre*, the integrity of the alexandrine, the symbol of poetic nationalism, had in fact been constantly undermined by the poetic avant-garde from the late 1850s onwards. Moreover, by the time of the first *vers libre* experiments of the 1880s, Paris had become a global cultural centre, attracting artists from all over the world, and many prominent poets from the Symbolist period and later were either francophones born outside France – Jules Laforgue, Blaise Cendrars, Saint-John Perse, Jules Supervielle, not to mention their many Belgian counterparts – or non-native, plurilingual incomers, such as Jean Moréas (Greek), Stuart Merrill and Francis Vielé-Griffin (US-American), or Marie Krysinska and Guillaume Apollinaire (Polish). Indeed, in his rather conservative governmental report 'Le Mouvement poétique français de 1867 à 1900', Catulle Mendès celebrates the Parnassians, 'imbus de l'âme nationale' (Mendès 184), while dismissing *vers libre* as not authentically French. Rather, he argues, it represents an aberration, and he blames this unwelcome hybridisation on Krysinska and a Peruvian poet, Pedro Della Rocca de Vergalo who, he claims, is 'féru, comme beaucoup d'étrangers, de transporter dans notre langue les règles prosodiques et même grammaticales de sa langue natale' (Mendès 217–18). As Karen L. Carter and Susan Waller have shown in *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870–1914: Strangers in Paradise*, many French artists were receptive to foreign influences – 'the more alien, the better' (Sonn 132) – so that, by the early twentieth century, any desire for the certainties of nationalism in the aesthetic realm had to contend with an equal fervour for an intoxicating internationalism, made possible thanks to new technologies of travel, as celebrated in volumes of poetry such as Cendrars' *Du monde entier* (1912–13) and Apollinaire's *Alcools* (1913).

Indeed, in 1918, with the First World War having provided a horrific demonstration of the dangers of extreme nationalist sentiment, the committed cosmopolitan Valéry Larbaud scorns the very idea of a national literature:

La France n'a que faire d'un poète national, de même qu'il serait ridicule de dire que Paris possède un poète local. Tout écrivain français est international. Il est poète, écrivain pour l'Europe entière, et pour une partie de l'Amérique par surcroît. La Suisse, la Suède, la Serbie peuvent avoir des poètes nationaux, mais la France, l'Angleterre, l'Italie, l'Espagne, l'Allemagne même, doivent être au-dessus de cela. Et les poètes nationaux des petits pays ne peuvent pas être très grands non plus, tout ce qui est national [...] est sot, archaïque, basement patriotique, c'est bon dans des circonstances particulières, ou à des époques particulières, mais tout cela est révolu.

(Boisdeffre 35–6)

Read today, Larbaud's suggestion that the major European nations necessarily speak to, or for, an international constituency beyond their borders smacks of a particular brand of universalism reminiscent of Pascale Casanova's world republic of letters with Paris at its centre (Casanova 2008). This quasi-colonial gesture has inspired fierce debate about the definition and role of a *littérature-monde*, and certainly, much of the scholarship on Larbaud produced in France from the 1960s to the 1980s reproduces this kind of framing, with titles such as *Valery Larbaud et L'Italie* (Ruggiero 1963) and *L'Exotisme de Valery Larbaud* (Weissman 1966). Ivan Farron suggests that Larbaud's role in helping foreign writers gain exposure in France makes him 'un représentant illustre' of Casanova's enterprise: 'Être un écrivain français, publié par la NRF, convoquer des écrivains étrangers sous cette illustre égide, c'est aussi les faire accéder à leur tour à un capital symbolique auquel ils n'avaient pas d'emblée accès, et peut-être, en échange, recevoir un peu de leur talent' (Farron 342). Yet Larbaud's rejection of nationalism in literature suggests a belief that genuine literary value is universal precisely because it looks beyond its immediate borders, akin to the principle that Françoise Lioure identifies in his writing: 'la volonté d'abolir les frontières pour retrouver l'universalité au-delà des particularismes des nations' (Lioure 163). In the following reading of his poetry, Barnabooth's experience emerges as a productive tension between the touristic pleasures of cosmopolitan consumption and the disorientating experiential rupture of statelessness, between belonging and non-belonging, possession and dispossession. 'Être un perpétuel évadé de tous les milieux', he muses in his *journal intime* (*Œuvres*, 217), suggesting both Baudelairean reveries of escape to an exotic elsewhere and anxieties about the implications of that constant displacement. I contend that it is the textual specificity of poetic discourse itself, as a rhythmic space capable of signifying at multiple levels beyond the semantic, which allows Larbaud to articulate the tensions involved in crossing, blurring or indeed erasing borders – an experience as disorientating as it is exciting – in particularly nuanced ways.

As Larbaud claims above of nationalism, 'tout cela est révolu', and this revolution unfolds in *Les Poésies d'A.O. Barnabooth*, first published in 1908 as *Poèmes d'un riche amateur* then in 1913 in definitive form. Michel Murat has identified in this, Larbaud's only volume of verse, 'une nouvelle forme du vers libre, qui dépasse les apories où s'était enfermé le mouvement vers-libriste et constitue dans ce genre la première œuvre cohérente et caractéristique du modernisme' (Murat 25). These poems offer a prime example of the relationship between a particular brand of early twentieth-century cosmopolitanism – the idealism of the wealthy and privileged male traveller, unconstrained by economic or societal obstacles – and a textual form adapted to respond to the requirements of a post-national poetics of borderlessness. As we shall see, the thematics of the global traveller articulated within this new modernist, internationalist *vers libre* makes of the poetic text a space apart, expressing Barnabooth's performance of statelessness as a restless non-belonging, or as multiple overlapping belongings.

Larbaud creates in the character of Archibald Olson Barnabooth an unassuming and sentimental young billionaire who, like the author himself, inherits his colossal fortune from his father. In the biography, a short prose text by Barnabooth's fictional biographer X. M. Tournier de Zamble – featured in the 1908 edition but expunged in 1913 – goes to great lengths to indulge Larbaud's fantasy of the rootless vagabond. Our hero, we learn, is descended from Finnish ancestors who emigrated to the New World several generations previously. While Larbaud himself was born in Vichy to French parents, Barnabooth is the only child of a wealthy guano magnate from Oswego, New York, and a young Australian dancer, Nora May Weller, known by the stage name Lenore de Vere. Crucially, the poet is stateless by birth, having been born in Campamento, a disputed province of Arequipa:

En l'an 1883, les armées de trois républiques: le Pérou, le Chili et la Bolivie, guerroyaient dans cette province et prétendaient la posséder, en sorte que M. Barnabooth, quand on l'interroge, peut répondre avec quelque raison qu'il est 'un sans-patrie'. Cependant, à sa majorité légale, il s'est fait naturaliser citoyen de l'État de New York, pays d'origine de sa famille. Et d'ailleurs, il n'a encore jamais manqué de célébrer, le 4 et le 28 juillet, les fêtes nationales des États-Unis et de la République du Pérou.

(*Œuvres* 1136)

Not only is Barnabooth a confirmed 'sans-patrie', but he is further cut off from his roots when he is orphaned by the age of ten. As for his strange, unplaceable name, his ancestors adopted upon their arrival in America a new, British-sounding surname whose provenance, of course, is lost: 'l'étymologie de ce surnom (*barn*: grange, *booth*: baraque) avec cet *a* intercalé dont la présence ne s'explique pas, est condamné à demeurer obscure' (*Œuvres* 1137).

No parents, no home country, an untraceable name and, moreover, Barnabooth has no single native language. As a child, he mixed almost exclusively with his family's Peruvian servants, and so: 'On eut quelque peine à lui apprendre à lire et à écrire l'anglais; il s'exprimait presque toujours en espagnol, souvent en mauvais espagnol' (*Œuvres* 1140). In addition to his basic English and bad Spanish, Barnabooth learnt Latin and French at school, and picked up other languages such as modern Greek on his travels, so that this absence of a native language results in an omnivorous multilingualism: 'En réalité, M. Barnabooth s'exprime avec une très grande facilité en français, en anglais, en italien, en allemand, en espagnol et en plusieurs autres langues d'un usage moins répandu' (*Œuvres* 1145). The characters we find in Barnabooth's poems are similarly multilingual, such as the poet's germanophone Spanish lover in 'Europe':

Le poète est debout auprès de sa compagne
Étendue sur un divan, sous des fourrures, à l'avant,
'Un ange, une jeune Espagnole' qui par instants,
Pensant à lui, lui dit à mi-voix:
'Mein Liebling!'
Et de nouveau le bruit indifférent des vagues

(*Œuvres* 69)

The whole collection is strongly marked by what Sylvie Parizet calls the 'jouissance' of Larbaud's polylingualism (Parizet 182), which erupts later in the same poem:

Oh! tout apprendre, oh! tout savoir, toutes les langues!
Avoir lu tous les livres et tous les commentaires;
Oh, le sanscrit, l'hébreu, le grec et le latin!
Pouvoir se reconnaître dans un texte quelconque
Qu'on voit pour la première fois!

(*Œuvres* 70–1)

A far cry from the *ennui* expressed in Mallarmé's 'Brise marine' ('La chair est triste, hélas! et j'ai lu tous les livres', Mallarmé I: 15), echoed here, Barnabooth's omnivorous bibliophilic urge constitutes an explosion of enthusiasm driven by the utopian panlingual dream which Stephen Kellman sees as 'the consummation of the translingual impulse' (Kellman 114). While, as Kellman argues, 'the legacy of the multiplicity of languages is the realization that each of us is incomplete' (*ibid.*), Barnabooth revels in a playful linguistic hybridity which

exemplifies what Jahan Ramazani, in *A Transnational Poetics*, calls 'the creolized texture of transnational experience' (Ramazani 4). Thus, fragments of other languages punctuate Barnabooth's French:

Nevermore!... et puis, zut! ('Nevermore...', *Œuvres* 48)
 Écoutez la paloma qui bat de l'aile... ('Mers-El-Kébir', *Œuvres* 56)
 Les serenos psalmodieront les heures... ('Musique après une lecture', *Œuvres* 57)
 Toutes les Pepitas vont danser dans leurs lits ('Musique après une lecture', *Œuvres* 58)
 Et tu es vaincu par ta proie, ô llanero! ('Ma Muse', *Œuvres* 60)
 Ce soir, mi Socorro, je suis une humble femme ('Carpe diem...', *Œuvres* 63)
 On quitte le 'pueblo' un beau matin ('Europe', *Œuvres* 72)

This effect is amplified in 'Voix des servantes', where Barnabooth recalls the Latin American servants of his childhood filling the air with their song – 'j'entends / Leurs voix jeunes emplir la *jaula* sonore' (*Œuvres* 52) – as fragments of the melodies flood back:

Rythmant le travail, les airs en chœur,
 Les vieilles scies, les refrains neufs;
 Et les choses sentimentales de toujours:
 La 'Paloma' et 'Llora, pobre corazon',
 Les choses d'il y a dix ans, vous vous souvenez?
 'Con una falda de percal blanca...'
 [...]
 Les zarzuelas de l'an dernier, comme
 'El arte de ser bonita' ou 'La gatita blanca'.
 Écoutez ces furieuses, criant à grosses voix, l'air:
 'Anteyar vi a una señora...'

(*Œuvres* 52–3)

When, in 'Yaravi', Barnabooth himself sings one of these songs – which could represent, one might suppose, a memory of his childhood and a link to a stable, locatable sense of identity – it is striking to what lengths he goes to undermine any sense of a secure self-expression:

Laissez-moi pleurer dans la nuit sans savoir pourquoi,
 Et chanter dans le vent ces vers:
 'Ya que para mi no vives',
 Sur un air de valse entendu je ne sais où, un air des tziganes,
 Chanter en sanglotant sur un air des tziganes!

(*Œuvres* 46)

The framing of this song unravels exquisitely, as the poet yearns to sing, without knowing why, a melody whose precise source he has forgotten, but which he has heard on his travels being sung by rootless itinerants – and the poet addresses no one in particular, allowing the wind to carry his melody off, fragmented, as in the poem 'Thalassa', where another Spanish song is similarly dispersed in the air:

Cris mangés de vent, qui brouillent la musique
 D'une mandoline égrenant: 'Sobre las olas del mar...'

(*Œuvres* 59)

The linguistic landscape of Barnabooth's poems, therefore, is a hybrid space of memory and travel, belonging to no single nation-state: translanguaging as carnival and exploration, yet also as dispossession, rupture or the loss of the past, a performance that, in Jacqueline Dutton's words, 'fundamentally challenges the monolingual paradigm and by extension the national or cultural hegemony it implies' (Dutton 415).

This commitment to linguistic pluralism is a fundamental principle of Barnabooth's cosmopolitan poetics. According to his biographer, Barnabooth's first volume of verse was written entirely in English, inspired by his adolescent discovery of Walt Whitman. His first poetry in French came three years later, along with 'un grand nombre de poèmes réguliers en italien', while 'Il estime par-dessus tout deux ou trois poèmes qu'il a composés en allemand' (*Œuvres* 1150–1). Barnabooth clearly reflects the tastes of the young Larbaud, who tells Marcel Ray in a letter of 6 August 1901:

C'est Walt Whitman qui a mes amours. Je le mets (pour le moment) au rang de Shakespeare. [...] Ce qui me plaît chez lui, c'est d'abord l'originalité de son style, et sa langue où se mêlent l'anglais, l'espagnol et le français, espèce de Volapük colossal.
(*Correspondance* I: 54)

Larbaud was a committed learner of languages, devoting several hours a day to his studies, and in a telling aside to Ray, he revels in the deleterious effect on his French, that supposedly dangerous bastardisation for which Mendès had chastised Krysinska and Della Rocca de Vergalo only five years previously: 'c'est effrayant ce que les doses de latin que j'absorbe mêlées à la quantité d'anglais que j'expire éreintent mes notions de la syntaxe française et même de l'orthographe' (letter to Ray, 21 June 1907, *Correspondance* I: 177). In Robert Mallet's reading of Larbaud, 'le style d'un écrivain "cosmopolite" qui parle plusieurs langues, avec un goût particulier pour le français [...] explique le mode prosodique très débridé avec parfois cependant, des références au mode classique et des tournures étranges qui ne sont qu'étrangères: anglicismes ou hispanicismes' (Larbaud 1966, 15–16). This assault on the integrity of both the national language and national verse forms, a source of great vexation for conservatives, becomes in Larbaud's hands a lightning rod for the thrilling creative possibilities of all the hybridisations of transnational modernity. From a nationalist point of view, these make for textual imperfections – and in his biography we see Barnabooth grappling with the challenge of having no native language, and thereby feeling master of none:

avec tous les défauts de mes poèmes [...]! C'est la même chose pour mes vers anglais et mes poèmes italiens. Et si je savais seulement le français! J'ai pourtant passé assez d'heures d'angoisse sur les pages de la troisième année de grammaire de Larive et Fleury. C'est malheureux, pour un poète français, de ne pas savoir le français.
(*Œuvres* 1147)

Yet this unravelling of the stabilities of national forms provides Larbaud with a productive aesthetic principle, a playful polylingualism that reaches its peak in the unpublished macaronic poem 'La Neige', written in 1934 using Spanish, Italian, German, English, French and Latin:

Un año más und iam eccoti mit uns again
Pauvre et petit on the graves dos nossos amados édredon
E pure piously tapándolos in their sleep
Dal pallio glorios das virgens und infants.
With the mind's eye ti seguio sobre levropa estesa,

Je partirais,
 Un bâton à la main, et j'irais, et j'irais,
 Je marcherais sans m'arrêter vers l'Équateur!
 ('Europe', *Œuvres* 71–2)

Driven by what Jean-Claude Corger calls 'une hantise de l'immobilisation et de l'embourbement' (Corger 1975, 85), Barnabooth embraces all that the new modes of modern travel can offer him. For Jacques Duhamel, 'il se donne l'air de feuilleter l'Europe comme un album de belles images' (Duhamel 14) and, it is true, from his privileged position as wealthy tourist, Barnabooth may indulge in what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have called 'stranger fetishism' (Lionnet and Shih 10). In this paradigm, 'the authentic stranger becomes a commodity whose difference is contained and consumed by those with purchasing power', so that 'a new global multiculturalism is thus engendered where strangers of various origins constitute the shopping list of cultures' (ibid.). Yet while Barnabooth's poems are strikingly visual collages which juxtapose souvenirs and fragments of his incessant travels, their modernist aesthetic lies in a more challenging tonality which might be described as a poetics of noise. It is here, I would suggest, that Larbaud transcends the status of quasi-colonial, cosmopolitan dilettante, and rather than instrumentalising other languages and cultures in a succession of picture-postcard scenes, gives his text over to the non-linguistic, supra-national sounds of travel and of raw natural phenomena in all their complexity and ambiguity.

Larbaud was far from the only artist to be struck by the intoxicating new soundscapes of industrial modernity, which constitute one of the defining aesthetic interests of the emergent twentieth century. In his Futurist manifesto, *The Art of Noises* (1913), Luigi Russolo calls for the concert hall to resound with a clatter and clang, with the sounds of the world. Likewise, in 'Ode' Barnabooth asks for the noise of the train, a key signifier of international mobility, to penetrate his poetry:

Prête-moi ton grand bruit, ta grande allure si douce,
 Ton glissement nocturne à travers l'Europe illuminée,
 O train de luxe! et l'angoissante musique
 Qui bruit le long de tes couloirs de cuir doré,
 [...]
 Je parcours en chantonnant tes couloirs
 [...]
 Mêlant ma voix à tes cent mille voix
 (*Œuvres* 44)

The music produced by the din of the train is not a comfortable one, but it is desirable for a poet seeking to embrace the multiplicity of the world in all its complexity and difficulty. The wish to incorporate this 'grand bruit' into his text might suggest a Hugolian, totalising vision of poetry – in 'Vendémiaire', Apollinaire articulates a similar enthusiasm for the modernist moment, as the poem reaches its paroxysmic 'Je suis ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers' (Apollinaire 154). Yet Barnabooth's universalism lies not in the quasi-messianic gesture of the poet's speaking for the world, but rather in his mingling with hundreds of thousands of other voices heard on the journey, in the momentary loss of the self. In the passage quoted above, it is striking how the fragments of alexandrines – a reminder of a national identity simultaneously left behind and ever present – dissolve immediately into the *vers libre* of the international space of permanent transit: 'Prête-moi ton grand bruit', with its alluring 3/3 rhythm, invites us to anticipate a satisfyingly familiar regular alexandrine before the very movement

of the train itself carries the rest of the line off to an awkward thirteen syllables: 'ta grande allure si douce'. The next line begins with the equally seductive hemistich 'Ton glissement nocturne', which disintegrates instantly into the ametrical with a further nine syllables. There is even a Hugolian alexandrine rhythmmed 4/4/4 – 'Qui bruit le long / de tes couloirs / de cuir doré' – which strikes the ear momentarily as a remnant of past national glories before being lost in a torrent of *vers libre*. For Barnabooth, the disruption of such national forms is an opportunity to be seized, and he continues:

Prêtez-moi, ô Orient-Express, Sud-Brenner-Bahn, prêtez-moi
 Vos miraculeux bruits sourds et
 Vos vibrantes voix de chanterelle;
 Prêtez-moi la respiration légère et facile
 Des locomotives hautes et minces, aux mouvements
 Si aisés, les locomotives des rapides
 [...]
 Ah! il faut que ces bruits et que ce mouvement
 Entrent dans mes poèmes et disent
 Pour moi ma vie indicible, ma vie
 D'enfant qui ne veut rien savoir, sinon
 Espérer éternellement des choses vagues.

(*Œuvres* 44–5)

Once again, the poet calls for noise to permeate his text, willing the sounds of the train to come and ventriloquise his poetic voice, talking through him as he relinquishes sole agency within the poems. The thuds and whistles of the train are universally expressive in a way that human languages are not, offering the poet a supra-linguistic language of movement which signifies at a level beyond the national. The transnational experience of what James Clifford, in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, calls 'dwelling-in-travel' (Clifford 26) is here characterised not by translanguaging, but rather by noise, a substitute for the panlingual ideal, which operates beyond the human and beyond the nation, in the universal realm of constant global mobility. Moreover, the effects of such noises on the poet are mirrored in the rhythmical fabric of the texts themselves, polyrhythmic spaces where the familiar and the unfamiliar interact in a constant tension.

Elsewhere the sounds produced by the boats and trains mingle with those of natural phenomena, as in 'Yaravi' where the poet once again abandons control of his own discourse, unable to explain what he means to say as his incoherent cries are lost amid myriad other noises which become the aural fabric of the text itself:

Je ne saurais dire si c'est de désespoir ou bien de joie
 Que je pleure ainsi, mêlant
 Mes sanglots étouffés aux cris de panique de l'aiglon,
 Au rythme de la machinerie, au tonnerre et au sifflement
 Des vagues tordues en masses de verre sur les flancs
 Du navire, et tout à coup étalées comme un manteau de pierreries
 (*Œuvres* 56)

Rhythmically, there is very little that is familiar about this passage. As the poet's voice is drowned out by the cacophony, only a couple of regular fragments surface fleetingly from the din, 'Mes sanglots étouffés' and 'tout à coup étalées' recalling alexandrine hemistichs.

The textual rhythms that reproduce the experience of this particular journey are unfamiliar and disorientating to such an extent that syllable counting becomes a superfluous gesture, a doomed attempt to cling to previous modes of poetic knowing. Far more striking than the six-syllable units I struggled to identify are the two *enjambements* which wash over the line-end like the waves crashing over the boat, in an energetic surge of rhythmic mimesis: 'au sifflement / Des vagues', 'les flancs / Du navire'. Similarly, in 'Thalassa' the poet muses on his impossible poetic goal, in a clear, if less radical, echo of Rimbaud's 'je me suis baigné dans le Poème / De la Mer' ('Le Bateau ivre', ll. 21–2, Rimbaud 162):

Couché sur un divan au fond de la cabine
[...]
Et, à demi sommeillant, je rêve
De construire, dans une forme inusitée encore, un poème
A la gloire de la mer.

(*Œuvres* 58–9)

Known metrical forms, then, are insufficient to represent the poet's experience of constant displacement and disorientating new contexts. In the section of his biography entitled 'M. Barnabooth poète; ses idées sur l'art', Barnabooth complains of a book of poems (whose title alludes both to Hugo's *Les Chants du crépuscule* and to the American wilderness imagery of Whitman) that fails to deliver on its promise to encapsulate the raw energy of the natural world:

Les chants de la prairie? Un jour sur la foi du titre, j'achète ça. J'ouvre ça pensant y trouver l'odeur de l'océan végétal, le vent fou, les troupes de chevaux sauvages. Bah! je n'ai vu que des petits vers, de la prosodie en action.

(*Œuvres* 1146–7)

Already during his lifetime, Hugo's detractors were tiring of his factory-like over-production of alexandrine after alexandrine filled with natural images, of the wearying effect of 'de la prosodie en action'. In contrast, in 'L'ancienne gare de Cahors' Barnabooth uses *enjambement* to dislocate the prosodic mechanism at the very moment he articulates key images such as the vast scale of the world, the unpredictable meanderings of the wind, and the railway lines:

Gare, ô double porte ouverte sur l'immensité charmante
→ De la Terre, où quelque part doit de trouver la joie de Dieu

Connaissent l'éclair froid des lézards; et le chatouillement
→ Des doigts légers du vent dans l'herbe où sont les rails
→ Rouges et rugueux de rouille

(*Œuvres* 51)

Indeed, the excessive accumulation of /R/ and /u/ sounds in these last two lines push alliteration and assonance close to self-parody, as if the traditional poetic technique of expressive aural mimesis were reaching a kind of crisis point, as obsolete and rusty as abandoned train lines leading nowhere. A similar rejection of metrical form coincides in 'Thalassa' with its dizzying soundscape of Barnabooth's ship buffeted by wind and waves:

Bruits du navire: voix dans un corridor,
Craquements des boiseries, grincements des lampes oscillantes,
Rythme des machineries, leur odeur fade par bouffées,

Cris mangés de vent, qui brouillent la musique
 D'une mandoline égrenant: 'Sobre las olas del mar...'
 Et le bruit coutumier qui finit par être silence.

(*Œuvres* 59)

It is not that these lines lack structure – indeed, just as the lamps swing from side to side as the boat lurches, each line is divided into two clear sections which lend them a similar oscillatory rhythm. Yet none of these rhythmic units belongs to the traditional forms of the country the poet has left behind – a syllabic scansion reveals just how fruitless such a familiar mode of reading would be: 4/7, 7/9, 7/8, 5/6, 8/7... until the final line where, as the ship succumbs to sleep, a hint of an alexandrine, 'Et le bruit coutumier', dissolves into the silence of the night. It is as if, in the absence of a single universal language, the sounds of travel themselves become the language of Barnabooth's poetry – a text in which the poet's voice is reduced to wordless cries and sobs, drowned out by the overwhelming din. Indeed, both passages quoted above insist on the rhythm of the machinery, the engine powering the journey itself, inviting us to look further into how the rhythms of international travel shape those of the text.

In 'Europe', Barnabooth reflects – in two lines that both close with a tantalising half-alexandrine fragment – on how his poetic inspiration is drawn from the rhythms of the cities experienced on his travels:

O ma Muse, fille des grandes capitales! / tu reconnais tes rythmes
 Dans ces grondements incessants / des rues interminables.

(*Œuvres* 71)

The 'grondements' indicate utterances half heard, in unfamiliar languages, from multiple sources – an indistinct hubbub in which precise communication is lost, in favour of the ongoing, unending process of signification upon which the poet insists: 'incessants', 'interminables'. Likewise, in his essay 'Une Renaissance de la poésie américaine', Larbaud expresses his admiration for the American poet and self-styled prairie troubadour Vachel Lindsay, and for the way in which the characteristic noises of modernity enter his verse:

Nicholas Vachell [*sic*] Lindsay [...] est aussi, par la forme de ses poèmes, le plus original et, pour nous Européens, le plus américain des poètes contemporains. Avec lui, le jazz-band, les cuivres de l'Armée du Salut, les danses et les cantiques des Noirs, les annonces lumineuses et les coups de klaxon des automobiles Ford sont entrés dans la littérature. [...] Ces poèmes sont parmi les plus sonores qu'on ait écrits en langue anglaise, et leur rythme est irrésistible: il faut les lire à haute voix. C'est ainsi, du reste, que l'auteur lui-même les lit, avec accompagnement de tambour, de cymbales et de cris. Il prend soin s'indiquer, en marge du poème, l'intonation qu'il veut qu'on donne à chaque partie, et quelquefois à chaque vers. Il écrit pour être déclamé et non lu en silence.

(in Delvaile 179–80)

Barnabooth performs a similar operation in 'Ma Muse', a poem abuzz with the delights of modern Europe, its transport networks, its vibrant cultural life and the thrill of urbanisation:

Je chante l'Europe, ses chemins de fer et ses théâtres
 Et ses constellations de cités, et cependant
 J'apporte dans mes vers les dépouilles d'un nouveau monde

(*Œuvres* 60)

After two ametrical lines, the third opens with an emphatic hemistich which places the keyword 'vers' in the accentuated pre-caesural position, but over the remaining eight syllables the alexandrine that our ear had been led to anticipate disintegrates. Indeed, it is striking that this disintegration is caused precisely by 'les dépouilles d'un nouveau monde', as the spoils that the poet has accumulated on his travels ruin the metrical integrity of the national verse form. Later in the same poem, regular alexandrines sit alongside irregular lines which sound disconcertingly close to their neighbours but which confound the ear thanks to subtle *entorses*:

Mes vers, vous possédez / la force, ô mes vers d'or, (12)
 Et l'élan de la flore / et de la faune tropicales, (14)
 Toute la majesté / des montagnes natales, (12)
 Les cornes du bison, / les ailes du condor, (12)
 La muse qui m'inspire / est une dame créole. (13)
 (Œuvres 60)

The first line would not feel out of place in a poem by Hugo, perhaps a rousing ode to the glory of his own poetry, as the expression of irrepressible life force spills over the caesura – 'vous possédez / la force' – and the line-end. Yet while the next line opens as an alexandrine, it disappears in the following eight syllables; and despite the presence of two rather run-of-the-mill alexandrines worthy of Leconte de Lisle at his most prosaic, the final line performs the same trick, opening with a six-syllable hemistich which disintegrates over the next seven syllables. Just as in the previous example, where it is the exotic element – the 'dépouilles d'un nouveau monde' – which disrupts the normal functioning of the alexandrine, both these ametrical lines are distorted by the appearance at the line-end of the non-European: 'tropicales', 'créole'. Whereas, for Baudelaire, the exoticism of the sonnet 'A une dame créole' (Baudelaire 102) was framed within the domesticating metrical framework of the national verse form, Barnabooth allows the foreign to act upon the text itself, welcoming the disruption it brings.

The particular rhythmic fabric of Larbaud's *vers libre*, then, is this constant interplay between regular and irregular, national and international, which Murat describes as a kind of textual deterritorialisation:

détacher la poésie française de sa tradition versifiée et du génie national dont elle est censée être l'expression, pour l'inscrire dans un espace occidental moderne. Cette déterritorialisation n'implique pas une rupture avec les formes anciennes: elle se situe 'ailleurs' plutôt qu'elle ne se dresse 'contre.'

(Murat 25)

For all that the poems reverberate with enthusiasm for the unfamiliar rhythms of the world, Barnabooth includes a significant number of regular alexandrines – vague reminiscences, perhaps, of the Romantic literature that no doubt shaped his sensitive soul, such as:

Peut-être que j'ai faim / de choses inconnues? (Œuvres 48)
 L'ébranlement des trains / ne te caresse plus (Œuvres 52)
 Oh! aimes-tu ce jour / autant que moi je l'aime? (Œuvres 62)
 Vivre danoisement / dans la douceur danoise (Œuvres 62)

Yet these alexandrines are never allowed to take control of the metrical framework, to assert a national formal paradigm. Rather, they are isolated from their fellow countrymen by lines and

lines of sprawling *vers libre*, or woven between resolutely ametrical lines, as in the first stanza of 'Carpe Diem...', where it is difficult to distinguish *vers national* from *vers international*:

Cueille ce triste jour / d'hiver sur la mer grise,	(12)
D'un gris doux, la terre est bleue et le ciel bas	(11)
Semble tout à la fois / désespéré et tendre;	(12)
Et vois la salle de la petite auberge	(11)
Si gaie et si bruyante / en été, les dimanches,	(12)
Et où nous sommes seuls aujourd'hui, venus	(11)
De Naples, non pour voir Baïes et l'entrée des Enfers,	(13)
Mais pour nous souvenir / mélancoliquement.	(12)
	(<i>Œuvres</i> 62)

These formal uncertainties provide a rhythmic demonstration of what Corger identifies as the central tension of Larbaud's statelessness: 'Évasion et séjour à la fois [...] une sorte de domaine mobile dont Larbaud ne se lasse jamais de tracer et retracer les frontières mouvantes' (Corger 1975, 90). These mobile borders are enacted textually by the constantly shifting rhythmical patterns, the interplay of familiarity and foreignness which characterises a poet 'toujours partagé entre le besoin de fuir et l'incapacité où il est de rompre tout contact avec ce qu'il fuit, entre le salut du sédentaire et celui du nomade, entre le déracinement et l'enracinement, entre la rupture et la continuité' (ibid., 95).

Barnabooth's exploration of statelessness depends on the potential of poetic rhythm to transcend the semantic dimension of specific languages and to create a textual fabric in which multiple belongings can co-exist in a dynamic and productive tension, pointing at the same time towards national and international allegiances. Barnabooth himself places rhythm at the heart of his poetic enterprise, claiming in 'Ma Muse':

Je suis agi par les lois invisibles du rythme,
 Je ne les comprends pas moi-même: elles sont là.
 (*Œuvres* 60)

Whereas Lamartine and Hugo posited as their rhythmical inspiration the regular rhythms and harmonies of the divine cosmos, the rhythms that act upon Barnabooth are irregular, harder to place. The first line amounts to an awkward thirteen syllables: while it may end in a regular six-syllable hemistich ('invisibles du rythme'), it is impossible to reduce the first seven syllables as there is no *e caduc* to massage away with a subtle *apocope*; and although the second line offers twelve syllables with a firm caesura after 'pas', the colon after the *e caduc* of 'même' creates an emphatic pause which counteracts its elision into the following 'elles'. If we look beyond the neo-Romantic mystification and gentle posturing of these lines, it is worth noting once again that rhythm affords Barnabooth an opportunity to divest himself of his selfhood, and of all the ties of belonging that go with it, in order to give himself up to the multiplicity of the world. Scholarship on Larbaud has so often focused on Barnabooth's predilection for playing roles – 'Le déguisement émeut toujours mon cœur de poète' ('Europe', *Œuvres* 75) – that the famous opening line of 'Le Masque' is by now a well-worn critical cliché: 'J'écris toujours avec un masque sur le visage' (*Œuvres* 47). Disguise and masks, however, imply control and a degree of performative appropriation, akin to the fantasies of a Pierre Loti, which does not do justice to Barnabooth's willing self-exposure to the potential risks of his stateless poetics.

It is true that Larbaud has found himself at the centre of critical anxiety over the exploitative cosmopolitanism of the wealthy tourist, whose privileged mobility is a quasi-colonial act of possession:

Le désert, la prairie, les Andes colossaux,
 Le Nil blanc, Téhéran, Timor, les Mers du Sud,
 Et toute la surface planétaire sont à nous, quand nous voudrons!

(‘Europe’, *Œuvres* 71)

A similar colonial undercurrent might be read in the essay on John-Antoine Nau, the French-language Symbolist poet born in California to French parents, in which Larbaud dreams of the future literature of a mobile poet capable of uniting humanity in ‘la grande Patrie mondiale’:

J.-A. Nau fut un des rares écrivains qui ont annoncé la littérature des temps futurs, lorsque le poète pourra visiter facilement toute la planète, tout le domaine que Dieu a donné à l’homme, se faisant citoyen de tous les pays qu’il préférera, les chantant, expliquant un peuple aux autres peuples, unifiant la conscience de l’humanité! Sainte Mission! Mission de paix universelle! A voir les honneurs que les nations donnent à leurs fils qui les ont le mieux servies, nous pensons: ‘Quels honneurs recevra un jour de la grande Patrie mondiale, la mémoire des esprits qui l’ont servie avec désintéressement et sans attendre aucun profit!’

(in Delvaille 207–8)

The echoes of the *mission civilisatrice* are all too audible in this internationalist fantasy – yet throughout the poems it is clear that Barnabooth’s understanding of textual multiplicity and polyphony involves abandoning authorial control, situating meaning beyond what the reader might infer to be an expressive intention at the surface level:

Prenez donc tout de moi: le sens de ces poèmes,
 Non ce qu’on lit, mais ce qui paraît au travers malgré moi

(‘Le Don de soi-même’, *Œuvres* 61)

This non-proprietary conception of the poet’s own subjectivity lies firmly in the tradition of Rimbaud’s ‘JE est un Autre’ and the multiple identities of *Illuminations*, such as ‘Je suis le saint [...] Je suis le savant [...] Je suis le piéton’ (‘Enfance IV’, Rimbaud 291). Barnabooth asserts this multiplicity in the short poem that precedes ‘Europe’, addressed to his biographer:

Un poème à la suite de ceux
 Esquels je distillai mes âmes,
 Car aussi bien j’en ai plusieurs.

(A. M. Tournier de Zamble’, *Œuvres* 68)

It is the act of travel, the migratory performance of statelessness, which allows Barnabooth to assume several identities at once, losing himself in the multitudes of different phenomena encountered along the way:

Je suis la paloma meurtrie, je suis les orangers,
 Et je suis cet instant qui passe et le soir africain;
 Mon âme et les voix unies des mandolines

(‘Mers-El-Kébir’, *Œuvres* 56)

Thus, as ‘Nuit dans le port’ opens with the striking image ‘Le visage *vaporisé* au Portugal’ (*Œuvres* 46, original italics), Barnabooth articulates a central tenet of his own poetry and of Larbaud’s understanding of literature, as expressed in an essay on Ramón Gómez de la Serna:

the experience of 'le Moi [...] volatilisé' made possible by 'l'art, qui est non seulement une libération, mais la liberté même' (in Delvaille 90).

I hope to have shown how the rhythmic possibilities of Larbaud's *vers libre* allow for an expression of statelessness which emerges from the dynamic co-existence of multiple voicings and belongings, located in the interstitial, always unsettled potentialities that are the proper domain of poetry. As the vogue for travel eclipses tired national paradigms, Larbaud's verse opens itself up to what Alexandre Gefen calls 'ce que doit être l'objet de la littérature, [...] l'expérience de la radicale diversité du monde' (Gefen 354). The emergence of *vers libre* concurrently with the awakening of a new global consciousness, brought about by the expansion and democratisation of travel, confirms it as a genuinely international literary form – mobile, promiscuous and unfettered by national allegiances. What Barnabooth's adventures in rhythm clearly articulate is the inherently unstable nature of his transnational enterprise, as the drive towards the possession of a cosmopolitan wholeness – the collection and consumption of global languages and cultures – involves a surrendering of the self, and of the text, to the frequently disorientating multiplicity of the world, and in particular the third space of travel. This constant state of self-divestment, while often thrilling to Barnabooth, involves encounters with the concomitant sense of rupture and loss that characterises the diverse range of experiences of statelessness, from that which is freely chosen to that which is forced upon individuals and groups against their will. In Larbaud's hands, it is the rhythmic fabric of the poetic text itself, startlingly new while shot through with fragments of the old, and pointing in multiple directions at once, which articulates the vital tensions between the hopes and fears, the forward momentum and the hesitations, the endless dialogue between unknown future and bittersweet memories, of the stateless subject – 'perpétuel évadé de tous les milieux'.

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