

The Body Poetic: Laforgue's Translations of Whitman
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ABSTRACT

This article explores Jules Laforgue's 1886 translations of a selection of poems from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and their connections with his broader *œuvre* through a thematic lens – that of corporeality. Both poets give a prominent role to embodiment, but there are significant disparities between their representations of bodily experience. Whitman's treatment of sexuality is forthright, betraying the influence of contemporary scientific discourse, while Laforgue uses jocular periphrasis; Whitman tends to portray vigorously healthy bodies, while Laforgue's poetry is riddled with illness and weakness. These differences are tied to their disparate conceptions of their roles as poets. Whitman sees his creative project as inherently political, his aesthetics being founded on the metaphorical equivalence between body, text, and nation; Laforgue, on the other hand, rejects this political role, focusing his attention on the suffering of the individual body. In contrast to Whitman's expansiveness, then, Laforgue's poetic self remains essentially bounded.

KEYWORDS: Jules Laforgue, Walt Whitman, translation, body, sympathy, illness, sexuality

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The year 1886 was an eventful one for Laforgue, both personally and poetically. He met Leah Lee in January, proposed to her in September, and, having been accepted, resigned his position as reader to the German Empress Augusta (since servants to the German court were not permitted to wed); on the final day of the year, they were married in London. In the midst of all this, he was writing the poems which would come to be known as the *Derniers vers* following his untimely death in 1887. First published in *La Vogue* between August and December 1886, the *Derniers vers* were amongst the pioneering works of free verse in French, appearing in the same year (and indeed, the same journal) as Rimbaud's 'Marine' and 'Mouvement' and Gustave Kahn's 'Intermède'. They were preceded, however, by his translations of some of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in June, July, and early August, the first verse translations of Whitman to appear in French.¹ This precedence has given rise to the theory that Whitman's work was crucial to the development of Laforgue's formal experimentation. While the question of a possible Whitmanian influence is obfuscated by the near-total absence of references to Whitman in Laforgue's writings, both private and published, Clive Scott has shown through detailed formal analysis that the translations were important for what they suggested 'in the way of very specific shifts in the machinery of verse'; in precise terms, these shifts were 'the redefinition of the nature and function of accent' and 'the usurpation of meter's throne by rhythm' (1990: 109).² Scott argues that Laforgue understood Whitman's innovations – 'presumably with the help of Leah Lee' (1990: 108) – and recognised them as being more radical than anything he had previously encountered.

While Scott's argument focuses on the formal aspect of Whitman's influence, Betsy Erkkilä argues that the American's work inspired Laforgue not only technically but also thematically (1980: 77). Laforgue's expression of 'the desires of the body as well as the soul', his exploration of 'the love relationship between men and women' (1980: 74), the

dominance of a more ‘life-embracing mood’ (1980: 73) in his later poetry: all of these provide evidence for the impact of the translations, according to Erkkilä.³ But the mood of the *Derniers vers* is not as positive as Erkkilä claims, and the theme of romantic love is central to Laforgue’s work from the time of *Les Complaintes* (as well as being an age-old theme of lyrical poetry in general, of course). In the same way, the physical and spiritual yearning evident in the later work is very much a continuation of the thematics of his earlier collections. Nonetheless, it is true that the representation of corporeality is central to the work of both poets: Whitman himself claimed to be ‘the poet of the Body’ (‘Song of Myself’, l. 422, Whitman, 1965: 48; hereafter *LG*), and much has been written about the bodily aspect of his work (see, especially, Killingsworth, 1991), while Laforgue has been described as having a ‘preoccupation with the physical’ (Collie, 1977: 91), and indeed as being ‘almost obsessed with the body’s functions’ (1977: 93).

This article examines the bodily poetics of Laforgue and Whitman. Despite the central role played by embodiment in both of their *œuvres*, I argue that there are significant disparities between the two poets’ representations of the body. These disparities are related to their differing conceptions of themselves as poets, as well as to the differing positions they take on the discourses of corporeal regeneration that prevailed in France and the United States. However, this is not to say that Laforgue’s attitude towards Whitman’s work was one of wholesale rejection. It is clear why he would have been drawn to the American’s poetry, as shown by an exploration of the reviews of Whitman in the 1870s and 1880s, reviews he is likely to have read. Ultimately, then, we need to move beyond the binary model of acceptance or rejection, considering instead the ways in which Laforgue engages with, responds to and challenges Whitman’s poetics.

Contemporary reviews of 'le radical, l'iconoclaste Walt Whitman'

Little is known about how Laforgue encountered *Leaves of Grass*, or what he thought of Whitman. He refers to the American poet only twice in his correspondence (Laforgue, 1986-2000, II: 860 & 862; hereafter *OC*), and then only in the briefest of terms, and his extant notebooks feature no references whatsoever; his only surviving evaluative comment is in *La Vogue* itself, where he prefaces his translations with the phrase 'Traduit de l'étonnant poète américain Walt Whitman' (*OC*, II: 347).⁴ As for the circumstances of Laforgue's encounter with Whitman's work, Percy Mansell-Jones speculates that it was the Franco-American poet Francis Vielé-Griffin who brought *Leaves of Grass* to his attention (see Scott, 1990: 100); however, Vielé-Griffin's biographer Reinhard Kuhn has dismissed this theory (see *OC*, II: 343). Other critics (Everdell, 1997: 93; Erkkilä, 1980: 69) argue that Laforgue came across Whitman through a review by the journalist and essayist Thérèse Bentzon in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* of May 1886, and given that Laforgue was at that time still employed as reader to the Empress Augusta and thus required to keep up to date with the press, this is a plausible supposition. The review (of E. C. Stedman's *Poets of America*) treats Whitman only briefly alongside seven other American poets, but Bentzon refers the reader to her earlier article on Whitman, published in the same periodical in May 1872. It is possible, then, that Laforgue read both of Bentzon's articles, in which her assessment of Whitman's poetry is largely negative. He may also have encountered a very different opinion in articles by the poet Emile Blémont, published in June and July of 1872 in *La Renaissance Littéraire et Artistique*; while Bentzon is essentially disapprobatory, Blémont offers full-throated praise. Despite this fundamental difference, the two reviewers focus on the same themes in Whitman's work: his formal innovations, his 'Americanism', his representations of the body, and his aesthetico-political ideal of sympathy.

Bentzon's 1886 review concentrates on Whitman's originality, a quality that would, of course, have appealed to Laforgue given his declared intention to 'faire de l'original à tout prix' (*OC*, II: 821). While Bentzon acknowledges that there is 'souvent une originalité réelle' (1886: 112) in the content and mood of Whitman's verse, she dismisses his formal innovations on the basis that they stem from metrical ineptitude and self-serving unconventionality: 'Cet irrégulier a brisé les moules anciens, faute de savoir s'en servir; il est plus facile d'arriver au succès par l'excentricité que par tout autre moyen' (1886: 112). In her earlier article, she is even more denunciatory, condemning 'son mépris absolu de la grammaire' and arguing that 'l'anglais devient sous sa plume un jargon barbare souvent incompréhensible' (1872: 573). In fact, even Blémont concedes that Whitman's grammatical inexactitude is one of his 'défauts monstrueux', but his general assessment of the poet's singularity is positive: 'quelle originalité absolue!' (1872b: 86). Both reviewers associate his formal innovation with his national identity, although again with opposing value judgments. Bentzon states that his '*américanisme*' consists in a rejection of 'toutes les formes, toutes les règles, toutes les traditions du passé' and she brands this experimentation 'fort peu désirable' (1872: 113). Blémont, on the other hand, lauds Whitman as a poetic pioneer who has succeeded in freeing himself of Old World constraints: 'Walt Whitman est absolument, essentiellement Américain; c'est le pur *Yankee*, contempteur de la forme et de la routine, grand défricheur de terres vierges' (1872a: 54). Praising his repudiation of rhyme and meter as well as the audacity of his neologisms, Blémont portrays Whitman's poetic expression as a torrential outpouring 'sans apparence de préméditation, d'ordre, de logique, et comme au hasard!' (1872b: 86). Such comments would surely have made Whitman's work attractive to Laforgue, who wrote in his notes on Rimbaud that 'Une poésie n'est pas un sentiment que l'on communique tel que conçu avant la plume' (*OC*, III: 194) and who advocated the poetic principle of 'l'en-allé' (*OC*, III: 195). Moreover, as Scott points out, Laforgue was 'sensitive

to the “américanisme” and yankee idiosyncrasies of Baudelaire’,⁵ and Bentzon’s attacks on Whitman’s New World aesthetic would thus ‘only have rallied Laforgue to Whitman’s cause’ (Scott, 1990: 100) – as would, of course, Blémont’s praise.

As well as shaking off the strictures of rhyme, meter, grammar, and tradition, Whitman had also – according to both Bentzon and Blémont – liberated himself from ‘la pudeur’. Bentzon reserves particular opprobrium for the frankness of his representations of the body, stating almost incredulously that

il prend l’homme comme il est et soutient que rien ne peut être mieux que ce qui est: si les appétits grossiers jouent un grand rôle, ce doit être la condition nécessaire des choses, et nous devons l’accepter. (1872: 571-72)

This principle ensures that ‘il n’y a point d’indécence qui le fasse reculer’; she even states that ‘la langue française se refuserait à la traduction de certains morceaux érotiques’, and lives up to her word in a prose translation of ‘I Sing the Body Electric’, whose enumeration of body parts she cuts short with the purse-lipped interjection ‘Nous n’oserions le suivre dans l’évocation des différentes parties de ce corps’ (1872: 571). (Whitman’s evocation of ‘man-balls, man-root’ (‘I Sing the Body Electric’, l. 143, *LG*, 100) no doubt offended her particularly.) For Bentzon, there is no question that Whitman is a materialist, not only because of the prominent role of corporeality in his work, but also because he identifies the soul with the body: ‘Le corps renferme l’esprit, et il est l’esprit’ (Whitman quoted in Bentzon, 1872: 570). Blémont, however, evaluates this theme entirely differently. He acclaims Whitman’s ‘vigoureuses conceptions d’une forte santé, chaste et sobre’, illustrating his forthrightness with a translated passage from ‘Starting from Paumanok’ in which the poet apostrophises ‘organes et actes sexuels’ as follows: ‘je suis déterminé à vous célébrer d’une claire et courageuse voix, pour prouver que vous êtes illustres’ (Whitman quoted in Blémont, 1872b: 86). Moreover, for Blémont, the bodily and spiritual aspects of Whitman’s work are in equilibrium: ‘Il est le champion de l’âme; il est aussi le champion sans honte de la sainteté

de la chair et des instincts charnels' (1872b: 86). To illustrate the interdependence of body and soul, Blémont translates a passage from the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in which Whitman argues that if you practise virtues such as charity, patience, generosity and open-mindedness, 'votre chair sera alors un grand poème' (Whitman quoted in Blémont, 1872a: 54).

These virtues are facets of one of the most important Whitmanian principles, one in which ethics, aesthetics, and politics meet: that of sympathy. For Whitman, sympathy is more than mere shared emotion; rather, it is an awareness of the commonality of identity, a kinship that encompasses not only fellow citizens (see Blémont's reference to 'To Workingmen'⁶) but also humanity in its entirety (see 'Salut au monde!', also referred to by Blémont (1872b: 87)). Indeed, as Bentzon points out, Whitman claims 'non-seulement de représenter un citoyen de l'univers, [...] mais encore de contenir en lui-même l'univers tout entier'; she is, however, critical of this position, declaring that 'la limite de l'absurde est dépassée' (1872: 573). Whitman's poetic self thus incorporates the world, but it is also disseminated *into* the world in the form of the text itself, as Blémont illustrates with a translation from 'So Long!', the final poem of the 1881 edition: 'Qui touche ceci, touche un homme. [...] C'est moi que vous tenez et qui vous tiens' (1872c: 91). The text, then, becomes a body capable of haptic communion with its readers – and this might, indeed, be read as an act analogous to transubstantiation. Crucially, this transformation recapitulates the metaphorical equivalence established in the idea of the body becoming 'un grand poème', but with a reversal of the terms. Both the body as text and the text as body are thus crucial to Whitman's conception of sympathy, and to his poetry itself.

Blémont extends the corporeal metaphor into the text's effect on its readers, arguing that reading *Leaves of Grass* 'serait particulièrement saine pour ce bon peuple de France [...] célèbre par ses engouements et ses frivolités' (1872c: 90; my emphasis). Whitman's work is

also conceptualised as a revivifying force for France's 'esprit fatigué' (1872c: 91), a reference – presumably – to the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. Indeed, the text is portrayed as generative as well as regenerative, Blémont declaring that the experience of reading Whitman's poetry produced in him 'une de nos joies [...] les plus fécondes' (1872c: 90). Unsurprisingly, Bentzon does not share in this joy, but she too appeals to a procreative metaphor in her discussion of Whitman's potential influence: 'il doit être, hélas! le père d'une longue génération de poètes' (1872: 582). Bentzon's and Blémont's reviews thus reveal the central importance of corporeality not only to Whitman's thematics, but also to accounts of the impact of his work.

In addition to being drawn to Whitman's formal iconoclasm, Laforgue would surely have appreciated the candour of the American's representations of physicality; after all, he had learnt to think of man as 'un être chimique et physiologique' from his reading of Hartmann (Hiddleston, 1980: 15; see also Collie, 1977: 93). However, as we shall see, his poetic renderings of embodiment do not echo the American's directness, and there are significant differences in other respects, not least in his problematisation of the harmonious body-soul relation proclaimed by Whitman's work. The *Derniers vers* do, to a certain extent, share Whitman's preoccupation with sympathy, but again there is a disparity that, subtle as it is, goes to the heart of the divergence between the roles that Laforgue and Whitman assign themselves as poets.

Poetry of the Body

Laforgue translated ten poems from the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*,⁷ eight of which came from the opening section, 'Inscriptions'. The first of these, and the opening poem of

Leaves of Grass, was ‘One’s-Self I Sing’ (‘Je chante le soi-même’), and it heralds Whitman’s celebration of the body:

C’est de la physiologie du haut en bas, que je chante,
La physionomie seule, le cerveau seul, ce n’est pas digne de la Muse; je dis que l’Être
complet en est bien plus digne.
(ll. 3-4, *OC*, II: 347)

Rather than itself being a paean of corporeality, however, ‘One’s-Self I Sing’ is essentially meta-poetic; it is in ‘A Woman Waits for Me’ (‘Une femme m’attend’) that the frankness of Whitman’s representation of embodiment comes to the fore. This was the last of Laforgue’s translations to be published, and his selection is thus framed by poems that express what Whitman calls the ‘eternal Bodily Character of One’s Self’ (‘Preface (1876)’, *LG*, 748).

Laforgue describes ‘A Woman Waits for Me’ as ‘un des plus Whitman du volume’ (*OC*, II: 860) in a letter to Kahn, the only remark in his correspondence that offers any real insight into his view of Whitman. Even then, of course, this is a teasingly vague description, but it might be interpreted as suggesting that Laforgue deemed Whitman’s quintessence to be his directness regarding the body. The poem is, after all, one of Whitman’s starkest (and, at the time of publication, most controversial) expressions of praise for sexuality:

Le sexe contient tout, corps, âmes,
Idées, preuves, puretés, délicatesses, fins, diffusions,
Chants, commandements, santé, orgueil, le mystère de la maternité, le lait séminal,
Tous espoirs, bienfaisances, dispensations, toutes passions, amours, beautés, délices
de la terre,
Tous gouvernements, juges, dieux, conducteurs de la terre,
C’est dans le sexe, comme autant de facultés du sexe, et toutes ses raisons d’être.
(ll. 3-8, *OC*, II: 355)

The notion of sexuality as the all-encompassing principle of human existence was already familiar to Laforgue from his encounter with the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, both of whom saw the sexual instinct as the primary manifestation of the Will and the Unconscious respectively. This is not to say that their work echoes Whitman’s laudation: Schopenhauer preaches chastity, and Hartmann follows his predecessor in condemning

sexual desire as a trick played on the human race, even if he accepts the necessity of reproduction for the purposes of social evolution and, ultimately, enlightenment (Schopenhauer, II: 559-60; Hartmann, I: 255).

While Laforgue's reading of German philosophy was crucial to the development of his ethics and aesthetics, he was by no means an uncritical follower of either Schopenhauer or Hartmann. This is particularly evident in his scepticism regarding the former's ethical doctrine of celibacy:

L'inanition de Schopenhauer est une stupidité. Sa délivrance non seulement de l'homme mais encore de toute vie sur la terre par la suppression du commerce sexuel dans l'humanité est un rêve, un motif à variations humoristiques [...]. (OC, III: 1135)⁸

This criticism implies that Laforgue saw sexual restraint as impracticable, and perhaps also as undesirable. Just as 'A Woman Waits for Me' insists anaphorically on the need to dispel sexual repression –

Sans honte, l'homme, tel que je l'aime, sait et avoue les délices de son sexe,
Sans honte, la femme, telle que je l'aime, sait et avoue les délices du sien.
(ll. 9-10, OC, II: 355)⁹

– so Laforgue seems to lament, in a paroxysmal stanza from *Derniers vers*, the secrecy in which sexuality is cloaked:

Ô merveille qu'on n'a su que cacher!
Si pauvre et si brûlante et si martyre!
Et qu'on n'ose toucher
Qu'à l'aveugle, en divin délire!
(*'Dimanches (IV)'*, ll. 38-41, OC, II: 310)

Hiddleston argues that Laforgue's criticism refers more generally to the empty clichés of the language of love ('on n'a pas voulu parler franchement et ouvertement de cette merveille; on l'a cachée sous un vocabulaire d'emprunt, n'osant pas la regarder comme elle est' (1980: 55)), but the previous stanza's apparent reference to sexual initiation ('voyez comme on tremble, | Au premier grand soir' (ll. 34-35, OC, II: 310)) suggests that we should read 'merveille' as referring to sex specifically. In this light, we might conclude that Laforgue follows Whitman in advocating sexual liberation. However, the very ambiguity of 'merveille'

is obviously and deliberately ironic, since this ambiguity keeps the term's referent hidden or, at least, indistinct. Such euphemism is a long way from Whitman's directness. Indeed, in the following stanza the notion of a critique of sexual repression seems to be undermined: 'Ô merveille, | Reste cachée idéale violette' (ll. 42-43, *OC*, II: 310). While this does not imply a return to the Schopenhauerian position, it does signal a disparity with Whitman.

It is important, then, to nuance Erkkilä's argument that Laforgue's poetry takes on 'a fleshy, carnal, and frankly sexual dimension' (Erkkilä, 1980: 74) under the influence of Whitman; while sexuality is a major theme of the *Derniers vers*, its portrayal is far from frank. In fact, sex is treated periphrastically throughout Laforgue's work, the poet making use of both erotic slang and idiosyncratic metaphors. When in 'Solo de Lune' the poet refers to 'un beau couple d'amants, | Qui gesticulent hors la loi' (ll. 64-65, *OC*, II: 321), or when in 'Pierrots (II)' he states that its eponymous heroes 'n'ont personne | Chez eux, qui les frictionne | D'un conjugal onguent' (ll. 11-12, *OC*, II: 83), we do not have to strain our interpretive faculties to deduce that sex is being referred to; but it is not explicitly mentioned, as it is in Whitman's work.¹⁰ Although there is a counter-example to this circumlocution in the poem 'Guitare', which refers to 'votre clitoris qui vous tordait pâmée | En de longs spasmes de langueur' (ll. 83-84, *OC*, I: 413), this is an isolated case, and it is taken from *Le Sanglot de la terre*, which Laforgue abandoned. In his mature work, such anatomical specificity is played for laughs, as for example in 'Clair de Lune':

Penser qu'on vivra jamais dans cet astre,
Parfois me flanque un coup dans l'épigastre.
(ll. 1-2, *OC*, II: 77)

The shift of register, from colloquial to medical, is of course typical of Laforgue's humour. There is humour, too, in the use of circumlocution more generally (see the 'conjugal onguent'), and again we see here a significant contrast with Whitman's essential seriousness, especially regarding sex.

As the reference to sex in ‘Pierrots (II)’ demonstrates, Erkkilä’s argument that Whitman inspired the sexual theme of Laforgue’s work is also undermined by the presence of this theme prior to his encounter with Whitman’s work.¹¹ It is in *Les Complaintes* that sexuality begins to taken on a central role in Laforgue’s poetry. The primitivist sexual fantasy of ‘Complainte des Nostalgies préhistoriques’, which imagines erotic adventures with ‘une enfant bestiale et brûlée’ (l. 13, *OC*, I: 573) in a paradisiac valley, is echoed by ‘Complainte du pauvre Chevalier-Errant’ (*OC*, I: 575-77), which envisions similar scenes of sensual fulfilment in a fairy-tale palace. Both poems, however, end with a bathetic return to reality, the former evoking a drizzly urban scene and the falsity of a polite dinner, the latter revealing the eponymous knight to be, in fact, an ‘homme-sandwich’ displaying a board for a restaurant called ‘Au Bon Chevalier-Errant’ (ll. 51-52, *OC*, I: 577). While these poems suggest that sexual satisfaction is an unattainable ideal, other poems express cynicism about sex itself, notably ‘Complainte du soir des Comices agricoles’: ‘Dans les foins | Crèvent deux rêves niais’ (ll. 22-23, *OC*, I: 594). This disillusionment can be related to Laforgue’s philosophical reading, in which – as we have seen – sexual desire is portrayed as a trick played on human beings for the purpose of the species’ continuation. Women facilitate this dupery, even though their role is an unwitting one; as ‘Les Jeunes Gens’ state in ‘Complainte des Voix sous le Figuier boudhique’, ‘c’est un Dieu qui par tes yeux nous triche’ (l. 48, *OC*, I: 553). While women’s seductiveness is represented in the poem by ‘Les Voluptantes’, they are counterpointed by the virginal ‘Communiantes’, and elsewhere in the collection we see similar examples of female restraint. In ‘Complainte des formalités nuptiales’, for example, ‘Lui’ attempts to persuade ‘Elle’ that spiritual connection is insufficient and must be accompanied by sexual congress, eventually resorting to a sinister appeal to force: ‘la vie [...] m’a fait le plus fort’ (l. 65, *OC*, I: 579). Rather than being an endorsement of violence on Laforgue’s part, this is a lament of the ethical aberrations provoked by desire: ‘Lui’ is one of

the dupes. However, Laforgue's work also has a certain element of earthy pragmatism regarding sex, as emblematised by this self-admonition from 'Complainte des Débats mélancoliques et littéraires':

Eh va, pauvre âme véhémence!
Plonge, être, en leurs Jourdain blasés,
Deux frictions de vie courante
T'auront bien vite exorcisé.
(ll. 29-32, *OC*, I: 614)

Les Complaintes, then, express a deeply polyvalent attitude towards sex: it is the subject of fantasy, but is also seen as a form of deception; it is resisted, but also welcomed as a form of release. This is a far cry from Whitman's unequivocal celebration of 'les délices' ('the deliciousness') of sexuality.

This polyvalence is reflected in the *Derniers vers*. The defiance of normative policing of sexual pleasure is implicit in the aforementioned image of 'un beau couple d'amants, | Qui gesticulent hors la loi' (ll. 64-65, *OC*, II: 321); 'Simple Agonie', too, seems to envisage a post-revolutionary society in which desires will be unfettered ('tous les intérêts [seront] purement charnels' (l. 25, *OC*, II: 318)). In contrast to this utopian vision, 'Dimanches (III)' recapitulates the violence of sexuality in lines that are adapted from 'Dimanches (XXVIII)' from *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté* (*OC*, II: 203): 'Ah, que je te les tordrais avec plaisir, | Ce corps bijou, ce cœur à ténor [...]' (ll. 41-42, *OC*, II: 307). This violence is reminiscent not only of 'Complainte des formalités nuptiales' but also of 'A Woman Waits for Me', with its line 'I do not hurt you any more than is necessary for you' (l. 27, *OC*, II: 356); however, for Whitman this force is rationalised, whereas for Laforgue it provokes shame and is dismissed ('Non, non!') in favour of a vision of mutual fulfilment:

C'est sucer la chair d'un cœur élu,
Adorer d'incurables organes
S'entrevoir avant que les tissus se fanent
En monomanes, en reclus!
(ll. 47-50, *OC*, II: 307)

To exist as ‘monomanes’, as ‘reclus’ is to forestall true romantic (and sexual) satisfaction; ‘monomanes’ suggests an obsession with sex (a ‘one-track mind’) but ‘reclus’ implies solitude; we might, therefore, read this as a reference to masturbation. This reading is supported by ‘Célibat, célibat, tout n’est que célibat’, in which the poet aspires to coupledness (‘Être deux avant qu’on se fane!’ (l. 3)) but fears the possibility of perpetual loneliness:

Ne serai-je qu’un monomane
Dissolu
Par ses travaux de décadent et de reclus? (ll. 4-6, *OC*, II: 188)

The emphasis placed on ‘Dissolu’ by its isolation invites us to over-interpret it and to assign it a sexual sense; moreover, this very isolation mirrors that of the poet himself, suggesting that dissolution is the inevitable result of solitude.

The term ‘monomane’ occurs again in the opening of ‘*Ô géraniums diaphanes...*’, but here it seems to refer to sexual intercourse. Its conjunction with the term ‘Sacrilèges’ introduces a pattern of religious imagery, as well as announcing the sense of shame concerning sex that suffuses the stanza alongside feelings of fear and regret:

Ô géraniums diaphanes, guerroyeurs sortilèges,
Sacrilèges monomanes!
Emballages, dévergondages, douches! Ô pressoirs
Des vendanges des grands soirs!
Layettes aux abois,
Thyrses au fond des bois!
Transfusions, représailles,
Relevailles, compresses et l’éternelle potion,
Angelus! n’en pouvoir plus
De débâcles nuptiales! de débâcles nuptiales!...
(ll. 1-10, *OC*, II: 330)

Within this apparently random listing of nouns and nominal clauses there are numerous suggestions of sex, most notably in ‘dévergondages’, but also in the ‘pressoirs/ Des vendanges des grands soirs!’; Hiddleston labels this an image of the violence of sex (1980: 43), linking it to the ‘vendanges sexciproques’ of ‘Complainte à Notre-Dame des Soirs’ (l. 18, *OC*, I: 551). Hiddleston also argues that ‘Transfusions’ should be read as signifying

insemination (1980: 72). The ‘grands soirs’ echo the initiatory ‘grand soir’ of ‘Dimanches (IV)’, while there are also sexual connotations in ‘Thyrse’ – phallic staffs used in Bacchic rites – and their location ‘au fond des bois’ (a topos long associated with sexual adventure, including in Laforgue’s work¹²). However, it is the consequences of sex rather than its pleasures that are evoked particularly strongly here: ‘Layettes’ suggests a baby, with the bodily trauma of childbirth conveyed by ‘compresses’; the epizeuxis of ‘débâcles nuptiales!’ reinforces the sense of anxiety. Moreover, there are also references to birth in ‘Relevailles’, the Christian ceremony that blesses women after labour (the ‘Churching of Women’), and in ‘l’Angelus’, the Catholic devotion that commemorates the Immaculate Conception. The latter term is used elsewhere in Laforgue’s work, perhaps most notably in ‘Complainte des printemps’:

– Vierges d’hier, ce soir traîneuses de fœtus,
À genoux! voici l’heure où se plaint l’Angelus.
(ll. 29-30, *OC*, I: 569)

The grotesque image of mothers as ‘traîneuses de fœtus’ and the call for them to pray might be read as a misogynistic concoction of Schopenhauerianism and Catholicism; but given his nuanced position on women’s rights,¹³ it might also be interpreted as a critique of society’s hypocritical expectation that women be pure yet motherly, like the Virgin Mary.

In any case, this emotional turmoil concerning the consequences of sex is in stark opposition to the positive message regarding procreation in ‘A Woman Waits for Me’, which was, indeed, originally entitled ‘Poem of Procreation’. The poem focuses less on the pleasure of sex than its generativity:

Les gouttes que je distille en toi grandiront en chaudes et puissantes filles, en artistes de demain, musiciens, bardes;
Les enfants que j’engendre en toi engendreront à leur tour,
Je demande que des hommes parfaits, des femmes parfaites sortent de mes frais amoureux.
(ll. 34-36, *OC*, II: 357)

The notion of human perfectibility ('des hommes parfaits, des femmes parfaites') is a crucial one for Whitman, and it displays his interest in the writings of the health reformers of the mid-nineteenth century. While the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* had asserted the revolutionary force of sexual energy, subsequent editions turned to 'science and pseudoscience for justification' and the poet thereby 'slipped toward an acceptance of the productivity principle embodied in the nineteenth-century medical model of sexual behavior and physiology' (Killingsworth, 1991: xviii). The poem's 'incorporation of eugenicist concepts and language' (Killingsworth, 1991: 70) is also evident in the use of agricultural images ('les fruits des arrosements jaillissants', 'les moissons d'amour' (ll. 38, 39, *OC*, II: 357)), images which are prevalent throughout his work, including his political writings *Democratic Vistas* (see Aspiz, 1994). These metaphors may seem comparable with Laforgue's use of 'vendanges', but there are in fact fundamental differences. In '*Ô géraniums diaphanes...*' the term is used in relation to the mechanics of penetration ('pressoirs') rather than its result, while in 'L'Hiver qui vient' the same term ('vendanges' (l. 64, *OC*, II: 298)) is used to suggest the sensual pleasures of summertime. The image never has the same generative signification as Whitman's agricultural tropes.

Whitman's celebration of procreativity is part of a broader concern with physical vigour. In 'A Woman Waits...', the poet 'embodies the ideal of (male) health and strength' (Killingsworth, 1991: 65), echoing his declaration in the 1855 preface that great poets should possess 'the soundest organic health' (*LG*, 723). He also announces in his open letter to Emerson of 1856 that one of the key principles of *Leaves of Grass* was to create a new American literature that would 'be electric, fresh, lusty, [and] express the full-sized body, male and female' (*LG*, 732). In parallel to this, Laforgue's evocation of the anxieties caused by sexuality is part of a thematics of illness and physical debility. The first of the *Derniers vers* announces the importance of this theme through the comparison of the weak, wintry sun

to ‘un crachat d’estaminet’ (its whiteness suggesting anaemia) and to ‘une glande arrachée dans un cou’; these references to spit and the throat prefigure the depiction of respiratory disease later in the poem:

C’est la toux dans les dortoirs du lycée qui rentre,
[...]
La phthisie pulmonaire attristant le quartier.
(ll. 66-68, *OC*, II: 298)

Tuberculosis haunts his work from the early novella *Stéphane Vassiliou* to ‘Le Miracle des Roses’ from *Moralités légendaires*, although we must resist the teleological fallacy that connects this theme to his own death from the disease. It is often implied in the poet’s expressions of concern for his lover, such as that in ‘Solo de Lune’:

Elle aura oublié son foulard,
Elle va prendre mal, vu la beauté de l’heure!
Oh! soigne-toi je t’en conjure!
Oh! je ne veux plus entendre cette toux!
(ll. 100-03, *OC*, II: 322)

The same sentiment and the same phrase (‘soigne-toi’) recur in ‘*Noire bise, averse glapissante...*’ (l. 17, *OC*, II: 337); in ‘Légende’, too, he appeals ‘soignez-vous’ (l. 46) and worries about her health: ‘Oh! comme elle est maigrie!’ (l. 36, *OC*, II: 325). This worry is also directed towards himself, however:

Oh! ces nuits sur les toits!
Je finirai bien par y prendre froid.
(‘Petites misères d’août’, ll. 22-23, *OC*, II: 208)

Indeed, in ‘Complainte des Débats mélancoliques et littéraires’, the poet declares himself to be ‘une âme hypocondre’ (l. 35, *OC*, I: 614). There is, of course, a paradox inherent in labelling oneself a hypochondriac; Laforgue thereby creates a quasi-solipsistic double bind of self-mocking self-pity.

By contrast, Whitman’s work reaches outward in expansive gestures of emotional and political affinity, his sympathy encompassing the ill and suffering: ‘the most formidable characteristic of Whitman’s self is its boundlessness’ (Rosenblum, 2011: 49). Laforgue’s self,

on the other hand, is essentially involuted. Moreover, Whitman sings the self – body, soul, and all – while for Laforgue it is the subject of distressed groans:

[...] j'ulule en détresse
Devant ce Moi, tonneau d'Ixion des Danaïdes.
(ll. 7-8, *OC*, II: 184)

The self is a source of torture, even if the ironic conflation of two Greek myths comically undermines the poet's self-pity. Debility is also evoked, the formulation 'j'ulule' suggesting a stuttering version of the poet's first name. (Again there is a contrast with Whitman, who refers to himself directly, with his full name, in 'Song of Myself' and 'Salut au Monde!' (*LG* 52 and 137).) Indeed, Laforgue compares the principle of poetic *désinvolture* to 'le bégaiement de l'enfant qui a mal' (*OC*, III: 195), an analogy that recalls the seminal 'Chanson du petit hypertrophique'. This poem was left out of the *Complaintes* despite its inauguration of the poet's new aesthetic, and Jean-Pierre Richard suggests that this may have been because the poem gave away the secret of the collection's prosody, which was based on the disordered rhythms of the suffering body: 'Un battement, maladif et obstiné, qui est aussi un boitement, ou un boitement' (Richard, 1979: 488). Illness was, of course, a central theme for the Decadent movement, with which Laforgue identified to a certain extent, but the notion that he sought to 'exacerber l'acuité des sens par la maladie' (Briche, 1989: 206) requires nuancing; Laforgue does not glamorise illness, even if it provides an aesthetic model. Instead he expresses sympathy for the bodily suffering of his fellow human beings, most obviously in 'Complainte du pauvre corps humain' with its refrain 'Voyez l'homme, voyez! | Si ça n'fait pas pitié!' (ll. 6-7 & 20-21, *OC*, I: 591).

The pity expressed here might seem to present a point of commonality with Whitman's 'boundless offering of sympathy' ('Preface (1876)', *LG*, 751 n.). In 'The Sleepers', for example, 'the poet's sympathetic imagination [...] engulfs and enfolds a variety of roles and conditions' (Killingsworth, 1991: 19), including 'The stammerer' and 'the

wasted or feeble person' (*LG*, 426) (both of which might describe Laforgue's selves).

However, the generalised expression of sympathy in 'Complainte du pauvre corps humain' is rare; more often, as we have seen, pity is directed towards the poet's lover (in what Whitman might have labelled 'a narrow, constipated, special amativeness' ('Preface (1876)', *LG*, 751 n.)), or – often ironically – towards the poet himself. This contrast is tied to the different ideas each poet had of his poetic role. Whitman espoused the Romantic notion of the poet as leader of men, a vatic conception that he explicitly invoked when he stated that the poet is 'a seer' ('Preface (1855)', *LG*, 713) and when he exclaimed 'The priest departs, the divine literatus comes' (Whitman, 1963-64, II: 365); this explains the expansiveness of his sympathetic vision. Laforgue, on the other hand, had abandoned his prophetic ambitions along with *Le Sanglot de la Terre*. Indeed, in the post-Romantic era in general the notion of the poet as *engagé* had limited currency, having been seriously damaged by the disillusionments of 1848 and 1851 (Bénichou, 1996: 385). Conversely, the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* 'may well have been precipitated by the events of 1848', since one of the earliest poems of the first edition ('Europe, the 72d and 73d Years of These States') dealt with the European revolutions and hopes for liberty that these engendered (Killingsworth, 1991: 133). These divergent conceptions of the role of poet also explain the disparity between Whitman's directness and Laforgue's euphemism regarding the body. Whitman seeks to evangelise the message of bodily liberation, and this requires an approach that is both frank and serious. Laforgue, on the other hand, has no such ambitions; his humorous periphrasis might be seen to express the absurdities of embodiment, but it is largely for his reader's amusement, not to mention his own.

Politics of the Body

Whitman does not merely sing the body for the benefit of the nation; he also sings the nation *as* body. In his letter to Emerson, he describes the ‘federalness’ of the United States in corporeal terms: ‘the union of the parts of the body is not more necessary to their life than the union of These States is to their life’ (*LG*, 733). The portrayal of this unity is, in conjunction with his portrayal of the body itself, the central purpose of *Leaves of Grass*, which he describes in the 1876 preface as ‘nutriment to that moral, Indissoluble Union’ (*LG*, 745). The relationship between body and nation is not merely metaphorical, though, since he envisages national unity as being founded on the ‘adhesiveness’ of homoerotic comradeship between men (*LG*, 751 n.). This aspiration to unity is also evident on the formal level: as Ben Lerner points out, Whitman’s lists – such as that in ‘A Woman Waits for Me’, quoted above – are always synthetic, and thus emblemise the democratic union he envisaged (Lerner, 2015: 43; see also Moon, 1991: 7). Erkkilä claims that Laforgue’s ‘use of the catalog technique’ is reminiscent of Whitman (1980: 72), but the asyndetic listing of ‘*Ô géraniums diaphanes...*’ and other poems is disjunctive rather than harmonious. In Laforgue’s case, we cannot necessarily extrapolate a vision of (disintegrating) nationhood from his use of parataxis; it does, however, indicate the extent to which Whitmanian synthesis is opposed by Laforguian fragmentation.

In fact, Whitman’s own conception of the body politic was not immune from the threat of disintegration. His experiences of the Civil War (during which he tended the wounded) challenged his vision of national unity, and this challenge is again presented in bodily terms, most obviously in this lament: ‘Alas! America have we seen, though in her early youth, already to hospital brought’ (Whitman, 1963-64, II: 378). He also admits that he is haunted by ‘the fear of [...] the lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close’ (Whitman, 1963-64, II: 368). In *Drum-Taps*, originally published as an autonomous collection in 1865 before being incorporated into *Leaves of Grass* in the 1867 edition, the idea of a nation fused

through 'adhesive' relations gives way to a preoccupation with suffering and death, and the collection thus offers a tacit admission of his utopian project's failure: 'The great sympathy arising from sexual love within the political body of the New World could not keep the Union from coming unglued' (Killingsworth, 1991: 134). Indeed, the analogical relation between body and nation – one of the central pillars of his aesthetics – was also called into question:

The war of disunion and the subsequent dismembering of bodies [...] convulsed and stalled Whitman's poetics, which depended upon a series of metaphoric relations between body, nation, and text. (Feldman, 2005: 2)

Feldman argues that Whitman sought to counter the romanticisation of the war and to portray bodies in 'their broken particularity' rather than making them do 'metaphorical or ideological work' (2005: 20): 'For Whitman, the wounded bodies must remain simply wounded bodies, and this is the truth of the war that ought to be shared' (2005: 21). However, while Rowe concurs that in *Drum-Taps* itself Whitman refuses to render the war poetic (1996: 171), he argues that the poet cannot maintain this disavowal: in *Sequence to Drum-Taps*, published later in 1865 and also incorporated in 1867, he 'rediscovers a poetic voice and authority' that allows him to represent 'more transcendently the damage to the body in war' (1996: 171). The shift of focus away from individual suffering and towards collective renewal is furthered by the revised 1871 'Drum-Taps' sequence (within *Leaves of Grass*), which reiterates 'his antebellum vision of inclusive, loving, national community' (Miller, 2009: 172), albeit now based on familial rather than erotic tropes; but as Miller shows, this involves the erasure of all references to the ideological basis of the war: the dispute over slavery. The omission of such references suggests not only that there is 'no logical hindrance to reunification' (Miller, 2009: 183), but also that the soldiers whom Whitman mourns have not died for a particular cause. Despite the 'shocking realism' of his depictions of the dead and wounded, then, the sequence as a whole implies that they are merely 'part of the price of political reunion'

(Miller, 2009: 189). The same logic is at work in the fragment ‘Death of President Lincoln’ from *Democratic Vistas*:

The soldier drops, sinks like a wave – but the ranks of the ocean eternally press on.
Death does its work, obliterates a hundred, a thousand – President, general, captain,
private – but the Nation is immortal. (Whitman, 1963-64, I: 99)

The continued cohesion of the immortal national body was, moreover, assured by Whitman’s poetry itself; increasingly, he saw his books as ‘surrogate bodies’ that could restore unity to a fractured nation (Arbour, 2013: 176).

A similar organicist conception of nationhood was prevalent in France after the Franco-Prussian War, with some commentators figuring the nation as a body that had been dismembered by the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine (Nye, 1984: 138). The regeneration of the French body politic was to take place through the individual body: the introduction in 1880 of compulsory gymnastics in schools was aimed at training a new generation of soldiers who could gain revenge against Germany, recapturing the lost provinces (Arnaud, 2006: 183-84). In this light, we might read Laforgue’s depictions of weak and sickly bodies as offering a subtle form of resistance to contemporary nationalist discourses. But his writings offer scant insight into such issues, dealing only rarely and briefly with questions of national identity or politics. In fact, his translations of Whitman constitute one of his closest engagements with the question of nationhood, since one of the two long poems he chose to translate was ‘O Star of France’, a lament for the quashing of the Commune:

O star of France!
The brightness of thy fame, and strength, and joy,
Like some proud ship that led the fleet so long,
Beseems to-day a wreck, driven by the gale—a mastless hulk.
(ll. 1-4, *OC*, II: 352)

Laforgue remains close to the original text in his translation, and yet the word he chooses for ‘hulk’ is intriguing in its homonymy: ‘carcasse’. The notion of France as a carcass hints at a recapitulation of the bodily metaphors used by Whitman for his own nation, as well as –

probably unknowingly – echoing Whitman’s use of the same term in his letter to Emerson; he describes the American character as forming ‘that new moral American continent without which, I see, the physical continent remained incomplete, may-be a carcass’ (*LG*, 739).

The same term recurs in ‘Solo de Lune’, but with a very different resonance: ‘Ma carcasse est cahotée, mon âme danse | Comme un Ariel’ (ll. 3-4, *OC*, II: 320). While the body and soul are often portrayed as painfully, antagonistically related in the *Derniers vers* – as emblemized by the line ‘Mon corps, ô ma sœur, a bien mal à sa belle âme’ (‘Dimanches (III)’, l. 33, *OC*, II: 306) – here there is disjuncture, the spirit’s liberation from bodily discomfort prompting a sense of ecstasy. These lines echo a fragment in Laforgue’s notes in which he fantasises about escaping physical unease by living a bodiless existence: ‘Ah, ne vivre qu’avec son âme!’ (*OC*, II: 1093). Thus, while the term ‘carcasse’ in Laforgue’s translation of ‘O Star of France’ might suggest the body politic metaphors used by Whitman and the notion of a national body in need of healing, in ‘Solo de Lune’ it refers to the individual body, which is not to be diagnosed as much as divested. This shift from the national to the individual is signalled by the opening line of ‘L’Hiver qui vient’, which appropriates a phrase from the lexicon of French military history (‘blocus continental’, the blockade of Great Britain during the Napoleonic Wars) and transposes it into a personal context (‘Blocus sentimental!’ (l. 1, *OC*, II: 297)). The poem’s references to war (‘les patrouilles des nuées en déroute’, ‘les soldats loin de la France’ (ll. 38, 50, *OC*, II: 298)) should also be read primarily as symbols of romantic discord, even if they bear the traces of the collective memory of conflict. While Whitman’s personal experience of war is, ultimately, subsumed into his political vision, Laforgue – who had never experienced war firsthand – refigures the military and the political as the personal.

Bodies of Work

For Laforgue, the decorporealised existence envisaged in ‘Solo de Lune’ was perhaps the only solution to the suffering of the body. Of course, this vision is chimerical: the Laforguean self remains bitterly embodied. Escape from physical suffering is the subject of fantasy, as is sexual fulfilment; but the reality of sexual intimacy – the opening up of the body’s borders – provokes profound anxiety. The self is thus bounded not only physically, but also emotionally, its self-involvement emblematised by the slew of first-person reflexive verbs in the opening lines of ‘Dimanches (III)’ (*OC*, II: 306), and by the scenes of lonely interiority in *Derniers vers* more generally. When Laforgue’s poetic self does reach out sympathetically, it is, in the *Derniers vers* at least, in a restricted fashion that is at odds with the all-encompassing nature of Whitman’s sympathy. Moreover, the same principle of boundedness is inherent in Laforgue’s reluctance to politicise the body as the site of national regeneration: unlike Whitman, for whom the vigour of the individual body is synecdochic of the health of the body politic, Laforgue’s focus remains on the suffering body *qua* individual.

But given the boundedness of Laforgue’s poetic self, how and why does his work engage with that of other writers such as Whitman? While there are profound thematic differences between the two poets, Laforgue seems nonetheless to have admired Whitman greatly, and his formal experimentation seems to have been inspired at least in part by *Leaves of Grass*. And Whitman certainly aspired to influence other poets, including foreign ones. As Colleen Boggs notes, he explicitly aimed to reach an international audience, writing in the preface to the first full German edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1889 that ‘I did not only have my own country in mind when composing my work. I wanted to take the first step towards bringing into life a cycle of international poem’ (quoted in Boggs, 2007: 125). Moreover, in one of the poems translated by Laforgue, ‘To Foreign Lands’, he writes:

I heard that you ask’d for something to prove this puzzle the New World,
And to define America, her athletic Democracy,
Therefore I send you my poems that you behold in them what you wanted.
(ll. 1-3, *OC*, II: 346)

Perhaps what Laforgue wanted to behold in Whitman's poems was simply an example of formal iconoclasm, rather than a grandiose aesthetico-political vision of poetry that could sustain and stimulate an 'athletic Democracy'. By contrast, Whitman's first German translator, Ferdinand Freiligrath, *was* inspired by the visionary qualities of the American's poetry, which allowed him 'to articulate his utopia of a democratic Germany in terms of an already predestined, iconic American history' (Boggs, 2007: 126).

Whitman's global ambition is, ironically, encapsulated in his description of his poetry as 'untranslatable' ('I too am untranslatable, | I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world' ('Song of Myself', ll. 1332-33, *LG*, 89)); as Boggs points out, we are invited to interpret this as a primitivist conception of a kind of Ur-language: 'a universally comprehensible, pre- or extra-cultural expression ("barbaric yawp") transcends (soars "over") the need for translation' (Boggs, 2007: 124). This is, as Boggs also notes (2007: 124), something akin to Walter Benjamin's theory that translation gives access to the 'central kinship of languages' (Benjamin, 2004: 77), allowing the original to rise 'into a higher and purer linguistic air' (2004: 79). It is also reminiscent of 'Shut Not Your Doors', one of the poems translated by Laforgue, which again points to the notion of a super-linguistic level of meaning: 'The words of my book nothing, the drift of it every thing' (l. 4, *OC*, II: 348). Of course, 'drift' ostensibly means 'gist', but we might interpret it more playfully as an expression of the expansive transnational movement to which Whitman aspired. Laforgue translates it as 'âme'; given the disjunctive body-soul relationship in Laforgue's work, we might say that there is a schism between the 'âme' of Whitman's work and the 'corps' of Laforgue's.

There are also schisms *within* Laforgue's body of work: despite the persistence of certain themes, his literary career is marked by repudiations (of *Le Sanglot*, of *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté*); as he remarks in a letter of 1883 to his sister Marie, 'la destinée d'un artiste

est de s'enthousiasmer et se dégoûter d'idéaux successifs' (*OC*, I: 822). Whitman's corpus, by contrast, is characterised by fluidity, his major poetic work *Leaves of Grass* being revised again and again over a period of several decades. Michael Moon argues that this 'lifelong commitment to revision is inextricably related to his commitment to representing the body and sexuality, especially sexuality between and among males, in his writing' (Moon, 1991: vii); just as he eliminates the boundaries between bodies – especially male bodies – so he elides the differences between texts. On the level of form, too, his insistence on parataxis brings objects into unobstructed contact with each other (Moon, 1991: 7). But the 'para' of 'parataxis' signifies both 'alongside' and 'against': Laforgue's parataxis is disjointed rather than synthetic.

There are thus crucial differences between Laforgue and Whitman not only in their treatment of corporeality within their work, but also in the ways their bodies of work are constituted. What, then, is the relationship between these two bodies of work? As the procreative metaphors used by both Bentzon and Blémont indicate, Whitman saw his poetic role as that of a virile father, producing hordes of literary offspring. This familial model of influence is hardly original, of course. But we might also construct a model of influence based on Whitman's 'adhesive' homoerotic relations; indeed, the early twentieth-century poet Hart Crane does precisely that, using the image of 'seed' to portray Whitman's influence on him as akin to sexual union (Guy-Bray, 2006: 82). From this point of view, Laforgue's resistance to Whitman's influence – at least thematically – might be associated with his anxieties concerning intimacy. From Whitman's point of view, too, this resistance might be interpreted in the same way: Whitman's conceptualised 'the tendency of the individual self to overcome moral, psychological, and political boundaries' as 'the "merge"' (Killingsworth, 1991: 1) and saw the fear of this "merge" as 'a self-protective, neurotic fear of sexuality, of nakedness and vulnerability' (Killingsworth, 1991: 28). Laforgue's self-enclosure might, in

this sense, be read as neurotic. Indeed, Laforgue's inward-looking verse – his self-quotation, self-pity, self-mockery – might even be characterised as masturbatory, just as masturbation emerges as an important element of his representations of corporeality; as George Steiner argues, if 'coition can be schematized as dialogue' then 'masturbation seems to be correlative with the pulse of monologue or of internalized address' (Steiner, 1975: 39).

But we need not subscribe to these sexualised metaphors. Just as Lori Chamberlain argues against Steiner's hermeneutic model of translation, which sees translation as analogous to the sexual penetration of the original text (2004: 312; see Steiner, 1975: 298),¹⁴ so might we think about the way two bodies of work relate in non-sexual terms. There are other modes of hapticity, other ways for two bodies to touch or co-exist. Perhaps we might see Laforgue's translations as fulfilling Blémont's desire for a transatlantic handshake with Whitman (Blémont, 1872c: 91), a gesture that also represents Laforgue's ideal means of physical communication with women (see White in this issue). Or perhaps Laforgue, rather than following in Whitman's footsteps ('vestigia') as in the Classical model of influence (Guy-Bray, 2006: 85), can be seen as simply 'sauntering along' ('Poets to Come', *OC*, II: 351) with Whitman for a while. This image of comradely poetic flânerie finds an echo in the final stanza of 'Dimanches (III)', in which the poet urges himself out of his lonely room (and, by implication, his suffocating self-involvement): 'Toujours enfermé tu te rendras malade!' (l. 61, *OC*, II: 307). While his poetic self remains, to a certain extent, 'enfermé', not to mention 'malade', Laforgue is no creative isolationist, even if the walk he takes with Whitman is merely 'une petite promenade' (l. 63, *OC*, II: 307).

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I am grateful to Dr Claire White for her generous and insightful comments on drafts of this article.

¹ Thérèse Bentzon, Emile Blémont and others published prose translations in their articles.

² Scott strikes a balance between the view of Betsy Erkkilä on the one hand, and Percy Mansell-Jones on the other. Erkkilä argues that 'Whitman's poetic theory and practice planted the liberating seeds which Laforgue and the new generation of French writers would develop according to their own potentialities and genius' (1980: 71). Mansell-Jones, meanwhile, argues that Whitman was admired by *fin-de-siècle* French poets, but was not influential. (This accords with the contemporary view of Teodor de Wyzewa that 'l'œuvre du poète américain n'a exercé aucune influence' despite the appreciation of a few young poets, including Laforgue (*Revue bleue*, 17 April 1892; quoted in *OC*, II: 344).) Scott's argument is that (*pace* Erkkilä) the *vers libre* of Laforgue and his contemporaries 'bears no detailed technical resemblance to *Leaves of Grass*' but that (*pace* Mansell-Jones) they did benefit from 'some of the general principles of his prosody' (1990: 109). See also Scott's article 'The Stuttering Poet: A Deleuzian Reading of a Laforguian Poetics' in this issue.

³ These remarks are made with regard to *Des Fleurs de bonne volonté*, rather than *Derniers vers*, even though Erkkilä does argue that the latter volume displays Whitman's influence more clearly. Given that there is no definitive evidence for the precise date of Laforgue's encounter with Whitman's work, it is possible that he did read *Leaves of Grass* before or during the writing of *Des Fleurs*; however, my hypothesis here is that he came across Whitman through Bentzon's article of May 1886, and that this informed his rejection of *Des Fleurs* and his decision to rework them as free-verse poems.

⁴ In a letter to Kahn at the end of July 1886 from Schlangenbad in Germany, Laforgue sends Kahn 'un Whitman', which he describes as 'un des plus Whitman du volume'; this was 'A Woman Waits for Me', the translation of which ('Une femme m'attend') was published in the 2-9 August issue of *La Vogue*. He had already published 'Dédicaces' ('Inscriptions') and 'O Étoile de France' ('O Star of France') in the previous two issues of the journal. The only other mention of Whitman in his correspondence is a brief acknowledgement of Kahn's receipt of the translation ('Tu as reçu le Whitman') in a letter of 7 August 1886.

⁵ See also Scott's article in this issue.

⁶ 'To Workingmen' was renamed 'A Song for Occupations' in the 1881 edition (*LG*, 210 n.).

⁷ After the first edition of 1855, revised editions were published in 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871-2, and 1881.

⁸ Elsewhere in this volume, Roger Pearson argues that these notes are essentially uncritical, but I interpret them as an expression of Laforgue's own views.

⁹ See also his 1856 open letter to Emerson: 'I say that the body of a man or woman, the main matter, is so far quite unexpressed in poems; but that the body is to be expressed, and sex is' (*LG*, 737).

¹⁰ Whitman does, of course, also use metaphor in his evocation of sexuality (ejaculation, for example, being referred to as 'gushing showers' in 'A Woman Waits for Me') but these co-exist with rather than replacing more direct language.

¹¹ Her argument is further undermined by an unfortunate chronological error: she states that the shift from *Le Sanglot de la Terre* to *Les Complaintes* occurred 'during the time that he was studying and preparing for his translations of Whitman' (1980: 70).

¹² See 'Solo de Lune' and 'Pan et la syrinx', for example.

¹³ See Claire White's article 'Laforgue, Beauvoir, and the Second Sex' in this issue.

¹⁴ Her main argument, however, is that that we should challenge gendered models of translation such as that which sees writing as original and hence masculine, and translation as derivative and hence feminine (Chamberlain, 2004: 306).