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Article publié le 15 juillet 2021.

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Introduction

1 It may appear strange or even erroneous to write about 'men-flowers' and 'women-flowers' when one would expect a more conventional syntax; in proper English, indeed, the head-noun should be 'men' (and women), and therefore plant should be linguistically subordinate to (wo)man. However, I willingly committed this faux pas, or cacosyntheton, as a tribute to the linguistic genius of Clark Ashton Smith, an author who knew how to cunningly transgress the rules of syntax so as to convey new meanings and conjure up new (ecopoetic) realities. Through this humble ecopoetic invention, I also wish to highlight the subtle role reversal at play throughout Smith's weird fiction. In many of his poems and short stories, Man is no longer a conqueror and Nature no longer a victim. Instead, humankind often becomes en-

slaved by nature; while the city, originally inhabited by humans, may become the dwelling place of strange, alien, moth-like or snake-like creatures (cf. "The Demon of the Flower", 1933)–or even a garden city, a place where flowers actually live as people in their own right, and are no longer used as mere decoration (see "The Maze of the Enchanter", 1933). In some other stories, men and women are themselves the domesticated species, being kept in cages by animals who despise the human race (as in "The Voyage of King Euvoran", 1933). This makes for a mode of writing very similar to that of Jean de La Fontaine, one might say. There is a notable difference however. In his stories known as 'fables', Jean de La Fontaine used anthropomorphism and prosopopeia (i.e. animals talking and behaving like humans) via a rather anthropocentric process[1]. Behind the fur and the feathers, one can often recognize a certain type of man or woman, or even a political figure of La Fontaine's time. However, in Smith's fiction, the same process seems to be used in a more zoocentric and biocentric way: behind the feathers of his jailer birds who keep humans in cages, behind the thorns and petals of his flower-priests and priestesses, there is often (unlike with the traditional fabular genre) not merely a 'human in disguise', but also the embodiment of a completely, appallingly alien consciousness – one that deeply troubles the reader, and prompts him/her not only to question their own humanity in an anthropocentric way (i.e. what makes humanity human, what is it to be humane towards other humans or towards animals?), but also and more importantly, to think beyond our traditional self-centered ideas of what the concept 'human' in itself might mean, in relationship with non-human living beings. "What if?" is the key-question subtly asked by the author through these unsettling stories. What if there were humanity in the rocks, plants, and birds? What if there were minerality or vegetality or animality within us, humans? There is a paradox, here. Prior to Smith, Romantic poets had endeavored to 'spirit' (wo)man away from the city, by celebrating the pristine (i.e. untamed) beauty of forests, lakes, rivers, etc., whilst many of the readers of their works were themselves urbanites. This idyllic and idealized view of 'Nature' actually reinforced the perceived separation of (wo)man and nature, instead of bridging it. The city was seen as antagonistic to nature, and the 'call of the wild' could only happen outside of humankind's so-called 'civilized' world. "*The*

cancrous cities spread over the grass, they clatter in their lairs continually, they glitter about us blemishing the night" weep the flowers in Lord Dunsany's poem "The Prayer of the Flowers" (1915), as if flowers could not thrive within the walls of a city. Yet, paradoxically, what Smith does in his stories, while borrowing some of its most beautiful tropes and ornaments from Victorian poetry, is to prompt us to see *ourselves* as organic beings that are part of nature, and to consider the city as a natural human habitat, much as a hive is for bees. This shift in perspective ~~-~~i.e. seeing the city as part of nature itself ~~-~~opens up an imaginary space where (wo)men and flowers could co-exist *inside* the city, as natural beings sharing the same habitat. "What if" (wo)man was as natural a being as all the rest of wildlife? What would that imply in terms of our relationship with other species, and the environment? That is certainly a very avant-garde question which Smith asked humankind, slightly less than a century ago, at the onset of what would later be known as science-fiction and fantasy literature.

2 In my article entitled "Faut-il retraduire Tolkien?" [Should we retranslate Tolkien?] (in *La retraduction en littérature de jeunesse/Retranslating children's literature*, eds. Virginie Douglas & Florence Cabaret, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2014), I claimed that one of the main constitutive features of fantasy literature is the use of neologisms, which I linked to the tradition of children's tales and the will to 'lull' them into sleep or reverie (i.e. the place where imagination can express itself) through the very matrix/texture of the text. Sci-Fi literature is thought to be more concerned with an imagined future, and its anticipated technological advancements; yet a closer look at the works of C. A. Smith and H. P. Lovecraft shows that, at the onset of the new genre(s), magic and science were not deemed contradictory. I suggest that the roots of the new genre lie, indeed, in a desire to return to nature by reincorporating it and reenchant/rewild the urban world.

1. Clark Ashton Smith: an inventor of new wor(l)ds

3 Clark Ashton Smith was a California poet and short fiction writer, and one of the founding fathers of the modern Sci-fi/fantasy genre[2], along with his contemporary H. P. Lovecraft. He was born in Long

Valley, California, in 1893, and died in Pacific Grove in 1961. Although he left school at a very early age, he read voraciously and learned French by himself, even producing some beautiful English translations of Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil), of which some echoes can be found in his own writings, where flowers are sometimes noxious non-human characters [3]. A self-educated man, he became very erudite and developed his own peculiar and baroque poetic style, characterized by a rich but convoluted syntax as well as both archaisms and neologisms, thus reinventing – and 're-enchanting' – the English language. As the author himself declared: "My own conscious ideal has been to delude the reader into accepting an impossibility, or series of impossibilities, by means of a sort of verbal black magic, in the achievement of which I make use of prose-rhythm, metaphor, simile, tone-color, counter-point, and other stylistic resources, like a sort of incantation" [4]. CAS first became popular in his native California with his poetry – a poetry that was very much influenced by the Romantic masters of Great Britain. He was part of a group of poets known as the California Romantics, or West Coast Romantics: a group of artists who endeavored to celebrate the natural beauties of California, and did so 'in the manner of' the British Romantics. Amongst these poets, let us mention Nora French May and George Sterling, who even composed an ode to the vulture [5].

4 Despite his love of poetry, Smith soon had to turn to a more profitable mode of writing, for purely economic reasons. He thus started the composition of his fantasy/science-fictional/uchronic tales– the precise genre of which is hard to define according to modern literary and editorial standards. Most of these were published in the iconic pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, which also featured the works of two world-famous writers of fantasy fiction, H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. Yet, contrary to these two fellow writers, Smith has remained little known. Indeed, in spite of the ever-increasing popularity of the fantasy and Sci-Fi genres both in literature and cinema (and even in song), Clark Ashton Smith is known mostly by a small elite of connoisseurs. Recently, a selective anthology of his works (short stories and poems) was published by Penguin Classics [6], which sparked new interest for the author in the press, but not so much within academic circles. In fact, only a very few academic articles have yet been

published specifically about this classic author of the Sci-Fi/fantasy genre, and the present essay is therefore an attempt to make up for this lack of academic attention. Indeed, the existing literature on Smith's writings has primarily focused on genre-related questions, in an attempt at defining or categorizing his short stories and novellas as part of either 'fantastical' or 'gothic' or 'science-fiction' literature. This turns out to be problematic due to the fact that Smith's themes are variegated in the extreme, and because his fiction always seems to be halfway between one genre and another. Thus Jean Marigny [7] suggests that Smith's stories mark the birth of "a new genre", a hybrid of "traditional fantastical literature and science-fiction" which he proposes to call "heroic fantasy", while Andrew J. Wilson [8] investigates "the weird marriage of poetry and pulp" and Richard Bleiler [9] for his part emphasizes the "speculative" aspect of his stories. Similarly, Charles K. Wolfe [10] writes about "the aesthetics of fantasy" in the Californian author's works, while other scholars analyze the poems and stories in terms of how they may fit (or not) into classic literary genres or movements. Scott Connors [11] questions Smith's relationship to Modernism, S. J. Sackett [12] describes him as "the last Romantic", and Johnny Murray [13] investigates into CAS's "weird fiction and the grotesque sublime", for example. It would appear, therefore, that my own analysis of the *ecopoetic* aspects of Smith's fiction is the very first of its kind. For the purpose of this analysis, I would like to rely on some of the criteria described by Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) in order to define what he calls "green writing" or "environmental texts", namely: 1) the fact that "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history", 2) that "the human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest", 3) that "human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation" and lastly, 4) that "some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or given is at least implicit in the text" [14].

2. Alien words, words of alienness

5 Smith was a masterful architect and shaper of the English language. His use of English often served an ecopoetic purpose. *He uttered an unknown word…* this sentence taken from "The Maze of the En-

chanter" could be regarded as a sort of stylistic strategy. Rhymes, puns, and other stylistic devices are not only there to 'embellish' the bulk of what is said; they are not only adornments for the pleasure of the eye or the ear; instead, they participate in the meaning of the literary text, and are often paramount to its effects. Words can be used to enchant, and even 'ensorcell' the reader, as French ecopoetic scholar Bénédicte Meillon has theorized in her article "Le chant de la matière pour désensorceler les modernes : vers une époétique du réenchantement à travers quelques romans des Appalaches"[15] [*What Matters Sings: Writing the Human and the Non-Human Out of their Modern Ensorcellment*]. In her article, Meillon claims that "literature reinitiates and sharpens our capacity to let ourselves be touched and be deeply moved, to feel empathy towards fictitious individuals, perceived from the reader's small-scale perspective. Willingly immersing oneself into an alternative world is an act that, indeed, holds the power to orient our own concrete reactions once confronted with the real world, and with problems relative to either individual or collective life" (my translation). Evoking the ecopoetic work of Dion Fortune, David Abram and Starhawk, she reminds us that magic, much like a dream, is "the art of willingly altering one's consciousness", and compares ecopoetic fiction also with a form of magical act, "the art of awakening us to all the many forms of consciousness that surround us". In every ancient and/or traditional culture, rhythms and sounds have been used to induce trance-like states (as in shamanic rituals) and Smith's poetic prose takes after such tradition. Thus, this California author often uses the materiality of words – sounds, rhythms, shapes of letters or words, or typefont, etc., to lull his readers into an altered state of consciousness, to some extent comparable to that of the dream state. In this altered state, new emotions can be felt, new realities can be experienced and new insights can be gained, in a way that can truly be transformative for the reader. Literature is not only about 'escaping' real life to live out a virtual one; it is also all about learning from a virtual life how to deal differently with real life, real people, and concrete situations – and the current ecological crisis is definitely part of these fictionalized, yet very real, situations. In the following paragraphs, I would like to show how Smith's very peculiar use of the English language produces, first of all, a narcotic-like effect that opens the reader's mind to new potentialities and that, also induces slight shifts in the reader's assumed anthropocentric aware-

ness that allows him or her to empathically 'merge' with the non-human animal, the vegetal, or the mineral realm, by means of the imagination. This shift from an anthropocentric to a more zoocentric or biocentric perspective is the very purpose of ecopoetic fiction, and represents a kind of paradox, in which the 'built' written text (associated with culture, and the city) mimetically takes on some of the 'wild' elements of nature.

6 First and foremost, let us consider the musical quality of Smith's language. There is a certain poetic resonance throughout his fiction, due to the fact that many of his short stories were first written as poems or prose poems [16]. Here, I have chosen one short paragraph from the beginning of "The Demon of the Flower" to show how C. A. Smith uses sound and rhythm in a twofold way: for imitative harmony, and for a certain form of narcosis or hypnosis, a kind of literary inebriation. Thus, describing the 'flowerkind' of the imaginary planet Lophai, this California ecopoet writes:

> Not as the plants and flowers of Earth, growing peacefully beneath a simple sun, were the blossoms of the planet Lophai. Coiling and uncoiling in double dawns; tossing tumultuously under vast suns of jade green and balas-ruby orange; swaying and weltering in rich twilights, in aurora-curtained nights, they resembled fields of rooted serpents that dance eternally to an other-worldly music [17].

7 In this introductory paragraph, the use of paronomasia, with alliterative syllables in pl- and bl-, has an incantatory effect, and constantly brings the word "plant" to the reader's mind. Subliminally, the meaning conveyed here is that the story's main theme will be plants, or more specifically, our conflictual relationship with the vegetal realm — an aspect that corresponds to the first criterion in Buell's definition of an environmental text. Using similar alliterative patterns, the author has managed to create a very special rhythmical form, of a binary nature, which sounds almost like a melody: not/the, plants/and, flowers/of; peacefully/beneath; simple/suns; double/dawns, etc. As far as rhythm is concerned, the author has used a prosodic pattern that seems, at times, reminiscent of a trochee ("not as the plants and flowers of Earth"); and, at some other times, of an anapest ("were the blossoms of the planet Lophai"). One may notice the prevalence of alliterative sibilant syllables ("peacefully beneath a simple sun", "tossing

tumultuously under vast suns", etc.), as well as a set of internal rhymes: curtained/serpents, twilights/nights, etc. Here again, the subtle interplay of rhythms and sounds contributes to creating a melody, a musicality, that ecopoetically and mimetically echoes the undulation and soft whispering of the plants, and the stylistic aim of which is none other, I believe, than to lull the reader into shifting his/her consciousness. It has indeed been noted that repetition of certain sounds and rhythmical patterns can influence the human mind, being the basis of hypnosis [18]. The other-wordly "music" could therefore receive a twofold interpretation: it may refer to the music of the plants, which are imbued with consciousness and possess the power to communicate in a form of musical 'flower language' [19] – but it can also invoke the music of literature itself. The lyricism in this sentence creatively performs what it describes, using language (and especially the materiality of it, the sonority and physicality of it) as a mind-opener and awareness-shifter.

8 When it comes to language, Smith is known for his peculiar use of rare, old-fashioned words, as well as neologisms – new words for new imaginary realities. Although the two devices may appear to be opposites, in the idiosyncratic style of the author they are part of the same literary process of distancing/alienation. In many respects, the literary language of Clark Ashton Smith is reminiscent of preciosity, characterized by extreme refinement in the choice of rare, forgotten words, and the use of complex, convoluted syntax. Such language creates a sense of exoticism, a scent of foreignness, as "an odor of heathen spices, heavy and strange" to quote a lyrical sentence from "A Vintage from Atlantis" (1933), another fantastical tale by the same author. It reveals a 'foreignizing' strategy that sets the story in a place 'out of space and time', a utopian and achronic world where all magical and transformative things become possible. Especially, it mimetically suggests the very idea of 'urban wildness', through the alienation and, as it were, of an 'outgrowth' of the text itself. Indeed, letting the text expand and 'grow' wildly in all its materiality and sonorous sensuality –in a sort of efflorescent way –might be seen as a kind of oxymoronic device since the written text has traditionally been identified with culture and the domestication of nature, as Thomas Pughe reminds us in "Réinventer la nature : vers une écopoétique" [20]. Thus, by letting his own texts grow wild, by interspers-

ing his stories with patches of linguistic and poetic outgrowth, Smith ecopoetically mimics and mirrors his own invented urban gardens, as for instance the one described in "The Maze of the Enchanter" (1933). Moreover, the artificial return to an 'idealized past' through archaic language brings the reader back to 'a time before' – a time before urbanization, a time before acculturation, a time when the human mind was not yet modeled and molded and therefore, was still in a transformative state, as in early childhood. It also merges such an 'idyllic past' with an imagined future in which cities have partly been reclaimed by wildness. Here lies the root of fantasy/Sci-Fi literature. Following such a defamiliarizing process, new words are typically invented, which fits the definition of 'ecological literature' as given by Thomas Pughe: "l'idéal d'une poétique écologique serait donc de dire l'altérité de la nature (de ce qui est sauvage) sans la civiliser, sans la cultiver" (i.e. "the ideal of an ecological poetics should be to utter the very otherness of nature, that is of the wild, without trying to civilize or cultivate it")[21]. I would now like to focus on some of these new, alien words as found in Smith's fiction. In a previous article written in French[22], I had already proposed the idea that neologism is one of the essential features, if not *the* founding stylistic element, of the fantasy/Sci-Fi genre. Each time, it would seem that these new words magically conjure up new beings or realities ("In a hole in the ground there was a hobbit" forms the first sentence of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien, 1937); yet, the new realities described are often exoticized versions of earthly realities. Thus, Tolkien's "hobbit", a leprechaun-like creature, represents the common British(wo)man living quietly according to his/her own 'habits' and habitus, in his/her habitual habitat. The word itself therefore has a deep ecopoetic meaning, gesturing to the virtues of a more traditional way of life, respectful of one's natural environment. I believe this is also the case with some of Smith's neologisms. For example, in "The Demon of the Flower" which I have already touched upon, the story is set on an alien planet called Lophai. Knowing the story's theme (i.e. a struggle between an enslaved humanoid race and a snake-like plant species), it does not require much effort to hear the word "leaf" behind the exoticized name of Lophai. 'Out there' in a faraway galaxy, is an unknown, habitable planet whose very name brings us right back to Earth, to our own trampled gardens and forests, which here again seems to echo Buell's third criterion (about human accountability) for an environmental

text. Indeed, the 'alien' planet is none other than a modified version of our own. What seems so fearsome, so appalling and simultaneously so intriguing in this vision of a new world (which indeed makes the popularity of the Sci-Fi genre), is not really the newness of it, nor is it the complete, incomprehensible strangeness of it – but rather, the fact that it reveals things that lie hidden inside of us (here, our conflictual relationship with the non-human, vegetal world). And the leaf has strange appendages– "leaves that suggested the wings of flying lizards, the pennants of faery lances, the phylacteries of a strange sacerdotalism" – or the names of natural beings/places have unusual lexical suffixes – "the planet Lophai" – so that the apparent foreignness of those names might somehow highlight their commonness, and especially our unhealthy relationship to this essential element of our environment (again, an element that seems to fit Buell's third criterion). As in the Jungian concept of projection, the writer projects humankind's own noxious attitude towards nature onto the alien plants. Here, plants become the mirrored image of us – although, as we shall see, Smith often hints at a vegetal and thus, truly alien form of consciousness. Sci-Fi literature, even when it dreams of faraway, exotic stars and planets, is all about Earth. Thus the Voorqual, a vegetal deity looming over the city of Lophai, growing on top of a pyramid that seems to stand for human civilization itself, can be seen as a reverted image and subversive rewriting of the influential 'pyramid of life' conceptualized by 16th century French philosopher Charles de Bovelles, and which has participated in shaping the Western conception of vegetal as being one of the 'lowest' forms of life (cf. Mancuso and Viola pp 29-31). In Clark Ashton Smith's ecopoetic rewriting, plants are the supreme intelligence and power, ruling even over cities. His magical tale here offers a poetic vision of Charles Darwin's early insights into the primordial place of plants in the order of the living. Moreover, the poetic reference to "the hanging gardens of some greater Babylon" also participates in conveying this picture of a world where the concept of 'urban wildness' would no longer seem oxymoronic. Similarly, one may wonder about the names of the two main alien creatures presented in the story: the flower-demon called the "Voorqual", and its mineral counterpart, the "Occlith". Are these two names significant? The choice of sonorities in "Voorqual" seems to evoke ideas of harshness, of threat, as opposed to the softer tones of "Occlith". This may be due to the contrast between the double

vowel [o] and the short vowel [i], two vowels that some linguists have described as 'ideophones[23]', with [o] being allegedly linked to ideas of coarseness and [i] to ideas of smallness, fragility and refinement in a number of languages. In "Occlith", the redoubled consonant C and the resemblance of the word with "occlusion" may also be an attempt at mimetically suggesting the sound of a rock or crystal reverberating (as the sound of the consonant [k] does in the human mouth). "Occ" is also a sound found in the word "rock", and "lith" is a Greek root meaning "stone/rock" found in a few English words such as "lithography" (the art of printing with the help of a stone) or "monolith" (a massive block of stone). Here again, the commonality of a stone is made to look and sound alien. As for the name "Voorqual", is it mere coincidence that the neologism begins and ends with the same letters as "vegetal"? "Voor-" may evoke words such as "carnivore" and "devour", thus transferring humankind's own 'voraciously' aggressive attitude towards plants onto the plants themselves, as a sort of a reversed image of us humans. Through this alienating device, Smith actually tries to exorcize our own flower-demons (i.e. our fears of our own nature as biological beings, our repressed wildness) and by doing so, brings them closer to our awareness.

9 However, many times in his poems and short-stories, this California songster veers from anthropocentric literary processes (i.e. using plants or animals as mirrors of human behavior or psychology) and adopts a truly ecopoetic style of writing, with attempts at capturing or conceptualizing other-than-human 'consciousness'[24] – or whatever that might be – through the inherently human medium of articulate language. One of his quintessentially ecopoetic stylistic traits is his use of the figure called 'hypallage'[25], a trope which basically consists in the use of an uncommon adjective or epithet/of an atypical verb with a noun, resulting in an unusual association that often has anthropomorphic effects. From Tennyson's "crooked hands" of the eagle in the eponymous poem (1851) to A. E. Housman's "sleepy" hill in his poem "On the idle hill of summer" (1919), down to T. S. Eliot's "forgetful snow" in his poem "The Waste Land" (1922), the figure has often been used in an anthropocentric way, so as to imbue 'things' or non-human beings, with human characteristics such as feelings, thoughts or volition. I would like to show how Smith uses the figure both in its traditionally anthropocentric orientation (i.e.

human attributes are symbolically transferred to non-human beings or things, through the use of unusual epithets, verbs, etc.) but also, in rarer yet very meaningful cases, in a new and profoundly ecopoetic way, endowing human beings with animal, vegetal, or mineral qualities.

10 Let us start, for example, by considering the introductory paragraph of "The Demon of the Flower" (1933), where unusual verbs are associated with plants: "coiling and uncoiling", "tossing", "swaying", even "dancing". Flowers are generally thought of as motionless and non-sentient beings; hence the perceived incongruity of these action verbs expressing voluntary movement. Stylistically speaking, what characterizes hypallage is an unusual association of two words (generally a noun and an adjective/epithet, or a noun and a verb) which would semantically not be possible without a reference to some absent, hinted third word. Here, the verbs are in the active mode, whilst they should be in the passive mode – the flowers are not supposed to be able to move by themselves, not at any perceptible speed at least, and the reader would logically expect them to be tossed and swayed *by the wind*. Since there is no mention of the wind causing the flowers to move, agency is subliminally transferred to the plants themselves, which thus become endowed with volition and movement. Although this stylistic process might be considered ecopoetic in its own context, it could also be argued that the author uses plants as pantomimes for human beings, much in the way that Lewis Carroll did [26]. It is true that Smith partly does so, since many of his hypallages are clearly anthropocentric, bestowing human features to plants by means of human-related words: the "long, sinuous arm" of the demon-flower, the "silhouettes" of the trees, the "drolly peering faces" of orchids, are but a few examples of this anthropomorphic process. His demonic flowers might be regarded as symbols of despotic power within human societies, in the spirit of La Fontaine. However, in many instances, this (wo)man-to-animal or (wo)man-to-vegetal transfer of qualities/attributes – which seems to suggestively mirror, or to call for, a transfer of consciousness, as vectorized by the use of hypallage – is actually reversed. In such cases, anthropomorphism shapeshifts into 'flowerism', 'apism', or even 'stonism', as it were. Thus, in "The Maze of the Enchanter", the author conjures up a dream-like, almost hallucinatory vision of conscious and moving

blades of grass: “Before him was an open lawn, covered with a queer grass that *squirmed* like innumerable worms beneath his bare feet [27]” (my emphasis). Here, the unorthodox choice of the verb “squirm” (generally used for crawling insects), combined with the sensory image of “bare feet” on the grass, creates a disturbingly unusual mental association, which helps to bring (wo)man closer to worm and earth. Such cognitive dissonance thus constitutes an attempt at (artificially and subliminally) conceptualizing what vegetal consciousness might be like. To illustrate this ecopoetic function of hypallage, I would like to focus now more specifically on the depiction of humanoid flowers/floraloid women in “The Maze of the Enchanter” (1933) and “The Flower-Women” (1935).

11 In spite of their humanoid appearance, Smith’s “flower-women” do have some qualities that are alien to the human species. In a feat of literary genius, Smith has invented hybrid, semi-human, semi-floral creatures, which allows him to construct an imaginary ‘flower perspective’ (cf. Buell’s second criterion), whilst still using human words and thought-patterns. In the first of these two stories, in which a sorcerer revels in his own magical garden in the midst of an imperial city, flowers are originally described as threatening beings, inspiring fear as well as a feeling of mental confusion: “About him, he saw the heavy-hooded blossoms that leaned from a winy gloom in *venomous languor*, or fawned toward him with open corollas that exhaled a *narcotic perfume* or diffused a *pollen of madness* [28] (my emphasis)”.

12 Although the hypallage of the verb “fawn” is obviously of anthropomorphic nature, associating the flowers with hypocritical courtiers or thieves, I believe such is not the case with “venomous languor”, “narcotic perfume”, and “pollen of madness”. In all three expressions, the typical structure of hypallage can be recognized: there is either an unorthodox (human-related) noun ascribed to a plant, as languor and madness, or at least an ambiguous word –as in the case of perfume, a word that can also apply to a manufactured product –being ascribed to a so-called ‘inanimate’ object with a hidden or hinted human agent behind it. Here, indeed, the sweet floral smell is associated with artificiality and malignity, with the will to seduce, or ensnare – and eventually, to kill and eat. This is actually closer to the reality of plant-life than what poetic imagination has often fantasized: flowers use scents and nectar to trick insects and birds into spreading their pollen

around, and sometimes, in the case of carnivorous plants, simply to lure them into falling into a trap, and to eat them. In this short passage, words conveying highly Romantic imagery are used: languor, perfume… The Romantic clichés related to flowers (seen as sensual/idealized female beings) are revived, but infused with both a more realistic and a more unsettling potentiality – that of an alien consciousness, not so idyllically innocent (and thus devoid of any volition or emotionality) as one may think.

13 By creating these potentially man-eating flowers, Smith confronts the reader not only with his or her own behavior as a (potential) meat-eater, but also with the possibility of vegetable consciousness, which is particularly disturbing for the modern Western mind, accustomed to eating plants as if they were mere 'things' intended for human or animal consumption. Or as John Charles Ryan reminds us in his article "On the Death of Plants: John Kinsella's Radical Pastoralism and the Weight of Botanical Melancholia" (Ecozon@, Vol 7, n°2): "After all, if a plant is construed as lacking percipient sentience—and is, thus, inferior to animals and humans in the great chain of being—then its death should matter to us neither personally, socially, nor intellectually. On a functional level, plants are the nuisances we eradicate (weeds) or the nutriment we consume (fruits, vegetables, herbs) on a regular basis: their deaths make life (and the pleasure of living) possible" (p. 118). Indeed, if flowers and plants in general are live and sentient beings, then they could morally have a right to live; they might experience the thrill of life and also the pain of being deprived of this life. That is what modern scientific research on plant life tends to show –as John Charles Ryan affirms in his aforementioned article: "the field of plant signaling and behavior indicates through empirical outcomes (for example, Trewavas) [that] plants have a kind of inner life—the exact nature of which we are not yet completely sure—affirmed by their ability to learn and remember" (p. 120). In another article entitled "Tolkien's Sonic Trees and Perfumed Herbs: Plant Intelligence in Middleearth" (Ecozon@ Vol 6, No 2), the ecopoet and scholar also goes on to say:

> Some of Tolkien's olvar are hybrids between actually existing species and mythological and folkloric plant personae. While historically and ecologically grounded, his botanical legendarium, in part, also prefigures contemporary evidence concerning acoustics, consciousness

> and memory in the vegetal world. In the light of this scientific research, Tolkien's olvar might not be purely imaginative or metaphorical after all, but rooted, at least partially, in emerging empirical findings. As an aspect of their behavioral ecology, plants have been shown to emit and respond to sound frequencies (Gagliano; Gagliano, Mancuso and Robert). [cf. p. 126]

14 This shows how visionary Clark Ashton Smith —and I dare say, science-fiction in general —turned out to be, since such scientific facts were discovered only recently. Thus, many of the intuitions found in ecopoetic fiction often form a sort of insight that is not entirely incompatible with science. Such is the case, then, with the concept of sentient life in plants. In the English language, the word 'vegetable', to be in 'a vegetative state', is applied to people in a coma who (supposedly) are unaware of their surroundings, and do not experience conscious life. But what if vegetables did consciously experience the world? When in the same story, Smith first introduces his petrified maidens – women who, by a magical act, have been turned into motionless statues – the cliché of the 'human vegetable[29]' is ironically exploited. The girls are depicted as utterly deprived of sensations, emotions, and thoughts; they are objectified. Playing with the misogynistic cliché of the 'alluring girl', the following passage may be regarded as an epitome of ecopoetic literature:

> In fact, it seemed that there were many hundred [of these girls], leaning or recumbent on ornate couches, or standing in attitudes of languor or terror. Tiglari discerned in the throng the women of Ommu-Zain, whose flesh is whiter than desert salt; the slim girls of Uthmai, who are moulded from breathing, palpitating jet; the queenly amber girls of equatorial Xala; and the small women of Ilap, who have the tones of newly greening bronze. But, among them all, he could not find *the lilied beauty of Athle*.
> Greatly did he marvel at the number of the women and the utter stillness with which they maintained their various postures. There was no lifting nor falling of eyelids, no dropping of hands, no moving nor opening of lips[30]. (my emphasis)

15 Here, the machoistic and misogynistic cliché of the beautiful yet stupid woman seems to have found its literary paragon in the form of these gorgeous maidens transformed into flower-like beings. The

floral hypallage ("the lilied beauty of Athle") is figurative of the way in which women have long been perceived in phallocratic societies: as beautiful objects of men's desire that should keep still and silent. And the way in which flowers have also been treated and regarded, as mere objects of visual pleasure, the way in which they have always been denied any individuality, any sentience, any conscious life of their own – seems to echo a certain patriarchal condescending view of womanhood. However, in Smith's tales, the flower-women never remain still and silent for long. To the male protagonists' amazement and dismay, flowers come to life; they speak, they sing, and express their own alien view of the world. This occurs for instance in "The Flower-Women", a tale in which the author imagines a kind of flower-language:

> As he went down the knoll into the valley, the enchanter heard *an eery, plaintive singing*, like that of sirens who bewail some irremediable misfortune. The singing came from a sisterhood of unusual creatures, half woman and half flower, that grew on the valley bottom beside a sleepy stream of purple water [31]." (my emphasis again)

16 Interestingly enough for its ecological overtones, in this tale, the flower-women are the "raped" victims of a species of reptilian creatures, dwelling in "their new-built citadel", and who prey upon them in order to conduct strange, esoteric experiments –these reptiles being a species of supra-intelligent scientists (not unlike certain human urbanites) that have lost all connection with their own natural world (they live in "a fortress [...] void of portal or window" right in the middle of a wild exoplanet). Here, the story's main protagonist, the enchanter Maal Dweb, having left his palace and imperial city, visits the far-away, wild planet where the vampiric flower-women dwell, and willingly succumbs to the bewitching voices of the chimeras, as if to invite the modern urban (wo)man to listen to nature's song. Quite unlike their Carrollian predecessors, C. A. Smith's live flowers do not speak an elaborate – Victorian or Californian – human language. Strange sibilations, murmurs, "eery" sounds, seem to constitute this flower-language, compared with "a wild and sweet and voluptuous singing, like that of the Lorelei" (cf. p. 278). Being vampire-like creatures, these hybrid women-flowers use their voices to cast a "captiously woven spell" on their (male) human victim. Their imagin-

ary language, of which no example is given, is nevertheless described as composed of "little cries […], shrill and sibilant", "murmurs […] like the purrings of hungry flame" (p. 279). In other words: the literary process used by Smith is halfway between prosopopoeia (i. e. attributing human language to a plant or animal) and a genuine attempt at creating what a realistic flower-language might be. Such a language, composed of "half articulate sounds", is built empathically on an inferred flower psychology, encapsulated in the following sentence: "As a rule their emotions and memories were short-lived, their nature being closer to that of plants or animals than of humankind" (p. 279). Thus the floral 'monsters' are described as "simple and naïve beings", and so is their language. Yet, they do have a language, which therefore means that they have individuality, emotions, and awareness. In this respect, ecopoetic literature might be viewed as an attempt at giving a perceptible voice to this inner life of plants, or perhaps more accurately, as a way to translate this unheard voice into human language, so that urban (wo)men may at last listen to it. Instead of filling up flower corollas with human words for social/political reasons, this emerging literature strives to capture their subtle music – forgotten and ignored for so long –in new and inventive ways.

17 Some of the stories that have been presented and analyzed here may be seen as early representatives of this emerging "green literature" described by Lawrence Buell. While shedding light on the work of Clark Ashton Smith specifically, I hope this article has shown how science-fiction and fantasy can be profoundly ecopoetic genres. In his poetry and short fiction, Smith has often epitomized the close relationship between machoistic views of women/the female body, and the harmful way(s) in which humankind treats nature. Uprooted from its natural self, humankind becomes a monster, an alien on planet Earth, bound to destroy itself and all the other living beings that human life depends on. Hearing the voices of plants and flowers may prove to be a remedy for this alienation of the human self, as Smith suggested in many of his stories. One century ahead of the present ecological crisis, the 'bard of Auburn' (as he was nicknamed) had foreseen some of the ethico-ecological problems that our modern world is facing today. He was a songster of 'urban wildness' down to the very efflorescent texture of his writings. Let me then conclude my

essay with these highly symbolic and ecopoetic words taken from "The Flower-Women":

> Soon he neared the straggling outer line of plants that were upstream from the knoll on which he had landed; and in confirmation of the vision beheld in the mimic world in his planetarium, he found that the turf was upheaved and broken where five of the blossoms, growing apart from their companions, had been disrooted and removed bodily. He had seen in his vision the rape of the fifth flower, and he knew that the others were now lamenting her. (p. 278)

18 Let us not forget, however, that by the end of the story, the barbaric killers of the flowers get destroyed by the enchanter.

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1 As Alain Génetiot explains in his article "Poétique de l'allégorie dans les Fables de la Fontaine" (in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 2012/2, Vol.

112), prosopopoeia is used by La Fontaine mainly to give a voice to specific people or types of people, in a pedagogical and moralistic way, and is therefore used as a sort of pretext to voice protests and criticism while avoiding censorship. “Je me sers d’animaux pour instruire les hommes” (I use animals as a means to educate men), wrote La Fontaine. Nowhere in the Fables does there seem to be any genuine attempt at imitating non-human animal communication, or at imagining what an ‘animal language’ might be like.

2 According to Anne Besson, “*fantasy* has imposed itself as a modern form of escapist fiction, reinventing this great popular tradition and infusing it with new meaning, by way of a more direct and truthful return to the medieval roots of the novel” (Besson, Anne, *La Fantasy*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2007, p. 34; my translation). She also insists on several key-elements that she regards as constitutive of the new genre: the concept of an initiatory journey (the hero’s journey), the invention of imaginary worlds, and by way of consequence, of new words and invented knowledge to describe such worlds.

3 As in “The Flower-Women” (1935), a short story (by the same author) where woman-like flowers are described as dangerous vampiric creatures, or “The Black Lake” (1922), a prose poem describing an abysmal underground lake of “bleak basaltic shores” where strange, fearsome orchids grow in total darkness, “bent above the waters like open and thirsty mouths”.

4 In: Clark Ashton Smith: LETTERS TO H. P. LOVECRAFT, Necronomicon Press, 1987.

5 “The Black Vulture”,1869 (see George Sterling, *The House of Orchids and other poems*, San Francisco, The Stanley-Taylor Company, 1911).

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14 Cf. introduction to Buell L.,The Environmental Imagination, Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 7-8.

15 Cf. Bénédicte Meillon, « Le chant de la matière pour désensorceler les modernes : vers une écopoétique du réenchantement à travers quelques romans des Appalaches », Transtext(e)s Transcultures 跨文本跨文化 [En ligne], 13 | 2018, mis en ligne le 01 décembre 2018, consulté le 14 mai 2021. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/transtexts/1202 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/transtexts.1202

16 "The Demon of the Flower", for instance, was first written as a prose poem entitled "The Flower Devil" (1922).

17 Cf. Clark Ashton Smith (ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger, *THE COLLECTED FANTASIES (Vol. 3): A Vintage from Atlantis*; San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2007, p. 111.

18 According to American psychologist John F. Kihlstrom, "hypnosis may be defined as a social interaction in which one person, designated the subject, responds to suggestions offered by another person, designated the hypnotist, for experiences involving alterations in perception, memory, and voluntary action" (J. F. Kihlstrom, Annual Review of Psychology Vol. 36 :385-418/Feb. 1985).

19 As documented by Stefano Mancuso and Alessandra Viola in *L'intelligence des plantes* (Albin Michel, 2018), plants have been shown to respond to the vibration of sounds at various frequencies, while they might themselves communicate through a subtle form of 'clicking' peformed via their roots (cf pp. 101-09).

20 "Le désir de représenter fidèlement la nature par l'entremise du texte littéraire est paradoxal car il procède d'une logique hostile à l'écriture elle-même" (cf. Thomas Pughe, "Réinventer la nature : vers une éco-poétique", Études anglaises 2005/1 (Volume 58), p. 70).

21 Cf. Réinventer la nature, p. 69.

22 Joachim Zemmour, "Faut-il retraduire Tolkien ?", in *La Retraduction en littérature de jeunesse/RetranslatingChildren'sLiterature*, ed. Virginie Douglas & Florence Cabaret, Peter Lang, 2014.

23 See, for example, Janis B. Nuckolls's referential article "The Case for Sound Symbolism" (1999).

24 As Clark Ashton Smith himself wrote in *Planets and Dimensions: Collected Essays* (Mirage Press, 1973), "Literature can be, and does, many things; and one of its most glorious prerogatives is the exercise of imagination on things that lie *beyond* human experience". He goes on to explain that "Science fiction, at its best, is akin to sublime and exalted poetry, in its evocation of tremendous, non-anthropomorphic imageries".

25 According to *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1911, Volume 14), hypallage is "a rhetorical figure, in which the proper relation between two words according to the rules of syntax are inverted. The stock instance is that in Virgil, Aen. iii. 61, where dare classibus austros, to give winds to the fleet, is put for dare classes austris, to give the fleet to the winds. The term is also loosely applied to figures of speech properly known as 'metonymy' and, generally, to any striking turn of expression".

26 In Lewis Carroll's lesser-known novel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), the female heroine, young Alice, comes across a "garden of live flowers" (chapter 2). "O Tiger Lily, I WISH you could talk", the little girl exclaims in front of a flower. To which the flower replies, rather mischievously: "We CAN talk, when there's anybody worth talking to" (cf. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*; London: Penguin Classics, 1998, pp. 135-136). The conversation that ensues between Alice and the flowers is full of wit and sarcastic hints, and mainly deals with 'manners', with the way one should dress, what colors one should be wearing, what proper words one should use, etc. "It isn't manners for me to begin [a conversation], you know, and I really was wondering when you'd speak!" the Rose says, in a parody of Victorian social role-play. Then the conversation shifts to trivial considerations about such things as the shapes of petals, suggesting the formal dress codes used by, and often imposed upon, many

Victorian ladies of the time. “I don’t care about the colour. If only her petals curled up a little more, she’d be alright” (cf. pp. 136-137 of the same edition). It is quite obvious, for a modern reader at least, that Lewis Carroll’s “live flowers” are a caricature of upper-class Victorian women with their strict moral codes, their repressed feminine sensuality/sexuality, and corseted bodies. The author’s purpose in using prosopopeia does not seem to be an ecopoetic one, strictly speaking; instead, the device appears to be purely anthropocentric, with flowers being used as a true ‘masquerade’.

27 Cf. Cf. Clark Ashton Smith (ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger), *THE COLLECTED FANTASIES (Vol. 4): The Maze of the Enchanter*; San Francisco:Night Shade Books, 2009, p. 112.

28 Cf. Clark Ashton Smith (ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger), *THE COLLECTED FANTASIES (Vol. 4): The Maze of the Enchanter*; San Francisco:Night Shade Books, 2009, p. 110.

29 In French, interestingly enough, the expression “belle plante” (beautiful plant) is sometimes used in familiar language to describe a beautiful (and supposedly stupid) woman, with highly machoistic undertones.

30 Cf. Clark Ashton Smith (ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger), *THE COLLECTED FANTASIES (Vol. 4): The Maze of the Enchanter*; San Francisco:Night Shade Books, 2009, pp. 112-113.

31 Cf. Clark Ashton Smith (ed. Scott Connors and Ron Hilger), *THE COLLECTED FANTASIES (Vol. 4): The Maze of the Enchanter*; San Francisco:Night Shade Books, 2009, p. 278.

English

From the very beginning and up to the present time, one of the main features of Sci-Fi/fantasy literature has been a desire to ‘return’ to the wild and the natural, as a reaction to modern society’s conquering urbanization, and a will to ’re-spiritualize’ nature. In this respect, a number of texts pertaining to the Sci/Fi genre appear to be part of a specific sub-category of literary fiction which Lawrence Buell, in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), has defined as ‘environmental literature’ –and the stories of C. A. Smith meet many of the standards described by Buell in order to categorize a piece of literary fiction as ‘an environmental text’. Indeed, Smith’s works contain phantasmal descriptions of some (re)enchanted urban gardens, in which nature, under idyllic guises, becomes noxious and even vengeful. In these luxuriant urban gardens, some strange half-plant, half-(wo)man creatures reign – in a sometimes despotic manner – over an op-

pressed and enslaved humankind. In such stories, Smith portrays nature not only as conscious and endowed with its own soul and will, but also as able to protect itself by destroying its very destroyers. The hybrid creatures which the author invents deeply question the boundary between human and non-human life, between the animal and the vegetal realms, and his dream-like language helps to suggest such hybridization in the reader's mind. Thus, by means of the trope known as hypallage, the Californian ecopoet calls for a 'rewilding' of the urban (wo)man, and environmental literature becomes a symbolic place for this very rewilding to happen, a kind of prophetic invitation to let the wild irrupt, as it were, in the midst of the city. In the very heart of urban spaces, ecopoetry becomes itself a sort of imaginary garden, offering visionary images.

Français

L'un des aspects fondamentaux et fondateurs de la SF/fantasy a toujours été, aussi bien à ses débuts qu'à l'époque moderne, le désir d'un 'retour' vers le naturel et le sauvage en réponse à l'urbanisation conquérante, une volonté de respiritualiser la nature. À cet égard, certains textes de littérature SF semblent s'inscrire dans ce que Lawrence Buell a décrit, dans *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), comme 'la littérature environnementale'. Or, les nouvelles de C. A. Smith répondent à plusieurs des critères établis par Buell pour définir ce que serait un 'texte environnemental'. En effet, l'œuvre de l'auteur californien est parsemée de descriptions fantasmagoriques de jardins urbains (ré)enchantés, où la nature, sous des allures idylliques, s'avère toutefois pernicieuse et vengeresse. Dans ces jardins luxuriants, d'étranges créatures mi-plantes mi-hommes/femmes, ou mi-animales, règnent parfois de manière despotique sur une humanité opprimée, réduite en esclavage. C. A. Smith y dépeint l'image d'une nature non seulement consciente, dotée d'une âme et d'une volonté propres, mais aussi capable de s'auto-protéger en détruisant ses propres destructeurs. Les créatures hybrides qu'il invente nous interrogent profondément sur la limite entre l'humain et le non-humain, l'animal et le végétal, et la langue onirique de C. A. Smith contribue à suggérer cette hybridité dans l'esprit de la lectrice/du lecteur. Ainsi, à travers la figure de style qu'est l'hypallage, l'écopoète californien invite à un 'ensauvagement' de l'homme et de la femme urbain.e, et la littérature environnementale se fait le lieu symbolique de cet ensauvagement, comme un appel prophétique à l'irruption du sauvage au sein même de la ville. Au cœur de l'espace urbain, l'écopoésie devient elle-même jardin imaginaire, parole visionnaire.

Mots-clés

écopoétique, science fiction, Smith (Clark Ashton), hypallage

Keywords

ecopoetics, science-fiction, Smith (Clark Ashton), hypallage

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