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Abjection, Derision and Power: Writing in the Voice of the Victim in Three French Postwar Texts[1]

I Introduction: Confronting Abjection

Even as they recede into a quite distant history, the Second World War and German Occupation of France continue to cast a very long shadow in French cultural history. The late 1960s and early 1970s have long been seen as a moment of an apparently sudden and at the time shocking shift from the pious certainties of a nation united in resistance to the ethical ambiguities of active and passive collaboration and the appalling realities of antisemitism and deportation. Phrases from the right-wing (and anti-Resistance) culture wars of the postwar period such as *la guerre franco-française* and *résistantialisme*[2] were disinterred and detached from their original meanings, seemingly tailor-made for this new picture of a nation disunited, marked by evasions, shame and guilt rather than courage and sacrifice, that, it now appeared, had been all too eager to sustain a protective Resistance myth for decades. Approaching all this nearly 50 years later means keeping in view the multi-layered nature of this historiography: the

term *mode rétro* for example has altered in meaning; for contemporary commentators it designated at first a kitsch fascination and even nostalgia for the look and feel of Nazism, but it soon took on its current historiographical sense denoting the obsessive return from the 1970s to the French past of the Occupation and the notion of French silence about the war years. Yet however much this has now become in turn a doxa,[3] it is the case that the novels and films devoted to the Occupation in the post-war period raise all sorts of issues that later decades thought were taboo. The whole question of complicity and collusion in relation to collaboration and to French antisemitism is a case in point.

The three texts under discussion here, Serge Gainsbourg's album of 1975, *Rock around the bunker*, the 1967 novel *La Danse de Gengis Cohn* by Romain Gary,[4] and the autobiographical *récit O vous frères humains* (1972) by Albert Cohen,[5] offer insights into the different ways complex issues such as anti-Semitism and the perpetrator-victim relationship during and after the war could be presented in the 1960s and early 1970s. They are little studied in the context of post-war texts on war and occupation, and unusual in using techniques of derision in the voice of the victim, to startling and unsettling effect. The aim of this article is to explore the nature and effect of these textual strategies in three such different texts – an LP, a novel and an autofictional essay – which nonetheless have in common a virtuoso deployment of language supporting their authoritative dismantling of the power of the *bourreau*.[6] This analysis is situated in relation to early and more recent portrayals of oppression and complicity with oppression in the writings of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jonathan Littell, and draws on Julia Kristeva's study of abjection[7] in order to highlight the different structuring of complicity

involved in texts narrated from the point of view of the victim – rather than that of the perpetrator.

Cohen, Gainsbourg and Gary each had a background in Jewish immigration to France in the late 19th/early 20th century, and each one addresses the impact of wartime. Giving voice to the victim in the victim/*bourreau* confrontation utterly changes its nature and wider implications; these scathing portraits of the *bourreau*, hateful anti-Semite or SS officer, are delivered by the abjected victim who explodes the pretentions to superiority of the perpetrator by reconfiguring the distance between them. Kristeva's account of abjection as a troubling dimension of subjectivity and society is pertinent here: she traces its psychological dynamics of attraction and repulsion, exposing the fragility of identity in that the capture and expulsion of the desire for the other is also constitutive of identity. Its social dynamic is equally threatening: the abject is the other side of social codes of religion, ideology and the law that are engineered to repress its disruptive potential. Crime is abject, for it exposes the fragility of the law.[8] Abjection appalls, but it also fascinates. In these texts it is the perpetrator who is pulled into collusion with the abjected victim on their terms, not in a structure of desire or admiration, but in a dynamic of destruction with death at its heart.

II *Bourreaux* and Victims

In the immediate postwar period in France, there was extensive reflection on the nature of the *bourreau*/victim relationship, alongside the interrogation of individual responsibility in relation to the trials of the *épuration* and the legal framework established for the punishment of collaborators. If writing on resistance to oppression embraced both national anti-German and

political anti-fascist motives, the *épuration* was situated unequivocally within a national frame punishing collaboration with the enemy, from the crime of *indignité nationale* to the crime of treason entailing the death penalty. Culturally, the post-war vogue for existentialism, with its emphasis on responsibility and choice, revealed its convergence with the spirit of the times.[9] More broadly, the dangers of collusion with torture, injustice and oppression were a leitmotif of Camus's ethical writings, whereas for Sartre, who rejected the prioritisation of pre-determined ethical stances as idealist, it was more a question of negotiating the complexities of complicity. From the mid-1950s, the Algerian war provoked a new positioning of the confrontation of victim and perpetrator, as France was seen by the supporters of Algerian independence to have taken up the position of occupier and torturer, and both Camus and Sartre explored the question of complicity with evil. Sartre's play *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1959) was designed not only to analyse the complex layers of a situation that made the decision to torture by the character Frantz (a near homonym for France) a credible choice, but also to unsettle its French audience who might have been tempted to think themselves removed from the torture in Algeria. In Camus's *La Chute* (1956), the first person narrator Clamence bears the guilt of various shameful deeds involving deaths of others, and ensures that his interlocutor, and by extension the reader, is drawn into the same dreadful logic. The law permeates both *La Chute*, in Clamence's profession as a lawyer and in his acerbic critique of processes of judgement, legal and intellectual, and *Les Séquestrés*, in Frantz's speeches for the defence addressed to his 30th century judges. This thematics will be strikingly absent from the three works of the next decade under discussion here, since their aim is to expose the murderous hatred directed at each Jewish narrator in all its bitter glory.

By definition, derision explicitly or implicitly attacks a status quo, and the status quo in these works is that installed by the perpetrator that has marked each one of the narrators for death. Derision is a broad term that embraces a wide range of techniques, thematic, structural and stylistic, in order to belittle, undermine and hold up to ridicule its chosen target. The linguistic and stylistic resources of sarcasm, mockery and laughter are many-facetted, and can combine with structural features such as the mishaps and misunderstandings of farce, where characters appear at the mercy of events, as well as thematic configurations that expose particular commitments and worldviews as derisory and worthless. At its bleakest, derision is sardonic, sarcastic and antagonistic, driven by an unwavering destructiveness. In practice, it is as varied as its targets.

Techniques of derision in narrating war and occupation are certainly not new, as Michel Jacquet's study of a large number of post-war French novels attests; he traces their lineage of mocking irony and sarcasm towards commitment and heroism which they equate with a politically dubious and ethically vacuous Resistance triumphalism.[10] These are novels where characters frequently change sides, where cynicism has the edge over commitment, and where chance rather than will and choice determines outcomes. Jacquet does not look at the works of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, though scorn, sarcasm and anger were important building blocks of his distinctive style, constructing highly wrought first-person tirades. Jacquet is interested in realist novels portraying the French in all their multiplicity during the Occupation, whereas Céline's writings are so often focused on himself as victim in danger of his life from murderous aggressors, be it the Jews (in his polemical pamphlets before the war), or the Resistance and the Allies singling him out (in his later novels). But Céline is not alone in constructing the

structure of violence as a personalised confrontation: Cohen recounts the humiliating anti-Semitic attack he suffered as a 10-year-old child; in Gary's novel Gengis Cohn was murdered in 1944 by the SS officer he now inhabits as a *dibbuk*; and Gainsbourg's album includes a song about the yellow star he wore as a child. 'We do not want to confront abjection face to face', writes Kristeva.[11] The abjected victim has no choice in the matter, but in these texts, they derive both knowledge and power over the torturer.

III Frères humains et futurs cadavres[12]

Albert Cohen (1895-1981) came with his family to Marseille from Greece when he was five. He studied in Geneva and took Swiss citizenship in 1919. A successful novelist from the 1930s, he was also in London during the war, after which he worked with refugee organisations and the United Nations. He enjoyed great success with his 1968 novel *Belle du Seigneur* which received the Grand Prix de l'Académie française. *O vous frères humains* is a modified and expanded version of his *récit* published in two parts in *La France libre* in 1945, *Le Jour de mes dix ans*.[13]

If Gary will use derision to turn the tables and open up the ugliness of antisemitism, an aspect of the murderous appetites of humanity, Cohen too offers a searing portrait of the cruelty of the anti-Semite. *O Vous frères humains* indexes the poem 'Frères humains' in *Le Testament* by the 15th century poet François Villon. Villon's poem is also referred to as the Ballad of the Hanged Man, since it addresses the poet's fellow men from the gibbet, asking them to pray for his absolution as he faces the final judgement: Heaven or Hell. The narrator of Cohen's autobiographical tale is not concerned with absolution. He is facing death, imminent or at least close, as an old man, and calls on the haters of Jews to recognize themselves as his brothers,

brothers in the commonalty of death. He offers them a story of a small child's misery that as anti-Semites they will enjoy: on his 10th birthday a street vendor selling stain removers refused his money (he wanted to buy three for his mother; he also wanted to feel part of this rather jolly group of seller and customers), told the child to clear off as a dirty Jew who wasn't wanted here, gave him a lesson in nasty Jewish characteristics (miserly, rich, foreign, taking their bread from the French) and slapped his face when, in shock, he failed to move away quickly enough. He retreats to the toilets of the nearby railway station. When he has the strength to venture outside once more, he then notices for the first time graffiti daubed on walls: 'Death to Jews'. Cohen reflects, in elaborate formal literary and stylized prose that has been compared to the incantatory style of the Bible, on the effect this had on him, on hatred and on antisemitism, then and now.

An early chapter is devoted to the corpse he will soon become, rigid and awkward in its coffin, dressed in clothes he would not have chosen. 'It's odd, I shall be a dead man in four or five years, or ten years at most (…), a dead man so dead, a genuine stiff with all the charms of the recently croaked, and in a hundred years a completely bony one with, beneath the now absent nose, the frightening large silent laugh between the two jaws, the wide never-ending laugh of the dead, and in one thousand years some debris in my box, a little femur perhaps or hipbone or sacrum or greater trochanter, and gravelly bone bits.'[14] With its elaborate syntax and its characteristic use of repetition of structures heightening the rhetorical effect, and removing any sense of familiarity from the slang words for the dead (macchabée/stiff, charmes de claqué/charms of the croaked), death is the absolute dehumanization of the individual. The

differences that are so vital to the anti-Semites are rendered as nothing by the shared destiny of their shared non-humanness in death.

This tale of the past is one that carries the weight of more recent events. The old man on the threshold of death surveys the continuity from 1905 to the present, for the murderous hatred of antisemitism is still part of the malevolent outdoors: 'on the walls of Aix-en-Provence, in the year of grace one thousand nine hundred and seventy, have been inscribed these noble words Let the filthy Jews die (Que la charogne juive crève) and the happy times of genocide return! O love of the neighbour.'[15] Furthermore, the line between the antisemitism of the street vendor and the camps is direct and causal, both thematically and stylistically. The only mention of cement, prior to the description of the cement floor of the gas chambers, is in the sequence where the child takes refuge in the toilet in the town's station, to cry and to think, lying on its cement floor, aware of the smell and the stink, subliminally associating the consequences for him of the vendor's onslaught with the gas chambers, as well as through the connotations of urine and excrement ('the soiling of fear' (souillures de la peur) in the gas chambers).[16]

In the street vendor's torrent of insults, a series of stereotypes involving the Jewish body are mobilised:

> You're a yid, aren't you? said the blond street vendor with the long thin moustache that I had gone to listen to from school with faith and feelings of tenderness, you're a dirty yid aren't you? I can see from your ugly mug, you don't eat pig do you, given that pigs don't eat each other (…) you feast on gold coins don't you? better than sweets aren't they? (…) I can see from your mug, you're a dirty Jew aren't you, a dirty Jew aren't you? (…) you're here to eat the

> bread of the French aren't you? Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce one of Dreyfus's pals, a little pure bred yid, guaranteed one of the brotherhood of the secateurs, shortened in the right place (…), nasty as a scabies rash, leeches of the world of the poor.[17]

And the ten year old Albert is sent on his way, in spite of his beseeching, ingratiating smile of supplication that now makes the narrator ashamed. 'But my torturer (*bourreau*) was pitiless and I can see his toothy, carnivorous grin with its long canines, a rictus of extasy, I can see his finger pointing as he ordered me to leave. The people standing around moved aside, with approving laughter, to let the little expelled leper through.'[18] Laughter that foreshadows the great crocodile rictus of the skeleton-to-be, no doubt.

The rhetoric of the 'dirty Jew', a fortiori the use of 'charogne', charged with a loathsome, putrid physicality, expresses the process of abjection, of expulsion from the social body as unclean filth. Kristeva underlines the abject, excremental nature of a corpse, 'foul and dead': 'like a true theatre, (…) expelled waste and corpses *indicate* to me what I set aside permanently in order to live.'[19] The scene of the expulsion of a 10-year-old child as foul and disgusting lays bare the violent immoderation of the abjecting subject. We are repeatedly told that without the vendor and his like, his 'peers in nastiness', there would have been no camps, no piles of corpses:

> Of course, one has done better since. But what happened on that tenth anniversary of my coming into the world, that hatred that I met for the first time, that imbecilic hatred was the notification of the chambers of intense fear, the bad omen and the beginning of the gas chambers, the long chambers of cement

> where two of mine, my uncle and his son, have suffocated and died, holding each other by the hand, the naked body of the son falling heavily down onto the naked body of the father who had loved him.[20]

The thematics of filth and the thematics of death are thus intertwined and the body is the focal point of both. The toilets of the railway station, and the false showers of the gas chambers, combine cleansing and expulsion of the unclean body, and all these connotations of water and movement conflict horribly, for the anti-Semites, with the reality of the desiccated bony bits which is the narrator's knowledge of the death awaiting them. It is the absolute nature of that knowledge that exposes the derisory nature of the anti-Semite's utterly futile hatefulness.

The text has been read as a great humanist statement,[21] addressing his torturers as brothers, yet the demonstration of the abject cruelty of the anti-Semite is scornfully shown: 'He just said that people had laughed at him and chased him off because he had a Jewish face. Then, the father and the mother looked with remorse on the face of the child they had brought into the world, and lowered their eyes. (…) All three, we cried. Something for an anti-Semite to celebrate.'[22] This passage closed the 1945 text (with the one change that 'réjouir' (celebrate) replaces the original 'faire rigoler' (laugh at). The 1972 text continues with three chapters on death, antisemitism and the camps, starting with: 'Of course, anti-Semites, tender souls, of course this is not a story of a concentration camp, and I did not suffer physically on this tenth birthday.'[23] showing not only the importance of the narrative development for the intricate handling of language, for here it is the juxtaposition with the ending of the previous chapter that gives the full sarcastic charge to 'tender souls', but also that there is no simple trajectory in the text from denunciation to fraternal feelings. In his testament, Cohen is going to set down

what he knows, knowing also they will not believe him. He often repeats how useless this is, as an ethical exercise. And his message is delivered, not as a request or an argument or a plea, but as an injunction:

> O you, human brothers, you who are moving for such a short time now, soon to be immobile and for ever constrained and dumb in your rigid deaths, have pity on your brothers in death, and without claiming to love them with the derisory love of the neighbour, which is not a serious love, which is a love in word alone, a love we have tasted at length over the centuries and know what it's worth, restrict yourselves, serious now at last, to no longer hating your brothers in death. Thus speaks a man from the height of his impending death.[24]

Hatred and fear, together with their opposed counterparts love and courage, are the established modalities governing the *bourreau-victime* relationship, and swept aside here by the authoritative voice of the victim demanding a different recognition as brothers in death, one that negates the whole world view of the murderous 'haters of Jews'.

IV Le rire est le propre de l'homme[25]

Kristeva describes Céline's laughter as 'apocalyptic',[26] a horrified and fascinated reaction to the crisis of being and society that is 'abjection'. In a discussion of Céline's antisemitism,[27] Philippe Sollers argues that Céline's laugh and antisemitism are a kind of nihilistic roar, disdaining shallow pieties and received ideas in favour of an unflinching and revealing elaboration of what evil really is. Alain Finkielkraut's riposte is pertinent for both Cohen and Gary:

> There are all kinds of laughter: ironic laughter, humorous laughter, Rabelais's laughter. There is also the carnivorous laughter of a lynch mob. That's the laughter that Céline's laughter lets us hear, any resistance to which, he tries to persuade us, comes from schmaltzy clichés and hackneyed sentimentality.[28]

Cohen's carnivorous laugh of the vendor is not the only way to hear the nihilistic roar of evil. Laughter is at the heart of *La Danse de Gengis Cohn* and is deployed as an excruciatingly uncomfortable way of dismissing hackneyed pieties and letting exterminating laughter be heard for what it is.[29]

Romain Gary (1914-1980) came to France from Lithuania at the age of 14, and grew up in Nice. He joined de Gaulle in London in 1940, serving as a pilot. His first novel, *L'Education européenne*, a story of partisans in Poland, was very successful, and he had been awarded the Goncourt for *Les Racines du ciel* in 1956. He worked as a diplomat, and wrote in French and in English. *La Danse de Gengis Cohn* was a commercial failure in France, though the partially rewritten translation was very successful in the United States. Gary has called himself a 'terrorist of humour'[30] and he shared with Gainsbourg an 'aesthetics of provocation'.[31] It is integral to the relations between the Commissaire Schatz, a senior policeman and former SS officer, and his *dibbuk*, Gengis Cohn, a Jewish cabaret comedian in pre-war days, who was murdered on Schatz's order in April 1944, after which he took up residence in Schatz's subconscious: 'It's soon going to be twenty-two years that he's been hiding a Jew at his place.'[32] A *dibbuk* is a mythic figure of Jewish culture, a demon-like spirit, often malevolent, that possesses the body of its victim. The murdered Jew thus becomes the persecutor and tormentor of his murderer, and this situation allows Gary to explore the relations between

Germans and Jews, perpetrators and victims, then and now, as well as setting them within a broadly metaphysical reflection on the ethical and aesthetic stances of humanity. Humanity does not come out of it well.

Extermination of the Jews is a fundamental and constant reference point throughout the novel, and operates at several different levels. Before introducing himself, his name and biographical details, the narrator starts with: 'I am at home here', explaining he is part of the air one breathes here, an absence so strong it becomes a presence. Undoubtedly elusive in meaning, but the subsequent reference to smoke in the sky helps to clarify the theme: 'smoke never marks the sky indelibly. The azure sky, for a moment Jew-ridden (enjuivé), passes a light wind over its face and straightaway, it's gone.'[33] Germany is collectively full of the Jews who were removed:

> Germany is a country entirely inhabited by Jews. Of course you don't see them, they have no physical presence, but… how can I put this? they make themselves felt. It's very strange, but that's how it is: you're walking in German towns, and also in Warsaw and Lodz and elsewhere, and you can smell Jews (ça sent le juif). Yes, the streets are full of Jews who aren't there. It's a striking impression. There is in fact a Jewish expression that comes from Roman law: *the dead seizes the living*. It's exactly that. I don't want to cause pain to a whole people, but Germany is a completely Jew-ridden country.[34]

Much of the black humour relating to the narrator's tormenting of Schatz and the Holocaust is in keeping with the cabaret comedian challenging anti-Semitic stereotypes. He explains his pre-war critics advised him to tone down his rather aggressive, cruel humour: 'Perhaps they were

right. One day, in Auschwitz, I told another prisoner such a funny story, he died laughing. He was no doubt the only Jew in Auschwitz dead of laughter.'[35] Cohn escaped from Auschwitz but was later caught and one of a group of forty-four Jews who had to dig their own pit before being shot, a scene that provides material for all sorts of 'jokes': 'I don't want to seem anti-Semitic, but no-one screams like a Jewish mother when her children are being killed. I didn't even have any earplugs on me, I was quite unprotected.'[36] He not only made an obscene gesture with his right arm to the soldiers, he then had time to drop his trousers and offer them a supreme gesture of contempt with his bare buttocks. And he has possessed Schatz ever since, in a relationship that displays the fragility of the abjecting subject: Schatz is condemned to an eternal repetition of the process that establishes his identity in the expulsion of the abhorrent other by whom he is possessed.[37] Cohn makes himself visible, with his chalk-white face, yellow star and striped pyjamas, to Schatz but only to him, and often prompts him to make inappropriate comments (such as '*Gott in Himmler*'), with the result that Schatz drinks heavily, often appears to be shouting at himself and is widely considered to be deranged. Schatz's obsession with cleanliness is matched only by his hysterical reaction to any reference to soap (he has a special powder), which the narrator exploits mercilessly for the reader: 'Schatzchen has a real phobia about soap. You never know who you're dealing with, he says.'[38] And later: '*you never know who is in there!*' [39]

The main plotline involves reports of a serial killer and discoveries of bodies that Schatz and his colleagues have the job of investigating, quickly followed by news of a missing woman, the wife, Lily, of one of two aristocrats who come to the police to report it. She seems to have run off with the gamekeeper, Florian, which allows for some fun exploiting *Lady Chatterley's Lover*,

mirroring also aspects of the Holocaust with groups of bodies being discovered in the forest and Cohn's frequent interjections of offence ('What about me!') on hearing these serial killings described as 'the crime of the century'. It then evolves into a fantastic allegorical narrative drawing on myths and legends, as Florian shifts in and out of other personae, notably Death, and the runaway wife Lily merges with the princess of legend and the Madonna in the tapestries, as well as the monstrous feminine figure of Lilith and humanity personified. All the victims of the serial killer are men, all discovered with their trousers removed and with beatific smiles on their faces; it emerges that they die in doomed attempts to satisfy the nymphomaniac Lily/humanity who is voracious in her consumption of bodies. Massacres upon massacres are never enough; 6 million is her price for turning a trick ('6 million la passe').[40] This is then in part a metaphysical novel, underlined in the deployment of these allegorical figures and also of places – the Forest of Geist (Spirit) is where much of the action takes place – and continually moving between the commentary on antisemitism past and present, and on the violent nature of humanity. There is a long nightmare sequence of the narrator transformed into Colonel Cohn serving in the American army and fighting in Vietnam. Characters slip in and out of the various personae, just as the first person narration, usually the voice of Cohn, passes also to Schatz and the writer (both occasional narrator and occasional character). The diegesis is similarly unstable. To give just two examples: a discussion of corpses, victims of Lily left in the grounds and that her husband the Baron had failed improbably to notice, suddenly takes on a more general character, as the uncontested reality of the serial killer's victims is used to point to the widespread and continuing denial of the reality of the Holocaust. The Baron is being interrogated by Schatz:

- Dead bodies in every corner and you saw nothing.
- It was hidden from us. We were kept in ignorance. We were deceived. We certainly knew there were excesses, but we didn't know the details. And besides, I'm still not convinced. A lot of it was propaganda.[41]

And an image from the Warsaw uprising, 'a hand coming out of a sewer drain in the Warsaw ghetto, a naked hand, left unarmed by the whole of humanity. Slowly the hand closes and the Jewish fist stays raised above the sewer',[42] interrupts a long sequence between Florian/Death and Cohn which resembles nothing so much as music hall patter, apart from its subject matter:

- Hey, you speak Yiddish?
- Fluently.
- Berlitz?
- No. Treblinka

We both laugh.[43]

This is a novel with multiple targets. As well as the deployment of German and Russian myths and legends, it displays European art, literature and culture as alibis and grotesque covers for atrocities: 'I suddenly remember that from the suffering of Christ, thousands of bastards have taken very beautiful works. They've really enjoyed themselves. (…) I recall that from the corpses of Guernica, Picasso took *Guernica* and Tolstoy benefitted from war and from peace for his *War and Peace*. I've always thought that if we are still talking about Auschwitz, it's solely because it's not yet been erased by a beautiful literary work.'[44] It denounces the hypocrisies of postwar colonialism, using the horrified coverage in the German media of atrocities carried out during the Simba rebellion in the Congo as an example. Cohn recalls that as he and his fellow victims

were digging their grave, he asked one of them to define culture. '*Culture is when mothers carrying their children in their arms are excused from digging their graves before being shot*.' came the reply.[45] As a professional comedian who recognizes the quality of the answer, Cohn devoted considerable thought to producing a better one. Years later, he has it: 'The difference between the Germans, inheritors of an immense culture and the uncultured Simbas, is that the Simbas ate their victims, while the Germans turned them into soap. *Culture is the need for cleanliness*.'[46]

Like Cohen, then, Gary is concerned with demonstrating the continuing vitality of antisemitism in the present. Jewish graves are desecrated, and a resurgent nationalism is on the rise with the NPD (German national party). A Sunday Times exposé of German antisemitism in 1966 is referred to more than once. And France is not forgotten, neither historically:

> Simon de Montfort himself shows me how to take a heretical newborn baby by the feet to burst its head against the walls of Toulouse, I guillotine Louis XVI, I'm made a Marshall of the Empire on the corpses:
>
> - Ah no! I scream with indignation. France for the French![47]

Nor in the present:

> We have a good laugh. He's a talent, this Florian. Death and his Jew, what a duo, what a treat for those who enjoy popular entertainment. They like burlesque, they like to laugh. A propos, I've just read that 16% of the French are anti-Semites. There's an audience for this, no doubt about it.[48]

With its aesthetic of aggressive provocation, of startlingly inappropriate Holocaust and anti-Semitic 'jokes', and its sardonic plotlines that orchestrate the permutations of *bourreau-victime*

in unexpected ways, this is a novel that espouses the grotesque both thematically and formally. Cohn's bitter knowledge of anti-Semitism places him, like Cohen's narrator, in a position of knowledge over humanity; like Gainsbourg, Cohn plays the fool whose wisdom is to highlight the dysfunctionality of the social order.

V Le couteau dans la play[49]

Serge Gainsbourg (1928-1991) was one of the 1.5 generation who had experienced the Occupation as children.[50] His parents were immigrants from the Ukraine. He had established himself in the late 1950s and 1960s as a singer songwriter straddling the chanson and pop worlds, straddling also the borders of decency and the indecent with many sexually explicit songs. In 1969 came the massive success of 'Je t'aime moi non plus' with Jane Birkin. *Rock around the Bunker* followed his first concept album, *Histoire de Melody Nelson*, in 1971, that was a critical but not a commercial success: the story of a 14 year old girl run over by a rich man in a Rolls Royce and their subsequent involvement demonstrating yet again the transgressive Lolita theme that would be a major feature of his work. *Rock around the Bunker* was a complete commercial flop.

Rock Around the Bunker appeared in 1975. It has nine songs: 'Nazi Rock', introduced by Gainsbourg saying 'Here comes the Night of the Long Knives' (Voici venir la nuit des longs couteaux), with cabaret-dancing Nazis in tights, makeup and blond wigs; 'Tata teutonne', a Teutonic homosexual called Otto; 'J'entends des voix off', and 'Eva', two songs sung at least in part by Adolf, the latter highlighting Eva's enervating love of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', followed by Gainsbourg's own cover of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'; a song about sex 'Zig Zig

(slang for sex and homonym of Sieg Sieg) avec toi'; one about the S.S. 'Est-ce est-ce si bon?'; and 'Yellow Star' combining the star that Jews including the young Gainsbourg were forced to wear with American culture ('juif' rhyming with 'sheriff'). The final tracks are 'Rock around the bunker', an apocalyptic end of the world destruction party which appears, with its references to napalm and temples, to nod also towards Vietnam, and 'SS in Uruguay', the escaped officer enjoying the high life in Latin America.[51] This is then a concept album with a clear narrative arc, from the sexually flamboyant SS, obliquely (or quite directly for anyone who had seen Visconti's *The Damned* (1969) with the blond bewigged Helmut Berger) referencing Eric Roehm and the SA who were attacked and killed in 1934, to the escaped Nazi enjoying his freedom post-war in Latin America, a culturally established trope. It is an album that is of its time with its sardonic use of kitsch Nazis, but also distinctively gainsbourgian in its virtuoso use of language, particularly alliteration and assonance, the combination of high and low registers and puns, its thematics of life and death, and hybrid French/English language and cultural references. It is both serious and insolent, like much of Gainsbourg's art of contestation.

The focus on cross-dressing Nazis, Germans, and the SS align the album with the depoliticising sexualisation of fascism denounced by Susan Sontag,[52] but there is no easy complaisance here. As Alain Coelho points out, Gainsbourg's technical virtuosity with language and music holds the material at a distance, its meaning inseparable from its dazzling linguistic structures.[53] 'Put make-up on your lips, guys/with delicate red lipstick/Give yourselves bloody mouths/Or black or blue if that tempts you/We're going to dance the /Nazi Rock Nazi/ Nazi Nazi Rock Nazi.'[54] With its strong rock beat, low pitch, passages of virtuoso rock guitar and female chorus, 'Nazi Rock' would be a typical rock song were it not for the clearly transgressive lyrics, taking the

grand guignol of *The Damned* into sardonically incongruous territory. The second song is also on the thematic terrain of Nazism and transgression, spoken to the beat in a low voice at very high speed, and provides a clear contrast, not only in the powerfully delivered words that are governed by the aesthetic of the singer-songwriter of the *chanson* tradition, but also in the complete reversal of the high showmanship of drag. Its coherence is built on the /t/ sound: 'Otto est une tata teutonne/Pleine de tics et de totos/Qui s'autotête les tétés/En se titillant les tétons/Et sa mitraillette fait/ Ta tatata tatata' (Otto is a Teutonic homosexual/full of nervous tics and fleas/Who self-suckles his nipples/while tickling his nipples/And his machine gun goes/Ta tatata tatata). 'Tata' (a diminutive of 'tante', aunt) is, like 'tante', a derogatory term for a homosexual, but fits the rapid fire repetition of /t/ to give a different combination of sexuality and violence, involving also excrement ('étron') thrown into squat toilets ('jeté aux tinettes'), cruising in public urinals ('fait les tasses') tentatively in the dark (à tâtons), and the rejection of female dress ('question tutu tintin'). Spelling it all out here is laborious, but the attributes of masculinity (the machine gun, the motorbike (gros pétard) and effeminacy, possibly corpulence (he likes his grub, his 'tortore'), with anality and solitary cruising in urinals create a very different figure from the previous song with a fearsome economy of form.

Combining Hitler's bunker with 'Rock around the clock' expresses the kind of irreverence that is coded as inappropriate by its very subject. One might compare this to the *Charlie Hebdo* covers of the late 70s, on the return of revisionism for example (in November 1978, with a Wolinski cartoon of a beaming prancing Hitler branded Super Nice (super sympa), under the heading: 'At last we can say it!' (Enfin, on peut le dire) with 'Salut les Youpins' ('Hi Yids' aping the popular pop show 'Salut les copains') in a speech bubble), in the use of the techniques and

aesthetic of derision.[55] These owe a great deal to the art practice of the 1950s and 1960s, the movements of pop art, of 'la figuration narrative' and 'le nouveau réalisme', grounded in a rejection of any romantic notion of art as sublime creation of an individual genius. This is art which takes apart the iconography of the media, popular culture, consumer society and advertising to place art firmly on the terrain of the everyday, but also to develop a political art whose targets are consumerism, American imperialism, the bourgeoisie and its authority figures and its icons of French nationhood.

Serge Gainsbourg trained and worked as an artist for 9 years before turning to the 'minor art', as he termed it, of 'la chanson'. Apart from his admiration for Francis Bacon and Picabia, he talks mainly of the old masters and little of his own art practice. He was however steeped in the avant-garde counter-culture of the times, characterised as 'a minority and boldly subversive state of mind, both intellectual and deviant, insolent and pretentious, which expresses itself via destructive polemics rather than a manifesto.'[56] In 1969 he wrote music for and appeared as Mr Drugstore in William Klein's *Mister Freedom*, a deliberately comic strip-like attack on the American ideology of freedom that it argued means enslavement and destruction. As with Warhol's *Campbell's Soup* or Erró's *American Interior* series, images of advertising and consumerism, or war and imperialism, are both displayed and appropriated, in order to accentuate their ideological vacuity and menace. They are familiar, they are immediately recognisable.

Similarly, *Rock around the Bunker* operates with what one might call ready-mades of the imaginary,[57] combining iconic references to Nazi decadence, Eva, Adolf, to American popular culture with the 1938 Jerome Kern hit 'Smoke gets in your eyes', Bill Haley's 1950s 'Rock around

the clock', held together by the hybridity of the music and the voice of the creative singer-songwriter, making this work as much about the present as Cohen's and Gary's are. Eva's liking for 'Smoke gets in your eyes' in the fourth track voiced by Hitler, seems not dissimilar to the smoke in the sky at the start of *Gengis Cohn*. Jonathyne Briggs suggests that it refers to the bombs falling on the bunker and the smoke from Hitler's suicide gun (Braun took cynanide),[58] yet the second verse clearly situates the song elsewhere, 'in my eagle's nest', referencing rather the well-known images of Hitler and company relaxing and dancing, which tends to suggest a much more disquieting reference to crematoria and the Holocaust rather than battles and warfare, especially as antisemitism figures strongly in the second half of the album. Gainsbourg's version of the song is an intimate crooning of the beautiful melody that is quite uncomfortable to listen to. The sixth track ('Est-ce, est-ce si bon?) returns to the SS (a homonym of 'est-ce, est-ce'): 'Yes, it's since the Anschluss that these leeches/Have been sucking the Jew Süss.'[59] *Le Juif Süss* was a Nazi propaganda film widely shown in France during the Occupation. It is followed by the first person song that places the experience of Jews in France at the centre of the album:

I've won the Yellow star
And on that Yellow star
Inscribed on a bright yellow background
There's a strange hieroglyph

I've won the Yellow star
And on that Yellow star

There's perhaps written Sheriff

Or Marshall or big chief

I've won the Yellow star

I'm wearing the Yellow star

Difficult for a Jew

The law of the Struggle for life.[60]

The music is jaunty, with a doo-wap introduction, the female group singing part of the lyrics, a lengthy section of jazz piano and a final 'oh yeah' reminiscent of Louis Armstrong, the incongruity of the music reinforcing the incongruity of the words, as has been the case throughout this very varied album.

Visconti drew criticism for the reading of Nazism as a psycho-drama of decadent sexuality in *The Damned*, although it is difficult to see someone like Gainsbourg associating cross-dressing with abjection when he was part of the cultural avant-garde scene that included Pierre Molinier and Copi, artists whose practice included an extreme and extremely rigorous dismantling of gendered norms of representation; it is the excessive figure in 'Tata teutonne', corpulent, excremental and violent, that is more closely aligned to the ambiguities of abjection. The rather nauseating pleasure Eva Braun takes in 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', reminiscent of Kristeva's description of the affect of repulsion caused by skin on the surface of milk,[61] and even more queasily reinforced as Gainsbourg assumes the subject position delivering the song, is part of the theatricality of an album that inscribes the yellow star within the culture of the American Western, without diluting the force of the still and sorrowful comment, 'Difficult for

a Jew/The law of the struggle for life', on a child marked for death. Although Gainsbourg and his immediate family did escape to the southern zone and evade deportation, his uncle, his mother's younger brother, was deported and died in Auschwitz. Gainsbourg frequently mentioned his Occupation experiences, often but not always, sardonically: 'I grew up under a lucky star: a yellow one';[62] in the 1950s, employed as the resident pianist in Milord l'Arsouille nightclub, he would introduce himself as 'le gigolo youpin'.[63] Scandalous provocation was part of his persona, but in this album, popular culture's complacent appropriation of images and themes detached from their murderous realities are not only critiqued, but regrounded in the pain of immense and continuing suffering.

VI Conclusion: Dances of Death

'Who, in other words, I ask you, would accept to call themselves abject, subject of or subject to, abjection?'

Julia Kristeva[64]

The epistemological bases of law and judgement are absent from these texts. That crimes have been committed is not the concern of these narrators who in two cases are either dead or speaking from the house of the dead. These are not texts seeking to memorialize the past, although how it is remembered is an important theme in *Gengis Cohn*. Nor are they testimonial texts, although the authenticity of personal experience is a structural component in each one. The recording of the virulence of contemporary antisemitism and violence explains their

tangential relation to representations of the war and occupation familiar from *mode rétro* works such as *Lacombe Lucien* for example, as well as their sharp contrast with the great perpetrator novel *Les Bienveillantes*,[65] a story of an old man, Maximilien Aue, returning to his abject past to spell out in great detail his participation in the extermination of the Jews. Referencing the famous ending to the prologue to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*: 'hypocritical reader, my fellow, my brother', *Les Bienveillantes* seeks by its very first words: 'frères humains', to draw the reader into a hateful collusion with evil. The victims are on the whole a mere function of this dynamic of complicity between Aue and his readers. In this huge novel, where each section is named after a baroque dance, and where massacres and murders, described in the painstaking detail of a seemingly carefully documented realism, are combined with clearly fantastic features such as Aue tweaking Hitler's nose as the latter gives him an award, the focus of complicity is the denial of the perpetrator as other: you and I are the same, says Aue to the reader. During the Algerian war, Sartre argued that 'no-one is exempt from the risk of torturing',[66] which may sound similar but is expressing a very different politics. Sartre too is aiming to make his audience uneasy, in order to ensure that the homology between Frantz the torturer and France prevents the French from believing that the torture being carried out in Algeria in their name has nothing to do with them. Frantz von Gerlach is therefore situated, personally, psychologically, socially and politically, in a way that Max Aue, whose logic is primarily a historiographical one, the glue that holds the wide number of literary and historical micronarratives together, is not.

Relations in perpetrator narratives are, then, structured very differently from those governing victim narratives. Aue's sister Una does give voice to the thesis that Germans and Jews are

bound together by desire, the Germans in love with their abjected selves, but this amounts to little more than a statement of mutual envy,[67] and has none of the visceral hatred for the victim (that Kristeva argues is driven from deep inside the perpetrator) that is on display in the three chosen texts. With narrators who are objects of a murderous anger that delivers, or seeks to deliver them, to death, but subjects of the narrative discourse that exposes it, each text dissects the thought processes and world views of their assassins, the sense of assurance in their own superiority (*Frères humains*), as well as the multiple and shifty accommodations and denials of the post-war years (*Gengis Cohn*), a complaisance that Gainsbourg uses caricature and distortion to dislocate.

The first person narrators of these three victim texts are not speaking for the law, nor are they seeking retribution or justice, nor they are not bearing witness to establish what happened. That is taken for granted, and the experience of it is the basis for what they know about being-in-the-world. The Holocaust remains a point of reference in the present, because anti-Semitic hatred is still targeted at them, and because it has revealed the violence of human existence to be ontological, a knowledge that is part of what ensures their mastery over the ignorant perpetrators in thrall to the violence of their murderous hatred. The narrators of *Frères humains* and *Gengis Cohn* are not concerned with legal codes but with the theology and metaphysics of the Law, in the sense of the social order, and its breakdown, while Gainsbourg collapses the law into a child's sardonically incongruous game, and places the mechanics of a life and death process over it. These victims are knowledgeable, more knowledgeable than the perpetrators whose limitations they expose, because it is a knowledge grounded not in ethics but in the materiality of death for Cohen and Gainsbourg, and in the knowledge of the futility of

transcendence for Gary. The power of the abjected victim is to lay bare the processes of abjection, its immoderation and excess, its lack of control.

Literature is particularly able to explore the apocalyptic limits of abjection, suggests Kristeva.[68] These works have in common a most sophisticated control of language, style and structure. Each one is a performance of a scandal. Shock, provocation and bravado were Gainsbourg's stock-in-trade; each of these texts seeks in its own way to shock, and it is the virtuosity of the performance, as well as the unsettling, unpalatable truths it conveys, that enable them to dissect the processes of abjection and to become, in the space of the textual arena they have created, powerful subjects of their own stories.

Word length including footnotes: 10,080

[1] I should like to thank Mihaela Mihai and Maša Mrovlje for their most helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this article, and my colleague David Coward for biographies of Albert Cohen.

[2] In his major analysis of the memory of Vichy, *Le Syndrome de Vichy*, (Paris, Seuil, 1937), Henry Rousso re-used the term *résistantialisme* coined by the abbé Desgranges in 1948 to attack the Communist Resistance (though it became used as a more general anti-Resistance term), with a change in spelling, to designate what he called the Resistance myth of the high years of Gaullism and Gaullist memory, from 1964. 'La guerre franco-française' is the title of a work by Louis-Dominique Girard (1950).

[3] Laborie, *Le Chagrin et le venin : la France sous l'occupation, mémoire et idées reçues* (Paris, Bayard, 2011).

[4] Romain Gary, *La Danse de Gengis Cohn,* (Paris, Gallimard, 1967). Page references here to Folio edition.

[5] Albert Cohen, *O vous frères humains*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1972). Page references here to Folio edition.

[6] 'Victime/bourreau' is the usual expression in French. '*Bourreau*' has several meanings: executioner, hangman, torturer, violent oppressor; in relation to more recent works particularly, it tends also to be translated as perpetrator.

[7] Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection*, (Paris, éditions du Seuil, 1980). Page references to Points edition.

[8] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p.12.

[9] Pierre Nora, 'Mi-vainqueur, mi-vaincu', in Anne Simonin and Hélène Clastres*, Les Idées en France 1945-1988*, (Paris, Gallimard, Folio Histoire, 1989), p.30.

[10] Michel Jacquet, *Une Occupation très romanesque : ironie et dérision dans le roman français sur l'occupation de 1945 à nos jours*, (Paris, Editions La Bruyère, 2000).

[11] 'nous ne voulons pas affronter l'abjection face à face'. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p.247. (All translations are my own).

[12] 'Human brothers and future corpses'. *Frères humains,* p. 209.

[13] Albert Cohen, 'Jour de mes dix ans'(I) and II, *La France libre* (London, Hamish Hamilton), vol X, no 57, 16 juillet 1945, pp. 193-200 ; vol X, no 58, 15 août 1945, pp.287-294.

[14] 'Drôle, je serai un mort dans quatre ou cinq ans, ou dix ans au plus, (…) un mort si mort, un authentique macchabée avec tous ses charmes de claqué, et dans cent ans un tout osseux avec, sous le nez disparu, l'effrayant grand rire muet entre les deux maxillaires, le large rire incessant des morts, et dans mille ans quelque débris dans ma caisse, un peu de fémur peut-être ou de l'os iliaque ou de sacrum ou de grand trochanter, et des graviers d'ossements.' Cohen, *Frères humains*, p.19.

[15] 'sur les murs d'Aix-en-Provence, en l'an de grâce mil neuf cent soixante-dix, ont été inscrites ces nobles paroles Que crève la charogne juive et revienne l'heureux temps du génocide! O amour du prochain.' *Frères humains*, p.29

[16] P.207. In the 1945 text, the sub-heading to this section devoted to the child crying in the railway toilets is 'camp de concentration imaginaire'. This phrase is shifted into the text itself in *Frères humains*.

[17] 'Toi, tu es un youpin, hein? me dit le blond camelot aux fines moustaches que j'étais allé écouter avec foi et tendresse à la sortie du lycée, tu es un sale youpin, hein? je vois ça à ta gueule, tu manges pas du cochon, hein? vu que les cochons se mangent pas entre eux, (…) tu bouffes les louis d'or, hein? tu aimes mieux ça que les bonbons, hein ? (…) je vois ça à ta gueule, tu es un sale juif, hein? un sale juif, hein? (…) tu viens manger le pain des Français, hein? messieurs dames, je vous présente un copain à Dreyfus, un petit youtre pur sang, garanti de la confrérie du sécateur, raccourci où il faut, (…) mauvais comme la gale, des sangsues du pauvre monde.' *Frères humains*, pp. 38-9.

[18] Mais mon bourreau fut impitoyable et je revois son sourire carnassier aux longues canines, rictus de jouissance, je revois son doigt tendu qui m'ordonnait de filer tandis que les badauds s'écartaient, avec des rires approbateurs, pour laisser passer le petit lépreux expulsé.' *Frères humains*, pp.41-2.

[19] 'cloaque et mort': 'tel un théâtre vrai, (…) le déchet comme le cadavre m'*indiquent* ce que j'écarte en permanence pour vivre.'Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p.11. (original emphasis)

[20] 'Bien sûr, on a fait mieux depuis. Mais ce qui m'advint en ce dixième anniversaire de ma venue sur terre, cette haine pour la première fois rencontrée, cette haine imbécile fut l'annonce des chambres de grand effroi, le présage et le commencement des chambres à gaz, des longues chambres de ciment où deux des miens, mon oncle et son fils, ont suffoqué et sont morts, se tenant par la main, la nudité du fils s'abattant sur la nudité du père qui l'avait aimé.' *Frères humains*, pp.201-2.

[21] See the 'Dossier de presse' in Albert Cohen, *Œuvres*, (Paris, Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993), pp. 1387-1395.

[22] 'il dit seulement que des gens avaient ri de lui et l'avaient chassé parce qu'il avait un visage juif. Alors, le père et la mère lancèrent un regard de remords sur le visage de l'enfant qu'ils avaient mis au monde, et ils baissèrent les yeux. (…) Et tous les trois nous pleurions. De quoi réjouir un antisémite.' *Frères humains*, p.200.

[23] 'Bien sûr, antisémites, âmes tendres, bien sûr, ce n'est pas une histoire de camp de concentration que j'ai contée, et je n'ai pas souffert dans mon corps en ce dixième anniversaire.' *Frères humains*, p.201.

[24] 'O vous, frères humains, vous qui pour si peu de temps remuez, immobiles bientôt et à jamais compassés et muets en vos raides décès, ayez pitié de vos frères en la mort, et sans plus prétendre les aimer du dérisoire amour du prochain, amour sans sérieux, amour de paroles, amour dont nous avons longuement goûté au cours des siècles et nous savons ce qu'il vaut, bornez-vous, sérieux enfin, à ne plus haïr vos frères en la mort. Ainsi dit un homme du haut de sa mort prochaine.' *Frères humains*, p.213.

[25] (laughter is a distinctive quality of man) Gary, *Gengis Cohn*, p.38, p.51

[26] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, pp.240-1.

[27] Alain Finkielkraut (ed.), *Ce que peut la littérature*, (Paris, Stock/Panama), 2006, pp.131-150.

[28] 'Et puis, pour en revenir au rire, il y en a de toutes sortes: il y a le rire de l'ironie; il y a le rire de l'humour; il y a le rire de Rabelais; il y a aussi le rire carnassier du lynchage. C'est ce rire-là que la virtuosité verbale de Céline fait entendre et dont il voudrait nous faire croire que tout ce qui lui résiste relève du *chromo*, c'est-à-dire de la sentimentalité la plus conventionnelle.' Finkielkraut, *Littérature*, pp.148-9.

[29] Andréa Lauterwein refers to the 'exterminating laughter of the passersby in Vienna', *Rire, mémoire, Shoah*, (Paris, éditions de l'Eclat, 2013), p.9.

[30] Quoted by Jean-Marie Catonné, 'Gary et l'héritage républicain', In Julien Roumette, (ed.), *Romain Gary I*, (Caen, Lettres Modernes Minard, 2010), p.52.

[31] Catonné, 'Gary', p.52

[32] 'voilà bientôt vingt-deux ans qu'il cache un Juif chez lui.' Gary, *Gengis Cohn*, p.12.

[33] 'la fumée ne marque jamais le ciel d'une manière indélébile. L'azur, un instant enjuivé, se passe un peu de vent sur la figure et aussitôt, il n'y paraît plus.'*Gengis Cohn*, p.11

[34] 'Prenez, par exemple, l'Allemagne. Aujourd'hui c'est un pays entièrement habité par les Juifs. Bien sûr on ne les voit pas, ils n'ont pas de présence physique, mais… comment dire ? Ils se font sentir. C'est très curieux, mais c'est comme ça: vous marchez dans les villes allemandes – et aussi à Varsovie, à Lodz et ailleurs – et ça sent le Juif. Oui, les rues sont pleines de Juifs qui ne sont pas là. C'est une impression saisissante. Il y a, d'ailleurs, en yiddish, une expression qui vient du droit romain: *le mort saisit le vif*. C'est tout à fait ça. Je ne veux pas faire de la peine à tout un peuple, mais l'Allemagne est un pays entièrement enjuivé.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.30.

[35] 'Peut-être avaient-ils raison. Un jour, à Auschwitz, j'ai raconté une histoire tellement drôle à un autre détenu qu'il est mort de rire. C'était sans doute le seul Juif mort de rire à Auschwitz.' *Gengis Cohn* p.12

[36] 'Je ne veux pas paraître antisémite, mais rien ne hurle comme une mère juive lorsqu'on tue ses enfants. Je n'avais même pas de boules de cire, sur moi, j'étais complètement désarmé.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.23

[37] See Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, pp.17-18

[38] 'Schatzchen a pour le savon une véritable phobie. On ne sait jamais à qui on a affaire, dit-il.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.14.

[39] '*on ne sait jamais qui est dedans!*' *Gengis Cohn*, p. 116 original emphasis.

[40] *Gengis Cohn*, p.252.

[41] '- Des morts dans tous les coins et vous ne voyiez rien. / - On nous l'a caché. On nous tenait dans l'ignorance. On nous a trompés. Nous savions bien qu'il y avait quelques excès, mais nous ne connaissions pas les détails. Et d'ailleurs, je ne suis pas encore convaincu. Il y a une part très grande de propagande.' *Gengis Cohn* p.133.

[42] 'une main sortant d'une bouche d'égout du ghetto de Varsovie, une main nue, laissée sans armes par l'humanité entière. La main se ferme lentement et le poing juif reste ainsi levé au-dessus de l'égout.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.217.

[43] '- Tiens, vous parlez yiddish? / - Couramment. / -Berlitz? / - Non.l Treblinka./ Nous rions tous les deux.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.216.

[44] 'Je me souviens soudain que de la souffrance du Christ, des milliers de salopards ont tiré de très belles œuvres. Ils s'en sont régalés. (…) je me rappelle que des cadavres de Guernica, Picasso a tiré *Guernica* et Tolstoï a bénéficié de la guerre et de la paix pour son *Guerre et Paix*. J'ai toujours pensé que si on parle toujours d'Auschwitz, c'est uniquement parce que ça n'a pas encore été effacé par une belle œuvre littéraire.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.188-9.

[45] ' *La culture, c'est lorsque les mères qui tiennent leurs enfants dans leurs bras sont dispensées de creuser leurs tombes avant d'être* fusillées.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.78. Original emphasis.

[46] 'La différence entre les Allemands héritiers d'une immense culture et les Simbas incultes, c'est que les Simbas mangeaient leurs victimes, tandis que les Allemands les transformaient en savon. *Ce besoin de propreté, c'est la culture.*' *Gengis Cohn*, p.79. Original emphasis

[47] 'Simon de Montfort lui-même me montre comment on prend un nouveau-né hérétique par les pieds pour faire éclater sa tête contre les murs de Toulouse, je guillotine Louis XVI, je suis fait maréchal de l'Empire sur les cadavres… / Ah non ! je hurle, indigné. La France aux Français!' *Gengis Cohn*, p.307. The slogan 'La France aux Français' has long been associated with xenophobic and anti-Semitic extreme right movements.

[48] 'Nous nous marrons. C'est un talent, ce Florian. La Mort et son Juif, quel duo, quel régal pour les salles populaires! Le peuple aime le burlesque, il aime rire. Je viens justement de lire que seize pour cent des Français sont antisémites. Il y a un public, aucun doute là-dessus.' *Gengis Cohn*, p.217.

[49] The knife in the play/wound (la plaie), 'plaie' being a homonym for 'play'.

[50] Susan Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2006).

[51] The words to all Gainsbourg's songs on the album are printed in Serge Gainsbourg, *Mon propre rôle* vol I (Paris, Gallimard, 1991), pp. 255-70.

[52] Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', *New York Review of Books*, February 6 1975.

[53] Alain Coelho, 'Gainsbourg côté texte', in Gainsbourg, *Mon propre rôle* I, p.12.

[54] 'Maquillez vos lèvres les gars/ Avec des rouges délicats/ Faites-vous des bouches sanglantes/ Ou noires ou bleues si ça vous tente/ On va danser le/ Nazi Rock Nazi.' *Mon propre rôle* I, p.257.

[55] Can be seen at https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2016/1/12/1388043/-No-Charlie-Hebdo-is-not-racist-Here-s-why accessed 17 6 19

[56] 'un esprit minoritaire et crânement subversif, intellectuel et déviant, insolent et prétentieux, qui s'énonce via le pamphlet destructeur plutôt que par le manifeste fondateur.' Guillaume Desanges and François Piron, 'Avertissement: *Aux Armes, et caetera*', in *Contre-cultures 1969-1989: esprit francais* (Paris, La Maison rouge/La Découverte, 2017), p. 9.

[57] Jonathyne Briggs makes a similar point, but his argument is a different one, that Gainsbourg's sexualised Nazis, using the currency of Visconti et al, is however a means to critique *la mode rétro* in its historiographical sense of representation of the Occupation. 'Nazi Rock: the *mode rétro* in French Popular Music 1975-1985', *Modern Contemporary France*, 19:4, pp.383-98.

[58] Briggs, 'Nazi Rock', p.390.

[59] 'Si, c'est depuis l'Anschluss que sucent/ Ces sangsues le juif Suss (sic)', *Mon propre rôle* I p.265.

[60] 'J'ai gagné la Yellow star/ Et sur cette Yellow star/ Inscrit sur fond jaune vif/ Y'a un curieux hiéroglyphe. J'ai gagné la Yellow star/ Et sur cette Yellow star/ Y'a peut-être marqué Shérif/ ou marshall ou big chief. J'ai gagné la Yellow star/ Je porte la Yellow star/ Difficile pour un juif/ La loi du Struggle for life.' *Mon propre rôle* I, p.266.

[61] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, p. 10.

[62] 'J'ai grandi sous une bonne étoile. Jaune.' Serge Gainsbourg, *Pensées, provocs et autres volutes*, (Paris, Le cherche midi, 2006), p.7. Livre de poche edition.

[63] 'The yid gigolo'. Yves Salgues, *Gainsbourg ou la provocation permanente*, (Paris, éditions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1989), p.266 (livre de poche edition).

[64] 'Qui, en somme, je vous le demande, accepterait de se dire abject, sujet de, ou sujet à, l'abjection?' Kristeva, *Pouvoirs,* p.247

[65] Jonathan LIttell, *Les Bienveillantes*, (Paris, Gallimard), 2006.

[66] Sartre, *Théâtre de situations*, p.302.

[67] Littell, *Les Bienveillantes*, p.802

[68] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, pp.245-6.