



## Miracle of the Rose

*Jean Genet , Bernard Frechtman (Translator)*

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This is the third of Genet's prose works to be published in America, following *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1963) and *The Thief's Journal* (1964). It is, however, Genet's second novel, having been written in La Santé and Tourelles prisons in 1943, directly after *Our Lady of the Flowers*. Like that first work, *Miracle of the Rose* was written in the solitude of a prison cell, on the pieces of white paper the penal authorities furnish the convicts for making paper bags.

The work is set in the State prison of Fontevrault. It is the height of the German Occupation and in the prisons of France the convicts, barely subsisting on near-starvation rations, spend their endless days weaving camouflage nets for their German conquerors. *Miracle of the Rose* is, first of all, an account of life at Fontevrault during that period. But Genet is no realist, and his account of prison life is an extraordinary mixture of dream and reality, past and present.

If Fontevrault is the present of his narrative, the past is the Mettray Reformatory, the almost idyllic, flower-covered "prison colony" for boys to which he was sent for theft as a mere child. It was here at Mettray that he was initiated into the life of confinement, into the world of the criminals and homosexuals in which he was to live for the next twenty-five years. Genet's story moves back and forth between Fontevrault and Mettray almost without the reader's being aware of the transition. Doubtless, in Genet's mind, there is no transition. Both prisons and both times fuse into one immense and erotic dream.

The boys at Mettray do not pity or despise the hardened criminals at neighboring Fontevrault; on the contrary, they are the "saints" the boys look up to, the heroes they hope to emulate. More than fifteen years after his precocious arrival at the Mettray Reformatory, Genet finally reaches the Fontevrault Prison. Among the pimps and big shots, the crashers and chickens that form the homosexual hierarchy of the convict criminal society, he finds again many of his former boyhood friends and lovers.

Foremost among them is Harcamone, a character notable in the narrative for his off-stage presence. Harcamone has been condemned to death for having killed the only guard at Fontevrault who had ever shown him the least bit of kindness. During the month and a half prior to his execution, his presence from his solitary cell on death row both encompasses and dominates the prison. At one point, as Harcamone passes Genet in the prison corridor, the author has a vision in which he sees the chains that bind Harcamone miraculously flower into a garland of white roses.

*Miracle of the Rose* contains many such visions wherein Genet, taking the dross of "evil" transmutes it into a work of beauty.

## **Miracle of the Rose Details**

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# From Reader Review Miracle of the Rose for online ebook

## Véronique says

J'ai été très séduite par les quelque 50 premières pages de ce récit, qui font un portrait hautement poétisé de la prison et de ses occupants. Le contraste m'a rappelé immédiatement Baudelaire (parallèle d'autant plus facile à faire que les fleurs reviennent sans cesse dans la prose de Genet). Par contre, une fois le choc initial passé, quel ennui. C'est un récit méditatif et non-linéaire, extrêmement répétitif, et sa singularité a (pour moi) perdu son attrait après quelques pages.

À noter que j'ai lu et beaucoup apprécié Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs auparavant, qui m'avait paru plus fulgurant et, bien qu'il s'agisse aussi d'un récit largement méditatif (mais plus masturbatoire), je l'ai trouvé plus achevé et plus porté vers l'action que Miracle.

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## Ada says

L'abjecció feta bellesa.

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## Mel Bossa says

I am almost shocked at how much this book touched me. It's not an easy read. It's all stream of consciousness and Genet moves from past to present seamlessly, taking you deeper and deeper into his world, a world where abandoned boys turned juvenile delinquents rule as a colony their orphanage/jail and then later as hardened criminals, their prison.

This is no ordinary prison story. This isn't Papillon or Escape from Alcatraz. This is erotic, dark, and superb magic realism.

Genet is a master at putting two contrasting symbols together such as the beautiful tragic rose and prison chains. It's just trippy. It's a book I wish I would have read back in the day I did drugs!

But wait, reducing this book to eroticism or homosexual longings and dreams is not doing it justice. Yes it's gritty and violent and at times unsettling or even disturbing (Harcomone murdered a little girl), and there is a lot of unhealthy relationships and suffering between these men, but the thing, the knife that wounded me, was just how tragic Genet's tale is.

He writes of his childhood at Mettray, that reform jail, of the colony of lost boys, of his days, nights, the landscape, the scents, sounds, his fears, desires, the cruel games the older boys played, the hierarchy, the whole made-up world they had to create to survive and how complex and profound that whole experience was... and it reminded me of my own visits to the place, the street, where I grew up. Everything seems so far away and though there is so much hurt there, the children we once were are lost in those streets.

Genet is the definition of Nostalgia, remembering pain.

But that's all there is for him to remember and he elevates that pain to another plane, lighting with heartbreaking prose, dressing it in the finest garments, tending to delicately as one would care for a rose bush... Then everything is revealed. Even in pain, anger, violence and revenge, children are always innocent.

That is the miracle of the rose.

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### **Kathryn Jacoby says**

Not my cup of my tea at all. In fact, I mostly loathed it. Still, I appreciated it for challenging me and presenting me with subject matter and a moral code so distant from my bourgeois reality.

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### **Jeffrey says**

I don't know whether this book is beautiful or hideous, much less whether I like it. It took me a long time to finish, despite its moderate length. The criminal turned literary savior (?) Jean Genet writes in a prose style that is both highly lyrical and highly lurid about his life in prison and childhood in a penal colony. The disjunct, plotless, self-contradictory narrative bears witness (without any irony whatsoever) to an extreme moral-aesthetic worldview that turns our notions of good and evil upside-down.

As I said, I'm not sure whether I like this book, but I think it is important to read and access because his dark sensibility is just simply too real and too pertinent--and perhaps most dangerously, too beautiful--for us not to know.

"I am the sentinel at the gate of the sleep of others, whose master I am. I am the spirit that hovers above the shapeless mass of dream. The time I spend there pertains to the time that flows in the eyes of dogs or in the movements of any insect. We have almost ceased to be in the world." - *Miracle of the Rose*, Jean Genet, trans. Bernard Frechtman

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### **Tyler Proctor says**

Genet writes beautifully?, poetically, even tenderly about disgusting things most people would rather not think about going on in the world, and I like that.

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### **Rachel says**

I've really deliberated over the rating for this book. It was such a struggle to get through, and I'm unsure as to whether I liked it or not even now. It's a dry, grinding, confusing read, but not without gems, and I did ultimately find reward in persevering and finishing it. For me most of what was illuminating and worthwhile in this book came from insight it offered in being a recommendation of Richey Edwards'. That's not to say there is nothing here for non-Richey fans, but my fandom made me approach from a different perspective and so see things in another way and pick up on other things that might mean nothing to a more neutral reader. You can say similarly of any two people approaching the same book, I suppose, but what I mean is that the perspective was not my own and coloured every part of my reading like another narrative running alongside. For that, this book was captivating, but on its own merit - which is what I am trying to rate it on - it was not. By the same logic, I wouldn't want to read it again for itself - but to draw out more of Richey's intent, I would, and gladly. In many, if not all, ways this is not an average book, but I can't bring myself to

give it more than three stars.

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### **D.S. Mattison says**

This is Genet's song about the vicissitudes of prison life. The mystical language enshrouds an otherwise straightforward, linear narrative. Every prison movie I've watched comes to the surface of my imagination. The inside voice of Genet articulates the scenes I have viewed henceforth superficially. The men covetous of their "chicken." The grim, hot, young thin man (Bulkaen) who seems straight because he won't give our author the time of day, is really just someone else's bitch. In fact he's the biggest cocksucker in the whole place. Nautical language and metaphor is almost as prevalent as religious symbolism. A ship at sea: we can easily see the connection. Escape is futile and the crew is raucous. Beware the captain. Obedience out of decorum, not logic.

This text forces us to examine Western ethical religious structure. Prisoners inside monastic enclosures: Martin of Tours and the desert fathers come to mind. The homosexually and kleptomaniacally charged writings of Genet are the unspoken words of the clergy.

But we shouldn't go too far. Genet, like many Christian monastics, is consumed by his own song and the ringing in his ears. Glorification of the condemned life culminating in a so called ecstasy. Perhaps a dangerous text for teenagers. Nevertheless, a quick and exciting read for an intellectually developed adult.

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### **Jonathan Frederick Walz says**

Strange, in a mystical kind of way...

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### **Inderjit Sanghera says**

Genet is like an alchemist, he is able to transform jail life into a kind of dream like atmosphere, the prose pulsates with poetry as he describes his time in jail, the unique sexual relationships and status quo of the "big shots", "chickens" and "queers" who populate prison life. Murderers become poets, instead of writing poetry with pen and paper their crimes and violence are transformed into acts of love, into works of art which Genet transcribes for us; violence becomes an act of love between two men as Genet, in his own inimitable style describes the sexual dynamics in a world populated by crude and violent men. Perhaps Genet's fantastical renderings of prison life were his way of coping with the violence and degradation of prison, perhaps his explaining the disgusting crimes of violence men in poetic terms leaves a sour taste in your mouth, but there is no escaping the vibrancy of his imagination and brilliance of his prose style.

"In order to escape, what was required, in addition to help from the outside, which Haracamone had never had never been able to arrange for, because he was as dull in free life as he was dazzling in prison(allow me to say a word about his brilliance, I would like to compare hardened convicts to actors-and even to the characters they impersonate-who in order to reach the highest pitch, require the freedom provided by the stage and by it's fabulous lighting, or the situation, which is outside the physical world, of Racine's princes"

"We had just been married in the presence of family B....that night was the loveliest of my life...the faster we went the lighter grew the moment, the faster our hearts beat and our veins swelled with hydrogen. Over-

excitement generates magic. At night, we were light-footed. During the day we moved in a torpor due to the fact that our acts were performed reluctantly. They belonged to the indefiniteness of dreams which produces suns, dawns, dews, breezes, a flower, things which indifferent because they are ornaments of the other world, and through them we felt the existence of your world and its remoteness."

"My head is spinning. I'm pitching with dizziness. I have just written the word 'chestnut trees'. The yard of the colony was planted with them. They bloomed in the spring. The flowers covered the ground and we walked on them, we fell on them, they fell on us, our caps and our shoulders. These April chestnuts were bridal and chestnut blossoms have just bloomed in my eyes."

"I have been wanting to see Mettray again in the autumn, and I conjure it up here, alone in my cell, with words that carry me away. I have been wanting to make a pilgrimage to it, in thought, with Pierrot, and make love to him in a hedge of laurels with wet mist, on the damp moss and leaves. We walk up the avenue of chestnut trees with the grave pace of the bishop when he came to visit us."

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### **Grace Kary says**

Genet changed my view of what was possible in terms of language and construction in a novel - even more than Robbe-Grille. It's simply breath-taking in scope in terms of flexibility of structure, poetic license, absolute reality to Genet is the limitless playground of his imagination. His reality is so difficult to negotiate at times I became dizzy reading. One of my top five books of all time, despite the show stopping observation he makes within: "women are born whores". I read and reread it. And then I understood it. And then it inspired me to make a piece about the subjugation of women in society - and how their survival depending on their sexual currency. For so many centuries this has been the status allocated to most women. Genet is the purest of passion and idealism meeting a guillotine. The settings in the juvenile detention centres and prisons and the life of silence he portrays in these rough holes become religious in his telling.

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### **Margareth8537 says**

Another one who doesn't know how to rate this book. Can't say I enjoyed it, but found his writing fascinating

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### **Ben Robinson says**

Took me a while to get through *Miracle of the Rose*, not that it isn't brilliant (it really is), but rather because its poetic density, combined with a resolutely non-linear narrative, means this story takes a fair bit of unpacking. It's a memoir of Genet's romantic escapades in Mettray and Fontevault prisons with all of their rituals, codes and ceremonies among the inmates. One of their number is the child murderer Harcamone, who's condemned to death and becomes the subject of this novel's more rococo prose. Within these pages crime is beauty, and ugliness is beauty at rest.

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## **Jonfaith says**

The miasma of history readily befuddles me. It leaves me stranded and confused. That said, sometime in the last century a friend told me something. In her words, I needed to get rid of those gay books and listen to Eminem. Not usually falling prey to suggestions for life changing elements, I did in this case. I listened to the hip hop artist's first two albums a number of times. I don't like hip hop, but i am from Detroit. I wasn't excited by the music. I couldn't tell if it all was a marketing ploy to snare the angst of the alienated: a meaner grundle with intent to straddle the racial divide. Most of all, I felt really sad for Mr. Mathers. Giving expression to such ideas of revenge has to stem from an unpleasant place. So I gather in my amateur analysis. There are signs of damage.

Such was largely my response to the *Miracle of the Rose*. The accounts drift into dreams and what emerges is bruised and ugly, despite the images of flowers, birds and birth. The novel was painful to absorb. I felt myself unable to find purchase. I kept slipping in the misery of abuse and betrayal. Genet's need to for acceptance in the "womb" of the institution and prison proved difficult to bear. I quickly admit that it was relief to finish the book.

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## **Jim Johnson says**

I've owned this book since the late 60's, but have only recently gotten around to reading it. I knew it was a classic French text written by a famous author, but that it was also considered a counter-cultural work by an author who existed in the shadows somehow. Now I understand why. It is a personal memoir by a writer who was on one level an incorrigible thief and who had been in incarcerated in both a boys' reform school (Mettray) and later a prison for adults (Fontevrault); on the other level, he was a brilliant poet who tended to describe his life and his prison surroundings in metaphoric terms. This later is what, in my opinion, made his book fascinating for me as a reader.

In his memoir, he focuses primarily on his experiences in Mettray and on his relationships with other prisoners. He analyzes the prison society, with its "class" differences between the older, tougher types and the younger, weaker sort, who were dominated by the former group. He has various slang terms for both types: the big shots and pimps vs. the chicks and kids, for example. The prison guards and officials were seen merely a part of the larger prison environment of rules and regulations that all prisoners had to conform to; but what really mattered to Genet was the society of the young prisoners themselves.

The author's primary fascination is with two of his fellow prisoners at Mettray: Bulkaen and Harcamone. The former was a beautiful boy with whom the author fell in love; their off-and-on love affair ended with Bulkaen's premature death. Harcamone, however, was represented by the rose, with which the poet was entranced. Harcamone as a 16-year old, in an act of thoughtless youthful passion, had strangled a younger girl who resisted him at one point in their lovemaking; fifteen years later at Fontevrault, he killed a guard and was condemned to be executed. Genet idolized Harcamone and waxed poetic in his depiction of this handsome and stoic "hero." For Genet, Bulkaen was the "finger of God," whereas Harcamone was "God." Indeed, the author effectively turned contemporary cultural values upside/down in his most positive rendition of this young murderer, whom the other prisoners also respected highly and saw as a kind of ideal prisoner. In his depiction of Harcamone's execution, Genet suggests that it was an impersonal and cruel world that deprived this glorious young man of his life. The last twenty pages of this text are spell-binding. From a



wider perspective, this work connects with the art and writing of the Surrealists who thrived in the early twentieth century.

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## **Tijana says**

Ponavljani dijalog poslednjih dana:

- E! Šta to ?itaš?

- Gej seks u zatvoru, znaš kako je mo?no!

- ...

Ok, to je istovremeno ta?no i nepravedno, kao kad sam na to pitanje odgovarala sa "nešto o teniserima" a knjiga u pitanju bila Infinite Jest. Ali baš mi je teško da pružim neki tako lakonski odgovor koji bi ta?no objasnio zašto me Žene toliko fascinira još od prvog ?itanja Kerela - pa tako je... tako... ne znam, uzmi da pro?itaš. Žene otkriva kako se konstruiše identitet? da. Žene piše o suštini žudnje? i to. I o tome kako se seksualnost "izvodi" kao predstava? da, da. I spaja lirizam koji ide do ki?asto preoptere?enog cvetnog stila sa najstrašnijom naturalisti?kom brutalnoš?u u opisima robijaša, nasilja i seksa? E, to, da. E, al pitajte me da li je seksi i odbojno u isti mah, to me niste pitali. *Jeste*.

Niko nikad nije ovako pisao o seksu i požudi i idealizaciji željenog objekta i na?inu na koji se najsitniji gest (objekta jelte) promišlja i razlaže i barokno ukrašava i niko nije baš ovoliko i ovako bio u stanju da zgadi i oduševi ?itaoca, n-i-k-o.

Nije ovo lektira za ?itanje na kilo, ja sam eto (kao i prošli i pretprošli put sa tako nekim pauzicama od po pet-šest godina) planirala da pro?itam tri Ženea u cugu, ali mi je i jedan ispao dovoljan. Sve uz usklrike: ovo je gadno! ovo fascinira! ovo je strava! e a ovo ipak malo prevršava svaku meru!

(šta radnja? nema radnje. reminiscencije na popravni dom, zatvor, gej seks. e da, i lirska platonsko-neplatonsko erotska fascinacija osu?enikom na smrt koja prelazi u nadrealne vizije.)

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## **Andrew says**

Genet seems really trendy, but regardless, this is a pretty impressive book. Confessional without being whiny, fabulist without being unbelievable, and nonlinear without being unstructured, Genet turns the brutalities of prison prostitution and gang violence into something beautiful and poignant. While I find myself often irked at that very French tendency to worship rogue figures, I still find this rogue so fucking vulnerable that I can't help but be sucked in.

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## **Richard Kramer says**

To get myself ready for this I read Edmund White's 600 page bio of Genet, which was so interesting I didn't want it to end, and had a quality I haven't applied to a book in about fifty years: it was HARD! But I got through.

And now I have read 94\$ of THE MIRACLE OF THE ROSE (in an actual text; the percentage is a guess.) I was sailing along, and then today (half an hour ago) I realized: this is one of the greatest books I've ever read, and if I don't put it down, at least for the next few days, I am going to turn into Genet himself. This book is like a prison that he draws you into, and as he does you are compelled to live in the skin of his poetry, his genius, his other-worldliness, his sense of dislocation, his fever-dreams, his baroque erotic fantasies, his hopelessness, his exaltation ... Oi vey! I remember a scene in CRIMES AND

MISDEMEANORS, where Woody Allen asks his father why there was a Hitler, and the father says "Why was there a Hitler? How the hell should I know? I don't know how the can opener works!" This book made me briefly forget that I am an aging simpleton and turned me into a doomed Genet angel -- and I had to step back. I had to remember that I had the key to get out, and that key meant putting the book down. I have felt high and low for a few days and it is this book that did it to me. It is an unsafe and unforgettable experience. Read at your peril. Peril like this is what poetry provides. And how many books can you say that about?

(By the way -- the translation, done in the early 50's, is pretty terrible, filled with dated slang terms that throw you out of the text.)

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## Arthur Lgx says

Si un roman m'a donné du fil à retordre, cette année, c'est celui-ci. L'écriture est extrêmement complexe, le style profondément atypique et original, et la trame narrative se déroule par à-coups, avec de multiples anticipations et remémorations. Petit à petit, cela dit, si le lecteur daigne s'accrocher à son livre et, patiemment, méthodiquement, en déplier les plis et les replis, s'y enfoncer de plus en plus profondément, la lumière se fait. D'abord, parce qu'on commence à débrouiller l'usage constant du vocabulaire carcéral et à identifier les principaux protagonistes ainsi que les principales plages temporelles où se situent les grandes étapes du récit. Ensuite parce qu'on se familiarise avec le style et que, progressivement, la beauté de la poésie – poésie travaillée en profondeur par le fantasme, c'est le moins que l'on puisse dire –, l'ampleur du travail et le caractère finalement éclatant de l'œuvre finissent par apparaître. C'est sur ces derniers points qu'il convient d'insister, parce que c'est là, à ce qu'il me semble, que réside l'intérêt majeur de l'ouvrage. Genet raconte sa vie et son adolescence en prison – à Mettray et à Fontevault – : c'est donc d'un récit d'inspiration autobiographique qu'il s'agit. Mais le point essentiel, le « miracle de la rose », c'est la manière dont il transfigure – presque au sens religieux – la réalité qui l'entoure pour la revêtir d'un caractère merveilleux et fantasmatique. Dire qu'il transfigure la réalité, d'ailleurs, relève déjà d'une interprétation ultérieure : lui-même ne fait de différence entre la réalité de sa vie en prison et le caractère presque onirique de son récit que lorsqu'il parle du processus d'écriture. Au niveau du texte lui-même, il n'y a pas lieu d'établir cette distinction et, sans cesse, la réalité est traversée de poésie, de fantasmes libidinaux, de rêves. D'une manière générale, cela se manifeste par de multiples passages lors desquels le fantasme prend l'avantage sur le réel, lors desquels la métaphore prend chair. Cela, Jean Genet en propose même la théorisation :

« le désespoir vous fait sortir de vous-même (je pèse mes mots). Il était si profond que, pour vivre (continuer à vivre était la grande affaire), mon imagination d'abord, la première, m'organisa un refuge dans ma chute même, et me créa une vie très belle. L'imagination allant vite, cela se fit rapidement. Elle m'entoura d'une foule d'aventures destinées peut-être à adoucir ma rencontre avec le fond de ce précipice – car je croyais qu'il y avait un fond, mais le désespoir n'en a pas – et, au fur et à mesure que je tombais, la vitesse de chute accélérât mon activité cérébrale, mon imagination inlassable tissait. Elle tissait d'autres aventures et de nouvelles encore, et toujours plus vite. Enfin emportées, exaltée par la violence, il me parut à plusieurs reprises qu'elle n'était plus l'imagination mais une autre faculté, plus haute, une faculté salvatrice. Toutes les aventures inventées et splendides, de plus en plus prenaient une sorte de consistance dans le monde physique. Elles appartenaient au monde de la matière, pas ici toutefois, mais je pressentais qu'elles existaient quelque part. Ce n'est pas moi qui les vivais. Elles vivaient ailleurs et sans moi. » (P. 248)

On le voit ici, s'il s'agit bien d'une sorte d'imagination, la trame et le contenu de celle-ci finissent par lui échapper, et ce dont il va être question, pour Genet, ce ne sera pas de rêver le monde carcéral, de sublimer les histoires sordides de ses amitiés et de ses amours, mais de percevoir le merveilleux, le fantasmatique au sein de ce même monde et de ces mêmes histoires. Jean Genet ne fait pas de la poésie « à vide » : il s'acharne et

s'évertue à percevoir et à retranscrire le caractère intrinsèquement poétique de sa réalité. D'où l'idée d'un effort extrême de l'attention : « il me fallait tendre toute mon attention pour percevoir très haut ou très loin en moi, puisque je les distinguais à peine, les dessins, le diagramme qu'y inscrivaient les vibrations suscitées par les gestes humains, par les actes sur terre d'Harcamone. » (P. 269). Il y a là une différence de taille, et les bases d'une théorisation de la création littéraire – ainsi que d'une analyse littéraire de la psychose, sans doute – pour laquelle l'auteur devrait cultiver quelque chose comme une perception de l'invisible, une sensibilité à ce qui ne se montre pas, à cette pesanteur dramatique ou symbolique qui habite chacune de nos actions. Dans le roman, cette création littéraire, pour ainsi dire miraculeuse, est représentée par la rose – figure allégorique qui traverse l'ensemble du roman. La rose, c'est justement cette beauté, ce caractère sacré, divin – il n'a pas peur du mot – qu'il rencontre au cœur de la cruauté des détenus, de la dureté et du caractère sordide de sa vie de prisonnier ; la rose, c'est le bonheur qu'il fait naître du plus profond de son malheur. On notera qu'il reçoit la rose de la chaîne même d'Harcamone, le plus accablé de tous les détenus, celui à qui l'on va bientôt prendre la vie : c'est cet accablement même fait le fond de son caractère mythique et qui cause le fantasme continu qu'entretient Genet pour lui. Ce qui intéresse ce dernier, c'est la manière dont sa condamnation à mort sacre Harcamone, le coupe des autres détenu, l'élève au-dessus de la foule, le rend inatteignable, en fait une figure pour ainsi dire mythique, sainte. On retrouve ainsi souvent l'idée – provocatrice à certains égards – que sans la cruauté, sans la laideur, il n'y aurait nulle beauté, nulle joie : « Enfin, je crois que la joie de ces enfants était d'ordre bachique, une espèce d'ivresse causée par certaines cruautés si fortes que cette joie ne pouvait s'exprimer que par un rire rauque mais musical, aussi, et s'ils souriaient parfois, c'est qu'ils ne savaient – et n'y songeaient – se refuser à cette joie tourbillonnante, musicale, qui enveloppe toute tragédie de haute qualité. Mais leur rire était sombre. Les fleurs sont la gaieté et certaines sont la tristesse faite fleur. » (P. 306).

Ou encore :

« Ainsi mon plaisir quand j'appris le meurtre de cet enfant de quinze ans par le soldat allemand me fut causé par le seul bonheur de cette audace qui osait, en massacrant la chair délicate des adolescents, détruire une beauté visible et établie pour obtenir une beauté – ou poésie – résultat de la rencontre de cette beauté brisée avec ce geste barbare. » (P. 341).

La beauté de son récit s'enracine donc, à ses yeux, dans le caractère malheureux de sa vie : « Il n'est pas étonnant que la plus misérable des vies humaines s'écrive avec des mots trop beaux. La magnificence de mon récit naît naturellement (...) des pitoyables moments de toute ma vie. » (P. 356). Le lecteur peut donc savourer, sans cesse, la sombre identité de l'horreur et de la beauté, le tout sans cesse mêlé aux récits des amours homosexuels que l'auteur/narrateur/personnage entretient avec de multiples personnages. Le ressort poétique et métaphorique est donc pour une bonne partie traversé de fantasmes sexuels d'où Genet fait naître une beauté, une magnificence insoupçonnée. Soit l'exemple de ce passage où Harcamone se trouve une fois encore déifié et symbolisé par Genet, où se mêlent l'allégorie et la métaphore au fantasme, et où réapparaît la figure de la rose :

« Si j'ai rêvé d'une queue, ce fut toujours de celle d'Harcamone, invisible à la Colonie, dans son pantalon de treillis blanc. Or, cette queue, je l'appris plus tard par une de ces indiscretions dont sont coutumiers les voyous, elle n'existait pas. La queue se confondait avec Harcamone ; ne souriant jamais, il était lui-même la verge sévère, d'un mâle d'une force et d'une beauté surnaturelle. Je mis longtemps à savoir de qui. La vérité, c'est qu'Harcamone appartenait à un prince-forban qui avait entendu parler de nous. De sa galère, entre ses gueux cuivrés, c'est-à-dire, aussi, couverts d'ornements de cuivre, voguant et bandant loin d'ici, il nous avait envoyé son sexe superbe, aussi mal dissimulé sous les traits d'un jeune maçon que pouvait l'être l'assassin lui-même sous les traits d'une rose. » (P. 228).

On a donc là un livre des plus intéressants, non seulement de par ce travail de la littérature à même le contenu et la trame narrative du roman, de par cette indistinction du réel et du rêve – le rêve final concernant Harcamone, d'ailleurs, est extrêmement intéressant : s'y mêle tout le sens de la construction symbolique esquissée par Genet –, mais également du fait de la poésie inhérente au texte et de la grande qualité du style. Celui-ci est clairement très original et peut même paraître, au début, assez déroutant, mais il vaut décidément

le détour. C'est donc une lecture à laquelle il convient de s'accrocher, qui est étonnante d'un bout à l'autre – et cela seul, déjà, n'a pas de prix – et qui révèle une richesse proprement abyssale.

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## **Mariel says**

*Ugliness is beauty at rest.*

My friend told me that the reason that I dislike memoirs is because I expect them to be true. Well, this is kind of true and kind of not. That's how I like my truths, with enough shedding snake skins under belly on the way to something else.

Pardon me if I talk about a couple of other books for a bit of background knowledge on the Mariel take on memoirs. The Executioner's Song by Norman Mailer is not strictly a memoir but the restrictions on what information was allowed was totally memoir. Someone was looking out for themselves or someone else with an agenda for the sake of looking good, etc. (The shades of who was prone to this and when they shook it off like a wet dog is endlessly fascinating to me but you can just read my review of that book if you want to read about that.) Quite a bit of the information imparted was misleading, or a downright lie. For example, Gary Gilmore refused any such thing about what an abusive nutjob his mama was. Homosexual love, the real reason for blowing his first stab at freedom in eighteen years, his baby- there's plenty to go around that is nowhere to be found unless you read brother Mikal Gilmore's memoir Shot in the Heart. It doesn't matter. Mikal Gilmore had the facts but I knew it all anyway because The Executioner's Song was written in a way that I could just know that they were lying. It is pretty amazing to me how much I was able to get without the information because of what information I did have. I could read those people in a way that I wish I could get in every book. Everyone can lie through their teeth for all I care. Mikal would never get the need for self destruction. He doesn't live on the edge of the precipice. He doesn't stare at the void and play chicken (and always, always lose). Not that his book isn't good because it is. Still, he had an agenda of "knowing his family" when it was more like trying to be there after the fact when it will always be too late. There's a way of getting to be there for these real life events that isn't really about the truth of the events, I guess is what I'm trying to say. Maybe I was too hard on that Mohamed Choukri book but it would have meant a lot more to me to be able to see in his work that the other prostitutes suffered as much as he did (I KNOW they did). Memoirists, no life is only about one person. Yeah, it is interesting when you can tell when they are lying to themselves. What is the point if you can't get inside? It is time of my own life I am giving them so I don't think I am asking too much here.

Jean Genet is a liar. These lies are packed in ships inside bottles and they reach me with prison lingo I know without doing the time (these poor young men are always prematurely ejaculating over the wrong prison lingo). I wouldn't last a day without all of these lies. I have read these lies before in his memoir The Thief's Journal and in his novels Our Lady of the Flowers and Querelle. It isn't enough to see beauty on another's face if you stay in the dark. They love me too. I can see through them, they probably don't, and yes he addresses an unknown reader from such false pretenses that is enormously frustrating to me. If he has me this wrong what about them? I can get inside and it is almost enough when I can cast aside to get what it is I really need. I'm not judging the prisoners and their this building has the capacity to maintain the persons of some such number courtesy of the local health inspector. You are gay, and you are not gay because society cast you off and it is a way to wallow in that. I don't care if someone is a criminal and my grammar is much worse than yours (besides, Genet, you critique the love letters of your so-called boyfriend and that's a fact!).

Genet's obsequiousness is painful for me to read. His cupid perches below the clouds of some number that's

not seventh heaven or nine or sixty nine. Let my tears run down your Christ like plate glass window! I'm conflicted here. I turned tail and ran back into Genet's outstretched arms for some not socially acceptable malaise. He's not the cool kind of ennui that David Foster Wallace so aptly described in Infinite Jest. The kind that will not impose on others. The world is hard and you don't break before it, only crack enough to take it in. Genet takes the mallet up to his own face. It will not ask you to acknowledge the way it ties the room together. He pees on the rug. I'm okay with that I can't even pretend to have that kind because it is better than being found out. It is a fear of mine to be taken for something more palatable than I really am and then have the rich rug yanked out under me when it is discovered that the rug was purchased off the back of a truck. Or I am lying to myself because it was hurting me that Genet prostrates himself at their broken strings and wood. Please don't do that! I see you as beautiful and ugly. Not ever at rest. The moving is better to me than lies.

*But along with the sweet feeling of being free from grim pride, I gradually became aware of the unambiguous and disturbing thought that I had taken the first step which leads to begging, to flabby attitudes- which is a very strong, very virile thug can allow himself because he knows will quickly regain his rigor- and as soon as I let myself put on the slightest act in order to get or be given something, the soul of a beggar was born to me, and it was bound to be fed and fattened by a host of petty capitulations.*

Oh no! It is killing me if he ever got enough to eat.

*His raised head and curled upper lip must have been kissing or receiving the kiss of a transparent being that hung from the sky by its bare feet.*

I want to get off his knees in his prayer. I keep thinking about the writing style of The Beatles. I remember reading George Harrison talking about how he learned to write by going off by himself and that was the way it was always going to be. John and Paul were already so good, and they weren't so gentle over his fledgling efforts. He wished he could write with someone else but the way he took them inside was damage done. I think about this image of young Paul and John in their little attic bedroom facing each other and poring over their pour outs. I feel a pang envy that I cannot stop. No amount of telling myself it is there will not stop it. Not even an entire memoir. Something about Jean Genet makes me think about if you were living your whole life like you were George Harrison and you had to go walk off to be by yourself somewhere all of the time. Please get off your knees!

I somehow forget some parts in my readings. I missed the way that he can see beauty in the ugly. I missed that so much that I didn't remember how much shit you have to wade through to get to it. He's honest about what a manipulative little bitch he is. He snitches on his friends so they'll get sent up to the colony with him. (What kind of a boyfriend does that?!) He wants something from the men he loves. Of course, I've read a lot of "greatest love of his life". My bullshit detector never stops going off. It's like the remembrall that Neville Longbottom has in the Harry Potter series. It will pop its own fucking head off if that perpetually forgetful kid forgets anything. It's all a lie and it could be true, you know? These colonists of Mettray could be brothers. Jean Genet is entirely too fixated on roles. Pimps, thugs, crashers, brothers, boyfriends, you, him, ugly, beautiful. I need to cut through the shit now.

*It seems to you impossible that I dare ascribe to a petty thief the act of building his life minute by minute, witnessing its construction, which is also a progressive destruction. Only a rigorously trained mind seems to you capable of that.*

Okay, so maybe I expect memoirs to be true and this is brick by brick by mortar by stone by blood by sweat by tears. The prisoners act out their lies in a stage play that doesn't change actors even when it changes men.

Young men who give themselves to ugly old men, the pimps, discarding their foreskins when they are fucked enough times into the hard men of the pimps. Memory amputates their cocks that moved them and they are the magnet for future poles. They are a take and take void. Was it ever truly mutual?

*The ladder was the murderer's wings. He would sometimes stop in his tracks and, with his chest arched and one leg stretched behind him, would turn his head sharply to the left, then to the right, cock one ear, then the other. He was a doe that stops to listen. Joan of Arc must have done likewise to hear her voices. When he murdered the girl, he came so close to death- perhaps to us by going through storms, by escaping from shipwrecks- that at the age of eighteen he regarded the life he continued to live as if it were a postscript.*

I can see the slaves, envision the unforgiving will on the lips of the masters and I would not have trouble imagining on my own those signs that are objects and omens. Bookends of tomorrow and yesterday. It is a lie that the bone hard skulls and penises have Jean Genet's memory. Maybe the voices that are always strangled or a whisper are asking for something else than to rape you. Maybe they starve for something else. Maybe Lennon and Paul are not writing together with heads bent into each other's crotches. Maybe there was never any closeness ever. Maybe George was all there was ever going to be.

Nah, I reread my old review of Querelle when I put it back on goodreads and I got the whole stampede thing exactly right. Jean Genet is a horse, he's horse meat, dog food, horsemen and running and stepping on and prey animal. I did get that right. The horseman astride is all over Miracle of the Rose. Maybe I'm not misreading all of the reins under the cloud? Maybe he's not either. I want to believe in that ugly beauty really bad, anyway. I like lies too!

But for fuck's sake, Genet, get off your goddamned knees. Take the kiss on the stairwell.

Oh yeah, there's way more in this book. But I talked about all of that in my reviews of his other books. If you read Genet you are going to get the same obsessions. I think one gnawing voice in the dark tends to take charge of the pack in each of the books I've read. Sometimes it is the pleading and sometimes it is a gasp. Sometimes what is enough isn't. The mistrust of anything good is The Thief's Journal like a fuck you before you can say fuck off to me. The timelessness of that bad moment that you make to damn it all to hell is Querelle. The romance that I can't satisfactorily describe to myself is Our Lady of the Flowers. I don't get romance. I have a lot of love that is going to be discovered by cockroaches after the apocalypse. You know, the Jean Genet kind like he thinks it's not good enough for anything else. Scurries in the light and scrounging antenna. Don't be like that, Jean! I still really think it's beautiful the way he could ask for that kiss on any dark stairwell in any prison. This love's going nowhere. How do you memoir that? In loving memory of.

I still have it on the tip of my tongue why I think of him as romance. Maybe it's just the asking. (And he didn't ask for himself and that's why I can't let go for these reviews. I guess I like vulnerable ear worm poetry.)

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