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T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats:* O.P.'s Tabby-Case of Modernist Tongue-in-Cheek

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T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* has attracted little critical attention among Eliot scholars. Critics at best briefly salute the book as recreational or circumstantial, possibly with a touch of nonsense to it. The poems are also considered to be a children's classic, but experts in that field have not paid much critical attention to them. There is furthermore no evidence of any telling mentions of the book in Eliot's letters and critical writings. The great success of the book's stage adaptation as the musical *Cats*[1] could have taken part of the attention away from the book, and contributed to eclipsing the original poems as well. The resulting critical neglect confines the poems to the margins of Eliot's works, on the subgeneric side of minor "cats' poems," as Stephen Spender humorously termed them, in one of the rare reviews that greeted the publication of the book, still fresh out of the Faber & Faber press, in October 1939.[2] For all that critical neglect, *OPBPC*[3] has yet never run out of print—certainly for the greatest pleasure and fun of readers of all ages, a matter of climacteric concern to middle-aged T.S. Eliot at the time of the book's composition.[4] This could be part of the "practical" aspect of the book: addressing an ageless spectrum of readers, or again standing on the inclusive side of an extensive "practical joke," or still revisiting any such dichotomies, especially when literary criticism establishes them, in abstract terms, along a dividing line between "major" and "minor" works. Now the appeal of *OPBPC* could contrastingly reside in its extensive inclusiveness, making always more room for more besides: room for "practical" cats that are "not quite" the cats we expect, room for tabby-cats of all extractions, room for half-fish half-fowl mongrels—plus one possum—within the exclusive world of English pedigree pets. This is also the way the poems revisit such questions as tradition, ethnic origin, national bias and living space, international and domestic, within the context of rising nationalisms across Europe, in the late 1930s.

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[1] Music composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber. First performed in London in 1981. *Cats* is among the longest-running musicals in the West End and Broadway.
[2] Stephen Spender. *The Listener* (October 1939).
<http://gale.cengage.co.uk/product-highlights/history/the-listener-historical-archive.aspx>
[3] Please read *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.
[4] Written in 1936, midway through a climacteric decade in Eliot's life, career, and works, *OPBPC* is composed in the immediate aftermath of Eliot's *Ariel Poems*, and against the background of Eliot's figurations of a "Pericles syndrome" in poems like "Marina," weaving figurative patterns of absence and loss, possibly as part of the grieving process that attends ageing. See Hart's "T.S. Eliot's Autobiographical Cats." See also Worthen's *T.S. Eliot. A Short Biography*. 216-223.

The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1931-32)[5] provides critical material in that regard, though in the way of dogs, which T.S. Eliot likens to unsophisticated readers. As also shown in "The Pekes and the Pollicles"—the only dogs' poem in *OPBPC*—, dogs are brainless street brawlers. However proud they are of their origin, they are portrayed as dim wits, forgetful of the very origin of the brawls they start,[6] and finally as curs, barking each other out of the little wit they started with. Dogs with Eliot stand for the rabble, all too readily involved in public demonstrations of anger.[7] Such demonstrations recall crowd scenes from Shakespeare,[8] but also mass meetings and rallies in the London or Berlin of the 1930s.[9] And if any sense is to come out of all that dogs' madness, it is by stealth and chance, preferably to strife and war; it is by acting like "practical cats," or again like feline "burglars," "baiting" the "housedog" away, with a bit of "nice meat"—to paraphrase Eliot's essay. The lowbrow image of the "housedog"—read "chauvinistic" and "xenophobic" as well—tells us enough about Eliot's highbrow disregard for all attempts at "lumping" sense into "one piece of meat," whether in poetry or for demagogic reasons. For belonging neither to brood nor breed—let alone blood—, sense combines the alternative terms of what may come as contradictions in its way. To make full sense, sense is preferably paradoxical, belonging with the full/fools' sense of nonsense as well. For being neither quite what it sounds like, nor quite the colour it looks, for being always "a different hue and cry," as the phrase goes, full sense displays mackerel-tabby patterns of streaks, going up and down, left and right, diagonally, across the spectrum: in sum, all ways at a time. The designs surfacing *en route* are rhizomatic, not least in the sense of "roots" extending into "routes"—however far-fetched.

The dynamic on hand certainly revives such notions as origin and tradition, but while making extra room for "practical" extraneity along the way. The book owes much to the nonsense of Lewis Carroll in that regard.[10] In a "practical case" of Carroll's "Wonderland" *vs* Eliot's

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[5] See Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism. Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England*. 144. This essay published in 1933 is based on part of Eliot's 1932-33 Norton Lectures.

[6] The Peke "Is no British Dog, but a Heathen Chinese" (26). "But a terrible din is what Pollicles like, / For your Pollicle Dog is a dour Yorkshire tyke," (32-33). "And the Pugs and the Poms, although most people say / That they do not like fighting, yet once in a way, / They will now and again join to the fray" (4-6).

[7] Dogs are uniformly presented as "friend(s) to men" in T.S. Eliot's works, but to the point of being mimetic with their masters. They thus represent a compromising form of critical blindness, making them scavengers and creatures of the dark, as in these lines from *The Waste Land*: "Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" (74-75).

[8] The climate of street-brawling in "The Pekes and the Pollicles" sounds like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Act I). London is depicted like some Verona riven by feuds, opposing several clans of dogs: "Then the Pugs and the Poms held no longer aloof, / But some from the balcony, some from the roof, / Joined in / To the din / With a / Bark bark bark bark/ Bark bark bark bark/ Until you could hear them all over the Park" (38-45).

[9] Street protests from Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts come to mind. See also Note 51.

[10] See Gilles Deleuze's famous prolegomenon on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books in *Logique du sens*. For instance this passage from "Avant-propos (de Lewis Carroll aux stoïciens), Douzième série, sur le paradoxe" : "Là, le langage atteint à sa plus haute puissance avec la passion du paradoxe. Au-delà du bon sens, les doublets de Lewis Carroll représentent les deux sens à la fois du devenir-fou. D'abord

"Waste Land," both "lands" cannot but overlap, for all their different "natures," *OPBPC*'s witty "tabbiness" reading, in that light, like a minor-key nonsense variation on the drier wit of *The Waste Land* (1922). As in the former grand poem, the kind of sense made in the book may "connect nothing with nothing,"[11] but the variation is in *OPBPC* playing down all manifestations of disconnectedness, in its own witty mode, preferably reflecting the extraneity all round in the way of nonsense. This could best define the minor mode of the poems, especially as their wit pointedly fails to be tragic in any major mode, calling instead for extra leases of sense when all is said and done, or "practically"—"not quite." *OPBPC* is a minor book thereby displaying the major capacity, with a world torn to pieces as backdrop, to fork the ways of sense into contradictions that generations of readers have enjoyed as funny oddities, the poems creating all manners of bonds along the way, while articulating antagonistic terms together to make sense greater—unless it also makes greater sense. Here could reside the "practical certainty" of chance connections, and the circulation of sense involved thereby, as shown crisscrossing in the florid patterns of mackerel-tabby cats' coats—half-fish, half-cat, half-fish, half-fowl, and always more besides. Put into cats' and dogs' terms, pets always having an eye on their bowl, this kind of sense is not to be gulped easily like raw meat. It rather tastes like titbits, preferably served out of the cat's bowl—with "forks" besides! The poems are strange starters in this unexpected way, like the premise of always more "food for thought" on the way—as says the menu in the book's liminal poem, "The Naming of Cats":

> When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
> The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
> His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
> Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
> His ineffable effable
> Effanineffable
> Deep and inscrutable singular Name.
> (25-31)

"What's in a name?" could be the staple question motivating this meditative menu about meaning in a name, origin, identity, and ultimately affiliation, when the streets of Verona or London, Berlin or Paris, are the sites of brawls between factions or clans. And, as with Juliet's rose, which "by any other name would smell as sweet,"[12] names—as any other words, but

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dans *Alice*, le chapelier et le lièvre de Mars : chacun habite dans une direction, mais les deux directions sont inséparables, chacune se subdivise en l'autre, si bien qu'on les retrouve tous deux dans chacune."

[11] "On Margate Sands. / I can connect / Nothing with nothing. / The broken fingernails of dirty hands" (*The Waste Land* 300-303).

[12] See Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the implicit comparison of Romeo to a rose: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet; / So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd, / Retain that dear perfection which he owes / Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name/ And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself" (Act II, scene ii, 43-49).

perhaps more so, whenever animate beings are involved—should not be attached to one sense only, which may prove lethal. This is a lesson addressed to children and adults collectively—"to call no names." And, whatever the scope of this address, it is no doubt intended to preclude any hazardous access to one-lump universals, through haphazard words foddering ideologies. This address in the book is not termed, itself, in the way of some stricture of course, but the point is made in the way of a departure off the course of formulas. Such is the "course" in "practicality", or "mecataphysics," which Old Possum—the narrative voice in the poems—delivers to readers of all ages through *his* book, tongue-in-cheek "baits" and "bites" of "nice meat" being served all along, preferably with forks, pricking in their ironic way(s). Such are again the "starters with forks" from which *OPBPC* tunes, in a minor key, to a number of major-key issues, these indeed forking their ironic way(s) from minor figurative constructs to major "prickly" conceits, in which "effable" stories make "ineffable" progress, on their way to "effanineffable" surprises. These are three stages ("effable," "ineffable," "effanineffable") that "The Naming of Cats," *OPBPC*'s liminal poem, signals, on the threshold of the collection, as narrative and figurative roots/routes ahead, off the beaten tracks of formulas—and they also guide our argument in this paper.

The book is read as "effable" poems, making sense like "fables" to children and adults alike. The poems are part of a literary tradition, typically drawing from stock formulas of the animal fable since Aesop. But "all the world's a stage," and the poems also draw from the theatre. The theatrical "backdrop" in them preferably involves some staging of the Victorian period; their subject matter are (cats') good manners, taking Victorian "affability" as an all round model, but while the poems also reroute all implied circularity, back to "all things Victorian," into some "ineffable" circulation, between ages, of "all senses Victorian"—from biblical times and the teachings of Buddha onwards—or is it backwards? Here and there, and always elsewhere, are the round-and-about modernist routes of Victorian affability, as revisited in *OPBPC*, leaving us in a state of "practical" inebriation, as the poems follow ineffable ways of their own, always past "cross words", but not unlike "crosswords" of a syncretic type, and not without biting inroads either. The poems are didactic *in* this way, but with much nonsense *on* the way. A strong narrative voice conducts the *ensemble*, but while also misconducting it, well to the point of orchestrating a polyphonic book, constantly making a sensitive issue out of sense.[13] This paper finally proposes to formalize the "effanineffable" terms of the issue through a roundup, focusing on the relevance in the book of the principles of "designation," "manifestation" and "signification." These constitute a

[13] This is a constant with Eliot's orchestrated polyphonies since *The Waste Land* (1922). His poems and plays of the 1930s are also polyphonic, notably through the use of ancient choruses. *The Rocks* (1934) is a case in point. See T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. 79-93. In that regard *OPBPC* falls into the main body of Eliot's works of the 1930s: *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) and the earlier versions of "Burnt Norton" (1936) and "East Coker" (1937) from *The Four Quartets* (1943).

threefold proposition, examined by Gilles Deleuze in *Logique du Sens* (*Logic of Sense*), on how sense is produced, notably through nonsense. This theoretical backing should allow us to make overall sense, in our turn, out of some recurring "odd figures" in the book, related as these are to the odd "baits" and "bites" of modernist humour and irony in them: "O.P.'s Tabby-Case of Modernist Tongue-in-Cheek"—our title.

Effable

From Latin *effabilis*, meaning "that can be expressed or described in words," the term "effable" appears early in the collection, in the liminal poem, "The Naming of Cats," alongside two more cognates: "ineffable" and "effanineffable." The term "fable" looks and sounds like an "able" root, producing the three cognates on hand, and no doubt more besides, the poem thereby drawing the attention of the reader, whether young or more mature, consciously or unconsciously, to the prolific workings of "able words," well down far-fetched etymological roots/routes. And why not add "affable" to the list? O.P.[14] puts enough emphasis on the art of "addressing" one's congeners… *OPBPC*'s liminal "Naming of Cats" and its concluding "Ad-dressing of Cats" make quite the pair in that regard, as if providing mecataphysical depth to the collection, both poems sounding profound, like poetic echoes, at each end of the collection, tapping as they do the fundamentals of cats' affability, illustrated elsewhere in the other poems. But the genre of the book proves to be unstable, like a cross between a collection of animal fables, a treatise in cats' taxonomy, a selection of profound poems, a guide on good manners, and a manual too: doesn't the book read/sound like "ad-dressing" beginners starting a course? Hence the hyphenated "ad-dressing," in the last poem's title, looking like an orthoepic clue to the right pronunciation of the word—not to be mumbled through, but to be uttered one syllable at a time, so as to make oneself affably clear to listeners, thereby not taxing their own affable attention too much in return. And, in all good practical sense, the poem moreover sounds like publicity for an engaging book, the title's "ad-dressing," ultimately sounding like a proper "ad-vertisement," as if by courtesy of a decent apocope, affably playing down any attempt at coarse self-promotion.

These are then the so many affable ways, with no doubt more effable yarns besides, in which "The Ad-dressing of Cats" is made to echo like an "able" recap on "The Naming of Cats," and on the so many in-depth lessons in affability that O.P. teaches readers, younger and older, down the route/root:

> You've read of several kinds of Cat,
> And my opinion now is that

[14] Please read Old Possum.

You should need no interpreter
To understand their character. […]
But
How would you ad-dress a Cat?

So first, your memory I'll jog,
Etc.
(1-4; 16-18)

"The Ad-dressing of Cats" makes the reader look back on the book as programmatic and cyclical.[15] It thereby allows readers to test what they remember from the book, whose overall structure stands out as practical for that reason as well. But isn't the idea already at the poem's core? Tautologies in it tell us so: "So this is this, and that is that: / And there's how you AD-DRESS A CAT" (68-69). Such tautologies make the poem and the collection, by association, complete a full "course" round that "core." *OPBPC* happens to be programmatic in this sort of way too, by being reminiscently curricular, and certainly cyclical, looping the loop as to the question of cats. In accordance with all *bona fide* course, this overall formula surfaces programmatically in the book's structure, reaching the standards of all-out neatness. Now does this not make the book "a sum," but also quite "a lump" to swallow as well? The formula certainly partakes of strong moral polarities all round. The tension between good and evil, or again its variation between right and wrong, stands out as compactly paradigmatic in the poems, as indeed is also the case for all formulaic literature, whether fables, or even guides and manuals, or again, unexpectedly enough, even thrillers.[16] This is the one-lump formulaic universality which *OPBPC* shares in, making itself accessible thereby to a whole spectrum of readers, familiar with such formulas. But the book also teaches how the "lump" may make "forks," or again how paradigms call for variations, but more of this later: poems in *OPBPC* do make progress down "ineffable" routes too!

"The Old Gumbie Cat" is a case in point, belonging in the formula, but with so many variations on it. The poem's "polarities" literally take after the day and night cycle in astronomy, and this telling opposition, between day and night, is in due course made to stand "on the right side of the bed," as the phrase goes, i.e. on behalf of sound sleep for the deserving members of an entire household, with no promiscuous manners about them, or practically. And this is a true challenge in matters of housekeeping. It is happily met through round-the-clock shifts. The Old Gumbie Cat—*aka* Jennyanydots—is in charge of the night shift in the house, and she performs her duty all round, with all-out zest and zeal: "But when the day's hustle and bustle is done, / Then the Gumbie Cat's work is hardly begun" (5-6). Through a semantic shift from proper name to function proper, Jennyanydots then acts as

[15] See Garnier for a study of circles, cycles and turns in T.S. Eliot's works.
[16] A "noir" genre which O.P. dabbles in with "Macavity: The Mystery Cat."

the household's "gumbie cat" (no capitals). In that capacity, she certainly burns the candle at both ends, but for the sake of a proper domestic economy only, for it requires a gumbie cat's enlightened caring, well into the night, so the high morals of a household is never ever left a chance to err in the dark:

> She is deeply concerned with the ways of the mice –
> Their behaviour's not good and their manners not nice;
> So when she has got them lined up on the matting,
> She teaches them music, crocheting and tatting.
> (9-12)

Half housekeeper and half governess, half a cat and half a maid of age and experience, and no doubt more besides, Jennyanydots is the ultimate"'house angel."[17] She is wholly dedicated to the household she belongs to. It is in particular through her own application that the creatures of the house's underworld are kept out of mischief over the night, for it makes practical sense to Jenny "[...] the cockroaches just need employment / To prevent them from idle and wanton destroyment" (31-32). So it is Jenny who sees to it that every dweller in the house works for their own betterment, down to its most improper members, well into the night. As the most improper part of the house, the basement—depicted like Dante's *Inferno*—adequately confines the creatures to the lower circles of the house, hiding them from good society, like an eyesore, or again like some domestic *residuum* that good, able Jennyanydots endeavours to control *and* reform, come what may. And how comforting it is to dutiful children seeking sleep "upstairs," when they are told about all that monitoring over the night hours, when vigilance needs reinforcing "downstairs"! "The Old Gumbie Cat" is, by all ways and means, an effable/affable story to be comforted by—besides teaching excellent lessons! A gumbie cat will know how to work such domestic wonders, not least by making things decidedly shift round the clock, to the always "right" side of the "blanket."

Down the route of perfect affability as well, "The Railway Cat" presents a similar case of round-the-clock zeal all round. The poem is the story of Skimbleshanks, the Railway Cat. He is a conductor on the Night Mail from London to Aberdeen. He performs his duty with utmost professionalism, having at heart to protect the Night Mail's passengers in their sleep, well over the border, way up to Gallowsgate—Aberdeen Central. And so does it go with this "northbound"' lullaby-poem, on a *train*—a French word also for "speed"—whose own brisk rhythm takes after the cadence of an engine, in a perfect case of imitative harmony. As Jennyanydots is the perfect epitome of domestic order and propriety, Skimbleshanks

[17] The phrase is repeatedly used about Esther Summerson as Ada's governess and John Jarndyce's housekeeper. See Dickens's *Bleak House*.

performs a similar role equally to perfection—outside the female domestic sphere, that is. Always on the move, up and down the country, Skimbleshanks stands for a male sense of collective direction and communal purpose, to be maintained day in day out, night in night out, north and south of a nation that looks as big as an empire looming up, on both sides of a ghostly Hadrian's Wall.

Ineffable

OPBPC is, as it appears, a well-organized compilation of well-intentioned stories, leaving nothing to chance or promiscuity, for this would be a breach of the affability it purports to inculcate. Here again Jennyanydots is a model all round. We know her to be a great educator of cockroaches. But she is also an expert in crocheting. And, as it happens, the poems present close-knit stories, recalling Jenny's most excellent works: the poems weave together various and sundry narrative and figurative strands that could otherwise run into improper directions. This is as much as to say that the "ineffable" temptation to err is, of(f) course, as strong as the instruction to follow the proper direction. But before reaching such "ineffable" lengths, the Victorian period does provide enough "effable" material for "proper" poems "proper," i.e. in all good taste: the figure of the devoted housekeeper,[18] the leitmotif of the train heading north to God-forsaken places,[19] etc. And Queen Victoria is, in all due respect, regularly mentioned throughout the book,[20] the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, and Empress of India, reigning supreme in the poems, as the most iconic, and ironic as well, of all references.

Beyond mere passing mentions, the poem "Old Deuteronomy" presents a singular case study in that regard, the Queen and the eponymous cat being two tutelary figures, made puzzlingly close to each other. As the poem's title signals, the text harks back to the Old Testament, while also tapping the root of hero-worship enervating a whole nation, in the best Carlylean tradition.[21] But the "old" cat purportedly owes his formidable name, "Old Deuteronomy," to his biblical age—preceding Queen Victoria herself on the symbolic grounds of epoch-making figures and ages! We can read:

> Old Deuteronomy's lived a long time;
> He's a cat who has lived many lives in succession.
> He was famous in proverb and famous in rhyme
> A long time before Queen Victoria's accession. (1-4)

[18] See note 17.
[19] See note 52 for examples of train journeys in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and *No Name*.
[20] See "Old Deuteronomy" (1-4), "Gus: The Theatre Cat" (45-48), "Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer" (3), "Growltiger's Last Stand" (55-56).
[21] See Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*: "

The cat seems to have enjoyed a proverbial reputation since the Books of Deuteronomy and Proverbs, his story having forked its way into minor proverbs and legends, well into apocryphal lay rhymes—up to the present poem. T.S. Eliot as O.P. certainly relishes the thought of a tabby Old Deuteronomy and of the ineffability of such a syncretic figure, beyond his legendary affability—the climacteric hallmark of (an) age. The biblical scheme of reference compounds, in particular, with hints of Old Deuteronomy's many karmic lives. These must account for the old cat's ineffable state of beatific wisdom, close to nirvana, as he lies displaying his affable smile on top of the graveyard's wall, dozing away his remaining earthly lifetime—practically *in* his final resting place already!

The poem's imagery thus unfolds into a tabby-case of figurative wit, both lowbrow and highbrow. And it also includes ineffable strands from Lewis Carroll's mackerel-tabby Cheshire cat, with his equally puzzling smile,[22] and elements of Humpty-Dumpty as well, on account of Deuteronomy's predilection for wall-tops as resting places.[23] The scheme of reference wavers ineffably, from the Bible to Victorian nonsense, or again to Buddhism, the explicit mention of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne being made to "stand out" magisterially, as a climacteric/epochal reference for age, or seniority, but also for an age, or a great era. The Queen is thereby made an absolute figure, round which the whole scheme unspools, past "cross words" between peoples and confessions, and more like "crosswords" of a syncretic turn. And the seasoned reader, well-versed in the practicality of mecataphysics, expects the scheme to reach further significance still, possibly along Cabbalistic routes, for the etymology of "Deuteronomy" is a case of ineffable onomastics: the second (*deuteros*) law (*nomos*). This makes Queen Victoria "practically" embody a New Covenant with God, by association with Old Deuteronomy, her "practical"/"near" consort, the poem thus ascertaining every reference to the Queen in the book (no capital) as iconic markers of the Book's Divine Law and likely ironic pointers to a strong related sense of religious bigotry.

No doubt this Victorian backdrop sustains the moral and didactic streaks of the book as a guide in good manners, or again a practical manual of domestic interest, or still a collection of fables, and so much more besides. The scheme of reference, for all its attempts at taxonomic accuracy and efficacy, is meanwhile ineffably affected, ramifying into a syncretic network, in the way of poetic/poietic conceits. And every inch of the way going of(f) course grows, to aware readers, into qualified nonsense. As in Edward Lear's limericks, the wit of the pieces is circulatory, challenging Victorian proprieties by channelling sense in always alternative directions, as when a root/route makes a fork, or again when "lines" drawn on

[22] See Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Chapters 6 and 8.
[23] See Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (Chapter 6). Old Deuteronomy's perching on his wall and his beatific smile may also recall the Caterpillar. See again Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Chapters 4 and 5).

paper twist and turn, shaping "figures" out of graphic crooks and funny curves—"features" that are typical of Lewis Carroll's "Wonderland" as well. And these are ways which *OPBPC* goes down blithely too, the poems' figurative scope thereby encompassing "all senses Victorian": the Victorians' sense of propriety, sense of duty, sense of purpose, sense of command, sense of morality, their common sense, and no doubt "nonsense" besides. In sum, *OPBPC* follows the way the Victorians had of channelling sense on practical grounds, to keep control over all situations from a preferably moral, didactic standpoint. But the book also stretches this logic to the point of nonsense, tapping some ineffable *bric-a-brac* of "all things Victorian," which the poems let freely outgrow their Victorian "origin," well outside the genres from which they borrow *en route*. The process notably goes through paradoxes, outgrowing all proprieties—proper names included—into quite syncretic networks of alternative routes, all kinds of sense being waylaid in the meantime, for the pleasure of children and adults, enjoying the "forks" along the way, independently of their grip and grasp of the specifics of sense.

Contrasting with the references of good Victorian stock so far considered, the book's recurring mentions of the Victorian stage constitute an intriguing counterpoint though, like a prickly fork, or again a moral stumbling block, owing to the strong stigma attached to acting in Victorian times. *OPBPC* indeed regularly happens to draw from the theatre—from major plays by Shakespeare to minor stage adaptations of Victorian "penny dreadful." And "Gus: The Theatre Cat" is, in matters dramatic and theatrical, quite a typical poem:

> He has acted with Irving, he's acted with Tree.
> And he likes to relate his success on the Halls,
> Where the Gallery once gave him seven cat-calls.
> (16-18)

Gus is introduced as a popular Victorian figure, the archetypical old actor reaching an also climacteric age, after having performed with legendary actors of the period, like Sir Henry Irving, believed to be the iconic inspiration of Bram Stoker's Count Dracula, or Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who was famous for performing in the classics, but also in stage adaptations of Victorian novels, like William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.[24] And the scheme of reference becomes more syncretic still, combining drama and prose fiction and non fiction, when Gus is said to "have sat by the bedside of poor Little Nell" (29), the character from Charles Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop*, which also went through various popular stage adaptations. "All the world's a stage" could be the tabby gist of the resulting figurative construct. But it would not be complete without one last melodramatic touch, so the depiction of that Victorian theatre "backdrop" is made complete: "Then, if someone will give

[24] See Gielgud's *An Actor and His Time*. On Irving, 183-189, 201. On Tree, 184-186, 196, 209.

him a toothful of gin, / He will tell how he once played a part in *East Lynne*" (35-36). Still drawing from the stereotype of the decrepit actor, with hollow teeth but for "a toothful of gin," and with always a gin-soaked yarn to spin about his former successes, the climacteric portrayal of Gus also ironically summons infamous stock images about Victorian London's gaudy gin palaces and lachrymose melodramas like *East Lynne*, a hugely popular Victorian novel by Ellen Wood, but also a minor one of the "penny dreadful" subgenre, which was repeatedly adapted for the popular stage in London from the time of its serialized publication.[25] The poem has by then encompassed a whole spectrum of major and minor references to the Victorian period, well across the most popular subgenres, and their constitutive stereotypes, and well down the most ineffable routes of Victorian affability, "rerouted" as it were into as many ironic inroads into it. The irony down the way goes with the distance that the poems take with all notions of origin, formula, genre and indeed reference—"major" or "minor," and especially Victorian. Poems certainly draw from such "effable" material, but they also compound it, notably through regular switches between "major" and "minor" modes—also read "highbrow" and "lowbrow." Each switch goes "round the bend," qualifying for "nonsense" and the epithet "ineffable." It occurs each time sense takes a figurative "bend" on meeting a "fork," down some modernist route of preferably mock Victorian affability.

The ineffable circulation of sense implied may make a cat dizzy down the line, for the flow belongs with liquids—from gin to tears as yet, but with rum and whisky galore on the way. And all that flow could prove immoderate and dubious, of(f) course. A case in point is the minor partiality that many cats show to alcohol. But their partiality is also a minor pointer to a major loss of balance, off the effable course of a *bona fide* fable. This is as much as to say that sense in *OPBPC* is not assignable to any stable *locus*, but blithely twists and turns in an ineffable state, or gyre, of practical inebriation. One related image that brilliantly makes the point is that of an intoxicating "tug of war" in "The Rum Tum Tugger":

> The Rum Tum Tugger is a terrible bore:
> When you let him in, then he wants you to be out;
> He's always on the wrong side of every door,
> And as soon as he's at home, then he'd like to get about.
> (12-15)

For all the "tugging" the cat is famous for, as his name affably signals, Rum Tum Tugger is certainly the tomcat we expect … or practically, this T*o*m/T*u*m cat, for he is also an ineffable "tugger," be it for all his lowbrow dithering or highbrow procrastination. Like Hamlet, but in

[25] See Wood's *East Lynne*. Popularly known as Mrs Henry Wood, she first published this novel in serialized instalments in *The New Monthly Magazine* between 1860-1861.

a burlesque vein, the cat is torn between practical certainties, between action and inaction. Neither here nor there, he finds himself between two rooms, or in some ineffable metaphysical "lobby,"[26] or again "down the passage that (he) did not take."[27] The Rum Tum Tugger is therefore pulled in every other direction, every other time, in a "tug-of-war" that could topple him to the ground any second—to the same final effect as inebriation indeed, the cat's half-avowed partiality to a little "rum" *to his own name* making his predicament more telling still. Such "practical" inebriation certainly undermines the cat's sense of balance, but also the sense of right and wrong in the poem, which a *bona fide* fable would have conveyed on certainly firmer grounds, making sense no doubt unambiguous, or "practical" in no odd sort of way.

OPBPC provides regular instances of similarly practical inebriation of the sense(s). As with the Rum Tum Tugger—but also Gus, as we have seen—, Skimbleshanks himself happens to indulge his taste for spirits a little too much—but only to help him with his watch:

> In the watches of the night he is always fresh and bright:
> Every now and then he has a cup of tea
> With perhaps a drop of Scotch while he's keeping on the watch,
> Only stopping here and there to catch a flea.
> (51-54)

The passage hinges, albeit lopsidedly, on a term-to-term opposition between English tea and Scotch whisky. On typically Victorian high moral grounds, it also opposes temperance to intemperance, a nation of sensible, modest tea-drinking teetotallers to a nation of senseless, shameless Scotch-drinking louts. The resulting figurative construct also "blends" the two terms into some spirited/witty liquid form, in a practical case of tongue-in-cheek referencing, when the metatextual clue to a similar construct from the literary canon is considered: the blending, in "The Flea" by John Donne, of the poem's two lovers' bloods within a flea, to the same effect as lovemaking[28]—a canonical reference, most likely accounting for the anecdote of the flea in the present passage, besides the odd hint of the probably flea-ridden tabby coat of the cat smelling like rotten mackerel! As it turns out, the figurative scheme may become confusing, perhaps intoxicating as well—in a practically vampiric vein to boot! The scheme of reference may make itself no doubt ominous, when one is *literally* "misconducted,"

[26] See Hamlet's answer to the King's question "Where is Polonius?": "In heaven. Send hither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby" (IV, iii.).
[27] See Eliot's *The Four Quartets*. "Burnt Norton," I, 12.
[28] See Donne's *The Major Works*. 89. "The Flea" (1631): "It sucked me first, and now sucks thee, / And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be; / Thou know'st that this cannot be said. / A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead, / Yet this enjoys before it woo, / And pampered swells with one blood made of two, / And this, alas, is more than we would do" (3-9).

misreading the train's destination to the letter: Gallows/gate.[29] "Skimbleshanks, The Railway Cat" then also sounds like a Gothic story of doom and gloom, from across the Scottish border.[30] As in a border ballad by Sir Walter Scott,[31] we are then in for a dive into an ineffable world of drinks, broils, feuds, raids, and elopements. These certainly contrast with the primary effable vision of the Victorian Night Mail, as it was duly speeding north of the Kingdom, under the legendary supervision of a most zealous train conductor—or practically, indeed!

Effanineffable

All that acting and drinking taps some ineffable root of "effanineffable" nonsense, which sounds like going down some infamous route to alcoholic, all too mundane perdition, or again like giving in to the ineffable temptation to err of(f) course, in some possibly crooked way. The ultimate telling "feature" in that regard is that the poems lead to no moral, while floridly displaying all the *bona fide* credentials that they do go down that honourable route. They are notably all too lax in castigating villains, while contrastingly offering to readers cat-heroes to worship. In "The Old Gumbie Cat," for example, good employment makes mice and cockroaches hopefully redeemable. And the stain of their past offences remains for everyone to see: Jennyanydots, industrious as she is, has devised a proper way for that—"And she's even created a Beetles' Tattoo" (36). With typical application, "Jenny" will make anything out of "any dots," in the way of wonderful marks and scars. The idea of a tattoo might be a little "dotty," and no doubt cryptic,[32] but how could any harm be done when it comes to "scar-abs" and a "spinning jenny"? Don't their very names call for it? Obviously enough, this reading evidences a crass word-for-word attachment to "origin," or again "nature," for whatever *that* means, such questions being sensitive issues then all taken in one lump. For this reason alone, a beetles' tattoo certainly stands all chances to remain to all readers a bewildering "creation." It furthermore leaves the seasoned reader uneasy, recalling as it does human branding on convicts and slaves—burning cases, all in one unpalatable lump. And if Jenny

[29] Gallowsgate sounds like a prison located way up North. This could recall Hamlet's words to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on their arriving from "southern" England, free and lively, to "northern" Denmark, prison-like and deadly: "*Ham*. Then is doomsday near [...] Let me question more in particular: what have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of fortune, that she sends you to prison hither? *Guil*. Prison, my lord. *Ham*. Denmark's a prison. *Ros*. Then is the world one" (Act II, scene ii).

[30] For more military, but as formidable, associations with the North, see also "And so they stepped out, with their pipers in order, / Playing *When the Blue Bonnets Came Over the Border*." ("The Pekes and the Pollicles" 36-37)

[31] See Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

[32] The tattoo remains cryptic, in part for not being described or commented on in the poem. Still, there seems to be emerging, though fluctuantly, an intertext with *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. For the very obscurity of the tattoo, susceptible to all sorts of reckonings and miscalculations, Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Gold Bug" may also come to mind. Those "cryptic" references could discreetly signal the possum's American "roots."

has no equal, as regards crocheting and all craft that comes in "handy," though she seems to be also of the likes of a Captain Crook, the image, by now turned into a "prickly" conceit, as typically indents the lace-like quality of her work as it extols its merits, practically in the way of a tear in the "crochet." And this tear is awkward within the specific context of the late 1930s, at a time when the stigmatisation of Jews was a more than ever pressing issue in Nazi Germany.[33] No use expecting, however, this to make definite sense, unless it becomes "meat for the housedog"—the figure of a German shepherd as part of the backdrop not being excluded. The meaning of the tattoo does not stabilize itself, being run by a "flow" waiving all moral strictures, the overall conceit wavering between stigmata of the most searing type, and pure ornamentation of the most exquisite lace-like accuracy.

In a mock-heroic, not so grave register, a similar challenge to the reader's wits runs through the poem "Growltiger's Last Stand." Growltiger is a tabby cross between a villain ("the Terror of the Thames" 4) and a hero of truly epic proportions, with also a touch of the Romeo-like passionate lover, with "no eye or ear for aught but Griddlebone" (33), until, that is, the impenetrable disappearance of the lady cat:

> I am sorry to admit it, she quickly disappeared.
> She probably escaped with ease, I'm sure she was not drowned –
> But a serried ring of flashing steel Growltiger did surround.
> (46-48)

Griddlebone's kidnapping—or is it an assisted escape?—occurs at the very time when her lover falls down. It ironically marks out the nemesis of a picaresque villain—or is he a felon picaro?—, at the very moment when he loses his life, while she keeps hers, within a criminal case of a cat's death in a "practical" mousetrap. But no moral to the story can eventually come through, not least due to the indeterminacy of the tragic dead-end it leads up to.

The case in "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" is similarly challenging:

> He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
> For when they reach the scene of crime – Macavity's not there! [...]
> And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's [...]
> At whatever time the deed took place – MACAVITY'S WASN'T THERE!
> And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
> (I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
> Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
> Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!
> (3-4, 22, 38-42)

[33] For a concise view of Eliot's political stance over the 1930s and beyond, see Peter Dale Scott's "The Social Critic and his Discontents." See also the developments by Jean-Michel Rabaté on "The Meticulous Metic." Both in A. David Moody (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. 60-76, 211-214. For a full-length study, see Christopher Ricks's *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice*.

The "proper" name "Napoleon"[34] should "properly" be enough to make Macavity pass off as an arch villain against the book's Victorian backdrop. But this cat's case is more like a tabby cross, between the French tyrant and the Moriarty of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[35] This certainly compounds the moral issue in the poem, at that precise effanineffable juncture when organised crime holds established order at bay. Incidentally, the reappearance of Griddlebone tends to confirm her most melodramatic duplicity in the death of her lover, perhaps even her being in cahoots, or in love, with Macavity, in a case of a cats' mousetrap as the perfect effanineffable crime. And what can established order do against a crime syndicate of that "order"? What can the English establishment do indeed? Irony is also part of a well-established answer: not much beyond the *façade*, or outside rhetoric, if only by considering the time members of the Establishment spend rehashing their Oxbridge days and ways, and getting fat on a surfeit of foods and drinks in Saint James's Clubland—an effanineffable case of fat cats eating like dogs! These are the bottomline standards of the Establishment, as they incisively appear in "Bustopher Jones: the Cat about Town," the collection's half-fish half-fowl social satire, but with no facile conclusions, about eating and related mores of the English elite.

The book thus unfolds through an effanineffable interplay of formulas and recipes. The interplay gives an overall sense of direction, order, and even flavour to the collection, but while also leading each of the stories to no specific ending, nor apposite lesson, nor any ultimate moral. For these reasons, poems in *OPBPC* remain fables at some aporetic stage, in the best tradition of nonsense tales and stories, in which there is no way that is not open-ended, all the more so to a practical cat, independently of the facile rhetoric that panders to dogs' rabid instincts. Sense is therefore a highly sensitive issue in *OPBPC,* incisively at times, but also for the greatest pleasure of all readers, especially when sense goes in effanineffable directions, well out of control, and well out of the reach of teachers, preachers, or rabble-rousers, however hard they strive to make sense (of) their own, notably through binary thinking of the effable/ineffable type. The poems' "logic of sense" thus grows like rhizomes suggestive of luxuriance and exuberance, rather than like old-growth trees or imperial pyramids, for instance, suggestive as these are of fixities and hierarchies. With the rhizome, there is neither definite "major," nor definite "minor." But sense grows past "lines of articulations." It expands in all effanineffable directions, or "senses," into "destratified"

[34] Holmes describes Moriarty as "the Napoleon of Crime" in *The Adventure of the Final Problem* published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1893. See Blenkinsopp's "Macavity and Moriarty," 103.
[35] Commenting on the complex characterisation of this cat, Eliot writes in a letter to Frank Morley: "I have done a new cat modelled on the late Professor Moriarty, but he doesn't seem very popular; too sophisticated perhaps." See Hart's "T.S. Eliot's Autobiographical Cats, " 382.

areas—"deterritorialized" areas as it were—, well beyond all types of divides.[36] Preferably to divides, sense fosters distance to the full/fools' benefit of a comprehensive type of humour, when readers of all ages may enjoy the freedom of mind which that distance brings in. This is the paradoxical distance that fills in "tabby" areas of "practical" difference in the book. Outside facile rhetoric, these areas of difference are true challenges to all types of formulaic binariness, which gives precedence to principles outside language. Rhizomatic expansiveness instead grows flat zones of difference within language, with borderlines of effanineffable meanings round and about.

In *Logique du Sens*, Gilles Deleuze expands accordingly on his prolegomenon on *Alice* books.[37] He notably signals Anglo-American nonsense as an outstanding mode of expression, fostering such borderlines through paradoxes:

> Tout se passe à la frontière des choses et des propositions. [...] Il y a là un usage du paradoxe qui n'a d'équivalent que dans le bouddhisme zen d'une part, dans le nonsense anglais ou américain d'autre part. D'une part le plus profond, c'est l'immédiat; d'autre part l'immédiat est dans le langage. Le paradoxe apparaît comme destitution de la profondeur, étalement des événements à la surface, déploiement du langage le long de cette limite. (68)

Deleuze observes "rhizomatic" connections between Anglo-American nonsense and Zen Buddhism. In the present study, this very connection shows with "Old Deuteronomy," the poem featuring the eponymous cat as an all-out composite figure, representing the Mosaic law and the beatific state of bodhisattva, in a syncretic case of mosaic/tabby completion all around. And what else are we to make of the tabby case of an avuncular, self-titled "Old Possum" in a book on "practical cats"? Here are enough pointers of near hybridity, or practical tabbiness. They all comfort the book's humorous improprieties and amalgamations, as part of an effanineffable game with words. This game is pleasurable to all, beyond the effable/ineffable principles of binary thinking, especially when this witty game helps to reconsider bigotry, by waylaying *en route* major but narrow views, through minor but telling skirmishes. Improprieties in *OPBPC* are accordingly Deleuzean zones of difference. They preclude any definite inscribing of sense into pre-set grooves, especially in the way of partisan opinions or beliefs. These can notably pass for common sense, a "practical" notion that is based on what is commonly thought as being "practical" to do. Victorian common sense, in that regard, is certainly the backdrop to the tongue-in-cheek "practicality" of the book, whether guide or manual. But *OPBPC* is above all a playful read, the book reshuffling the constituent parts of sense—be it "common"—like Alice with a pack of cards, while also

[36] See Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*: "Dans un livre comme dans toute chose, il y a des lignes d'articulation ou de segmentarité, des strates, des territorialités; mais aussi des lignes de fuite, des mouvements de déterritorialisation et de déstratification" (13).
[37] See note 10.

questioning the rules of the ongoing game and therefore the "logic of sense" inherent in them. In *Logique du Sens* Deleuze defines these rules as part of a "forked" proposition with three "tines": "designation," "manifestation" and "signification." We shall finally examine *OPBPC* in the light in that proposition, for a final roundup.

Roundup

The use of proper names stands out in the book as the most significant aspect of what Deleuze terms "designation."[38] It is common sense to assert that proper names are "proper" signifiers: their function is to signify who/what they strictly designate. They are non-lexical items, blank and empty forms as regards figuration, and therefore improper supply for figurative language ready with images. But, as seen with the "The Ad-dressing of Cats" in particular, cats' proper names may still be puzzling figurative objects of "mecataphysical" inquiry, as in the case of "Old Deuteronomy." They may contribute to a greater circulation of sense, against all stigmatisation linked to origin or nature, while belonging with a flow originating in a universal reservoir of images, like minor-key variations on a *Spiritus Mundi*.[39] The terms of that tabby-profound puzzle seem to be posited magisterially in the following lines of "The Naming of Cats":

> The Naming of cats is a difficult matter,
> It isn't just one of your holiday games;
> You may think at first I'm mad as a hatter
> When I tell you a cat must have three different names.

This quote is a quick plunge into a promisingly logothetic scheme of reference. Naming is introduced as a core question that is likely to expand like a rhizome of ample proportions. There is indeed some rhizomatic "logic of sense" to be expected from this piece of hatter's madness related to cats' names. In his bossy avuncular voice, not unlike the original hatter,[40] O.P. sees that there is sense first. But he also compounds the issue over cats' names into a sacrosanct trilogy of three different names. O.P.'s line of argument is spun with a long yarn of

[38] See Deleuze's *Logique du Sens:* "Beaucoup d'auteurs s'accordent pour reconnaître trois rapports distincts dans la proposition. Le premier est appelé désignation ou indication : c'est le rapport de la proposition à un état de choses extérieur (*datum*). [...] Ce qui compte pour le moment, c'est que certains mots dans la proposition, certaines particules linguistiques, servent de formes vides pour la sélection des images en tout cas, donc pour la désignation de chaque état de choses: on aurait tort de les traiter comme des concepts universels, ce sont des singuliers formels, qui ont un rôle de purs 'désignants' ou, comme dit Benveniste, d'indicateurs. Ces indicateurs sont : ceci, cela ; il ; ici, là ; hier, maintenant, etc. Les noms propres aussi sont des indicateurs ou des désignants, mais d'une importance spéciale parce qu'ils sont les seuls à former des singularités proprement matérielles. Logiquement, la désignation a pour critère et pour élément le vrai et le faux" (91-92).

[39] This modernist tenet of the *Spiritus Mundi* was initiated in "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats. Yeats argues for the readiness of a stock of images and symbols in a *Spiritus Mundi* cyclically supplying poets and writers with figurative material.

[40] See Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Chapter 7.

theology. In a typically sanctimonious voice, he starts teaching—or is he "preaching"?—a lesson—or is it a sermon?—in cats' names, to the "name" of *Logos* itself. He makes out that there are: 1) the name that the cat's family uses daily, 2) fancier names, which happen to be gendered sweet names, and 3) the cat's twice proper name—read "proper proper name"—, which the animal is always attentive to keep secret. But, however commonsensical the passage first reads, in terms of clear-cut sharpness and logothetic formulas, the paradox is that O.P.'s present case sounds like nonsense, or like a case of arcane sophistry that expands into a juggler's handling of words aiming nowhere. It may not be the stuff "holiday games" are made of, but the effect is as funny, even for the handling of "holiday" as a likely pointer to the mock "holiness" of the game. Whatever the case, O.P.'s exegesis of cats' names remains a forbidding mystery to be worked out in a profound scholarly way, albeit tongue-in-cheek. O.P.'s guidance in the matter follows some tabby maieutics, helping readers of all ages to bring latent ideas into consciousness, not unlike the mock clues that Wonderland's characters provide to a clueless Alice. The hatter's madness is indeed catching, as O.P. knows.

With respect to the second level of sense, "manifestation" as defined by Deleuze,[41] the book's effanineffable touch greatly derives from the absence of an "I" manifesting itself, but while this leaves room for a multi-perspectival "eye," roaming up and down figurative margins. That absence ultimately challenges "manifestation," along "lines of (dis)articulations" allowing for periodical reshufflings of formulaic terms, away from any such centre as a manifested, well-termed "I." Such multi-focal reshufflings disputably deform the formulaic terms of all binary logic[42] commanding to prescribed relationships, outgrowing them instead to the point of nonsense, while such reshufflings can't be complete unless they also inform rhizomatic relationships all round, growing them in defiance of all common sense. The revisited logic of such rhizomatic relationships manifests itself, at its most nonsensical, by pointedly defying the "manifestation" of the self as the hub of prescribed relationships. A case in point is the prescribed relationship marked by the genitive in the title, challenging as it does the manifestation of the origin of the book. The challenge is channelled with the paradox whereby O.P. gives itself out as the obvious origin of the book, but while the genitive in the title also echoes ironically, since no "Old Possum" is either involved in the *diegesis,* or ever addresses the reader in the first person, besides a dedication to the book, cryptically signed

[41] See Deleuze's *Logique du Sens:* "Un second rapport de la proposition est souvent nommé manifestation. Il s'agit du rapport de la proposition au sujet qui parle et qui s'exprime. La manifestation se présente donc comme l'énoncé des désirs et des croyances qui correspondent à la proposition. Désirs et croyances sont des inférences causales, non pas des associations. [...] Hume l'avait vu profondément: dans l'association de cause à effet, c'est 'l'inférence selon la relation' qui précède la relation elle-même. Ce primat de la manifestation est confirmé par l'analyse linguistique. Car il y a dans la proposition des 'manifestants' comme particules spéciales : je, tu ; demain, toujours ; ailleurs, partout, etc. Et de même que le nom propre est un indicateur privilégié, Je est le manifestant de base" (98-99).

[42] Such as cause and effect relationships.

up "O.P."[43]—initials only. The distance O.P. formally establishes with his subject matter—cats' manners—and with his readers in this arcane subject is seemingly complete.

As part of the modernist backdrop to the poems, "Old Possum" is famously Ezra Pound's nickname for Eliot.[44] Pound gave him this sobriquet for what he perceived as Eliot's ability to play at being what he was not, much as the possum plays "practically" dead, to thwart the plans of potential predators—a singular case of zoological camouflaging, or non-manifestation. O.P. is then a trickster. Like/as Eliot, he is able to lead readers into blind alleys of meaning, or "baiting" them with "a bit of (gamy) meat." But Eliot as O.P. paradoxically recognizes as much. He "manifests" this sobriquet as a truth in an untruth, in the way of a "telling" penname—albeit through initials in a dedication. The book's dedication, along with its preface, therefore comes as a rhizomatic paradox. It is dedicated to everyone who contributed to the book, up to its publication:

> This Book is respectfully dedicated to those friends who have assisted its composition by their encouragement, criticism and suggestions: and in particular to Mr. T.E. Faber, Miss Alison Tandy, Miss Susan Wolcott, Miss Susanna Morley, and the Man in White Spats. O.P.

But, as part of the paradox, who can "the Man in White Spats" be? What does this ultimate slip into fiction—on top of a list of "proper" names of "proper" people known to Eliot—amount to? This is certainly a tabby-case of modernist tongue-in-cheek again. As a complement to the mackerel tabby cat's coat, the fishy spats—probably cats' white paws—are part of the sartorially-challenging attire which the poet's/possum's many *personas* dress up with, while thus promoting, at "manifestation" level, endless games with the "eye," away from any original "I." The capitalized "White Spats" of the "Man" are tricks perturbing "designation" and "manifestation." And so are the "misty" conjuring tricks of Mr. Mistoffelees:

> You ought to know Mr. Mistoffelees!
> The Original Conjuring Cat –
> (There can be no doubt about that).
> […]
> There's no such Cat in the metropolis;
> He holds all the patent monopolies
> For performing surprising illusions
> And creating eccentric confusions.
> At prestidigitation
> And at legerdemain
> He'll defy examination
> And deceive you again.

[43] The dedication is quoted in full immediately afterwards.
[44] See Ackroyd's *T.S. Eliot: A Life*. 174-177. 316-317.

The greatest magicians have something to learn
From Mr. Mistoffelees' Conjuring Turn.
Presto!
Away we go!
And we all say: OH!
Well I never!
Was there ever
A Cat so clever
As Magical Mr. Mistoffelees!
(1-3, 6-22)

The passage seems to warn gullible spectators/readers against taking the all too "Mephistophelean" tricks of "the Original Conjuring Cat" at face value, or indeed as "original" wonders, despite each and every *bona fide* "patent" testifying to their very origin. Here again, the debatable notion of origin is questioned from multiple effanineffable angles, while the poem produces endless mirror games precluding any type of specific focus like origin to start with/from—and no use expecting any greater "prestidigitation," or "legerdemain," than the poem itself. Even Mr Mistoffelees's alleged tricks can't stand the comparison.

But it would be no all-round trick yet, unless the I/eye made itself visible/caught—as in "catch an eye"—at least at one point. In its "added" edition of 1953, *OPBPC* was completed by a coda poem in the first person, this time signed up in block/all-capitalized letters: MORGAN.[45] Part of the paradox, but somehow redressed, is that Morgan is no possum, but a mongrel/mackerel tabby-cat. But what is an American possum in England anyway? It looks like nothing but a mongrel/mackerel tabby beast, in exclusive cat-ridden Bloomsbury, London, England—the modernist background again. It should be noticed too that the coda is couched in the unexpected form of a late introduction. Its title is "Cat Morgan Introduces Himself," for one primal/final tabby-case of modernist tongue-in-cheek wit's "end." As the story goes, Morgan was the Faber & Faber mascot, a cat that T.S. Eliot saw as an *alter ego* in his life, much as O.P. was his *alter ego* in the original book.[46] Yet it would be most untypical if the cat were typical of its *alter ego*—or *egos,* O.P. being part of the mirror game. Morgan's English is indeed awful, in absolutely no way comparable to Tom Eliot's[47] / O.P.'s perfect English. Neither are Morgan's tastes as much refined. Here is a sample:

I ain't got much polish, me manners is gruff,
But I've got a good coat, and I keep meself smart;
And everyone says, and I guess that's enough;
"You can't but like Morgan, 'e's got a good 'art."

[45] The poem was added in 1953 (2nd "added" edition of the book).
[46] Hence Eliot's desire to later include Morgan in his cats' book.
[47] See Eliot's *Letters*. Tom is the diminutive for Thomas. Eliot used it especially in his younger years to sign up his private letters with. Our previous developments on Rum Tum/Tom Tugger take on a biographical dimension for that reason as well, T.S. Eliot being torn between his American family and an unhappy married life in England (among other aspects of his life).

I got knocked about on the Barbary Coast,
 And me voice it ain't no sich melliferous horgan;
But yet I can state, and I'm not one to boast,
 That some of the gals is dead keen on old Morgan.
(9-16)

The "manners" are indeed "gruff." They don't "go by the book," as the phrase goes. The language in particular sounds demotic, with a Cockney touch that doesn't sound R.P., by Tom's or O.P.'s excellent standards. The poem rather sounds like an ultimate—read also "later"—tabby prank which Tom and O.P. play on readers, in the way of pretending to manifest the ultimate origin of the narrative voice, through a coda, intended to work out any mystery left in the book. But the coda fudges the manifestation of any mystery, playing instead with what effanineffably sustains and resists "fables" in and about the book.

But what could this all imply, demonstrate, and signify? According to Deleuze's third aspect of a "proposition," i.e. "signification,"[48] there is no foundation to truth outside the possibility of error.[49] The articulation between both flatly places signification at a conceptual/effanineffable juncture. Sense cannot therefore be either designated or manifested within one signifying "lump," like a bit—or bait—of meat. Sense instead fosters nonsense against the odds. It supplements itself with nonsense, thus mapping out so far unchartered areas of difference.[50] That could be the ultimate truth of all binariness, as it paradoxically manifests itself each time sense makes a fork, so often to the greater benefit of nonsense. Well beyond all types of strong, even polarities, *OPBPC* actually presents several puzzling cases of odd "figures," reading like effanineffable "features," or again "indexes," of nonsense. In a case similar to Morgan's "gruff manners," there is accordingly no doubt about Growltiger that:

His manners and appearance did not calculate to please; [...]
At Hammersmith and Putney people shuddered at his name. [...]
The Cats of foreign name and race no quarter was allowed.
(5-10-18)

[48] See Deleuze's *Logique du Sens*: "Nous devons réserver le nom de signification à une troisième dimension de la proposition: il s'agit cette fois du rapport du mot avec des concepts universels ou généraux, et des liaisons syntaxiques avec des implications de concept. [...] La signification se définit par cet ordre d'implication conceptuelle où la proposition considérée n'intervient que comme élément d'une 'démonstration', au sens le plus général du mot, soit comme prémisse, soit comme conclusion. Les signifiants linguistiques sont alors essentiellement 'implique' et 'donc'" (101).
[49] See Deleuze's *Logique du Sens*: "La signification ne fonde pas la vérité sans rendre aussi l'erreur possible. C'est pourquoi la condition de vérité ne s'oppose pas au faux, mais à l'absurde : ce qui est sans signification, ce qui ne peut être ni vrai ni faux" (105).
[50] See Deleuze et Guattari's *Mille Plateaux*: "Écrire n'a rien à voir avec signifier, mais avec arpenter, cartographier, même des contrées à venir" (16).

Whether patronyms or toponyms, the designation through proper names, in likely reference to an unsurpassable origin—be it flatly Hammersmith, or Putney!—is allowed "no quarter," come the word as it may, though also with dreadful connotations in the context of Jewish "quarters" or "ghettos" at the time of the book's composition. Yet the mode of signifying in the book is not any more "calculate[d] to please." Readers are to appreciate what they reckon, for exactly what they think it is worth.

The worth of "figures" in *OPBPC* is no doubt "figurative," for at least one reason: compounding major and minor modes of representation into "odd" patterns of "even" figures. One case in point is the following conundrum in tongue-in-cheek numerology: what are we to make of the "able" figure "nine," in the already "able" word "effa-*nine*-ffable"? Explanations would be dogs' food in a cats' world. We are then left so, possibly waylaid, midway through a likely pun on a figure that yet no doubt bears some significance in the poems:

> Old Deuteronomy's buried nine wives
> And more – I am tempted to say, ninety-nine;
> And his numerous progeny prospers and thrives
> And the village is proud of him in his decline.
> (5-8)

Nine must be Old Deuteronomy's lucky number. Some mecataphysical analogy may further link it with Buddha's nine virtues. The passage is also a case in matrimonial matters, which oddly reads like a twice private joke—read "private private joke"—in view of Eliot's relationship problems with his wife, Vivien Haigh-Wood, at the time of the book's composition.[51] It is however against the odds of time that Deuteronomy's longevity mostly manifests itself. And this is no isolated case in the book. The Night Mail's delayed departure is another case in point, against the very same odds of time—especially in view of the Railway Cat's legendary round-the-clock professionalism:

> There's a whisper down the line at 11.39,
> When the Night Mail's ready to depart, [...]
> At 11.42 then the signal's overdue
> And the passengers are frantic to a man –
> (1-6)

[51] For background information about the collapse of T.S. Eliot's marriage with Vivien Haigh-Wood Eliot, his separation from Vivien (1933), their divorce (1939), and her confinement in a mental asylum, see Worthen's *T.S. Eliot. A Short Biography*. 174-195. See also Ackroyd's *T.S. Eliot: A Life*. 61-72. 156-163. In relation to Eliot's taste for costumes and to the political context of the 1930s, Vivien occasionally disguised like a Mosley's Blackshirt to embarrass Eliot in public.

Passengers are seized by panic at 11:39. Three minutes later, they are "frantic to a man." It is 11:42 by the clock. No explanation is provided as to the reason for this climacteric delay: this is a cats' world.[52] What we know is that passengers calm down only at the sudden sight of Skimbleshanks coming back. As all passenger-cats are held to a man, he reappears out of the night like the odd cat out on the scene. He then gives an untypically belated "all clear" (14) away from the metropolis to some odd Northern 'part', sounding as odd as Hamlet's Denmark after the polished ways of an educated England[53]: 'And we're off at last for the northern part/ Of the Northern Hemisphere!' (15-16)

Procrastination, as manifested in these last two cases, partakes of some odd supplements in time, providing zones of difference, whether fantastical, melancholy, or merely odd and funny. These zones are "cavities," as when Ma-cavity faces a deadly mousetrap. They are zones of ironic indeterminacy, instances of "time out of joint." O.P. suggests as much when telling us about the havoc Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer's odd duet of thieves happen to wreak on a typical Sunday dinner, a most improper and unhappy time for any disturbance:

> When the family assembled for Sunday dinner,
> With their minds made up that they wouldn't get thinner
> On Argentine joint, potatoes and greens,
> And the cook would appear from behind the scenes
> And say in a voice that was broken with sorrow: 'I'm afraid you must wait and have dinner *tomorrow!'*
> For the joint has gone from the oven – like that!
> Then the family would say: "It's that horrible cat!
> It was Mungojerrie – or Rumpelteazer!" – And most of the time they left it at that.
> (21-29)

This proves to be a tabby-case of mock theatrics in a perfect modernist vein. It is reminiscent of Hamlet, but with a Victorian taste of domestic melodrama added to it. What greater tragedy could there be next to a household held "out of joint," following a criminal deed of that kind? What greater blow to established order? What greater departure from the Sabbath? And what untimelier event when Sunday dinner must be postponed till Monday?

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[52] The poem revisits a leitmotiv in Victorian fiction: train journeys, especially way up North, and the confusion they are associated with. They regularly challenge "the management of large crowds, which is one of the characteristics of Englishmen in authority" (Wilkie Collins writing about York train station in *No Name*). The narrator in Collins's *Woman in White* similarly tells about his confusion on a train journey to Carlisle: "My travelling instructions directed me to go to Carlisle, and then to diverge by a branch railway which ran in the direction of the coast. As a misfortune to begin with, our engine broke down between Lancaster and Carlisle. The delay occasioned by this accident caused me to be too late for the branch train, by which I was to have gone on immediately. I had to wait some hours; and when a later train finally deposited me at the nearest station to Limmeridge House, it was past ten, and the night was so dark that I could hardly see my way to the pony-chaise which Mr. Fairlie had ordered to be in waiting for me."

[53] See note 29.

From *fabula* to *fibula*,[54] there is here nothing much left but dog's food, or the motif for a dogs' inane brawl, as in "The Pekes and the Pollicles," or again a dogs' bone of imbecilic contention to pick up, for want of any sensible working out of the "joint" mystery. A tabby-case of tragic dilemma indeed faces the Sunday assembly, whether it is Cook "behind the scenes," in the kitchen, or the masters centre stage, "on the scene" in the dining room. As the words from Hamlet go, "The time is out of joint; O curs'd spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!"[55] The curse is also for the "I" to have to put matters to evens, well against the odds of the "eye," as when a bone, set out of joint, has to be painfully "set right," i.e. back into its proper juncture with another bone. The anatomical streak in Hamlet's original metaphor makes itself mockingly literal in *OPBPC*, under the odd form of some "joint of meat" that tends to be oddly rhizomatic. Yet, as they keep mistaking Mungojerrie for Rumpelteazer, oddly enough lumping them into one "horrible cat," like some Hamlet to some Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the members of that honourable household let it stand at that, in some compoundingly effanineffable way, albeit "most of the time"—thus keeping the principle of odd exceptions, possibly rhizomatic ones, intact as yet.

Conclusion

From effably formulaic to nonsensically effanineffable, *OPBPC* revisits formulas and stereotypes, such as those of the animal fable in particular. The poems do so through the use of improper paradoxes—wit's typical trope—away from any definite sense of propriety, but like ineffable inroads into nonsense. The poems thus "bend" the "logic of sense" to near breaking point, revisiting on the way any term-to-term opposition, as in the sense of "times present and times past,"[56] or of any related essentialist attachment to origins. However, the resulting "collection"—as the word goes—more typically picks up the pieces, drawing lots with them and compounding the remaining "odds" of "even" logic. The book thus pushes logic to wit's end, in some modernist tongue-in-cheek manner. Rather than manifesting a one-way critical distance to any type of formula, tongue-in-cheek wit instead captures the inherent crisis in its state of irresolution, "practically" or "nearly"—outside all proper "designation," "manifestation," or "signification"—, but while containing the immediacy of some critical juncture, when sense makes itself sensitive, but also sensibly nonsensical, at

[54] The fibula is the long, thin and lateral bone of the lower leg.
[55] See Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I, v.
[56] See Eliot's *The Four Quartets*: "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future /And time future contained in time past. / If all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable. / What might have been is an abstraction / Remaining a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation. / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present. Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened / Into the rose-garden. My words echo / Thus, in your mind" ("Burnt Norton," I, 1-15).

that very odd moment when time goes "out of joint." In that regard too, *OPBPC* challenges all notions of "minor" and "major," not so much in critically bending the terms of the implied opposition, but as in conterminously blending those terms as they reach full significance in crisis—or practically. No animal could better coat this over than a tabby-cat, with its mongrel origins and improbable proper stripes, none having its exact match. What better animal to slip into the modernist attire of masks, spats and other (dis)guises? What better animal to play hide-and-seek with looks, appearances, and sense when it gets confused? None, but no doubt the odd Possum out besides, an American breed able to fake death for survival, against all odds in his new English milieu[57] as it seems. It is through his tabby-case of tongue-in-cheek wit that the possum attempts to blend with this world of English fat cats and great felines, taking in the full import of their social classes and related traditions and ways of living, which come down to us in the poems as so stereotypically Victorian. The possum's social parade is perfect in that respect. He is knowledgeable about the most arcane of social practices among cats. He is a downright authority in cats' good manners, to the point of writing and publishing the present book/manual on them. Yet, good manners or not, this would be without reckoning with the madness of the hatter, whom the possum also poses as. Across all divides, minor or major, and therefore across the gender divide too, this madness has equally "moonstruck" the Jellicle Cats, with their effeminate "airs and graces," as the phrase goes. It keeps them dancing in "*effeminate*ffable" zones of queer difference, on the slippery side of some "jelly" midnight, well against a "gumbie" cat's better judgment:

> They like to practice their airs and graces
> And wait for the Jellicle Moon to rise. [...]
> They know how to dance a gavotte and a jig. [...]
> Jellicles jump like a jumping-jack,
> Jellicle Cats have moonlit eyes.
> They're quiet enough in the morning hours,
> They're quiet enough in the afternoon,
> Reserving their terpsichorean powers
> To dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon. [...]
> If it happens to be a stormy night
> They will practise a caper or two in the hall.
> If it happens the sun is shining bright
> You would say they had nothing to do at all:
> They are resting and saving themselves to be right
> For the Jellicle Moon and the Jellicle Ball.
> (7-8, 12, 19-24, 27 to the end)

The Jellicles' tabby song and/or dance mark(s) some emblematic shift to the odds. Tongue-in-cheek or not, their dance follows some impenetrable choreography, at some modernist wit's end, but also round and round a core of difference, which is also the core of T.S. Eliot's

[57] Could read *mi-lieu* in the context. Also see note 26 about "lobby" and "passage."

perception of the divine and "sense" of poetry, well across the remit of any *Logos* and its related logic. Whether in the burlesque minor key of a children's story from a tabby collection of cats' poems, or in the major key of a polyphonic sequence of quartets, the Jellicles are guests equal to the dance that is hosted:

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
> But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
> Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
> Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
> There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
> (*The Four Quartets,* "Burnt Norton" 64-69)

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