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Demonic Seduction (a Nietzschean Reading of Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*)

The Manuscript Found in Saragossa abounds in instances of seduction. Accordingly, the object of this essay will be to demonstrate how the novel unfolds its seductive potential. But seduction is a gradual process which consists in a subtle play (a kind of *jouissance*, a joyous play that promises bliss, victory and fulfilment) of magnetic influences; it is an art to be practised by those who are patient and sanguine at the same time. For this reason we will first have to explore the ecological factors that are conducive to the inception and progression of emotional transformations which Alphonse van Worden undergoes in the course of his sojourn in the Alpujarras. Then, by a painstaking reconstruction and reinterpretation of some key experiences which he goes through – which are, in point of fact, artfully inflicted upon him by those responsible for leading him astray – we will, hopefully, gain an insight into the true nature of his ambiguous predicament. Finally, we shall discover the intricate pattern of seduction which underlies the two major epistemological figures Alphonse's seductors personify, namely truth and illusion.¹

¹ According to Jean Baudrillard, seduction by definition involves a dynamic relationship to truth: "To be seduced is to be diverted from one's truth. To seduce is to divert the other from his truth. This truth then becomes the secret that escapes him". Jean Baudrillard, "On Seduction", in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Stanford: California University Press, 1988), p. 160.

I will argue that it is precisely the impossibility of distinguishing truth from illusion that generates seductive energy in the course of Alphonse's meandering journey to Madrid. His protracted stay in the Alpujarras will be seen as resulting from his suspension in between two orders: that of reality and that of fantasy. The suspension is effected by the first seductive episode which terminates under the gallows of Zoto's brothers. The gallows itself is a visible, excessively literal figure of this suspension but Alphonse's confrontation with the foul corpses of Zoto's brothers is merely a consequence of another truly seductive tryst. What seduces him is, in fact, an interplay of truth and illusion, their kaleidoscopic substitutions and enchanting interchangeability. Can there be anything more beguiling than a concurrence of truth which is veiled in the appearance of illusion with illusion in the guise of truth?

When does Alphonse's original seduction take place then? Certainly not under the gallows for it is a most unsuitable location, and the company definitely lack charm and allurements. Seduction prefers interiors, cosy rooms and candlelight; understatement in terms of scenery and circumstance. It is in the Venta Quemada that Alphonse receives an invitation to join the play of truths and illusions, to attend a spectacle of delirious story-telling which leads up to an equally delirious (and oneiric) love-making with its anticlimax by the side of Zoto's brothers. The two succubi who captivate his attention for the period between the stroke of twelve and the first cock crow invite him to a separate chamber which then turns out to be another nocturnal hallucination and leaves him with the impression akin to that which theatregoers are well familiar with: once the performance is over, there is no coming back to the fictive universe that actors conjured up for the duration of one magic night only. The impression is too strong to be unreal. And yet he can plainly see that reality will never accommodate his wish to go on living the enthralling fiction, the fiction which is woven out of illusive cues given by Emina and Zubeida, the two leading actresses who, clad in seductive exotic costumes, perform live for their sole spectator.

There is, too, something overly dramatic about Alphonse's choice of the more perilous route to Madrid. No doubt, by obeying the sacred laws of honour, which prescribe that he should brave every available danger, he wants to dramatise his own person at the outset

of the journey. That is his way of parrying the reservations made by the innkeeper at Andújar who takes notice of Alphonse's young age and lack of experience.² As it soon turns out, van Worden's code of values is modelled on that of his father whose punctiliousness about matters of honour verged on the comic. By adopting his father's extravagant mode of settling questions of honour, Alphonse inadvertently follows in the footsteps of such hyperbolic figures as Don Quixote or Roland, the legendary nephew of Charlemagne. Nevertheless, his courage is also a ticket to the feast prepared for the bold soldier by the two Moorish beauties.³ Unruffled by ill forebodings that accompany his arrival at the Venta Quemada and weird inscriptions that guard its gates, Alphonse enters the inn with a firm resolve not to show any signs of fear. But in fact he is troubled by doubts whether ghosts occupy that bizarre hostelry, and he does sense something out of the way about its appearance and location.

Like the gates of Hades, the Venta Quemada is a Magic Door which demands an "open sesame" before it yields up its treasures to a reckless adventurer. It is also a symbolic boundary of the territory under the rule of two charming spirits. The moment he leaves behind the relatively sober reality of the valley of Los Hermanos and enters the hostelry, Alphonse starts undergoing a rite of passage meant to test his courage and integrity. Surprisingly, the hostelry he visits is hostless: the inn-keeper has forsaken it, thus rendering the Venta hostile rather than hospitable to strangers.⁴ Consequently, it is Alphonse who runs the risk of becoming its new host in the sense of Latin *hostiā*, i.e., an animal which is offered as sacrifice to appease the wrath of gods. The inn's reputation for being haunted by demons is accordingly justified by its semi-religious function: as a temple of sorts it is a meeting ground where people's transactions with spirits can take place. Alphonse's nocturnal episode in the Venta Quemada will therefore be governed by the interlaced codes of the real and the transcendent, the rational and the supernatural.

The transcendent aspect of Alphonse's experience merits particular consideration. It is certainly possible to explain away the

² Cf. Jan Potocki, *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 6.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴ Interestingly, in Latin, *hostis* means also a stranger.

miraculous happenings in the inn through recourse to magic or witchcraft. And yet the supernatural is commonly defined in opposition to the real whilst Alphonse's sense of reality is temporarily suspended and he is invited to pay a visit to a parallel universe which is complete in itself and does not come in conflict with the reality outside the inn. This infinitely subterranean universe may defy the laws of physics but it is so illusive that in broad daylight Alphonse is prone to blame all the night's dealings with spirits on his own hallucinations and nightmarish visions.⁵ It is not by accident that he awakens in the open, far away from the hostelry which saw his descent into the delirious world of enchanting tales and tempting gestures. No doubt, his return to reality is abrupt and painful. And yet he does realise that there can be no direct commerce between the two zones. Whatever is going on "for real" requires that he should forget about his exotic companions and thus keep the promise that he has made them. Conversely, for the duration of his amorous encounters with Emina and Zubeida, he is obliged to leave behind all his earthly commitments and abandon himself to their seductive charm.

He is not unaware of their overwhelming power to allure and ensnare their prey, to be sure. Brought up as a Catholic, Alphonse must be well versed in the art of identifying a large variety of evil spirits: in no time at all does he reach the conclusion that the two charming girls belong to the species of succubi, that is they are demons in the guise of beautiful women bent on seducing sleeping men with the intention of having a carnal intercourse with their victims. All the evidence that Alphonse can amass seems to corroborate that: the girls are more beautiful than other women he met; their charm is irresistible; finally, there is something diabolical about their determination to cast their spell on the young soldier and possibly make him recant his religion. Their sly manoeuvres, the nocturnal setting they choose for their appearance, the secrecy they insist upon – all those suspicious circumstances immediately alert the young officer. Furthermore, by revealing that they are his close relatives, the Moorish beauties evidently hint at the possibility of introducing some incestuous overtones into the relationship with their cousin. It is all the more surprising, then, that he eventually succumbs to their temptation.

⁵ Cf. J. Potocki, *The Manuscript...*, p. 34.

In order to account for his acquiescence in his own seduction it might be necessary to assume that it is actually Alphonse van Worden who toys with his seducers. Or, possibly, he reposes complete confidence in his own power to keep a tight rein on the progress of his oneiric amours. The state of Alphonse's heart and mind is aptly conveyed by Roland Barthes in the following description of the amorous subject's readiness to experience ravishment: "The hypnotic episode [i.e., ravishment], it is said, is ordinarily preceded by a twilight state: the subject is in a sense empty, available, offered unwittingly to the rape which will surprise him".⁶ By way of specifying his point, Barthes offers a telling illustration: "I never fall in love unless I have wanted to; the emptiness I produce in myself (and on which, like Werther, quite innocently, I pride myself) is nothing but that interval, longer or shorter, when I glance around me, without seeming to, looking for *who to love*".⁷ Apparently, what we can identify here is a predisposition towards being captivated, a kind of tacit agreement to being implicated in an amorous adventure.

Enchanted as he is, Alphonse perceives the Moorish girls as too beautiful to mean any harm. Their manners are impeccable and their declarations sound ardent and convincing. Alphonse's suspicions are thus lulled to sleep and he lends his ear to the story they are about to tell him. Strategically, this is one of the crucial points in the book: the tale (whether true or fictive is another matter) narrated by Zubeida is like the first domino piece which triggers a series of further narratives. Up till the end of the novel Alphonse is under this spell of story-telling; for the most part of the book he listens to other characters' accounts though he is also obliged to give an account of himself while enjoying the hospitality of a hermit. The two months he spends in the Alpujarras abound in personal narratives to the effect that few "real" incidents of consequence are recorded by van Worden. On leave from his duties, the young *caballero* seems to be living out a fantasy concocted by someone else's wayward imagination.

The seductive sisters, having been assigned the roles of masters of ceremony, introduce Alphonse into the magic world of story-telling. The personal narratives which make up the bulk of *The Manuscript* are an

⁶ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

extraordinary mixture of fact and fiction: allegedly true, they all involve some explicitly fictive effects, i.e., emplotment of events, selection and dramatisation of incidents, magnification of many a protagonist's qualities. However, the young soldier takes the narratives at face value. He is led to turn a blind eye to their rhetoric under the influence of their seductive charm which consists in a crafty combination of truth and illusion. This is precisely what Emina and Zubeida are responsible for: they are to make Alphonse lose sight of the tenuous border-line which separates reality from fantasy. The girls themselves become but two *rhetorical figures* whose function is confined to enticing Alphonse into relying on the truth-value of the stories he is told by other characters.

The Story of a Demonic Philosopher Who Wanted to Redefine Truth and Reality

It is high time to acknowledge that the inspiration for identifying woman with truth, and truth with woman, comes from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche. The German philosopher, who never married (though he did propose to Lou Salomé) and often spoke and wrote disparagingly even of his own mother and sister,⁸ conceived of femininity as metaphor on a number of occasions. However, what seems to be a particularly persistent association in his works is the metaphoric conflation of truth and woman.⁹ One passage, included in the Preface for the second edition of *The Gay Science*, is particularly illuminating in our context: "Perhaps truth is a woman who has her reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is – to speak Greek – *Baubo*?"¹⁰ Indeed, we cannot rule out the possibility that truth is very much like Baubo, the mythical archetype of female

⁸ Cf., e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 41.

⁹ I shall refrain here from enumerating all the relevant passages in Nietzsche's texts, some of which will be discussed further on in this essay. Instead, I suggest that the reader consult by far the most insightful discussion of the issue in question to be found in Jacques Derrida, "The Question of Style", in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), pp. 176–189.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 38.

sexuality and licentiousness who, through merriment and dance, managed to cheer up Demeter when the goddess despaired of the loss of her daughter. Thus, Baubo helped restore fertility to the world and ever since has been duly extolled by women. Interestingly, according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Baubo was originally a *demonic* personification of the female genitals.

Dance, amusement, demonic promiscuity – one cannot help recalling the first night Alphonse spent with Emina and Zubeida in the Venta Quemada. But why is it specifically Baubo that Nietzsche associates with truth? Why should truth have a feminine nature? What is it about truth that invites such comparisons? In order to answer those questions we will have to examine major attempts at defining truth and find out how they relate to Nietzsche's approach to this issue. That will also involve a re-evaluation of the concept of reality, or the real world, which, according to Nietzsche, is part of the Platonic legacy and as such must be exposed and deconstructed.

In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche concedes that truth has a lot of girlish charm about it.¹¹ Moreover, he acknowledges implicitly that it must have undergone some transformations, and, most likely, will continue developing in a direction which may displease its "suitors". The young beautiful girl will grow into a mature lady who, in turn, will become a scowling old woman. This makes Nietzsche conclude that, in fact, her charm is in continual decline. In time the power of attraction that she exerts will diminish and those who are under her spell may turn to her rivals: untruth, error, illusion, falsehood, appearance. In a characteristically allegorical fashion, Nietzsche smuggles in a profound truth about truth itself: the truth that truth has had its own history and has been relative to fluctuating epistemological paradigms. No doubt, this is his way of anticipating another major shift which will soon affect our attitude to truth. Its anthropomorphic presentation is certainly meant to alert us to its wayward and mutable nature. As femininity incarnate, she can hardly be defined and controlled by all those who want to found their views on her dogmatic stability and reliability. As a young woman, she is irresistibly attractive and seductively unapproachable. That is

¹¹ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 121 (section 257).

probably the reason why men have always fantasized about her without ever winning her favours.

Those fantasies have often taken the formal shape of a theory of truth. Among the most widely accepted accounts of truth is the so-called correspondence theory. In a nutshell, it says that those statements and beliefs are true which correspond to brute facts. Thus it assumes a relationship between our linguistic practice and the actual world which is supposed to be represented by the true enunciations we produce. Interestingly, in this theory, truth is reduced to its discursive aspect: its major proponents, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein, speak of beliefs and propositions which are either true or false.¹² Even if we extend the applicability of this theory to all kinds of representations – in fact, what Wittgenstein puts forward in the *Tractatus* can be described as the picture theory of truth¹³ – we come up against some serious problems. Not only does this theory presuppose some indisputable definition of facts and reality but it also takes for granted the possibility of *mirroring* brute facts in language. Without this assumption, what we obtain are two incongruous elements which belong to two *incommensurable systems*.

Nietzsche seems to have anticipated the aporias inherent in that theory. In the section of *Twilight of the Idols* entitled “How ‘the Real World’ at last Became a Myth”, he describes what he himself calls “history of an error”.¹⁴ It is an allegorical overview of how the real world gradually became unattainable and left in its wake merely its own useless *idea*. If we read this section in conjunction with the immediately preceding ones, we find out that the basic claim Nietzsche makes is that the so called “real world” is just an abstract notion very much like “the apparent world” with which it is traditionally contrasted.¹⁵ It may be a purely nominal confusion but in the final

¹² For a thorough presentation of all the major theories of truth to date, I am indebted to Lawrence E. Johnson, *Focusing on Truth* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), passim.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Antichrist*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 50–51.

¹⁵ In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche dismantles the very opposition between the “true” and “apparent” world by arguing that, in fact, “the first is a mere fiction, constructed of fictitious entities” whereas appearance itself “belongs to reality: it is a form of its being”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 306 (section 568).

analysis every definition resorts to some kind of nominalism. Of course, the correspondence definition of truth is no exception.

The assumption of a relationship between things and words, between particular facts and statements of those facts, is also subject to Nietzsche's ebullient critique. In "On Truth and Falsity in their Ultramoral Sense", an essay written in 1873 (that is well before *Human, All Too Human*), he notes that every word relies on an idea which, in turn, by failing to do justice to each particular thing's unique and inimitable qualities, misrepresents the things it is supposed to stand for.¹⁶ To put it in a more technical way, words tend to overgeneralise their referents. The incommensurability of language and reality is additionally emphasised in a celebrated passage from *Human, All Too Human*:

The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world.¹⁷

Eventually, nothing *fundamentally true* or *false* can be said of the real world: some of our beliefs, statements and propositions may give a convincing expression to certain aspects of extralinguistic reality but on the whole the two realms do not translate into each other. That obviously plays havoc with the entire correspondence theory of truth which Nietzsche had demolished even before it was developed by Russell and Wittgenstein.

Another major theory of truth is associated exclusively with things mental. Its detachment from brute facts must be seen in a larger perspective of the views which have been espoused by the proponents of the idealist philosophy. As an integral component of the idealist

¹⁶ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense", in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Oscar Levy, ed., vol. II: *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924), pp. 177–180.

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Human...*, p. 16 (section 11).

metaphysics, the coherence theory of truth is based on the contention that “the degree of truth in a particular proposition is to be judged in the first instance by its coherence with experience as a whole”.¹⁸ In other words, we can define as true what coheres with all the previous beliefs that we have taken to be true. The new proposition, then, must be in conformance with a general body of truths which make up a coherent system. The idealist assumption that at bottom such a system is premised on the Truth which gives rise to all the other “minor” truths prevents truth as such from being relative to one’s individual experience of reality. But the problem with this theory is that there may be more than one coherent system.¹⁹ We may be faced with a choice of several different seemingly coherent systems which are incompatible: at this point a coherentist will need a criterion which is anterior to those systems, one that transcends them altogether. But, as Nietzsche points out in the context of his discussion of science as a metaphysical system, such a criterion is always a matter of our arbitrary choice because “there is absolutely no science ‘without presuppositions’, the very idea is inconceivable, paralogical: a philosophy, a ‘belief’ must always exist first in order for science to derive from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a *right* to existence”.²⁰ Apparently, once we have accepted a system of truths, it is easy to verify each new proposition, but the system itself, premised as it is on a mere “belief”, an unverifiable presupposition, will never be *absolutely true*.

Out of a variety of truth theories,²¹ the pragmatic conception of truth seems to be the closest to Nietzsche’s views. Pragmatists take truth as “being a matter of fitting in with practice”.²² Accordingly, they designate as true those ideas and beliefs which we can verify and

¹⁸ B. Blanshard, “The Nature of Thought”, quoted in L. E. Johnson, *Focusing...*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Cf. L. E. Johnson, *Focusing...*, pp. 27–28.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 127.

²¹ Because of the limited scope of this essay, I have focused only on selected conceptions of truth (those particularly relevant to Nietzsche’s views) but the reader should bear in mind that there are many other theories of truth in the field including Tarski’s semantic theory of truth, the redundancy theory of truth and the performative theory of truth, to name just a few.

²² L. E. Johnson, *Focusing...*, p. 64.

assimilate: eventually, what matters about truth is its “cash-value in experiential terms”.²³ William James argues that, in fact, the truth of an idea is relative to our ends because truth does not reside inherently in the idea but *happens* to it.²⁴ It must be added, however, that pragmatists encourage us to see as true those beliefs which might work out well over the generality of our experience, that is, those which might retain their epistemological qualification in every context. Undoubtedly, on this account, truth is radically subjective but at least it is tied to our cognition without which there could not be true or false statements.

On closer inspection, however, the pragmatist theory of truth entails what Nietzsche terms “psychological confusions”.²⁵ In a telling passage from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche asserts that what people have mistaken for truth is *belief* in it rather than truth itself.²⁶ Our “will to truth” results from a confusion between what we want to be true and what can be true; we find it extremely difficult to come to terms with a truth which is painful or harmful to us. All that makes Nietzsche reach the following conclusion:

How is truth proved? By the feeling of enhanced power – by utility – by indispensability – in short, by advantages (namely presuppositions concerning what truth ought to be like for us to recognize it). But that is a prejudice: a sign that truth is not involved at all.²⁷

The pragmatist collocation of truth and expedience²⁸ is, according to Nietzsche, an instance of wishful thinking with regard to truth. *Veritas* and *utilitas* would certainly make a splendid couple but their marriage would only give expression to our instrumental imposition of truth upon whatever we find advantageous to our projects. That, in the

²³ William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), p. 77.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁵ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Will...*, p. 249 (section 455).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249 (section 455). See also F. Nietzsche, “On Truth and Falsity...”, pp. 177 and 181.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 249–250 (section 455).

²⁸ William James defines “the true” along the following lines: “‘*The true*’, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ‘*the right*’ is only the expedient in the way of our behaving”. W. James, *Pragmatism...*, p. 86 (italics supplied by James).

long run, such an approach to truth would also pave the way for its ideological/political abuse is an obvious corollary of the entire argument though Nietzsche seems to be more interested in the reasons why we need truth at all.

The will to truth, alongside the will to power, is one of Nietzsche's central concerns. On a number of occasions it acquires the status of an ethical problem: "The will to truth requires critique – let us define our own task in this way – the value of truth must for once, by way of experiment, be *called into question* (...)".²⁹ The experiment Nietzsche proposes consists in a re-examination of the origins of our unconditional will to truth. Based on the contention that nothing is unconditional, his efforts to undermine the antithesis of truth and illusion involve a suspicious scrutiny of the conditions which gave rise to "the tyranny of the true". The results of that scrutiny are presented in section 344 of *The Gay Science*: the indisputable value of truth is a matter of a metaphysical faith, "a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine".³⁰ By way of demonstrating how relative a faith like that can be, Nietzsche hastens to ask: "But what if this should become more and more incredible, if nothing should prove to be divine any more unless it were error, blindness, the lie – if God himself should prove to be our most enduring lie?"³¹

Apparently, even if what we take to be our truths are, in fact, lies and illusions,³² we must allow them to seduce us into believing that they are true. That might explain a great deal with regard to Alphonse van Worden's willingness to be misled by his seductresses: once we deny truth its ethical prerogatives, there is no reason why we should guard ourselves against untruth. But, in his writings, Nietzsche does not content himself with demystifying the illusive quality of truth as such; he also emphasises that we had better remain in the dark about the "true" nature of truth and illusion. Or, to put it in a different way, in the name of our survival we must *posit as true* (and subsequently forget that we have done so) whatever proves to be

²⁹ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy*..., p. 128.

³⁰ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*..., p. 283 (section 344).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283 (section 344).

³² Cf. F. Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity...", p. 180 where truths are defined as illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions.

useful for life, whatever enhances the feeling of power.³³ In consequence, deception, simulation and illusion, if veiled in the appearance of truth, will not be stigmatised but extolled as life's fundamental instruments whose role is to sustain and perpetuate life itself. It might seem that we are back to the pragmatist theory of truth, and that it has returned with a vengeance. And yet Nietzsche's argument, dispersed as it is over his copious writings, involves one major modification: what he encourages us to believe in is not "true truth" but its mere semblance, a simulacrum of truth, its delusive surrogate. No longer an antithesis of illusive appearance but rather its twin sister – Baubo alias Emina; Baubo alias Zubeida.

The Story of Alphonse van Worden's Demonic Seduction Continued

The progress of Alphonse's seduction must be reconstructed with military precision. Once in the Alpujarras, the Walloon officer, who is supposed to be on his way to Madrid to join the Spanish army, keeps loitering for more than two months. Temporarily relieved of his military obligations, he is seduced also in the sense that he is persuaded to desert his allegiance to the army.³⁴ His inadvertent desertion, however, does not seem to be much of an ordeal. Conscientious as he is, the young soldier indulges freely in his diversions: torn between the reality principle (represented by his military duties) and the pleasure principle (represented explicitly by Emina and Zubeida and implicitly by the phantasmic universe they invite him to), he does not scruple to choose the latter. The sensation of being overpowered by the supernatural which he experiences is thus a way of rationalising his own *willing* suspension of disbelief in the fictive, a lame excuse for abandoning himself to the seductive phantasmagoria.

As an object of seduction, Alphonse is subjected to the economy of illusive attractions and seductive illusions. But, were we to rely on Robert Meister's foreword to *A Literary Guide to Seduction* – a text

³³ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *The Will...*, p. 290 (section 534).

³⁴ This is, in fact, one of the major meanings of the verb "seduce" that *The Oxford English Dictionary* gives.

which boasts of its own pioneering role in terms of unpacking the theoretical intricacies of seductive mechanisms – we should dismiss the notion of attraction altogether. Meister insists that “the first postulate in the dogma of seduction is the *absence of mutual attraction*”.³⁵ Naturally, to arouse attraction is the chief object of seductive manoeuvres. But, apparently, attraction does not come into play on the level of the seducer’s motivations. Here, however, Meister does not seem to be quite consistent for, having introduced a distinction between “angelic” and “satanic” seduction, he argues that the angelic seducer must be motivated by love,³⁶ which is, after all, a kind of powerful attraction. Problems start piling up when he ascribes sincerity to the angelic type of seducer while, as we all know, seduction by definition involves anything but sincerity, which is reserved for courtship. Alphonse’s seduction is thus neither angelic nor satanic; it is fundamentally, and demonically, discursive.

The demonic succubi who seduce Alphonse are first and foremost demons of language. The young officer succumbs to the discourse they use to enchant him, but also, and perhaps in equal measure, to his own discourse which he projects onto his amorous encounters with Emina and Zubeida. Alphonse’s efforts to interpret – that is, to get at the truth of – the figures who (which) seduce him eventuates in his falling prey to the inevitable seduction of his own discourse:

Every interpretive discourse (discours de sens) wants to get beyond appearances; this is its illusion and fraud. But getting beyond appearances is an impossible task: inevitably every discourse is revealed in its own appearance, and is hence subject to the stakes imposed by seduction, and consequently to its own failure as discourse. Perhaps every discourse is secretly tempted by this failure and by having its objectives put into question, changing its truth effects into surface effects which act like a mirror absorbing and engulfing meaning. This is what happens initially when a discourse seduces itself; the original way in which it absorbs meaning and empties itself of meaning in order to better fascinate others: the primitive seduction of language.³⁷

³⁵ Robert Meister, ed., *A Literary Guide to Seduction* (London: Elek Books, 1964), p. 16.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁷ J. Baudrillard, “On Seduction...”, p. 150.

The primitive seduction of language insinuates itself into Alphonse's perception of the two exotic beauties who appear to be bent on making him relinquish his integrity as well as his military and religious loyalties. Although it is true that the women refrain from dispelling his doubts, we must also concede that they are just content to observe how Alphonse *seduces himself* into believing that he is being seduced.³⁸ Emina and Zubeida are quite simply projections of his own idea of seduction: they come from what Roland Barthes calls the amorous "Image-repertoire",³⁹ and, at most, they testify to Alphonse's willingness to be led astray.

The two Moorish beauties are figures of transition and initiation. They herald the transition from the order of reality to that of fantasy (or fiction), but they are also responsible for initiating Alphonse into their own epistemology, with its blurred distinction between truth and illusion. Initially, there is every indication that Emina and Zubeida can hardly be other than demonic hallucinations, illusions meant to confuse Alphonse's sense of reality.⁴⁰ They are pregnant with "supernatural" significations which van Worden is quick to apprehend; eventually, they turn out to be pregnant with "real" meanings in the shape of Alphonse's children. A peculiar mixture of candour and cunning, they do not lie to their cousin, and yet neither do they try to lead him out of error. Emina and Zubeida are seductive figures precisely to the extent that they refuse to identify their own status as true or illusive. Instead, they let Alphonse speculate and draw conclusions grounded on his own suspicions and expectations. Thereby he assumes the role of the agent of his own seduction, prompted by his own imagination to believe in the illusive nature of the Moorish beauties.

Emina and Zubeida are pregnant with literary significations, too. The two exotic Muslims are modelled on Scheherazade whose gift for

³⁸ Again, this self-reflexive momentum is in perfect conformity with Baudrillard's idea of seduction: "Is it seducing, or being seduced, that is seductive? Yet being seduced is still the best way of seducing. It is an endless strophe. There is no active or passive in seduction, no subject or object, or even interior or exterior: it plays on both sides of the border with no border separating the sides. No one can seduce another if they have not been seduced themselves". J. Baudrillard, "On Seduction...", p. 160.

³⁹ Cf. R. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse...*, passim.

⁴⁰ Alphonse himself identifies both girls with illusions cherished and literally caressed in his dreams. Cf. J. Potocki, *The Manuscript...*, p. 23.

story-telling was truly miraculous. And it is primarily as story-tellers that the Moorish girls convey an important message: the plot they implicate Alphonse in is neither entirely true nor completely fictive. By undermining the tenuous distinction between truth and illusion, they introduce Alphonse straight to the heart of the most seductive truth, the Nietzschean truth that there is no truth outside language, and language is always, and by definition, illusively metaphoric. Like in every story van Worden is told in the Alpujarras, truth and fantasy intermingle for they are twin sisters whose illusive charm and seductiveness are truly irresistible.

Leszek Drong

Demoniczne uwodzenie: nietzscheańska interpretacja *Rękopisu znalezionej w Saragossie* Jana Potockiego

S t r e s z c z e n i e

„Demoniczne uwodzenie” to interpretacja *Rękopisu...*, w której na plan pierwszy wysuwają się postaci kobiece. Emina i Zubeida – uwodzicielki w sensie dosłownym – ucieleśniają również kuszącą niejednoznaczność epistemologicznych kategorii prawdy i fałszu. Owa niejednoznaczność zasadza się na poglądach Fryderyka Nietzschego, który, odwołując się do „niewieściej” metaforyki, proponuje zrewidowanie tradycyjnego spojrzenia na wartość poznawczą prawdy i kłamstwa. Te dwa kluczowe pojęcia, tak istotne dla ontologii świata przedstawionego *Rękopisu...*, przenikają się wzajemnie do tego stopnia, iż możemy w ich przypadku mówić nawet o wymienności funkcji. Emina i Zubeida to siostry bliźniaczki, których uwodzicielski urok i uderzające podobieństwo mają zasadnicze znaczenie dla zrozumienia istoty relacji prawda/fałsz (fakt/fikcja, historia/zmyślenie) w całym powieściowym *universum*.

Leszek Drong

Une séduction démoniaque: pour une interprétation nietzschéenne de
Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse de Jan Potocki

R é s u m é

„Une séduction démoniaque”, c’est une interprétation de *Manuscrit...* dans laquelle on met au premier plan les personnages féminins. Émine et Zubéide – séductrices au sens propre du terme – incarnent aussi une équivocité, elle-même séduisante, des catégories épistémologiques de vrai et de faux. Cette non-univocité relève des opinions de Friedrich Nietzsche qui, en recourant à la métaphorique „féminine”, propose de réviser la vision traditionnelle de la valeur épistémologique du vrai et du faux. Ces deux notions-clés, si importantes pour l’ontologie de l’univers représenté de *Manuscrit...*, s’interpénètrent au point que nous pouvons parler à propos d’elles d’interchangeabilité de fonctions. Émine et Zubéide sont deux soeurs jumelles dont le charme séducteur et la ressemblance, qui est en effet une identité, ont une importance capitale pour la compréhension de l’essence de la relation vrai/faux (fait/fiction, histoire/mensonge) dans tout l’univers romanesque de Potocki.