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Nostalgic Impulse
Marc Chagall's Trilogy of Illustrated Books in France

Shu Hsuan Kuo

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Nostalgic Impulse
Marc Chagall's Trilogy of Illustrated Books in France

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The five years in the Netherlands benefited me in many ways more than I could have imagined in the beginning. Born on a tiny island named Taiwan, I was amazed that how similar but also how different these two small countries appear to be. In the book *Dutch Touch* cooperated with other Taiwanese PhD candidates, I wrote

These two countries [The Netherlands and Taiwan] have similar sizes and population; both have been occupied by foreign powers; both have a powerful neighbouring country... However the Netherlands have succeeded in becoming a strong and independent country. There must be something we Taiwanese can learn from the Dutch.¹

I therefore dedicate this dissertation to all the people I have met in the Netherlands; for the hard work of my tutors in providing me with an academic education, for those friends and acquaintances that were the source of a great deal of writing inspiration, and for all the culture shocks I have had the utmost pleasure of experiencing.

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¹ Kuo, Shu Hsuan, 'Why are we writing a book about the Netherlands', preface to *Dutch Touch*, Taipei: Avanguardbooks, 2011.

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INTRODUCTION

It is they [Chagall and his generation] who established the patterns of nostalgia a century ago in one great, reconstructed myth.

*Benjamin Harshav,
Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World¹*

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) spent most of his life in an extraterritorial situation. As early as 1910, the young Chagall left his Russian hometown of Vitebsk for Paris to study the arts.² In 1914, when he went home to visit his family and his fiancée Bella, Chagall asked his friend and poet Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961) to keep his paintings for him temporarily. With the outbreak of the First World War, however, he found himself stuck in his little town. In 1923, through Cendrars, Chagall made his second journey to Paris at the invitation of the publisher Ambroise Vollard (1886-1939) to finish his commission to illustrate books. He eventually settled down in Paris with his family and received French citizenship in 1937.

When the Second World War erupted, Chagall, as a prominent Jewish artist, accepted the support of the United States and escaped to New York with his family. From then on, he became part of the Jewish Diaspora, during which he lost his beloved muse Bella.³ After the war, Chagall returned to France and chose to spend his remaining days at the Côte d'Azur.

1 Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, NY: Rizzoli, 2006, p. 121.

2 In Paris Chagall stayed in the studio at *La Ruche* (the beehive). Located in the centre of Montparnasse, La Ruche is a circular building divided into cheap studios for artists. Chagall was a neighbour of Modigliani, Soutine and Léger, and also befriended writer Blaise Cendrars and the poet Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918). See ed. Jean-Louis Ferrier, *Art of the 20th Century: A Year-by-Year Chronicle of Painting, Architecture, and Sculpture*, Éditions du Chêne, 1999.

3 The death of his first wife Bella was such a big shock to Chagall that he couldn't work for months. He regretted their solitary situation in America, away from their fellow countrymen and lamented that "New York killed her." See Jackie Wullschlager, *Chagall:*

Due to his complicated life experiences, the terms “nostalgia”—as well as “love”—have appeared frequently in earlier studies when describing the undeniable characteristics of Chagall’s artwork. With recurring Russian motifs in his pictures, the artist seems to constantly lament his departure from his hometown. However, in this thesis, I will argue that the nostalgic feeling of his works should be seen as striving for a transcendent human status, rather than the mere sentimental longing for a tangible little town. To achieve this, I’ll approach Chagall’s work with the help of categories developed in nostalgia studies. I will reinterpret his works in a two-levelled analysis on the basis of distinctions made within the phenomenon of nostalgia. To be more precise, in my analysis I will relocate Chagall’s works not only in relation to the times and places in which he created them, but also in relation to the times and places which he longs for through his images. In this way, I intend to position Chagall’s works within the social and political contexts of his time and also to theorize his works from a new perspective.

1. The “Trilogy” of Illustrated Books

Chagall’s works that will be central to this thesis are the three illustrated books commissioned by Vollard during Chagall’s second stay in France, namely *Les Âmes Mortes* (*Dead Souls*, produced in 1923-27) by Nikolai Gogol, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (1927-30) and *La Bible* (1931-52).⁴ To distinguish them from Chagall’s other illustrated books, these three books of illustrations will be referred to as “the trilogy of Chagall’s book illustrations in France”, or simply “the trilogy”. Although these three works have not been named as a trilogy in other critical approaches of his work, it is my intention to demonstrate that these three works can be considered as an interrelated whole.

I selected this trilogy of illustrated books as the subject of my research for the following reasons:

- a) Chagall’s numerous illustrations are worthy of higher attention in general, especially the rare etchings which were mainly used in his early period.

Love and Exile, Allen Lane Penguin Group, 2008. For Chagall, the loss of his first wife meant the loss of the connection to the good old days in their hometown, which haunted him in his later works as another kind of nostalgia for the lost time and space.

⁴ To make it clear: in this thesis I will use the French titles to refer to the illustrated books published by Vollard, and the English titles to refer to the original texts.

- b) These three works together form an ideal example of the artist's triple identities—a Russian Jew with French citizenship—and also offer a good opportunity to observe how he reflects upon his various backgrounds.
- c) The subject matters of these three works present different but coherent materials for the study of nostalgia.

Through the trilogy, I attempt to demonstrate the importance of Chagall's illustrations as such, which are underestimated by most scholars who have written about Chagall's work. In the context of art and literary history, I'd like to position his illustrations within his contemporary publishing milieu and also within the history of printing. In the context of Chagall's own artistic development, it is worth paying more attention to the freestyle drawing technique in his etchings.

It is important to note the correspondence between the journeys in Chagall's life and the subject matter of the trilogy: *Les Âmes Mortes* is a retrospective visualization of his childhood hometown Vitebsk; *Les Fables de La Fontaine* represents his second home in France, particularly the south of France where he chose to spend the last years of his life; and *La Bible* reflects his ultimate identity of being a Jew in an era of diaspora. Although many critics have doubts as to what degree the author's background and intentions should be taken into account regarding the interpretation of his works, in Chagall's case, it would be misleading to ignore the relationship between the author's life and his works. This is because one of the fundamental aesthetic characteristics of Chagall's work stems from the influence of his birthplace on his work. Apparently, it is no coincidence that Chagall settled on the three choices with Vollard, since the trilogy perfectly reflects his triple identities.

At first glance, the literary texts chosen to be illustrated for this trilogy appear to be three individual works disparate in both genre and era. *Les Âmes Mortes* is a Russian epic-novel written in the 19th century; *Les Fables* is a compilation of fable verses completed in the 17th century; and *La Bible* is a new version of the Old Testament. However, for the multi-cultural artist Chagall, these texts could refer to his idea of homecoming, or of his nostalgia for the lost time and space. It is the overall theme of nostalgia that links these three separate works. Through the study of the thematics of nostalgia, Chagall's work can be further assessed as more than a simple psychological yearning for his hometown or childhood identity.

2. Nostalgia Studies

Nostalgia has become a central focus in recent approaches of Modernism. Nostalgia often pertains to issues such as diaspora, exile, identity, and the quest for self. This focus of scholarship and criticism is not surprising given that throughout the 20th century, nostalgia has been reflected in contemporary art and literary works of all formats and genres. Many of these literary and artistic works convey a nostalgic mood as a result of various diasporic movements around the world. Within this context of diaspora, the relatively “old-fashioned” works by Chagall will receive a new understanding and will in return function as nostalgic testimonies to an era of nostalgia.

Nostalgia was once considered a pathological symptom of homesickness, and it was not until the late 19th century that nostalgia was associated with the concepts of memory and imagination. In France – particularly at the turn of the century when Chagall began working at his La Ruche studio – nostalgia played an important role in historical and cultural analysis, literary criticism and art history. Nostalgia ultimately became a very fashionable topic in the 20th century. Nostalgia is no longer considered a clinical disorder, but has come to include a sense of the loss of place or self.⁵

As O’Sullivan points out, the first use of nostalgia in a non-clinical sense can be found in Balzac’s *La Comédie Humaine* and “designates passions and obsessions ranging from the religious to the erotic and gastronomic. [...] It introduced the notion of the fantastic to nostalgic desire, and allowed it to be used as a metaphor for spleen, ennui and melancholia, all conditions considered as separate clinical categories by French medical writers.”⁶ The notion of nostalgia has since deviated down different paths to include the analysis of social phenomena in history or the interpretation of the longings expressed in literature and the visual arts. In other words, nostalgic desire has transformed from a literal return home to an imaginary journey into the past. In their article “Nostalgia and the shapes of history”, Atia and Davies summarize that nostalgia “serves as a negotiation between continuity and discontinuity” and that:

It insists on the bond between our present selves and a certain fragment of the past, but also on the force of our separation from what we have lost. [...]

⁵ For more details on the history of nostalgia studies, see *Memory Studies*, vol.3, no. 3, 2010, especially the articles by Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, “Nostalgia and the shapes of history”, p.181-186, and Lisa O’Sullivan, “Lost imagination: French nostalgia and the turn to memory”, p.192-195.

⁶ O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 193.

If 'nostalgia' names the particular emotion or way of thinking that arises from a deeply felt encounter between our personal continuities and discontinuities, then nostalgic emotion might be nothing less than the felt awareness of how identity is entangled with difference.⁷

The authors go on to explain that since nostalgia now gives depth to our awareness of other times, places or possibilities, in this sense it has the potential to function as a kind of "critical self-consciousness".⁸ The use of the notion of nostalgia therefore varies vastly in different approaches. In her *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart goes even further in abstracting nostalgic desire from homesickness by stating that:

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience [...] nostalgia is the desire for desire.⁹

In the context of art history and literary studies, the most convincing definition of nostalgia is found in Svetlana Boym's voluminous book *The Future of Nostalgia*, where she clearly explains that:

The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.¹⁰

Boym clarifies later that there are two basic types of nostalgic impulses: restorative and reflective nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes "nostos", which means "return home", whereas reflective nostalgia focuses on "algia", meaning "longing". In Boym's words, restorative nostalgia "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home", while reflective nostalgia "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging".¹¹

With its implication of self-quest, the notion of nostalgia suits the example of Chagall's retrospective artworks. And it is according to the two categories of

⁷ Atia and Davies, 2010, p. 184.

⁸ Atia and Davies, 2010, p. 184.

⁹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke University Press, 1993, p. 23.

¹⁰ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, 2001, p.xv

¹¹ Boym, 2001, p. xviii

nostalgia suggested by Boym that I develop my interpretation of Chagall's works in this thesis. Chagall's trilogy of illustrated books also serves as a visual demonstration of the two meanings of nostalgia: in the restorative sense, these three books point to the return of a certain place which corresponds to a place that is central to the artist's personal backgrounds; in the reflective sense, the theme of the trilogy reflects the spiritual longing of different human conditions—of being intuitively responsive to one's desires, of being naive as a child, and of being spiritually connected to the divine existence.

Unlike literary texts, pictures do not reflect the notion of nostalgia in terms of literal descriptions. Instead, visual elements refer to the lost or longed for time or place. By reconstructing the visual spaces in memory, the first sense of nostalgia, "returning", is made possible via images. It is through the subject or the atmosphere evoked by the pictures that the second sense of longing is conveyed to their viewers. Moreover, in the medium of illustration, which consists of coherent pictures accompanying the texts, pictorial narration also plays an important part in the implication of nostalgia. In Chagall's most explicit example of nostalgia in *La Bible*, the narration in individual pictures forms a sequential longing for the lost holy land as well as for the holy time when spiritual leaders shed light on their prophecies and when God's words were more accessible. By extending this nostalgic longing for one's own roots with the longing for the lost divine condition of a whole people, Chagall's illustrations actually introduce history into "the private or collective mythology" that Boym described.

In short, through the study of nostalgia, this thesis attempts not only to uncover Chagall's multiple identifications with realistic locations, but also to reveal the spiritual quests hidden behind the illustrated literary texts. Through a close reading of Chagall's three illustrated books, one in each chapter, the objective of this thesis is to perform and demonstrate a new interdisciplinary research.

3. Chapter Summary

Because of the specific subject matter of book illustrations, this research also focuses on the relationship between words and images in addition to the overall theme of nostalgia. The first chapter of this thesis therefore consists of a general introduction to Chagall's illustrations from the perspective of nostalgia, followed by three chapters in which I adopt different approaches to open up new possibilities for the cross-interpretation of literary texts and visual images in Chagall's trilogy.

In Chapter 1, I'll argue how Chagall's illustrations were influenced by, and benefited from, a mixture of elements. These elements include Chagall's personal

background (his birthplace) and his journeys to many countries, together with his contemporary artistic environment. This environment is characterized by the abundant number of publications of *livres d'artiste* (artists' books), the activities of Jewish avant-garde artists, and the political situation of exiles during and after the interwar period. All of these elements together transform Chagall's illustrations into a characteristic representation of the subject of nostalgia.

In Chapter 2, grotesque realism, the key notion of carnival in Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory of dialogism, functions as the main concept in the interpretation of Gogol's text and in relation to Chagall's exaggerating illustrations. Throughout the chapter, Bakhtin's critical ideas will be used as a new perspective on this illustrated book, including significant concepts like polyphony¹² and heteroglossia¹³.

Grotesque realism is the kind of aesthetics Bakhtin extracts from folk carnival of the medieval and the Renaissance periods. In Bakhtin's argument, the secular carnival is the best practice of dialogical principles. During the festive event when there was no distinction between performers and audience, the whole population transformed conventional or authoritative values into a grotesque subversion of them. Due to the fact that existing values, classes and disciplines were to be mocked and laughed at, participants at carnivals were allowed to indulge in a Utopian "second world", which referred to the "lower" dimensions of noisy, mocking, informal, non-political or non-religious elements in human lives. Taking Rabelais's works as an example, Bakhtin explains that the importance of carnival lies in the "bodily participation in the potentiality to another world."¹⁴ As

¹² Bakhtin adopts the musical concept of "polyphony" to his literary theory. In music, polyphony is a texture consisting of two or more independent melodic voices, as opposed to music with one voice, or monophony. In literature, the most well-known example is Bakhtin's criticism of novels by Dostoevsky (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1929). Bakhtin points out that in Dostoevsky's novels, the author does not aim for a single vision, but rather "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels." See Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minnesota University Press, 1984, p.6.

¹³ Based on the concept of polyphony, Bakhtin introduces the idea of "heteroglossia" (literally meaning "multilingualness") in his essay "Discourse in the Novel" (1934). It alludes to the multiple forms in a national language and it can be seen in the diverse forms of speech in a novel. The essay is included in Bakhtin, Ed. Michael Holquist, *The dialogic imagination: four essays*, University of Texas Press, 1981

¹⁴ The ideas about carnival aesthetics are found in Bakhtin's major work *Rabelais and His World* (1965). The quotation comes from Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans.

a key role in this second world, the material bodily principle—the bodily images of eating, drinking, excreting, and intercourse—emphasizes the joy of human lives during which the body keeps expanding and transforming. Degradation, however, becomes another characteristic of the aesthetics of carnival, meaning that the sublime, abstract and spiritual is transformed and lowered into the physical or bodily. The laughter generated in carnivalesque vocabularies—of jokes, clowns and parodies—therefore brings out the positive meaning of carnival culture. The concept of carnival can be seen as universal, playing a role in all cultures. During carnival all bodily aspects of human realities are exposed through hyperbole and the grotesque. Bakhtin summarizes the phenomenon of carnival in terms of grotesque realism.¹⁵

Therefore, when applied to literary texts, the aesthetics of carnival are referred to as carnivalesque text, which makes a mockery of tradition through all kinds of grotesque or ridiculous forms. In addition to Rabelais, Bakhtin's prime examples of carnivalesque texts also include *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) and *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne (1713-1768), who exerted a powerful influence on Gogol's writings. What these works have in common is their twisted, exaggerating style inspired by contemporary social realities.¹⁶

It is my ambition to use Bakhtin's concepts for the analysis of Chagall's illustrations in *Les Âmes Mortes*. The main argument in Chapter 2 will be based on Bakhtin's notion of grotesque realism. In both Gogol's literary text and Chagall's illustrations, grotesque forms of realistic elements can be observed frequently. For example, the daily details of eating and drinking in *Les Âmes Mortes* are often presented in a carnivalesque way: in Gogol's text, festive scenes reappear throughout the entire novel and the characters are often described as funny clowns. Similarly, in Chagall's illustrations, the jubilant atmosphere goes even further so that all the figures, objects and even backgrounds are jumping, spinning and celebrating. Both the author and the illustrator of *Les Âmes Mortes* have transformed familiar details from their hometowns into carnivalesque characters. It is with the vocabulary of the grotesque that they created a spirit of profound mockery in their works.

In general, the spirit of grotesque realism can also be found in Chagall's other artworks in addition to the illustrated books discussed in this thesis.

Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana Univ. Press, 1984, p, 48.

¹⁵ See Bakhtin, 1984, p.18-20.

¹⁶ For more introductions on carnivalesque texts, see Tzvetan Todorov, "History of Literature", *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Eng. Trans. Wlad Godzich, Univ. of Minnesota, 1984, p.78-80.

However, in the third and fourth chapters on “Infant Joy: *Les Fables de La Fontaine*” and “The Quest of God: *La Bible*”, I return to an iconological approach, a relatively conventional approach for art historical studies. I do so, because I am convinced that the analysis of the illustrations of both *Les Fables* and *La Bible* is the most productive when iconology is involved. *Les Fables* and *La Bible* distinguish themselves from other illustrated works in that they have a long history of being illustrated. This long history of illustration is considered an iconographic tradition in itself. Therefore, besides the knowledge of the familiar stories and traditions established by previous illustrators, the challenge of illustrating *Les Fables* or *La Bible* also lies in how to re-use the iconography of certain images to create new ones.

Erwin Panofsky distinguished three levels of iconological analysis, namely pre-iconographic description, the iconographical analysis, and the iconological interpretation. The pre-iconographic description refers to the identification of primary or natural subject matter; the iconographical analysis refers to conventional images, stories or allegories based on knowledge of specific cultural traditions; and the third level of iconological interpretation refers to meaning and content based on the synthetics of various contexts when the artist creates the work, which include aspects of a psychological, social, political, cultural, ideological nature.¹⁷

An analysis based on the three-tiered approach of images proposed by Panofsky will have to begin with a pre-iconographic description of the fabular or biblical images, since most of them are representational figures or scenes. Although in Chagall’s case, the description may be tricky since he deliberately twisted or exaggerated the figures into grotesque shapes. The second level of iconographical analysis is also easily identified because most illustrations are of well-known stories or plots, and some of these stories are usually represented by means of a conventional, recognizable idiom. In order to recognize the uniqueness of Chagall’s presentations within the long iconographical history of illustration of both *Les Fables* and *La Bible*, my approach is to compare Chagall’s works with other existing images of the same text—whether done by precursory or contemporary artists, and to identify any similarities and/or differences between them. Because of the long and established traditions of depicting bestiary images, this level of image-reading is especially important in Chapter 3 on *Les Fables*, since it in turn affects the tone and interpretation of the morals.

After having performed the first and second level of the iconographic analysis of the images, I will attempt to perform the third level of iconological

¹⁷ For further analysis and examples see Edwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Art*, University of Chicago Press, 1955, p. 53-58.

interpretation of the trilogy of illustrated books. To do so, I will examine the contemporary social, political and cultural milieu in which Chagall produced the illustrated books in order to give a multi-dimensional interpretation of his works. This kind of interpretation plays an extremely important role in Chapter 4 on *La Bible*, since this series of illustrations was profoundly influenced by the contemporary social-political situation as well as by Chagall's personal experiences. This chapter will therefore focus on Jewish history and the modern fate of the establishment of Israel, which is shown in parallel in Chagall's illustrations.

In short, by using notions of modern literary theory and iconological analysis, this thesis aims to re-evaluate and reinterpret Chagall's illustrations in different contexts.

4. Critical Literature on Chagall

This thesis builds on previous research done by various scholars. Theoretically, I aim to introduce a new example within the interdisciplinary approach outlined above. As a contribution to historical and biographical analysis, I will try to highlight parts of the illustrated books that often go unnoticed.

The amount of research on Marc Chagall and his work has reached massive proportions and new research continues to be published, which is not really surprising for a historically important artist like Chagall. As regards biographical research, Jackie Wullschlager's voluminous contribution *Chagall: Love and Exile*, which includes sharp criticism of many of his works, has functioned as a crucial reference for Chagall's long and experienced life.¹⁸ Additionally, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture* (edited by Benjamin Harshav) can be seen as first-hand information on the artist's beliefs and the motivations behind his artworks.¹⁹ Based on such important compilations, my research will focus on linking Chagall's art and life with the history of illustrated books so as to introduce new arguments on his respective works.

Regarding the relationship between words and illustrations, I will attempt to integrate the existing research on each work with a formal analysis of Chagall's illustration pieces. For *Les Âmes Mortes*, I adapted Richard Peace's brilliant interpretation of Gogol's works to suit an analysis of Chagall's illustrations for

¹⁸ Wullschlager, 2008

¹⁹ Benjamin Harshav, ed., *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, Stanford University Press, 2003

this text.²⁰ Amid the countless studies on La Fontaine, Alain-Marie Bassy's *Les Fables de La Fontaine : quatre siècles d'illustration* and Gérard Gréverand's *La Fontaine et les artistes* both provide an extensive history of fabular illustrations and Chagall's role therein.²¹ As regards the analysis of biblical images, Benjamin Harshav's prominent book *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World* forms the foundation of my further analysis of the Jewishness of Chagall's works,²² while Jean Bloch Rosensaft's *Chagall and the Bible* offers basic but convincing descriptions for every illustration in *La Bible*.²³ Building on the vast amount of research conducted on Chagall's biblical images, I intend to distinguish this thesis from previous works by focusing on the characteristics of the medium of illustration and systemizing his images as a theoretical case study on illustration.

To conclude, under the general approach of precursory nostalgia studies, this thesis aims to highlight Chagall's illustrations as an independent realm of art, and subsequently, to examine this realm of art with conventional or non-conventional modern theories for interdisciplinary studies. In this way I expect not only to build on previous research of Chagall's biography and the overall history of *vies d'artiste*, but also to contribute to memory studies, literary criticism and art historical theories.

²⁰ Here I am referring to Peace's major work *The Enigma of Gogol: An Examination of the Writing of N. V. Gogol and their Place in the Russian Literary Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

²¹ Alain-Marie Bassy, *Les Fables de La Fontaine : quatre siècles d'illustration*, Éditions Promodis, 1986, and Gérard Gréverand, *La Fontaine et les artistes*, La Renaissance du Livre, 2002

²² Harshav, 2006

²³ Jean Bloch Rosensaft, *Chagall and the Bible*, Universe Books, 1987

I. CHAPTER ONE – Chagall's Illustrations in View of Nostalgia

It was with illustrations that Chagall started and ended his long life as an artist. He began his first art lesson by copying an illustration from the magazine *Niwa*, a magazine by which he was inspired.²⁴ And on the day of his death, he was still discussing the details of a lithography illustration with his assistant Charles Sorlier.²⁵ Throughout his life, Chagall created more than 25 series of illustrations for literary texts. He made them using various techniques, including pen and ink drawing, etching and lithography. Despite their sheer size and explicit relationship to his oil paintings, Chagall's illustrations are often underestimated and only briefly mentioned by most of his biographers.

In France, Chagall's illustrated books began with the ambition of a publisher to make *livres d'artiste* without financial restrictions. With the considerable number of publications he produced, Ambroise Vollard is one of the most prominent publishers to promote *livres d'artiste* at his time. As a successful art dealer with intuitive taste, Vollard already made a fortune with his financial strategy of "buy low, sell high". He soon became an amateur merchant when he established his own gallery at Rue Laffitte and began financing young and unknown artists. With Vollard's support many artists became recognized and significant in later years, including Cézanne, Maillol, Renoir, Picasso, Rouault, Gauguin and Van Gogh. Most of them had also collaborated with Vollard on book illustrations.

It seems an unlikely decision for a businessman like Vollard to take the risk of commissioning young artists to create unconventional illustrated books that collectors were unlikely to appreciate. However, it is both Vollard's personal interest in graphic arts and his belief in *livres d'artiste* that made everything

²⁴ "Je courus à la bibliothèque, saisis cette grosse édition de « Niwa » et me mis à copier le portrait du compositeur Rubinstein, séduit par ses pattes d'oie et ses rides, ou par une Grecque et d'autres illustrations..." Marc Chagall, *Ma Vie*, first published in 1931, Stock, 1995, p.78-79.

²⁵ Sorlier visited Chagall on 28 March 1985. An hour after he left, Chagall passed away in his studio at the age of 98. The small lithography he showed Sorlier turned out to be his final piece. See Charles Sorlier, *Marc Chagall: Le Livre des Livres*, ed. André Sauret / Michèle Trinckvel, 1900, p. 19.

possible. "All the same, I shall have the last word,"²⁶ Vollard reminded himself after each rebuff from book collectors.

After working with a few potential artists on book publications, Vollard decided to cooperate with the Russian-Jewish artist Marc Chagall. In spite of all the difficulties and interruptions during the process, Chagall completed three series of book illustrations commissioned by Vollard. Similar to other artists' examples of *livres d'artiste*, Chagall interpreted the texts in his own artistic style. Although the public was already accustomed to the idea of the artist's book, it was still difficult for Chagall's books to gain appreciation because of his rather unusual and casual style. Particularly his treatment of *Les Fables de La Fontaine* aroused strong objection from the world of bibliophiles.²⁷

Chagall's three illustrated books made in collaboration with Vollard can be appreciated separately, but they attain a wider dimension and a new interpretation if viewed as a trilogy. Seen as a trilogy, the three illustrated texts convincingly exude a sense of nostalgia, as is the case in most of his other works. On the other hand, his trilogy is not unique in this respect: the sense of longing for a lost world, as a result of exile and nostalgia, can also be recognized in several works of contemporary artists and literary writers, including other *livres d'artiste* by artists of the École de Paris.²⁸ Therefore, this trilogy of illustrated texts will be examined from the perspective of nostalgia. I will reflect on the influences and reflections of his contemporary milieu, the sources of inspiration inherited from the artist's birthplace and ethnic identity, and finally the styles and techniques that shaped his representations.

1. The Golden Age of *Livres d'Artiste*

The artistic achievement of Chagall's illustrations also contributed to the so-called golden age of illustrated books in France. The peak of *livres d'artiste* took place from the last quarter of the 19th century to the interwar years, which is more or less the same period as the French Belle Époque.²⁹

²⁶ Ambroise Vollard, trans. Violet M. MacDonald, *Recollections of a Picture Dealer*, Courier Dover Publications, 2003, p.255.

²⁷ I will elaborate more on Chagall's pictorial styles in the following section and provide further details on the illustration of *Fables* in the third chapter "Infant Joy: *Les Fables de La Fontaine*" of this thesis.

²⁸ This will be discussed in the following section.

²⁹ The definition of the term *livre d'artiste* and the dates of its peak period vary among scholars and researchers. In this thesis I adopted the classification by Gordon Norton

How to maintain one's own style while illustrating a text is the main concern for an artist when producing an artist's book.³⁰ Although without a precise definition, the term *livre d'artiste* (or *livre de peintre*), refers to "a book containing illustrations carried out by the artist himself (...) who has himself employed some autographic process for the execution of his designs."³¹ In the context of the French publishing world, it can refer to either a few French precursors in early 19th century,³² or the works by artists under the commission of specific publishers in Paris around the turn of the century.³³ In the latter category, the idea is to commission artists to create book illustrations without the interference of engravers. Unlike professional illustrators, the artists bypass technical regulations for book illustrations and with their own artistic styles they see the book as an artwork independent of the text.

Ray in his voluminous book *The Art of the French Illustrated Book, 1700-1914*, because it makes the most sense to me since he related the summit of book illustrations to La Belle Époque, which explained the implicit influences from the aesthetics in the latter period. See Gordon N. Ray, *The Art of the French Illustrated Book, 1700-1914*, Cornell University Press, 1982, p.372-498.

³⁰ It is necessary to briefly review the general situation of illustrated books before this period. As early as the second half of 18th century, William Blake already made the initiation with his illuminated books. Owing to the progress of the industrial revolution in the beginning of 19th century, there emerged a renovation of illustrations in England, led by pre-Raphaelite painters and William Morris's Art and Crafts' Movement. It was in the late 19th century that Parisian publishers found their renaissance in illustrated books. With new printing technologies, such as the use of lithography, the production and circulation of illustrated books were made more available to the public than they used to be. The technical possibility led to new experiments of the illustrated book, on its formats and subjects, and thus came the notion of *livres d'artiste*.

³¹ Here I adopted the definition by WJ Strachan, 'The Livre d'artiste', *The Artist and the Book in France: the 20th Century Livre d'Artiste*, London: Peter Owen, 1969, p.19.

³² In fact, in the first half of 19th century, Eugène Delacroix already shocked the book market with his innovative use of lithography in his illustrations for Goethe's *Faust* (1828). Despite Delacroix's precursory works, the tradition of delicate engravings was still considered the ideal format for book illustrations in Vollard's time. Firstly, the form of illustrations was meant to be decorative, such as the well-praised version of *Œuvres de Molière* (1836) illustrated by Tony Johannot. Although Johannot had proved his ability of imaginative interpretation for many other fantastic texts, he also had to follow the norms of decorative illustrations, which included using the proper medium for engravings, clear and understandable details of images, and the pleasant layout accompanying the texts, etc. Secondly, the content of illustrations should remain loyal to the texts. The standard example is the huge illustrated albums by Gustave Doré (1832-83) who visualized numerous classics into sharp realistic details, which is ironically the only artistic feature attributed to this famous professional illustrator.

³³ This definition comes again from Ray in his "Painters' Books", *The Art of the French Illustrated Book, 1700-1914*, 1982, p. 496.

Unsurprisingly, the avant-garde experiments of the *livre d'artiste* were not easily accepted by the public, or by the market of book collectors to be precise. The frustrating experience of selling an illustrated book by Maurice Denis is a typical example. When Vollard tried to recommend Denis's illustrated *Sagesse* (text by Paul Verlaine, 1889) to a book collector who had been a connoisseur of Denis's oil painting, the latter rejected the work by arbitrarily declaring that "Painters are not illustrators. The liberties they permit themselves are incompatible with the 'finish' which is the whole merit of an illustrated book."³⁴ A more notorious example is Pierre Bonnard's *Parallèlement* (1900), commissioned by Vollard as well, which paradoxically has been evaluated as both a scandal and an innovation in book printing history. Paul Verlaine's rebellious poetry about the passion of young lesbians was vicious enough for his contemporary readers. More than that, Bonnard's unconventional way of drawing the images around the text, plus the use of lithography in pink ink, annoyed most collectors and authorities at the time.³⁵

Fortunately, the belief in making *livres d'artiste* was not obstructed by such acidic criticism. Persisting on the belief that artistic expression in book illustrations should be independent of the texts, publishers and commissioned artists cooperated to accomplish a revolution in the history of illustration.³⁶ During this flourishing period of *livres d'artiste*, it is "hard to think of a single great French painter or sculptor who has not illustrated at least one such book—and often several (in the case of Picasso, dozens)—with masterpieces of creative originality."³⁷

As the atmosphere of *fin-de-siècle* still haunted the art world, the concept of "art for art's sake" and the aesthetics of the Decadents were also expressed in the visual and material form of books. Moreover, it is important to note that in the world of book publication, foreign artists known as belonging to the "École de

³⁴ Vollard, *Ibid*, p.254.

³⁵ A typical reaction is that when M. Béraldi, who showed much appreciation for *Gaspard de la Nuit* (illustrated by Armand Seguin, text by Louis Bertrand) in the beginning, learned the name of the publisher, he abruptly rejected the book: "The man who published *Parallèlement* and *Daphnis et Chloé*? Ah, no! That would be letting the Devil into my library..." See Vollard, *Ibid*, p. 254-255.

³⁶ Besides Vollard, there were other significant publishers working on *livres d'artiste* such as Marty, Floury and especially Henry Kahnweiler who sponsored young artists like Picasso, Braque and Derain. All these efforts made the gold age of illustrations possible. Further details see Ray, 1982, or Jacqueline Armingeat in "The Illustrated Book", *Lithography: 200 Years of Art, History, and Technique*, Harry N. Abrams, 1983, p.223-239.

³⁷ Strachan, *Ibid*, p.20.

Paris” especially enriched the production of *livre d’artiste*. These artists shared themes of identity, exoticism and nostalgia in their works. Chagall is a prime example of a foreign artist belonging to the École de Paris. For a Russian painter like Chagall, it was exactly his outspoken attitude and hometown pride that made him distinctive and attractive to the French audience.

Among the most popular topics for *livres d’artiste*, there appears to be a preference for either French literature of the late 19th century or for reinterpretations of the ancient classics.³⁸ The former includes poetry by Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rimbaud and other contemporary writers,³⁹ while the latter ranges from Greek and Roman mythology and classical literature to versions of fables and bestiaries.⁴⁰ Altogether they display a spectrum consisting of a fascination for the contemporary and a yearning toward the ancient or the naïve. In this context, Chagall’s illustrated books *La Bible* and *Les Fables de La Fontaine* can be seen not only as the direct



Figure I-1 Le voyage d'Urien

³⁸ For example, the popular classics for the texts of artists’ books included Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, illustrated by Collin, Bonnard (1902) and Chagall (1967); Dante’s *Vita Nova* illustrated by Denis; La Fontaine’s *Contes et Nouvelles* by Derain, etc. Picasso also made a good amount of illustrations for Greek masterpieces, such as *Les Métamorphoses* by Ovid (1931) and *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes (1934); Chagall himself made illustrations for Homer’s *Odyssey* (1974-75) and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1975) in his later years as well. Of course, the classical texts for artists’ books vary widely and here I only list titles or artists that are somehow related to Chagall’s works. For references of titles of illustrated books, see Strachan, *Ibid.* and Ray, 1982.

³⁹ There are illustrated versions of *Les Fleurs du Mal* by artists like Matisse, Rouault, Goerg, etc., and *Le Spleen de Paris* by Emile Bernard. There are Richier, Coutaud and Prassinis interpretation of Rimbaud’s *Une Saison en Enfer*. For contemporary authors, the most famous example is Toulouse-Lautrec on Gustave Geffroy’s *Yvette Guilbert* (1894). The creations of *livres d’artiste* are mentioned in many studies. Here I mainly refer to the surveys by Strachan in *The Artist and the Book in France: the 20th-Century Livre d’Artiste* or Armingeat, “The Illustrated Book”, 1983.

⁴⁰ It is necessary to note the animal image as a specific theme in illustrated books, which spans from ancient fable stories to contemporary adaptations. The most popular texts used include Jules Renard’s *Histoires Naturelles* illustrated by Buffon, Bonnard and Toulouse-Lautrec (1899); *Fables de La Fontaine* by Chagall, Lurçat and Krol; or Apollinaire’s *Bestiary: Or the Parade of Orpheus* illustrated by Dufy (1910-11).

results of the artist's cultural background, but also as a reflection on the trends of his time.

The illustrated books by Maurice Denis offer a good example of the *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics of book illustration. His illustrated versions of *Sagesse* and *L'Imitation de Jésus Christ* (1903), again published by Vollard, are more a demonstration of his Nabis art than a faithful visualization of the texts. Particularly his illustrations for *Le voyage d'Urien* (1893, fig. I-1), written by André Gide, consist of almost mysterious pictures.⁴¹ Coherent with his painting style, characters in these illustrations seem to consist of contours or shadows instead of substantial figures, and the backgrounds are either flat in perspective or integrated with the character in an ambiguous way. However, Denis's style in these illustrations not only shows his affinity with a certain art movement, but also evokes an elusive atmosphere in Gide's text. While *Le voyage d'Urien*, a wordplay on "le voyage du rien", describes the hallucinatory trip of Urien, Denis's illustrations correspond with empty and surreal shadows instead of realistic details. The choice of the text itself together with Denis's Nabis style creates a sense of nothingness in an uncertain world.

Aside from 19th-century literature, the reinterpretation of classical texts in *livres d'artiste* implies the longing towards a more primitive or innocent state of humankind. One of the examples is Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*.⁴² Filled with elements such as nature, animals, love and desire, the ancient Greek pastoral explains how two orphans, a shepherd and shepherdess, discover their natural eroticism as well as their real identities. It is clear that *Daphnis and Chloe* remained popular among artists at the time when *livres d'artiste* thrived, which is proved by its numerous illustrations especially from the latter half of the 19th century.⁴³

Immediately after the scandalous publication of *Parallèlement*, Vollard was determined enough to cooperate with Bonnard again on a new version of *Daphnis and Chloe*. Bonnard finished the illustrations quickly and the book was published

⁴¹ Denis made thirty designs to illustrate *Le voyage d'Urien*, a work of Gide's early Symbolist phase. Gide invited the artist to take the assignment out of his admiration for Denis's drawings for *Sagesse* (produced in 1889). See Ray, 1982, p. 491.

⁴² The life of Longus, author of *Daphnis and Chloe*, remains unclear. The work was set on the isle of Lesbos in the 2nd century AD, which is assumed to be the author's background.

⁴³ Throughout its history, *Daphnis and Chloe* has been illustrated for centuries by a great variety of artists. Since late the 19th century, artists who continued to illustrate this story include the cooperation of the British artists Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, French artists Raphaël Collin (1877), Bonnard (1902), Maillol and Chagall (1967).

in 1902. Owing to the “correct” choice of subject matter and Bonnard’s relatively restrictive illustrative format this time, the illustrated *Daphnis et Chloé*⁴⁴ was more successful than the previous *Parallèlement*.⁴⁵ However, this does not mean that Bonnard chose to compromise his notion of art. Despite the standard illustration format, Bonnard still expressed a rather modern, almost impressionist artistic style for this classical text. His sketch-like drawings of shattering landscapes and naïve figures produce a vague, fragmented sense of a forgotten dream.

In spite of the different medium of coloured lithography, similar effects were created in Chagall’s later version of *Daphnis and Chloe* (fig. I-2).⁴⁶ Chagall’s blurry colours often escape the contours of objects, which results in dissolving colours as if in a watercolour painting. With a dreamy atmosphere reminiscent of Bonnard’s impressionist drawings, Chagall also alluded to the Old Testament in his frontispiece of *Daphnis et Chloé*. In the picture, the offering of the red fruit—which can be interpreted as the boy offering fruit to the girl or the other way round—reminds readers of the most familiar scene in the Garden of Eden. The difference here is that on the little Greek island of Lesbos, there is neither a serpent nor a correlation with sin; instead there is pure joy as if caused by the discovery of a primitive desire and self-identity. Taken together, this expresses a sense of nostalgia in two ways: firstly the longing for a lost time and place that once existed (albeit in mythology) and secondly the longing for a primitive and innocent state of mind of humans.

As mentioned earlier, it would be problematic to assume that the frequent choice of the same themes for illustrations is purely a coincidence. From the perspective of nostalgia, the choice for classical or pastoral themes as the texts for *livres d’artiste* can be interpreted as a yearning for the lost and desired. After the age of Belle Époque, it would have been plausible that the two World Wars would have thwarted the success of illustrated books. Although the wars did cause some financial problems for the publishers, the turbulent situation also provided artists with the necessary nourishment to reflection on such notions as exile, nostalgia,

⁴⁴ Again to make it clear, I use the English title “Daphnis and Chloe” to refer to Longus’s work, and the French title “*Daphnis et Chloé*” to refer to specific illustrated versions published by Vollard.

⁴⁵ Bonnard’s 151 lithographs for *Daphnis and Chloe* were printed in black ink to match the text. “Abandoning the free and daring disposition of images throughout the margin area that in *Parallèlement* had proved anathema to contemporary bibliophiles, Bonnard restricted his *Daphnis and Chloe* illustrations for the most part to an unvaried rectangular format...” C. Ives, H. Giambruni, S. M. Newman, *Pierre Bonnard: The Graphic Art*, Harry N Abrams, 1990, p. 172.

⁴⁶ Chagall’s version of 42 illustration plates was produced between 1952 and 1957 and was published by Tériade in 1967. For more than half century after Bonnard’s version, the theme was still popular among artists.

identity and self-quest. It is within this complex environment—of both the publishing circle of *livres d'artiste* and of the social political reality—that Chagall undertook the commissions for his illustrated trilogy.

To be more precise, “exile” in this context does not necessarily refer to political refugees. The term “displacement” is perhaps more appropriate for this discussion, for it offers a better description of most of Chagall’s foreign journeys during which he completed his illustration trilogy.⁴⁷ Chagall was not only part of the Jewish Diaspora, but was also one of the representatives of these 20th-century art and literary movements. As George Stein’s rather radical proposal states, a whole genre of 20th-century Western literature is “extraterritorial, a literature by and about exiles, symbolizing the age of the refugee.”⁴⁸ The same can be said about the visual art of the 20th century. Chagall’s choice of subjects and his caricatural, sometimes mysterious style of expression was a very personal reflection on the era in which he lived.

At first glance, Chagall’s three illustrated books in France played only a small role among the numerous publications of *livres d'artiste* in the first half of the 20th century. However, as the productions spanned more than thirty years – from Vollard’s initiation to Tériade’s final publication⁴⁹ – Chagall’s trilogy can be said to span the most abundant period of French illustrated books. With both its overall theme and its pictorial styles, the trilogy reflects the social environments of the period between the World Wars. On the one hand, the trilogy distinguishes itself from other art experiments by the background and identity of the artist; on the other hand, the trilogy is a testament to the more general spirit of the *livres d'artiste* with its experiments of artistic independence.

2. The Handwriting of the Birthplace

For Chagall, the sense of nostalgia is inherent to art, whether one is aware of it or not. It is the birthplace that clings to the work of every artist like his or her

⁴⁷ The term is suggested by Nico Israel in his book *Outlandish*, in which he made a clear distinction between exile and diaspora. For further definitions and thoughts, see Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora*, Stanford Univ. Press, 2000, p.1-22.

⁴⁸ George Stein, cited in Edward Saïd, “Reflections on Exile”, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 173-174.

⁴⁹ Due to Vollard’s accidental death and Chagall’s flee to the United States, the prints of *Les Âmes Mortes* and *Les Fables* remained hidden until Tériade (real name Stratis Eleftheriadis, 1897-1983) published them in 1948 and 1952 respectively. The series for *La Bible* was executed and published in 1956. See Sorlier, *Marc Chagall: Le Livre des Livres*, Edition André Sauret / Michèle Trinckvel, 1990, p.13.

handwriting. To quote Chagall himself: “Every painter is born somewhere, and even though he may later respond to the influences of other atmosphere, a certain essence—a certain ‘aroma’ of his birthplace clings to his work. [...] The vital mark these early influences leave is, as it were, on the handwriting of the artist.”⁵⁰

In Chagall’s illustrations, this “handwriting” of the birthplace expresses itself from his earliest drawings dedicated to Yiddish literature.⁵¹ Due to the affinity in cultural backgrounds with the authors, Chagall’s surreal arrangement of realistic elements corresponds to the Jewish nature of the illustrated texts. In addition to some designs he made for the Jewish magazine *ShTROM*, his first illustrations of texts by Jewish authors, such as Der Nister’s *Tales in Verse*⁵² and I. L. Peretz’s *The Magician*⁵³ published in 1917, followed by David Hofstein’s *Troyer* (1922),⁵⁴ clearly displayed Chagall’s identity for the lost Jewish world among his early illustrations.

In these early illustrated books, the prominent theme of nostalgia in Chagall’s later works is prefigured. These books also demonstrate the strong relationship between the artist’s birthplace and his art.⁵⁵ Aside from the choice of

⁵⁰ This comes from Chagall’s speech in French at Mount Holyoke College in 1943, and at the University of Chicago in 1946. The English translation was done by Robert B. Heywood, first published in 1947, and was also included in ed. Harshav, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003.

⁵¹ Including works by David Hofsteyn (also spelled as Hofstein), Abraham Sutzkever, Elkhonon Vogler and others; also poetry by Abraham Lyesin (Walt) in the 30s (discussed below). See Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, 2006, p. 18.

⁵² Der Nister (The Hidden One) is actually the pseudonym of Jewish author and critic Pinchas Kaganovich (1884-1950). The children’s book *Tales in Verse* consists of two poems: “The Rooster” and “The Little Kid” (A mayse mit a hon, dos tsigle). The title of “The Little Kid” is often substituted as “The Goat” in other versions in different languages. Chagall made eight small illustrations and one title page with ink on paper for this publication. For more details, see Susan Tumarkin Goodman, “Chagall’s Paradise Lost: The Russian Years”, *Marc Chagall: Early Works from Russian Collections*, Third Millennium Publishing, 2001, p. 56-58.

⁵³ I. L. Peretz (1852-1915) was a Yiddish author and playwright. The use of Hebrew letters in these early illustration works of Chagall will be further discussed in the chapter “La Bible”.

⁵⁴ David Hofstein began writing poetry in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian and Ukrainian, but after the Russian Revolution of 1917 he wrote only in Yiddish. Hofstein was a co-editor of the Moscow Yiddish monthly *Shtrom*. His elegies *Troyer* (Yiddish, meaning “grief”) with Chagall’s illustration is dedicated to the white movement pogroms in Ukraine, 1919, during which time the Jewish communities were devastated.

⁵⁵ In Chagall’s own words during Sweeney’s interview: “The root-soil of my art was Vitebsk, but like a tree, my art needed Paris like water.” See James Johnson Sweeney,

Figure 1-2 The She-goat and the Bear

more with the text itself. In the drawing of “The Dead Man and the Rooster”, the ornamental sense is reinforced by the framed characters depicted in handwriting. Also on the title page of “Goat and Rooster”, the Hebrew characters written in a formal, printing typology are arranged parallel to the pictorial objects of the goat and the rooster. By way of incorporating different forms of Hebrew letters into these folklore images, Chagall actually responded to the renaissance of Jewish culture and also opened up a new relationship between words and images.

Another example is shown in his illustrations for *Troyer* by the Yiddish poet David Hofstein. Here Chagall’s surrealistic rendering of realistic elements is literally entangled with the text itself; we find the Hebrew letters “escape” from the poetry and become part of the picture. In the piece titled “The Walking Village” (fig. I-4), a little figure from the window of the “walking” houses is pointing at one line of the poem: “why do I need it, the clear, transparent lucidity?”⁵⁸ On the one hand, the inserted text emphasizes the theme of this illustration: the absurd situation of the Jewish Diaspora these villagers were facing. On the other hand, as many readers do not understand the Yiddish language, Chagall peppers his images with quotes from the text; these quotes tend to interpret the typographic characters into purely artistic forms. The text can be seen as a row of square letters in balance with the row of the rectangular houses; therefore, it also functions as part of the visual composition.

This interplay with Hebrew typography seems somehow similar to what Chagall’s countryman and avant-garde art colleague El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky, 1890-1941) tried to achieve in his numerous illustrations.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, unlike the supremacist stance El Lissitzky had chosen, and aside from using typography as a mere declaration of the visual artistry of Hebrew characters, Chagall also reinforced the message of the text itself by combining it with personal emotions and experiences. Owing to his multicultural background, Chagall often adopted Russian and Yiddish characters in his pictures as well, while El Lissitzky used solely Hebrew characters in art nouveau style. Just as Lissitzky later used Hebrew characters as the main feature in his book designs, Chagall frequently incorporated Russian, Hebrew and Yiddish typography into his own artworks, such as oil paintings and book illustrations.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This line was translated from Hebrew to English by Benjamin Harshav. In fact Harshav explained that the title of this illustration is misleading, since the Yiddish idiom “the whole town goes” means the Jews are leaving their hometown, fleeing into exile. It is safer to assume that the title should be “The Town Is Walking”. See Harshav, 2006, p. 122.

⁵⁹ Works by El Lissitzky, *Sihav hulin: Eyne fun di geshikhten* (An Everyday Conversation), Jewish Passover song *Had gadya* (One Goat), etc.

⁶⁰ In fact, the use of texts is not uncommon in Chagall’s oil paintings. Chagall often

The insertion of textual characters in Chagall's artworks also implies an identification with the subjects he painted. For example, in "Homage to Gogol" (fig. 1-5), the sketch for the curtain design of the Gogol festival at the Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg (1917), Chagall displayed his enthusiasm for Russian literature by showing respect to a great Russian author. Here, the artist distorted the figure of himself into an arabesque curve, with a laurel dedicated to Gogol in his hand and a typical Russian orthodox church on his feet. His curved body surrounds the colourful Russian characters "To Gogol, from Chagall". Once again, Chagall included Russian characters to decorate the whole composition with their forms and colors, as well as to express the message of the picture itself.

To return to Chagall's trilogy of *Les Âmes Mortes*, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* and *La Bible* from the perspective of the theme of nostalgia discussed above, this theme explains the general characteristics of those naïve, festive images with realistic details as well as local idioms. In the trilogy, the nostalgic sense can be seen as embodied in at least two major ways: the first is the details of illustrated objects based on real places; the second is the pictorial forms he chose, including the insertion of local languages, the festive presentation within supernatural compositions, the use of Chagallian animals/figures, etc.⁶¹ How these two aspects are expressed in the illustrated trilogy will be explained below.⁶²

In the illustration for *Les Âmes Mortes*, local elements from the Russian countryside are depicted realistically throughout the series; from trivial things such as a traditional tea maker (illu. 18), to the overall view of a rural village (illu. 3). In each illustration, the seemingly naïve figures, the distorted perspective, or the Chagallian animals floating around, form a sketch of nostalgia reminiscent of

inserted Russian, Hebrew or Yiddish characters into his images, for example, as the backdrop in *The Red Jew* (1915) or as the inscription on his well-known *The Cemetery Gate* (1917). In the latter piece, Chagall covered the Jewish cemetery gate with sacred texts inscribed with Hebrew characters to emphasize the sacred meaning of the subject. However, the sense here is different from the words quoted directly from the illustrated texts. The characters written/inscribed on the objects in a picture belong to the tangible, representational world, while the excerpts from the texts actually belong to the abstract, literal field. Now as soon as they come across into the images and become part of it, they actually function as the transition from the illustrated to the illustrating, and hence they blur the boundary between words and images. I will come back to this point again in the chapter "La Bible" later in this thesis.

⁶¹ It is necessary to note that Chagall himself has emphasized more than once that his choice of pictorial elements, the repetition of Chagallian animals for examples, were purely for formal reasons. To him, the insertion of a green cow is not for the sake of the allegory but for the sake of aesthetics. See Ed. Harshav, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, Stanford University Press, 2003, p.78.

⁶² Of course, further analysis on each series in the trilogy will be included in the following chapters. Here I'll give an overview of the different ways the theme of nostalgia is used in each series.

the traditional lubok image again. Take the very first illustration piece “The arrival of Chichikov” (illu. 1): the brichka⁶³ that rides through the entire novel with Chichikov, the weather roosters that perch on top of the city gate, the Russian letters inscribed on the signs of shops, or the orthodox churches that stand on the slanting horizon, all these realistic details, arranged against an abstract background, invoke a vivid dream of a place that once existed.

Similarly, in the illustration of “The Tavern” (illu. 20), where we see the depiction of a typical Russian *traktir*⁶⁴ with roosters on its roof, the distinctive shapes of pillars and windowpanes, as well as arabesque patterns on the façade of the building continuing on the clothes of the hostess. All these details echo Gogol’s picturesque description:

The time-darkened wooden inn received Chichikov beneath a narrow, welcoming porch, resting on slender carved wooden posts, which resembled ancient church candlesticks. This inn was built along the lines of a Russian peasant hut, /.../ painted on the shutters were jugs with flowers.⁶⁵

Chagall made a corresponding water-colour sketch especially for this illustration, which is unusual during the production of *Les Âmes Mortes*. The exception of this important sketch might be explained by Chagall’s nostalgia for his hometown activated by his memories when he made the illustrations. The sketch also shows the significance of realistic observation needed to capture a hotel so different from those he saw in Paris.⁶⁶

In later illustrations, which Chagall produced for the poetry of his Jewish editor A. Lyesin⁶⁷ published in 1938, many elements familiar from the *Les Âmes*

⁶³ A brichka is a three-horse carriage; a kind of poor man’s troika.

⁶⁴ “*Traktir*” is a type of Russian tavern or inn, where one can also get a tea and a bite to eat.

⁶⁵ Nikolay Gogol, trans. Robert A. Maguire, *Dead Souls*, Part 1, Ch. 4, Penguin Books Ltd, 2004, p. 67. In this thesis, all quotations of *Dead Souls* come from this edition of Penguin Classics.

⁶⁶ Chagall did not make sketches of watercolour or gouache for this series; instead he made etchings for smaller sketches of 96 illustrations. See Susan Compton, “From Commissar to Citizen”, *Marc Chagall: My Life- My Dream: Berlin and Paris, 1922-1940*, Prestel, 1990, p. 20.

⁶⁷ A. Lyesin (pseudonym of Abraham Walt, 1888-1938) was a poet and then became the long-term editor of a Yiddish journal in New York, where Chagall published his memoirs and poems. In 1938, three volumes of Lyesin’s poetry were published posthumously with 34 drawings by Chagall. See Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and His Times: A Documentary Narrative*, Stanford University Press, 2003, p.328.

Mortes and *La Bible* series were reused. For example, the scene of crowds in the street in the illustration for the poem “The Grave” (fig. 1-6) resembles the illustration of “The Public Prosecutor’s Funeral Procession” (illu. 78) in *Les Âmes Mortes*. Both pieces consist of realistic elements from his Russian hometown, such as the peasant-like villagers, the Star of David on the coffin in the carriage, and the typical houses with Russian signs above the door. On top of that, the spirit of his Hasidic teaching is shown throughout his pictorial caricature style. Although the subject in both pieces is the funeral itself rather than mourning, Chagall’s depiction of the people in the pictures seems to capture them singing, dancing and celebrating. It is in these elements that the impact of Chagall’s birthplace can be recognized.

The festive atmosphere continues in the illustrations for the French classic *Les Fables de La Fontaine*. This time, the festiveness is coloured with the sunshine in the countryside of France, Chagall’s second home. The characters are no longer dressed as stout Russian peasants. The landscapes of the south of France are evoked in bold colours in the premier gouaches. However, in spite of these French appearances, the impression of the artist’s birthplace still haunts the pictures. First, the choice of the *Fables* itself—a genre of literature with animals as its main characters—coincides with the artist’s vocabulary: Chagall is known for his use of animals in many of his other artworks, such as the famous “I and the Village” which will be discussed below. This can be explained by his memory of the animals in his hometown in the Russian countryside where, in Wulschlager’s words, “chickens and goats scratched; cattle wandered on dirt tracks and into houses and shops.”⁶⁸ Chagall uses the animals from his homeland as formal elements to construct his pictures:

I have used cows, milkmaids, roosters, and provincial Russian architecture as a source of form [*sic*] because these are a part of the country from which I come; and these things, without doubt, have left a deeper impression in my visual memory than all the other impressions I have received.⁶⁹

Secondly, the anthropomorphic representation of animals in *Les Fables* again shows the influence of both traditional folklore images and, more specifically, the teaching of Hasidism that all beings are relative and are the permeation of God himself. Therefore, Chagall’s illustrations demonstrate “the one-ness of animal

⁶⁸ Here, Wulschlager is describing the scenery in Peskovatik, a suburb of Vitebsk where Chagall was born. Jackie Wulschlager, *Chagall: Love and Exile*, Allen Lane Penguin Group, 2008, p. 12-13.

⁶⁹ This is part of Chagall’s speech from 1943/1946, included in ed. Harshav, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003, p.78.

and human life.”⁷⁰ Most animal characters in *Les Fables* bear a human expression: they smile, laugh, mourn, or frown. The human expressions not only show the sarcastic attitude in the verses toward the human world, but also hint at Chagall’s view of the universe.

The Hasidic conception of all beings in the universe is often misunderstood as pagan and pantheistic. However in Hasidism, God, absolute Reality, is beyond physical being; hence, all beings are illusive and are seen as created in God’s image. This also explains that in Chagall’s *Les Fables*, the world seems like a carnival where animals, humans and gods can rejoice, interact or even transform into each other. In a way, this colourful playground shows Chagall’s Russian roots, though with some French features, which can be seen as the transition from the artist’s first cultural identity to the second one.

The seemingly pagan world in *Les Fables* contrasts with the world of the third book of the trilogy: Chagall’s illustrations for the *Bible* delve into the core of his Jewish identity. This time, the nostalgia for his birthplace goes further into a quest for the hometown of his ancestors. To make this series, he managed a trip to Palestine—though Vollard disagreed with this trip and replied with “*allez plutôt place Pigalle*”—so that he could visualize an imaginary biblical world based on a realistic place. As a matter of fact, aside from a direct depiction of the *Bible*, Chagall’s vision of the Holy Land extends to many of his other art works. The nostalgia toward both the place of the Holy Land and the time in the Old Testament continues as one of the main subjects in his works: the characters and themes from *La Bible* in particular reappear in many of his later illustrations, oil paintings, stained glass windows, and the famous stage designs for the Jewish theatre in Moscow.⁷¹ On top of that, Chagall’s *La Bible* is not merely a faithful mirror of authentic Judaism. Mixing Jewish, Hasidic, Christian and even mythological elements, Chagall constructed a biblical scene from his own interpretation.

The sense of nostalgia in *La Bible* also lies in several pictorial elements like the use of Hebrew letters and Jewish religious symbols, which will be discussed later in the chapter “La Bible.” As a whole, Chagall attempts to re-narrate a story of Jewish people from the view of a modern painter. For example, and as previously mentioned, Chagall frequently inserts texts of Yiddish, Hebrew or Russian characters in his pictures, either as the reinforcement of a certain message

⁷⁰ Wullschlager, 2008, p. 327.

⁷¹ Chagall made the foyer design of the Jewish theatre, as well as decorations, sets and costumes for its first production. The Jewish theatre can also be translated as the Yiddish art theatre (Jewish and Yiddish are the same word in Russian), and was later known as GOSET. The design for GOSET was Chagall’s most significant work back in his hometown in Russia.

or purely as part of the pictorial field itself. As regards the trilogy, the insertion of texts appears most often in *La Bible* so as to emphasize the authenticity of the scriptures and the prophetic messages.⁷² Unlike his other works, where he often mixed Yiddish dialects with Hebrew texts, in *La Bible* he switched to a rather serious tone via a formal typeface and printing style.

The subjects in the trilogy are therefore different but coherent in respect to their relationships with the artist. This trilogy clearly demonstrates how Chagall visualized the sense of nostalgia as a multi-cultural representation based on a variety of elements from his birthplace.

3. Stylistic commonalities of Chagall's Illustrations

Rooted in different sources, Chagall's nostalgic attitude in his illustrations expresses itself via specific styles and techniques. In the trilogy Chagall elaborates his supernatural and caricatural style by means of experiments in printmaking.

There is no reason to separate the style of Chagall's illustrations from that of his major paintings, in spite of some fundamental differences in materials and ways of expression. Although the nature of Chagall's art has been discussed by many critics and scholars, it is still necessary to briefly summarize the stylistic commonalities shared by his illustrations and paintings.

"*Surnaturel!*" is the word Apollinaire used when he saw Chagall's works for the first time in his studio at La Ruche, and afterwards it turned out to be perhaps the best description for Chagall's artistic style.⁷³ The "supernatural" or imaginary elements in his paintings often led to him being incorrectly categorized as surrealist. The manifesto of surrealism was published by André Breton in 1924; the year after Chagall started to work on *Les Âmes Mortes*. Though similar in their surrealist appearance, Chagall never associated himself with any artistic or political groups throughout his life.⁷⁴ In fact, although influenced by many artistic

⁷² This will be further discussed in the chapter "La Bible".

⁷³ To quote Chagall himself in his speech at Mount Holyoke College: "...Apollinaire, despite everything, came to see me in my studio. It was there that he pronounced for the first time the magic word 'supernatural'. [...] To be honest, I little understand this word myself at that time." See "Some Impressions Regarding French Painting—Address at Mount Holyoke College, Aug 1943/March 1946", English trans. and ed. by Harshav, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003, p.71.

⁷⁴ In fact, in Sweeney's interview, Chagall showed his doubt on the method of "automatism" proclaimed in the Surrealist manifesto and declared that "Fantastic or illogical as the construction of my pictures may seem, [...] I did not do it by

trends, especially impressionism and cubism, which he openly admitted, Chagall did not participate in any of them. Instead he kept his distance from them. Instead of following the Surrealist Manifesto, the supernatural arrangement in Chagall's pictures was an aesthetic concern inspired by elements from his hometown and the festive nature of Hasidism mentioned earlier in this chapter:

*[M]y first aim is to construct my picture architecturally, [...] please defend me against people who speak of 'anecdote' and 'fairy tales' in my work. A cow and a woman to me are the same—in a picture both are merely elements of composition.*⁷⁵

Therefore, in his pictures it is typical to see figures and objects displayed in a topsy-turvy world: there are figures like a green-faced Jew, a fiddler dancing on the roof, an up-side-down head on a body, or a flying couple crossing many of his pictures. All these elements construct a supernatural and very idiosyncratic vocabulary of art.

In one of his most famous oil paintings, "I and the Village" (1911, fig. I-7), for example, the pictorial language Chagall had developed is evident. The realistic elements from Vitebsk are dotted unrealistically around the picture, such as the traditional village houses in the background, the farmer and the upside down village girl, and the milking woman inside the head of a cow.⁷⁶ However, despite the fact that Chagall claimed that the absurd way he arranged these elements was purely for compositional reasons, the image explicitly evokes a feeling of nostalgia for his hometown. The nostalgia does not only concern the longing for the tangible land itself, but also the quest for the spiritual harmony between humans and animals in this countryside village, which is shown through the painter's parallel deployment of the cow and the green-faced human. Another interpretation of the picture concerns the quest for one's identity. The green man with a cross on his neck is the artist himself—which shows the strong influence of Christianity despite the Hasidic teaching he grew up with—while the cow functions as the projection of his ego, since Chagall often expressed his idea of the oneness of humans and animals: "I often said I was not an artist, but some kind of a cow. What's the difference?"⁷⁷

'automatism'". This remained even clearer in his later conversation with Pierre Schneider in 1967: "Surrealism is automatism. Art requires control, but by the artist's gift." See Harshav, ed., *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003, p.86 & p.162.

⁷⁵ See Harshav, ed., *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003, p.81-82.

⁷⁶ For further analysis on "I and the Village", see ed. Harshav, *Marc Chagall on Art and Culture*, 2003, p. 83.

⁷⁷ Chagall, *Ma Vie*, 1931, English translated and quoted in Harshav, 2006, p. 60.

The supernatural rendering of elements based on the artist's background results in a recognizable Chagallian style in all his illustrations, paintings, theatre designs and stained glasses in his later period. He integrated personal experiences into universal topics, which makes his world of art funny and serious at the same time, and also pleasant to the eye.

As a matter of fact, most of Chagall's illustrations meet the above description of his painting style. However, there is an extraordinary touch added exclusively to his illustrations: the casual, semi-sketch style of caricatures.⁷⁸ Owing to the drawing-like nature of etchings he used for this trilogy, Chagall was able to represent free, almost improvised lines and shadows in his illustrations. Together with the sarcasm implied in the pictures and the exaggerating portraits of figures, Chagall's illustrations often resemble the depiction of a satirical caricature, which is different from his other paintings.

Chagall's expressive style of caricature is deeply affected by the different printing techniques he chose. His early illustrations in Russia were produced with ink on paper, and it was only after he traveled to Berlin to be an apprentice of Hermann Struck⁷⁹ that Chagall started to make etchings for his illustrations. Chagall soon proved his talent for printmaking with the etchings he made for his autobiography *Ma Vie*, written at the age of thirty-five. Although the finished plates were never used as illustrations for the book, the publisher Paul Cassirer (1871-1926) decided to publish these etchings as an independent portfolio, *Mein Leben* (1923), without the accompaniment of any text.⁸⁰ It was the clean lines and the dreamy atmosphere in *Mein Leben* that caught Ambroise Vollard's attention in the first place.

In *Mein Leben*, Chagall already showed the sense of humour which can be recognized in most caricatures. In the most well-known piece, "Self Portrait" (fig.

⁷⁸ It might be interesting to bear in mind that this was the period after Daumier and others had already made their establishments in satirical caricatures when the young Chagall first arrived in La Ruche in Paris. Despite no direct evidence for their influences on Chagall, it is important to point out the public awareness of the form of the drawing style of caricatures.

⁷⁹ Hermann Struck (1876-1944) was a German-Jewish artist known for his etchings. Though banned from teaching at Berlin Academy because of his Jewish blood, Struck still signed his works with his Jewish name and the Star of David. Marc Chagall is one of his most famous students.

⁸⁰ Due to the problem of translating Chagall's dreamy Yiddish poetry into French, the plan of publishing the illustrated autobiography was postponed. However, Cassirer's decision proved a wise one, for sales were better than expected. Later on, the French version of *Ma Vie* translated by Bella Chagall was published in 1931, but the original engravings were not used in this version.

I-8), Chagall depicted his childhood house on an enormous head and his beloved family surrounding him below. The unnatural proportions indicate the theme of this self-portrait: how his hometown always haunts him and how he carries them with him as his responsibility for his whole life. The portraits of the family members also imply a sense of haunting memories and their extraterritorial situation: Bella and their daughter Ida, who were with the artist in Berlin at the time, were shown as head-shoulder portraits, while his parents who lived far back in their Russian hometown were portrayed in full length.

Chagall's impossible composition in *Mein Leben* not only created the humour that characterizes caricature, but also a sense of distant memories. He drew a flying carriage across a traditional village house in "House in Vitebsk" reminiscent of lubok images and summarizing Chagall's supernatural style. Likewise, he dissolved the silhouette of figures in "Lovers on the Bench" as if they were melting into a passionate kiss; the discontinuous lines evoke the feeling of a vague, hilarious dream. A free play with lines and compositions is made possible in the form of caricatural drawings.

Later on, Chagall added sarcasm to his caricatural illustrations, either politically, socially or religiously. For example in *Les Sept Péchés Capitaux*,⁸¹ a smaller illustration series he made in 1926 between *Les Âmes Mortes* and *Les Fables*, the gross and distorted figures produce a sheer sarcasm on the title of the series. Chagall's illustrations clearly distinguish themselves in this respect from his other works.

4. Printing Techniques

With the new printmaking techniques he acquired, including etching, engraving, drypoint, aquatint and roulette, Chagall was able to make stronger variations on black and white surfaces, from clear-cut silhouettes and dark, heavy shadows to hazy gradient backgrounds. Already known for his ability to manipulate colours, Chagall was now able to create the effect of chiaroscuro in black and white.

Due to the fact that it is not easy to make modifications with drypoint, the prints preserve the original touches during the artist's creative process directly. Nikolai Gogol had already made a vivid metaphor of artistic labour when he described how difficult life is for a writer who "with the robust strength of an implacable chisel has made bold to set them [lies] forth in full and bright relief for

⁸¹ *Les Sept Péchés Capitaux* (the Seven Deadly Sins) is a volume by seven authors including the famous French author Jean Giraudoux. Chagall made 16 prints with grotesque images for this work. See Wullschlager, 2008, p. 326.

all the people to see!”⁸² As the acid bites into the copperplate so as to reveal the picture that the artist tries to create, the analogy between the work of the author and that of the printmaker here reinforces the acidic sarcasm brought out by his caricature prints.

It is with these printmaking effects that Chagall created a great number of emotions and situations in the series *Les Âmes Mortes*.⁸³ For example, etchings made with a pointed needle are used to create thin and smooth contours. Pictures in the form of pure etchings with clear and shadowless lines are suitable for creating sentimental scenes or illusive spaces. Since in the series few pieces consist only of etchings—most of them are combined with drypoint or other techniques—it explains why these pure etchings receive more attention. Examples are “Chichikov bids farewell to Manilov” (illu. 12) or “Lovers on the Bench” mentioned earlier. The soft tone in these pictures corresponds to the over-sentimentality described in the scene. Also, in pieces like “At the Town Gate” (illu. 47) or “The Witnesses” (illu. 58/3), the discontinuous contours without shadows create a drifting and unreal surface, reminiscent of the absurdity of the entire story.

In addition to the gentle and smooth lines produced by etching, drypoint could create rough scratching lines or thick heavy shadows, which require hard sculpting movements of the artist on the copperplate. Therefore, just like the brushstroke left in an oil painting, the texture of drypoint marks the strong, original emotions of the artist, invoking moody atmospheres or shabby situations. For example, when Chichikov feels frustrated during “A Heavy Cold” (illu. 74), or when the governor’s daughter feels wronged when “The Governor’s Wife Scolds her Daughter” (illu. 67), the heavy and disordered lines run across the background as if deleting the whole surface. Besides the background, these kinds of fierce lines sometimes appear directly on the objects, as in “Pliushkin’s Old Garden” (illu. 39) in order to emphasize the pathetic surroundings of the landlord, or even on the face of the characters in “Our Hero Is Getting Ready” (illu. 77), together with discontinuous lines, so as to increase the tension of the hero’s unknown fate in the following scene.

With the help of drypoint technique, Chagall was able to create contrasts between brightness and darkness in the series. One of the examples is “Pliushkin and Mavra Arguing” (illu. 46) where the black-dressed maid situated in lightness

⁸² Gogol, trans. Robert A. Maguire, Chapter 7, *Dead Souls*, Penguin Books, 2004, p.149.

⁸³ I focus my discussion of the techniques of printmaking on examples of illustrations from *Les Âmes Mortes* because I consider this series to be the best etchings among Chagall’s works. In two other series of *Les Fables* and *La Bible*, it is the painterly effects that Chagall pursued mainly in his etchings because of the watercolour sketches he made premier to the prints. In this section I’ll focus on the techniques. Further analysis on the style of expression will be discussed in the next chapter “Les Âmes Mortes”.

is confronted with the white-robed master in the shadow. This enhances the emotion of conflict in the illustration. Chagall once again proves his ability to elaborate his vocabulary with black and white and often uses this kind of dual composition to create a visual effect un-presentable in the literal texts.

In addition to the printmaking techniques adopted in *Mein Leben*, Chagall also experimented with the technique of aquatint in *Les Âmes Mortes*. Aquatint helps to render a melting effect, which is suitable for creating a blurry background. In *Les Âmes Mortes*, illustrations with aquatint appear mostly in the second volume, owing to the scenes of recalled memories or embarrassing feelings. It is with this technique that Chagall invoked Chichikov's distant memory of the governor's daughter for "In Church" (illu. 82), as well as the foggy background in the uncertain journey of "Troika at Night" (illu. 85), which concludes the illustration series in a dreamy atmosphere.

As mentioned earlier, Chagall's trilogy of illustrated books is distinctive because of the material he chose. Since he turned to coloured lithography soon after, these three series became a rare testimony to his endeavours with a large number of etching plates.⁸⁴ The trilogy soon proved its charm and its sense of nostalgia, created by the variety of etching techniques in black and white.

Just like other *livres d'artiste*, the nature of the trilogy is defined by the spirit of independent artworks representing the artist's ideas and styles, and also by the fact that these works are commercial products reflecting the tastes and interests of the time. For the series *Les Âmes Mortes* solely, Chagall made 96 plates plus 11 head- and tail-pieces. In 1950, the publication was finally issued by Tériade in an edition of 285 pages all signed by the artist, with the first 50 copies containing a set of etchings on japon nacre paper, and 33 artist's hors commerce proofs. Despite the unusual presentation of Chagall's caricatural and supernatural styles, the medium of engravings applied in the series met the taste of his contemporary book collectors. The way he revealed the influences from his birthplace via absurd but surprisingly realistic details seemed to please most buyers.

Soon after he had made the trilogy, commissioned by Vollard, Chagall turned to the medium of coloured lithography with which he stayed for the rest of his illustration projects. From then on, the nature of freehand lithography drawing enabled him to convey his thoughts and emotions via his well-known flowing colours. For example, in the work *Daphnis et Chloé* mentioned earlier, the sense of nostalgia and primitive affection are shown in his abundant use of multi-

⁸⁴ For Vollard's commission, Chagall made a much larger number of plates than for his earlier series of illustrations. *Les Âmes Mortes* consists of 96 illustration plates in total, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* of 100, and *La Bible* of 105.

coloured plates.⁸⁵ However, this does not mean that black and white became Chagall's second choice; in fact, in one of his last illustration series *The Tempest*,⁸⁶ Chagall actually used coloured lithography to present mono-coloured prints in grey tones which resemble the effects of black-and-white etchings.

Chagall's trilogy of illustrated books distinguishes itself from his later illustration projects in many ways. First, with a large number of engraving plates, the trilogy concludes the characteristics of the artist's early illustration drawings. Second, the black and white etchings contribute another aspect to the artist's reputation in addition to his ability to use colours. Third, the trilogy was produced in the highly tense interwar period, which prompted a dialogue between the works and the social environment on themes like exile, quest, identity and nostalgia. With a variety of techniques, Chagall's illustrations present contemporary themes in a recognizable style. Chagall's trilogy—as well as his later series—can be viewed as individual interpretations of classic literature, but when considered from the perspective of the idea of nostalgia, his illustrations taken together express a consistent theme reflecting the spirit of his time.

⁸⁵ It's worth mentioning that Chagall was very enthusiastic about the plates in *Daphnis et Chloé*. He went to Greece to get a first-hand impression of the little Mediterranean island. To produce the 42 lithographs, with over 25 colours for some prints, he used more than 1000 zinc plates in total. See Ulrike Gauss, ed., *Marc Chagall: The Lithographs*, Hatje, 1999.

⁸⁶ Chagall's *The Tempest* was produced in 1975 and published by André Sauret, containing 50 lithograph plates.

II. CHAPTER TWO - Human Desire: Grotesque Realism in *Les Âmes Mortes*

When the publisher Vollard suggested different texts for Chagall to illustrate, either Vollard's own writing or *Les Aventures du Général Dourakine* by La Comtesse de Ségur, the artist flatly refused.⁸⁷ However, instead of being annoyed, Vollard allowed Chagall to choose his own text to illustrate. Finally he decided upon the Russian author Gogol's epic novel *Dead Souls*.⁸⁸ Produced by Chagall during his second stay in France, the work (with the French title of *Les Âmes Mortes* when published) is deeply rooted in the Russian culture of the 19th century, and thus reflects Chagall's Russian background.

This "epic novel", as Gogol's subtitle points out, was initially intended to follow an epic structure similar to Dante's *Divine Comedy*.⁸⁹ The idea of this novel was initiated by Pushkin, who handed over his own materials assembled from Russian tales to Gogol after reading the latter's works.⁹⁰ In 1842, Gogol published

⁸⁷ *Les Aventures du Général Dourakine* (Paris, 1863) was published as one of the series for "Bibliothèque rose illustrée". The French adventure story for young adults, written by the Russian noblewoman Mme la Comtesse de Ségur, was quite popular when it was published. Yet Chagall refused to illustrate this work for the reason that he was not familiar with the comtesse's works. See Susan Compton, "From Commissar to Citizen", *Marc Chagall: My Life- My Dream: Berlin and Paris, 1922-1940*, Prestel, 1990, p.11-34.

⁸⁸ Charles Sorlier, *Marc Chagall: le livre des livres*, Édition André Sauret, 1900, p. 10. Again in this thesis I use "Dead Souls" to refer to Gogol's original text and "*Les Âmes Mortes*" to refer to this specific illustrated edition.

⁸⁹ When Gogol first composed the idea of *Dead Souls* in 1835, it was only supposed to be a single volume similar to *The Inspector General* (1836), but approximately during 1836-38 he changed his mind and intended to write it as a trilogy. Nevertheless, after the first part of *Dead Souls* was published, Gogol began to view his own works as a sin under the pressure of his severe attitude towards religion. Therefore he burned his scripts of the second part, of which only four incomplete chapters have survived, of which the first part remains the only complete work. Generally, Gogol's trilogy is considered an analogy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with three parts representing "Inferno", "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso" respectively. See Ernest J. Simmons, *Introduction to Russian Realism: Gogol, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Sholokhov*, Indiana University Press, 1965, p.44-90.

⁹⁰ This anecdote comes from Gogol's "Author's Confession". Though there's no evidence for this account, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Gogol's outstanding writing itself has testified to its veridicality. See Richard Peace, *The Enigma of Gogol: An Examination of the Writing of N. V. Gogol and their Place in the Russian Literary Tradition*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981, p. 213.

the first part of *Dead Souls*. With Chichikov the pathetic “hero” and the quest for “dead souls”, this accomplished work forms the basic structure of a semi-epic.

The main plot of *Dead Souls* concerns the journey of the calculating businessman Chichikov, who attempts to purchase the names of serfs who have died since the last government census. His scheme is not only to gain the reputation of a gentleman landowner, but also to make a fortune by using these dead serfs as collateral. The first part of *Dead Souls* concentrates on the process of Chichikov trading with five individual landlords—each a quite different type, and each with a different response to his strange request—and it ends with Chichikov’s ultimate failure.

The title “Dead Souls” itself contains a sense of absurdity in the first place. In the Russian language, the word for soul also refers to serf and is therefore a clever equivoque. On the one hand, “Dead Souls” indicates Chichikov’s cunning purchase; on the other hand it functions as an ironic reference to the characters in the novel. Following the tracks of Chichikov’s brichka, various aspects of the whole of Mother Russia—the deceitfulness, dullness and greed hidden beneath the “dead” upper class—is gradually revealed. It is often considered the first major Russian novel, and the inspiration for many of the great classics of Turgenev, Tolstoy and Chekhov, to name but a few.

Marc Chagall’s 96 illustrations for *Les Âmes Mortes*, produced between 1923 and 1927, correspond beautifully and appropriately to Gogol’s writing. The use of absurdity, metaphor and multiple narrations in Gogol’s text parallels the mixture of reality and illusion in Chagall’s artworks. The text and illustrations in *Les Âmes Mortes* are both characterized by realistic details within grotesque surroundings, and hence create a style of “grotesque realism” in the illustrated book. Despite its solemn theme on Russian social problems, the writing and the illustrations have, on the whole, developed a joyous and bustling atmosphere. This chapter therefore aims to examine the dialogues between word and image in the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes* in the spirit of grotesque realism.

1. Dialogical Design: Relationship between Word and Image

The primary targets of this paragraph are to clarify the relationship between word and image, embodied and emphasized more explicitly in Chagall’s *Les Âmes Mortes* than in any of his other works. I will then discuss Bakhtin’s notion of polyphonic dialogue as manifest in this illustrated work.

In “Gogol and Chagall” (illu. 48), a frontispiece in *Les Âmes Mortes*, Book II, Chagall brings to the fore the issues of the relationship between illustration and written text. The question thereby provoked is: What is the status of the text and

the illustrations? Is Chagall's illustration the mere second imitation that supplements the text, or is it in fact a creative imitation on a different level?

The frontispiece holds an ambiguous position. It can be considered an individual work independent of the text, as the opening of a play, or as an adjacent illustration which goes with the beginning of Chapter 7. As the turning point of the novel, in this chapter the narrator presents a confession of an "author" at the "time" when the protagonist, Chichikov, goes to rest after the first part of his journey.⁹¹ The author-narrator states that people greet with applause a writer who describes the beautiful sides of life and avoids the ugly. On the contrary, the narrator adds:

But such is not the lot, and different is the fate of the writer who has made bold to summon forth everything that at every moment lies before the eyes and is not perceived by indifferent eyes...and who with the robust strength of an implacable chisel has made bold to set them forth in full and bright relief for all the people to see!...For the judgment does not acknowledge that much spiritual depth is needed to illuminate a picture drawn from ignoble life and elevate it into a pearl of creation.⁹²

Here the narrator draws an analogy between writing and painting. In the frontispiece Chagall converts this analogy into an enigmatic picture, in which Gogol and Chagall work side by side. In the novel, the narrator—in the role of the "author" of Chichikov's story—takes a rather positive, receptive attitude. He examines the artist's attitude toward novel writing and at the same time creates dialogues with the outside world. The way the author-narrator inserts the digression corresponds to Bakhtin's dialogism, which states that an utterance is not a single voice, but is constantly producing a plenitude of meanings which come from social interaction.⁹³ In this sense, an utterance is an inter-indication among utterances and dialogues between different cultures. Put another way, Bakhtin's dialogism states that no novel can possibly exist in a literary vacuum. This also explains the sense of dialogue in Gogol's works. Besides, the author-narrator in the novel suggests that both literature and painting should be based on embracing and examining real life in society, and that a meaningful piece of

⁹¹ The author-narrator of *Dead Souls* often suspends the plot and then interrupts it with an episode or unrelated narration. Gogol's use of digression seems to be influenced by Laurence Sterne. In Sterne's masterpiece *Tristan Shandy*, the time of "narration" is regarded as independent from that of "reality". See Peace, 1981, p.273.

⁹² Gogol, *Dead Souls*, Penguin Books, 2004, p. 149.

⁹³ Bakhtin's thoughts on terms of utterance and dialogism are mainly seen in his essay "Discourse in the Novel", published in Michael Holquist, ed., *The dialogic imagination: four essays*, University of Texas Press, 1981.

artwork rests on the full understanding of culture in society. This seemingly down-to-earth attitude is also observed in Chagall's frontispiece.

It is apparent that Chagall shows his empathy for the writer in this illustration. In the frontispiece "Gogol and Chagall", the writer and the painter are depicted in similar profiles. They work side by side in the front, one with a pen and the other a palette. Together they work for the virtual world of the novel behind them, but with different materials. In the middle of the picture stands a Russian peasant carrying two pails of water; in the far background are a church and a brichka, which appear repeatedly throughout the illustrations. In the top-left of the picture is an angel who brings inspiration, embracing all of creation in the artwork. Occupying the centre of the picture, the farmer and church, drawn from real life, are presented by both the writer and illustrator to symbolize the cultural heritage existing in real society. The heritage is not only objectified passively by the artists, but also functions actively as the source of the creations behind—literally in this picture—both of them.

Nevertheless, the issue confronted in the illustrations of *Les Âmes Mortes* is not limited to the different materials of painting and literature; how to retain the independent status of the illustration should be an essential task of an illustrator as well. The duty of an illustrator is not merely to draw accompanying pictures: on the one hand, since *Dead Souls* is regarded as a literary classic, the illustrator also has to interpret and translate the text; yet on the other hand, he cannot be a real "painter" who can decide what to draw, because in the process of text-to-picture translation, an illustrator is oftentimes forced to follow the literary text and illustrate what supplements the text.

From Chagall's point of view, the illustration is more an individual piece of artwork than simply supplementary material to the text. In the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes*, the parallel layout of texts and pictures in the whole book eliminates the leading/supporting relationship between word and image. In the frontispiece "Gogol and Chagall" mentioned above, the parallel position of the writer and the illustrator also demonstrates the equal status of text and illustration. Possibly influenced by the boom of artists' books at that time, Chagall's "Gogol and Chagall" shows that he puts more emphasis on the word-image relationship than his earlier illustrations by showing the individual status of the text and the picture.

In another frontispiece (fig. II-1) in *Troyer*, which he produced earlier in 1919 for the works of Russian-Jewish poet David Hofstein, one can observe the shift of Chagall's viewpoints on word and image. In this picture, the images of the author and the illustrator merge into one as their heads rest on the same body, while in "Gogol and Chagall" the two heads are separate and each has an individual image. Written by the side of the upper head is the name of David

Hofstein, inscribed in Hebrew; written by the side of the lower head is the name of Marc Chagall. Though both *Deal Souls* and *Troyer* are works of Russian poets, in the frontispiece of *Troyer* a closer relationship is shown between the author and the illustrator. Their images merge into one, since both of them recognize the great “troyer” (grief) written in artistic form across the “body”, which implies that they share the same burden of the fate of their race. Nevertheless, apart from the same body of content, the author and the illustrator maintain different minds in terms of their creations—their heads look in opposite directions and hence create their works by different means. As a matter of fact, the single, merged body in the frontispiece of *Troyer* does not signify that the spirits of the author and the illustrator are united, but rather, that the illustration is just beginning to develop its own identity independent of the text.

Moreover, the up-down position of the heads of the author and the illustrator in the frontispiece of *Troyer* not only implies that the creation of text occurs before that of illustration, but also hints at the conventional idea that words should be superior to images. In “Gogol and Chagall”, however, discrepancy in the status between the poet and the illustrator disappears. They both appear on the same level, parallel as the buckets on the farmer’s shoulder. Here the author and the illustrator are no longer a merged subject but two individual beings with similar profiles, yet turning in opposite directions. The illustration has become independent of the text; words and images have gained their own autonomy and their own unique vocabulary as well.

In addition to the equal status, a back-to-back relationship, almost a sense of competition, is also drawn between the author and the illustrator in “Gogol and Chagall”. Though sharing the same background, the text and the illustration each has its own boundary and limitation. For instance, one of the main features of Gogol’s novel is language itself.⁹⁴ In the story, the languages used are different from character to character. Among different languages/dialects used in the story, peasant vernacular and argot play a major role. His use of peasant language seems to challenge authority and thus shows the spirit of anti-authoritarianism inherent in many carnivals.⁹⁵ In the written work, language serves as the main medium

⁹⁴ For example, the languages used by each landlord correspond to their respective characteristics. Manilov’s flattering nature is reflected by his frequent use of the polite expression of the person “vy”, while the stubborn Korobshika often gets confused between the polite form of “vy” and the direct form of “ty”. Nozdriuev, on the other hand, tends to be ambiguous on the usage of “ty” itself, while the language of the hero Chichikov usually switches from person to person. The various characteristics of languages are not Gogol’s invention, as many realistic novels present similar expressions of stylization. See Peace, 1981.

⁹⁵ For Bakhtin’s theory, see *Rabelais and His World*, Eng. trans. Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.5, 15-17.

through which ideologies are expressed. The illustrator, on the contrary, presents something which cannot be fully shown in words, such as the insertion of the symbolic meaning of animals and distorted spatial layouts, as he could not present the subtle differences in terms of language. In fact, the sense of competition between the author and the illustrator was already revealed in the text of *Dead Souls*. In Chapter VIII, Part I, there is a paragraph in which the author makes a paradoxical comment:

To find some explanation for this, one would have to say a great deal about the ladies themselves, and about their society, and describe their spiritual qualities in living colours, as the expression goes; but for the author, this is very difficult...So be it: anything that's to be said about their characters must evidently be left to someone who commands brighter colours and has more of them on his palette, while we will be confined to say perhaps a word or two about their appearance and about somewhat more superficial matters.⁹⁶

Generally speaking, words should surpass illustration in terms of their ability to describe people's inner characters, but the narrator, as if holding a painter's brush, describes only the looks and actions of people in detail. In fact, as he records the arguments and quarrels amongst these ladies with rather a humorous voice, a clear picture of the upper class is evoked in the minds of the readers.

Gogol's writing techniques in *Dead Souls* remind us of the notion of "ut pictura poesis"⁹⁷ by describing visual details in the text, as if drawing pictures in the reader's mind. Likewise, when Chagall draws the characters in Gogol's novel, he tries to translate the text into visual pictures. In other words, he translates temporal elements into spatial elements and words into pictures. In his illustrations, he transposes the characteristics of the text to pictures, such as the use of dramatic poses, to make up for the lack of language. In the above quoted passage from Chapter VIII, the narrator deals not only with writing techniques but also with the possibility of dialogue between author and illustrator. By depicting

⁹⁶ Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 177.

⁹⁷ Literally means "As is painting so is poetry." The statement appears in Horace's *Ars Poetica*, c. 18 BC. Horace meant that poetry resembles painting, and the description usually used in observing artworks can also be applied to literature. This brought up the idea of "sister arts" which was widely discussed in the 18th century. In recent researches, the notion of ut pictura poesis is still used to interpret the relationship between word and image. A good example is W. J. T. Mitchell's analysis of Blake, which becomes the inspiration for this thesis. See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton University Press, 1978.

the image of “Gogol and Chagall” the illustrator responds to the challenge offered by the author decades earlier.⁹⁸

Furthermore, “Gogol and Chagall” also reveals the implication about the sense of dialogism within this illustrated work. In *Dead Souls*, the narrator seems to narrate the journey of the hero’s quest in the role of a bard. Nevertheless, departing from the traditional position, the “author” does not intend to control the development of the plot from an omnipotent view anymore, but presents himself directly to the readers instead.⁹⁹ For example, at the end of Part 1, the author-narrator finally gets the “chance” to explain to readers the identity and motivation of the protagonist. Regarding this imperfect image of our hero, the narrator begins to “address” his readers:

It is very doubtful that the hero chosen by us will prove pleasing to readers...Alas! All this is well known to the author, but be that as it may, he cannot take a virtuous man as his hero... because appeals to the virtuous man are hypocritical; because the virtuous man is not respected. No, it’s time, at last, to put the rogue in harness too. And so, let’s harness the rogue!¹⁰⁰

He then questions his readers:

But who among you, filled with Christian humility, not publicly but silently, alone, at moments of solitary converse with yourself, will direct this weighty question into the deepest recesses of your own soul: “And isn’t there something of Chichikov in me too?”¹⁰¹

By diminishing the distance between the reader and the hero, the “author”, leaving his omnipotent position and involving himself in the progress of the novel,

⁹⁸ In fact, when the Russian printmaker Alexander Agin suggested to Gogol the idea of making illustrations for *Dead Souls* in 1843, Gogol rejected him immediately with the reason that the illustration would probably destroy the imaginative pictures invoked by the text itself. As Gogol viewed his vital words as comparable to real paintings, here the quotation from Chapter 8 is actually taken as a challenge to the competition with an illustrator, not a real “invitation”. See Ernst-Gerhard Güse, “Die Toten Seelen”, *Marc Chagall, Druckgraphik*, Hatje, 1994.

⁹⁹ Here I am referring to the Author-God in Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” (1967). However, this down-to-earth author in *Dead Souls* is in fact the “character of the author”, while Gogol, the real author, is still playing the omnipotent Author-God unless readers are aware of this and take up the responsibility of interpretation themselves. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, in Raman Selden, ed., *The Theory of Criticism: From Plato to the Present*, Longman, 1988, p.318-320.

¹⁰⁰ Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 254-5.

¹⁰¹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 280.

actually becomes the negotiator between them. In this author's confession, the author is no longer the autocrat of the text; on the contrary, every decisive element in the novel is necessity. As the author gives up those elements, he also gives over the authoritative status of a traditional author. Now the choices of the characters are no longer under the author's direct control, but are forced by the situation "because it is time, at last, to give the poor virtuous man a rest."¹⁰² And the author is not the origin of the novel anymore:

So it was that this strange plot took shape in our hero's head. Whether readers will be grateful to him for it, I don't know. As for how grateful the author is, that's really hard to put into words. For, say what you will, if this idea hadn't entered Chichikov's head, this long poem would never have seen the light of day.¹⁰³

Using this device, even the plot is not decided by the author, who only functions in a passive role here:

And so, readers should not feel indignant towards the author if the persons who have been appearing so far have not been to their taste. This is Chichikov's fault, he is fully in charge here, and wherever he takes it into his head to go, we must plod along in the same direction too.¹⁰⁴

This is the paradoxical way through which the author gives up his predominant position, and hence it is here that the voice of an "author" and his characters in the creation merge. Even more, when reading this author's confession, the reader in the real world often identifies him/herself with the imagined readers in the novel, consciously or unconsciously, and therefore starts to answer the questions posed by the narrator. A further dialogue between the fictional world and the real world is therefore opened up. Consequently, the novel's discourse becomes polyphonic and the monophonic authority exists no more.

In other words, with the above statement, the author is no longer the creator of a novel but a participant in it; nor does a character serve as, in the words of Bakhtin, a "vehicle for the author's own ideological position", but rather a "plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 255.

¹⁰³ Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 275.

¹⁰⁴ Gogol, *Ibid*, p. 275.

¹⁰⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 6-7.

Since the author has given up the authority over the text, what then unfolds in the text are the mediocre hero himself and, from the viewpoint of “the death of the author”, the interpretations of each reader.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the illustrator presents the image of himself in *Les Âmes Mortes* and initiates dialogue directly with the viewers through the frontispiece “Gogol and Chagall”. As a result, along with the polyphonic language in the written text, various voices have been added to the illustrated work, not only by the illustrator but also by the individual interpretation of the viewer.

Moreover, according to the traditional concept, the word “author” implies a position of “authority”; accordingly, we might consider the “illustrator” as the origin of visual “illusion”. In *Les Âmes Mortes*, however, both the author and the illustrator have given up their superior positions. The author has descended from his omniscient position, while the illustrator has put aside the responsibility for the simulacrum of visual illusion. After the death of the author/ illustrator, there arises the birth of the reader/viewer.

So far, the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes*, both the text and the illustration, actually reflect the sense of meta-language, exploring the meaning of a work within the work itself. Gogol’s text conveys the idea of meta-fiction under the disguise of a realistic novel, while Chagall’s illustration explores the issue of the status of illustrations as such.

In fact, these techniques of polyphony and meta-language often appear in Chagall’s other works. For example, similar issues are at stake in the frontispiece of *The Great Fair: Scenes from My Childhood* (fig. II-2), written by the Russian writer Sholem Aleichem and illustrated by Chagall in 1958.¹⁰⁷ In this frontispiece, the painter depicts himself as drawing a portrait for the author he admires. Nevertheless, what appears in the picture within the picture is not the image of the author at all, but another work of Chagall himself, the famous *Over Vitebsk* (1914-21). Here, with his own artwork, the painter explains the inspiration and influences of the author’s writing on him. Hence, the way he explores the issue involved in this picture by means of the picture itself constitutes the meta-language of the painting. Furthermore, the frontispiece of *The Great Fair* could also be regarded as another kind of polyphony, as it mixes the interpretation of the

¹⁰⁶ To be more clear, I am referring to the ideas in Barthes, 1967, especially the famous ending “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author”. Selden, ed, 1988.

¹⁰⁷ Compared to the original text of *The Great Fair: Scenes from My Childhood* (New York: 1955), the adopted musical version of *Fiddler on the Roof* is probably better known. The drawing of Marc Chagall appears on the reprinted paperback edition of *The Great Fair*, published in 1958. See Susan Compton, *Chagall: Love and the Stage 1914-22*, Merrell Holberton, 1998, p.19, 25.

text with another dimension of painting and thus creates dialogues between the two contexts of creations. Chagall's frontispiece *The Great Fair: Scenes from My Childhood* not only conveys his homage to the author, but also enriches the language of the text itself.

Similarly, in the frontispiece in *L'Odyssée*¹⁰⁸ (fig. II-3) produced in the latter part of Chagall's life, the intention to explore the meaning of the illustration by means of the illustration itself becomes more apparent. Once again, the scheme of a picture within a picture is deployed in this frontispiece. Chagall has depicted himself as working in front of a painting of Homer's bust. To the left of the bust there are a series of heroic head portraits of Homer's epics, while on the right there appears the image of a donkey's head, frequently shown in Chagall's other artworks. Like "Gogol and Chagall", the image of blessing angels can be seen on the top left of the painting. What is explored in this frontispiece is the issue of representation. Chagall has presented the process of his creation in this painting. Consequently, the illustrator appears to carry on a dialogue with his viewers and remind them it is an illusory world, from the painter's own creation. Besides, the images regressing from Chagall's own visual vocabulary remind us that this frontispiece, dedicated to Homer, still belongs to Chagall's artistic creation. Additionally, in this picture within a picture, it is Homer's bust that is depicted, which implies that the illustrated work in *L'Odyssée* is rather the representation of Homer himself as a conceptualized object, than the mere imitation of this well-known epic. Instead of one single portrait of the author, the bust together with other imagery symbolizes the dilemma of representing the classic work in the unique way of the illustrator, and the artist's awareness of the challenge as well. This is the way Chagall achieves the sense of meta-language in the frontispiece in *L'Odyssée*.

Apart from the issue of word-image relationship, the composition of this *Odyssey* frontispiece still provides another dimension for discussion. The picture within the picture forms a second frame to the real one. The inner frame seems to divide the image into two worlds: "reality" (the world between the two frames) and "creation" (the world within the second frame). However, this seemingly clear distinction actually represents an ambiguous viewpoint: the right and bottom sides of the second frame in fact overlap with the first, outer frame. Accordingly, the figure of the painter who should belong to the world of "reality" can be seen within the second frame as well. Therefore, this frontispiece can be regarded as not only the painter's working scene but also a picture of Homer's bust and

¹⁰⁸ Chagall produced 82 lithographies in colour and in black-and-white for the illustrations of Homer's epic *Odyssey*, published under the French title *L'Odyssée* by Fernand Mourlot. The illustrated work was published as two volumes, respectively in 1974 and 1975. Ulrike Gauss, ed., *Marc Chagall: The Lithographs*, Hatje, 1999, p. 326.

Chagall's portrait within one picture. The painter of the "reality" is integrated with the virtual world of the picture within the second frame, while the imaginative angels escape from the picture within the picture, wandering between the first and the second frames. Through this mixture of the real and the illusive in Chagall's creation, another sense of polyphony presents itself: the painter does not control everything outside the painting anymore; on the contrary, he himself enters his painting to interact with his characters, and even turns out to be a depicted object himself.

Through the frontispiece of "Gogol and Chagall", Chagall's attitude towards illustration has been clearly declared. It reflects and predicts a shift in his thoughts on the issue of the relationship between word and image; it also proves that for Chagall, the illustration signifies the painter's active contemplation of the art of painting rather than the passive correspondence to the written text.

On the one hand, by means of the frontispieces, the change of Chagall's views on the relationship between the author and the illustrator can be thus observed: the author first appears superior to the illustrator (*Troyer*), then both are equal ("Gogol and Chagall"), and lastly the latter takes a dominant position (*L'Odyssée*). On the other hand, the author and the illustrator have cooperated in the dialogism of the work and presented an amazing polyphonic world. In the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes*, the text and the illustration correspond to each other, but still retain their own independence.

2. Juxtaposition of Reality and Illusion

In recent years, critics have gradually discarded the traditional view of Gogol's work as the forerunner of social realism and suggested a new way of interpreting Gogol's works as an "abstract existence" to confront the former idea of "realistic existence". In Nabokov's view, the story of *Dead Souls* is by no means the realistic reflection of contemporary Russian society, but is actually established in a non-existent illusionary world.¹⁰⁹ The plot and characters, although vividly described, are all within the imagination of the author. It is through Gogol's concrete depiction that readers tend to miscomprehend it as the reflection of real Russian society, but in fact, these realistic details are constructed within an essentially absurd framework.¹¹⁰ Obviously, Chagall has aligned himself with the

¹⁰⁹ For details of Nabokov's interpretation, see Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol*, New Directions Books, 1944.

¹¹⁰ As Ksana Blank points out in her writing "Conquest of the Irrational: Reading Gogol along with Salvador Dali" (AATSEEL Conference, San Francisco, 1998), the creation of Gogol is the "concretization of the irrational", which refers to the principle of "realistic

point-of-view of these modern critics. He highlights the irrational parts in the texts by showing supernatural pictorial elements in his illustrations. Also, it is these surreal techniques that enable Chagall to respond to Gogol's specific style of narration.

By discussing unrelated issues in long paragraphs, Gogol's technique of digression not only interrupts the reader's attention, but also mixes the unreal with the real. Therefore, in reply to Gogol's imaginative digression, in Chagall's illustrations objective and subjective elements, as well as real and virtual elements are juxtaposed. From *Les Âmes Mortes* illustrations nr 49/3 to nr 55/2, Chagall has deployed a considerable amount of illustrations just for a "pointless" monologue of Chichikov at the beginning of Chapter 7, so as to emphasize the sense of defamiliarization created by the author in the text.¹¹¹ While Gogol deploys multiple narrations and mixtures between reality and illusion, Chagall corresponds with a "twofold vision" where objective plots and subjective consciousness of characters contradict but still correspond with each other in one picture.¹¹² In chapter 7, Chichikov fancies the backgrounds of each peasant when he is looking at the names on his "dead souls" list. His imagination jumps from the spring farmland (illu. 49/2) to the grain harbour after the autumn harvest (illu. 55). The objective "time" of this monologue cannot last too long, half an hour at most, but in the hero's subjective imaginary time it has lasted an entire year. As a result, Chagall has produced most illustrations for this short monologue and hence created equal effects of digression and defamiliarization as the text does.

Apart from defamiliarization, the idea of the "twofold vision" also concerns the "second world" hidden in human spirit. In the Medieval aesthetics of the carnival, contrary to the serious, official, clerical and political forms and rituals in daily life, there exists another "nonofficial" human aspect. It is the humorous form of the carnival that releases the oppressed second world, reverses the order

details within an absurd framework" similar to the surreal techniques of Dali. Blank compares Gogol's novel creation with Dali's surrealist painting and indicates that the common point of both lies in the emphasis on hallucination. Therefore both have developed similar artistic techniques, such as the mixture of the real and the illusive, the discarding of the boundary between life and death, the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated things, etc. This comparison with surrealist paintings can also be applied to Chagall's "irrational" paintings; also the techniques mentioned above can be observed in his illustration for *Dead Souls*.

¹¹¹ The literary term "defamiliarization" of Russian formalism is adopted here to describe the same effect of making objects "unfamiliar" in visual arts.

¹¹² The term "twofold vision" comes from W. J. T. Mitchell. See Mitchell, Ch.1: "Blake's Composite Art", *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry*, Princeton University Press, 1978, p. 35.

of high and low, and allows people to laugh.¹¹³ This is a world in which everyone deserves to participate; this is the world concealed in Gogol's *Dead Souls* where everyone acts irrationally and exaggeratedly (but not impossibly). Correspondingly, Chagall's illustrations stress this second world by either depicting the subjective vision or by juxtaposing the subjective and the objective. Without an understanding of this "two-world condition", one would tend to regard the carnivalesque expression in this illustrated book as merely an entertaining one.

For example, in the illustration "Stepan" (illu. 50), there coexists the real and the illusive. The stout figure of the carpenter occupies the foreground with all the substantial details described in the text, such as "the axe in his belt and a pair of boots slung over his shoulders".¹¹⁴ In fact, the pure presence of this illustration in the whole series is ambiguous: the character "carpenter Stepan" is not part of the plot of the novel, and both his appearance and life stories come out of the intoxicating fantasy of the hero. In the left background of the picture is Chichikov's imagined death scene of the carpenter:

...where did you meet your end? To make some big money did you climb up to the cupola of a church, and maybe even pull yourself out on to the cross, and slipping off the crossbar crash to the ground, where only some Uncle Mikhey or other was standing near you and would scratch the back of his head and say: 'Hey, Vanya, now you've really gone and done it!' and then would tie a rope round himself and crawl up to take your place.¹¹⁵

The spatial device of this illustration seems quite reasonable at first glance. Firstly, the objects in both the fore and background are the result of juxtapositions of two scenes which could never occur at the same time. Secondly, the whole image is established in an imagined time and space created by the hero. Hence it produces a double-illusive effect. "Carpenter Stepan" demonstrates Chagall's surrealist technique of "realistic details within an absurd framework".

Likewise, in the illustration of Grigory Doyezzhay-Ne-Doyedesh (meaning "Grigory Always-on-the-way-but-never-getting-there", illu. 53), with its funny name unrealistically enough, two imagined deaths of "[fighting] for the sake of some fat and red-cheeked soldier's wife" and "stepping straight through a hole in the ice"¹¹⁶ made up by Chichikov are juxtaposed in the fore and

¹¹³ See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Eng. trans. Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.5-6

¹¹⁴ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.152.

¹¹⁵ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.152.

¹¹⁶ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.153.

backgrounds respectively. Furthermore, in the illustration of “Madame Sparrow” (illu. 52), this imaginary monologue of words has been transformed visually in a most brilliant way. The landlord Sobakevich changed the ending of this female serf’s name in order to make it appear as a male name, and slyly put it on the dead souls list sold to Chichikov:

...she had been registered so skilfully that from a distance she could have been taken for a muzhik, even her name looked like a man’s the way it was written, that is, not Yelizaveta but Yelizavet.¹¹⁷

The name that appears only once in the novel and is deleted from the list immediately by Chichikov has been well-visualized in Chagall’s illustration. The character covers her face with her arm as if to disguise herself as a man; one of her big feet rises up to symbolize the converted suffix. “Madame Sparrow” functions as another means of “concretization of the irrational” in Blank’s words. Through semi-realistic characters, Chagall has translated successfully the non-figurative word play into a figurative picture.

This word play of transforming words into images is a common technique used by Chagall. In “Meal at the Inn” (illu. 21), for instance, the mirror on the wall displays a surprising vision of a face with four eyes which is totally irrelevant to the other realistic elements in this picture. Chagall actually transforms Gogol’s exaggerated description of “a mirror that reflected back four eyes instead of two and instead of a face some sort of flat cake”¹¹⁸ into a pictorial image, and hence responds to the author’s humorous language.

More examples can be discovered throughout the entire set of illustrations: while people in the novel wonder about Chichikov’s background, saying that he might be the one-legged general Kopeikin or even Napoleon himself in exile, Chagall places these two fictional characters in opposite directions with a half-seen forefinger at right side and a Kremlin-like monolith in the background (“Kopeikin or Napoleon”, illu. 72). Once again the subjective and the objective vision occur at the same time. Also, a more explicit depiction appears in “Chichikov’s Dream” (illu. 30). With Chichikov’s “dream-girl” floating in the sky, masses of clouds mixes up the real with the illusive and evokes a dreamy effect in the picture.

In the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes*, Chagall deploys the technique of juxtaposing various elements to create a contrast between subjective and objective, real and imaginary, word and image, the serious first world and the boisterous

¹¹⁷ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.153.

¹¹⁸ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.67.

second one. Furthermore, Chagall's surreal device brings out the alienation effect on stage. By displaying these shocking elements to the audience, the work as a whole breaks the false realistic appearance and reveals its ironical nature.

3. Transformation and Metonymy

As one of the main characteristics of carnival, masquerade mocks and reverses the serious with bizarre disguises, of which bodily transformation is the most common. Similarly, it is in a "carnavalesque" way that Gogol mocks the falseness of the upper classes with semi-absurd descriptions. Gogol's rich depictions of characters, especially the landlords, make the whole novel appear as a series of literal caricatures, or a "gallery of portraits".¹¹⁹ In responding to Gogol's techniques of exaggeration, Chagall applies comical expressions to his illustrations so as to demonstrate a pictorial humour and imagination equal to, or even beyond, the textual narration.¹²⁰ "The deliberate deforming of the image is an essential step in the process of reforming it."¹²¹ Through physical transformation, an image can be renamed and reconsidered, thereby developing the satiric meaning of transformation.

A similar effect is brought out through Gogol's other technique: the metonymical device which accentuates the analogy and sarcasm achieved by the transformation. Through the detailed description of seemingly irrelative objects, a metonymically motivated metaphor is created in the pages to show the inner side of the characters. Chagall, proving himself to be not only a good illustrator but also a good reader, digs out the most important metonymies in the texts and deliberately transforms them into highlighted attributes or surrounding elements. Therefore, this section will focus in turns on the use of transformation and metonymy. First I will sort out different means of pictorial transformation in *Les*

¹¹⁹ "Gallery of portraits" is the section title Peace used in his analysis of *Dead Souls*. See Peace, 1981.

¹²⁰ Andrei Biely (spelled as Bely as well) has summarized Gogol's devices of writing as "hyperbole, synecdoche, metaphor and hypallage", among which he specifies that "metaphor" is shown by means of "metamorphosis". These devices listed above can also be found in Chagall's illustrations. According to Biely, a hyperbole refers to the sharp representation of forms; a synecdoche is to analogize the whole with trivial details, such as Gogol's long digressions, discussed in the section before; a hypallage means the "misplacing" of unrelated elements. See Andrei Biely, *L'Art de Gogol* (1934), quoted in Georges Nivat, "L'enjambée tendre de Marc Chagall", Fondation Pierre Gianadda, Martigny, *Marc Chagall*, L'exposition Christina Burrus, 1991, p.160-161.

¹²¹ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1982, p.12

Âmes Mortes and then observe how subtle metonymies, both in text and in images, perform their satiric function.

Transformation

Physical, or pictorial, transformations usually contain hidden symbolic meanings. As an exaggerated form in carnivals, physical transformation refers to the revolt against all kinds of authorities, including social norms and pictorial principles. In *Les Âmes Mortes*, “transformation” plays an important role: one can see grotesque and realistic elements continuously confronting each other in this work. These opposite elements are presented visually in Chagall’s caricature techniques, including pictorial hypallages of realistic objects, abstractions of lines and uneven proportions.

Hypallage, a literary device that consists of a reversed syntactic order of two words, refers in this example to the pictorial misplacement of two objects, usually of opposite qualities like normal and abnormal, high and low, living and lifeless.¹²² This kind of affinity/antagonism connecting two distinct elements has been a common pictorial device since the Renaissance. The best example of pictorial hypallage in the *Les Âmes Mortes* illustrations can be found in “The contract office” (illu. 58). After the audience walks through the realistic looking building of “The courthouse” (illu. 57), they are suddenly confronted with a most bizarre vision. As Gogol writes “Our heroes saw a great deal of papers, in both rough and fair copies, bent heads, broad napes, tail-coats, frock-coats of a provincial cut and even just an ordinary light-grey jacket, which stood out very sharply...”¹²³ Chagall’s office presents an image which is in fact a montage. Looking from the right door, the figure of the officer in the front row oddly mixes with the table itself, and those in the background gradually fade as heads with table, or heads in the air only. The picture as a whole looks like either a round board with ink stains on it, or a round clock hung in an office room.¹²⁴ This piece of illustration thus obtains the sense of pictorial hypallage in exchanging the meaning of the living and the lifeless.

¹²² Again I apply the term of literary criticism to the realm of visual arts. Hypallage can refer to the reversal of syntactic order as in “her beauty’s face”. Also it can mean the transferred epithet, which allows the sentiments of subjects to be experienced by objects, as in “sleepless night” or “happy room”... Similarly, the idea of pictorial hypallage can refer to the exchange or mixture of subjects and objects, often seen in Chagall’s artworks as flying clock, objects with human features, etc. And it responds to the description of “...the co-presence of the normative, fully formed, ‘high’ or ideal, and the abnormal, unformed, degenerate, ‘low’ or material.” in Harpham, *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹²³ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.158.

¹²⁴ The similes of the board and the clock come from Güse, 1994.

In a broad sense, most pictorial devices in the illustrations of *Les Âmes Mortes* correspond to the theme of the carnival. With the mixture of human figures and objects in “The contract office”, or Petrouchka’s body combining with the bed in “Petrouchka” (illu. 5), the worlds of human beings and the lifeless are deliberately confused, and thus becomes the reverse of classes and also the true meaning of degradation.

As regards the abstraction of outlines, another device of transformation, the characters in *Les Âmes Mortes* have no fixed appearances. They tend to be adjusted according to their backgrounds and hence the same character can differ vastly in the illustrations. Even if they appear as a realistic portrait in one illustration, it is very likely for them to be transformed and exaggerated as abstract lines in the next one. What Chagall depicts is rather a “type” than an “individual”. Take the landlord Manilov for example: when Chichikov thanks him genuinely for his bestowment of “dead souls”, Manilov is so touched that he indulges himself with his typical sentimentality:

Manilov was deeply moved. Long did both friends continue to press each other’s hands, and long did they gaze wordlessly into each other’s eyes, in which welling tears could be seen. Manilov simply did not want to release our hero’s hand and continued to press it so warmly that Chichikov had no idea how to unhand it.¹²⁵

This sentimental atmosphere is presented as abstract lines in the illustration “Chichikov bids farewell to Manilov” (illu. 12). Here the substantial figure of “Manilov” (illu. 8) has been transformed into airy contours; objects in the background also lose their gravity and rise up in distorted perspective to dance with our characters.

Another example of this transformation of lines appears in the illustration of the female landlord Korobochka. In the beginning she was scared and confused by Chichikov’s strange suggestion of buying dead souls, but as soon as she realizes what a trade it means, her fear becomes greed. In the illustration “Morning tea” (illu. 18), Korobochka bargains with Chichikov obsequiously. The contours of these two figures are simplified as a smooth “S” curve which connects Korobochka’s bowing with Chichikov’s puffing gestures, and hence creates the comical effect in the picture.

Likewise, in these two illustrations “Chichikov shaving” (illu. 75) and “The Swiss footman refuses to allow Chichikov to enter” (illu. 76), the hero’s changing emotions are expressed through the distortions of physical lines. In the

¹²⁵ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.39.

former, where Chichikov is dressing himself in front of a mirror, he gets so proud that his body inflates into a balloon-like figure; like the jump cut in a film, in the very next picture where Chichikov is humiliated by the footman, his figure shifts into bizarrely distorted limbs, as if melting with the aquatint background. With this strong contrast, Chagall specifically spotlights the crucial moments and the implicit emotions in the long text.

In respect of the use of uneven proportions, the illustration “Sobakevich near an armchair” (illu. 37/2) is a good example. In contrast with the tiny armchair and upstanding lampstand, it seems that the stout body of Sobakevich is continuously broadening to the ceiling. Through this irregular proportion, Chagall is able to create his humorous and absurd effects. Similarly, Chagall makes use of this uneven proportion again in “Nozdrev’s revelations” (illu. 64) to depict Nozdrev’s swashbuckling character. When people inquire about Chichikov’s mysterious intention, Nozdrev boasts as if he’s the only one who knows the “truth”, but in fact everything he says is nothing but braggadocio. In this illustration, the figure of a blatant landlord disproportionately occupies two-thirds of the picture; in the background the panicky crowd is diminished in size and floats in the air. The composition is thus made up of three layers: the magnified figure of Nozdrev in the foreground, the close-up of a shocking head on the middle-right, and the ignorant crowd in the background. The juxtaposition of different proportions therefore invokes the surprising effect and the satirical meaning of the illustration.

The same technique of distorted proportions has been applied in the depiction of the mean landlord Pliushkin, who feels genuinely happy about Chichikov’s suggestion to reduce his tax for perished serfs. Only when he takes advantage will he show his “hospitality”. Therefore, in the scene of “Pliushkin offering a drink” (illu. 44) imagined by Chagall,¹²⁶ the figure of Pliushkin pouring wine into a glass is dramatically enlarged, and the shrunken figure of Chichikov is observing the smug landlord in a dismissive but also pitying manner.

In fact, the use of irregular proportions is a reappearing technique in Chagall’s works. For instance, in the print “The Talmud teacher” for *Mein Leben*, on the magnified Talmud teacher’s shoulder stands the tiny child, the young Chagall himself, so as to dramatize the child’s fear of the long and dreary lessons. Through all these devices of transformation mentioned above, Chagall reveals the hidden side of humanity in a humorous manner.

¹²⁶ In the original text, Chichikov refuses Pliushkin’s offer, so this scene of drink-offering only comes from the illustrator’s idea.

Metonymy

Both the author and the illustrator of *Les Âmes Mortes* are known for their use of metonymies. For Gogol, he usually deploys detailed descriptions of landscapes to imply the characters in question. For example, whenever the hero Chichikov enters a new farmstead, the narrator always vividly depicts its surroundings—building, crops, peasants, even the air—before the landlord actually appears. The description of the surroundings has already revealed part of the characteristics of the house owner. Therefore, it has played a prominent role in Gogol's text, sometimes even more important than the dialogues or direct descriptions of the characters themselves. Likewise, instead of fixative appearances, Chagall tends to portray the characters with their attributes or surrounding elements. In the portraits of each landlord, Chagall's metonymical devices indicate their inner characteristics.

Manilov, the first landlord met by Chichikov, is a living portrait of the word "niceness". However, his niceness is always intermixed with a certain preciousness. Since he welcomes Chichikov at the gate ("Manilov", illu. 8), his overpassionate manner shows a sense of artificiality, and when he invites his guest into the dining room, they even "argue about who should go in first, and finally Chichikov edged his way into the room"¹²⁷ ("Manilov and Chichikov on the thread", illu. 9). Hence in the portrait of Manilov, Chagall adds the attribute of a pipe to this friendly fat man, besides the faithful depiction of "the master himself standing on the porch in a green shalloon frock-coat, his hand held to his forehead like an umbrella, to have a better look at the approaching vehicle".¹²⁸ Though the narrator doesn't make mention of the pipe here, later in the chapter it is learned that Manilov almost never puts away his pipe. Compared with the dining table of flowers and fruits only ("Meal at Manilov's", illu. 10), it seems that Manilov would rather swallow shapeless smoke than real, substantial food. In fact, what Manilov symbolizes is impractical sentimentalism. Therefore, in this portrait-illustration, Chagall cleverly uses the image of the pipe as a metonymy for the nature of this character.

As the only female landlord in the whole novel, Korobochka is visited incidentally by our hero. Naïve and superstitious, all she truly cares about is nothing but the sale of her farm. When she shows up in her nightcap and flannel at the knocks of Chichikov at midnight, Gogol here deploys a long digression as follows:

¹²⁷ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.31.

¹²⁸ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.24.

[she is] one of those nice old ladies, small landowners who bemoan the poor harvest and the losses....and meanwhile, slowly but surely, accumulate a tidy sum in little bags of bright calico that are tucked away in various chests of drawers.¹²⁹

Indeed, her name “Korobochka” literally means “little box” in Russian.¹³⁰ Unsurprisingly, Chagall depicts “Madame Korobochka” (illu. 15) as she holds her precious purse with both hands to represent her meticulous nature. Moreover, when Chichikov gets up and looks out of the window, Chagall has displayed the poultry-farm in Chichikov’s eye to the readers: within the definitely confined fences, countless hens and chickens, the devouring sow and her family, and, unmentioned in the text, the lady landowner sitting unnoticeably but contentedly beside the kennel. The entire poultry farm is a metonymy for the landlord himself who watches over her properties in her rustic and calculating way.

Nozdrev is also visited by Chichikov incidentally. In the portrait of “Nozdrev” (illu. 22), his physical appearance reveals everything about his character: a medium-size man, thick hair and moustache, but his whiskers are uneven on either side. In a later paragraph we learn that this is because Nozdrev often gets seized by his whiskers when he’s caught cheating at poker. This physical unevenness is the visualization of his contradictory nature. Furthermore, his brother-in-law is his counterpart in the household. As an example of affinity/antagonism, the brother-in-law is as false as Nozdrev himself, but disagrees with him all the time. Hence in “Nozdrev”, Chagall arranges his brother-in-law in a shadow-like position against Nozdrev to set off the latter’s ridiculousness. Also, as the environment described in Gogol’s text always implies the owner’s personality, Nozdrev’s house is nothing but a mess. In the illustration of “The house painters” (illu. 23), everything loses control; all the perspective lines disappear and all the furniture seems to incline in every direction. All this represents the capricious nature of the landlord. Again Chagall presents this portrait with Gogol’s metonymically motivated metaphors.

Stout Sobakevich occupies the entire picture, leaving no space for other elements of his surroundings (“Sobakevich”, illu. 32). He is the only landlord who is portrayed without specific attributes, but shows up with his spouse instead. Therefore these two illustrations “Sobakevich” and “Madame Sobakevich” can be viewed as paired portraits. Obviously Chagall bears Gogol’s amusing description in mind when he produces this pair:

¹²⁹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.48.

¹³⁰ See Peace, *Ibid*, p.217.

...he noticed two faces peering through a window at almost the same time: one female, in a cap, narrow and long like a cucumber, and one male, round and broad, like those Moldavian pumpkins called gourds...¹³¹

The simile of the vegetable implies that this robust landlord is physically much stronger than his spouse—later we learn that he has absolute power in the household, and Chagall's paired illustrations also correspond to this implication.

The last landowner is Pliushkin. This miserable figure is often interpreted as the plight of Russia at that time. Among the portrait-illustrations of these five landlords, the one of Pliushkin is perhaps the most distinguished. Instead of showing his face, Pliushkin turns his back towards the audience in the dark shadow produced by Chagall's drypoint ("Pliushkin at the door", illu. 40). His attribute of the key ring on his waist and the heavy lock on the door indicate his nature as a moneygrubber. In this chapter, Gogol deploys most prominent metonyms in the landscapes. Accordingly, Chagall pays close attention to both illustrations of "Pliushkin's old garden" (illu. 39) and "Pliushkin's room" (illu. 41) in which he depicts the outside and inside of Pliushkin's dwelling and thus makes up for the absence of the physical appearance of the landlord. The old garden is the only place where there are some signs of life; yet under thick branches and leaves lay the shabby and ruined mansion. With distorted perspective, Chagall hereby implies the plight of being oppressed under one's own property. Furthermore, in Pliushkin's disordered room, a huge lamp in the top-left corner stands out in the picture, reminding readers of Gogol's narration:

Suspended from the middle of the ceiling was a chandelier in a canvas bag, so thick with dust that it had come to resemble a silk cocoon, with the worm still inside.¹³²

This chandelier is the best metonymy for this miserly landowner who, confining himself in solitude, watches over his abundant but tattered property from up high.

From merry Manilov to miserly Pliushkin, this gallery of portraits forms a journey from laughter to tears. In addition to Gogol's vivid description, Chagall enhances this impression to the readers through his acute observation of the text. All the elements in the illustrations come from the text itself, though not asserted explicitly. It is the way Chagall applies the metonymies from the text to his own creation.

¹³¹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.104.

¹³² Gogol, *Ibid*, p.128.

4. Gastric and Sexual Desires

Besides exaggeration, transformation, mockery of hierarchy and reverse of values, the grotesque realism of carnival also emphasizes the aspect of the open body, which fulfils the cultural functions of eating and intercourse, as Bakhtin phrases:

The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements.¹³³

Eating, drinking, defecation and sex are common to all of humanity, and hence conform to the democratic essence of the carnivalesque spirit. As Rabelais's works often praise constant indulgence in both food and sex, carnivalism affirms popular culture through the celebration of materiality, degradation and physical enjoyments.¹³⁴

Bakhtin's elaboration of the grotesque realism of Rabelais's works can be applied to the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes*, since both the text and the illustrations contain similar expressions. Similar to Rabelais's work, there appear lots of descriptions of feasts and eroticism in *Dead Souls*, where humanity is displayed in all its aspects. Correspondingly, the illustrator does not omit this carnivalesque feature; on the contrary, he emphasizes these scenes with unique pictorial devices so as to reveal both the gastric paranoia and sexual desires in his illustrations in *Les Âmes Mortes*.

Gastric Paranoia

Boisterous scenes of feasting appear many times in Gogol's text. Besides the food itself, Gogol carefully depicts the often grotesque eating and drinking habits of every character. Like the environmental surroundings, the various plots of eating and drinking also cleverly imply the personality of the characters. Through the emphasis on food and drink, humanity demonstrates its victory. Here a human's relation with the world is joyous and victorious; he overcomes and devours the

¹³³ Bakhtin, 1984, p.26-27.

¹³⁴ See Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1984, p. 295.

world instead of being himself devoured.¹³⁵ “The feast (every feast) is an important primary form of human culture,”¹³⁶ as Bakhtin pointed out.

Scenes of feasts are not only a good opportunity for the author to portray a group of people, but also the moments when readers are invited, as it were, to chomp and gulp along with the characters in their imagination. From refreshments to banquets, Gogol’s brilliant descriptions tend to provoke the readers’ desire to eat and drink.

A good example is when Petukh instructs his cook for a banquet the next day, which “would have quicked the appetite of a dead man”¹³⁷:

“Now, make a four-cornered fish pie...In one corner put the cheeks of the sturgeon and some gristle, in the others some nice buckwheat groats and some tiny mushrooms with onions and some sweet milt and some brains...It should be browned nicely on one side, you understand, but a little lighter on the other. And as for the bottom, bake it so it sucks up the juices and gets wet all the way through, you know, so that all of it, you know, mmm, so that it doesn’t crumble, but melts in the mouth, like snow, so that you don’t even feel it melting.” Petukh accompanied his instructions with a smacking and sucking of his lips.¹³⁸

In fact, it seems that almost every character in *Dead Souls* tries to obtain certain fulfilment through his conquest of food. A good appetite is given such great importance that:

More than one gentleman of the grand sort would sacrifice, on the spot, half his serfs and half his estates, mortgaged and unmortgaged, with all the improvements in the foreign and the Russian style, for the sole purpose of having the kind of stomach possessed by the gentleman of the middling sort...¹³⁹

Here the most primitive human desire is highly valued, even sublimated; a well-fed stomach is actually the common goal of every human being. In *Dead Souls*,

¹³⁵ For further explanation see Bakhtin, 1984, p.281.

¹³⁶ Bakhtin, 1984, p.8.

¹³⁷ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.342.

¹³⁸ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.342-343. Although this paragraph of part 2 of *Dead Souls* is not included in Chagall’s illustrations (only the first part is illustrated), this passage is still a brilliant example of Gogol’s description of food.

¹³⁹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.66.

the dilation and digestion of the stomach hence form the theme of “gastric paranoia”. What fills the stomach is rather man’s indulgence and conquest of the world, than the food itself. As Don Quixote fights with windmills, characters in *Dead Souls* use cookers as weapons and kitchens and banquets as battlefields, so as to display the ironic absurdity of the ideology of the “Higher Ranks”. With laughter, individual spirituality turns out to be popular materiality; with the movements of eating and drinking, the false highness collapses and the new spirit succeeds. This is the revolutionary function of Gogol’s feasts.¹⁴⁰

Since it is in the large banquets presented in Gogol’s text that every part of real humanity is exposed to the reader, as a result a large proportion of Chagall’s illustrations, is occupied by numerous dining scenes, including “Meal at Manilov’s” (illu. 10), “Morning tea” (illu. 18), “Meal at the inn” (illu. 21), “The groaning table” (illu. 35), and “Sobakevich at the table” (illu. 36), as well as those of dancing crowds, including “The evening at the governor’s” (illu. 4), “The banquet at the police chief’s” (illu. 59), “Chichikov arrives at the ball” (illu. 62), “The governor’s ball” (illu. 63), and “The revelry degenerates into a brawl” (illu. 68). Bodily desire is accentuated and memorialized in a large number of illustrations.

Among these scenes of feasts, “The groaning table” offers a close-up of the dining table. Take a closer look, and what is depicted in the plates are entire mini-animals. The implication of the conquest of food is shown in Sobakevich’s bold statement:

When we have pork, then we go ahead and plunk the whole pig on the table; when it’s mutton, then we haul in the whole ram; when it’s goose, the whole goose!...eat as much as I want, as much as the soul requires.¹⁴¹

“The groaning table” is the only illustration without any appearance of human beings; the empty chairs around the dining table affirm the human absence. The table is depicted erectly so that the spectator can see everything on it absolutely clearly. In this way, the feast itself becomes the main character in the picture to interact with the spectators.

In addition to the direct depiction of the subject itself, every single illustration in *Les Âmes Mortes* actually conceives a sense of joy and bustle, and hence dilutes the slightly serious and melancholic atmosphere retained in the text. Influenced by Chagall’s Hassidic background mentioned in the introduction, the pictorial forms of the illustrations also brilliantly correspond to the concept of

¹⁴⁰ Bakhtin, 1984, p.22.

¹⁴¹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.109.

carnivalism. With techniques of transformation and distorted perspective discussed before, all figures in these illustrations are exaggerated and transformed into, in Bakhtin's term, a certain "carnival gesture" as if in crazy dances. Moreover, the perspective lines often seem to be jumping or swinging in the background with the characters and confuse the limits of the pictorial space. For example, in "The governor's ball", the band in the background and the candles on the wall seem to be pushed out by the crowds into mid-air. The whole composition loses its balance, like the ebullient rhythm of the dance tune itself.

In the illustrated work, the limits between humans and animals, spirit and material, highness and lowness are no longer concrete. Also, often emphasized in Chagall's illustrations is the sense of "incompleteness" in carnivalism. Opposed to the concepts of beauty, sublimity and completeness, the grotesque images in these illustrations are usually ugly, distorted and incomplete, challenging both moral and pictorial principles. For example, the two legs of Sobakevich (illu. 32) appear in obvious discord; there are also incomplete figures depicted in "Lying on the bed" (illu. 60) and "Our hero is getting ready" (illu. 77). These are subtle techniques by means of which the illustrator tries to correspond and, indeed, add to the spirit of the carnival.

To sum up, in terms of both subjects and techniques, the illustrations in *Les Âmes Mortes* affirm the carnivalism displayed in the text itself. In emphasising the eating and drinking, as well as exaggerated carnival gestures, the illustrations on the one hand highlight the popular culture depicted in the novel; on the other hand, they embody the material meaning of "the lower part of the body". This is a Utopian world. It is "the feast of becoming, change, and renewal"¹⁴². In the illusive world of *Les Âmes Mortes*, the characters are enjoying the feasts themselves. But besides the pungency of the eating and drinking scenes, the sexual implications are even more intriguing.

Eroticism

Eroticism demonstrates the incongruity between the higher aspirations and lower desires, of human nature. In Bakhtin's words

They [the grotesque images] remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of "classic" aesthetics, that is, the aesthetics of the ready-made and the completed.

[...]

¹⁴² Bakhtin, 1984, p.10.

Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness. And such is precisely the grotesque concept of the body.

And:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.¹⁴³

Like other open parts of the body, sexual intercourse is one way to meet the world and it emphasizes the incomplete image of the grotesque.¹⁴⁴ In carnivalism, the desire for the body of the opposite sex is highly praised, and thus it accomplishes another form of dialogue with the world.¹⁴⁵ In this sense, the way sexual desire is represented in *Les Âmes Mortes* implies an important aspect of carnivalism; this is especially embodied in the depiction of the female gender. Interestingly, the author and the illustrator of *Les Âmes Mortes* hold quite different attitudes towards affection and gender.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, in regard to both the author and the illustrator's creations, the erotic implications have already been the focus of many research studies. Regarding love and eroticism, Gogol and Chagall hold very different attitudes, and in the illustrated *Les Âmes Mortes* where their works meet, one would expect a certain

¹⁴³ Bakhtin, 1984, p. 26.

¹⁴⁴ Besides sexual intercourse, the grotesque concept of the body explained by Bakhtin is that of an unfinished image: pregnancy, growth, birth, death, dismemberment, etc. Another tendency is to show the image of two bodies in one. The grotesque image contrasts with the classic canons of the completed body. See Bakhtin, 1984, p. 25-29.

¹⁴⁵ Harpham also points out the close relations between sex and the grotesque in literature, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, *Esmeralda and Quasimodo*, *Lolita* and *Humbert*, etc. Here one can find the amalgamation between the high and the low; the opposed values demonstrate the absurdity of human love and sex. See Harpham, 1982, p. 10-11

¹⁴⁶ Of course, in discussing sexual content in Gogol's time, the extent of self-censorship, and that of the state and indeed the reader, cannot be underestimated. In 1846, ten years after the second edition was published, with a preface by the author in which he admits his own self-censorship, the Russian police still did their best to prevent accolades at his funeral. This must be taken into consideration when discussing Gogol's attitudes toward both the female sex and eroticism.

divergence. In Gogol's case, many researchers have noticed specific sexual implications hidden in his texts. For example, in the two short stories "A Terrible Vengeance" and "Ivan Fedorovich Shponka and his Aunty", written in his early life, the author already somewhat reveals his own fears of sex or eroticism.¹⁴⁷ In his celebrated allegorical short story "The Nose", some researchers believe he had fear of his own sexual impotence. Later on, Gogol makes this more explicit in the story of the groom who ran away on his wedding day in "The Wedding", and also in a paragraph concerning ladies in N Town in *Dead Souls*: "No, I simply can't; a timid feeling of sorts comes over me."¹⁴⁸ All these, plus the fact that Gogol remained single throughout his life, are by no means sufficient to assume Gogol's homosexuality, nor any real suggestion of impotence, yet it is clear that Gogol had certain fears and an attraction and repulsion towards the opposite sex. However, this is not our main concern here.

Neither is there any indication that Gogol is a chauvinist who despises women; on the contrary, he almost holds a fearful and trembling attitude towards them and usually, as he himself admits, depicts only the outward appearance and behaviour of the female sex. As a result, this voyeuristic view places the women of Gogol's writings in an "observed" position, with men as the observers. The representation of the female sex in *Dead Souls* therefore depicts women as rather mysterious sex objects based on a distant, voyeuristic observation.

Quite opposed to Gogol's alienation to females, Chagall's passionate love towards his spouse is well known. During the period of creating illustrations for *Les Âmes Mortes*, Chagall lived happily with his first wife Bella, who was both his model and muse for numerous paintings, and their little daughter Eva. After Bella's death, Chagall and his second wife Valentina (whom Chagall intimately calls "Vava") also developed a stable relationship not only of husband and wife, but also of artist and agent. It is not surprising to see how Chagall expresses ardent emotions in his paintings. As a result, the way he depicts females is quite different from that of Gogol: either by direct depiction of flying lovers, or by love symbols of roosters and bouquets of flowers. In this series, we will therefore examine how the loving Chagall responds to Gogol's descriptions of the female characters.

Sweet Madame Manilov is the first female character encountered by readers, and she could be viewed as the basic model for the depictions of all the other females in *Dead Souls*. Madame Manilov functions not only as the

¹⁴⁷ These two short stories were published in the collection *Evenings in a village near Dikanka* in 1831. "A Terrible Vengeance" is a story about incest and "Shponka" is about a sexless nephew being forced to get married. See Simmons, 1965.

¹⁴⁸ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.177.

representation of the author's general impression of the opposite sex, but also as the symbol of the female status in a feudalistic society. For example, when it comes to the state of the housework in Manilov's mansion (whilst incidentally taking a sideswipe at female education, such as it was, of the day), the narrator sarcastically defends Madame Manilov:

But all these are low matters, and Manilov's wife had been well brought up...in boarding schools, as we know, three main subjects constitute the foundation of human virtues: the French language, which is indispensable for a happy family life; the piano, for affording one's spouse some pleasant moments; and, finally, in the specifically homemaking skills, the knitting of purses and other surprises...but I confess that about ladies I am very much afraid to say anything.¹⁴⁹

Madame Manilov is this kind of lovely woman: beautiful, follows whatever her husband says, and gives surprising little gifts from time to time. In the grand mansion, her status is just like the delicate vase in the corner—beautiful but essentially useless. Hence in Chagall's illustration, her position is shown almost as mere decoration. In the portrait of "Manilov" (illu.8), her face is placed incompletely within the window frame on the right-hand side, thus corresponding to her marginal status in the house. Also, in "Chichikov bids farewell to Manilov" (illu. 12), she appears again in the doorframe, this time in the background. Although in the original text, Madame Manilov should be participating in this conversation in the room; in Chagall's illustration she is pushed towards the exit to emphasize her marginal position even further.

On the one hand, this marginal status points out the limited individuality of women at that time; on the other hand, the arrangement of a picture-like frame, whether doorframe or window frame, reflects both the status of being observed and the function of "decoration" in a house. Therefore, this marginality becomes the basic orientation of the women in *Les Âmes Mortes*. Other female characters in this novel all have similar positions/functions in both the text and the illustrations.

Madame Sobakevich is also a dutiful wife. Though her serious personality is quite different from sweet Madame Manilov, they are both limited in the frames of husbands and of houses. In fact, behind her aloofness, Madame Sobakevich's status in the house is even more miserable. The contrast between her elongated body type and her stout husband has already hinted at their unequal authority in the house. Despite her seemingly controlling comments to her husband—"Ugh!

¹⁴⁹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.27.

What an unpleasant thing to say!”¹⁵⁰ —none of her opinions are taken into consideration by her husband. When the males are chatting, she becomes completely oppressed:

...with a movement of her head like an actress playing the role of a queen. Then she settled herself on the sofa, drew her merino shawl round her and from that point on moved neither eye nor brow nor nose.¹⁵¹

Accordingly, in the illustration “Madame Sobakevich” (illu. 33), Chagall uses the attribute in his picture brilliantly again by juxtaposing the lady with their thrush in the birdcage. The little bird that keeps “tapping against the frame of the wooden cage”¹⁵² is no doubt the best symbol for this restricted lady, and it proves Chagall’s sympathetic observations towards the female characters described in the novel.

The ladies of N town, to whom Gogol dedicates lengthy paragraphs, embody the decorative meaning of women. They are depicted as fashionable and pretentious in Gogol’s text, so that they can function only as decorative mannequins at best at the mansions or parties. Amongst them, the passage between “Merely Pleasant Lady” and “Lady Pleasant in All Respects” is perhaps the most representative one. Their shallowness makes their discussion about the latest fashions look completely farcical:

“...here’s what’s amazing: just imagine, bodices have started getting even longer, they’re coming down to a V in front, and the front stays are completely overdone; the whole skirt is gathered all round, the way farthingales used to be in the old days, and a bit of cotton padding is even being added in the back, to make it all look utterly belle-femme.”

“Well, that’s all simply...I must say!” observed the Lady Pleasant in All Respects, making a movement of her head that conveyed a sense of dignity.

“Exactly, that’s it precisely: I must say!” replied the Merely Pleasant Lady.

“Well, you do what you like, but I am certainly not going to start imitating that!”

¹⁵⁰ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.108.

¹⁵¹ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.106.

¹⁵² Gogol, *Ibid*, p.106.

“I feel the same way...It’s true, when you think what fashion is coming to sometimes...it’s just not done! I managed to get my sister to send me a pattern, just for the fun of it; my Melanya has started sewing it.”

“So, you actually have the pattern?” exclaimed the Lady Pleasant in All Respects, not without perceptible agitation.

“Of course; my sister brought it with her.”

“My sweet, let me have it, in the name of everything that’s holy.” ...¹⁵³

Decorativeness stands out in Chagall’s “The charming lady and the lady charming in every way” (illu. 66). The whole picture is composed of decorative details, such as the skirts with arabesques, the ornaments and pretentious gestures of the ladies, together with the fawning puppies and the flowerpots on the window frame. Two ladies, two windows, two pots, two dogs; the composition is altogether symmetrically ornamented. The illustration thus reveals the female as merely an ignorant decoration.

Other female characters depicted in the illustrations, like the face-covered hostess (illu. 77) or the blonde girl in Chichikov’s dream (illu. 30), all reflect a certain sense of marginality or of being purely a sex object. It’s not difficult to find that, while Gogol tends to sarcastically describe the appearances or dialogues of these characters, yet never narrates their central consciousness in the way he portrays male characters, Chagall the illustrator tends to use pictorial disposition and attributes to annotate the female status he himself observes.

The erotic imagination concealed in Gogol’s words is more explicit in Chagall’s female imagery. Though their attitudes and representations of the same theme are quite different, they both contributed to the exploration of male desire, and thus attained the sense of carnivalism. The imagined dialogues among the author, the illustrator and the readers can be interestingly further continued.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Chagall’s illustrations for Gogol’s *Dead Souls* from the perspective of Bakhtin’s notion of grotesque realism. By focusing on its dialogical nature and carnivalesque appearance, I tried to position the text and the illustrations within the theme of nostalgia. On one hand, Chagall’s choice of this Russian classic demonstrates his nostalgia for the time and place of his Russian

¹⁵³ Gogol, *Ibid*, p.204-205.

roots. On the other, his carnivalesque images reveal the nostalgic longing for a utopian world where confined desires can be fulfilled, that is, where desires can be released from the pressure of reality and can freely create dialogues between the self and the world.

The carnivalesque dimension of Chagall's work suggests what is missing in civilized human society: the bold expression and outspokenness of gastric and sexual desires, which are basic but often limitary. At carnivals, people are allowed to follow their natural instincts and do what they really want, whereas in daily realities it would be forbidden or despised. Now people are free to get drunk, to enjoy feasts, to laugh at authorities, to flirt with the opposite sex, to swear, and so on:

Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind.¹⁵⁴

It is this utopian world embodied in carnival that is longed for in *Les Âmes Mortes*. At first glance, the seemingly realistic depiction of Russian villages implies the restorative sense of nostalgia; but further exploration reveals the festive and exaggerated style of expression indicating the longing for a carnivalesque utopia in the reflective sense. In the utopian world of *Les Âmes Mortes*, the real and the virtual are interlaced, physical forms are transformed, and characters are feasting and lusting. Nostalgia in *Les Âmes Mortes* therefore explains the style of grotesque realism in both text and illustrations: nostalgia refers not only to the realistic places, but also to a utopian ideal expressed in grotesque forms.

¹⁵⁴ Bakhtin, 1984, p.10.

III. CHAPTER THREE - Infant Joy: *Les Fables de La Fontaine*

Soon after the completion of illustrations for *Dead Souls*, Ambroise Vollard gave Chagall another commission to illustrate the French masterpiece *Les Fables de La Fontaine*. This choice for a foreign artist instead of a French native immediately provoked certain indignation: "Everyone knows that La Fontaine is universal. That is why he is called classic. But Chagall is not classic. He is the exact opposite of a classic, in fact. Chagall is Slavic,"¹⁵⁵ criticized Hubert Colleje in the paper of Antwerp *La Métropole* on 9 March 1930.

Vollard was emphatic about his own choice, nevertheless. "Why Chagall?" defended Vollard in the article "De La Fontaine à Chagall" for the evening paper *L'Intransigeant* before he held the exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in Paris: "Precisely because his aesthetic seems to me very close and in a sense akin to La Fontaine's, both dense and subtle, realist and fantastic."¹⁵⁶

It seems that the idea of re-illustrating the *Fables*, a classic which already inspired a long list of illustrators, came from Vollard himself due to his expectation of making innovative *livres de peintres* which accentuated artistic expression rather than literary interpretation. On the other hand, it is not unreasonable to assume that Chagall, as an artist with strong personal opinions, also accepted this suggestion out of his own inclination. In fact, born in a Hasidic family where stories and allegories were integrated with daily lives and beliefs, Chagall tends to create his visionary world on a fabular basis, as his canvases often fill up with images of animals and folklores.

¹⁵⁵ "On sait bien que La Fontaine est universel. C'est même pour cela qu'on l'appelle classique. Or, Chagall n'est pas classique. Il est même tout le contraire d'un classique. Chagall est slave." See Céret, Musée d'Art Moderne, 'Les gouaches de Chagall pour les *Fables* jugées par la critique des années 1920-1930', Preface to *Marc Chagall: Les Fables de La Fontaine*, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1995, p.15. For the English translation quoted, see Trans. Esther Allen, "The Critics' response to Chagall's Gouaches for the *Fables of La Fontaine*", *Marc Chagall: Fables of La Fontaine*, The New Press, 1997, p. 17.

¹⁵⁶ "'Pourquoi Chagall?' Je réponds: 'Mais, précisément, parce que son esthétique m'apparaît tout proche, et en un sens, apparentée à celle de La Fontaine, à la fois dense et subtile, réaliste et fantastique'." The article was published on the 8th of January, 1929, before the opening of the exhibition of gouaches at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in February, 1930, see Céret, *Ibid.*, p. 14. Also see the English translation quoted in trans. Allen, *Ibid.*, p. 16.

For Chagall, as well as for numerous readers, the visualization of the *Fables* signifies the return to one's childhood memory. Partly owing to his lack of proficiency in French, which made the critics disqualify him as an illustrator for La Fontaine, Chagall apparently decided which fables to illustrate on the basis of his poetic instinct.¹⁵⁷ However, by skipping some of the most best-known and strongly moralistic pieces, such as "La Cigale et la Fourmi", "Le Rat des Villes et le Rat des Champs" and "Le Lièvre et la Tortue", he chose the fables according to his own artistic ideas but not the traditions of LaFontainian illustrations: "No, this is not for me," said Chagall after listening to his wife reciting the fables.¹⁵⁸ Obviously, it was not La Fontaine's elegant form of classical verses that caught Chagall's attention, but the nature of an eloquent bestiary that corresponded to the painter's own pictorial context.

The attitude Chagall held towards his illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine* might be traced to Chagall's other work, in which the teachings of Hasidism in his childhood always function as a key to understand his works. This spiritual sect of Judaism gives Chagall's works an allegorical appearance with flying cows, roosters and donkeys shuttling around a human village. It is a world closer to a child's naïve imagination than an adult's sophisticated interpretation. Accordingly, the embodiments of Hasidic thoughts in Chagall's illustrations—the morals in the form of stories, the solemn theme in a merry tone, and the mellow co-existence between human beings and animals—all correspond to the nature of the *Fables*. The combination of a French appearance with Russian and Hasidic cultural backgrounds explains the specificity of Chagall's illustrated version of the *Fables*. Therefore, despite its un-classical or un-French appearance, some contemporary critics started to find Chagall's illustration surprisingly innovative and appropriate for a new look of La Fontaine's *Fables*.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ The illustrated fables chosen by Chagall primarily come from the first five books of *Les Fables*, like most illustrators have done, probably because those fables are more familiar to readers. Among Chagall's 100 fable illustrations, 65 come from the first five books, and only 35 from books 6-12.

¹⁵⁸ "Ça, ce n'est pas pour moi." According to Pierre Courthion's explanation in 1929, it was Madame Bella Chagall who read the contents of the *Fables* in a high voice to the painter Chagall, and after listening he'd decide whether it is chosen or not. See Didier Schulmann, 'Chagall illustrateur des *Fables de La Fontaine*, ou Comment quitter la Russie et devenir français', *Marc Chagall: Les Fables de La Fontaine*, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1995, p. 26. Another result of this reading could be seen in a misunderstanding of the text: in the illustration for the fable of "Le Chêne et le Roseau" (illu. 12), Chagall painted a bush of red roses instead "reed" in the text, which seems to be a confusion between French words "roseau" and "rose".

¹⁵⁹ It was only after Vollard's death, and also when the sense of anti-Semitism became alarming, that the public started to appreciate his choice of illustrator. Ever since the positive comments by Robert Roy in 1941, the majority of critics continued with this

Chagall made one hundred watercolour drawings for the chosen fables, but when it came to the process of execution, the publisher encountered unsolvable technical problems and Chagall was forced to compromise on copper plates and hand-colour some copies afterwards.¹⁶⁰ It is difficult to judge whether the original watercolour drawings are better than the hand-coloured prints. However, even in black and white, the final engravings bear almost the same pictorial effect as the watercolour ones.¹⁶¹

Chagall thus created his colourful world of *Fables*. His illustrations can be seen as a two-dimensional theatre. On the basis of an analysis of the comical tones of the pictorial narration, the characters of animals, humans and gods, and the formal devices of colour and details, I will explore Chagall's *Fables* illustrations from different perspectives.

1. From Epic to Comedy

The content of La Fontaine's fables is always the same, but through the history of fable illustrations, illustrators have used very different styles. In fact, one of the biggest problems of fable illustrations is that well-known images can become stereotypes. Since the first illustrated edition of *Fables de La Fontaine* by François Chauveau,¹⁶² all illustrators have struggled to break from the fixed image of every fable. Unlike the illustrations of long stories, fables are either short scenes with simple actions, or plain dialogues or thoughts from animal characters. It is therefore a difficult task for an illustrator to visualize the simple plots

point of view. For more details and experts of their comments, see trans. Allen, *Ibid.*, p. 19-23.

¹⁶⁰ This edition of *Fables* was published as two volumes; each contains one frontispiece illustrated by Chagall as well. Owing to the publisher Vollard's death in a car accident, 200 copies of this edition were printed and published by Tèriade as late as in 1952, among which 85 copies were hand-coloured by the artist; 15 copies were reserved as hors commerce for collectors. All 200 copies were sign in black and white ink by the artist. See Patrick Cramer, *Marc Chagall: the Illustrated Books: Catalogue Raisonné*, Cramer, 1995, p.68.

¹⁶¹ To meet the artist's original ideas, this chapter would focus its main concern on the watercolour works, if available.

¹⁶² On 31 March 1668, *Les Fables choisies mises en vers par M. de La Fontaine* was published as six books containing 124 fables with 118 vignettes illustrated by François Chauveau. As an acquaintance of La Fontaine himself, Chauveau's illustrations bear the recognizable clarity and directness to the essence of the fables which form the successive iconology of La Fontainian illustrations. See Gérard Gréverand, 'Illustrations et illustrateurs', *La Fontaine et les artistes*, Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre, 2002.

different from other competitors. This is the main reason why the tradition of fable illustrations often appears to use the same stereotypical iconography.

In his *Les Fables de La Fontaine: quatre siècles d'illustration*, Bassy classifies the traditions of fabular illustrations into four categories: French, Italian, Flemish and English. The French tradition is largely influenced by the style of miniatures and the illustrations usually appear as delicate and well-organized emblems, as in the works of Chauveau and Oudry, for example.¹⁶³ The Italian tradition is based on mythological themes from the Renaissance, hence the grand style and the dramatic gestures of figures. The Flemish tradition, in the manner of Brueghel, is distinct from its rural atmosphere where the legends are often presented in a solid and realistic way. Lastly, similar to the tradition of caricature, the English tradition is dominated by its burlesques or comical appearances.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, the style of fable illustrations could range from plain and straightforward illustrations or delicate and grand illustrations to the humorous and satirical ones. We find that works from illustrators of later generations still fit within these traditions, or at least a combination of them.

In the 19th century key figures introduced a freestyle version of artists' works to renew the *Fable* illustrations. For instance, the rich collector Antoni Roux who invited Gustave Moreau to make dreamy watercolours for his compilation of the *Fables* (1881-85),¹⁶⁵ or the renowned dealer Ambroise Vollard who commissioned Marc Chagall to create a series of colour engravings. Though with distinct personal styles, these "fables des artiste" also inherited the old traditions of fabular illustrations, albeit consciously or unconsciously. For Chagall, his works bear caricatural and humorous forms but he omits the satirical and political implications of the fable, which an artist like Daumier would have most likely included.

¹⁶³ Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686-1755) was a French Rococo-style painter and engraver. Known for his naturalistic paintings, Oudry amused himself by drawing 276 sketches for the fables of La Fontaine during 1729-35, and later on Charles-Nicolas Cochin undertook the responsibility to engrave these plates for him.

¹⁶⁴ For further details see Bassy, Alain-Marie, Ch.1: 'Le paradoxe de l'image', *Les fables de La Fontaine : quatre siècles d'illustration*, Paris: Éditions Promodis, 1986.

¹⁶⁵ Gustave Moreau (1826-98) the Symbolist painter was originally commissioned to produce watercolours for the *Fables of La Fontaine* by his patron Antoni Roux for an edition including other works by major illustrators of the day, such as Doré, Lami, Baudry, Derôme, Raffaelli and so on. In 1881, nearly 150 watercolours were exhibited at the Cercle des Aquarellistes, held at the Galerie Durand-Ruel. Owing to Moreau's outstanding works, Roux decided to commission Moreau to illustrate the whole work. However Roux's *Fables* proposal was never published; Moreau's watercolours remain in private hands nowadays.

The question should therefore focus on how Chagall's illustrations, apart from his initial fable choices, capture the comical nature of fables without carrying the old burden of didactics. Before answering this question, we must examine how the language used in fables corresponds to the illustrations. Quintilian made a clear distinction between two language modes: pathos and êthos.¹⁶⁶ The former concerns the language used to express emotions and grand styles (i.e. the language of tragedies), while the latter mode, êthos, concerns the normal and sometimes moral language used in comics, speeches, and fables in this case. Unlike the self-indulging language of epics, fabulists write in a more distant, almost critical voice.

On the other hand, when converted to visual images, the genre of the fable can be translated into both epic and comical tones which correspond to the aforementioned traditions of illustrations. Doré's work is a good example of the former style. Continuing with the effect he pursued for the illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*, Doré's illustrations successfully invoke the epic atmosphere through his use of black and white chiaroscuro.¹⁶⁷ For example, in "Le Lièvre et les Grenouilles" (fig. III-1), he increases the dramatic effect with shadow, and the upstanding figure of the hare appears fearsome compared to the tiny frogs. Doré thus imagines La Fontaine's rhymes according to the classical mode of epic language. On the contrary, artists who envision the LaFontainian world through comical language tend to respond in a humorous way. In fact, due to the nature of the language mode of the fable, more and more artists, including Chagall, found it suitable to employ the comical or caricatural way for fable illustrations.



Figure III-1 Le Lièvre et les Grenouilles

¹⁶⁶ See Calder, Andrew, 'Conversation and Commonplace', *The Fables of La Fontaine*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2001, p.105-115.

¹⁶⁷ Published as *The Vision of Hell* (1866) and *Il Purgatorio ed il Paradiso* (1867), the productive illustrator Gustave Doré produced voluminous and impressive illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. His creations of *Les Fables de Lafontaine* were executed in the same year and published in 1868.

Once again, when we try to examine the tones employed in the fable illustrations, frontispieces can serve as a starting point to reveal what attitudes the illustrators hold towards the creation of the fable itself, what language they tend to use to interpret the stories, and how they regard the relationship between the original text and their own work. As a special page in an illustrated book, the frontispiece usually plays not only the role of introducing the content of the illustrated text, but also of embodying the illustrators' views towards the entire work.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, in the case of *Fables*, the frontispieces might even show the status of La Fontaine, how La Fontaine's world is seen by the illustrators, and the relationship between humans, animals and nature.

In Romeyn de Hooghe's work of 1685, for example, the satirical function of the fable is emphasized by the presence of the satyr (fig. III-2). In Cochin's work, the role of La Fontaine appears to be an intimation of nature and animals (fig. III-3) while Cham's caricaturist representation shows La Fontaine as a language teacher of the animals (fig. III-4). The iconography is a testimony to



Figure III-2 Frontispiece of *Fables de La Fontaine* (Romeyn de Hooghe)



Figure III-3 Frontispiece of *Fables de La Fontaine* (Cochin)



Figure III-4 Frontispiece of *Fables de La Fontaine* (Cham)

¹⁶⁸ For the role of the frontispiece in (pre-La Fontanian) fable books, see Paul J. Smith, "Title Prints and Paratexts in the Emblematic Fable Books of the Gheeraerts Filiation (1567-1617)", in Philiep Bossier and Rolien Scheffer, ed., *Soglie testuali. Funzioni del paratesto nel second Cinquecento e oltre. Textual Thresholds. Functions of Paratexts in the Late Sixteenth Century and Beyond*, Rome: Vecchiarelli, 2010, p. 157-200.

how the views of nature and animals have changed in different periods.¹⁶⁹

The above examples all show that the image of La Fontaine himself as the poet or creator is a repeated motif for a fable frontispiece. However, the ultimate role of the author is ignored by artist-illustrators in the 19th century: they do not represent him anymore in the frontispiece.¹⁷⁰ In this view, Benjamin Rabier's frontispiece¹⁷¹ for his comic fables displaces his emphasis from the sophisticated poet to childhood innocence (fig. III-5). Here, instead of the figure of the poet-lecturer, a child takes the role of reciting the fables to these cartoon-faced animals. The world of fables no longer belongs to adult writers, but is constructed by the imagination of a child-reader. The return of infancy is emphasized in this piece.¹⁷²



Figure III-5 Frontispiece of *Fables de La Fontaine* (Benjamin Rabier)

Moreau's rather mysterious frontispiece shows a seemingly unrelated image (fig. III-6): a woman half-covered in colourful drapery leaning on a

¹⁶⁹ For further arguments, see Kirsten H. Powell in her 'The art of making animals talk: constructions of nature and culture in illustrations of the Fables of La Fontaine', *Word & Image* 12, no. 3, 1996, 251-272, where she shows examples (some of which are demonstrated here) of the relationship between La Fontaine and his illustrators through the representation of frontispieces.

¹⁷⁰ In order to focus on the comparison of Chagall with his contemporary illustrators, I choose artists who have something in common, namely Benjamin Rabier, Gustave Doré, and Gustave Moreau, due to their shared ideas that illustrators have the freedom to break through existing stereotypes and create images according to their own artistic styles. In this view, Rabier echoes Chagall with his innovative strip forms for *Fables* which broke through the classical traditions of fable illustrations, while Doré's works create a similar sense of drama through the use of black-and-white chiaroscuro as well as in Chagall's etchings. On the other hand, Moreau's poetic presentation could serve as a good parallel with Chagall's work.

¹⁷¹ Born in 1864, the French illustrator Benjamin Rabier is known for his design of "*La vache qui rit*". Rabier produced his comic-style illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine* with the publisher Jules Tallandier in 1906.

¹⁷² For further analysis on Rabier's illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine*, see Shu Hsuan Kuo, "The Art of Making Animals Laugh: Benjamin Rabier's Comic Illustrations for *Les Fables de La Fontaine*", *Neophilologus: An International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature*, Vol. 96, Issue 2, Springer Publishing, 2012.

hippogriff. This female personification of the Fable (the title word of “Fable” appears beside her head) is holding a comedy mask and a whisk in her hand. The title of this perplexing frontispiece “Allegory of Fable” hints at the way Moreau sees the nature of fables: the didactic function in comical disguise. Furthermore, the whole image is reinforced by delicate details from Moreau’s own imagination,



Figure III-6 *Allegory of Fable* (Moreau)

where he often applied these bizarre elements, and hence creates another level of artistic interpretation.

On the other hand, Chagall’s two frontispieces (for two volumes respectively) show neither the bust/portrait of the sage-like poet nor the figures of the interpreter or allegory, but rather the conversations of animals themselves. The two frontispieces display the two kinds of language and emotion. The piece for volume 1 indicates the cunning and sarcastic dialogues between “The Crow and the Fox” (fig. III-7), while the one for volume 2 depicts the emotional and self-indulging dialogues between the “Two Pigeons”. Essentially, fables are the imaginative world of talking animals. Chagall obviously tries to retreat from the adult world back to the purely animal world untainted by moral interpretation.

2. Moral or Not?

How does a verbal moral exist in a non-spoken image? If we compare Doré’s “Le Renard et les Raisins” (fig. III-8) with Chagall’s work of the same title (col. 35), we notice the difference between a “moralized” and an “un-moralized” interpretation. In Doré’s title-piece for this fable, he relates the animal moral to human relationships by juxtaposing the fox with two gentlemen looking up to a group of ladies behind a fancy fence. In another full-page illustration to this fable, the fox is totally omitted; the moral of unfulfilled desire is translated fully into an interaction between human beings. In contrast, Chagall’s illustration emphasizes solely the face of the fox and a bunch of grapes. The focus is on the animal, instead of morality.

“[Chagall] n’eut pas recours au procédé d’humanisation des animaux ou à la lecture morale de l’œuvre; [...] il traduit le mystère des choses simples.”¹⁷³

The contrast between Chagall and Doré’s works is merely one of the examples implying how stories function differently for every reader. The representation of the bestiary shows if and how artists relate these stories to the human world.

This anthropomorphization of fabular animals is not unique to Doré, however. In the English tradition of fabulist illustrations, animals are often either personalized as real human beings or dressed up in human suits, making them even more cynical. Early illustrators, like Grandville¹⁷⁴, are the best examples. For the above fable “Le Renard et les Raisins” (fig. III-9), he displays a parallel vision of the “fable”—the fox coveting the grapes above the high wall on the right—and the “reality”—the dressed-up animals which are again mocking the real human world. This “parody within a parody” creates a double reference and thereby heightens the sarcasm.

Besides dressed-up animals, another dimension of this anthropomorphization indicates another characteristic of fables: talking animals. The ability to talk is the main difference between humans and animals; hence in the world of fables, the boundary is blurred with the existence of talking animals. “The art of making animals talk” becomes the conventional concept and function of fables. This is also the significance of Cham’s frontispiece in which La Fontaine plays the intermediate role of a beasts’ language teacher who brings them across the line toward the human world. Moreover, Rabier’s frontispiece contributes another level to the view of talking animals: his animals are not only “talking” but actually “laughing”, which is another facial expression unique to human beings. Here, as Moreau’s Fable demonstrates, the artist actually puts a comedy mask on the animal’s face to emphasize the funny or the mocking function of fable stories.

In Chagall’s fable world, however, we rarely see this crossover between humans and animals. In his illustrated world, animals do not have to be “dressed up” as human or bear human expressions, but are themselves independent personages with abilities to think and communicate. Without the need for anthropomorphization, the moral or didacticism is reduced to a minimum. It is this pure bestial world where animals retain their own appearance as being “animal” that makes Chagall’s *Fables* distinguishable from others. The

¹⁷³ Gréverand, Gérard, *La Fontaine et les Artistes*, Tournai: La Renaissance du Livre, 2002.

¹⁷⁴ Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard, pseudonym J.J. Grandville, is a French caricaturist and book illustrator. His illustrated version of *Les Fables de La Fontaine* was first published in 1838.

relationship between different characters will be discussed in the following section.

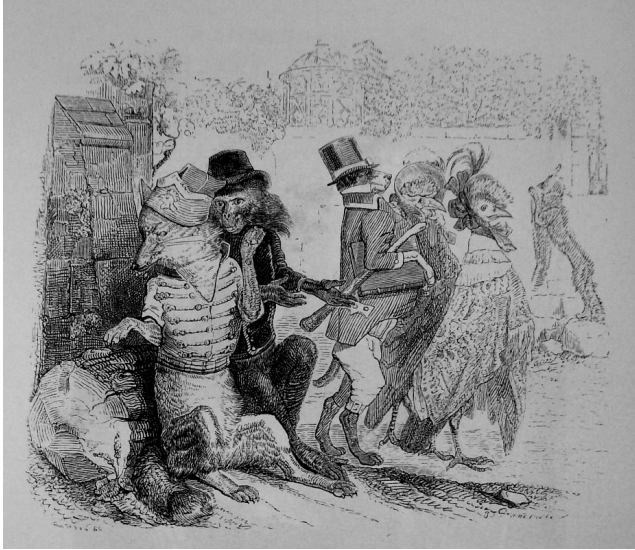


Figure III-9 *Le Renard et les Raisins* (J.J. Grandville)

3. Characters

Animals

In literature every novel or poem may project its own separate fictional world with its own characters and situations, whereas in Chagall's oeuvre, all paintings refer to one total fictional universe, a construct outside the paintings, but to which all those paintings refer.¹⁷⁵

With the premise of the existence of "talking animals", La Fontaine's fables appear to be a theatre on paper enacted by

animal characters, human beings, gods and others, while animals also play an important part in Chagall's own artworks. In fact La Fontaine also characterizes his own fable texts as follows:

Une ample comédie à cent actes divers

Et dont la scène est l'univers

Hommes, dieux, animaux tout y fait quelque rôle¹⁷⁶

As an animal lover, Chagall depicts the animals from his hometown with strong sympathy. While never clearly explained, his love for animals manifests itself through general ideas such as warmth, emotion, and nature. More specifically, he identifies the image of a cow/calf with himself or his beloved. In his renowned oil painting "I am the village" (fig. I-1), for instance, a man with a green face offers a bunch of grapes to a cow (or a calf) whose head contains an

¹⁷⁵ Harshav, Benjamin, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2006, p.35.

¹⁷⁶ "Le Bûcheron et Mercure", *Les Fables de La Fontaine*, Line 27-29.

image of a woman milking a cow. The image of the cow/calf replaces the role of a beloved. Besides the overall motif of the nostalgia for the Russian hometown, “I am the village” displays the harmonious co-existence between animals and humans. This intimacy is further revealed in another picture, “The Rooster” (1929, fig. III-10), painted during the same period when Chagall made the illustrations for the *Fables* and in which the images of humans and animals can almost be seen as an integrated unity. The harlequin-dressed woman embraces the giant rooster’s neck in such a close way that the bodyline of the human can be seen as the extension of the rooster. The intimacy here is echoed by the cuddling couple in the boat in the far background.

The closeness between animals and human beings is further testified in Chagall’s “Dedicated to my Fiancée” (1911, fig. III-11). Here, a man with a bull’s head is resting his elbow on a table while a woman climbs onto his back, legs encircling him, and spits into his mouth. This work was almost refused by the Salon des Indépendants because of its overt sexual implications.¹⁷⁷ Chagall’s affinity with animals is therefore expressed as the image of the animal-human hybrid. Another example of this hybrid image is the image in “Listening to the Cock” (1944, fig. III-12). We see a total upside down world: a big cockerel (despite the egg in his body) in the red dawn of the lower part of the picture, a human couple’s face with the body of a cow in the upper background of the dark night, and a reversed tree as well and falling crescent moon. The bizarre image of the hybrid couple paradoxically invokes the warmth and nostalgic feeling for one’s hometown, symbolized here by the crowing rooster and the little house next to them. This hybrid image is not merely a costume play like Grandville’s caricatural depiction of dressing and talking animals, but Chagall’s own contemplation of the interaction between animals and human beings. Through this radical representation of physical fusion, the empathy and identification between animals and humans is praised to the highest extent.

Meanwhile, this hybrid image offers another dimension of reading Chagall’s *Fables* illustrations. One example is the wolf in “Le Loup devenu Berger” (col. 29) who attempts to deceive the flock by dressing up as a shepherd. But in Chagall’s illustration, the red-dressed wolf stands upright like a real person at the edge of the dark green background, while the shepherd leans forward on his stick almost as horizontally as a four-footed sheep, with similar pink and white colours. This shows not only the cross-dressing of an animal but also an actual interchange taking place between human and animal identities.

Chagall’s own animal affiliation continues in his illustrations of La Fontaine’s *Fables*. Apart from the physical hybrid, the motif of human-animal

¹⁷⁷ See Harshav, 2006, p.60-65.

mixture reappears in Chagall's fable world through similar features or expressions of humans and animals. In "Le Lion devenu Vieux", for example, the face of the old lion who looks out toward the audience bears the expression of a thinking human; or, the hollow eyes and the plain face of the boy who almost drowns (*L'Enfant et le Maître d'école*, illu. 10) reduce the human characteristics to a minimum. On the other hand, there is the cat that is transformed into the shape of a girl but still wearing the expressionless animal face (*La Chatte métamorphosée en Femme*, col. 25). Bearing the most explicit motif of "métamorphose", this fable story offers illustrators ample opportunities to depict the image of a "hybrid". In Grandville's illustration, for instance (fig. III-13), he applied the unmistakable face and gesture of a real cat to a female human figure. On the contrary, what Chagall did here is simply hint at the transition: an elongated neck, a pair of ear-like buns in her head, and a nearly-scary face with human nose and mouth but without any eyebrows or hair. This is not just a misplacement of physical elements, but a new creature standing right between animals and human beings.

In Chagall's world of the *Fables*, animals do not need to be personalized and humans do not need to be animalized. What is represented is the very coexistence of animals and humans.¹⁷⁸ As the main protagonists themselves, animals in Chagall's *Fables* possess humanity within their animal shapes; they cross and blur the boundary between animals and human beings. This is also what LaFontainian fables carry out: the nature of human beings and animals are not very different from each other.

Humans

"The Dream" (fig. III-14), one of Chagall's oil paintings created at the time when he was beginning to produce the *Fables* illustrations, testifies to the dreamy, naïve but witty relationship between animals and humans presented in Chagall's fable world. With a hint of reference to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* where the character Bottom was bewitched and transformed into a donkey, the image here represents a girl who is carried by a donkey (some say it is a giant rabbit) in an upside



Figure III-13 *La Chatte métamorphosée en Femme*

¹⁷⁸ This statement originally comes from Schulmann, *Ibid.*, upon which I base my interpretation of the illustrations in question.

down night. As the title points out, this is a dream world in which human beings are guided by self-aware animals, and it corresponds to the views in other *Fables* illustrations. Far from superior to animal characters, human characters are often shown as selfish, ridiculous and being mocked through the artist's pictorial devices, including physical up-and-down positions as shown in "The Dream", unreal or exaggerated proportions, and unconventional gestures of humans and animals. Examples are shown below.

In "La Poule aux oeufs d'or" (illu. 59), the story of a hen who lays golden eggs describes the greediness and ignorance of human beings. Therefore, in Chagall's picture, the hen is dramatically enlarged and confronts the tiny, fatuous farmer on the right side. Through the confusion of perspective, the juxtaposition of these two uneven figures displays the theme of the fable itself: man's greediness makes him worthless. Likewise, the marginalized position of mankind is shown in the illustration of "Les deux Perroquets, le Roi et son Fils" (col. 96). In this somehow bizarre fable, the old bird speaks with extreme wisdom and sharpness, while the father and son from the royal human family are absorbed with anger and anguish. This is clearly shown through the following compositional devices: occupying the centre of the composition, the old parrot covered with sparkling feathers shines against the dark background, echoed by the young bird with a hint of strong colours in the left corner. On the other hand, the image of the human king is barely seen as a shadow; neither of the two human figures are exposed completely. The position of the human is again marginalized and, instead of being shrunk, tarnished.

In the illustration for "Le Rat et l'Éléphant" (col. 85), we find another example of Chagall's interpretation of the superior/inferior relationship between animals and human beings. The human figures on the elephant's back are deliberately shrunk out of proportion; each of the three layers on the elephant contains more than one person in their full size. Compared to Doré's piece with dignified characters (fig. III-15), Chagall's human beings are represented as tiny and unreal puppets from theatre, as if they could be flushed away by the flow of



Figure III-15 *Le Rat et l'Éléphant*

free colours at any moment. Here, the humans who are supposed to rule the giant animals now turn out to be the toys in the cage. Human beings are no longer the rulers of animals; on the contrary, they are but a vulnerable and pathetic species.

With regard to the animal-human relationship in Chagall's *Fables*, "Le



Figure III-16 *Le Lion amoureux*

Lion amoureux" (illu. 40) is a unique example. In this fable, a lion—the king of forest—falls in love with a human girl, but is slain after agreeing to pull out all his fearful teeth and claws. In the original fable, the animal character plays the deceived and defeated role. Nevertheless, unlike numerous illustrators who depicted the lion at his moment of weakness (Doré [fig. III-16], Grandville, etc.), it is clear that Chagall chose the opposite. In this illustration, the lion stands upright like a real young man, with his eyes looking deeply into those of his beloved and "arms" tightly clasped around her neck in an almost suffocating gesture, while the human girl, with a pale look, helplessly clings to her "lover" like a lifeless doll. In the pictorial world, the animal is shown in full dominancy and therefore the strong/weak

relationship between humans and animals is reversed.

Chagall's world of the *Fables* shows the co-existence of humans and animals, with the latter obviously playing a more important role. As in the artist's other works, "The Dream" especially, it is animals that lead the human-child on the fantastic journey of dreams and imagination.

Gods

Besides animals and man, other illusory beings perform in this fable play. Characters like Olympian gods, monsters and other creatures are all part of the imaginative world. While Greek mythology appears as a motif in La Fontaine's *Fables*, mythological elements are also frequently implied in Chagall's art. The way he represents these images of mythological figures is another way of understanding Chagall's interpretation of La Fontaine's world.

In the illustration for “Le Paon se plaignant à Juno” (col. 24), Chagall’s composition shows a strong affinity with Doré’s work (fig. III-17). The positions of the two peacocks are almost identical; both of them look up towards the goddess standing on the pedestal in the top-left corner. Doré, as usual, applies this bestiary to the human condition: the peacock that envies a nightingale’s lovely voice is personalized in the far background as a long-robed woman who leans toward her companion playing an instrument. On the other hand, Chagall obviously does not care about the human analogy, replacing Doré’s realistic background of Greek temple remains with abstract sparkling dots. Dragged out of human civilization, the two characters seem to float in a transcendent universe where the goddess is dressed in the form of a semi-bird. She wears a few bird feathers on her head and a pair of white wings stretches out from her back as she spreads her arms. The white feathers and costume contrast with the peacock’s colourful tail. Once again, Chagall emphasizes the animal roles by identifying the goddess with a bird image; the angel-like goddess plays the role of hybrid human and animal figures. While borrowing from an existing illustration, Chagall proves his ability recreate the fable world in his own vision.

Death is a universal phenomenon. It shows its presence in

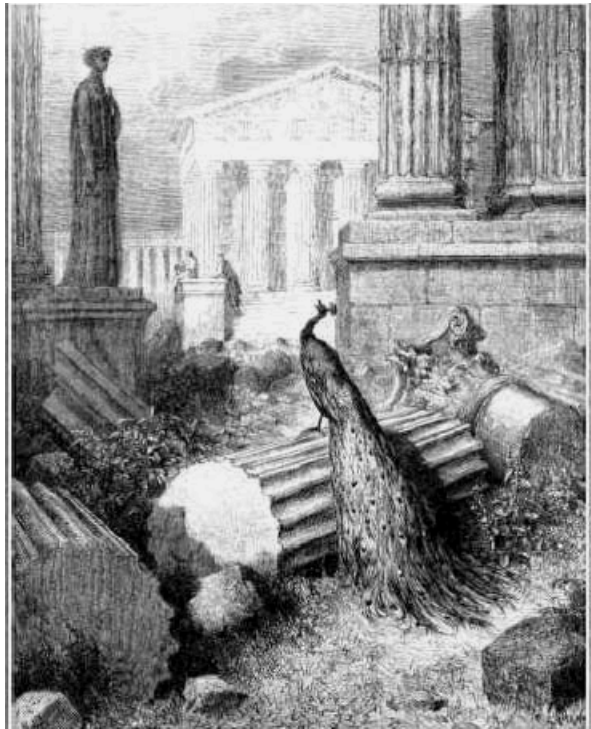


Figure III-17 *Le Paon se plaignant à Juno*

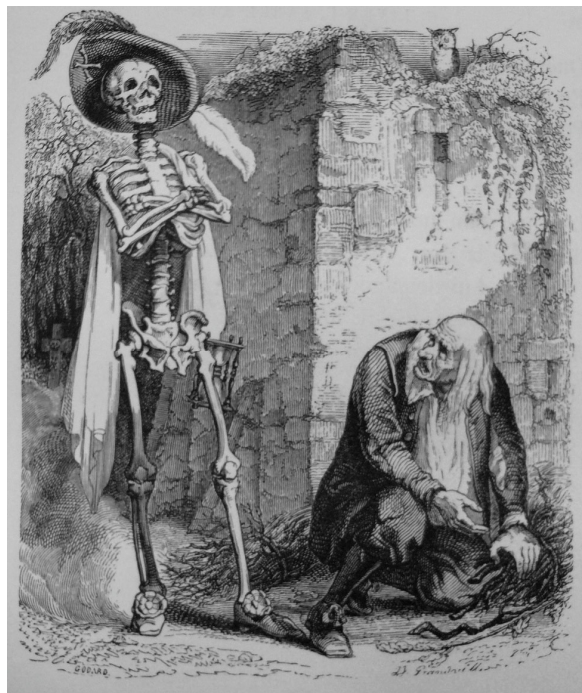


Figure III-18 *La Mort et le Bucheron*

almost every religion, legend and folklore. Therefore, in the tradition of fable illustrations, images of Death vary with the cultural background or the artist's inclination. In Grandville's piece (fig. III-18), for example, Death is shown as a skeleton with a captain's accessories symbolizing Death's fearfulness and triumph. This reminds us of the Death who leads humans toward the end of their life journey in Thomas Rowlandson's *The English Dance of Death*¹⁷⁹ (fig. III-19) in the English cartoonist tradition. Another example of Death, represented according to a specific cultural context, is an anonymous Chinese version in which Death is depicted as Yama with his two ox-headed and horse-faced demons.¹⁸⁰ Yet there are also images of Death that seem to be the result of the artist's own invention. For instance, Doré chose to use a haunting shadow to display a horrifying atmosphere that echoes his illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*, 1857. Later on, in Moreau's work, Death becomes a bewitching female figure as one of Moreau's *femme fatales*.¹⁸¹

Death appears twice in Chagall's *Fables*, namely in his illustrations of "La Mort et le Malheureux" (illu. 7) and "La Mort et le Bucheron" (illu. 8). At first glance, Chagall's Death is also a sexless skeleton; however, this skeleton is clearly not the image of power and guidance as in Grandville's illustrations. If we compare the two Deaths in Chagall's "Le Malheureux" and "Le Bucheron", it is obvious that, with both wearing tricorns and half-costumes, Chagall's Death is actually the harlequin in comedies, or rather, the juggler in Chagall's own *Cirque* (fig. III-20).¹⁸²

It is also interesting to note that in these two Death illustrations, the depictions of human characters somehow also mirror the LaFontainian spirit. Just as "La Mort et le Bucheron" is known as La Fontaine's reflection of the Aesopian

¹⁷⁹ Emerged from medieval ages, the topic of "The Dance of Death" itself is an intriguing iconology. The image of a skeleton living, leading and "dancing" with human beings was repeatedly depicted and widely spread through prints. In Rowlandson's version, published in 1816, the topic is represented as the free-style caricatures which turn the solemn theme of life and death into a farce of life.

¹⁸⁰ In Chinese folklore, Yama is the king of Hell and his two attendants are named Cattle Head and Horse Face. The image mentioned here comes from North China, 20th century. See *Fables de La Fontaine*, Éditions du Chêne, 2005.

¹⁸¹ For the iconological comparison among Chauveau, Grandville, Doré and Moreau, see A. Kibédi Varga, "Criteria for Describing Word-and-Image Relations", *Poetics Today* 10, no. 1, Spring 1989, p. 44-49.

¹⁸² Chagall started to create gouaches for the series *Le Cirque* in 1927, the same year he worked on *Les Fables*. Similar to the fate of other illustrations of Vollard's commission, owing to the publisher's abrupt death in 1939 and the outbreak of WWII, it was not until 1967 that these gouaches of *Le Cirque* finally got published under the legendary publisher Tériade's management. *Le Cirque* series contained 23 colour lithographs and 15 pieces of black and white when it was first published.

version “La Mort et le Malheureux”, Chagall’s woodman appears in a more relaxed, even tranquil attitude. The tense and frightening relationship between human and Death in the former picture is released as a witty reply in the latter: “C’est, dit-il, afin de m’aider/ À recharger ce bois; tu ne tarderas guère.”¹⁸³



Figure III-19 The English Dance of Death

The harlequin or juggler image of Chagall’s Death therefore testifies once more to the overall tone in the artist’s *Fables*. Rather than sophisticated morals, we can assume that what catches a child-reader’s attention is funny stories with talking animals and other creatures. In Chagall’s *Fables de La Fontaine*, animals, humans and gods coexist merrily together without the boundary of rank or class. Here, humans are no longer superior to animals and gods might serve as entertainment for the world. We have already seen the hybrid image of animals and humans, but the merging of all these beings can still be proven in further examples.

Other deities appear in the illustration series, such as Jupiter, Mercury and Fortune. It is interesting to point out that these images of gods retain similar traits of a clown or juggler joyfully playing tricks to the world of animals and humans. As “*deus ex machina*”, these deities are depicted as either descending from the clouds or flying through the sky in unexpected ways. When the small frogs asked for a king of their own (“*Les Grenouilles qui demandent un Roi*”, illu. 30), Jupiter the heavenly king is shown upside down in the sky, with his hand making gestures of sending the crowned crane to earth. Against the far-below horizon, the two figures are implied as floating in the sky, or coming down from another dimension unknown to the earthly creatures.

Just as La Fontaine uses the more intimate form of “Jupin” instead of “Jupiter” in this witty fable mocking different governmental systems,¹⁸⁴ Chagall’s Jupiter does not resemble the bearded statue in “*Le Statuaire et la Statue de*

¹⁸³ *Fables* I, 16, line 15 & 16.

¹⁸⁴ “Jupin en a bientôt la cervelle rompue.” (*Fables* III, 4, line 23) For more details about the linguistic usages of playful and ridiculous connotation in La Fontaine’s fables, see Maya Slater, “La Fontaine et les Dieux”, *Fabuleux La Fontaine: Études réunies par Kees Meerhoff et Paul J. Smith*, Rodopi, 1996, esp. p.31.

Jupiter”, but rather a playful vaudevillian performing on a hanging bar. This is also the gesture of Mercury in “Le Bucheron et Mercure” when coming down from the sky to comfort the woodcutter who lost his axe. Here the messenger god, with his feet unseen beyond the picture frame,¹⁸⁵ also appears as hanging down from some invisible swinging bar. This playful trait is further shown by the image of his ambiguous sexuality: the male god appears like a female figure.

When Mercury reappears in the illustration of “Le Chartier embourbe” (illu. 70), again with a feminine body, he is not shown as descending from heaven but flying joyously across the clouds. This horizontal position seems less intrusive to the earth than the vertical hanging/descending one, and hence displays another,

more harmonious relationship between gods and all creatures in the *Fable* world. Likewise, when the goddess Fortune passes by and warns the boy who carelessly sleeps on the edge of the well (“La Fortune et le jeune Enfant”, illu. 58), she is not shown as standing on her wheel and supporting the child in the way Doré has done (fig. III-21), but flying horizontally above the well echoing the gesture of the sleeping boy.



Figure III-21 *La Fortune et le jeune Enfant*

This is Chagall’s vision of the gods in the *Fables*. Rather than a superior or a dominant power, the deity represents a more mellow and frisky being who enters the world as a funny surprise. Chagall’s *Fables* embody a child’s joyful view more than an adult artist’s one.

4. Colour

...This splendid rush of colour in which blazing reds, opaque blacks, acid greens, opulent yellow, and radiant mauves mingle, the prodigious alchemy

¹⁸⁵ It is interesting to point out that in conventional iconography, Mercury is often depicted with a winged hat and winged sandals, which are cleverly blurred away in Chagall’s depiction.

revealed by an examination of the tiniest portion of the surface of these images, or their fabulous inventiveness and touching sweetness of spirit.¹⁸⁶

“Dripping” might be the most applicable word to describe the colours in Chagall’s poetic illustrations of *Fables*. The original sketches of gouaches he made for the intended prints shine with free-flowing colour strokes like those seen in “Le Rat et l’Éléphant” where watercolours rush down and blend into the whole composition. It is this free dripping of colours that speaks for its own sake instead of following confined contours, and therefore marks Chagall’s poetic and dreamy atmosphere. For example, in the illustration for “Le Soleil et les Grenouilles” (col. 67), the reddish sunlight seems to drip through the green brushes, down to the white, yellow, red and blue stream. Contrary to most depictions of this fable, the main characters, the frogs, are not shown in sight at all. Without the title, it would be difficult to recognise it as an illustration to a known fable but a painter’s landscape with masterly colour-play. It is more a dreamland of imaginary visions than a literal translation of the text.

The free-flow of colours even washes away the boundaries between objects. In the piece “La Souris métamorphosée en Fille” (col. 90), the lines are vaguely depicted, while the colours seem to be dyed all over the print spontaneously. The chromatic effect merges the female figure with the mountain and the sky as one picturesque background. The fable itself describes an unrealistic story in which the sun, the wind and the mountain are all possible “fiancés” to a mouse-girl. Chagall wittily avoided the possible absurdity of showing a tiny mouse/girl with other huge non-animals, but created a harmonious image in which every combination seems to be true and natural.

While the “dripping” effect creates the dreamy air in Chagall’s illustrations, the bright colours reflect the switch from the gloomy Russian mood in *Les Âmes Mortes* to the sunny air in the French countryside.¹⁸⁷ Obviously, in Chagall’s *Fables* colours do not respect the lines of contours but also not common logic. In

¹⁸⁶ This is the comment by the critic Jacques Guenne on *L’Art vivant*, 15 December 1927. “...Ce splendide ruissellement où se mêlent les rouges fulgurants, les noirs opaques, les verts acides, les jaunes opulents, les mauves radieux, la prodigieuse alchimie que révèle l’examen de la moindre surface de ces images, ou la fabuleuse invention et la touchante gentillesse de cet esprit.” quoted by Céret, *Ibid.*, p.19-20; English translation by Allen, Esther, *Marc Chagall: The Fables de La Fontaine*, The New Press, 1997, p.21.

¹⁸⁷ In 1926, Chagall and his family made an intensive trip to central and southern France. The stay in Toulon was their first visit to the Mediterranean, where the bright landscape obviously made a great impact on the artist. During this time, Chagall made other paintings of flowers and nature, which showed distinct differences in light and colour from his previous paintings. For the detailed record of his trip in France, see Wulfschlag, *Chagall: love and exile*, London: Allen Lane, 2008, p.329.

the illustration for "La Grenouille qui se veut faire aussi grosse que le Boeuf", the ox is coloured in an eccentric way: a green head, a yellow body and a blue-purple rump. It stands out against the bright-red ground; its head looking toward the tiny black frog—which is omitted in the later engraving version—in the right-bottom corner. The colours do not help the interpretation of the fable itself, but it pleases the eye with bright and brave contrasts and creates a poetic atmosphere.

As Nicolas Surlapierre has argued, "[t]his is no longer the moral of the poet; this is the moral of the painter."¹⁸⁸ Another plate testifying this "painter's moral" is that of the fable "Le Loup et le Cigogne". Here the pinky-purple wolf is dotted with white brushstrokes which continue to the stork in dark green and blue tones. These humorous colours reaffirm that this is not a real world, but an imaginary one in which the poetics of the painter rule.

Besides the arbitrary use of colours, the rendering of dark backgrounds also serves as a frequent means of "making the colours talk". The piece of "Le Paon se plaignant à Junon" we saw earlier is a typical example. Similarly, in "Le lion et le Moucheron", the artist imitates the effect of wood engravings through which white lines shine out against black backgrounds to create a strong visual effect. A surrealist atmosphere is evoked by the way that white fur and brushes of bright colours on the lion float in the edgeless darkness with a white hint of the goat, again vanished in the finished version.

Although the coloured drafts were not executed for the published plates, the later black-and-white engravings still display equally painterly effects, which is essentially different from the clear linear etchings and massive drypoints of the previous illustration series *Les Âmes Mortes*. The artist still used the same engraving techniques, but based on the colourful drafts, he successfully created a picturesque palette with the gradation of grey and black. Take "L'Âne chargé d'éponges et l'Âne chargé de sel" (illu. 19) for example: while this watercolour piece plays with funny but harmonious colours like blue, green and yellow ochre, the non-coloured one shows a white donkey in black water and a black one in a medley of grey tones. Chagall proves that even without colours, he is still able to evoke warmth from a cold palate.

¹⁸⁸ "Ce n'est plus la morale du poète, c'est la morale du peintre." Surlapierre, Nicolas; Tériade, Alice, et al, *Tériade & les livres de peintres*, Musée Matisse, Le Cateau-Cambrésis, 2003, p.51.

5. Decors

Apart from the colour arrangements and the familiar Chagallian animals scattered around, the entire illustration series is shown as a stage-like setting with uncommon spatial deployment.

Known for breaking or discarding perspective principles, Chagall often chose a dramatic composition of a flat, shallow or abstract space, so as to enhance the dreamy and imaginary sense in his works. The illustrations for the *Fables* are no exception either; most of them demonstrate an ambiguous treatment of space. Frequently, the objects in the illustrations are jammed in a shadow foreground, as if it is a performance on a limited stage. It becomes more obvious when a confining wall in the background is “pushed” forward, such as the illustrations of “Le Loup, la Chèvre et le Chevreau” (illu. 47) or “Le Renard et le Bouc” (illu. 31). Without the chance to see beyond the backdrop, the audience is obliged to focus on the plots on stage; hence in these pictures, what is important is the imagined stories themselves, not the trompe l’oeil of pictorial principles. The audience is watching a show unfold before their eyes, and this is how the sense of stage performance is created.

Even if the pictorial space is not absolutely confined, most objects are displayed in a close-up or a flat viewpoint. An example of this spatial flatness can be found in “La Vieille et les deux Servantes” (illu. 56) where the old lady and the two servants on the bed seem to be displaced on a flattened surface. The arrangement of the two nudes, one lying on the front and the other on the back, is a common composition in Chagall’s paintings, like a repeated phrase in his vocabulary, and here it enhances the unreal sense in the picture.

Furthermore, sometimes the dramatic sense goes so far that the spaces appear purely abstract. In “L’Aigle, la Laie et la Chatte” (illu. 32), like “Le Renard et les Raisins”, the background is just a hinted space; the blue colour makes the tree look like it is floating in the air. Another example is “Le Cheval s’étant voulu venger du Cerf” (illu. 45), where the white figures appear against a dark background. There’s no implication of depth or perspective in the blackness, just a smooth abstract surface like a Chinese ink painting. Similarly, in “La Femme noyée” (illu. 39), the sea of the edgeless darkness evokes an intriguing space where the upper or lower reaches of the river are no longer distinguishable.

In the above examples, the spaces are just slightly implied but not represented as reality.¹⁸⁹ This gives his works a naïve or primitive look, as if from

¹⁸⁹ Chagall’s two-dimensional and imaginary device is not, however, similar to Walter Crane’s planar dimension in his compositions for *Baby’s Own Aesop* (1887), which are meant for purely decorative purposes. A distinction must be drawn between these two

a child's perspective. The pictorial principles are not significant for a child when watching the interaction between the animals, humans and deities.

This is a joyful perspective. As the warm sunshine in the southern French countryside brightens up Chagall's canvas, his colourful and painterly illustrations of *Fables* also vary from those of the previous *Les Âmes Mortes*. While the peasants and little houses with red roofs in the *Fables* illustrations still remind us of the traditional rural style in Russia, the orthodox churches which appear in "Over Vitebsk" or "Au-dessus de la ville" gradually change into the typical Catholic belfries of France, such as the white church in the background of "Le Meunier, son Fils et l'Âne" (illu. 28).¹⁹⁰ Despite occasional remnants of Russian elements, Chagall's *Fables* mark the turning point of his cultural identity.

6. Conclusion

The illustrations in *Les Fables* testify once more to the different dimensions of the theme of nostalgia. On one hand, a move away from the hometown, an expectation of a foreign land and a longing for identification with a new environment make themselves felt. Like the fables of La Fontaine themselves, these illustrations show the appearance of the French countryside with a hint at Oriental roots. On the other hand, the sense of nostalgia can also be recognized in the retreat to a child's perspective and an Arcadian world in which animals coexist in harmony with humans. This is the world of *Les Fables* from a Russian painter's perspective, which justifies Vollard's choice in the first place.

Boym's distinction of two categories of nostalgia turns out to be productive again in Chagall's *Les Fables de La Fontaine*. Firstly, the subject of *Les Fables* itself brings up the artist's childhood experience of living with animals and through the use of bright colours he evokes memory of the south of France. All of these dimensions fulfil the first category of nostalgia. Secondly, an emphasis on animal characters reflects the longing for a purer human status, which can be harmonious with animals and nature, and as naïve and humble as a child. This is the reflective sense of the longing for the Arcadian pastoral that is lost and dreamed of.

Les Fables demonstrates an overlap between Chagall's identification with Russia with his identification with France, and the sense of nostalgia that manifests itself in *Les Fables* therefore refers to a longing for both places. However, through Boym's categories, another sense of nostalgia is brought to the

kinds of illustrative styles.

¹⁹⁰ For more details about the Russian and French representation, see Schulmann, *Ibid.*

fore and refers to the spiritual world which transcends the experience of the local to a more universal experience: the experience of an infant's joy to appreciate all creatures without any bias, judgement or moralism.

7. Appendix: Selected Fables

Fables I, 15 La Mort et le Malheureux

Un Malheureux appelait tous les jours
La mort à son secours.
O mort, lui disait-il, que tu me sembles belle !
Viens vite, viens finir ma fortune cruelle.
La Mort crut, en venant, l'obliger en effet.
Elle frappe à sa porte, elle entre, elle se montre.
Que vois-je ! cria-t-il, ôtez-moi cet objet ;
Qu'il est hideux ! que sa rencontre
Me cause d'horreur et d'effroi !
N'approche pas, ô mort ; ô mort, retire-toi.
Mécénas fut un galant homme :
Il a dit quelque part : Qu'on me rende impotent,
Cul-de-jatte, goutteux, manchot, pourvu qu'en somme
Je vive, c'est assez, je suis plus que content.
Ne viens jamais, ô mort ; on t'en dit tout autant.

Fables I, 16 La Mort et le Bucheron

Un pauvre Bûcheron tout couvert de ramée,
Sous le faix du fagot aussi bien que des ans
Gémissant et courbé marchait à pas pesants,
Et tâchait de gagner sa chaumine enfumée.
Enfin, n'en pouvant plus d'effort et de douleur,
Il met bas son fagot, il songe à son malheur.
Quel plaisir a-t-il eu depuis qu'il est au monde ?
En est-il un plus pauvre en la machine ronde ?
Point de pain quelquefois, et jamais de repos.
Sa femme, ses enfants, les soldats, les impôts,
Le créancier, et la corvée
Lui font d'un malheureux la peinture achevée.
Il appelle la mort, elle vient sans tarder,
Lui demande ce qu'il faut faire
C'est, dit-il, afin de m'aider
A recharger ce bois ; tu ne tarderas guère.
Le trépas vient tout guérir ;
Mais ne bougeons d'où nous sommes.
Plutôt souffrir que mourir,

C'est la devise des hommes.

Fables II, 17 Le Paon se plaignant à Juno

Le Paon se plaignait à Junon :
Déesse, disait-il, ce n'est pas sans raison
Que je me plains, que je murmure :
Le chant dont vous m'avez fait don
Déplaît à toute la Nature ;
Au lieu qu'un Rossignol, chétive créature,
Forme des sons aussi doux qu'éclatants,
Est lui seul l'honneur du Printemps.
Junon répondit en colère :
Oiseau jaloux, et qui devrais te taire,
Est-ce à toi d'envier la voix du Rossignol,
Toi que l'on voit porter à l'entour de ton col
Un arc-en-ciel nué de cent sortes de soies ;
Qui te panades, qui déploies
Une si riche queue, et qui semble à nos yeux
La Boutique d'un Lapidaire ?
Est-il quelque oiseau sous les Cieux
Plus que toi capable de plaire ?
Tout animal n'a pas toutes propriétés.
Nous vous avons donné diverses qualités :
Les uns ont la grandeur et la force en partage ;
Le Faucon est léger, l'Aigle plein de courage ;
Le Corbeau sert pour le présage,
La Corneille avertit des malheurs à venir ;
Tous sont contents de leur ramage.
Cesse donc de te plaindre, ou bien, pour te punir,
Je t'ôterai ton plumage.

Fables III, 11 Le Renard et les Raisins

Certain Renard Gascon, d'autres disent Normand,
Mourant presque de faim, vit au haut d'une treille
Des Raisins mûrs apparemment,
Et couverts d'une peau vermeille.
Le galand en eût fait volontiers un repas ;
Mais comme il n'y pouvait atteindre :
Ils sont trop verts, dit-il, et bons pour des goujats.
Fit-il pas mieux que de se plaindre?

Fable IV, 1 Le Lion amoureux

Séigné, de qui les attraits
Servent aux Grâces de modèle,
Et qui naquîtes toute belle,
À votre indifférence près,
Pourriez-vous être favorable
Aux jeux innocents d'une Fable,
Et voir, sans vous épouvanter,
Un Lion qu'Amour sut dompter ?
Amour est un étrange maître.
Heureux qui peut ne le connaître
Que par récit, lui ni ses coups !
Quand on en parle devant vous,
Si la vérité vous offense,
La Fable au moins se peut souffrir :
Celle-ci prend bien l'assurance
De venir à vos pieds s'offrir,
Par zèle et par reconnaissance.
Du temps que les bêtes parlaient,
Les Lions entre autres voulaient
Être admis dans notre alliance.
Pourquoi non ? puisque leur engeance
Valait la nôtre en ce temps-là,
Ayant courage, intelligence,
Et belle hure outre cela.
Voici comment il en alla :
Un Lion de haut parentage,
En passant par un certain pré,
Rencontra Bergère à son gré :
Il la demande en mariage.
Le père aurait fort souhaité
Quelque gendre un peu moins terrible.
La donner lui semblait bien dur ;
La refuser n'était pas sûr ;
Même un refus eût fait possible
Qu'on eût vu quelque beau matin
Un mariage clandestin.
Car outre qu'en toute manière
La belle était pour les gens fiers,
Fille se coiffe volontiers

D'amoureux à longue crinière.
Le Père donc ouvertement
N'osant renvoyer notre amant,
Lui dit : « Ma fille est délicate ;
Vos griffes la pourront blesser
Quand vous voudrez la caresser.
Permettez donc qu'à chaque patte
On vous les rogne, et pour les dents,
Qu'on vous les lime en même temps.
Vos baisers en seront moins rudes,
Et pour vous plus délicieux ;
Car ma fille y répondra mieux,
Étant sans ces inquiétudes.
Le Lion consent à cela,
Tant son âme était aveuglée !
Sans dents ni griffes le voilà,
Comme place démantelée.
On lâcha sur lui quelques chiens :
Il fit fort peu de résistance.
Amour, Amour, quand tu nous tiens
On peut bien dire : "Adieu prudence."

Fables V, 13 La Poule aux Oeufs d'Or

L'avarice perd tout en voulant tout gagner.
Je ne veux, pour le témoigner,
Que celui dont la Poule, à ce que dit la Fable,
Pondait tous les jours un oeuf d'or.
Il crut que dans son corps elle avait un trésor.
Il la tua, l'ouvrit, et la trouva semblable
A celles dont les oeufs ne lui rapportaient rien,
S'étant lui-même ôté le plus beau de son bien.
Belle leçon pour les gens chiches :
Pendant ces derniers temps, combien en a-t-on vus
Qui du soir au matin sont pauvres devenus
Pour vouloir trop tôt être riches ?

Fables X,12, Les deux Perroquets, le Roi, et son fils

Deux Perroquets, l'un père et l'autre fils,
Du rôl d'un Roi faisaient leur ordinaire.
Deux demi-dieux, l'un fils et l'autre père,

De ces oiseaux. faisaient leurs favoris.
L'âge liait une amitié sincère
Entre ces gens : les deux pères s'aimaient ;
Les deux enfants, malgré leur coeur frivole,
L'un avec l'autre aussi s'accoutumaient,
Nourris ensemble, et compagnons d'école.
C'était beaucoup d'honneur au jeune Perroquet ;
Car l'enfant était Prince, et son père Monarque.
Par le tempérament que lui donna la parque,
Il aimait les oiseaux. Un Moineau fort coquet,
Et le plus amoureux de toute la Province,
Faisait aussi sa part des délices du Prince.
Ces deux rivaux un jour ensemble se jouants,
Comme il arrive aux jeunes gens,
Le jeu devint une querelle.
Le Passereau, peu circonspec,
S'attira de tels coups de bec,
Que, demi-mort et traînant l'aile,
On crut qu'il n'en pourrait guérir
Le Prince indigné fit mourir
Son Perroquet. Le bruit en vint au père.
L'infortuné vieillard crie et se désespère,
Le tout en vain ; ses cris sont superflus ;
L'oiseau parleur est déjà dans la barque ;
Pour dire mieux, l'Oiseau ne parlant plus
Fait qu'en fureur sur le fils du Monarque
Son père s'en va fondre, et lui crève les yeux.
Il se sauve aussitôt, et choisit pour asile
Le haut d'un Pin. Là dans le sein des Dieux
Il goûte sa vengeance en lieu sûr et tranquille.
Le Roi lui-même y court, et dit pour l'attirer :
Ami, reviens chez moi : que nous sert de pleurer ?
Haine, vengeance, et deuil, laissons tout à la porte.
Je suis contraint de déclarer,
Encor que ma douleur soit forte,
Que le tort vient de nous : mon fils fut l'agresseur.
Mon fils ! non. C'est le sort qui du coup est l'auteur.
La Parque avait écrit de tout temps en son livre
Que l'un de nos enfants devait cesser de vivre,
L'autre de voir, par ce malheur.
Consolons-nous tous deux, et reviens dans ta cage.
Le Perroquet dit : Sire Roi,

Crois-tu qu'après un tel outrage
Je me doive fier à toi ?
Tu m'allègues le sort : prétends-tu par ta foi
Me leurrer de l'appât d'un profane langage ?
Mais que la providence ou bien que le destin
Règle les affaires du monde
Il est écrit là-haut qu'au faite de ce pin
Ou dans quelque Forêt profonde,
J'achèverai mes jours loin du fatal objet
Qui doit t'être un juste sujet
De haine et de fureur. Je sais que la vengeance
Est un morceau de Roi, car vous vivez en Dieux.
Tu veux oublier cette offense :
Je le crois : cependant il me faut pour le mieux
Eviter ta main et tes yeux.
Sire Roi mon ami, va-t'en, tu perds ta peine ;
Ne me parle point de retour ;
L'absence est aussi bien un remède à la haine
Qu'un appareil contre l'amour.

IV. CHAPTER FOUR - The Quest of God: *La Bible*

If I were not a Jew, I wouldn't have been an artist; or I'd be a different artist altogether.

Marc Chagall,
Leaves from My Notebook

Satisfied with Chagall's creativity in *Les Âmes Mortes* and *Les Fables*, Vollard gave him another *commission* that suited the artist's origins: the illustrations for *La Bible*.¹⁹¹ The project was initially titled "The Book of Prophets" (*Le Livre des Prophètes*), but later the publisher and the artist agreed on a broader version of the complete illustration for the Hebrew Bible, or in Christian terms, the Old Testament. It might be hard to believe that the subject of the Bible could still fascinate modern artists. However, for Vollard it was his ambition to publish a modern version of the Bible and, according to Chagall, the assignment meant a quest for the roots of his identity rather than merely another artwork:

I went to verify feelings, without a camera, without even a brush. [...] There, far away, bearded Jews dressed in blue, yellow, red, wearing fur caps, go and come back to the Wailing Wall. Nowhere will you see so much despair, so much joy; nowhere will you be so distressed and so happy as when seeing the

¹⁹¹ Though published in French at last, Chagall should have used the Yiddish *Bible* for reference when he made the illustrations. The assumption is based on two factors: first, in his correspondence with Koenig in 1925 he asked his Yiddish friend to find him a Yiddish Bible, since Chagall did not read Hebrew very well. Second, he once mentioned to Franz Meyer that Bella "read passages from the Bible aloud to him in Yiddish." See Wulfschlag, *Chagall: Love and Exile*, London: Allen Lane, 2008, p.325, 361-2. Again, to make it specific, I will use its French title "*La Bible*" when referring to this Vollard edition, and "The Bible" as a general term when mentioning the Jewish/Christian holy book.

age-old mass of stones and dusts of Jerusalem, of Safed, of the mountains where prophets are buried over prophets.¹⁹²

Chagall took this commission so seriously that he made several trips especially for this illustration project. He insisted on going to the Holy Land of Palestine and Egypt to touch the earth himself. He did this in 1931; later on he made a journey to Amsterdam to study Rembrandt's drawings of biblical scenes, whose influence can be observed in his finished works; and in 1934, even without Vollard's financial support because of the depression, he still managed to make a journey to Spain in order to encounter the works of the painter El Greco.¹⁹³

The path to this modern-illustrated Bible was nevertheless tough. With Vollard's accidental death in 1939, followed by the onset of the Second World War and the rise of anti-Semitism, Chagall had to leave his work behind and flee to the United States in 1941. Sixty-six plates were completed and printed before Vollard's death and were already in the publisher's possession; thirty-nine plates remained shelved and were only resumed upon Chagall's return to France in 1952. Like the works of *Les Âmes Mortes* and *Les Fables*, the project was finally continued and published by Tériade in 1956.

In this *Bible* illustration series, Chagall expressed a strong fascination for his Jewish background by his choice of illustrated subjects and his use of Hebrew symbols. In the meantime, his personal views on religious issues can be seen deducted from his pictorial narrations. Starting with *La Bible*, the biblical motif became an on-going subject in his later works, including oil paintings, lithography, murals, stained-glasses and more illustration works. Consequently, this chapter will explore Chagall's Bible illustrations in two parts: first, I will discuss the choice of illustrated subjects and characters that shaped the main focus of the entire series; secondly, I will discuss the pictorial elements with Hebrew and/or Christian roots that show Chagall's religious and artistic perspectives. To conclude my examination of Chagall's treatment of biblical themes, another version of Bible illustrations from 1960 will be compared and analysed, so as to evaluate Chagall's biblical messages as a whole.

¹⁹² Sorlier, *Chagall by Chagall*, Harrison House, 1979, p.195; also quoted in Jean Bloch Rosensaft, *Chagall and the Bible*, Universe Books, 1987, p. 15.

¹⁹³ For the detailed records of Chagall's trips during this period, see Wullschlager, *Ibid*, p.353-354.

1. An Artist's Story of a People

When we examine Chagall's choice of *La Bible*, one might notice that Chagall stuck to those themes concerning the history of Israel and the inheritance of God's covenant. Under this premise, most parts of Genesis and many important books are omitted, while some of the most unlikely illustratable texts are included. Meyer Schapiro classifies Chagall's choice of illustrations in three groups:

- a) The great ancestors who founded the Jewish community and received from God a covenant and law;
- b) The achievement of nationhood with Joshua, Samson, David, and Solomon;
- c) The prophets, in their integrity and solitude, their vision of God and prophecies of the misfortunes and consolations of Israel.¹⁹⁴

Awareness of being Jewish, as Schapiro asserted, is evidently shown through Chagall's choice of subjects. His choices thus link the history of the beginning of the world with Jewish destiny in modern society. It is also important to point out the differences between the first and the second part of the illustration series divided by Chagall's return from the United States. The hazy texture and bold composition in the latter contrast strongly with the soft tones and relatively delicate lines in the former; the solid mass of figures and the rough rendering of the crowds in the later part, such as in "Capture of Jerusalem" (illu. 101), also differ from the subtle depictions in the former part as in "The Exodus from Egypt" (illu. 33). The obvious difference between these illustrations hints at the influence of the contemporary milieu, to which Chagall displayed explicit empathy and identification.

The Image of Great Ancestors

Among many other important figures in Genesis and Exodus, Chagall focused his *illustrations* on those who contributed to the establishment of the Jewish faith and Israeli tribes. After the Creation of Man, the first illustration he chose was Noah with the dove of the ark (illu. 2), the symbol of a new hope. It is interesting to point out that Chagall omitted all other stories before Noah, not even mentioning the flood itself, but started from God's new covenant with man.

Therefore, he chose to illustrate Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, with whom God had made covenants respectively, and although he often

¹⁹⁴ Meyer Schapiro, "Chagall's Illustrations for the Bible", *Modern Art 19th & 20th Centuries*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1978, p. 121-134.

depicted them with conventional attributes, he also frequently diverged from the representational traditions on the basis of his own interpretations.

Chagall's depiction of Moses is a typical example of conventional representation influenced by individual expression. Chagall depicted him with two bright rays on his head like two huge horns. According to the text, Moses comes down from Sinai with a ray of light shone on his face.¹⁹⁵ This image of horned Moses has a longstanding history, which is familiar to readers through Michelangelo's famous sculpture of Moses with two little horns on his head. However, this iconology actually came from a misreading, since the root of the Hebrew phrase (פְּנֵי עוֹר קָרְן) can be explained as either "horn" or "ray of light", depending on the context.¹⁹⁶ However, Chagall's depiction shows more affinity with Gustave Doré's rendering of the "rays":¹⁹⁷ they both show two unrealistic rays of light shining out above Moses' head instead of real "horns" (fig. IV-1). On the other hand, Chagall's perception of the rays is still different from Doré's in the sense that the latter only presented them once in the illustration of "Moses Coming Down From Mt. Sinai";



Figure IV-1 Moses Showing the Ten Commandments

¹⁹⁵ Exo34: 29-30 "And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him." All quotations from the Bible in this thesis come from the King James Version.

¹⁹⁶ Schapiro has argued that Chagall should have known the Jewish legend that Moses' face shone before his second descent from Mt Sinai, and his borrowing of the image of a horned Moses comes from a more Christian detail. However I'd like to suggest that this might also stem from another artistic context such as Doré's depiction. For Schapiro's argument, see Schapiro, *Ibid*, p.126-127.

¹⁹⁷ Gustave Doré made hundreds of illustration for a new English *Bible* edition. Published in 1866, these illustrations are used in many editions of *Bible* in many languages.

yet Chagall showed them as a permanent attribute for Moses, from the first piece of adult Moses in front of the burning bush (illu. 27) to the last one of “Moses’ Blessing over Joshua” (illu. 42).

For Chagall, it is clear that the purpose of his Bible series is not a faithful illustration accompanying the text, but a narration retold by the artist himself with adaptation of traditional iconography. In this sense, Chagall’s Moses does not merely function as a character from the Bible, but as an icon of the great ancestor of the artist’s origin.

The depiction of Abraham, on the other hand, shows another aspect of Chagall’s interpretation of the Bible. This great father of faith is portrayed as a God-fearing and human-loving figure: he is shown executing the circumcision of the new-born, entertaining the angels with hospitality, sacrificing his beloved son, and mourning his wife Sarah. In Chagall’s later oil paintings based on the compositions of this etching series, he shows the religious significance of this legendary ancestor. In his oil painting “Le sacrifice d’Isaac” (1966, fig. IV-2), the composition and elements like the two figures, the angel and the lamb, remain similar to the earlier etching “The Sacrifice of Abraham” (illu. 10), while the scene of Christ on the way to Golgotha is juxtaposed with the original composition. The lamb as a substitute for the sacrifice, the symbol of Christ, appears under the tree in both compositions. Chagall obviously adopted the Christian interpretation of seeing this episode as an analogy of God’s sacrifice of His own son. This is the way Chagall mixed diverse thoughts while emphasizing the Jewish context.

Besides incorporating both Jewish and Christian views of the biblical figure, the specific use of colours in this image is also worth mentioning. The drypoint and etching in the original black-and-white illustration already create a gradient tone as if painted; in the oil painting version, colours are released and flow freely on the canvas. Here, colours are applied independently from the contours of the objects, as the way images are created independent from words. The basic colours red, blue, yellow and brown construct the scene, and the way the red colour spreads out from the cross to cover Abraham and Isaac seems to imply that the blood of Christ redeems the mortal beings.

The Image of National Heroes

While Moses bears his permanent rays of light, his successor Joshua has a flexible appearance in the nine illustrations Chagall devoted to him. From an armed warrior in “Joshua Armed by God” (illu. 43) to a spiritual leader with the costume of a rabbi in “Joshua Reads the Words of the Law” (illu. 47), Joshua keeps changing forms from a glorious king when he enacts God’s miracle of stopping

the sun (illu. 48) to a praying elder in front of the Rock of Shechem¹⁹⁸ in an expression resembling Chagall's "Praying Jew" (1923). Unlike Moses, portrayed as an eternal figure shining with God's glory, Chagall highlighted all of the diverse aspects of Joshua: he is not only a military leader but also a spiritual one. He is the inheritor of God's kingdom in Chagall's eyes, even at a time when the Jews were not ruled by themselves.

Chagall shows a similar rendering of King David, one of his favourite biblical characters. Although the appearance of King David does not vary physically in the same way Joshua does, Chagall still succeeded in portraying different dimensions of his life. He did not emphasize David's militant characteristics, for this is well-known to everyone, but rather portrayed him as a brave and blessed young man before Saul (illu. 60-64), a God-worshiping king and a psalm author (illu. 66, 68, 74), while simultaneously showing him as an intrigued lover (illu. 69, 75) and desperate father (illu. 70, 71, 73).

An important dimension of King David can be related to Chagall's Hasidism background. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the essence of Chagall's storytelling is closely linked to the Hassidic teachings of his childhood. Owing to the praising and festive rituals of this sect, he renders Jacob's ladder playfully (illu. 14): a bearded Jew¹⁹⁹ floats upside down introducing the angelic dream to the sleeping Jacob. Chagall did not omit the scenes of dancing and singing in the Old Testament, even though those are not the main plots in the Bible narration. He adds an illustration of Miriam alone, the female leader of worship ("Dancing of Miriam, Sister of Moses", illu. 35) and he depicts King David with even greater sympathy, dancing and playing his lyre on the way carrying the Ark ("The Ark Carried to Jerusalem", illu. 68) as well as the king hymning with both arms upward to the Almighty God ("Song of David", illu. 74) as the lyrics, written in Hebrew characters, shine in the air under heavenly light. The artist's background in Hasidism can be recognized in the images of biblical stories.²⁰⁰

After depicting songs and dances, Chagall did not forget to consider another human aspect of King David, who lusted over his servant's wife Bathsheba and made this mistake at huge cost. Chagall chose the scene of David

¹⁹⁸ Jos24: 27 "And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God."

¹⁹⁹ Rosensaft assumed this black-robed and long-bearded figure is a Hasid, which is not yet evident. See Rosensaft, *Ibid*, p. 131-132.

²⁰⁰ The connection between Hasidic teachings and the scenes of celebration is also mentioned in Rosensaft, *Ibid*, p.13-14.

overlooking Bathsheba in the bath, where the king leans forward, echoing the position of the tree on the right, to show his obsession for the woman. He also represented the scene of Bathsheba at the old king's feet begging him to anoint her son Solomon as the successive king. These two scenes with Bathsheba demonstrate how the great king fell for love and how his emotion largely determined his life. Likewise, the scenes with Absalom show David's genuine affection for his son ("David and Absalom", illu. 70) and also his grave anguish when, hearing the news of Absalom's death ("David Mourns Absalom", illu. 73), he sat against the wall of Jerusalem weeping in his palms, unable to see the great rising sun.

As the righteous Noah is shown naked and drunk ("The Mantle of Noah", illu. 5) and Lot is shown sleeping with his daughter, Chagall chose to portray David in the same natural way. Rather than a national leader or a historical legend, King David is more of a human being caring for his loved ones, whether it is his God, his wife or his son and carried away by sexual desire. This erotic dimension is accented in Chagall's later work "David et Bethsabée" (fig. IV-3), part of a set for the magazine *Verve* in 1956, where the faces of David and Bathsheba are united together, surrounded by a red angel and other biblical figures. Against the red-ochre background, this double sight shows again King David's strong connection and affection towards the woman, turning the original biblical rape story into a love story.

Though Chagall focused his illustrations on the great leaders of Israel, he tended to depict them in a personal way quite different from the traditional rendering. Once again, this implies that Chagall's biblical images are personal, artistic views rather than conventional religious illustrations.

The Image of the Prophets

Chagall's book of prophets starts with the evocative etching of "Prophet Killed by a Lion" (illu. 82). The image of the prophets is the most mysterious and perplexing one in Chagall's Bible. In the post-war era, Chagall displayed disturbing scenes and figures in the latter half of this illustration series. He devoted most etchings of prophets to Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. If we read along this storyline of Chagall's Bible, it is easy to conclude that his deployment of prophetic visions recalls a straightforward message: from the miracle-enacting Elijah, to the weeping prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the visionary Ezekiel, one can see a reinforcement and retelling of the fate of modern Israel. Once blessed as God's chosen people, they went through the suffering of the Holocaust, but they will meet Ezekiel's powerful vision eventually. Read as a separate narration of Jewish people independent of the original text of the Bible, Chagall's story of men starts from being created in God's hand and ends with the

heavenly scroll passed down by the hands in the cloud.²⁰¹ The sequence of stories testifies to the destiny of human beings in the Almighty's hands.

What Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah have in common is their mourning of Jerusalem. Chagall depicted them in a posture of deep grief. "Elijah on Mount Carmel" (illu. 86), "Isaiah's Prayer" (illu. 99) and "Sufferings of Jeremiah" (illu. 103) all show the prophets, able to see the future prospects beforehand, in desperate prayer and mourning for their people. The solid figures of the prophets occupy the centre of the composition without other intruding elements. The bodily presentation reminds us slightly of Chagall's "Green Jew", created at the start of the war in 1914, but instead of using mixed hazy colours, the medium of etching allows rougher and fiercer textures, so as to show the profound sorrow and anxiety in a more expressive way.

Therefore, this sorrowful journey of prophets cleverly concludes with the two pieces of Ezekiel's revelation. This captured and weeping prophet would become the hope-receiving one, in the same way as the occupied and suffering Jerusalem would be set free again. In the artist's rendition of the nation, the biblical message is responded with a contemporary comprehension. The sense of nostalgia is expressed not only towards the Land of Promise, but also towards the unobstructed connection between God and humanity in the Old Testament days.

2. Hebrew Roots or Christian Thoughts

In the same way we saw Russian elements appearing in the illustrations in *Les Âmes Mortes* and French ones in *Les Fables*, many pictorial elements with Hebrew roots can at first glance be recognised in Chagall's Bible. This includes the repetition of Hebrew characters, the Star of David, and the vivid depiction of Palestine views based on his earlier journey. As we observe more closely, we can find other influences from Christian thoughts and/or the artist's personal views.

The illustration of "The Child Revived by Elijah" (illu. 84) is a good example that embodies all of the Hebrew elements mentioned above with religious and individual infusions. The story, frequently interpreted by Christian theologians as the foretelling or analogy of Jesus' resurrection, explains how the prophet Elijah raises the son of the widow of Saperta from the clutches of death. In Chagall's etching, the tetragrammaton, God's name in four Hebrew letters (יהוה)

²⁰¹ Eze2: 8-10 "But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

²⁰², is encircled by a frame-like Star of David, out of which shines God's radiance in concentric circles. The rim of the light circle touches the dead child as if God's healing power is working on him when the prophet cries out and prays to the Lord.

The circle of light is not an uncommon way to imply God's presence in visual representation; the Star of David with the tetragrammaton, albeit with its strong Jewish allusion, is more often seen in a Christian context, for Jewish people rarely inscribe God's name except in the scrolls. However, in "The Child Revived by Elijah", the way Chagall used the tetragrammaton with full vowel points (יהוה) is quite rare, even rude for some religious people, for it is like calling God's ineffable name directly without using any euphemisms. It is unlikely that Chagall did this out of ignorance, since he grew up with the teachings of the Bible and the Talmud. Chagall's depiction not only shows the iconography from both Judaism and Christianity, but also the freedom of presenting images for art's sake.

Furthermore, if we bear in mind that the latter part of this illustration series was resumed after the Second World War, we can see the artist's response to the meaning of the Star of David, the symbol of Jewish identity. While the symbol was once humiliating as the yellow badge marking the identity of Jewish people during Nazi oppression, Chagall glorified it as God's presence within this very symbol, reassuming that the essence of Jewishness lies in their belief of being God's chosen people, and that their glory from God shines out through this symbol of their identities. The theme of this illustration is Elijah raising the window's child from death. This also corresponds to the revival of the Jewish nation after the war. The connection between the Old Testament and the 20th century is therefore made explicit.

3. The Presence of God and Angels

In a similar way as in "The Child Revived by Elijah", instead of depicting the image of God directly, Chagall tends to use various indirect ways to show the presence of God, such as the light circle with shining rays, arms/hands stretching out from the clouds,²⁰³ angels in the role of God's agent, or more frequently, God's

²⁰² The four Hebrew letters יהוה are usually transliterated as "YHWH" and often rendered as "Yahweh" in English. However, when reading the Bible, the Jews usually pronounce it as "Adonai" ("the Lord" in English) out of the respect for God's name. The vowel points of the tetragrammaton vary in different scrolls and also in different ages; the vowel points Chagall used in "The Child Revived by Elijah" are common in manuscripts. See the discussion below in this section.

²⁰³ As shown in "Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law" (37) and the last piece "Calling of

name written in tetragrammaton as we have seen above. In some cases, it is the combination of representations, as in “Isaiah's Prayer” (illu. 99), God's name written in a circle of radiance and pointed out by an angel as God's intermediate,²⁰⁴ or more specifically, in the “Calling of Jeremiah” (illu. 100), an angel enacting God's role by carrying God's burning circle of light in his chest.²⁰⁵

At first glance, all of these renderings seem to be variations of the Jewish taboo of depicting God's image. Nevertheless, if we observe the whole series and also compare it with Chagall's other similar biblical subjects, we will easily find that the non-personification of God's image is not entirely a religious issue, since he did portray God as a human figure sometimes. An example is the image of God, personified as a bearded old man, shown directly in the illustration of the “Death of Moses” (illu. 41). Being the great spiritual leader of the Israeli people all his life, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, but in Chagall's interpretation he was rewarded with God's glory. If we compare this with Chagall's later lithography series in *The Story of Exodus* (1966),²⁰⁶ God's image appears as a glorified king in “God Directs Moses to Make Vestments for Use in the Sanctuary” (fig. IV-4). Apparently, Moses cannot see the physical presence of the Lord, for his head turns another direction while listening carefully to His directions. We can conclude that for Chagall, the personification of God is not “forbidden” but “unnecessary” in most of his biblical themes. When it is needed for reasons of composition or narration, we are able to see God's image through the artist's imagination.

In the very first image of biblical illustrations, “Creation of Man” (illu. 1), Adam's inert body is carried by an angel. At the top of the background overhangs a circle of light with the tetragrammaton inscribed within it. The presence of an angel during this creation act exists neither in Jewish nor Christian thought, but only in the artist's own imagination. In his later oil painting “Création de l'homme” (fig. IV-5), Chagall repeated all the elements of God's light circle and the agent-angel in the etching of Creation. However, a fuller vision of apocalypse is shown here: besides the creation of man, God's circle now shines as a huge rainbow-coloured sun surrounded by major figures in the Bible, including David, Jeremiah, Aaron, Moses and Jesus' crucifixion. This apocalyptic picture is

Ezekiel” (105).

²⁰⁴ The tetragrammaton in this illustration is left-right reversed. It is assumed to be a mistake made during the etching process.

²⁰⁵ This image comes from the text of Jer1: 9 “Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.” The role of God here is substituted by his angelic messenger.

²⁰⁶ In 1966, Leon Amiel published Chagall's *The Story of the Exodus*, a portfolio containing twenty-four large colour lithographs.

realized in a spiritual way through which men and animals are integrated as God's Creation: Moses receiving the Tablets is represented as a winged being now, and at the bottom-right corner of God's circle is a green goat-headed figure with red Torahs in his hand, which used to be the presentation of the prophet Jeremiah (as in the *Verve* set in 1956) but can also be seen as the artist himself meditating on the entire meaning of creation.

The agent-angel is shown again in the piece "Man Guided by God" (illu. 97), an illustration of prophecy among the last pieces in which a man is led by an angel instead of by God Himself. These two illustrations together indicate the relationship between God and man; from the beginning to the end, man is always taken in God's hands (here the angel's hands). The substitution of an angel as God's agent is a practical way to demonstrate the physical connection between God and human beings.²⁰⁷

Apart from being God's intermediaries, angels play different roles in the Bible series that greatly alter their images. Sometimes they appear as non-human (and hence non-sexual) beings. Like the messenger-angel in "The Sacrifice of Abraham" (illu. 10), only the facial features are recognizable, but the rest of the figure is just vaguely hinted at as a body with two wings. Sometimes they have specific features according to scripture, for example the seraph with six wings in "Vision of Isaiah" (illu. 91).²⁰⁸ In most of Chagall's etchings, however, angels bear individual appearances and/or attributes as they take different roles. For instance, angels can take human figures as they sit at Abraham's table ("Abraham and the Three Angels", illu. 7); they can act as God's spokesmen as they blow horns or read heavenly scrolls ("Prophecy over Jerusalem", illu. 90); they can also dress up as a warrior/executioner with a sword in their hand, as shown in "The Passover Meal" (illu. 32), "Joshua before the Angel with the Sword" (illu. 45), and "Oracle over Babylon" (illu. 93).²⁰⁹

The images of angels show a tremendous change between the first half and the second half of the series due to Chagall's resumption after his return from the

²⁰⁷ Other illustrations with angels enacting God's role include "Joshua Armed by God" (43), "Samuel Called by God" (59), "Solomon's Dream" (77), "God Will Have Pity on Jacob" (94), "Promise to Jerusalem" (96), and "Calling of Jeremiah" (100),

²⁰⁸ Mentioned only once in the Jewish *Bible*, the seraph is perceived as the highest rank of angels. In later iconography it is often depicted in human form with six wings. Chagall's presentation of the seraph is relatively conventional here. The image of seraphim is described in Isa6: 2 "Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."

²⁰⁹ This image of the angel does exist in the Bible, as in Gen3: 24 "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

United States. Angels in the later part of the series are often posed in dramatic gestures; their appearance is more personalized and mysterious as well. Although angels are supposed to be genderless in religious views, Chagall often depicted them as inherently male or female, which is also more obvious in the latter half of the illustration series. Examples include the two angels in “Solomon's Dream” (illu. 77) and “Capture of Jerusalem” (illu. 101) with explicit female features. In the case of the four creatures with four faces in Ezekiel's Vision (illu. 104), Chagall chose to depict the man's face with female features.²¹⁰ Chagall's mode of representation claims the artist's freedom to follow his/her own imagination instead of depending on religious interpretation or traditional iconography.

This is demonstrated again by the unconventional gestures of Chagall's angels in the last prophetic images. In “Elijah's Vision” (illu. 88), an unusual choice for Bible illustration, Chagall depicted an angel with expressive gestures mirroring Elijah's movement in God's wind and earthquake.²¹¹ The angel covers his face with one of his giant dark wings, produced freely through Chagall's hazy etchings, and holds up a protective hand as if instructing the prophet with God's oracle. Another similar representation can be found in “Promise to Jerusalem” (illu. 96), where the angel covers himself—supposedly male due to his moustache—with huge floating drapery. The image of the angel is combined with the rainbow of Noah's covenant (“The Rainbow”, illu. 4) and God's circle of light at the right side of the background. In a Blakean breath, the angel's grandiose gesture corresponds to the text “I hid my face from thee”²¹² when the Lord speaks

²¹⁰ In the Bible, the four creatures, said to be the cherubim, are described as having four faces, but Chagall, for aesthetic reasons perhaps, only depicted them as one of each face; their feet are also drawn out of their own kind, not of a calf as the script says. See Eze1: 5-10 “Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass. And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings. Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.”

²¹¹ 1King11-13: “And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”

²¹² Isa54: 8 “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting

to the prophet about the fate of Israel. Unlikely to be illustrated, Chagall's choice of illustration is unique in terms of both theme and composition. If we place these powerful images in the post-war setting in which he finished the etchings, or more precisely, the establishment of Israel in 1948, then the message in these images of prophecy clearly proclaims the hope of the nation's destiny: God will keep the covenant he made with his people. Therefore, Chagall's angels show the fierceness but also the great mercy of the Almighty Lord in their unique ways of representation.

4. The Visualization of Hebrew Letters

We have already seen Chagall's use of the tetragrammaton to indicate God's presence, usually inscribed inside a circle of light and/or pointed out by a messenger-angel.²¹³ Even without any knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet, readers automatically associate the letters in their minds with the image of God Jehovah. The Hebrew character thereby acquires a new reading: more than a signifier of concepts, the alphabet itself becomes a pictorial element integrated within contextual readings.

The adoption of Hebrew characters in visual compositions is nothing new in Chagall's work. In the cover design for *The Magician* (1915, fig. IV-6) by I.L. Peretz, the title words, suspended in the upper part, are inscribed in a "hollow" style which echoes the hollow figure inclining along the bottom curve of the oval frame. In this way, the words are integrated as part of the pictorial composition; the visual coherence is enhanced by the square-ness of Hebrew characters as well. Similarly, in Chagall's illustration for David Hofstein's *Troyer*, of which the frontispiece has already been discussed in the previous chapter on *Les Âmes Mortes*, the integration of images and Hebrew characters also add a further dimension to the illustrations. Another, more straightforward, example can be found in his cover illustration for the Soviet Yiddish Journal *ShTROM* (1922, fig. IV-7), where the characters themselves become the main pictorial design and are visually geometrized.²¹⁴ From this perspective, Chagall's incorporation of Hebrew characters forms a process starting from visually echoing characters with images,

kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

²¹³ God's name appears in illustrations of Creation of Man, Jacob's Ladder (illu. 14), The Burning Bush (illu. 27), Darkness over Egypt (illu. 31), The Exodus from Egypt (illu. 33), The Child Revived by Elijah (illu. 84), Promise to Jerusalem (illu. 96), and Isaiah's Prayer (illu. 99).

²¹⁴ In his chapter on "The Lost Jewish World", Harshav analysed the typological design of this cover illustration in detail. See Benjamin Harshav, *Marc Chagall and the Lost Jewish World*, Rizzoli, 2006, p. 145-146.

to the combination of words with images, and then to the becoming of an image itself. The growing significance of Hebrew characters sheds a different light on Chagall's fascination with his Jewish identity in his illustrations.

As a consequence, it is reasonable to see the appropriation of Hebrew characters reappear in the biblical scenes in Chagall's Bible illustrations starting from 1931. Due to the nature of illustration, the use of Hebrew characters in this series also functions as an indication to the corresponding texts. Examples include Chagall's depictions of the Ten Commandments ("Moses Receives the Tablets of the Law", illu. 37; "Moses Breaks the Tablet", illu. 39; and "Crossing of the Jordan", illu. 44), Aaron's breastplate with the names of Israel's twelve tribes ("Aaron and the Lamp", illu. 40)²¹⁵, Joshua's book of law ("Joshua and the Rock of Shechem", illu. 51)²¹⁶, and God's scroll in Prophet Ezekiel's vision ("Calling of Ezekiel", illu. 105).

It is important to point out that most of the Hebrew texts "transplanted" into the images concern laws and regulations. On the one hand, the inscription of the text directs the reader's attention to the root of the Hebrew scripture and emphasizes the legitimacy of the Israeli nation and its laws. On the other hand, though it seems a direct copy from the Bible itself, it is still the artist's choice that makes the connection between pictures and the written texts. By emphasizing the Hebrew texts, the Israeli tribes and the prophecy, Chagall is once again retelling the story of Israel's past, present and future. The use of Hebrew characters implies more than a mere aesthetic device for his composition.

5. Jewish Symbols and Views of Jerusalem

Apart from the use of alphabets, there are still other examples of Hebrew heritage in *La Bible*. The most obvious should be the repetition of the Star of David. It not only appears reasonable on King Solomon's throne, but also, anachronistically, first on the Ark of Covenant ("Crossing of the Jordan", illu. 44) and Joshua's rock of Shechem (illu. 51) when the time of David has yet to come, and then even more ironically, shines as an ornament on the throne of Saul ("Saul and David", illu. 61; "David before Saul", illu. 64) who would soon be jealous of the young hero. The imaginary arrangement of the Star of David proves again that this

²¹⁵ Exo28: 29 "And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually."

²¹⁶ Jos24: 25 "And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD."

illustration is not a faithful depiction from the Bible, but a symbol of authentic Jewishness foregrounded in Chagall's way of storytelling.

The Ark of Covenant embodies the artist's visual vocabulary in another way. The ark, in traditional perception, is supposed to be a chest carried upon two staves, according to the records in the Book of Exodus:

And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

-And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them.²¹⁷

However in Chagall's imagination, the Ark is an entirely different object—more like a giant monument engraved with the Tablets of the Ten Commandments²¹⁸, the anachronistic Star of David and two Lions of Judas.²¹⁹ The fact that these details depart from the biblical text might be explained by Chagall's later lithography of "Bezaleel and his two golden cherubim" (fig. IV-8) in the illustrations of *The Story of Exodus* (1966). Here, the gifted craftsman Bezaleel is depicted in the likeness of Chagall's self-portrait; his hand reaches toward the Star of David at the centre, inscribed with the tetragrammaton inside and encircled by a red circle of radiance. The left side of the picture shows a crowned rooster, the mercy seat with two hands on it, two cherubim in the form similar to the lion of Judah,²²⁰ and Bezaleel's golden candlestick.

The fact that Chagall identifies his own image with the biblical artisan implies the status he considers himself to have reached: he is a craftsman inspired

²¹⁷ Exo25: 10, 14.

²¹⁸ The order of the Ten Commandments in "Crossing of the Jordan" is reversed left-and-right from the one Moses received on Mount Sinai, perhaps due to the process of etching making.

²¹⁹ The Lion of Judas comes first from the Book of Genesis, where Jacob describes his son "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" (Gen49: 9). Later it becomes the symbol of the Israeli tribe of Judah. In Christian iconology, the Lion of Judah is usually regarded as the symbol of Christ. In Chagall's biblical themes, it often appears in unrelated context, such as on the gate of Solomon's palace ("The Queen of Sheba", illu. 80).

²²⁰ Exo37: 7 "And he made two cherubims of gold, beaten out of one piece made he them, on the two ends of the mercy seat." Although there's no common recognition of the image of cherubim, it is often described as winged angels; in the book of Ezekiel they are four-headed creatures, lion-head included. Therefore Chagall's cherubim with lion's body with man's face can be seen as his unique design.

by God's teachings, but he creates with his artistic eyes. All those familiar elements in Chagall's biblical images, such as the tetragrammaton and the Star of David, serve as continuous symbols of Jewishness without historical accuracy, even though they are rendered as a realistic presentation of a certain moment.

On the other hand, Chagall drew the views of Palestine affectively in distinct realism instead of purely imagination. Thanks to his journey to the Holy Land, he was able to represent the landscapes in relatively realistic detail. One of the examples is the scene of Rachel's tomb (illu. 17), the only scene without any human figures in this series. If we compare the hand-coloured version of Chagall's illustration with a postcard dating from 1910, the landscapes are obviously identical. However, Chagall transferred the picture with a softer touch: the dome of the tomb echoes with the tender curves of nearby hills; the rounded back of the camel and the bending of the grand tree also correspond to this continuous curved line. The sense of nostalgia disperses in the gentle hint of red colour and in the tree's embracing gesture toward the tomb of the wife, buried in solitude and left behind during Jacob's journey.²²¹

The view of Jerusalem appears many times in the whole series, especially in the last few pieces concerning the fate of the city. Chagall depicted the scenes of Jerusalem in two different ways: Jerusalem in King David's time is shown closely, focusing on its solid and formidable ramparts ("King David", illu. 67; "David Mourns Absalom", illu. 73), while the panorama of Jerusalem in the later prophecy is seen from a distance and is usually distorted as in a dream ("Prophecy over Jerusalem", illu. 90; "God Will Have Pity on Jacob", illu. 94; "Deliverance of Jerusalem", illu. 95; "Salvation for Jerusalem", illu. 98; and "Capture of Jerusalem", illu. 101). The last etchings of prophecy differ from all other pieces in this series: mysterious and powerful, they are boldly arranged in surrealist compositions. When Isaiah in his prophecy sees the return of Israel to its own land,²²² Chagall illustrates this scene with Isaiah and an angel, the latter holding tight to the former ("God Will Have Pity on Jacob"). Floating in front of God's circle of light, they overlook the city of Jerusalem and the homecoming of its people together. Suspended above the city is a rainbow, the symbol of God's covenant, upon which the figures of Isaiah and the angel seem to rest. God's

²²¹ Gen35: 19 "And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem."

²²² Isa14: 1-2 "For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors."

promise of Israel's return from exile thus forms the centre of the picture and connects this vision of prophecy with the events in the future.

The vision of the homecoming in Israel is again depicted in "Deliverance of Jerusalem". This time the entire capital and its people is displayed in the big circle of God's light. Here, the flying angel bears obvious Jewish features: he is wearing a traditional phylactery (*tefilin*) on his head²²³ and the Hebrew letters of "Jerusalem" are blown out from his shofar, a horn used for Jewish religious services. The floating circle with the city panorama seems to be blown up from the mouth of the shofar; the awakening of Jewish consciousness is celebrated in this picture.

The circle of light in both illustrations functions as a frame delimiting different times and spaces. The revival of Jerusalem can be seen either as a prediction for the unknown future during Old Testament times or as contemporary scenes coexisting with eternal prophetic calling. As in "Salvation for Jerusalem" (illu. 98), the artist juxtaposes the view of Jerusalem and the newly-married couple, recalling both his personal reunion with his wife Bella and God's reunion with his chosen people. Different temporal events are narrated together in the spatial image, where the everlasting messenger-angel and the Lion of Judah are all present in one space. Chagall, in this way, reveals the message of the life, belief and identity of Jewish people.

6. An Artist's Biblical World: *Verve Bible*

La Bible, commissioned by Vollard, demonstrates the awakening of Jewishness, the influence of Christianity and other art conventions all integrating in the artist's creation. The framing of the series shows the concern for humankind: from the beginning to the end, man has been connected to the almighty God who hides His glorious face behind the clouds. The choice for illustrating *La Bible* not only embodies the artist's own search for ethnic identity, but the seeking of God's image also implies a nostalgic longing for a lost world where all creatures are taken care of under an omniscient higher being.

Ever since Vollard's commission, motifs from the Bible continued in Chagall's artworks and he ultimately contributed an entire museum of biblical works to Nice, France.²²⁴ Some of his other lithography and oil paintings on

²²³ Orthodox Jews usually wear two *tefilin*, one on the head and the other around left arm, as shown in Chagall's "Praying Jew".

²²⁴ Le Musée national Marc Chagall, Nice, was completed and inaugurated on 7 July 1973, Chagall's birthday. In 1967, the Louvre in Paris exhibited 17 large-scale paintings and

biblical subjects have already been examined and compared in the above discussion. In Chagall's biblical world, the lithographs for another version of the Bible, published in the Parisian magazine *Verve* in 1960,²²⁵ stand out as a counterpart to Vollard's *La Bible* and complete Chagall's vision of the biblical world.²²⁶

In his aforementioned classification, Shapiro listed three categories of Chagall's figures in *La Bible*, but he omitted an equally important section: the images of women.²²⁷ Chagall depicted some female characters in *La Bible*, for example Lot's daughters, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel; Potiphar's wife, Delilah; Bathsheba; the Queen of Sheba; and the widow of Sarepta. None of them are the focus in biblical stories, but they all play an important role in making a turning point in the male-centred narration. Among these female figures, Chagall, following the principle concerning Jewish roots in *La Bible*, had devoted singular portraits to three characters: Moses' sister Miriam, the god-invoking woman Anna²²⁸ and the prophetess Deborah. Each of these women contribute a certain paradigm to the Israeli people, and each of them has a close relationship with God, no less than male heroes or prophets: Miriam as the first-known female leader of worship, Anna as the exemplary figure of her faith, and Debora as God's prophetess in the era of Judges. The original texts on these women are quite brief, but as Chagall chose to depict them in individual portraits, we can see that

38 gouaches under the title "Message Biblique", which he donated to the nation of France on condition that a museum was to be built for them in Nice.

²²⁵ As an important publisher in his time, Tériade's most memorable publishing is the colourful journal *Verve* that included numerous works by the best artists. Without using typography, this magazine is full of artists' handwritings including, among the most well-known, Matisse's *Jazz* in the first volume. In 1956, the project *La Bible* left by Vollard was finally fulfilled by the Swiss publisher Tériade. To celebrate the occasion, Tériade commissioned a set of lithographs on biblical themes for a special number of *Verve*. See Riva Castleman, *A Century of Artists Books*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1994, p. 31-32; also see Wulfschlager, *Ibid*.

²²⁶ To make a difference, I'll call the illustrations for the *Bible* commissioned by Vollard in 1931 as *La Bible*, and the one for *Verve* in 1960 as *Verve Bible*, although it might cause some confusion as well since Chagall had contributed more than one version of biblical lithography to *Verve*, for example another *Bible* series in 1956. Since the *Verve Bible* hasn't been reviewed much in literatures, most discussions about the illustrations are based on my own interpretations.

²²⁷ Since the image of women has played an important role in Chagall's art, the *Verve Bible* featuring female figures can be seen as the artist's interpretation of biblical stories.

²²⁸ According to scripture, Anna was pregnant with Samuel because of her enduring faith and prayer to God. See Sam1: 19-20 "And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD."

Chagall chose not to omit the female significance when he narrated his storyline visually.

While Vollard's *La Bible* is filled with images of great ancestors, national heroes and prophets, plus occasionally specific women as supporting characters, the *Verve Bible* in 1960 is obviously a women's version: most of the 24 illustrations are women's stories, unmentioned in *La Bible* but now chosen and adorned, including Eve, Sara, Hagar, Rachel, Tamar, Rahab, Naomi, Ruth, Michal, Vasthi and Esther.

The very beginning of the *Verve Bible* starts with a female voice of narration. The first lithography "The Face of Israel" (fig. IV-9) presents an angel with female features announcing God's words to a man and a woman. These could be the general representation of human beings, but could also represent Rebecca and her favourite son Jacob, for the name of Israel appears in the title of the piece.²²⁹ The woman is holding the man to her breast in a protective gesture and she is the one who looks upon and receives the angelic voice. In the far background on the right, a mother with her son reminds us of Hagar and Ishmael in the desert, who appear later in this illustration series. Indicating both the face and fate of Israel and the strangers, the frontispiece in this context shows the visualization of femininity and motherhood, and hence a narration dominated by images of women.

Eve is the first female character we encounter in the original Bible and also in this illustration series. The six pieces about Paradise are narrated from Eve's perspective, which was totally omitted in the earlier *La Bible*. We can see her peeking with one eye and playing with the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (fig. IV-10), tempted by the serpent—a beautiful creature with a human face by then, sharing the fruit with Adam and harking the sentence from God, who now appears as a green bearded elderly man descending from above. The story of Eve is the beginning of female suffering in human fate; the *Verve Bible*, therefore, continues with the narrations of those women who sought their destiny and salvation.

Ruth stands out among the other female stories, as Chagall dedicated five illustrations to this figure. The Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther are the only two books in the Old Testament named after a woman; however Chagall obviously paid more attention to the ordinary woman than the glorious queen. Starting from Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law who mourned her sons' deaths with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth's story carries on as she gleaned in Boaz's field and lay at his feet actively asking for his duty of a levirate marriage. Often

²²⁹ Gen35: 10 "And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel."

interpreted as the feminist exegesis to the Torah, the Book of Ruth stands for brave women who fight for their own lives and happiness in a patriarchal society.

Consequently, the fact that Chagall focused on Ruth in the lithography set shows his sympathy toward this modern example of women who take initiative. The artist's rendering of the scenes concerning the interaction between Ruth and Boaz is worth discussing as well. With the brown backdrop of the cornfield, the lithography itself forms a pictorial narration beyond the letter of the text. With the dramatic gestures in "Meeting of Ruth and Boaz" it seems that the red-haired woman is trying to seize the man who, expressing amazement, displays a half-resisting and half-inviting gesture with both arms. A huge red circle, perhaps a distortion of the setting sun, is burning behind his back, which can be seen as a symbol for strong passion and desire behind this first meeting scene.

The play of colour is a clever device in this visual narration. In all of the illustrations in the *Verve Bible*, red functions as the main colour, especially in Ruth's story when sweating red overflows in "Ruth gleaning" (fig. IV-11), corresponding to Ruth's diligence in the cornfield. Red continues to dominate in the passionate "Meeting of Ruth and Boaz" (fig. IV-12), while the gentle silver-blue of the moon drips down the night that Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet and lies down with him (fig. IV-13). In the next scene "Boaz wakes up and sees Ruth at his feet" (fig. IV-14), Ruth's burning red hair mysteriously turns a calm blue and the giant red wheel in the "Meeting of Ruth and Boaz" also reduces as the gentle rising sun.²³⁰ Hope is now shining upon the future of Naomi and Ruth. This is Chagall's pictorial re-narration of a well-known story.

Despite the fact that the events are presented from the perspective of female characters, Chagall's biblical view does not vary much with the relationship between God and (wo)men. From the cover lithography of the *Verve Bible*, a design of blue-and-black colour tone, God appears magnificently in a diagonal gesture, overwhelming the figures of King David and Bathsheba, an example of a woman's power dominating a man. On the left of the cover design, a giant dove occupies most of the lithography, while a little goat (usually symbolizing Christ or the artist himself) and an abstract presentation of a pilgrim (echoing the theme of Jewish Diaspora again) are shown balancing the composition.

The belief that the relationship between God's power and man's fate is the artist's main concern is proved once again in the last two pieces on Job, in spite of those strong-willed women in-between. Occupying the whole composition, the solid figure of Job differs remarkably from those elongated women in a Blakean

²³⁰ Both characters are shown naked in the last picture, indicating that Chagall already asserted the two characters had physical contact that night. Even though the Bible does not mention it, it is not a new interpretation of the verse: "spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid" (Ruth 3: 9).

style as if it comes from another series of illustrations altogether. The sharp contrast between the image of Job and of other females could imply that it functions more as an allegory than a direct depiction of the biblical figure. The last pieces of Job, who is well-known of his steadfast faith and close relationship with God, correspond to the message about God and humanity in the beginning of the series.

7. Conclusion

The *Verve Bible*, together with other Bible-related works by Chagall, narrates stories independently from the original text. With references to the already-known stories, these coloured or black-and-white images are purposely juxtaposed and thereby encourage a new reading of the Bible. From *La Bible* to the *Verve Bible*, Chagall tried different alternatives to view and represent the original Hebrew text. It shows not only his personal concern and interest in the biblical world, but also the innovative way of re-narrating old stories within contemporary trends—in these cases, the turbulence of the political situation and the rise of feminine awareness.

Once again it is appropriate to examine *La Bible* from the perspective of the two categories of nostalgia. First, the journey to Palestine and the nearly faithful depiction of views of Jerusalem show Chagall's determination to represent the restored images of the biblical world. Second, the sense of longing and belonging to the heirs of "God's chosen people" is strongly reflected in the depictions based on and mixed with different religious traditions. All of the Jewish symbols, characters and regulations appear as a mysterious code which is only comprehensible to Jewish people. Moreover, the distinctive change in Chagall's drawing styles from the first and the second half of the illustrations indicates a shift in mind-set for the artist. This shift was motivated by the World Wars and the oppression suffered by the Jewish people, as well as by a reinforcement of the identification of being a Jew and the political ideal of reconstructing the homeland.

In fact, *La Bible* can be viewed as the most obvious demonstration of the concept of nostalgia. The nostalgic sense appears repeatedly and is depicted from different perspectives in Chagall's later artwork, including the female version of *Verve Bible*. The sense of nostalgia inspired by the holy land and the divine connection is a never-ending story.

CONCLUSION

La Bible marks the ending of Chagall's trilogy of illustrated books created between the two World Wars. Viewed from a historical perspective, the trilogy of *Les Âmes Mortes*, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* and *La Bible* was executed at a time when everything was precarious. Many artists, including Chagall, had to leave their countries and continued to procure the sense of dislocation and nostalgia through their creations. It is not surprising that the reappearing allusion to the Jewish Diaspora was formed in Chagall's works by this nostalgic impulse in an epoch of exile.

Chagall's trilogy has proved to be a suitable object for modern nostalgia studies. Svetlana Boym's definition mentioned in the introduction is particularly applicable. According to her argument, the two types of nostalgia—restorative and reflective—might use the same triggers of memory and symbols, but tell different stories about it.²³¹ And in Chagall's artworks, both tendencies are visualized in his personal presentations. As Boym describes it:

Nostalgia of the first type gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture. Nostalgia of the second type is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself. If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space.²³²

In most of Chagall's artworks, including the three series of illustrations, the two tendencies of nostalgia can be found to co-exist in the same pictorial symbols and devices while narrating different visions simultaneously. However, in Chagall's illustrated worlds, the distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is less distinct. The spaces depicted in the illustrations seem to be fragments of real places in the past, but are often twisted by unrealistic or anachronistic imagination. As if he encountered them when dreaming his childhood, everything seems to be familiar but also blurry and intermixed with elements of current moments. On the one hand, the symbols of a homeland are restored visually in the illustrations in

²³¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, 2001, p. 49.

²³² Boym, 2001, p. 49.

the restorative sense; on the other hand the individual signs shatter the fragmented memories and reflect a longing for the lost in the reflective sense.

It is exactly the way this trilogy bewilders the realities of time and space—or in Boym’s description, the way it temporalizes space and visualizes time—that it combines and fulfils the notions of nostalgia. Echoing the contemporary surroundings, the illustrations reject the loss of a certain time and space by recapturing it in imaginary images based on collective or individual memories.

In Chagall’s trilogy, many spatial devices refer to the dreamy spaces haunting one’s obscure memory. In *Les Âmes Mortes*, perspectives are often distorted and objects seem absurd; more importantly, it often presents a stage-like composition. “At the Town Gate” (illu. 47), the last piece in the first volume of *Les Âmes Mortes*, is a typical example of theatrical arrangement. As the semi-circular outline resembling a stage curtain separates the scenes of the drama “Dead Souls” from the two viewers in the foreground, “At the Town Gate” draws the curtain down at the end of the first half of *Les Âmes Mortes*. The theatrical device within a picture reveals the gap between the real and the virtual, reminding the audience that the seemingly realistic fragments in the restorative nostalgic journey actually reside in the imaginary fiction. As if waking from a dream on a long night, the audience senses something unreal during the drama/illustrations, but not until the last moment do they realize the illusive construction and start to consciously look forward to the following part of the journey home.

The awakening composition in this illustration therefore allows for the exploration of a “virtual reality of consciousness” in reflective nostalgia.²³³ Likewise, other pictorial devices in the trilogy have similar effects, for example the surrealistic colours in the backdrops of the watercolour drafts for *Les Fables*, or the anachronistic sighs such as the reappearing Star of David and the mysterious prophetic visions in *La Bible*. When constructing the original images in the memories, the illustrations at the same time present the flexible and creative imaginations to reveal the virtuality of shattered memories. Besides the illustrations themselves, the co-existence of two types of nostalgia has become one of Chagall’s characteristics in his later works.

The form of the illustration also enhances the discontinuity of the illusive memories. The frames of each illustration are separated from each other by text and make it impossible to construct a coherent plot. Illustrations can be seen as a continuing narration, but they are as such individual pictures reciting different fragments of the storytelling. Unlike comic strips with dialogue balloons that tell

²³³ Defined by Henri Bergson, the virtual reality of consciousness is about human freedom and creativity. Boym quoted his definition and used Marcel Proust’s way of remembrance as an example. Boym concludes that it is the memorable fugue that matters, not the actual return home. See Boym, 2001, p. 50.

a story in a combined form of word and image, readers of illustrations cannot understand the complete story by merely looking at the images; instead, the illustrations open up a new meaning beyond the texts. The last seven pieces in *Les Âmes Mortes* are good examples of presenting fragments of past memories. When Gogol finally revealed the past of Chichikov through the long storytelling of the narrator, Chagall chose some significant plots to visualize past moments via the misty atmosphere evoked through the use of aquatint. Though the six illustrations (apart from the final piece showing the sleeping hero) imply a complete story in the “reality” of the text, they can also be seen as separate portraits from different stories. The reconstruction of memories is therefore awakened or broken up in the format itself.

In addition to a confusion of the spatial and temporal senses, Chagall’s trilogy also presents the yearning for a different time, which lingers with one’s life in one’s memories.²³⁴ Each series of the trilogy refers to a past period of time, and altogether the chronography formed by these three series displays a reverse order of time. The literary texts on which his series is based go backwards in time: from 19th century Russia (*Dead Souls*), to 17th century France (*La Fontaine*), all the way back to the Holy Land during the centuries before Christ (*Bible*). This corresponds to the spiritual states suggested in the themes of each series: from adult desire (*Dead Souls*), to innocent infancy (*Fables*) to the primitive status when men were newly created with a better connection to the divine being (*Bible*). Placed together, the quests in these three series consequently construct a journey through the mental and spiritual experience of human beings. As the journey goes on, more distant memories are gradually awakened. However, the journey is not merely about the past it revisits; it also hints at the prospects of an idealized future, like the prophetic visions indicated in the last illustrations of *La Bible*:

Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. [...] Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.²³⁵

The past is gone. The nostalgic impulse understands it. In Chagall’s case, he chose to stay in the south of France for the rest of his life after he returned from the United States, instead of returning to Russia—the frequently depicted and

²³⁴ In Boym’s words “At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. See Boym, 2001, p. XV.

²³⁵ Boym, 2001, p. XVI

dreamed-of hometown. He knew by heart that the past, the old Vitebsk, could not be restored in reality and therefore stayed away from it in order to keep on longing for it until the end of his life journey.²³⁶ “A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home,” as Boym concludes.²³⁷

Apart from the analysis of the unusual presentation of time and space in Chagall's trilogy, which fulfils the two categories of nostalgia, the approach to nostalgia in this research also explored both external and internal factors that determined the accomplishment of the trilogy, and hence determined the outcome and the meaning of the trilogy in different aspects. The external factors, such as historical or social situations, evoke the nostalgia of the age and are in turn reflected in contemporary artworks. Synchronically, Chagall's trilogy represents the artistic trends in a political environment of diasporas and exile; diachronically it not only responds to the history of *livres d'artiste* from the golden age, but also continues traditions of illustration, especially in the examples of *Fables* and *Bible*.

In terms of internal factors, nostalgic sentiments also manifest themselves in Chagall's own notion of art and his motifs of presenting dreamy, topsy-turvy visions. The subject matter of these three illustrated series—Russian peasant lives in *Les Âmes Mortes*, animal and human relationships in *Les Fables*, and inspiring biblical characters in *La Bible*—become a kind of microcosm of Chagall's long and profound artist life. Ultimately the main concern in Chagall's artworks concentrates on nostalgia, not merely of an individual, but of a nation or of the whole of humankind. To achieve this, Chagall determinedly chose a surrealist style to present the lost and longed for images in his distant memories. In addition to the visualization of an abstract notion of nostalgia, the festive and caricatural expression of his pictures on the one hand implies the avant-garde art movements of his time; on the other hand it also responds to influences from his multicultural backgrounds.

This thesis therefore performs a new application of nostalgia studies to the realm of the visual arts. Moreover, since the sense of nostalgia is explicitly expressed in the three chosen texts themselves, it opens up a further interpretation of the relation between the literary texts and their illustrations. In this way, nostalgia studies provide another approach for word-image relationships. Meanwhile, by using Marc Chagall's early illustrated books as examples of nostalgic expression, this thesis foregrounds the importance and seriousness of the

²³⁶ Chagall kept picturing the nostalgic views throughout his artistic life. For example the painting “Artist over Vitebsk” (1982), the very old theme of Vitebsk was done just 3 years before his death.

²³⁷ Boym, 2001, p. 50.

artist's illustrated works. It also draws attention to the once-cherished genre of *livre d'artiste* to modern readers.

In this thesis I have tried to position Chagall's three illustrated books within a framework of nostalgic sentiments. In doing so I was able to access a more consistent or more reasonable relationship with the historical background, both synchronically and diachronically. I expect that this approach of word-image relations can be further applied to other artworks, especially those created in the same era as the trilogy. Moreover, through this initial effort, I intend to motivate a review and re-evaluation of the vast productions of other illustrated books, either by Chagall or by contemporary artists, from the perspective of word-image relationships, for they are certainly worth it.

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SAMENVATTING

In mijn proefschrift *Nostalgic Impulse: Marc Chagall's Trilogy of Illustrated Books in France* (*Nostalgische impuls: Marc Chagalls trilogie van geïllustreerde boeken in Frankrijk*) onderzoek ik het thema van de nostalgie en de interactie tussen tekst en beeld in de drie door Marc Chagall geïllustreerde boeken die de uitgever Ambroise Vollard bij hem bestelde, namelijk *Les Âmes Mortes* (*Dode zielen*, 1923-27) van Nikolaj Gogol, *Les Fables* van *La Fontaine* (1926-31) en *La Bible* (1931-39). Deze drie werken, in dit onderzoek 'de trilogie' genoemd, kunnen los van elkaar worden besproken, maar krijgen een veel bredere dimensie en kunnen ruimer worden geïnterpreteerd als ze als geheel worden gezien. Als trilogie laten de drie geïllustreerde teksten overduidelijk een gevoel van nostalgie zien, net zoals dat in het meeste andere werk van Chagall het geval is.

Deze trilogie, die tijdens het interbellum werd voltooid, lijkt gekozen en gemaakt in het besef van diaspora, een gevoel van afstand en het nostalgisch instinct. Vanuit het perspectief van nostalgie kan de keuze voor klassieke of pastorale thema's als teksten voor *livres d'artiste* worden geïnterpreteerd als een sterk verlangen naar wat verloren is gegaan maar wel gewenst wordt. De turbulente situatie tussen de twee wereldoorlogen verschaftte kunstenaars de nodige stof tot nadenken over begrippen als ballingschap, nostalgie, identiteit en zelfonderzoek. Binnen deze complexe omgeving – van zowel de uitgeveryskringen van *livres d'artiste* als de sociaal-politieke realiteit – aanvaarde Chagall de opdrachten voor zijn trilogie van geïllustreerde boeken.

Nostalgie is een centraal aandachtspunt in recente benaderingen van modernisme. Deze aandacht voor nostalgie wekt geen verbazing aangezien nostalgie door de twintigste eeuw heen voorkomt in alle stijlen en genres van de hedendaagse kunst en literatuur. Het gevoel van verlangen naar een wereld die verloren is gegaan, waartoe ballingschap en nostalgie leiden, kan in feite ook worden herkend in een aantal werken van kunstenaars en schrijvers uit dezelfde tijd als Chagall, waaronder andere *livres d'artiste* van kunstenaars van de École de Paris. Daarom zal ik in dit proefschrift zowel de invloeden en overwegingen van het milieu in Chagalls tijd als de inspiratiebronnen die de kunstenaar meekreeg uit zijn geboorteplaats en etnische identiteit bestuderen.

De trilogie van Chagall blijkt een geschikt onderwerp voor hedendaags onderzoek naar nostalgie – in het bijzonder is Svetlana Boyms definitie van nostalgie erop van toepassing. Boym maakt duidelijk dat er twee basistypen nostalgische impulsen zijn: 'restauratieve' en 'reflectieve' nostalgie. Restauratieve

nostalgie legt de nadruk op ‘nostos’, wat ‘terugkeer naar huis’ betekent, reflectieve nostalgie daarentegen concentreert zich op ‘algia’, oftewel ‘verlangen’. Volgens Boym probeert restauratieve nostalgie te komen tot een transhistorische reconstructie van het verlies van thuis, terwijl reflectieve nostalgie stilstaat bij de ambivalentie tussen menselijk verlangen en het gevoel erbij te horen. Beide vormen van nostalgie gebruiken weliswaar herinnering en symbolen als *triggers*, maar hebben er een ander verhaal bij. In Chagalls kunstwerken zijn beide tendensen zichtbaar in zijn persoonlijke voorstellingen.

Aan de hand van deze twee door Boym voorgestelde categorieën van nostalgie, zet ik in dit proefschrift mijn interpretatie van Chagalls werk uiteen. In restauratieve zin verwijzen deze drie geïllustreerde boeken naar de terugkeer van een bepaalde plek die correspondeert met een plek die centraal staat in de persoonlijke achtergrond van de kunstenaar. In reflectieve zin weerspiegelt het thema van de trilogie het spirituele verlangen naar verschillende menselijke condities – naar intuïtief ontvankelijk zijn voor je verlangens, naar naïef zijn als een kind, en naar spiritueel verbonden zijn met het goddelijke bestaan.

Vanwege het specifieke onderwerp van boekillustraties, concentreert dit onderzoek zich naast het overkoepelende thema van nostalgie ook op de relatie tussen woord en beeld. Daarom begint dit proefschrift met een hoofdstuk dat gewijd is aan een algemene introductie op Chagalls illustraties vanuit een nostalgisch perspectief, gevolgd door drie hoofdstukken waarin ik verschillende methodes toepas om nieuwe mogelijkheden voor de kruislingse interpretatie van literaire teksten en visuele beelden bloot te leggen. In elk hoofdstuk gewijd aan de analyse van de drie geïllustreerde werken, probeer ik naast een interpretatie van de illustraties de twee tendensen van nostalgie die in het werk tot uiting komen naar voren te brengen.

In **hoofdstuk 1** onderzoek ik hoe de illustraties van Chagall werden beïnvloed door en baat hadden bij een mengeling aan elementen, waaronder Chagalls persoonlijke achtergrond (zijn geboorteplaats) en zijn reizen naar vele landen, en tevens het artistieke milieu van zijn tijd. Dit milieu kenmerkt zich door het overvloedige aantal uitgaven van *livres d'artiste*, de activiteiten van Joodse avant-gardistische kunstenaars en de politieke situatie van ballingschappen tijdens en na het interbellum. Al deze elementen samen maken dat Chagalls illustraties een karakteristieke uitbeelding van nostalgie zijn.

In **hoofdstuk 2** fungeert grotesk realisme, het sleutelbegrip van carnaval in Michail Bachtins literaire theorie over ‘dialogisme’, als belangrijkste concept bij de interpretatie van Gogols tekst, ook in relatie tot Chagalls hyperbolische manier van illustreren. Voor de analyse van Chagalls illustraties in *Les Âmes Mortes* maak ik gebruik van Bachtins denkbeelden. Grotesk realisme is het soort esthetiek dat Bachtin haalt uit het volks carnaval van de middeleeuwen en

renaissance. Omdat met bestaande waarden, klassen en disciplines de spot werd gedreven, mochten degenen die aan carnaval meededen toegeven aan een utopische ‘tweede wereld’. Als sleutelrol in deze tweede wereld benadrukt het materiële lichaamsprincipe – de lichaamsbeelden van eten, drinken, ontlasting en coïtus – het genot van het menselijk leven waarin het lichaam in omvang blijft toenemen en blijft veranderen. Zowel in Gogols literaire tekst als in Chagalls illustraties zijn niet alleen regelmatig groteske vormen van realistische elementen waar te nemen, maar is ook het nostalgisch verlangen naar de utopische wereld van het carnaval zichtbaar.

Behalve in de geïllustreerde boeken die ik in dit proefschrift bespreek, is de geest van grotesk realisme in het algemeen ook te vinden in Chagalls andere kunstwerken. In **hoofdstuk 3 en 4** over ‘Kinderlijk geluk: *Les Fables de La Fontaine*’ en ‘De zoektocht naar God: *La Bible*’ keer ik terug naar een iconologische benadering, die vrij gebruikelijk is voor kunsthistorisch onderzoek. *Les Fables* en *La Bible* onderscheiden zich in zoverre van ander geïllustreerd werk dat ze een lange illustratiegeschiedenis kennen die als een op zichzelf staande iconografische traditie wordt beschouwd. Daarom ligt de uitdaging van het illustreren van *Les Fables* en *La Bible*, naast het kennis hebben van de bekende verhalen en tradities die door eerdere illustratoren tot stand zijn gebracht, er ook in hoe je de iconografie van bepaalde beelden hergebruikt om nieuwe beelden te creëren.

De illustraties van *Les Fables* en *La Bible* getuigen opnieuw van verschillende dimensies van het thema nostalgie. *Les Fables* laat aan de ene kant het Franse platteland zien met een vleugje oosterse invloeden; aan de andere kant kan het gevoel van nostalgie ook worden herkend in de terugkeer naar het gezichtspunt van een kind en naar een arcadische wereld waarin dieren en mensen vreedzaam samenleven. In *La Bible* laten de reis naar Palestina en de getrouwe vergezichten op Jeruzalem allereerst Chagalls vastberadenheid zien om de gereconstrueerde beelden van de bijbelse wereld af te beelden. In de tweede plaats komt het gevoel van verlangen naar en horen bij de erfgenamen van ‘Gods uitverkoren volk’ sterk naar voren in de illustraties die gebaseerd zijn op en vermengd zijn met verschillende religieuze tradities. Beide reeksen kunnen goed worden geïnterpreteerd aan de hand van Boyms indeling.

In overeenstemming met de algemene benadering van inleidende onderzoeken naar nostalgie, tracht dit proefschrift te benadrukken dat Chagalls illustraties een autonome kunstwereld vormen, en vervolgens deze kunstwereld te bestuderen aan de hand van conventionele en onconventionele moderne theorieën die voortkomen uit interdisciplinair onderzoek. Zo verwacht ik niet alleen voort te bouwen op eerder onderzoek naar Chagalls biografie en de algemene geschiedenis van *livres d’artiste*, maar ook een bijdrage te leveren aan herinneringsstudies, literaire kritiek en kunsthistorische theorieën.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Shu Hsuan Kuo (a.k.a. Jessie Kuo) was born in Taipei, Taiwan. After graduating from the Department of English Literature and Linguistics, National Cheng Chi University, she continued to study in the Institute of Art Studies, National Central University, and received her MA in 2003. In 2007 she came to the Netherlands to pursue her PhD at the Institute for Cultural Disciplines in Leiden University (LUICD).

Before coming to the Netherlands, Jessie worked as an art history author and has published two major books of *The Secrets of Illustration* (AS IF Books, Taipei: 2007) and *Art in Diagrams* (Easybooks, Taipei: 2005). She was also a lecturer of beginners' art courses in the private institute of Art & Collection Group.

During her study in LUICD, Jessie kept on writing art reviews for different publications in Taiwan, including the leading art magazine *ARTCO Monthly* and *Art Collection + Design*. Jessie also cooperated with other authors and has published *Dutch Touch* (Avantguard, Taipei: 2012) and *Design Collection* (National History Museum, Taipei: 2010). Apart from writing, Jessie worked as an active translator and has translated numerous books and articles from English to Traditional Chinese, for example *The UnDutchables* by Colin White & Laurie Boucke (Ta Chia, Taipei: 2010) and *ZEN in the Fifties* by Helen Westgeest (Art & Collection Group, 2007).

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Nicolas Gogol, *Les Âmes Mortes*, traduction de Henri Mongault, Paris: Tériade, 1948.

Two volumes of unbound pages plus 96 etchings of illustrations and 11 etchings for the chapter headings.

The plates were executed between 1923 and 1927.

Edition of 335 numbered copies. 33 copies of *hors commerce*. All copies signed by the artist.

La Fontaine, *Les Fables de La Fontaine*, Paris: Tériade, 1952.

Two volumes of unbound pages plus 100 etchings of illustrations and 2 etchings for the frontispieces.

The plates were executed between 1927 and 1930.

Edition of 200 numbered copies with text; 85 copies hand-coloured by the artist and 100 in black-and-white; 15 copies of *hors commerce*. All copies signed by the artist in the colophon. Additional 100 numbered portfolios without text were signed by the artist.

Bible, Paris: Tériade, 1956.

Two volumes of unbound pages plus 105 etchings of illustrations and 2 etchings for the frontispieces.

The plates were executed between 1931 and 1939. By 1939, 66 etchings were printed; the remaining 39 were reworked and printed between 1952 and 1956.

Edition of 275 numbered copies, 20 copies of *hors commerce*. All copies signed by the artist. Additional 100 numbered portfolios were hand-coloured and signed by the artist.

* All illustrations were titled and numbered by Meyer Shapiro.