

## **Techno-rationalities and the motherhood trilogy of Fabrice Hadjadj: beyond the reaches of Kaufmann's *médico-religieux***

### **ABSTRACT**

Vincent Kaufmann's *Ménage à trois: littérature, médecine, religion* (2007) sets up the category of the *médico-religieux* as a tool to understand the intersection of medicine and religion within French literature. This article aims to contest this paradigm, not only in the spirit of Felski's hostility to the hermeneutics of suspicion (2015) but also because Kaufmann's account of the religious is too dependent on a Weberian model of the instrumental-rational and thereby insensitive to patterns of religious self-understanding. To illustrate and deepen this objection to Kaufmann's notion of the medico-religious, the article offers a reading of three plays by Fabrice Hadjadj, contemporary France's most prolific Catholic writer, especially by using the concept of the theandric encounter (a meeting of the divine and the human) which is sensitive to the possibility of the value-rational in a medico-religious imaginary but does not exclude the instrumental-rational. *Massacre des innocents* (2006), *Pasiphaé* (2008) and *Jeanne et les posthumains* (2014) all evoke in different ways elements of the medico-religious, including the evasion of pain and the instrumental uses of religion. Nevertheless, they also attempt to articulate an axis of the imagination that traverses the purely instrumental through experiences of religion that are epiphanic and transformational.

### **KEYWORDS**

Vincent Kaufmann, Fabrice Hadjadj, medico-religious, instrumental-rational, value-rational, theatre, theandric, pain, divine, human.

Vincent Kaufmann's *Ménage à trois: littérature, médecine, religion* (2007) is a pioneering work in its field and one that still sets the pace for scholars of French literature studying the representation of the intersection between medicine and religion. While there are many works of scholarship and even whole journals devoted to the intersection of literature and religion and the medical humanities, Kaufmann's work remains exceptional not only for its treatment of such literary themes but also its attempt to triangulate their concerns or theorise their intersections.<sup>1</sup> Cure of the body and the cure of the soul seem parallel processes that French literature has, according to Kaufmann, often associated or pitted against each other. Likewise, according to Kaufmann's thesis, in literature as in the Judeo-Christian tradition, medicine and religion often interweave their concerns, ape each other's benefits or challenge each other's legitimacy. Seeing suffering as a distinct albeit generally related issue, in the second part of his study Kaufmann analyses pain, whether imaginary or genuine, as a significant source of literary inspiration. The essays in this volume are wide ranging, deploying mostly French but also some English and German primary sources (Nathaniel Hawthorne and Thomas Mann feature, for example), and exploring the representation of psychological and physical illness, and of fleeting medical crazes like magnetism. While scholars could take issue with some of Kaufmann's assumptions or characterisations – for example, his reductionist reading of divinity in the Old Testament<sup>2</sup> - they would still have to admit the power and variety of his theses and the light they cast on landmarks in the canon, ranging from Molière, Michelet and Zola, to Daudet *fils*, Camus and Leiris.

While acknowledging Kaufmann's contribution to the field, nevertheless, this present article pushes back against Kaufmann's claim that his findings allow us to evaluate how far the 'configuration medico-religieuse imprègne la littérature moderne' (2007, 11) – an argument that seems ambitiously universal in its implications. Specifically, it questions whether this tripartite configuration, as he draws it, is adequate to cope with recent and

significant contributions to the French canon made by contemporary writer Fabrice Hadjadj, especially in the latter's theatrical work. Kaufmann appears to anticipate objections to his methods by saying he has consciously eschewed 'des analyses trop fastidieuses' (2007, 11) and that this collection of essays is but a '*patchwork*' [sic]. He even cites Deleuze's 'éloge des surfaces', by way of forestalling a critique of his work on the basis of the data's lack of representativity. What is especially peculiar here is that Deleuze's treatment of surfaces (1989) concerns levels of the unconscious, rather than conscious methods of organising data for analysis.

Still, as this article will argue, the difficulty lies less in the representative nature of Kaufmann's samples and more in his problematic conceptualisation of religion which ought not be overlooked on the sole grounds that his study concerns *le medico-religieux* rather than *le religieux*; after all, a study of the former necessarily requires an adequate conceptualisation of the latter. Kaufmann interprets the phenomenon of religion from a Durkheimian perspective, assuming that its functionalist potential – like that of law and morality – illuminates its deepest drives.<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of literary studies, however, to read the *representation* of religion in literature through the same analytical lens places two obstacles in our way. First, it requires the imposition of a hermeneutic of suspicion - to use Paul Ricoeur's phrase - the deconstructive dynamic of which refuses to allow literature to be more than the sum of its parts. That such a critical approach has its limits is an argument recently advanced by American literary critic Rita Felski. Her remedy to counter the limitations of this critical trend involves 'divesting it of presumptions of inherent rigour or intrinsic radicalism – thereby freeing up literary studies to embrace a wider range of affective styles and modes of argument' (Felski 2015, 3). This is not an invitation to a benignly colourless critical relativity when addressing the challenges of *le medico-religieux* in literature, so much as a call to

acknowledge that every critical apparatus remains hypothetical, or at least vulnerable to the probing that every hypothesis deserves.

A second problem in Kaufmann's approach concerns the cost of his hermeneutic of suspicion when applied to a category such as the *le medico-religieux*. Functionalist models of religious dynamics tend to interpret religious logic exclusively in the light of Weber's *Zweckrational* – the instrumental-rational – but, thereby, they risk collapsing the religious into the medical or some other category of the instrumental. Symptomatic of such a collapse is the continuum Kaufmann posits between writer, priest and doctor and in which the last of these is the 'plus ancien spécialiste des thérapies imaginaires' (2007: 9). If, however, literary analysis is sensitive only to the covert utilitarian in religion, is it not by the same token destined to be resistant to religious self-understanding at the cost of misinterpreting the literary representation of the religious? To assert the rights of the hermeneutics of suspicion in this case would seem to be the secularist equivalent of the critical colonisation of ethnic or indigenous literature where the latter finds itself squeezed into the only categories permitted by the hegemony of the coloniser. For literary studies simply to admit this reductionism in the analysis of *le medico-religieux*, most particularly in texts composed by a believing author, risks hindering an exploration of the specific contribution of religious faith to this domain of literary representation. The critical cost of such reductionism has been lamented by the present author in the case of the French Catholic literary revival of the Belle Epoque (Sudlow 2011, 3). In the context of theatre, a similar reservation has been advanced by the performance studies specialist Donnalee Dox (2016) who has critically evaluated and contested the reduction of all expressions of spirituality to instances of performance.

Fabrice Hadjadj's 'motherhood trilogy', *Massacre des innocents: Scènes de ménage et de tragédie* (2006), *Pasiphaé: ou comment l'on devient la mère du Minotaure* (2009) and *Jeanne et les posthumains ou le sexe de l'ange* (2014) seems to offer an appropriate source of

data to question Kaufmann's model of the intersection of literature, medicine and religion; although these texts are drawn from one author only, an in-depth qualitative analysis of these works is sufficient to show some of the shortcomings in Kaufmann's schema. Hereafter the plays will be referred to as *Massacre*, *Paisphaé* and *Jeanne*. Fabrice Hadjadj is one of contemporary French Catholicism's most articulate, provocative and prolific voices. His oeuvre, which numbers nearly thirty works, includes philosophical essays, scriptural exegesis, art commentary and even original songs, but it is in the field of drama where he has been the most active and perhaps the most inventive.<sup>4</sup> That said, Hadjadj's drama is very much a theatre of the word which lends itself less to questions of theatrical performativity and more to a *mise en scène* of ideas that battle through the competing discourses of the plays' protagonists; Hadjadj is himself most often described as a philosopher, even if he sees himself especially as a creative artist (Sudlow 2020). *Massacre* dramatises a series of imagined scenes that happen during the gospel episode narrated in *Matthew 2: 16-18* when the guards of Herod the Great execute all male children in Bethlehem under two years of age in an attempt to eliminate the child Jesus. *Pasiphaé* retells the tale of King Minos's unfortunate queen, cursed with a zoophilic passion for a bull that leads her to conceive the monstrous Minotaur. *Jeanne*, in contrast, is an original futuristic story (containing intertextual references to Joan of Arc's trial) about a perfect society in which the orgasmic and procreative functions of sex have been entirely separated, and against which regime the principal character of Joan revolts by sleeping with one of her co-workers (having been inspired to do so by some mysterious angelic voice). Although these plays were not written programmatically as a trilogy, they all interweave concerns about religion, the gods, grief, motherhood and the techno-medical tools that humans have introduced into the sphere of fertility.<sup>5</sup> More importantly for our purposes here, in all three works we discover representations of religion which this article will classify as theandric moments – theandric

denoting the meeting place of the human and the divine. While such moments could of course provide a therapeutic effect, or be the occasion of some utilitarian exchange – we will see this notably in *Pasiphaé* – Hadjadj also represents them as a place where the distinct agencies of divinity and humanity can become as it were *sociés*; and where religion returns to its etymological sense of *re-ligare* – the tie together again – bypassing in certain cases the instrumental-rational and embracing the *Wertrational* (the value-rational) of a communion of persons.<sup>6</sup> The three plays thus represent theandric moments from the perspective of three distinct theological models: in *Massacre* there is the transcendent Jarweh of the Hebrews and proto-Christians, in *Pasiphaé* the vengeful, merchant gods of the Greeks, and finally in *Jeanne* the absent God of a future dystopia. All three plays evoke in various ways the medico-religious – through metaphor in *Massacre* and through concretely engaging with its problematics in *Pasiphaé* and *Jeanne* – and yet all three are also resistant to the kind of reductionism that Kaufmann has built into his understanding of religion within the conceptualisation of the medico-religious. Were we exclusively to apply Kaufmann’s model to such data, we would miss half of their imaginative provocation as works of religious literary expression published in an irreligious context. This especially is why it is important to contest critically Kaufmann’s assumptions about the nature of the medico-religious.

In the course of the analysis that follows, further proof of how Hadjadj undermines the functional reductionism of religion (and its medico-religious assimilation) will also be observed in his treatment of pain which is a central feature of Hadjadj’s theatre and which comes under scrutiny in the second part of Kaufmann’s work. All three plays considered here engage in a critique of human attempts to therapize or evade pain through fake rationalisations (*Massacre*), through technology (*Pasiphaé*) and through the suppression of transcendent teleology (*Jeanne*). The question here is whether these analgesic therapies should be interpreted simply as instrumental actions, or whether Hadjadj’s representation of

them should be understood differently? While Hadjadj (2018) claims his art is simply creative rather than apologetic, the underlying contours of his theatre seem distinctly evangelical.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, his representation of the *Wertrational* in the context of the medico-religious provides solid empirical grounds on which to contest the assumptions that inform Kaufmann's model.

### **The three plays**

As we noted above, to conceive of the religious as a place of theandric encounter is not to set aside the instrumental purposes of religion but it is to broaden the category so that instantiations of the religious can be identified beyond the instrumental-rational. The three plays of Hadjadj that constitute the data of this study offer representations that are sometimes instrumental in character without foreclosing on terrain that lies beyond the purely instrumental. While *Pasiphaé* with its roots in Greek myth approaches the instrumental-rational most closely, *Massacre* and *Jeanne* draw into the space of the theandric encounter two theological problematics: why would a divinity let bad things happen to good people (*Massacre*), and how can a personal god become imaginable in the context of medical hegemony (*Jeanne*)? Here we will consider these works in chronological order, also taking into account where appropriate Hadjadj's representation of the evasion of pain as a test of instrumental action within the theandric moment.

#### *Massacre*

*Massacre* is a play without a plot that stages a series of scenes recounting the reverberations of the killing of male children in Bethlehem by the guards of Herod the Great. A wide array of characters have their moment on stage, from a drunken soldier trying to process what he

has done, to scribes of the temple joking about the ignorance of the Magi from the East, to the Magi themselves who are grief stricken because their visit to Jerusalem brought the birth of Jesus to Herod's attention and thereby sealed the fate of the infants of Bethlehem. Arguably, the two most powerful scenes in this play, however, are the soliloquies delivered by representative examples of the extremes of Jewish society reacting to the massacre: at first, a lone 'berger' in Scene 3 (33-42), who bumbles haplessly like a country yokel across the stage, and King Herod himself in Scene 9 (107-19), haranguing the audience directly with a flood of impenitent remorse and regal bitterness. Now, while a Kaufmannian reading of Hadjadj's Herod would be possible, showing the medico-religious at work on metaphorical and anthropological footings, the shepherd's scene seems to represent a form of the religious that exceeds the explanatory power of Kaufmann's thesis.

During Herod's soliloquy, the audience finds itself in the presence of one of the great villains of ancient history, a murderous and conniving schemer who played the Roman and the Jewish leaders alike and with more skill than his gospel portrayal might depict (Marshak, 2015). Hadjadj's Herod is a duly masterful and imposing figure and breaks the fourth wall of the theatre to tantalise the audience with false concern for their comfort and entertainment, before taunting them about coming to a play about a massacre. Nevertheless, this figure of magisterial and majestic authority, is suffering barely concealed pain, rubbing and scratching his hands – Lady Macbeth-like – which he has been unable to get clean since the massacre (115).

Herod presents, therefore, with psychosomatic symptoms that suggest the turbulence the massacre provokes within him. What he does about this is significant, however, for grasping the power and the limitations of Kaufmann's category of the medico-religious. First, Herod attempts to justify the pain rationally, admitting his hands are

Couvertes de sang, oui, mais comme celles du praticien qui sectionne le membre menaçant de gangrène et de septicémie [...] Mieux vaut que périsse la partie et que le tout ne s'en aille pas à la mort, et c'est ce commandement que je suis, en rigoureuse médecine. / L'opération est douloureuse, je le concède, mais elle n'en est que plus urgente.<sup>8</sup> (110)

In other words, in medicalising his crime metaphorically – an action akin to medicalising the novelistic (Kaufmann 2007, 65) – Herod's actions draw on the justifying power of the instrumental-rational; who but moral-bound absolutists could object if his infanticidal actions result in the good health of the body politic? The function of the medical metaphor with all its flattering overtones is intended by Herod to underline just how practical (and normative) his orders had really been. Thereby, and unwittingly, Herod only proves that his imagination is limited to the scope of the useful and the immediate.

Very quickly, however, Herod shifts his position. From having tried to suppress the pain rationally (justifying it as the action of a surgeon), he now searches out an irrational analgesic, and launches himself into an encomium of the massacred children whose death he represents as a heroic act of sacrifice. In other words, having just medicalised his crime a few moments ago, Herod now sacralises it:

Quant à ces petits-là, je n'oubliais pas de dire à mes soldats pour qu'ils ne perdent pas cœur, ces petits-là, ils étaient les héros, les sacrifiés sur l'autel de demain, / Mes victimes, sans doute, mais aussi mes ministres, / Mes aides, / Mes petits soldats mêmes, / Ceux qui auront permis l'avènement meilleur, / Des fleurettes coupées avant qu'elles pourrissent, / Un frais bouquet de thym offert à l'avenir (113-14).

Curiously, Herod's justifications in this passage become properly *religious* in the sense that René Girard (1972) assigns to the term. For, having sought the death of the children, Herod

now acknowledges that they have acquired the sacred and venerable status of scapegoats. The Kaufmannian medico-religious thus enters fully into the structure of Herod's religiosity but only because Herod's religion is a process of instrumental actions designed to heal by inflicting injury. There is no room here even for vengeful gods; only for self-serving humans.

In sharp contrast, Hadjadj's shepherd could have walked out of any Shakespearean comedy, so benign and insightful does he seem.<sup>9</sup> Yet if this is a fool, he is a holy fool; his opening lines on the nature of prayer as a process that concerns more divine agency than human effort echo the kind of mystical discourse found in the writings of Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross.<sup>10</sup> Having longed to be a rabbi for many years, he has become to his great surprise one of the shepherds of Christmas night to whom angels announced the birth of the Jewish messiah. Nevertheless, we learn that in spite of it all – his piety as a Jew and his role as a witness to the new-born child – this man's own son has been murdered by Herod's guards in the massacre. Unlike Herod who appears locked in his own utilitarian imagination, this man has encountered God in two theandric moments: first, in a vision of angelic glory, and then in a tragedy of seeming divine neglect that promises life-long pain.

If we were to apply a medical interpretation to this narrative, we would have to say the shepherd's religion functions not as bereavement therapy but rather as the cause of a psychological and existential crisis. Through his belief, he is caught in a blasphemous double bind that pits his bitter injury against his tenacious convictions. Thus, he rails against the coming of the messiah – *'Ton Messie, s'il faut que nos gosses en crèvent, nous préférons qu'il reste dans ton ciel bien au chaud !'* (41) – and yet he still believes. Thereby, the paradox of what has happened becomes a kind of epiphanic shock, enlightening him to the nature of divinity and his own broken heart:

Je vois bien que je vous appelle encore, mon Dieu / A qui qu'on s'en remettrait,  
 sinon ? Y a pas où aller. Et voilà, / On vous met en procès contre vous-même./  
 Puisque c'est encore vous le juge, c'est devant vous que je vous accuse, / Et puisque  
 c'est vous la victime, c'est vous qui êtes le plus à plaindre. (41)

There is no minister here to function as a doctor or guide, and in the face of his anger both medico-religious and even theologo-religious interpretations at first breakdown.

As a witness of the birth of Jesus, however, the shepherd has himself become a kind of prophet, but one who now laments that his friends and neighbours ever believed a word he said about the child in Bethlehem. From this perspective, his religion is less psychologically therapeutic and more existentially transformative; compared to bodily processes, it denotes less a recovery and more a metamorphosis. Thus, in the final lines, after his repeated rage-filled objections of 'mais' have simply given way to bleating 'mêêêêh' (42), he realises post-climactically that he has become 'Comme une bête laineuse et tondue et qui a froid' (ibid.). The problem this raises for the Kaufmann's category of medico-religious is that the instrumental-rational offers no way of interpreting the shepherd's experience. There is no comfort in the shepherd's experience, but neither is the shepherd simply left uncured, like the powerful but hapless Herod. He becomes something else instead; a being reconfigured by the theandric moment he is living.

The shepherd and Herod thus bestride this play from their respective positions towards its beginning and its end. In terms of their differences, it is surely striking that not once does the shepherd attempt to hide his eyes from the events of the massacre or evade the pain it causes; his rage against God is a measure of his honest confrontation of the loss that has swept over him. Herod in contrast is in flight from a pain that is revealed in his physical symptoms. While the shepherd stands up to the force paradoxical events in which he is

unprotected by his belief, Herod resorts to the resources of instrumental-rational pain relief, whether it be by the rational advantages of bloody amputation or the irrational memorialisation of deaths cheapened by a sacralising misrepresentation. While the shepherd undergoes a transformation that comes upon him by confronting the horror of his loss, Herod oscillates between the metaphors of the operating table and the myths of religious sacrifice – between the imaginaries of medicine and religion – without ever finding an authentic anchorage for his abominable act. In this light, once again, while Kaufmann's medico-religious allows us to interpret Hadjadj's Herod – or at least the limitations of Herod's own moral imagination – it struggles to account fully for the experiences that Hadjadj's shepherd evokes.

### *Pasiphaé*

In retelling the story of Pasiphaé – wife of Minos, mother of the Minotaur and daughter of the sun himself – Hadjadj (2008) represents the theandric moment as something that could be plotted along the spectrum of the rational-instrumental through a relationship with the gods characterised by trade (in the sense of exchange), competition and even hostility. At least until the final few scenes of *Pasiphaé*, religion is not a place of transformation, as it was for the shepherd in *Massacre*, but of struggle between competing power centres where the human agents gyrate wildly between obeisance and revolt without any means of equilibrium. Moreover, in this gyration there are the first signs of a breakdown in the medico-religious imaginary. What the gods have decreed by fate (the death of all Minos's lovers and Pasiphaé's natural inability to copulate with a bull) is contested by medico-technological means that offer the imagination new possibilities – possibilities that will be denounced eventually by Pasiphaé as 'un rien gonflé de rêve' (83). While pain as a physiological trial is

more muted in *Pasiphaé* than in *Massacre*, the evasion of pain through technological solutions is omnipresent and highly significant.

In many respects, the representation of instrumental-rational religion in *Pasiphaé* draws on the ancient classical model in which distant and often capricious gods must be appeased.<sup>11</sup> Early in the play, Minos announces his intention of pacifying the god Poseidon by slaying a pure white bull (17). Likewise, Minos knows he has angered his wife by his constant infidelities, but he relies on the gods to calm her, rather than exercising control over himself. This kind of displacement of subjective responsibility – transferring liability outside the individual – is found also in *Pasiphaé* and her servant Oenone who blame the queen's zoophilia solely on a curse of the gods (55). If this dilemma seems to recall the story of Racine's *Phèdre*, it should be remembered that in Greek mythology Phaedra is the daughter of *Pasiphae* and Minos. The point here, however, is that Hadjadj represents the theandric relations in *Pasiphaé* primarily as loci of instrumental-rational exchange where human and divine agencies have become rivals. There is a meeting with the gods, but it is not epiphanic and transformational, so much as conflictual and potentially destructive.

There are real-world consequences too – not merely theoretical or abstractly theological ones – for a religion whose dynamics are those of jealous, cursing gods and disempowered human puppets with no control over their own actions. First, it does not take long before the mercantile piety of Minos becomes fury at what he deems to be the wayward behaviour of the gods (87). Second, the humans become locked into a logic of mimetic emulation of the gods that they otherwise honour. Gripped, for example, by her zoophilic feelings but unreconciled with them, *Pasiphaé* is torn between the desire to be either wholly bestial or wholly divine:

Vivre au niveau de la mangeoire, / Ne pouvoir s'écarter des routes de l'instinct [...] /  
Ou bien respirer à la cime de l'Olympe [...] /Enfin, être une bête ou un dieu, / La

brute sans conscience ou la divinité sans juge, Incorruptible, impeccable, impunie.  
(30)

If we read these sentiments through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory (1972), it makes sense that emulation of the gods' privileges should lead to a dawning rivalry with them, before unleashing a raging battle between monstrous doubles.<sup>12</sup> In *Pasiphaé*, that rivalry is embodied by the figure of Dédale, the Cretan technological genius (and father of the unfortunate Icarus who does not appear in the drama), for whom 'il n'est point de magie qui résiste à la science' (12). As Hadjadj remarks in an essay published alongside the play, 'L'essence des machines de Dédale est d'abolir le tragique. Notre déchirure de bas en haut se ramène pour lui à un simple dysfonctionnement' (120-21). Here, it could be argued that the evasion of pain that Dédale facilitates becomes itself a kind of new value-rational, the imaginative consequences of which Hadjadj will experiment more with in *Jeanne* (Sudlow, 2019).

Furthermore, in *Dédale* the filiation of the technological spirit seems to find its reference point not in the rationalities of the Christian response to materiality – as Lynn White (1967) argued in his famous article blaming ecological disaster on Christian technological rationalities of exploitation – but in a model of religion as trade and competition and which induces alternative strategies (medical, technological, etc) for reshaping reality. In fact, Dédale's emergence in this play as the first medical fertility specialist – creating a primitive prophylactic to control Minos's death-dealing ejaculate (13) and a bovine sex doll that facilitates Pasiphaé's copulation with Poseidon's bull (36) – suggests not the complementarity of doctor and priest but their rivalry. The religious appears here alongside the medical, not as a way stage along a shared spectrum of instrumental reason (à la Kaufmann) but in transversal opposition to it. Thereby, Dédale's declaration towards the end of the play that his own inventions are 'rouages dans la plus grand machine des dieux' (97) rings out with the delicious irony of an indifferent deist *avant la lettre*.

Perhaps because of the opposition that the play evokes between the medical and the religious, Hadjadj's ending turns *Pasiphaé's* representation of religion on its head. The importance of the notion of theandric encounter becomes ostensibly puzzling here because on a purely human level it is through encountering her child – and experiencing a free communion of persons – that Pasiphaé's relationship with the gods passes beyond rivalry. Indeed, since the Greek gods are shaped by relations that are instrumental-rational in nature, Pasiphaé's transformation appears to be not theandric but post-theistic. How Pasiphaé arrives at this point, however, is crucial to solving such a puzzle.

First, she breaks with the instrumental-rational spectrum in choosing not to abort the Minotaur in her womb, in spite of Dédale's willing offer to perform such a procedure. Thus far in the drama, she has been driven on by the sexual possibilities that Dédale's machines facilitated; now, she comes up short when she compares the instrumental advantages of Dédale's 'aspirateur d'embryons' (76-7) with the value of the monster in her womb:

Si le mieux n'était pas de réaliser nos désirs, mais de les purifier? / Si la tâche était,  
non pas de rendre le monde meilleur, non, / Mais de devenir meilleure soi-même, /  
Soi-même dans le monde pire ? / [...] La grandeur de mon père n'est pas de dominer  
dans un indifférent surplomb / Mais de donner le jour [...] Afin que [...] / Nous ayons  
à choisir : / Ou bien biaiser encore par des subterfuges / Ou bien les assumer dans la  
justice jusqu'à la fin. (80-81)

There is a hint here of another Greek theology – one that is more related to the universal benignity Pasiphaé alludes to in her father, the sun – yet it is not one easily reconciled with the appeasing, rival-ridden logic that the play has thus far dramatized. The second phase in Pasiphaé's transformation appears in a burgeoning penitence for her zoophilia which denotes a rediscovery of subjective responsibility (as opposed to her being the victim of some divine

diktat). In fact, when Minos and Pasiphaé finally meet after the birth of the Minotaur, Pasiphaé recognises that she was responsible and that her responsibility renders her actions monstrous. She announces her guilt, however, while pointing the finger at Minos himself: ‘J’étais devenue folle, et toi, pas là pour me venir en aide, / Tu filais doux parmi tes captives’ (91-2). Minos too then is responsible, yet in that case the gods are even more distant than ever, present to Minos and Pasiphaé neither through their favours nor their curses. Minos himself finishes the play with a soliloquy in which he admits: ‘Je ne sais quel dieu peut sauver [l’homme] de sa misère’ (102).

Still, by this point *Pasiphaé* has already solved the strange absence of the gods at its conclusion through the paradoxical epiphany of Pasiphaé’s child, the Minotaur. When Pasiphaé appeals to her husband Minos for the sake of her half-man half-bull child, she argues thus: ‘Si toi et moi sommes coupables, lui n’a rien fait de mal. / Il est exempt de toute faute, et plus encore : il est prophète. / Le monstre nous montre qui nous sommes au-dedans’ (94). In assigning to the Minotaur the role of prophet – i.e. a figure who articulates some revelation – Hadjadj appears to be drawing on two sources. First, as a symbol of ‘altérité radicale’ (Korff-Sausse, 2001:101), the Minotaur offers Hadjadj the possibility of reintroducing *en scène* a form of divinity that is radically different from the one proposed by the mercantile and instrumentalist theology of Greek myth. The bestiality of the Minotaur becomes thereby as revelatory as the ‘bête laineuse et tondue’ (Hadjadj, 2006: 42) evoked by the shepherd in *Massacre*. Hadjadj’s understanding of the dignity and worth of the unborn is likewise written into his portrayal of the Minotaur whose very presence renders him undesirable.<sup>13</sup> The second source that Hadjadj draws on here to reimagine the theandric moment lies in the close parallels between the Minotaur and Christ. Like Christ, the Minotaur is a fusion of two entities: a bull-man rather than a god-man. Like Christ, Hadjadj’s Minotaur is also an innocent party, even if he appears guilty. Finally, like Christ, Hadjadj’s Minotaur is

defined both as a priest and a victim. Far from eliminating the gods, therefore, Hadjadj's drama breaks with a Greek theology of trade (the instrumental rational), imagining a new theology of theandric encounter (as a value-rational proposition) in the revelatory paradoxes embodied by the Minotaur. Thus, the theandric moment is itself transformed in a very human encounter between expectant mother and her unborn outcast whose radical difference articulates his worth – a worth unavailable to a merely instrumental-rational measure. Unwittingly engendered, the Minotaur is the unplanned-for offspring of the techno-biomedical brilliance of Dédale. Yet, in Pasiphae's rejection of the Minotaur's abortion – by which Dédale could have rid the world of the effects of his own medical mistakes – Hadjadj breaks the spectrum of instrumental-rational action by a transversal thrust of the imagination, positing anew the value of a being who has been conceived, even though his existence is inconceivable.

### *Jeanne*

In *Jeanne et les posthumains* all the tendencies that are represented in *Pasiphaé* – religion circumscribed by trade, the power of Dédale's instrumental mastery and the tendency of some characters to push all responsibility outside of themselves – are drawn into a picture of the future in which the medico-religious has tried to foreclose entirely on the religious as such. Nevertheless, by the end of the play the religious endures, no longer as a point along the Kaufmannian spectrum of the medico-religious but, as in *Pasiphaé*, through a transversal opposition to the instrumental-rational. *Jeanne et les posthumains* takes place in a civilisation called “DéMo” (short for *démocratie mondiale* and only one letter short of *démon*).<sup>14</sup> “DéMo”, which emerges after an event the play labels ‘la Conflagration Universelle’ (Hadjadj 2014, 17), is a soft authoritarian regime with a managed economy, an uber-state that

blends the gaudy commercialism satirised in Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1987) with the biomedical resources of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and with the total vision and control of a screen culture anticipated by Paul Virilio (2005; Sudlow 2015). In this future world, religion as exchange or cure has become extinct and the earthly benefits that the Greeks sought through divine means are delivered by supreme technological mastery. Pain and illness have almost been eliminated, but thanks to euthanasia, the ultimate painkiller, the death rate has remained constant (Hadjadj 2014, 136). In such a context, the medico-religious could only be conceived of as the triumph of the medical over the religious as a way of knowing or ordering the world.

As the play opens, two 'psycho-ingénieurs' – the medico-technological descendants of Dédale – prepare to interrogate Joan d'Ark-Market who has had physical relations with a co-worker. In "DÉMo" this is seen as a doubly irresponsible act since all procreation is organised by commercially-sponsored laboratories, and all individual gratification delivered by 'Playbox IV', a virtual-reality platform for hard-wired erotic neurological activation, capable of simulating every imaginable form of sexual congress unrestricted by sex, genitalia or species. While Joan's fornication might seem surprising in such a scenario, especially for an avowedly Catholic author, it marks a revalorisation of embodiment and a rejection of the angelism or decorporalisation that Hadjadj (2018) associates with an extreme techno-cultures. In line with the canons of classical French literature, no such 'events' are dramatized in the play; only narrated obliquely.

The play is resolute in staging a dramatic lampooning of the instrumental-become-omnipotent; in *Jeanne* the supremacy of the medical makes of it a new kind of value-rational whose advocates find Joan's actions incomprehensible. In this scenario, however, religion and medicine continue to meet but in indirect and subtle ways. For example, the omnipotence of the instrumental-rational is epitomised by the notion of the 'grand pardon', a protocol for a

medically-executed memory washing applied to “DéMo”’s most recalcitrant malefactors and presumably applied to Joan as the curtain falls at the end of the play. Yet even this protocol is itself an unconscious tribute to religion (because it ensures a ‘pardon’). While the Christian model of religion had offered individuals the recovery of blamelessness through forgiveness and a divine forgetting of sins, “DéMo” renders individuals blameless and harmless through an imposed human forgetting – neurologically induced – in the interests of the state.

The pretensions of this supremacy are contested by Joan directly. When, for example, Joan is asked whether DéMo has ever failed to offer her all the wellbeing and comfort possible, her response is both merciless and unsentimental:

Peut-être que ce qui me manque, / C’est rien. / Peut-être que ce qui nous manque, /  
C’est le manque lui-même. Peut-être que notre détresse et de ne plus gémir, / Et peut-  
être que notre espérance n’est plus rien d’autre que cela : / Sentir le désespoir comme  
un trou dans le ventre (117).

In other words, the assertion of the instrumental-rational and the perfection to which it must aspire comes at a profound human cost. Joan’s intuition here is the intuition of Augustine’s *cor inquietum* according to which human fulfilment is a mirage outside of the perfection that only theandric communion guarantees. In contrast, the perfect world of the techno-scientific “DéMo” in which every mystery is simply ignorance and every disorder a mere malfunction, is experienced by Joan – who is at this point irreligious – as intrinsically false. It is a measure of “DéMo”’s existential dilemma that its representatives can only interpret Joan’s words as the result of illness or criminal remote control (although before the end of the play her interrogators will succumb clandestinely to Joan’s advocacy of the corporeal).

The final stage of the clash of religion and medicine in *Jeanne et les posthumains* comes in the third and final encounter between Joan and her interrogators. The unborn child

she has conceived is diagnosed with an unnamed genetic condition and the psycho-engineers insist she have an abortion. They even promise her that the foetal remains will be put to good therapeutic use and that Joan can receive shares in the products developed from her foetus's remains; to do anything else it would be a most inefficient waste. It is not that "DéMo" sinks here into mere vulgarity but that in a world of the pure instrumental-rational, there is no other measure of the perfection of "DéMo"'s procedures and the complete efficiency of its resources. Here, we find the Hadjadjian representation of the transversal tension between two extremes: on the one hand, medicine as a kind of totalising biopolitical techno-rationality that has no use for the imperfect foetus inside Joan, and on the other this encounter of persons – Joan and her unborn – which in Hadjadj's dramatic schema renders a theandric moment imaginable once more. In fact, like the shepherd in *Massacre* or the repentant Pasiphaé, Joan towards the end of the play is drawn into a similitude with the divine, as she unconsciously begins to recite to her unborn child the words of God's compassion for humanity, taken from the prophet Ezekiel:

À ta naissance, / au jour où tu vins au monde, / on ne t'a pas coupé le cordon, / on ne t'a pas lavé dans l'eau pour te nettoyer [...] Tu fus jetée en pleine campagne, / par dégoût de toi, / au jour de ta naissance. / Mais je suis passé près de toi et je t'ai vue / te débattant dans ton sang. Et je t'ai dit: "Vis !" (116-117)

In his introductory essay to the play Hadjadj underscores the importance of this moment of compassion, reflecting on the connection between the mercy of the mother (which defies the instrumental-rational choice of the abortion) and the compassion of the divine. Alluding to the earlier plays of *Massacre* and *Pasiphaé*, he argues: 'En hébreu *rahamim* dit à la fois les entrailles féminines et la miséricorde divine. Mettons que cette *Jeanne et les posthumains* est le dernier volet d'une *Trilogie des Rahamim*' (14). Given such an association in Hadjadj's mind, it is little wonder that Joan ceases to listen to the pleadings of her persecutors and at

intervals cries out ‘Mon Dieu’ three times, before being manacled automatically in her chair and slowly drawn into the shadows. That Joan at this point has undergone a transformation similar to the shepherd of *Massacre* and Pasiphaé is borne out by her final lines in which her sense of abandonment – ‘O mon ange, où es-tu? / [...] Est-ce que tu peux m’abandonner?’ (121) – echoes the desolation of Jesus on the cross, crying out, “Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani?” (My God, why have you forsaken me?). Both lines are in fact an allusion to a prayer contained in Psalm 22 of the *Book of Psalms*. Hadjadj’s defiant conclusion is no attack on medicine as such, but on the supremacy of the instrumental-rational articulated through an extremist form of the medico-political.

One final word ought to be said here about Hadjadj’s choice of genre which has remained tangential in this analysis of Hadjadj’s treatment of the medico-religious. Other plays of Hadjadj, such as *Passion: Résurrection* (2003) or *Solo pour un clown* (2013) are much bolder in their deployment of innovative theatrical devices or *détournement* of dramatic conventions (Sudlow 2020). *Massacres* and *Pasiphaé* might also work just as well as short stories, rather than as theatrical pieces. Nevertheless, it is paradoxically the last of the plays considered in the analysis above that comes closest to the *embodied sensibility of spirit* evoked by Dox (2016) in her study of how the spiritual can shape performance art – paradoxically because it is the play which most excludes the divine from the stage almost until the denouement. Moreover, it is arguably Hadjadj’s sparing use of dramatic gestures in this play – realised only at the end in Jeanne’s unconscious citing of Scripture and her chair being drawn slowly into the darkness – that ensures its power as a piece of theatre.<sup>15</sup> In Joan’s defeat by the medical powers of “DéMo”, the embodied sensibility of the divine is precisely that of the fundamental imaginary of Christianity itself which takes as its central icon the defeated figure of a crucified criminal. From a Kaufmannian perspective, Jeanne’s obliteration by the medically inspired ‘grand pardon’ might be seen as the last phase of a

medico-religious process that resolves itself ultimately in some practical functionality. In contrast, Hadjadj's dramatic configuring of Joan with Christ in this scene – citing the words of the Old Testament and being obscured by darkness<sup>16</sup> – is a sign not of surrender to the functional supremacy of the instrumental but of confidence in the metamorphosis that the Christian is promised in death (for the 'grand pardon' is mortal in its implications, if not in its corporeal effects). Thereby, Hadjadj represents mortality no longer as a problem to be solved by the ever-greater mastery of medical means but as a passage towards theandric communion inconceivable within the scope of a techno-medical problematic.

## **Conclusion**

To return to our starting point, Kaufmann's model of the medico-religious can no doubt illumine some dimensions of Hadjadj's imagination, but once such a writer passes beyond the imaginary patterns set down by the limits of the instrumental-rational (on which the medico-religious paradigm lives), the Kaufmannian model no longer serves its purpose adequately. That this this should be the case again underscores the pertinence of the argument (Sudlow 2011, 3) that certain critical categories wrongly forestall full engagement with religious literature because the latter's imaginaries and assumptions threaten to transgress secularity's own boundaries. In this sense, Dox's view (2016) that the spiritual is capable of shaping performativity, rather than being merely another manifestation of it, allows us to grasp the significance of Hadjadj's representation of the medico-religious through the genre of drama.

Hadjadj is happy with his relative obscurity (Hadjadj, 2019), content to be a creative artist ignored by the critical world but read by a small number of appreciative readers (including Fields Medal winner Laurent Laforgue, Olivier Rey and, perhaps paradoxically,

Catherine Millet). Still, it would be a shame if he continued to be ignored only because critics did not understand his coordinates.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent works that explore the intersection of literature and religion or theology include Knight and Lee (2009), Davies and Garfitt (2014) and King and Werner Winter (2019). Works exploring the intersection of literature and medicine include Hunsaker Hawkins and Chandler McIntyre (2000), Carson, Cole and Carlin (2014) and Crawford, Brown and Charise (2020). Much scholarship tangentially related to the themes of Kaufmann's study can be found in the pages of journals such as *Religion and Literature*, *Literature and Theology* and *Literature and Medicine* but the author has found nothing that tackles the triangular problematic of religion, medicine and literature set out by Kaufmann.

<sup>2</sup> On the paradoxes of the God of the Old Testament who is considerably more complex than Kaufmann allows for, see Lamb (2011).

<sup>3</sup> On the functionalism of religion in Durkheim's thought, see especially Pickering, 2009: 308

<sup>4</sup> His plays thus far include the following: *A quoi sert de gagner le monde. Une vie de saint François Xavier* (2001), *Passion : Résurrection* (2003), *Massacre des innocents : Scènes de ménage et de tragédie* (2006), *Pasiphaé: ou comment l'on devient la mère du Minotaure* (2009), *Rien à faire. Solo pour un clown* (2013) and *Jeanne et les posthumains ou le sexe de l'ange* (2015). Another play was staged in 2019 and its publication has been announced: *La conversion de Dom Juan : tragédie en trois actes*.

<sup>5</sup> This is an observation Hadjadj himself makes in the essay accompanying the published version of *Jeanne* (2014).

<sup>6</sup> The notion of communion of persons not only evokes the Christian theology of the relations between the persons of the Trinity but also Hadjadj's own view (2008) of the interpersonal union that characterises erotic relations between the sexes.

<sup>7</sup> There is little or no engagement with Hadjadj's writing either in French or English but alongside this article the author (Sudlow 2019 and 2020) has just published another two with the aim of opening up Hadjadj's writings to wider critical evaluation.

<sup>8</sup> Herod here is made to anticipate the counsel of the High Priest Caiaphas in John 18:14 that it better for one man to die than for the entire nation to perish.

<sup>9</sup> Hadjadj is an anglophile with a passion for English and American literature. He has completed his own translation of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (Hadjadj 2016) and is engaged in a doctoral project on the works of American novelist Walker Percy (Hadjadj, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Teresa's *El Castillo Interior* (1577) or John's *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (1579?) which are both classics of Spanish literature, as well as landmarks in spiritual theology.

<sup>11</sup> A limited but valuable map of the influence of Greek myths on contemporary world literature can be found in McConnell and Hall, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Girard's theory of imitation – an imitation that leads to hostility but is eventually controlled by sacred practices that diffuse conflict – is found across a series of texts but its best summary is *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (1978).

<sup>13</sup> In his essay *Réussir sa mort*, Hadjadj will go much further, deconstructing the justifications for abortion as myths that conceal a persecutory logic: 'Le climat de notre société respire ces charniers minuscules. Une structure d'illusion et de péché nous fait croire que le petit d'homme est une menace et que l'on peut construire un bonheur contre lui. Cette structure

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charpente si bien notre siècle que beaucoup [...] pratiquent le meurtre en croyant ainsi rendre un culte à la liberté humaine.' (2005 : 200).

<sup>14</sup> It was Hadjadj (2019) who made this observation to me in the course of an interview.

<sup>15</sup> The stage direction states: '*De soudains bracelets métalliques immobilisent Joan sur son siège. Une porte s'ouvre dans le fond. Le siège recule lentement dans l'ombre.*' (Hadjadj 2014, 121).

<sup>16</sup> These two phenomena are mentioned together in Matthew's gospel account of the death of Christ: 'Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"' (*Matthew* 27: 45-46) – the latter being an allusion to the twenty-second Psalm from the Old Testament: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (*Psalms*, 22: 1).