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**Intertextuality and/in Cadiot**

Dominic Glynn, IMLR

It is a measure of Olivier Cadiot’s current standing in the French literary landscape that an increasing number of young scholars are discussing his work in their doctoral theses.(1) Moreover, those working in the emerging field of ‘Cadiot studies’, well-versed in literary theory, appear to be most interested in digging out hidden references that form part of inter as well as intra-textual networks. Yet despite much excellent fine-grained analysis of the mechanics of Cadiot’s writing, not enough has been made of the fact that the poet cum novelist cum playwright titillates, plays with and frustrates his reader in each of his works by referring to others. For, just as Cadiot directs them to an impressive library of literary, critical, filmic, musical, popular, historical and autobiographical material, he also pokes fun at their constant reference hunting. In this essay, I wish to highlight his contribution to intertextuality by briefly exploring the paradox of seemingly encouraging yet simultaneously ridiculing the tracing of sources.

Readers of this article unfamiliar with Olivier Cadiot’s work will no doubt be amused to learn that he was appointed associate author of the Avignon theatre festival in 2010 despite never having published a play, is frequently labelled a poet though he has only one book of poetry to his name, and occasionally a novelist, though he displays a notable lack of interest in narrative. Contradictions and paradoxes are therefore key to understanding his major works, which are published by POL, an independent publisher that nevertheless belongs to the Gallimard group. Moreover, Cadiot’s tastes are heteroclite: he has sampled the likes of Gilles Deleuze for pop collaborations with guitarist Rodolphe Burger, translated the Bible and Gertrude Stein’s *Doctor Faustus lights the lights*. Such a range of interests explains the particularly dense networks of allusions that characterise his writing.

Cadiot crafted his first major work, *L’Art poétic* (1988), with the jubilatory mock innocence of a child playing with a shredder, and the help of a cutter rather than a pen. In this OVNI (Objet Verbal Non Identifié), phrases are extricated from dry generic grammar books to provide lively nonsensical conversations – ‘Le voice qui vient/ Ha! Vous voilà!/ Vous ne venez pas? Si’ – (2) and novels are cut up to provide tense revision exercises. Yet, with the exception of a handful of misleading signposts in the form of chapter titles (‘La Tempête’, ‘Davy Crockett’) no indicators of the provenance of the textual imports are provided. And while the reader may recognise hole-punched extracts of Chateaubriand, the enjoyment of reading stems more from the performance aspect of having to fill in the blanks – a quality which is emphasised when Cadiot delivers live readings at breakneck speed. Indeed, the major concern is in seeing how these orphaned fragments of text combine as grammatical cogs in a sentence-machine to spark curious little incidents, rather than how one might trace their genetic heritage.

However, given the plethora of references provided in later works, when he abandons cutting up in favour of ‘writing’, it is easy to see why allusion spotting has become such a favourite game of Cadiot scholars. Disguised quotes, translations, appropriations, parodies and pastiches: the writer uses the whole gamut of techniques to refer to personal events, historical memoirs, novels, poems, photographs and films. References to the latter are particularly common, such as in *Fairy queen*, where the narrator describes a scene in Godard’s *Pierrot le fou* during which Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo play out an episode of the Vietnam war to American navy officers: ‘elle faisait les avions en piqué, les ailes 45°, vrr, lui l’impact des mitrailleuses, elle en même temps imitait la victime, bridant ses yeux, napalm, forêt, serpents, herbes des marais, temple, gong, voilà l’idée’. (3) Those familiar with Godard’s work will notice that certain details do not correspond exactly with what occurs in the film. Indeed, as Michel Gauthier notes, in Cadiot’s work recollections of films are usually partial.(4) In *Pierrot le fou*, it is Belmondo who imitates the planes and the machine gun explosions come from sound effects. To spot the inaccuracy, one needs of course to have seen the film just as one needs to be armed with a certain level of general knowledge to appreciate such modern esoteric literature. Yet systematic reference hunting, while potentially a sign of great erudition, can also easily turn into intellectual snobbery, a vice that is particularly harshly mocked by Cadiot.

In the course of his novels, the various narrator-protagonists are subjected to the tirades of various pseudo-specialists or artist wannabees. This is most notably the case at a party described in *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé*, where one of the guests voices off about the fact that it is ‘plus novateur de regarder à nouveau l’étrange société dans laquelle on vit plutôt que de chercher à créer des forms avant-gardistes’ and another – an amnesiac film buff suffering from the flu– feels compelled to provide trite summaries of films he claims to be masterpieces: ‘Yamamoto quitte Tokyo-centre après la mort de son chef et retrouve son demi-frère à L.A., là il rencontre les copains de Denny, un jeune Noir dont il devient l’ami intime après tout de même lui avoir pratiquement crevé un œil, excusez-moi, je suis émotif à force d’être confronté à des choses magnifiques’.(5) These characters, along with many others, reel off their knowledge in order to impress and silence the people they are addressing and thus dominate the conversation. Such tyrannical behaviour is satirised all the more effectively as the crucial element, the titles of the works in question, are often omitted. This means that critical readers are often compelled whenever they catch an allusion to identify it – a case in point; the film referred to above is Takeshi Kitano’s *Brother* (2000). Yet it also means that they run the risk of simply name-dropping without necessarily uncovering deep meaning, as occurs almost systematically in the press reviews of Cadiot’s works, where despite fine analytical points being provided, the emphasis is on outing as many hidden references as possible.(6)

Outing a reference is not the same as explaining it, and moreover, as the transfer of a number of Oliver Cadiot’s works to the stage attests, not catching references in real time – it is not usually possible to check Wikipedia during a performance – takes little away from the enjoyment of the prose.(7) This is not to say that we should stop lifting up slabs to see what colonies of allusions are hiding in the literary moss, but simply that we to remember that in reference hunts, instead of catching snarks, the reader often comes across boojums. Cadiot’s contribution to intertextuality is therefore both to encourage readers to search for sources, while deriding them in the process by revealing it to be both a thankless and, to an extent at least, futile task.

1. To give but two examples: Anne Woelfel, ‘Le Système Cadiot: l’hétérogène dans le champ de l’expérience’ (doctoral thesis, Université de Pau et des Pays de l’Adour, 2014) < <http://www.theses.fr/2014PAUU1003>> [accessed 01 June 2015), and Daniel Letendre, ‘A la cheville des temps, la construction du présent. La construction du présent dans la littérature narrative française au tournant du XXIe siècle’ (doctoral thesis, UQAM, 2013) <[https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/10355/Letendre\_Daniel\_2013\_Thèse.pdf](https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1866/10355/Letendre_Daniel_2013_Th%C3%A8se.pdf)> [accessed 01 June 2015]
2. Olivier Cadiot, *L’Art poétic* (Paris: POL, 1988), p. 15.
3. Olivier Cadiot, *Fairy queen* (Paris: POL, 2002), p. 20.
4. Michel Gauthier, *Olivier Cadiot: Le Facteur vitesse* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2004), p. 69.
5. Olivier Cadiot, *Retour définitif et durable de l’être aimé* (Paris: POL, 2002), p. 64.
6. This most notably occurs in the reviews of Un mage en été (Paris: POL, 2010), where all the newspapers highlighted that the image described in the opening pages was Nan Goldin’s *Sharon in the river*.
7. Cadiot’s works are most frequently adapted to the stage by Ludovic Lagarde, the artistic director of the Comédie de Reims.