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An Impossible Task? Reconciling Europeanism and National Popular Culture in *Caliban* (1947–51)

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ABSTRACT

A kind of hybrid between high-profile political and literary periodicals and successful popular book digests targeted at a mass audience, the French magazine *Caliban* (1947–51) both tried to adjust to a fast-changing global marketplace *and* to defend a form of cultural legitimacy based on national claims against globalist domination. This article traces the evolution of the magazine's editorial venture in relation to questions connected to the issues of modernity and mobility. In particular, it aims at examining *Caliban*'s implacable 'anti-digest' stance.

KEYWORDS

Popular culture, popular press, Europeanism, *Caliban*, France

In August 1951, in an interview with Jean Daniel published in the French book digest *Caliban*, Albert Camus voiced his concern about the decline of independent journalism and critical thinking across the nation. In his view, the current trend towards sensationalism, signaled a mounting peril for democracy: 'everything that degrades culture shortens the path that leads to bondage', he emphatically stated, adding that the debasement of the press should be met with uncompromising resistance by the 'free spirits' of Europe.[1] The rhetorical slant was intended to serve the main didactic aim of the magazine, namely to justify the use of literature as a tool of European reconstruction in the turbulent era following the war. Neither the tone of Camus's declaration nor the somewhat provocative claim contained in the issue's title 'Plus anti-digest que jamais!' ['More anti-digest than ever!'] offered a hint of the magazine's impending demise. However, as both Jean Daniel, its editor, and Camus, one of its major supporters, well knew, rising paper and printing costs, as well as stagnant circulation revenue had exhausted *Caliban*, and publication ceased with its next issue, in November 1951. In hindsight, Camus's response to the negative impact of the printed press on popular culture was more a farewell to the form of cultural awareness that had been the fundamental tenet of the magazine's editorial politics than an intellectual call-to-arms for public-minded intellectuals advocating social progress in an age of rising globalization. An intriguing archive of postwar modernity, *Caliban* invites investigation into its founders' and contributors' attempt to marry seemingly irreconcilable concepts, such as mass culture and canonical texts, or national cultural exceptionalism and supranational political and cultural dynamics.[2]

Given the changing cultural dynamics out of which the magazine emerged, it was perhaps inevitable that its original inspiration would give rise to differing and sometimes contradictory narratives. Indeed, the politically and intellectually tense period that followed the Liberation in France was also a time of momentous changes in the national publishing industry. In the retributive atmosphere of these months, when the intellectual community was much taken up with arguments about wartime collaboration, dozens of new periodicals sprang up with the aim of contributing to the debate on the future of the country. At the same time, in the midst of what writers and critics viewed as a crisis of the French novel, new and established publishing houses competed to answer the growing demand for works of popular literature, including hard-boiled crime fiction and sentimental novels. The period was also marked by the advent of novel editorial forms and mass-market techniques such as book clubs and digests modeled on the American *Reader's Digest*, whose French edition appeared in March 1947.

Caliban was born out of this fraught context. A monthly book digest whose first issue hit newsstands in March 1947, it aimed at an editorial approach that tried to respond to the direction of current thought and social trends while promoting the universal truths and timeless values contained in novelistic masterpieces. This twofold aim was to foster universal peace by helping readers, as its editors announced in the first issue, 'comprendre le monde pour mieux servir la paix' ['understand the world to serve peace']. A kind of hybrid between high-profile political and literary periodicals (such

1 'Tout ce qui dégrade la culture raccourcit les chemins qui mènent à la servitude […]. Et les esprits libres que compte encore, pour son honneur, l'Europe savent que l'issue de la lutte épuisante que l'histoire les oblige à mener dépend en partie de l'énergie avec laquelle ils refuseront la compromission.' Albert Camus, 'Une des plus belles professions que je connaisse…', *Caliban*, no. 54 (August 1951), 14, 16.

2 Because of their somewhat ambiguous nature and cultural status, book digests have often been disqualified as suitable library materials, which makes them difficult to find. I serendipitously chanced upon an almost complete set of the magazine while searching Jean Catel's (1891–1951) papers and thank his family for allowing me the freedom to carry out research in this archive.

as *Esprit*, *Europe, Les Temps Modernes* and *Le Figaro littéraire*) and successful popular book digests targeted at a mass audience (such as the American *Omnibook*, and *Reader's Digest,* or their French counterpart *Succès* which also launched in 1947), *Caliban* both tried to adjust to a fast-changing global marketplace *and* to defend a form of cultural legitimacy based on national claims against globalist domination.

Caliban's generic affinities with other digests lay in its characteristic booklet size, colorful covers, and affordable price, and its general-interest articles that addressed modernity from the perspective of progress. However, its commitment to publishing serious essays by regular contributors and to reissuing unabridged works of fiction by such prestigious writers as Balzac, Chekhov, Lagerlof, Sade, Stendhal, or Zweig (as well as noted contemporary writers such as Langston Hughes, Lawrence, Moravia, or Vercors) clearly situated it at the vanguard of the 'anti-digest' magazine controversy movement that raged in France at the end of the forties. In the course of its four-and-a-half year existence, this dual impulse turned the magazine's internationalist worldview from an ideal, cosmopolitan vision of cultural modernity inherited from the interwar period to a new perspective that was at once both localized and globalized.

This essay aims to trace the evolution of *Caliban*'s editorial venture in relation to issues of modernity and mobility. Examining the magazine's cultural trajectory against the background of French intellectual history in the interwar period offers an insight into the 'new' Europeanism that was debated in its pages, in the context of the nascent Cold War. In particular, it sheds light on the tension between different temporal regimes — a dialectic that complicates our understanding of *Caliban*'s contemporaneity and prompts further investigation of its participation in the shaping of national cultural identity. Drawing on recent methodological work in the field of comparative literature, I will argue that *Caliban*'s selection of representative works of world literature maps the contours of contemporary cultural anxieties in postwar France and raises questions about its editors' implacable 'anti-digest' stance. A closer examination of the editorial as well as social forces which lay behind *Caliban*'s efforts to keep abreast of new media trends in the later phase of its existence, joins with a number of studies in the field of visual culture in confounding any facile opposition of national, international, and global popular media.

Caliban's Europeanism: a Contemporaneous Noncontemporaneity?

Caliban's internationalism was born out of the Resistance. Corinne Renou has traced its genesis back to a bi-monthly clandestine paper, *Le Français*, which ran from November 1941 to August 1942 with a circulation of roughly 20,000 per issue.[3] Shortly after the Armistice, some of its founders successfully applied to the Ministry of Information for permission to edit a new cultural weekly, which officially appeared under a new name, *Caliban*, on February 5, 1947. The humanist spirit of the Resistance, largely shared by French opinion, inspired the journal's manifesto in the inaugural issue. This declaration, collectively signed by the editors under the name 'Ariel', emphasized the idea, commonly voiced across the Left after the Liberation, that the war had shrunk the world and that nations' insularity was a thing of the past. In their eyes, this new international solidarity was to be grounded in a form of national consciousness they identified as the 'common place', a form of communality understood as both 'ordinary' and 'shared by a community':

3 Corine Renou, '*Caliban*, une revue de vulgarisation intellectuelle?', *Vingtième siècle*, *revue d'histoire,* no. 40 (October–December 1993), 75–85.

> It has become a common saying that the world has shrunk. Yet, we should be not afraid of common sayings, but rather of losing sight of them. For this world, in which all nations find themselves locked in an iron solidarity, needs, if it is to survive and enjoy technical advances, a virtue belonging to the popular essence: common sense, common place […]. The future of man and his universe depends entirely on the understanding that peoples will have of one another, and on the tolerance and friendship that will flow from that understanding. […] A nation needs a conscience […]. Out of this lucidity and this fusion will be born a consciousness of peace, a national and international citizenship.[4]

As both a vehicle and a locus of a universal 'commonplace', *Caliban* sought to enlighten its readers regarding the world's postwar modernity in a way that was unfiltered by political and partisan views. This claim probably prompted the choice to include Pearl Buck's 1930 novel *East Wind, West Wind* in its inaugural number (Fig. 1), as its title perfectly illustrated this generous, ethical programme. On closer inspection, however, this worldview was somehow challenged and counteracted by the magazine's claim to a common European identity and its willingness to participate in the debate over European construction.

The roots of *Caliban*'s Europeanism lie in its name, which refers to a book written in 1928 by Jean Guéhenno — who was also editor, from 1929 to 1936, of the pacifist literary periodical *Europe* founded by Romain Rolland in 1923. In *Caliban parle* [*Caliban speaks*] published in Paris in 1928, Guéhenno restated a thesis made by Ernest Renan in *L'Avenir de la science* [*The Future of Science*] (1848) that the culture that makes a man should embrace everyone, including Caliban, the mythical creature representing the lowest of men. Guéhenno reassessed Caliban positively by making him the mouthpiece of the masses and giving him a 'European destiny'.[5] The inaugural issue of *Caliban* contained a piece in the form of a conversation with the writer whose aim was to stress, *contra* Gide, that his belief in the particular as a means to reach for the universal was also at the core of the magazine's editorial project:

> Caliban is each and every one of us. This point cannot be emphasized strongly enough. The problem is not to give Caliban access to notions that are and could remain foreign to him. It is a question of giving him the ability to take full possession of all of those which are already part and parcel of his native intelligence.[6]

However, while it is true that this dialectic fueled *Caliban*'s worldview, it did not prove effective in progressing an international conversation on the concept of modern

4 'C'est devenu un lieu commun de constater que le monde s'est rétréci. Il ne faut pas avoir peur des lieux communs, mais plutôt redouter de les perdre de vue. Car ce monde, où toutes les nations se retrouvent enfermées dans une solidarité d'airain, a besoin, s'il veut survivre et jouir de ses progrès techniques d'une vertu d'essence populaire: le bon sens, le sens commun […]. L'avenir de l'homme et de son univers est intégralement suspendu à la compréhension que les peuples auront les uns des autres, à la tolérance et à l'amitié qui découleront de cette compréhension. […] Il faut à une Nation une conscience […]. De cette lucidité et de cette fusion naîtront une conscience de paix, un civisme national et international'. All translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

5 'Ma destinée est désormais européenne; c'était à peu près vrai il y a quarante ans, et c'est un fait que M. Renan a trop négligé' [My destiny is now European; this was more or less true forty years ago, and it is a fact that Mr. Renan has tended to overlook]. Jean Guéhenno, *Caliban parle* (Paris: Grasset, 1928), p. 54.

6 'Caliban est chacun d'entre nous. J'insiste. Le problème n'est pas de faire accéder Caliban à des notions qui lui sont et qui pourraient lui demeurer étrangères. Il s'agit bien de lui donner le moyen de posséder la totalité de celles qu'il porte déjà en lui.' 'Jean Guéhenno parle à "Caliban"', *Caliban*, no. 1 (February 1947), v.

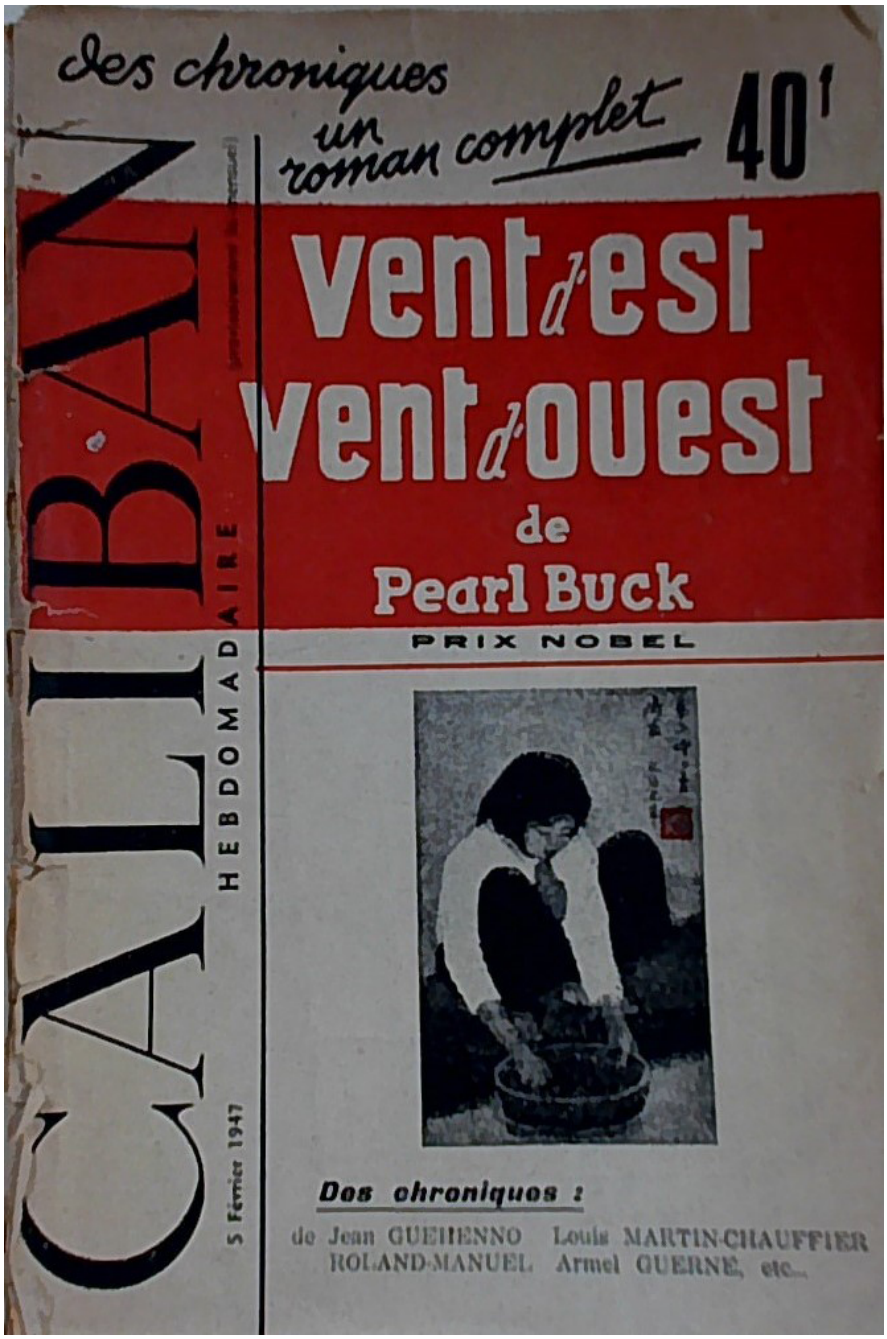


Fig. 1 *Caliban*, no. 1 (5 February 1947)

supranationality, further than the recognition that it was the only way to guarantee world peace and security.

A survey of recent scholarly literature in the fields of French cultural history helps situate more precisely *Caliban*'s position within a protean network of intellectual

exchanges over Europe in the immediate postwar years.[7] In the first year and a half of its existence, the magazine held the same pan-europeanist views as those defended in the left-leaning journals *Esprit* and *Les Temps Modernes*. In May 1948, several months before the start of the Kravchenko trial in Paris (January 1949) and the publication of David Rousset's manifesto calling on fellow survivors of the Nazi concentration camps to denounce the Soviet gulag,[8] *Caliban* reprinted part of Viktor Kravchenko's testimony before the House Committee of Un-American Activities on July 22 1947 (in which Kravchenko explained why the Soviet Union had turned down the Marshall Plan) and placed it in direct counterpoint to David Rousset's plea for the Marshall Plan. This editorial choice demonstrated a will to foster critical nonpartisan debate about the role of American economy in the reconstruction of Europe. As the polemics soon polarized French periodicals, the magazine maintained a neutral attitude while siding with Camus's ideal of a new universal formation that would subsume the authority of executive powers into an international democracy.[9]

From the vantage point of hindsight, it appears that *Caliban*'s political internationalism peaked in February 1949 in an issue that ran two important articles. The first one, written by Maurice Rivière and entitled 'Pour relever l'Europe' [To Raise Europe], was on the complexities of European economic reconstruction. The second one, written by André Breton, called for a world government and world citizenship. This issue was a watershed of sorts in the short history of the magazine, as it was the last time the national debate over Europe was openly discussed in its pages. Rivière protested the arbitrary division between East and West, and stressed the need both to help Germany recover economically and to extend cooperation with eastern European and African countries.[10] Breton opposed the United Nations Organization on the grounds that it stood as the prototype of the kind of evil-mongering associations defending national interests at a time when the concept of the nation had lost historical validity and legitimacy. His article was written in support of Garry Davis, a young war pilot who, in September 1948, had declared himself a 'citizen of the world' after tearing up his U.S. passport and taking refuge in Palais de Chaillot, the temporary headquarters of the UNO in Paris (Fig. 2).[11] Davis's support committee was founded in October 1948 by a number of influential writers and intellectuals, some of whom were regular contributors to *Caliban*, like Camus, Sartre, and Vercors (Jean Bruller), the author of the war classic *Le silence de la mer* (*The Silence of the Sea*, 1942).[12] In November 1947, the three writers had also signed a collective declaration entitled 'First Call to International Opinion' that was first published in *Esprit* and partly reproduced in *Caliban* a month later.[13] This

7 General references include *La vie intellectuelle en France*, vol. 2, *Le Temps des combats (1914–1962)*, ed. by Christophe Charle and Laurent Lapierre (Paris: Seuil, 2016), and Gisèle Sapiro, *Les Écrivains et la politique en France. De l'affaire Dreyfus à la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Seuil, 2018). Among essays addressing more specifically the roles of French periodicals in the debate, see for instance Claire Blandin, 'Les interventions des intellectuels de droite dans le *Figaro littéraire*. L'invention du contre-engagement', *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 96 (2007), 179–94, and Stève Bessac-Vauve, 'L'idée européenne dans Esprit et Les Temps Modernes. Penser ou construire l'Europe? Idéalisme intellectuel et refus du réalisme (1945–1954)', *Siècles*, 41 (2015).

8 David Rousset, 'Au secours des déportés dans les camps soviétiques. Un appel aux anciens déportés des camps nazis', *Le Figaro littéraire* (12 November 1949), 1.

9 In October and November 1948, *Caliban* ran an exchange between Camus and Sartre on the meaning of democracy. In April and June 1948, the magazine had also echoed Camus's dispute with Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie over pacifism and social justice. In both cases, Daniel implicitly sided with Camus by giving him the last word. On this subject, see Renou, pp. 84–85; and Ronald Aronson, 'Sartre, Camus, and the "Caliban" Articles', *Sartre Studies International*, 7.2 (2001), 1–7.

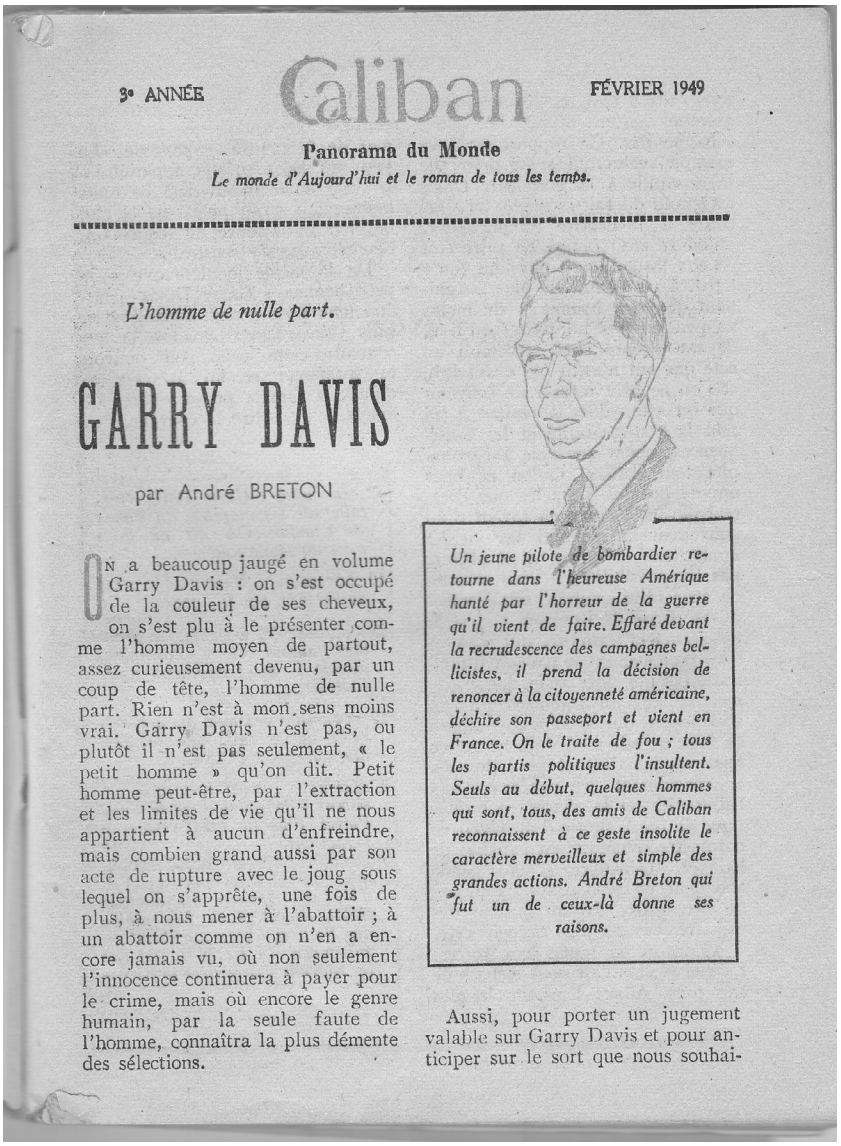
10 Maurice Rivière, 'Pour relever l'Europe', *Caliban*, no. 24 (February 1949), 59–63.

11 André Breton, 'L'homme de nulle part. Garry Davis', *Caliban*, no. 24 (February 1949), 5–6.

12 Vercors, *Le silence de la mer* (Paris: Minuit, 1942).

13 'Premier appel à l'opinion internationale', *Esprit*, no. 139 (November 1947), 794–96.

declaration called for a 'neutralist' united Europe whose inclusive socialist, democratic, and pacifist values would prevent the emergence of a new form of European sovereignty.



3e ANNÉE Caliban FÉVRIER 1949

Panorama du Monde

Le monde d'Aujourd'hui et le roman de tous les temps.

L'homme de nulle part.

GARRY DAVIS

par André BRETON

On a beaucoup jaugé en volume Garry Davis : on s'est occupé de la couleur de ses cheveux, on s'est plu à le présenter comme l'homme moyen de partout, assez curieusement devenu, par un coup de tête, l'homme de nulle part. Rien n'est à mon sens moins vrai. Garry Davis n'est pas, ou plutôt il n'est pas seulement, « le petit homme » qu'on dit. Petit homme peut-être, par l'extraction et les limites de vie qu'il ne nous appartient à aucun d'enfreindre, mais combien grand aussi par son acte de rupture avec le joug sous lequel on s'apprête, une fois de plus, à nous mener à l'abattoir ; à un abattoir comme on n'en a encore jamais vu, où non seulement l'innocence continuera à payer pour le crime, mais où encore le genre humain, par la seule faute de l'homme, connaîtra la plus démente des sélections.

Un jeune pilote de bombardier retourne dans l'heureuse Amérique hanté par l'horreur de la guerre qu'il vient de faire. Effaré devant la recrudescence des campagnes bellicistes, il prend la décision de renoncer à la citoyenneté américaine, déchire son passeport et vient en France. On le traite de fou ; tous les partis politiques l'insultent. Seuls au début, quelques hommes qui sont, tous, des amis de Caliban reconnaissent à ce geste insolite le caractère merveilleux et simple des grandes actions. André Breton qui fut un de ceux-là donne ses raisons.

Aussi, pour porter un jugement valable sur Garry Davis et pour anticiper sur le sort que nous souhai-

Fig. 2 André Breton, 'L'homme de nulle part. Garry Davis', *Caliban*, no. 24 (February 1949)

Yet, this brand of internationalism was not particularly new. Indeed, it had its roots in an ethical and cultural debate about true universalism among French and European intellectual circles during the interwar period, whose echo reverberated in the conversation with Jean Guéhenno in the first issue of *Caliban*. In this piece, the writer openly referred to a quarrel that had opposed him to Gide in 1929, in the pages of the journal *Europe*, on the subject of the Europeanisation of culture. Guéhenno had taken the side of Roman Rolland's pacifist internationalism against Gide's notion that the general interest is better served by greater particularity.[14] This dispute itself harked

14 On this topic, see for instance Paul Phocas, *Gide et Guéhenno polémiquent* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1987).

back to a controversy that raged in the press in the summer of 1919 on the subject of Romain Rolland's 'Declaration of Independence of the Mind', that famously opposed internationalists and pacifists to nationalists close to the right-wing Action Française.[15] In other words, *Caliban*'s internationalism was steeped in a national debate over the fear of a decline in France's cultural power that looked back to a multilayered debate over European patriotism and Europe's leadership in the world in the first decades of the century. These imbricated temporalities endowed the magazine's 'will-to-Europe' with a sort of paradoxical noncontemporaneity that points to its fundamentally *literary* nature and sheds further light on the magazine's editorial project.

Reading into *Caliban*'s Literary Pantheon

As historians have noted, by pushing nation-states to prioritize economic growth and military defense, the Cold War put an end to the conception of Europe as a literary idea that had prevailed among French writers and intellectuals since Michelet and Hugo: 'The European theme had lost its benevolent neutrality, which attracted the best minds, seduced by the infinite potentialities it contained: Europe was no longer an abstraction, but the first battlefield of the Cold War.'[16]

This literary conception of Europe was at the core of *Caliban*'s aesthetics and politics. In their inaugural editorial, its founders explained that they intended to promote transnational democratic values by offering their readers a selection of novels that represented the best of world literature or exemplified literary genius:

> [The novel] educates the mind and refines the taste. At the same time, it serves as an exemplum of a culture and of a civilization. It offers an insight into the beliefs and habits of different cultures. Being a source of enlightenment, it fosters friendship across the boundaries of languages and cultures.[17]

The same didactic zeal transpires in the short introductions that the magazine commissioned from an array of contributors to serve as critical frameworks for the reedited material. For instance, the preface to Selma Lagerlof's 1914 *The Emperor of Portugallia* (first issued in French translation in 1943) notes that: 'If fiction and reality blend, it is not in the world that the protagonist of that novel inhabits, but in one's mind and heart, magnifying the cruelest occurrences of one's life and troubling one's mind, but leaving the virtues of one's heart intact'.[18]

Most of these comments seek to balance concern for universal moral values and close attention to the depiction of national character. For example, the introductory remarks to *East Wind, West Wind* stress Pearl Buck's insider's knowledge of Chinese culture with her ability to make 'China emerge out of the picturesque', and thus touch

15 Romain Rolland, 'Fière déclaration d'intellectuels', *L'Humanité* (26 June 1919).

16 'C'est que le thème européen a perdu de cette neutralité bienveillante qui attirait les meilleurs esprits, séduits par les potentialités infinies qu'il contenait: l'Europe n'est plus une abstraction, mais le premier champ de bataille de la Guerre froide'. Bertrand Vayssière, 'Les écrivains français entre conscience et militantisme européens (1919–1945)', *Cahier d'Histoire Immédiate*, 1.1 (2003), 139–55.

17 '[Le roman] enrichit le goût et l'esprit. En même temps, il témoigne pour une culture, pour une civilisation. Il est une explication d'un temps, d'une psychologie, de mœurs. Il éclaire. Donc, il véhicule l'amitié. De peuple à peuple.' Ariel, 'Présentation de Caliban', *Caliban*, no. 1 (5 February 1947), iii

18 'Si fiction et la réalité quotidiennes se mêlent, ce n'est plus dans le monde où évolue le héros du livre, mais dans la pensée, le cœur même de l'homme, magnifiant les plus cruels événements de sa vie, lui dérangeant l'esprit, mais laissant intactes les vertus du cœur.' Pérégrine, 'Selma Lagerlof', *Caliban*, no. 2 (20 February 1947), xxxii.

the deeper issues of life. Likewise, in the preface of Chekhov's *The Shooting Party* (first published in France in 1936) local drama is given universal resonance. [19]

It is beyond doubt that these glosses reflected a genuine belief in the internal relation of reason to imagination, feeling and sensibility, and hence in the indispensable use of literary texts to propone moral perfection. However, the assumptions underlying the (romantic) idea about the distinctiveness of national cultural expressions and the participation of the artist in producing 'national character' somewhat belie the magazine's egalitarian, democratic aspirations. If, as literary scholar and cultural historian Anne-Marie Thiesse has recently argued, works of literature can achieve universal recognition only after achieving national recognition, then their so-called universal character depends on their position in a broader literary market characterized by competition for status.[20] The complex tensions resulting from this hierarchical organization reverberate in *Caliban*'s claims about the universalism of major literatures as well as in its choice of prize-winning writers (such as Nobel laureates Pearl Buck and Selma Lagerlof, or Pulitzer Prize winners Louis Bromfield and Thornton Wilder). The list of works published in the magazine shrank the world of letters to a dozen Western nation-states placed by *Caliban*'s editors under French cultural dominance. This dominance was expressed less in the selection of French writers (with the notable exception of Balzac and Stendhal) than in the use of a certain comparative 'focal lens' and rhetoric designed to serve acculturating purposes. In particular, the literary techniques and achievements of the American writers were scrutinized and assessed according to the standards of French national tastes and tradition. Accordingly, the introduction to Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927) called the reader's attention to the fact that Wilder was a professor of French and that his 'spirit was imbued with French cultural tradition' that looked back to Mérimée, Anatole France and Madame de Sévigné.[21] Similarly, for Louis Parrot, what distinguished Louis Bromfield from his fellow American writers were qualities of 'strength' and 'subtlety' emulated from French writers. Though Parrot's fine commentary on Henry Miller's *Max and the White Phagocytes* (first issued in French translation in 1947) further evidenced his acquaintance with contemporary American literature, he could not refrain from asking whether Miller was not 'more a French writer than an American one'.[22]

The reception of American fiction in *Caliban* prompts closer attention to the omissions and gaps in the collection of texts that composed the magazine's actual library. Drawing on contemporary research in the field of comparative literature, I will contend that these omissions help us map out the contours of its 'mental library'.[23] The choice of novels by Bromfield and Wilder is somewhat surprising, given the great success of the genre of hard-boiled crime fiction (whose introduction in *Caliban* was delayed till the late 1950s) and the keen interest of the French literary establishment

19 'Pearl Buck', *Caliban*, no. 1 (February 1947), n.p.; Jeanne Fabre, 'Anton Tchekhov', *Caliban*, no. 5 (15 May 1947), 2–4.

20 Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La fabrique de l'écrivain national. Entre littérature et politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2019). This relational model was first developed by Pascale Casanova in *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999). However, while Casanova's study aimed at examining regimes of inequality in the world of letters from a Bourdieuian perspective, Thiesse focuses on the figure of the national writer, and the relationships between literature and nation from the early nineteenth century to the present day.

21 'Thornton Wilder', *Caliban*, no. 3 (5 April 1947), no page.

22 Louis Parrot, 'L'œuvre de Louis Bromfield', *Caliban*, no. 8 (15 July 1947), 4; and 'Un nouveau livre de Henry Miller', *Caliban*, no. 4 (30 April 1947), iii.

23 *Caliban*'s editors explicitly promoted the idea that subscribing to their magazine was 'a cheap way of acquiring an outstanding library'. The term 'mental library' (understood as a set of works of a linguistic nature of which an individual or a group may have a more or less conscious awareness or representation) is borrowed from the comparative approach which is currently being developed by William Marx in his seminar on 'invisible libraries' at the Collège de France in Paris.

in the modern American novel, which famously culminated with Sartre declaring a crisis of the French novel and in Claude-Edmonde Magny's publication of a critical appraisal of American literature, eloquently entitled *The Golden Age of American Fiction*.[24] *Caliban*'s circumspect acknowledgement of the editorial and critical success of the 'Big Four' (Faulkner, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck) only transpires in periphrastic or euphemistic evasions such as: 'Louis Bromfield, who shares with the novelists of his generation the pessimistic tendencies of contemporary literature, distinguishes himself from these writers by a more nuanced approach of the perception of self' or '[Thornton Wilder's] position on the margin of that trend that seems to characterize the writers of his generation makes him all the more important'.[25] An interview with the Italian editor Elio Vittorini offered *Caliban*'s editors further opportunity to work their way around American contemporary fiction. Vittorini, who had translated Faulkner and Saroyan, praised (*contra* Camus) the 'primitive freshness and invigorating sobriety' of these writers to whom he felt contemporary Italian writers owed a lot. Vittorini's positive assessment of these writers ran squarely against Camus's judgement that American novels lacked depth and structure. The interview served to triangulate the debate over the growing influence of American fiction on French fiction that was aired concurrently across a wide range of periodicals, yet without questioning French national superiority in the cultural and literary fields.[26]

Caliban's reticence to bestow 'universality' upon American fiction was probably negatively influenced by Sartre's strategic use of American fiction to his own advantage. Sartre's emphasis on the achievements of the American proletarian writers ran counter to one of the main goals of *Caliban*'s literary projects, namely to promote French proletarian writers, including Louis Guilloux, a major figure on the prewar literary scene, whose 1927 novel *La Maison du peuple* was reprinted in *Caliban* with an introduction by Camus and a short essay by Jean Rousselot on the difference between proletarian and revolutionary literatures.[27] In this context, one can imagine that the inclusion of American proletarian fiction might have deflected the audience's attention from the French writer's work. Moreover, *Caliban*'s editorial politics in relation to American fiction were also probably influenced by Sartre's domestication of what was viewed in France as American literary 'primitivism' in order to legitimize existentialist novels. Earlier authors, argues Sartre in his essay 'Situation of the Writer in 1947', tried to justify 'the foolishness of storytelling by ceaselessly bringing to the reader's attention, explicitly or by allusion, the existence of an author'. By contrast, new fiction 'should exist in the manner of things, of plants, of events, and not at first like products of man'.[28] By avowedly appropriating and domesticating American literature, Sartre both aimed at breaking with traditional ways of writing *and* at reestablishing a new literary tradition,

24 Jean-Paul Sartre's essay 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?' ['What is Literature?'] first appeared in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1947 and was published in book form in *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); Claude-Edmonde Magny, *L'Âge d'or du roman américain* (Paris: Seuil, 1948).

25 'Louis Bromfield qui partage avec les romanciers de sa génération les tendances pessimistes de la littérature contemporaine s'en distingue par son application à nuancer la psychologie de ses personnages', *Caliban*, no. 3 (5 April 1947), n.p.; '[Thornton Wilder] se situe un peu en marge de cette tendance qui semble caractériser les écrivains de sa génération, il n'en est que plus important', *Caliban*, no. 8 (15 July 1947), 4.

26 Jean Daniel, 'Elio Vittorini parmi nous', *Caliban*, no. 8 (15 July 1947), viii.

27 Louis Guilloux, 'La Maison du peuple', *Caliban*, no. 13 (January 1948), 66–127; Albert Camus, 'Albert Camus vous parle de Louis Guilloux', *Ibid.*, 63–65; Jean Rousselot, 'Les écrivains du peuple', Ibid., 56–62.

28 'Nous souhaitions que nos livres se tinssent tout seuls en l'air et que les mots, au lieu de pointer en arrière vers celui qui les a tracés, oubliés, solitaires, inaperçus, fussent des toboggans déversant les lecteurs au milieu d'un univers sans témoins, bref, que nos livres existassent à la façon des choses, des plantes, des événements et non d'abord comme des produits de l'homme'. Sartre, 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?', p. 276; *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 169.

thus reaffirming the power of Paris as a legitimizing editorial and critical center for texts and authors.[29] *Caliban* was in no way opposed to existentialism but its attachment to the past and literary filiation placed it in direct opposition to Sartre's defense of the modernity of existentialism. This may explain why the magazine commissioned Claude-Edmonde Magny, a brilliant new literary scholar and the author of *L'Âge du roman américain* (1948), to write the introduction to Sade's *Justine*. In this piece, entitled 'Sade, martyr of atheism', Magny effectively reestablished Sade as a preeminent novelist whose 'metaphysical' preoccupation bore a close resemblance to the modern poetics of Malraux, Camus, or Vian.[30] Enshrining the infamous 'divin Marquis' in *Caliban*'s anthology helped consolidate the magazine's editorial field and circumscribe a body of works deemed essential for its national audience. Conversely, it also hinted at the relative power of French national tradition within the context of an increasingly globalized popular culture.

At the turn of the fifties, as modernization and American-style mass consumerism swept the country, the magazine found it increasingly difficult to reconcile 'today's world and the greatest novels of all time', as its motto declared. In its general-interest section, contributors went on recording — and even extolling — social and economic progress, while its literary section, which kept dwindling in size, provided a selection of minor, mainly French, novelists. The glaring omission of American hard-boiled crime fiction soon proved to be an untenable choice and, after accommodating minor novels that illustrated the attempt by French authors to write novels in the hard-boiled style, *Caliban* reprinted Dashiell Hammett's *The Scorched Face*.[31] By then, the journal had entered a new phase of its history, characterized by a change in the form of cultural commentary it sought to advance.

'More anti-digest than ever'?

The first phase of *Caliban*'s development came to an end in mid-1949, when the changing political, cultural, and social climate led its editors to seek new ways of retaining the reader's attention without detracting from their original premise, 'la juste vulgarisation de la culture' ['the rightful vulgarization of culture']. As it became clear that European integration was now a matter of hard-nosed technological realism, the magazine turned its focus from universal cultural issues such as Soviet cinema, jazz or atonal music, existentialism, atomic science, or the adoption of a global calendar, to national social and cultural concerns, including the impact of technological and scientific modernization on public welfare. Quite revealingly, international coverage now targeted specifically 'foreign' issues, such as oil resources in Tunisia, the American fad for gadgets, or differences in life in East and West Germany. In other words, the initial internationalism of the review, predicated on inclusion and egalitarianism, had given way to cultural relativism driven by cultural differentiation.

A striking example was the introduction of a series of articles purporting to describe national characters in the form of fictional portraits brimming with ethnic

29 This was the gist of the lecture Sartre gave at Yale University in 1946, when he ensured his audience that 'your American novelists have enriched French writers with new techniques, and French writers have absorbed these and have used them in a different manner [...]. We shall give back to you these techniques which you have lent us. We shall return them digested, intellectualized, less effective, and less brutal, consciously adapted to French taste.' Jean-Paul Sartre, 'American Novelists in French Eyes', *Atlantic Monthly*, 178.2 (August 1946), 114–17.

30 Claude-Edmonde Magny, 'Sade, martyr de l'athéisme', *Caliban*, no. 10 (October 1947), xli–xliv.

31 Dashiell Hammett, 'Piège à filles', *Caliban*, no. 43 (September 1950), 90–106 and 124–42. 'The Scorched Face' was first issued in *The Black Mask* (May 1925). It was published in French translation in 1950 in *Caliban* and by Presses de la Cité (collection Un Mystère, no. 24).

stereotypes. In June 1949, for instance, a short piece described the average Hungarian citizen as 'someone who would be ready for anything provided he is given his daily dream-seasoned ration of food in exchange for a minimum amount of work'.[32] The next issue contained a portrait of a young Swedish girl that was more positive but hardly less biased .[33] Other contributions tapped into the deep reservoir of anti-American animosity that had first built up in the eighteenth century and had reemerged sporadically in the form of incensed debates, notably in the years following World War I. Anti-American hostility flared up again in 1947–49 when 'a combination of cultural snobbery toward mass culture, an aversion for capitalism, stereotypes of America and Americans, and anxiety about French hegemony and French decline, led many prominent intellectuals as well as influential newspapers and reviews to attack the American cultural menace'.[34] This time, anti-Americanism found its voice in a crusade against digests. At this point, *Caliban*'s declared 'anti-digest' politics became part of a larger cultural defensive grouping that reshaped political and intellectual alliances into new mobile and transient formations.

In the wake of the creation of the Kominform[35] in October 1947, the surge of digests in the French publishing market rekindled a fierce controversy orchestrated by the Communist Party. The phenomenal success of these periodicals was perceived as the sign of a pernicious attraction to vulgar entertainment and intellectual laziness, and more generally, for the permissiveness pictured in hard-boiled crime fiction. The American *Reader's Digest* was especially targeted for its noxious impact on popular culture. One contributor to *L'Humanité*, the organ of the Party, denounced it as a kind of secular 'opiate of the masses' ['vénéneux narcotique'] and the journal *Esprit* devoted a whole section of its July 1948 issue to the question of digests. In the midst of this partisan debate, critic and essayist Denis de Rougemont raised his voice to observe that digests could hardly be accused of being the harbinger of American modernity since their origin could be traced back to Antoine Houdar de la Motte's 1714 free-verse translation of Homer's *Iliad* which triggered the 'Homer Quarrel' that brought an end to the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. By resituating the debate within the wider context of the literary 'canon wars' in France and Europe, Rougemont pointedly drew attention to the real issues at stake, namely literary value, modernity, and national identity.[36] Indeed, as historian Thierry Cottour has confirmed, not only did the quarrel over book digests provide a terrain for political dissension, but it was also the symptom of deep-running anxieties over the prestige and agency of the French cultural model, in particular in the field of literature.[37]

By pitting its editorial standards against those of the *Reader's Digest* and its competitors, *Caliban* positioned itself on the side of cultural legitimacy — or 'vulgarization, not vulgarity', as one of the magazine's mottos proclaimed. In light of the number of full-text novels reissued in the magazine at a time when books were either unavailable or too costly, it is only fair to say that *Caliban* never failed to deliver on this

32 Jean Marabini, 'Paul Vicar, citoyen hongrois', *Caliban*, no. 28 (June 1949), 30.
33 Jean Rabaud, 'Ingrid Svensson', jeune fille suédoise', *Caliban*, no. 29 (July 1949), 13–17.
34 Richard Kuisel, 'The Fernandel Factor: The Rivalry between the French and American Cinema in the 1950s', *Yale French Studies*, no. 98 (2000), 125.
35 The Communist Information Bureau (or Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties) was established under Soviet auspices with the intended purpose of exchanging information among the communist parties of Europe. It was established on October 5 1947 with nine members: the Communist parties of the U.S.S.R, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, and France.
36 Denis de Rougemont, 'La querelle des condensés. Ce sont les Français qui ont commencé', *Le Figaro littéraire* (14 February 1948), 1, 3.
37 Thierry Cottour, 'Haro sur les abêtisseurs de poche. Les digests, des périodiques méconnus et méprisés', in *La légitimité culturelle en question*, ed. by Sylvette Giet (Limoges: PULIM, 2004), 161–208.

commitment. However, a closer look at the titles of these works reveals a gradual change in focus and content. Till the end of 1949, the choice of classics of world literature responded to the search for a form of inactuality that *Caliban*'s editors considered a token of quality and universal accessibility. From mid-1949, the focus shifted to include more popular subgenres, such as hard-boiled fiction, and adventure or sentimental novels, often imported from the United States or domesticated for the national market. The magazine also revamped its content strategy to include more advertising and offer new entertaining content, in the form of games, crosswords, and quizzes.

But it was the use of photo essays that had the deepest impact on the magazine's narrative construction, drawing *Caliban* into the mainstream while diluting its identity. By modernizing its editorial character, *Caliban*'s editors were no doubt trying to adjust to the pressure of a very competitive market. Nevertheless, their reliance on a form of narrative that told stories through images alone had a significant impact on the magazine's core identity. Indeed it tended to foster what photo-historian Thierry Gervais has called a 'global consciousness' quite distinct from the moral cosmopolitanism *Caliban* had sought to advance in the first place.[38] A new, 'modern' way of looking at life powered an international mythology that was part of the magazine's conception of cultural identity and knowledge production in French society in the early fifties. As the magazine settled into the more optimistic mood of the new decade, it increasingly relied on image-led narrative construction. The June 1951 issue contained no less than three photo essays (Figs. 3 and 4): the first was on Henri Matisse, the second on the Black Jews of Harlem, and the third on what was pleasantly presented as a national pastime: 'la paresse' ['laziness']. A close examination of their layout does not fall within the scope of this essay, yet it is important to note that it tended to emphasize similarities rather than differences, thus prompting the reader to look at the world from within the 'safe' boundaries of French national culture, and eventually to believe that the chaotic world might be shaped in such a way that the local, the international, and the universal coexisted in some organized way.[39] This sense of visual dominance encouraged an illusion of proximate spectatorship that was quite distinct from the anxious quest for a democratic 'commonplace' on which the magazine was originally premised.

This is not to say that *Caliban* promoted a rigid, ideological worldview of the kind that the *Reader's Digest* presented to its readers. On the contrary, Daniel's magazine should be credited for its pioneering character. Its attempts to balance the contingent with the universal, and modernity with tradition, at a time of transition when narratives of national cultural exceptionalism were being reshaped within the framework of a new economic and cultural liberal internationalism drove its editors to experiment with a form of cultural mobility which was denied to more 'segmented' magazines. If it is tempting to empathize with a reader's letter of July 1951 deploring the loss of what the reader called the old 'Caliban spirit', one should bear in mind that the transformational and transactional practices that shaped the magazine — and that the magazine helped produce — are precisely what makes the study of modernist cultural production such a fascinating topic.[40]

38 Thierry Gervais and Gaëlle Morel, *The Making of Visual News. A History of Photography in the Press* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

39 In his recent study of the photographic language of the interwar mass-media magazines *Vu* and *UHU*, Tim Satterthwaite demonstrates that visual groupings or 'patterns' bore upon individual and collective representations of a more harmonious and happy society. *Modernist Magazines and the Social Ideal* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

40 Roger Feria, 'Y-a-t-il un esprit Caliban', *Caliban*, no. 53 (July 1951), 127.



Fig. 3 'Portrait. Yeux bleus, barbe blanche, lunettes d'or. Henri Matisse', *Caliban*, no. 52 (June 1951), 59–60



Fig. 4 'Avec les Juifs noirs de Harlem', *Caliban*, no. 52 (June 1951), 66–67

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