

Maïca SANCONIE

Au-delà du vertige
Mises en abyme ou la traduction des réseaux de clichés
dans les romans Harlequin

Duke, Elizabeth, *Heartless Stranger*, 1996, pp. 64-70.

An Academy Award-winning performance, she congratulated herself as she swung her face away as if to compose herself. In actual fact, it was to avoid that keen, penetrating gaze!

“I’m forever being accused of favouring the underdog,” she confessed with a deep sigh, twisting her slender hands in her lap. It was true enough.

“So you see Harry Shaw as the underdog”, Trent said, his tone sardonic.

“Well, isn’t he?” She asked unsteadily, not needing to act this time. “From what you’ve told me, he’s a harmless old man living alone who just wants to go fishing and grow his vegetables and be left in peace. And along you come —the big property developer— doing your utmost to turn his cosy little world upside down!”

She expected Trent to bite back with a lecture on progress, or a reminder of the generous compensation he was offering Harry in return and what his resort was going to mean to Kaoga Bay, or offer some other excuse to justify what he was doing, but instead he reached out his hand and touched her on the leg, just above her knee.

She nearly jumped out of her seat, the heat of his hand sending fiery prickles from her toes right up into her cheeks.

“How’s your ankle standing up to the rough road?” he asked, his soothing tone, when she had been expecting a tongue-lashing, knocking her completely off-balance.

“It—it’s fine.” The words came out as a pathetic croak. She was acutely aware of his hand on her leg, of the way her skin, even beneath the protective layer of denim, was tingling under his touch. Why was she reacting like this? It was crazy. She had been touched in more intimate places than this, and on her bare skin, by men she had liked a lot more, without feeling so much as a flutter!

She gave a trembling sigh. It’s because I’m so aware of him, she decided, attempting to be clinical. Not as a man so much —male— but as a challenge,

Duke, Elizabeth, *Un Dilemme pour Sandra*, trad. Corrèze Maïca, Paris, Harlequin, 1997, pp. 63-68.

Elle se détourna pour cacher son visage. Une prestation pareille lui aurait valu un oscar, à Hollywood ! D'habitude, elle avait horreur de faire des simagrées. Mais ce jour-là, le jeu en valait la chandelle.

— Je défends toujours les opprimés, ajouta-t-elle avec un soupir déchirant.

— Comme Harry ?

— Oui. Ce vieil homme ne peut pas lutter contre un promoteur de votre acabit. Tout ce qu'il veut, sans doute, c'est continuer à aller à la pêche et à faire pousser ses légumes.

Elle se tut, s'attendant à ce que Trent lui fasse une leçon sur l'inéluctable modernité, balayant sur son passage les vestiges du passé. Ou qu'il lui rappelle la confortable indemnité qu'il proposait à Harry à titre de dédommagement.

Au lieu de cela, il posa la main sur la cuisse de Sandra, juste au-dessus du genou. Elle tressaillit vivement.

— Votre jambe ne vous fait-elle pas souffrir, sur ce chemin cahoteux ? s'enquit-il.

— Non, murmura-t-elle, si troublée qu'elle en perdait l'usage de la parole.

Que lui arrivait-il ? Trent n'était tout de même pas le premier homme à la toucher ! Il fallait absolument qu'elle se reprenne. Ce type était un escroc et un Don Juan, elle ne devait jamais l'oublier.

a force to be reckoned with. This man, she brooded, is the devil in human guise. He's powerful, he's ruthless, and he's dangerous. His being tall and sexy and silver-eyed makes him doubly dangerous. An irresistible combination ... to some women, she thought with disdain. There would always be women only too willing to be tempted, weakened, seduced by a sexy, good-looking villain, knowing he was dangerous, knowing he was no good for them, but unable to resist, poor fools.

Well, not me, she vowed silently. You have no power over me, Trent Corbin. I'm no more attracted to you than I am to big, beefy Roland!

At the thought of Roland, she shuddered, and stifled another shaky sigh. Who was she kidding? She hadn't reacted to Roland this way!

"Have you done anything about my bike yet?" she asked sharply —too sharply.

"Anxious to leave, Sandra?" Trent drawled as he withdrew his hand and pumped the accelerator, the vehicle responding with a surge forward.

She tried to ignore the seductive undertone, unsure if he was simply teasing her, mocking her for his own amusement, or issuing a veiled invitation.

"Well, have you?" she asked irritably, not prepared to play his game, whatever it was.

"Your new bike will be ready for you by the time you're fit enough to ride it."

"My new bike?" she echoed. "You mean... What about my bike?" she demanded. Had he decided to replace it, just like that, without even trying to get hers repaired?

"Don't worry, your new bike will be an identical model. I called in at the bike shop in Nowra this morning, which is where the nearest specialty bike shop is. Roland or I will drive down to pick it up when it comes in later this week. They didn't have your model in stock."

Later this week! So... she had a few more days, then. "That's most kind of you", she mumbled. Thanking Trent Corbin for anything was difficult. Not that there was any need to go overboard with gratitude. It wasn't as if he was doing her any special favours. He was only doing, what was right and proper. He was the one who'd run into her and damaged her bike! And he could certainly afford to replace it.

"If you particularly need to get back to Sydney before then", Trent said slowly, "I could always drive you."

She hid her dismay at the thought. Did he want her out of his life already? How could she help Harry if he bundled her back to Sydney? Not that he sounded particularly enthusiastic about driving her back. And why should he?

— Avez-vous fait réparer mon vélo ? demanda-t-elle enfin, d'une voix altérée.

— Il vous tarde donc tellement de partir, Sandra ? répondit-il en retirant sa main.

Elle frémit, et garda le silence tandis que la voiture repartait sur la route étroite. Trent se comportait vraiment comme s'il avait souhaité qu'elle reste ! Espérait-il la ranger au nombre de ses multiples conquêtes ? Eh bien, il en serait pour ses frais !

— Répondez à ma question, rétorqua-t-elle, glaciale.

— Vous aurez une nouvelle bicyclette dès l'instant où vous serez en état de monter dessus.

— Mais je ne veux pas d'une nouvelle bicyclette ! Qu'avez-vous fait de la mienne ?

— Ne vous inquiétez pas. J'ai appelé une boutique spécialisée à Nowra, ce matin, et j'ai commandé exactement le même vélo que le vôtre. Roland ou moi irons le chercher à la fin de la semaine. Ils n'avaient pas ce modèle en stock.

Voilà qui lui donnait donc quelques jours supplémentaires...

— Merci, c'est très aimable à vous, murmura t-elle.

Il lui devait bien cette compensation. Sans lui, elle n'aurait jamais eu d'accident. Et, en plus, il avait largement les moyens d'acheter une bicyclette neuve.

— Si vous avez besoin de rentrer à Sydney plus tôt, je vous y emmènerai, déclara-t-il.

Gênée par cette proposition, Sandra mit quelques instants à trouver une réponse adéquate. Impossible d'aider Harry, si Trent la ramenait à Sydney !

He'd only just come down here! Presumably he had things to do, business matters to deal with.

"I wouldn't let you do that", she said quickly. "You have work here, and people to see. I intended resting up here for a couple of days anyway", she assured him, "An extra day or so is neither here nor there. I'm on leave, remember."

"You must stay on as my guest until you're perfectly fit again."

She smiled up at him. "That's most kind", she murmured.

Trent was surprised to hear himself issuing the invitation to stay on ... especially as there was something about Sandra Wyatt that made him distinctly uneasy, something that told him he'd be a fool to trust her. Not that he could put his finger on what it was.

She'd been honest and open enough about her disapproval of him and his line of work. And he admired her for her honesty, irritating as he found it at times. But he had a feeling there was more to her antagonism than mere disapproval. Was there? And, if so, what in hell's name could it be?

Was she a friend or sister of some girl he'd had a fling with in the past and then ditched? Was she related in some way to a family he'd bought out, a family with some grievance as a result? His eyes narrowed. Could she have come here seeking some kind of vengeance?

But she hadn't sought him out. It was purely by chance that they'd even met. He'd knocked her off her bike, for heaven's sake! There was no way in the world she could have planned that, or known that he was coming up from behind. Hell, he could have killed her! As for bringing her back to his house, that had been his own idea, with no coaxing from her.

Still, it probably wasn't at all wise —in fact it was quite possibly insane, the most insane thing he'd done in his life— to keep her here with him at his house. A stranger. A girl he knew virtually nothing about. And, moreover, one he didn't altogether trust. But damn it, wise or not, he wanted her with him, at least for the time being. She intrigued him. Not many women in the past five years had managed to do that. And never to the extent that this girl did.

She wasn't entirely immune to him either, much as she might pretend otherwise ... and much as she might disapprove of him, and even actively dislike him. He'd felt the chemistry, the electricity between them, and it had nothing to do with their lively verbal sparring. It was a physical thing. They struck sparks off each other, and had done from the beginning. Well before she'd even known who he was.

Yes, there was chemistry between them all right, and chemistry was something that hadn't affected him since ...

— Ne vous dérangez pas, dit-elle enfin. Vous avez votre travail et, de toute façon, j'avais prévu de me reposer un jour ou deux avant de continuer mon périple.

— Je tiens à ce que vous repartiez en pleine forme.

Cette fois, le sourire de Sandra était des plus sincères.

— C'est très gentil, murmura-t-elle en lui lançant un regard si lumineux qu'il déporta légèrement le véhicule sur le bas-côté.

Pourquoi l'avait-il engagée à rester ? songea Trent, abasourdi. Cette jeune femme ne lui inspirait pas confiance. Etait-elle l'amie ou la sœur d'une de ses ex-maîtresses, qui s'estimait abandonnée ? Etait-elle apparentée à l'une des familles dont il avait racheté la propriété, et qui lui en gardait rancoeur ? En tout cas, elle semblait animée d'un esprit de vengeance qui l'intriguait au plus haut point.

Elle n'avait cependant eu recours à aucun subterfuge pour s'introduire chez lui. Tous deux s'étaient rencontrés par le plus grand des hasards. Elle ne pouvait pas avoir prémedité l'accident qui l'avait renversée.

D'ailleurs, il lui avait offert l'hospitalité sans qu'elle demande quoi que ce soit. Quelle folie d'avoir invité chez lui une inconnue ! Mais l'idée de ne pas la revoir avait été insupportable. Aucune femme depuis cinq ans n'avait produit un tel effet sur lui.

En plus, elle semblait sensible à son charme. Oh, bien sûr, elle prétendait le contraire et, pourtant, il aurait juré qu'il l'attirait. La façon dont elle avait tres-sailli, tout à l'heure, lorsqu'il avait posé la main sur son genou, en disait assez long.

Jamais il n'avait éprouvé une telle attirance depuis...

Damn it, no! he thought explosively. He'd be a fool to start making comparisons. There was no comparison. With Celia, it hadn't been chemistry alone, and even that —the chemistry between them— had been different, gentler, not this wildness, this mad fever in his blood, this fierce yearning that made no sense. With Celia it had been love ... intimacy... commitment. And *pain*. Agonising pain.

He groaned inwardly, silently berating himself for thinking of the two women in the same breath. He never wanted to feel that kind of pain again. He never intended to. No way would he get into a position where he could.

But a little excitement, for once. With a touch of chemistry adding spice. His eyes flicked to the girl's knee as he found himself remembering the way she had reacted to his touch.

Hell... why not?

Trent poured her a mug of hot soup from a Thermos flask as they sat on a bench seat overlooking the broad sweep of Kaoga Bay's main beach, with the cool wind in their faces and Magda's sandwiches spread out on their laps.

There were one or two surfers in wetsuits riding the waves, and a man walking a dog, but otherwise the beach was deserted, the long stretch of sand still dark and damp after the rain.

Sandra could see Trent Corbin's towering headland from where they were ... and the rugged cliffs belonging to Harry's property. Her eyes swept over the tumbled rocks at the base of the cliff.

"Is that your neighbour's private cove that you were talking about?" she asked innocently, pointing to a tiny strip of beach nestled between the jutting rocks.

"Sure, that's it," Trent said broodingly. "You see how handy it would be for people staying at a resort up above? It's a sheltered little beach and those rocks on either side are superb for rock fishing. And access from above, though it's steep, is not difficult."

"So that's where your neighbour ... Harry... goes rock fishing", she murmured, squinting across the water. There was no sign of Harry there now. The cove looked deserted.

"Most of the time, yes. It's his favourite spot." Trent seemed reluctant to admit it. "Can't see any sign of him there today, though. He must have gone fishing somewhere else. There are plenty of other spots", he said indifferently.

She drew in a fractured breath. So uncaring! He didn't care one iota about Harry or what he must be going through. All he cared about was getting his hands on Harry's land!

She reached... for her stick. "I think I'd like to go back now" she said, assu-

Il étouffa un juron. Non ! Il ne comparerait pas cette inconnue à Célia ! Et, de toute façon, la situation était totalement différente. Avec Célia, il avait ressenti du désir, certes, mais rien de ce feu intérieur qui le consumait. Il avait tendrement aimé son épouse. Sandra Wyatt, elle, serait une conquête des plus agréables, qui le changerait des relations insipides dont il s'était contenté jusqu'ici.

Trent ouvrit la bouteille Thermos et versa la soupe brûlante dans la tasse de Sandra. Ils étaient assis sur un banc fixé à une plate-forme rocheuse, juste au-dessus de la plage principale de Kaoga Bay.

Une brise fraîche soufflait sur la mer, où deux surfeurs en combinaison de plongée fendaient les vagues. Longeant l'écume, un homme promenait son chien. En levant les yeux, Sandra aperçut la maison de Trent et, un peu plus haut, les rochers acérés protégeant le cottage de Harry.

— Est-ce la crique privée dont vous me parliez ? demanda-t-elle en désignant une bande de sable, à peine perceptible, dans un creux de la falaise.

— Oui, répondit-il en déballant les sandwichs de Magda. Un lieu idéal pour la résidence que je souhaite y construire. Cette petite plage est abritée du vent, et les rochers, de chaque côté, sont propices à la pêche. Le sentier qui y mène est certes un peu accidenté, mais il n'a rien de dangereux.

— Ah ! C'est donc là que votre voisin vient pêcher, déclara-t-elle en plissant les yeux dans un vain effort pour apercevoir son père.

— En effet. Mais je ne le vois pas, ce matin. Il a dû aller ailleurs. Les endroits ne manquent pas, sur la côte.

Sandra termina sa soupe et reprit sa canne. Rester plus longtemps ici ne servirait à rien, et elle en avait assez des commentaires cyniques de Trent. Il se moquait pas mal des souffrances qu'il imposait à Harry, comme à toutes ses victimes, d'ailleurs.

— J'aimerais rentrer, maintenant, murmura-t-elle. J'ai besoin de mettre une compresse chaude sur ma cheville.

ming a plaintive tone. "I want to give my ankle some more heat treatment." She limped back to the car, using the stick for support. She was walking more easily now and with less pain, but was still taking care not to put all her weight on her injured foot.

She felt Trent's hand at her elbow and her pulse skillered. "I can manage", she said quickly, wondering how she could be so ultra-aware of a mere touch, a polite helping hand. Especially from this man. And not only aware of his touch —aware of his nearness, aware of his breath mingling with hers in the sharp sea breeze, and, above all, aware of his physical magnetism.

She was relieved when she was safely back in her seat in the four-wheel drive, with space between them.

Elle se dirigea en boitant vers la voiture. Aussitôt, son compagnon la prit par le bras.

— Je peux me débrouiller toute seule ! s'écria-t-elle, frissonnant à ce contact comme s'il avait tenté de l'embrasser.

Pourquoi diable sursautait-elle dès qu'il la touchait ? Il essayait de l'aider, voilà tout. Il n'y avait pas de quoi tomber en pâmoison...

Cependant, malgré ses résolutions, Sandra ne respira normalement qu'une fois installée dans la Mercédès, à distance respectueuse de Trent.

CLEO
BIBLIOTHEQUE