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Cats and bugs

Some remarks about semantic parallelisms

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To Cadfael, the little grey Cat, unforgettable.

In several European languages lexical items meaning “cat” also designate the “monkey”, the “drunkard” (or “drunkenness”), several “insects” and some supernatural creatures. Those coincidences – here termed “semantic parallelisms” – are in fact intimately associated and constitute a network of beliefs linked with the medieval carnival. Building up on the pioneer work of Sainean (1905) and previous works by the author (Masson 1999), this paper illustrates the importance of semantic parallelisms not only from the linguistic viewpoint but also from the anthropological and cultural viewpoints. It shows that the semantic parallelisms stem from the cross-culturally recurrent conception of these living beings as connected to supernatural powers, giving rise to semantic shifts such as “scarecrow”, “frighten”, “devil” or “have the gift of witchcraft”.

Keywords: anthropology; cat; culture; metaphor; semantic parallelism; semantic shift

1. Introduction

A *vessel* is a sort of craft. It is also a sort of container (especially in the idiom *blood vessel*; cf. also Fr. *vaisselle*). Now a craft is hollow and a container is hollow as well. Thus one can be prone to consider that the two words *vessel* are akin but one can also be entitled to contest this view for it is well-known that with some imagination one can find a common denominator between any two elements of reality. The force of the subjective judgement depends, in fact, on the authority of the person that bears it.

But now it can be observed that these two meanings of *vessel* can be found not only in the French words *bac* and *nacelle* but also in Latin where *alveus* and *linter* both mean “trough” and “canoe”, in Ancient Greek where *skaphê* means “basin” and “canoe” or in Biblical Hebrew with *teba* meaning “box” and “ark (Noah’s)”.

If so, the association of the meaning “craft” and the meaning “container” is imposed from the outside: it is not made by myself but by the speakers of various

languages at various times and thus it is no longer subjective and I can base myself on what can be called a “semantic parallelism”¹ to assert that *vessel* “craft” is indeed akin to *vessel* “container”.

It appears then that collecting semantic parallelisms as exhaustively as possible is obviously of interest for the etymologist as well as for the semanticist who can ponder over the genesis and mechanism of those coincidences. But more generally all human sciences could benefit from this type of investigation. This is what I would like to illustrate by a few examples.²

For this purpose I would like to resume a remarkable study realized in 1905 by L. Sainean³ on the names of the cat and, incidentally, of the monkey (ape). The author’s intention was not turned towards parallelisms but it happens that he mentioned an impressive number of them although he did not exploit them completely. These parallelisms display two types of anthropological information, some appearing in isolation, others in networks, and they are discussed in turn below.

2. Parallelisms in isolation

Sainean (S 41–42) points out that the name of the cat is frequently applied to various small mammals as well as to monkeys or apes. e.g.:

- civet: Fr. *chat musqué*; It. *gattozibetto*; Port. *gato de algalia*; Germ. *Zibetkatze*.
- squirrel: Occ. *chat-esquirol*; Bret. *kazh-koad* (= “wood-cat”); Germ. *Katzeniechhorn* “blue squirrel”.
- pole-cat: Occ. *cat-pudis* (= “stinking cat”); It. *gatto spusso*; Germ. *Ellenkatze*; and, of course, Engl. *pole-cat*.
- stone marten: Fr. *chafouin*; Catal. *gat-fagi*.
- monkey: It. *gattomammone*; Occ. *cat-mimoun*, *gaminou* “female monkey”; Sp. *gato-paul* “long-tailed monkey”; Germ. *Meerkatze* “female monkey”. (cf. also S 89).

What our mental habits can lead us to judge as a strange confusion lies in fact upon a pre-linnéan classification of animals: not so long ago, species were not fundamentally defined by the possibility of reproduction but by other features such as, for example,

1. A denomination proposed by David Cohen in his seminars at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*.

2. For a larger development, see Masson (1999).

3. The references to Sainean will be indicated by the letter S followed by the number of the page. The abbreviations concerning the geographic denominations are taken over from Sainean as they are. However the names of the different dialects of Occitan are given as Occ.

their aspect, (in the present case, the fact that these animals are anthropoid and hairy). Likewise, under the name of “insect” were grouped together what we still call now that way but also worms, scorpions or small snakes (roughly speaking what is defined in the Bible as the “creeping things” [Gen. 1–24; in Hebrew: *šéresš*]). The word *vermin* derived from French *ver* “worm” still refers to animals as different as fleas, cockroaches and mice. In spite of our reluctance, we must keep in mind that the cat and the monkey are two aspects of what can have been considered as a single entity – which does not imply that the users did not perceive differences but that they judged them as secondary; somewhat as we do nowadays when we give the same name of “dog” to creatures as different as the pug or the basset. We shall see later what can have justified such an apprehension of animal reality.

Of course this pre-linnéan distribution of the animal world is well-known (Linné was so conscious of it that he proposed another one to correct its inadequacy) but the merit of the above-quoted parallelism is first to remind us of this mental distribution and secondly to make us perceive concretely how certain species were classified in particular regions of Western Europe and, thus, bring a contribution to the intelligence of mentalities.⁴

3. Parallelisms in networks

Four types of strange coincidences can be noticed.

3.1 Parallelism associating the monkey and the cat to drunkenness

This is illustrated by Occ. *mounard*, *mounino*, *mounzo* “drunkenness”; It. *scimiato*, *monno* “d°”; Sp. *mona*, *moña* “d°” (s. other examples below and in Sainean 92).

This association between the monkey and drunkenness is also attested by tradition⁵ since it is already to be found in the Talmud⁶ and is represented on the Saint Denis Basin (±1180)⁷ where, among many other figures, a monkey appears beside a personification of drunkenness.⁸ How can this be explained? Such sayings as “black as ink” or “quick as a flash” are based on the indisputable observation that ink is a

4. Concerning this question, see for example, Mounin (1965: 31–54) or Guiraud (1967: 33–64 and passim).

5. On this point, see Janson (1952: 49–51).

6. In Midrash Tanxuma I.13 (ad Genesis 9.20).

7. Nowadays to be found in Paris in the courtyard of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

8. Quoted by Janson (1952: 56).

black substance *par excellence* and that a flash is an *extreme* manifestation of quickness. Would the monkey be then a drunkard *par excellence*? This is what is suggested by Sainean and the FEW chiming in with Pliny (Hist. Nat. 23/44) followed by Elian (Var. Hist. II.40). But this position is untenable. First, because, as is underlined by Janson (1952: 256 n. 6; see also Mac Dermott (1938: 86), Pliny only says that a trick to catch monkeys is to make them drunk. Besides – Janson goes on – no mention is made of monkeys liking wine in the zoological literature of the Middle Ages. In fact, in the wild, monkeys (apes) obviously do not drink alcohol and those that are tamed consume what they are given. They may react with more or less pleasure. They seem to prefer spirits when they are not too strong (diluted in syrup, for example) and, exactly like human beings, they may then become addicted. But nothing proves that they prefer alcohol beyond anything else, sufficiently to give rise to metaphors. Conversely, it is well known that they are fond of fruit and cakes and yet this inclination has never generated metaphors.⁹

Moreover, if monkeys happen to be intoxicated by alcohol, they will grow fidgety. Now monkeys are reputed to be fidgety by nature – even when they are not drunk. In fact, drunkenness does not change their essence: it is not significant and thus can hardly give rise to a metaphor.

Another explanation could be that a drunken man would be comparable to a monkey. But it is gainsaid by the cat. Indeed, this animal is also associated with drunkenness as is testified by such words or idioms as Occ. *mineto*, *miato*, Catal. *gat*, It. *gatta*, Port. *gata*, Sp. *gatera* “the fact of getting plastered” and Catal. *mix* “drunk” and also “pussy” (cf. S 32, 37, 62). Now it is a well-known fact that cats positively hate all alcohol. Considering the coalescence of the two animals as illustrated in the preceding paragraph, it would not be understandable that what goes for the cat should not be valid for the monkey.

3.2 Cat and insects

Let us face now a second parallelism no less strange than the former: the one that, at least in the Romance and Germanic domains, associates the name of the cat – or of the monkey – with the name of an insect in the pre-linnéan sense of the word, i.e., of small invertebrate animals. e.g.¹⁰

- scolopendra:
Fr. *chatte* (St Malo).

9. This information was given to me by Mr Pierre Charles-Dominique, Directeur de recherches au CNRS (Museum d'Histoire Naturelle de Brunoy/91). I thank him heartily.

10. All the following examples are taken from Sainean 28, 33, 40, 47, 56, 69.

- worm:
It. *mignatto* “earthworm”; Sp. *miñosa*, Port. *minhoca*, Gal. *moñoca* “earthworm”; *malmignatta*, *marmignattu* (Corsican) “venomous worm” (= “bad kitten”); Rhaeto-Rom. *ghiata* “sort of worm” (and also “kitten”).
Fr. *macon* (Meuse), *magot* (Guern.); Engl. *maggot* (from the French).
Cf. the names of the cat (monkey) attested in the Romania under connected forms *maco*, *macou*, *magou*, *magot* (s. S 18s).¹¹
NB. Besides, Fr. *macaque* refers to a variety of grub.
- moth:
Fr. *migne*, *mignon* “wax moth”; Pic. *mine*, *mène* “moth” and *minon* “cheese, flesh or fruit worms”.
Cf. names of the cat (monkey) in the Romania: *mine*, *minet*, *minino* (v. S: 16); for words in *mign-*: see above.
- leech:
It. *mignatta* (*bignatta*), *mignelle* (*mignera*); Sic. *mignetta*; Port. *bicha* (= “kitten”).¹²
Cf. names of the cat (monkey) in the Romania: see above.
- silk worm:
Old Fr. *magnan*, *maignan*; Occ. *magnan*, *magna*, *magnac*, *magnard*, *magnaud*, *magniau*, *magni*, *magnon*, *magnot* (all also meaning “cat”); It. *mignanna*, *mignatti*, *magnate*; Sp. (Arag.) *mona* “kitten”.¹³
It. *gatt* (Bol.), *gatina* (Piém.), *gatin* (Milan); Fr. *gatemine* (Gironde) beside It. *gatto* and Sp. *gato* “cat”.
- glow worm:
Fr. *tsato* (Basse Auv.); It. *gata* (Ossola).
It. *mamauin*
Cf. names of the cat (monkey) in the Romania: see above.

11. Guiraud (1967) following Sainean (1905), has well shown that, especially in the Romania, many denominations of the cat were subject to formal recurrent plays whose affective, ludic and finally onomatopoeic origin is beyond doubt: they are composed of one syllable consisting of an initial M- followed by a vowel but, moreover, this fundamental syllable may often be enlarged by various consonants and/or be reduplicated and/or affected by (functional or dummy) affixes. The onomatopoeic character of the basic syllable guarantees the fundamental kinship of the different forms.

12. Cf. Port. *bicho*, *micho*, *bichano*, *bichenho* “kitty”.

13. Cf. Sp. *mono* “sing”; Occ. *mouno* “monkey + cat” (Fr. *moune*, *moumoune*).

- caterpillar:
Occ. *cato*, *chato* (Auv.), *tsotilho* (Corrèze), *gato* (Béarn); Fr. *chatte* (Loire-Inf.); It. *gattina*, *gattola*; *gattareda* (sic.) and, of course, Engl. *caterpillar*, from the French *chate pelose* “hairy cat”.
See also: S. 40.
NB. To Sainean’s list could be added:
Fr. *manne* (wallon) and Occ. *manna* (Périg.) “mayfly”
It. *mammanu*, *mamài* “louse” (Sicily);¹⁴ *magonu* “cockroach” (Cors.; Sard.: *mangonu*).
Fr. *mamau*, *marmaute*, *marmauche* “bug”; Occ. *marmote* “maybug”.¹⁵

All these words are to be compared to denominations of the cat (monkey) in M-such as *man*, *manan* (Milan), in M-M such as Old Fr. *maimon*, It. *mammone* and in MARM- such as Fr. *marmot*, *marmotte*, *marmouse(t)*, *marmoin*, *marmion*; It. *mar-mocchio*, *marmotta* (all quoted by Sainean: *passim*).

NB. In view of what has been said above, it would be advisable to qualify the received etymology of the Fr. *mite* “moth”. According to the FEW, the word is borrowed from Dutch *mijt* which itself would be connected to a non-attested verb meaning *to gnaw*. At present the influence of the word *mite* meaning “cat” in Old French could be taken into account.

Likewise, the etymology of Fr. *man* “May beetle grub” could be revised. For the FEW, the word was borrowed from Frankish **mado* “same meaning”. But the origin of this word is unclear and the detail of the phonetic evolution from *mado* to *man* is not obvious.

3.3 Cat, monkey, insects and black mood

Not only is the cat (monkey) associated by a parallelism with drunkenness and insects but, moreover, the cat (monkey) and the insects themselves are all associated with black mood. e.g.:

- melancholy, queerness:
Fr. *avoir le cafard* “to feel depressive”; Port. *minhocas* “queer habits” (*minhoca* “earthworm”).
It. *grillo* “whim” + “cricket”; Germ. *Grille* “whim + cricket”
Fr. *avoir une araignée au plafond* and Occ. *ave la cigalo* “to have bats in the belfry”

14. Cf. Piccitto & Tropeza (1985).

15. Cf. Simin Palay (1991) who also cites *marmaute* “monkey”.

Occ. *barbòu* “depression” + “strange fellow”;¹⁶ *aver un babot din la testo* “to have visions”; *babarauno* “glow worm + whim, visions”.

And, of course, Engl. *to be lousy* and *a basketball bug*.

NB. Parallel to names of the cat (monkey): Occ. *ramagnol*, *ramamiau*, “whim, craze” (S: 63); *mounino*, *mouninado* “whim, craze”, *mounel* “bizarre” (*mouno* “monkey, cat”) (S: 90 et 92) and pop. French *matagot* “eccentric” (S 92), properly “monkey” (obsolete).

- gloomy
Sp. *chinchearse* “to get angry”; *estar con la chinche* “to be bad-humored” (*chinche* “bug”); *amoscarse* “to take exception” (cf. Fr. *prendre la mouche*); *chincheare* “to bore” (*chinche* “bug + nuisance”); *escarabajo* “bug + trouble”; *bicho* “insect” + “ill-intentioned person”.
Germ. *Dem ist eine Laus über die Leber gelaufen* (lit. “a louse is running on his liver”).
Occ. *grimaud* “sullen person” + “louse, insect”; Occ. *cùcou* “insect” + “sullen”.¹⁷
Cf. Engl. *beetle-browed*; *to bug* “to bother”; *louse* “bastard”.
NB. Notice the expression which in Catalan also refers to a form of mental agitation: *tenir cucs* “to be in a blue funk”, lit. “to have the worms” (*cuc* “worm”).
NB. Parallel to names of the monkey:
Fr. *marmouserie* “melancholy”; *mone*, *moneux* “melancholy (ADJ.)”
Occ. *marmusat* “sickly”; *mouni*, *mouninous* “melancholy (ADJ.)”; *moucaco* “bad look”; *quinaud*, *quinard* “puny” (Périgord).
Sp. *monicaco* “puny”.
It. *darsi alle bertuocchie* “to be worried stiff” (litt. “to give oneself to the monkeys”).
Parallel to names of the cat:
Fr. *maraud* “sickly”.
Occ. *maroto* “bad luck”; *marrano* “bad luck + languor”; *mouruegno* “languor”.
It. (Genoa) *marottu* “sick”
Port. *engatado* “sickly”.
Other ex.: S 37, 44, 48, 63–4, 73, 93.
NB. All the above examples are taken from Sainean 1905; they are connected by the author with names of the cat (monkey).

16. Cf. Simin Palay (1991, sv).

17. Also “deceitful”; cf. Simin Palay (1991, sv).

3.4 Cat, monkey, insects and dreadful creatures

The fourth coincidence deserves all the more attention, as it certainly constitutes the key to the three preceding ones. It appears as a double parallelism: on the one hand, the name of the cat (monkey) is associated with names of dreadful creatures or objects and, on the other hand, the name of insects are likewise associated with those awesome realities. e.g.:

Occ. *babau* “bugbear + bug”.

Fr. *grimaud* “louse” + “wizard + name of the Devil”; *diable* “devil + name of various insects”.

Sp. *coco* “worm + bugbear”

Occ. *morgue*, *mourgo* “fairy” + “bug”.

Catal. *cùco* “glow-worm” + “scarecrow”;¹⁸ *la Cucu fera* “the Tarasque” (litt. “the wild Worm”); (*dimoni cucarell*) “incubus” (*cuc*, *cua* “worm”).

It. *fare baco baco* “to frighten (children)” (*baco* “worm”); *mammicucchiera* “worm” + “monster” (Sic.).¹⁹

Fr. *avoir le barbot* “to have the gift of witchcraft” (*barbot* “bug”).²⁰

Likewise with the names of the cat (monkey):

It. (Milan) *magnan* “scarecrow” (+ “cat”); *mao* (Bergame) “scarecrow” (+ “caterwauling”); *mamao*, *maramao* (Côme), *marramao* (Sic.) “scarecrow” (+ “caterwauling”) (S: 67, 71).

Occ. *mamiu* “caterwauling + bugbear”; It. (Sic.) *mamau*, *mamiu* “caterwauling + bugbear” (Forez *mamiu* “goblin”); Fr. *croquemitaine* (*mitaine* = “cat”); It. (Venice) *marmutone*, *mamutone* “bugbear”, corresponding to Occ. (Lang.) *marmoutin* “cat” (S 70–71); *giatemarangule* “bugbear” (Frioul: S 49).²¹

Occ. *matagot* “wizard cat” (S 79–80).

Fr. *matou* “wizard” (in Furetière), *macaud*, *maraud*, *marcou*, *marlou* (Berry) “wizard + tom cat” (S 79–80; s. also 26 and 49).

Old Fr. *marmot*, *babouin* (*babou*, *baboue*, *baboye*, *babaye*) “bugbear + name of monkey” (S 90).

18. Cf. Simin Palay (1991).

19. Cf. Piccitto & Tropeza (1985, sv).

20. Villeneuve (1998, sv).

21. Diminutive of **giatmara* [*giat* “cat”] connected by Sainean to Occ. *catomiauro* where appears the name of the cat and an imitation of its caterwauling.

Occ. *mouno* “scarecrow” + “monkey” (and “cat”).

It. *mammone*, *gattommamnone* “monkey + bugbear”.

NB. In the domain of French could be added to Sainean’s list: *marmouset* “magic puppet + monkey”²² and *mourmouse* “demon”.²³

In at least three cases it can be noticed that the collusion between the cat (monkey) and the insect is emphasized by the clear formal proximity of some terms belonging to the Romance domain:

Fr. and Occ. *marmouque* “ghost” beside *marmauche*, *marmote* “bug” and *marmaute*, *marmote* “monkey”.

It. (Sic.) *mammicucchiera* “worm + monster” in which can be found the form in MAM- referring to the cat and the element *cuc-* meaning “worm”.

Occ. *babau* “bugbear” + “bug” and Fr. *babouin* “baboon”.

Moreover it would need a good deal of pyrrhonism to dissociate *mamau* “bugbear” (It. Sic.) from Occ. *marmau* and Fr. *marmot* “d” on the one hand and from Occ. *babau* (*baboue*) on the other hand; but the latter words can hardly be separated either from *barbau*, on the one hand and from the simple form attested in Spanish *bu* “bugbear” on the other hand. Thus is revealed a device, if not a system, allowing expressing one and the same semantic whole {cat/monkey/insect} by means of a phonetic set characterized by three components:

1. B + vowel + B.
2. Nasalization of B.
3. Infixation of R into 1 or 2.

3.5 Cultural and historical explanation

Intermingling such animals as different as the cat, the monkey and insects may seem absurd but it can be explained if we accept to admit a way of thinking governed by preoccupations that are no longer ours. Indeed the investigations of the sociologists and ethnologists teach us how a particular form of thinking that some have dubbed “primitive” (Lévy-Bruhl), “magic” (Cassirer) or better “archaic” (Cazeneuve). In this kind of mentality can work, “under the diversity of the forms assumed by beings and objects ... exists and circulates one and the same essential and manifold

22. Villeneuve 1998, sv. *Dagyde*.

23. Lecouteux (1995: 25).

reality, both natural and spiritual at once” (Lévy-Bruhl 1927: 3). This reality is admittedly called *mana*, in the way of the Melanesians who

believe in the existence of a force absolutely distinct from all material force, which acts in all sorts of ways, either for good or for evil, and which it is to man’s advantage to put under his hand and dominate ... It is a force, an influence of an immaterial order and, in a sense, supernatural; but it is by physical force that it is revealed or by any kind of power and superiority that is possessed by man. The mana is not fixed upon a determined object; it can be brought upon all kind of things (Codrington 1891: 118, quoted by Cazeneuve 1961: 126).

It is precisely this supernatural force that is at work in all the components of our fourth parallelism. The fact is obvious in the case of the words designating the devil, the bugbear or the goblin that are the embodiment of the evil force but also the wizard, who is inhabited by that force at least while he is busy casting spells, and also the ghost, who is what is left of life after death. But the Force can also become incarnate in an animal, let it be a cat, a monkey or an insect. This interpretation is historically documented: the eerie reputation of the cat is notorious (e.g., Hue 1982: passim). The monkey, too, has long been considered as a devilish creature (cf. Janson 1952: passim). As to insects (in the broad sense of the term), their contact with the earth and rot makes them close to the world of the dead, the beyond and the terrors pertaining to them. Thus each of the components of the fourth parallelism constitutes a facet of one and the same reality.

Thus can be explained the association {cat (monkey)/insect} but the association {queerness (depression)/cat (monkey)/insect} also becomes transparent in its turn: until recently, mental disturbances or even simple oddness were perceived and conceived as forms of possession. And the drunkenness attributed to the cat (monkey) could be interpreted in the same way. Indeed, let us examine the way it is expressed: in German, for instance, “to get plastered” is *einen Kater haben* “litt. to have a tom cat” or *einen Affen haben* “litt. to have a monkey”; in Port. *tomar o gato* “to take the cat”; in Occ. *prene la mieto* (*miato*, *miacho*) “d°”; in It. we have *pigliare la gata* “to take the kitten” and *pigliare la bertuccia*, *la monna* “to take the monkey”; Sp. *tomar la mona* “take the monkey”.

In all the above cases one is drunk when one “takes” a cat or a monkey. Occitan is still more concrete: one “loads” it (*carga la mineto*), a simile that is to be sometimes found in English concerning a particular form of intoxication in the expression *to have a monkey on one’s back* “to be drug-addicted” (Robert & Collins 1987, s.v. *monkey*). German, for its part, indicates the result: once one has “taken” it, one *has* it; when one has “a hangover”, the Germans say “one *has* a tom cat”. And what does the tomcat do? He indulges in the *Katzenjammer*, i.e., “caterwauling” – and this expression precisely refers to the nauseous headache resulting from inconsiderate potation.

Therefore one has got the cat as one has got the flu and, in order to have them, one catches them. One does not only become comparable to a cat or a monkey, one has in fact ingested it. And, as a result, in order to sleep off one’s wine, one must send the animal to sleep – as Spanish puts it (*dormir la mona*) – or even pour out its active substance, that is to say no less than flay it – as is said in Catalan (*escorxar el gat*). Thus one *has* a monkey inside oneself as one *has* the devil in oneself. And this in the full meaning of the word. Indeed, as recalled above, in the Middle Ages, cats as well as monkeys were seen as devilish beings. Thus, drunkenness is perceived as a state of possession. The demon cat-monkey is thoroughly inhabited by that evil force and he who gets drunk somehow swallows that force: he literally *sucks the monkey*; and when one is dead drunk, one is totally imbibed in this evil spirit,²⁴ one is then entirely a cat (monkey) or, as Catalan puts it, one is *ben gata*, or, to say it in regional French (Ain), one is *miron* (*miron* “cat”).²⁵ One is somehow “be-catted” (“be-monkeyed”) as one can be bedeviled or bewitched.

This interpretation is confirmed by a well-known coincidence: in Ancient Greek, it is one and the same word *bakkhos* that designates a supernatural being (the god Bacchus), the adept of this god (the bacchant) but also wine. In other words, man’s state of mind is altered, he identifies himself with the god by ingesting a substance, a substance endowed of a mysterious power, that is to say a god, the same one to whom the bacchic man identifies himself.²⁶

4. The semantic parallelism with “gloomy, grinning”

We must now account for a last semantic association: the one connecting the idea of “gloomy, grinning” with the cat (monkey) on the one hand and with insects on the other hand.

In the case of the monkey, it may seem transparent since it is accustomed to make faces. Moreover, it is a humanoid and its look invites one to compare it with that of human beings but, as it is hairy and as its features is (comparatively) coarse, it looks like a wild man. But, on the contrary, as far as the cat is concerned, the association is disturbing for its face now mischievous now serene is undoubtedly a paragon of beauty.

24. For all this, see Janson (1952: 49–51).

25. The expression *être miron* is not mentioned by Sainean; we found it in Fréchet & Martin (1998, s.v.).

26. Cf. also Germ. *Kobold* “goblin” + “kind of mead” (Kluge 1995, s.v.).

Now the demoniac character of the cat (monkey) is not only a matter of opinion, of myth, but also of rite. Indeed, numerous testimonies show that this animal was the unfortunate hero of carnival rituals. Sainean (S 82) gives several examples of those abominations. It could be added that, for example, cats were burnt alive on Saint John's Eve and that, in England, they used to be hanged.²⁷ We could also recall all the cruelty underlying the French denominations of several games (*chat perché*, *chat coupé*, etc.; see also S 66) or the well-known song of *La Mère Michel qui a perdu son chat*. Moreover, in French again, this persecution is echoed by a metaphor concerning two (obsolete) words: *mitonner* "to cheat"/*miton* "cat" and *mistoufler* "to cheat"/*mistoufle* "cat".²⁸

It is easy to understand that, being treated in such a way, the wretched creature should not display an inviting countenance and that its downcast look could have been considered as emblematic in view of the social importance of the rituals in which it appeared. It must be pointed out that monkeys were not martyred in the regions whose languages are envisaged here. The reason is obvious: they are exotic and therefore rare and costly. However they may have been exposed to vexations as is testified by some linguistic facts: cf. Fr. (Picard) *moneux* "ashamed"/*mone* "monkey"; Old Fr. *marmot* "monkey" but also "underdog"; *quinaud* "ashamed" derived from *quin* "monkey"; *marmouser* "to bully", *embabouiner* "to cheat"; Port. *mandar bugiar* "to send sb packing" (litt. "to send sb be a *bugio*, i.e., a monkey");

27. See Villeneuve (1998, s.v. *chat*). See also Van Gennepe (1943, I. 862–3) or Hue (1982: 71–75).

28. And probably also *mystifier* (hence Engl. *mystify*) which first appears in 1760. The *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* of Bloch & Wartburg derives it from the Greek *mystes* "initiated" for "about the middle of the 18th century, burlesque initiations were often practiced at the expense of credulous persons. The most famous case is that of Poincette who was made to believe that the King of Prussia wanted to trust him with the education of the crown prince." However, it could be objected that it is not certain that the word attested in 1760 was necessarily born at that time – it may have appeared before; on the other hand, it would be desirable to establish the existence of burlesque initiations more firmly: the example chosen by Bloch & Wartburg is particularly unconvincing for the mystification they mention is not integrated in a pseudo-ritual; moreover, if the mystification were a "burlesque initiation", the victim would be the *myst* or, rather, the one that is made to believe that he is a *myst* and, *pari passu*, it would be expected that the word *myst* came to mean "dupe" and become as common as the word *mystification*. Now *myst* has preserved its original meaning and is only known by specialists. This is why it seems reasonable to suppose that the verb *mystifier* has been formed in the same way as were its synonyms *mitonner* and *mistoufler*, that is to say from a name of the cat similar to *mistoufle* and *miston*. The use of the *y* would be a manifestation of the customary pedantry of French spelling (cf. for example the arbitrary *y* in *gymkhana*, *ylang-ylang* or *sylvestre*).

Sp. *quedarse hecho un mono* (litt. "to be left made a monkey"); It. *berteggiare* "to kid"/*berta* "monkey"; Occ. *mounard* "gullible person" and *far mouna* "to submit".

Now, what about the association of the names of insects with the notion of "gloomy, grimacing"? It is all the more surprising as it is rather unusual to look into the facies of insects; moreover, they are not seen as carnival heroes.

But, precisely, in the carnival ritual, two components are most often to be observed:

- being held as demoniac is ill-treated. As has been seen, it can be a cat that is made to pull a wry face but also another animal (a bear, a goat), a dummy made monstrous by its size and its sardonic, bearded face or a man disguised in a monstrous fashion. He is often clad in foliage or animal hide and wears a horrible mask. He is sometimes called the Wild Man or the Feuillu;
- the participants in the ritual also give themselves a frightening appearance by anointing themselves with a black substance or by sporting masks.

In other words, the mask constitutes the fundamental and perhaps defining feature of the ritual. Let us now return to the insect and examine the following list:

Engl. *dragon-fly*; Sp. *saltamontes* "grasshopper"; Germ. *Heupferd* "grasshopper" (= "hay-horse"); Dutch *sprinkhaan* "grasshopper" (= "hopping cock"); Pol. *konik polny* "grasshopper" (litt. "field poney"); Bret. *marc'h-raden* "grasshopper" (= "fern-horse"); Rus. *božnaya korobka* "ladybird" (= "God's little cow" – transposed into Mod. Hebrew as *parat moše rabeynu* "Our Master Moses' cow"); Fr. *cerf-volant* "stag-beetle" ("flying stag"); Engl. *centipede* and Fr. *mille-pattes* ("thousand feet"); Engl. *praying mantis* and Fr. *mante religieuse* (already in Greek; in Mod. Hebrew *gmal šlomo*, [= "Solomon's camel"]). All those words show that there exists a disposition in the speakers to consider insects as beings larger than they really are, that is to say in the way that children do with most of their toys.

Moreover, if one looks into the head of an insect as if it were a human face, one can notice that it is totally inexpressive with blank, somewhat fascinating eyes and thus it corresponds exactly to what is named a mask. The correspondence is so striking that the facies of some insects is called *mask* by the entomologists who also apply to certain forms of various insects the word *larva* which in Latin means "ghost" and also "mask".

Consequently, if gigantic proportions are given to that creature endowed with a miniature mask, it can be understood that it should have been enrolled in the carnival ritual as is precisely the case of the Tarasque designated in Catalonia by the expression *la Cuca fera* "the wild Worm".

This hypothesis is confirmed by two details:

Firstly, in Occitan we meet the word *babouiro* “carnival mask” that has the same consonance as *babau*, *babal*, *babòu*, *baboueto* “insect”. It is to be found in Old French as *babeoire* (or *babounière*) which also appears in the form *barbeoire* sounding like words designating insects in the Gallo-Roman domain (*barbot*, *barboto*).²⁹

Secondly, another carnivalesque reality is also named after an Occitan expression in which appears a word akin to the two preceding ones, *far la barbara*, that is “to subject to the public humiliation of the (so-called) *charivari*”. Indeed, it is known that the carnival ritual includes the *charivari* in the course of which the King of Carnival is ridiculed – which does not prevent this practice from being applied outside the carnival to any person that one wants to bully. He (she) is exposed to what is called in Old French *la quine mine* and he (she) becomes then all *quinaud*, expressions in which is precisely to be found the name of the carnival animal, the *quin*, that is the “monkey”, in parallel with that of the insect in the Occitan *barbara*.

NB. All this allows one to understand better the link uniting the words *bug*, *bugbear* and *bugaboo* the origin of which is qualified as obscure by the Oxford Dictionary: the *bug* “object of dread” is very probably related to Welsh *bwg* (*bwgan*) “devil” as is suggested by the Oxford Dictionary but it might well be akin to the mask-wearing animal, the bug “insect”. It is of course to be found in *bugbear*, associated to the bear that, like the cat and the monkey, is one of the hypostases of the carnival hero. And, in *bugaboo*, it is certainly joined to the onomatopoeic element present in *to boo* (also cf. Sp. *bu* “bugbear”) that evokes the hullabaloo of the *charivari* ritual.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that semantic parallelisms do not necessarily function in an isolated way; there also exist networks of mutually connected semantic features resulting in a sort of very short story expressing a world vision and which it would not be incongruous to compare to a myth.

Thus, beyond the obvious interest that it presents for the linguist and particularly for the etymologist, the observation of semantic parallelisms could open out a twofold perspective.

First, in the same way as written documents or iconography, it can be used as an auxiliary to other types of reflection, let it be historical, literary or sociological. Thus, for instance, it could enrich such investigations as those of Walter

29. S. Godefroy (1982, svv).

(2003) or Lecouteux (1995).³⁰ Then, on a larger scale, it could throw some light on the study of mentalities and cognitive processes or psychoanalysis and, in particular, lead to the discovery of universals. Moreover, a priori, the observation of parallelisms is supposed to cover the whole globe and, there again, as long as the inventory is not complete, the interpretation of the data can be perturbed. For instance, to return to the present study, it can have been noticed that all the parallelisms belong to modern languages of Western Europe (Romance and Germanic) but this is simply because our basic sources were Sainean and Guiraud. The conclusions that can be drawn are necessarily provisional.

However, it must not be concealed that coping with semantic parallelisms requires a good deal of prudence: the field is considerable and one is never sure to have at one's disposal all the elements pertaining to a parallelism. Now the absence of one of them can prevent one from interpreting the functioning of a network adequately. For example, among the parallelisms examined above, it appears that the one associating a supernatural being with the cat (monkey) and the insect plays a key-role: it is this that puts us on the track of the mana and reveals that all the other parallelisms are interconnected; without it, we would have only a catalogue of coincidences, certainly interesting but lifeless.

However, semantic parallelisms allow us to reduce the subjectivity of the observer and, if cautiously handled, they can be of enough use to invite the researchers to go deeper into the matter.

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