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**The Caetani-Mathews Papers:  
Introducing René Char to the American Readership**

*Abstract*

In this article I intend to shed light on the work of Marguerite Caetani, modern and cosmopolitan editor and patron in the context of post-World War II literary history.

*Hypnos Waking*, the first anthology of René Char's poetry ever to appear in the United States, was published by Random House in 1956. The volume, which pioneered a long series of "Char studies" in the US, was translated by American scholar Jackson Mathews and included works that had been previously published in «Botteghe Oscure», an international and multilingual literary journal based in Rome and edited by American-born princess Marguerite Chapin-Caetani.

Caetani's leading role in promoting Char's poetry on both sides of the Atlantic emerges with utmost clarity from the correspondence she exchanged with both Char and Mathews in the years preceding publication of *Hypnos Waking*. The study of these letters shows how Caetani used her considerable influence in the literary world to boost Char's reputation and give maximum visibility to his work. In this article I contend that Caetani's interest in Char reveals a deep consonance of aesthetic views, and draw a comparison between his poetry and her editorial philosophy through the cross-disciplinary concept of literary counterpoint.

*Hypnos Waking*, edited by Jackson Mathews and published in 1956 by Random House, was the first volume of poems by René Char ever to appear in English translation. In an article published on *World Literature Today* in 1977, twenty years after the book, literary critic and scholar L. C. Breunig reports on Char's popularity in the US literary community. In the article Breunig thanks Mathews «for having almost single-handed introduced René Char to the American public» (BREUNIG 1977, 396). In the following sentence, however, Breunig notes that a number of Mathews' translations had already appeared in the US on the pages of «Botteghe Oscure»: an international, multilingual literary review printed in Rome and run by the American-Italian Princess Marguerite Caetani.<sup>1</sup> Breunig goes on to write that excerpts from *Hypnos Waking* were published by important literary periodicals such as *The Nation*, the *Atlantic*, and *Poetry*, and that — after slowing down in the sixties — Char's notoriety in the US soared once his poetry started to appear in anthologies for undergraduate courses in many French

Studies departments. A number of doctoral dissertations on the French poet followed suit, and finally a full-length study by Mary Ann Caws (*The Presence of René Char*, 1976).

Almost forty years have passed, and many more studies on Char have been published: three volumes with new translations of his poetry were released in 2010 alone. Char is today widely recognized as one of the greatest modern French poets. The present article, however, is not about Char's poetry or Mathews' translations; it focuses instead on the person Mathews called «Char's principal sponsor»: the American expatriate, literary patron, and editor Marguerite Caetani (1880-1963).<sup>2</sup> Wealthy, fluent in both French and English, and with a remarkable sense of artistic intuition that allowed her to spot young talent, Marguerite was an important *trait d'union* between Char, Mathews, and their respective publishers in France and in the States. She provided precious connections with journalists, editors, and critics on both sides of the Atlantic; her international, Rome-based review, «Botteghe Oscure», hosted Char's poetry in twelve out of twenty-five issues, from 1949 (No. 3) to 1960 (No. 25). Unlike many other “ladies bountiful” who left detailed accounts of their every move, word, and thought, Marguerite always refrained from publicly speaking about her deeds; and yet, without her help, Jackson Mathews would have never been able to publish *Hypnos Waking*, no American reviews would have published his translations, and Char's poetry would have remained unknown to the American readership for a longer period of time.

Only in recent years have the editorial accomplishments of Marguerite Caetani started to garner scholarly attention; the repertoire published by her reviews («Botteghe Oscure» was preceded by another international review, «Commerce», printed in Paris from 1924 to 1932) is formidable for both quality and variety and includes works of poetry and prose, plays, radio broadcasts and opera libretti. A comprehensive list of the most important authors who published in Caetani's journals would occupy the full length of this paper, but it seems fair to recall at least the names of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Paul Valéry, William Faulkner,

Tennessee Williams, Dylan Thomas, Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia, Eugenio Montale, and Pier Paolo Pasolini.

In this article I investigate the circumstances that brought together Caetani, Mathews, and Char, and how their concerted effort resulted in the publication of *Hypnos Waking* in the USA. Caetani's contribution to this important literary achievement deserves to be acknowledged per se, but there is another, equally compelling reason calling for a thorough analysis of the long-lasting and fruitful relationship among these three characters. While it is generally recognized that Caetani was actively involved in the compiling and editing of her publications, to this date there has been no serious effort to reconstruct her editorial philosophy. Existing sources point to the abundance of literary consultants that helped Marguerite Caetani to assemble each number of «Botteghe Oscure», first and foremost Giorgio Bassani; their individual roles, however, have been often overestimated.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to her intellectual energy, financial resources, and innate cosmopolitanism, Caetani was able to coordinate the variety of input coming from so many different personalities without forcing them to comply with a specific cultural or political agenda, so that her journal was the result of a choral effort rather than the emanation of one particular school or artistic trend.

This attempt to capture a multitude of independent voices shaped «Botteghe Oscure»'s identity and found its literary counterpart in the poetry of René Char. It is not a coincidence that his work was featured so prominently in the journal's twenty-five issues and in other publications sponsored by Caetani. The consonance between Caetani's artistic sensitivity and Char's verse inspired their collaboration and fostered a solid friendship. In the following pages I provide biographical information about Caetani and present a concrete example of her “polyphonic” editing, one which resulted in the exporting of Char's poetry on the US market.

Extensive correspondence between Caetani, Char, and Mathews allowed me to draw a fairly detailed picture of the painstaking process behind the publication of *Hypnos Waking*. The bulk of such correspondence constitutes part of the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill in North Carolina. The

Jackson Mathews Papers include fifty-two autograph letters from Char and a considerable amount of correspondence with Marguerite, spanning the years 1952-58. It appears that Mathews was much better than Marguerite at keeping records, which explains why I could only locate a small number of his letters at the Caetani archive in Rome. Incidentally, only one letter by Char is to be found there. According to one of the curators, Marguerite had probably thrown away Char's letters like she did for other correspondence, but such an explanation is not entirely convincing: why would Marguerite discard all of Char's letters? It is reasonable to suppose that the content of some might be too personal to be made public, but why would she want to cancel so completely any written memories of a poet she loved and cared for so much?

Missing letters notwithstanding, the correspondence preserved in Chapel Hill and Rome offers valuable insight into Marguerite's editorial philosophy and testify to her determination in promoting René Char's poetry. In this regard, Caetani showed a remarkable intuition; despite the good notoriety he had achieved in France, partly due to his bravery as part of the Maquis, Char was far from established as a poet in other countries. With Char's best interests at heart, Marguerite took upon herself the multiple roles of agent, publisher, and patron; she supported Jackson Mathews in his translating work and, as often happened with the collaborators she most esteemed, the two became lifelong friends. But who exactly was Marguerite Caetani? Why would she publish English translations of French poetry in her review, which was printed in Italy? How did her acquaintance with Mathews and Char develop?

Born in 1880 in New London, Connecticut, Marguerite Chapin was Mathews' senior by twenty-seven years. Her mother, Leila Gibert, descended from a family of French aristocrats, which may explain Marguerite's early fascination with European culture. Marguerite's father, Lindley Chapin, descended from a long and illustrious lineage that went back to Deacon Samuel Chapin, founder of Springfield, Massachusetts. Leila Chapin died when Marguerite was only five; her father entered a second marriage with Cornelia Garrison Van Auken, who bore him three more children.<sup>4</sup> Marguerite loved her stepsiblings but could never quite

settle within the acquired family, and moved to France as soon as she turned twenty-one. Lindley had died five years earlier, leaving her free and very well off financially. She never returned to the States.

Paris offered Marguerite the spiritual nourishment she had always longed for; thanks to her curious, outgoing personality and to her financial independence, Marguerite was able to delve deep into the city's lively artistic and intellectual environment. She studied singing with celebrated tenor Jean de Reszke<sup>5</sup> but soon decided not to pursue a career in music; instead, she began to commission artwork from notable artists like Pierre Bonnard and Eduard Vuillard. Her wealth allowed her to live sumptuously and granted her access to exclusive circles; she was perfectly attuned with the ever-changing artistic currents that were shaping the age of modernism.

In 1911 Marguerite married prince Roffredo Caetani, a young and handsome composer, scion of one of Rome's most illustrious families. The couple settled at historical Ville Romaine, in Versailles; their residence soon became one of Paris' most celebrated literary-artistic venues. The Caetanis' Sunday luncheons were attended by Joyce, Stravinsky, Paul Valéry, Gide, Bracque, Colette, Picasso, Claudel, Valery Larbaud, St. John Perse, and many others. Their conversations provided the spark that ignited Marguerite's life-long commitment to literature. She decided to sponsor the publication of a review to share the sense of intellectual freedom and cosmopolitanism that animated those gatherings. The title chosen for the new periodical was «Commerce» because, in its editors' intention, authors of any background and nationality would exchange and compare their ideas on its pages.<sup>6</sup> Larbaud, Léon-Paul Fargue, and Valéry would be co-editors along with Jean Paulhan and Alexis Leger (Saint John Perse) as non-official collaborators.

As for Marguerite, she did not want her name to appear at all; by reading her correspondence with editors and contributors, however, one immediately understands that her role went far beyond that of financial backer for the review. In a letter sent to Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth, with the purpose of obtaining permission to translate and publish several texts written by the German

philosopher, Marguerite clearly stated the mission her new publication would carry out: «In such a combination of what is still young and will remain forever young together with the new contributions of our time I see the true meaning of a review like “Commerce”» (LEVIE 1989, 29-30). Marguerite thought that the adjective “young” should not be applied to new authors exclusively; rather, it indicated a larger category of works that preserved their “youth” regardless of when they were created.

The same ideals had been championed by T. S. Eliot in his journal «The Criterion», which started two years before «Commerce». Eliot was a distant cousin of Marguerite and one of «Commerce»’s literary consultants. As early as 1919, in an essay printed on «The Egoist», Eliot had identified a sort of “cultural burden” carried by modern European poets:

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. (ELIOT 1919, 55)

While drawing attention to the infinite echoes of cultures past, Eliot affirms the necessity to establish a constant dialogue among literatures from different countries and different ages; in so doing he takes a stand against the concepts of linear time and rupture with the past that informed the avant-garde, and envisions a choral approach to creative work that will inspire Caetani’s editorship of «Commerce». A similar approach, albeit with less focus on the chronological and more on the geographical dimension, will inform Said’s notion of contrapuntal writing: finding new meanings through a multiplicity of distinguished and independent yet correlated voices.

Eliot’s «historical sense» can be usefully compared to the «feeling of time» evoked by Giuseppe Ungaretti in the collection of poetry that bears the same title: *Sentimento del Tempo*. The analogy has been drawn by Elena Conti in his article *Ungaretti, mediatore culturale di «Commerce»*. The Italian poet, by his own

admission, owed much to Caetani's enlightened patronage and to her hospitality at the Caetani residence in Versailles, described by Ungaretti as «Casa italiana sul suolo di Francia, casa aperta, come era nel programma di "Commerce", a chiunque, senza distinzione di paese, le sembrasse illuminato dalla poesia» («An Italian house on French land, open, just like "Commerce", to anybody, from any country, she deemed enlightened by poetry»; UNGARETTI 1958, 14).<sup>7</sup> Ungaretti was Caetani's consultant for the Italian section of «Commerce». Like Eliot, he was determined to uphold his country's great literary tradition, but his letters to Caetani abound with bitter remarks concerning Italy's literati. He expressed his frustration toward the narrow views of Italian critics, portrayed as obtuse and unable to appreciate innovative work. He felt suffocated and planned to react by founding his own literary magazine: this project, however, never took off.

Caetani's hospitality at Versailles allowed Ungaretti to deepen his connections with the poets he most admired, like Valéry. Ungaretti published in «Commerce» two series of poems that testify to a new stage of his poetic development, a phase that will culminate in the 1933 collection *Sentimento del tempo* ("The Feeling of Time") in which these poems are included (with variants). Ungaretti meditates on the concept of internal duration (he had attended the lectures of Henri Bergson for two years in Paris) and the idea of temporal reversibility: the mind can establish a bi-directional flow that allows us to interact with the past in our present. The notion of reversibility resonated with Eliot's ideas on "cultural memory" and "living tradition," concepts that shaped Caetani's editorial model in «Commerce» and, later, «Botteghe Oscure».

Caetani's reverence for the past did not turn her away from those authors who took an innovative stand in their writing; on the contrary, many works published in her journals marked a radical break from literary conventions. The first number of «Commerce» featured a long excerpt from Joyce's *Ulysses*, translated into French for the first time by Valéry Larbaud and Auguste Morel (with considerable help by Adrienne Monnier); another modernist masterpiece, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, first appeared in France on the pages of «Commerce»: *Time Passes*, the second part of the novel, was included in the

tenth issue (winter 1926) of the review with the title *Le Temps Passe*.<sup>8</sup> Even surrealists like Louis Aragon and André Breton saw their work published in «Commerce».<sup>9</sup>

The global financial crash of the Thirties took a heavy toll on the Caetanis' finances. They decided to relocate to Italy, where Roffredo's family owned most of the land between Rome and Naples, and took residence in the historic Palazzo Caetani on Via delle Botteghe Oscure in Rome; the street name can be roughly translated as "of the dark shops", and it refers to the vendors that once settled in the street-level arcades of an ancient Roman amphitheater. The street kept its name even though it had been considerably widened during Mussolini's ambitious urban development plan. Shortly after WWII, when Marguerite decided to name her second literary review after her home address, many among her friends and collaborators expressed their concern that the title may originate some confusion; the Italian Communist Party was also headquartered in Via delle Botteghe Oscure, only blocks away from the *Palazzo*. Caetani would always reject the objections on the ground that her husband's family had been living there for hundreds of years, much longer than the Communists.

With the notable exception of Gelasio, Roffredo's brother, who served as Italian ambassador in Washington, the Caetanis never showed enthusiasm toward the fascists' swift rise to power. This was especially true for Marguerite, who remained faithful to the American ideals of freedom and democracy. Her feelings could do nothing to prevent her son, Camillo, from joining the army when WWII erupted; in 1941 he was killed in action on the Greek-Albanian front. Camillo's death was a devastating blow and caused the extinction of the Caetani family, since he was the only heir to the Caetanis' immense fortune. The war had ended but the world was far from pacified, split as it was into two political blocks, each aiming for military and cultural supremacy. Both parties lay down their claims to Italy's war-ravaged territory. Most Italian intellectuals felt compelled to engage directly in the political struggle: not to do so would be unthinkable after the culpable inaction of the Fascist era. The debate was especially fervent within the political left; the Communist party undoubtedly had the best gear to win the



battle for cultural supremacy. The leftist intelligentsia deployed an array of pamphlets, magazines, and reviews in the attempt to win over the masses to the cause of socialism. There was a call for widespread participation to politics, but in many cases literature became a means to an end, the end being a more or less orthodox version of applied socialism.

Marguerite Caetani could not subscribe to this vision of militant literature; she despised all forms of propaganda, and was not keen on fomenting new divisions within the Italian society. She chose a different form of engagement and in November 1944, five months after Rome was liberated from the German occupation, became president of a cultural association founded by her friends Nina Ruffini and Giuliana Benzoni. “Il Ritrovo” (“The Retreat”), as the name suggests, wanted to be a shared space to foster communication with the Anglo-American troops, as well as a place of reconciliation amidst the various political forces at work in the capital with the objective of rebuilding a sense of national identity.

“Il Ritrovo” stayed active for almost two years, hosting a remarkable series of cultural events – lectures, poetry readings, concerts, art exhibits – until in 1946 Marguerite and the other members of the board quietly decided to put an end to its activities. The new social and political climate called for a different kind of organization, more focused and less ecumenical, which however hardly suited Marguerite’s unwillingness to make compromises. Moreover, a new and more ambitious project was taking shape in her mind. As far back as 1941, in a letter to her half-sister Katherine, Marguerite had mentioned the idea of starting up a literary publication on the example of «Commerce». In the punctuation-free, colloquial style she often used with family and close friends she wrote: «I am terribly tempted to try a sort of “Commerce” Prose and Poetry in French Italian and English no translations [sic]. One is suffocated here by the quantity of publications political, critical, historical dry as dust. One longs at least I do for some light and air and a bit of phantasy [sic]. Perhaps it is only a dream and impossible to accomplish now» (12 April 1941). Now that the war was over, Marguerite's dream could finally take a concrete form: a bi-annual literary review

that would look beyond national boundaries and literary fashions, establishing a platform for writers and poets regardless of their language, country, or political ideas.

Like Madame de Staël a century before her, Marguerite believed that a nation's artistic renewal depended on its intellectuals' ability to expand the radius of their cultural horizon, engaging in a literary counterpoint with authors of different nationalities. In 1816 de Staël sent an open letter to all Italian writers, inviting them to look beyond geographical boundaries, using translation as key to access mind-opening literary riches from other countries. The letter, *Sulla maniera e la utilità delle traduzioni* (*On the Manner and Usefulness of Translations*), starts with the following words:

Trasportare da una ad altra favella le opere eccellenti dell'umano ingegno è il maggior beneficio che far si possa alle lettere; perché sono sì poche le opere perfette, e la invenzione in qualunque genere è tanto rara, che se ciascuna delle nazioni moderne volesse appagarsi delle ricchezze sue proprie, sarebbe ognor povera: e *il commercio de' pensieri è quello che ha più sicuro profitto*. (DE STAËL 1821, 387.<sup>10</sup> My emphasis)<sup>11</sup>

To carry from one language to another the excellent works of human wits, that is the greatest good one can do to literature; given that so few of those works are perfect, and that invention in all genres is so rare, if each modern nation was content with its own riches it would be always poor: and the commerce of ideas is the one that grants most certain profit.

«The commerce of ideas is the one that grants most certain profit»; a simile that may have been the motto of an American “Gibson Girl” who entered the editorial business in Paris at the peak of the “Roaring Twenties.” While «Commerce» aspired to reflect an idea of global and “timeless” literature but remained in essence a French review, however, with «Botteghe Oscure» Marguerite aimed for a truly international readership; from the second issue (1949) the review became multilingual with the addition of an English section; French, German, and Spanish followed suit. Most of the texts were presented in the original language with no translation, except for brief selection of works from other countries like Korea and the Netherlands, which were translated in English. More importantly, the review published nothing but literature; it did not

contribute with reviews or criticism, provide any room for ideological confrontations, or offer critical reflection on the role of intellectuals that were so common in other publications.

We have seen how much space «Commerce» gave to translations; for «Botteghe Oscure», Marguerite preferred to use original texts; from the fourth (1949) to the sixth (1950) issue, however, a booklet with an Italian translation of the English section was enclosed with the review. In 1950, moreover, Marguerite edited an anthology of works by Italian writers, translated in English for the American market. The works selected from the pages of «Botteghe Oscure» included several prose works: Vasco Pratolini's *The Girls of San Frediano* (*Le ragazze di San Frediano*), Guglielmo Petroni's *The House is Moving* (*La casa si muove*), and Mario Soldati's *The Window* (*La finestra*). Poetry was represented by authors like Attilio Bertolucci, Giorgio Caproni, and Roberto Roversi. The *Anthology of New Italian Writers*, published in New York by New Directions, was received favorably by most commentators, who were struck by the “vitality” coming from our country (“The Vital Italians” titled Thomas Bergin in reviewing the anthology on «The Freeman»); the volume stands as yet another example of Marguerite Caetani's efforts to promote a fertile «commerce of ideas» between writers and intellectuals of different nationalities.<sup>12</sup>

«Botteghe Oscure» started publications in 1948, and soon attracted Char's attention. He was a good friend of Marguerite's and eager to participate in a new editorial project now that his own *Empédocle* had ceased publications due to financial problems (GREILSAMER 2004, 268).<sup>13</sup> The third issue (1949) featured a short selection of Char's poetry (*Poésies*); the fifth published *La lune d'Hypnos*; the seventh, *La minutieuse*. Starting from the eighth issue, published in 1951, Marguerite made a significant modification to the format of the review: she switched around the French and the Italian sections so that the former now opened the volume. Marguerite made such a drastic change in spite of the objections moved by her closest collaborators at the time, Giorgio Bassani and Elsa Dallolio (VALLI and CAETANI 1999, 7). From now on, Char's work would occupy a special position in the review, always at the beginning of the French section, i.e.

of the review, or at the beginning of the English section when published in translation.

Did Marguerite's decision to change the order of the sections in the review originate from a desire to give increased prominence to Char's work? While it may be tempting to answer in the affirmative, given Marguerite's growing interest in Char's poetry, one should consider that the rearranging of the sections began with an issue that did not include any writings by Char. It is more likely that Marguerite wanted to emphasize the growing importance of «Botteghe Oscure» on the literary scene of other countries besides Italy. Data gathered in occasion of «Botteghe Oscure»'s tenth anniversary, in 1958, showed that 568 writers from over twenty different countries had contributed to the review (MACLEISH 1960, 26).

As «Botteghe Oscure» became popular in Europe and in the States, Marguerite felt increasingly responsible toward her readership as regards quality: she did not hesitate to reject works submitted or recommended by friends if they were not up to her standard, and she kept raising the bar as more and more contributions poured in. This predicament was especially true for all submissions in English and French, given her mastery of those languages. In 1953 she refused a whole set of poems by a young friend of Allen Tate; Tate himself had sent her the poems, recommending his pupil warmly. She wrote Mathews that she did not think that was poetry at all, adding: «I get so much material now that I feel I must not compromise in any way, especially for Poetry. I get such a lot of competent, dull, earth-bound, soi-disant poetry which I can't bear» (15 March 1953). Caetani's fondness for poetry made her particularly selective in that genre and put her at odds with some of her closest collaborators, like Bassani, who instead favored narrative fiction.

Despite their occasional difference of opinions, however, Bassani and Caetani were alike in advocating sobriety, in life as in literature, and opposing excesses of any kind: the rarefied poetry of the hermetics, the mannerism of the late neorealist production, most of the avant-garde, and any writer with an all-too-evident agenda were excluded. The editors of «Botteghe Oscure» also shunned

profanities and obscenity: Caetani refused to publish Alberto Moravia's story *Luna di miele, sole di fiele* because of its crude wording. In another occasion she wanted Bassani to ask Pasolini to change some words in the poem *Picasso* («Botteghe Oscure» No. 12, fall 1953), but Bassani was able to dissuade her.

The main criteria adopted in selecting works for «Botteghe Oscure» were expounded by Bassani in the only editorial article that ever appeared in the journal; a reflection that closed the twenty-fifth and last issue and was aptly entitled *Congedo (Farewell)*. Looking back on twelve years of editorial work, Bassani made some observations that can be summarized as follows:

1. «Botteghe Oscure» never printed literary criticism; the choices made by its editors, however, were informed by a precise strategy, and therefore helped shaping the development of contemporary Italian literature.
2. «Botteghe Oscure» expressed a strong preference for those writers who were still unknown (or little known) in their own countries, especially if they were young.
3. «Botteghe Oscure» eschewed “experiments” (*prodotti sperimentali*) of any kind, and rejected the so-called “avant-garde literature.”
4. «Botteghe Oscure» refused to indulge in a sterile commemoration (*commemorazione*) of old-fashioned, pre-war poetic models.<sup>14</sup>

Another, non-written rule adopted by the editors consisted in granting new authors enough space to offer a representative sample of their work, which caused «Botteghe Oscure» to grow in size at an alarming rate. Caetani was aware of this problem: announcing to Mathews the release of issue XI, in the spring of 1953, which for the first time broke the 500-page mark, she wrote: «“Botteghe Oscure” is out here *just*, and you will get yours as soon as possible. It is a monster and if not ‘heavy to the mind’ at least it is ‘heavy to the hand’ I fear, but I swear never to make such a big one again» (11 May 1953). For the record, Marguerite was able to keep her promise, if barely: the following issue had “only” 529 pages instead of 539.

Starting in the early Fifties, Caetani began to give more prominence to works by English-speaking authors. In an interview she gave in 1958, when she was

seventy-eight years old, she explicitly stated that European writers struck her as less prone to experiment with language: «Instead, they appear to be trying to consolidate and refine the use of the written word», she told her interviewer, and added: «From America comes work that appears to be more lively, more varied, more original than what is produced in Europe; perhaps it is because the United States is so much bigger, so much more diversified». She went on to identify national writing attitudes: «There is quality in the writing of young British writers, but less variety than we find in the Americans». The strongest criticism was reserved for the French: «[They] have come up with relatively little. We have found many interesting, accomplished writers and poets whom we have published... But on the whole current French writing is not so exciting. They all write about Paris» (LEVIN 1958).

Surely, one of those “interesting and accomplished” French poets was René Char. In 1952, four years before the publication of *Hypnos Waking* in the States, Marguerite decided to open the English section in the tenth issue of «Botteghe Oscure» with a selection of Char's poems translated by Scottish-Irish poet Denis Devlin and Jackson Mathews.<sup>15</sup> The prominence given to Char's work, strategically positioned between the French and the English sections, indicated Marguerite's goal of introducing her favorite poet to the US readership. Along with the review came an offprint of 39 pages containing Char's poems, press reviews, and a bibliography; the booklet also announced a forthcoming volume of Char's poetry translated by Mathews and including the French originals. Besides the poems included in the review and the offprint, one more publication came out in the same year, this too sponsored by the princess, to further advertise the work of Char: a 30-page essay in French by Pierre Guerre, aptly entitled *René Char*, of which 1500 copies were printed in Rome. Such an impressive concentration of publications leaves little doubt about Marguerite's intention of boosting Char's reputation on the international scene, preparing the way for his North-American editorial debut.

Marguerite had met Jackson Mathews in the summer of 1952, in her Paris apartment at 4 Rue du Cirque. The two might have corresponded prior to this

visit, but there is no evidence in that regard.<sup>16</sup> In the fall, Mathews was back in America to resume his teaching duties at University of Washington. On October 18 Marguerite writes to him asking for news: «Dear Professor Mathews, it seems so very, very far away that last day I saw you and my new and very warm and grateful friendship feels [illegible] by being kept so long without news, especially as you are just about as far away as you could possibly be» (18 October 1952). Since Marguerite refers to a “new” friendship we can safely assume that the two had in fact met in Paris; her writing, however, denotes a degree of intimacy that could not develop after just one or two occasional meetings. It seems more likely that Marguerite and Mathews had met frequently and that a bond had already been established between them over the summer.

In the letter Marguerite speaks of gratitude; what was she grateful for? The answer can be found just a few lines below: «Char was able to see how you went on until the last minute improving the translations and if he hasn't written to you yet it is my fault for not giving him your address and he has been continually away from Paris». The last statement reinforces the impression that Marguerite was an active agent in the collaboration between Mathews and Char. She thanks Mathews for his work on Char's poems – «You are an angel from heaven», she writes – and assures him that the French poet will get in touch as soon as she gives him Mathews' address. It appears that it was her who had introduced the translator to the poet, with a specific task in mind: the publication on «Botteghe Oscure» 10 (fall 1952) of a long selection of Char's work, translated by Denis Devlin and Jackson Mathews. Mathews soon replaced Devlin as Char's translator of choice for «Botteghe Oscure»; the American was more suited to the task, given his deep knowledge of French poetry and his previous work in the field of French-English translation.<sup>17</sup>

Mathews replies to Marguerite on October 25<sup>th</sup>, in the same warm tone, confirming the circumstances of their first meetings: «I have not, as you do know, left off thinking of you, of our many talks at fine lunches, our projects, and especially the sudden great pleasure of our friendship, that put a shine on the summer that wasn't there in the weather» (25 October 1952). Among their

projects, the most important consisted in finding an American publisher for a volume of Char's poetry translated by Mathews. Their strategy involved a two-pronged attack: first Marguerite would send offprints from «Botteghe Oscure»; Mathews then followed with a letter to the editors. In one of these letters, addressed to Mr. Robert Giroux of Harcourt Brace & Co. and dated January 12th, 1953, Mathews writes:

Dear Mr. Giroux, You will perhaps have received from Princess Caetani an offprint of her review Botteghe Oscure, containing a selection of poems by the French poet René Char, translated by Denis Devlin and myself. I hope you may also have seen Genêt's "Letter from Paris" in The New Yorker for January 10th, which speaks of Char's leadership of living French poets. I am at present translating with the help of Char and Signora Caetani, a good-sized volume of his work, and we wish to propose that Harcourt Brace publish it. (12 Jan 1953)

Mathews underlines how both Char and Marguerite are helping him with the translations; clearly she is more than a wealthy patroness. Mathews keeps her informed of the progress he is making with the translations, and in a letter dated February 23 (1953) outlines the method he intends to follow:

I am seeing the poems much more clearly and feeling them more fully than last summer, without an already Englished text standing between me and them. My notion is to send them along to you and R.C. in batches, for your suggestions, and also for you both to pass them on to others for criticism, if you will. You or anyone else can write directly onto the sheets, and later you could return them to me? What do you think of this plan? These are first drafts, not final. And I have kept copies. My notion is to get them all done and in circulation through you, and then give them time to mature by revision, before publication. (23 February 1953)

To add weight to his request, Mathews asked poet Robert Lowell to intercede with Harcourt Brace. The move was orchestrated by Marguerite; Lowell and his wife had just been in Rome, guests of the Caetanis, and Marguerite had him read the Char translations. After Harcourt Brace declined the offer, in spite of a second recommendation from another of Marguerite's friends, poet Allen Tate, Mathews contacted David MacDowell of Random House Press. The letter was accompanied by a series of articles drawing attention to the international reputation achieved by Char, and suggested that Random House publish a volume of his poetry.



MacDowell's first reaction was positive, but months went by and no decision was made.

In the meantime, Marguerite kept track of all the articles on Char appearing in both specialized and mainstream press; she collected press clippings and sent copies out to critics and scholars in the States. No amount of praise toward whom she called «the greatest French poet» seemed to be enough for her. On April 18<sup>th</sup> 1953, commenting on a «Times Literary Supplement» article sent to Mathews she writes: «... almost giving him [Char] his place – all the others seem to disappear somehow – only he remains» (18 April 1953).<sup>18</sup> She then adds with a certain pride: «Char has quite another international position than six months ago and this is what we must make these people we need such as publishers understand». The «Nouvelle Revue Française», recently reopened after the accusations of collaborationism, also published an essay on Char by Maurice Blanchot, titled *La bête du Lascaux* (*The Beast of Lascaux*). Marguerite had copies of both articles sent to her contacts in the States, including McDowell and Stephen Spender, editor of «Encounter» magazine and future US Poet Laureate.<sup>19</sup>

After consulting with Char, at the end of September Mathews was able to outline the terms of the book contract for McDowell; the volume would consist of two hundred pages of English translations, plus an appendix of a hundred pages with the French originals, printed in smaller font. Content would include the following poems: *Partage Formel*, *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, *Le Poème Pulverisé*, *A Une Sérénité Crispée*, *Lettera Amorosa*, *Rempart de Brindilles*, and a selection from the volumes *Fureur et Mystère* and *Les Matinaux*. Mathews hoped to have the manuscript ready by November 1<sup>st</sup>, and he assured that Albert Camus would write an introduction to the book. Regarding compensation, Char and Mathews would split an advance of \$500 (approximately \$4000 today), plus any royalties.

Only at this point in the negotiation Mathews wrote to Char's editor, Gaston Gallimard, inquiring about possible copyright issues. In his letter Mathews mentioned the ever-growing interest for Char's poetry in the States, largely due to the review «Botteghe Oscure». The answer came from Gallimard employee Denis Mascolo, who asked for more information, but preemptively warned Mathews

that Gallimard had intention to publish an edition of the complete works of Char; therefore, they could only consent to the publication of a limited selection of his poems. Almost at the same time (October 21, 1953) McDowell sent a draft of the contract to Mathews, unaware of the impending complications.

Char wanted the deal to go through and suggested that Random House contact Gallimard directly; McDowell, however, decided to stall the project until the copyright issue between the poet and his editor was sorted out. On February 2, 1954, a letter from Mascolo informs Mathews that the contract stipulated between Random House, Mathews, and Char was not acceptable and that a new one needed to be drafted. In another letter, sent ten days later, Mascolo outlines the terms of the new contract to McDowell and recommends that Random House deal with Gallimard directly, *de facto* excluding Mathews from the loop. According to Mascolo, Char was bound by a previous contract that included all future foreign editions of his work. McDowell immediately informed Mathews, and the project suddenly came to a stop.

Communication between Random House and Gallimard became rather sparse; it seemed that no agreement would be possible under the conditions dictated by Gallimard (a \$500 advance plus 7.5% royalties for the first five thousand copies, 10% for the following five thousand and 12.5% thereafter). McDowell wrote to Mathews in June 1954 that «[...] things are going ahead on the Char business and I hope to be able to give you a definite decision next week. I realize how impatient you are, but there have been specific reasons why it hasn't been settled earlier» (3 June 1954). The vagueness of McDowell's attitude puzzled Mathews and greatly annoyed Marguerite, who (on September 13) thus incites Mathews from Paris: «Jack dear couldn't you stir up McDowell to answer Gallimard which he should and René is so afraid that one day Gallimard will get his book up and chuck it all which would be terrible for everyone but most of all for René. It seems to be only on the subject of English rights and that is surely to be discussed between publishers and Random has never answered. Please attend to this. It makes me so nervous» (13 September 1954). Marguerite put the blame on McDowell for not pushing the copyright issue with Gallimard; McDowell, on the other hand, was

waiting for Char to clear up the issue with his editor before making a move. The poet was greatly annoyed by this impasse; he was particularly upset with Mascolo, whom he described to Mathews as «a serf acting as master» in a letter dated March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1954.

In the meantime, Marguerite continued to give maximum exposure to Char's work through her publications: an *Interpretative Essay on Two Poems by René Char*, by René Menard, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (Mathews had kindly refused to do the translation) and with the French originals; *Leaves of Hypnos (Estratti) e Lettera Amorosa*, an offprint from «Botteghe Oscure» 14. Both were printed in 1954. Five thousand copies of the offprint would be printed and shipped to the States for distribution through Gotham Book Mart. In that regard Marguerite wrote to Mathews on October 17: «Yesterday René and I corrected the proofs of your offprint and it should be ready very shortly. Don't forget the list you promised me and how many do you want for yourself» (17 October 1954). Beside the confirmation of her active role in editing Mathews' translations, the sentence sheds light on Marguerite's distribution strategy; while she relied on several distributors over the years, her preferred method consisted in obtaining lists of people and institutions that may be interested in «Botteghe Oscure» and help with its diffusion.

Being well aware of the necessity for targeted advertising, much more now than at the times of «Commerce», Marguerite did not miss any opportunity to contact literary critics, columnists, employees of cultural institutes, whoever could add to the review's notoriety. Since each number of «Botteghe Oscure» averaged well over four hundred pages, she had offprints made to be sent before or in substitution of promotional copies in order to reach a wider audience and minimize costs. By asking her friends and collaborators to send her their contact lists, Marguerite meant to replicate on a larger scale the method she had adopted for «Commerce» many years earlier: establishing circles of cultured friends, attuned with Marguerite's literary taste, eager and capable to promote the review in their own environment, hence creating new acolytes. In the case of «Botteghe

«Oscure» 10, for example, she obtained lists from Mathews, Allen Tate, Charles Singleton, David McDowell, and many others.

Marguerite was growing increasingly restless at the Char business; she started corresponding with McDowell directly, informing Mathews of any developments. On November 20 she received an upsetting letter from McDowell and immediately informed her friend:

Dear Jack, I just received a letter from David McDowell from which I copy this which makes me furious: 'I am going to be writing to Gallimard about the Char business within the next few days. I think you understand that we were all ready to go ahead and had a contract drawn up, and that all of the delay is due entirely to the stubbornness of Gallimard. I do hope that we can get it worked out as soon as possible. I will let you know about it as soon as I hear. In any case however we would not be able to publish the book in the spring, but I don't think that Rene Char's trips over here in the spring would do anything but good for the book.' Isn't this too maddening. Do you think you can bring some pressure to bear? I don't think he [Char] would go over if his book is not out and after you won't be there and I am sure I would not go either. It is really a fearful mess. Do please try to do something. I will write him but of course I can't do much. (20 November 1954)

Six days later Marguerite is still very upset and writes to Mathews again:

I am obsessed by this business of Rene's book and so furious at that beast of David McDowell. Couldn't you take it away from him and give it to [...] someone else? I think McDowell doesn't appreciate it at all. If the book doesn't come out when you are there it will be disastrous and probably Rene won't go to the States if the book is not out... He has only said how sorry he is on amount of you who have taken so much trouble about it. I am sure that for once and because René was so violent with him, Gallimard was all set to come to an agreement, although he found McDowell's conditions very miserable. (26 November 1954)

Clearly McDowell's apparent inaction was putting a strain on the relationship with both Mathews and Marguerite. She suggested looking for another publisher, and Mathews responded accordingly. In December he asked his friend Stanley Young (of Farrar, Straus & Young, the main distributors of «Botteghe Oscure» in the States) to investigate about Random House's real intentions regarding the Char volume. Mathews expressed his suspicion that they might be trying to «delay their way out» of the deal (22 December 1954). He wondered about whether it would be possible to find another publisher in time for the book to

come out in the spring. He also considered pulling back completely from any requests, an idea that considerably upset Marguerite: «We must fight this out by every means and I would so wish to take it away from that horrible McD. [McDowell] and give it to someone who realizes what it is!» She wrote on December 11<sup>th</sup>, «Couldn't you write to Seymour Lawrence et al. and Stanley? What if I paid your journey to New York and back? If it would not be too tiresome for you! I would do anything to get this well settled somewhere else» (11 December 1954).

The deal with Random House was eventually made and the book came out two years later, in 1956. It sold 997 copies in the first six months after its release; «Not very many», comments Mathews to Marguerite, «But poetry hardly ever sells more than a thousand. Ted [poet Theodor Roethke] sells about 500. So maybe it isn't bad for six months» (18 January 1957). By then Mathews had become Vice-President of the Bollingen Foundation, and was actively engaged with the promotion of «Botteghe Oscure» in the States. In the same year Marguerite published an anthology of essays on Char's poetry, in English; it included Blanchot's *The beast of Lascaux*, translated by David Paul, plus other writings by Gabriel Bonoure, Albert Camus, George Mounin, Gaston Picon, René Menard (translated by R. Fitzgerald) and James Wright. It was a small volume: 133 pages, including a bibliography of Char's works, but it helped consolidate Char's first-rate position among contemporary French poets both in Europe and in the States.

It was through «Botteghe Oscure» that Char made his first appearance on the American literary scene: no other English translation of his work was available at the time. The brochure enclosed with the tenth issue of the review constituted a spearhead to break the initial resistance many editors could raise at the idea of publishing a French surrealist poet who was virtually unknown in the States. All the other off-prints dedicated to Char, written in English and widely distributed to libraries, specialized journals, and mainstream periodicals throughout the country, contributed greatly to made Char known to the American literary intelligentsia.

The long editorial struggle behind *Hypnos Waking* saw Marguerite Caetani engaged at least as much as Jackson Mathews; it was thanks to their combined effort that the book was published and Char's poetry began to circulate among a wider audience. Marguerite's contribution, unfortunately, was all but forgotten; very few scholars do more than mention her name as one of Char's sponsor. Some hint at the possibility that she could have been his lover, like Laurent Greilsamer in his 2004 biography of the French poet (GREILSAMER 2004, 268-69). The sources I have consulted, however, do not endorse the hypothesis of a love affair between the two.

Marguerite's passion for literature extended to the authors she generously supported; clearly she had a special consideration for Char, to the point where some accused her of giving space only to his followers and imitators.<sup>20</sup> I am more inclined to believe that Marguerite felt a deep affinity with Char's ideals. She could relate to the «aesthetic of solitude» (NOLAND 1997, 570) that informed his poetry since *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, the collection of aphorisms and poetic fragments composed in form of a cryptic journal during Char's militance in the French resistance against the Nazis (Hypnos was his codename in the Maquis) and published in the 14<sup>th</sup> issue of «Botteghe Oscure» (fall 1954).

Char's aphorisms transcend historical contingency to gaze upon the human condition; his poetry is detached from reality but remains deeply rooted in personal experience. As Carrie Noland convincingly shows in the article *The Performance of Solitude: Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and the Resistance Poetry of René Char*, the poet's dispassionate detachment is a form of resistance against totalitarianism: by keeping his watchful stand, Char escapes manipulation and retains his judgment. Noland traces this attitude back to Baudelaire, who championed solitude as a way of protecting the poet's own vision; a position that evolved into Rimbaud's radical isolation, Noland argues, in which the poet is surrounded by a «holy loneliness» that puts him above society, able to «see without being seen, to enter the crowd and yet rise powerfully above it through an act of vision» (NOLAND 1997, 567). In Char's case, this supreme form of awareness requires a sort of self-effacement that serves two purposes: it shields the poet

from the temptation of building his verse as an egotistic narrative, and allows him to assemble a mosaic of liminal voices, bringing out nuances that would be hardly perceptible in a monothematic work. The poet speaks through a multitude; his voice is exalted by the diversity he was able to conjure. As Noland writes,

The *Feuillets d'Hypnos* are far from impersonal, rather they are the personal multiplied. Thus, the notebook represents a collectivity of singular perspectives, a polyphony of voices that remain distinguished, through proper names and diacritical marks, from one another. Whether the fragments of voices are mere inventions of the author or whether they are actual transcriptions of the utterances of fellow resisters is less important than the gesture of quotation itself. For such a gesture suggests rhetorically a model of nonconformity in which collective action and individual vision might comfortably coexist. (NOLAND 1997, 570)

Noland's music-inspired simile («a polyphony of voices») brings to mind the concept of *counterpoint*: a non-hierarchical structure in which narratives («voices») coexist as discursive practices applicable to the nexus culture-society without being framed in a restrictive editorial model, be it political, religious, or purely aesthetic. Said first used the term *counterpoint* to indicate a constructive dialogue between the center and the periphery of post-colonial societies; a horizontal communication model practiced by expat writers and, more in general, by individuals who are aware of multiple realities. The heightened sensitivity of their “inner ear” allows them to develop a distinctive voice; they cultivate a new subjectivity, which encompasses the ultimate frailty of traditional bonds like state, nation, and institutions. I believe that Marguerite Caetani belonged to this category; her cosmopolitanism had roots in her personal experience and was strengthened by a deep sense of loss: she was an orphan of both parents and lost her only son in the war. It seems fitting to recall Said's description of *exiles* as people who are aware of more than one culture, and therefore possess a «plurality of vision» that in turn gives rise to «an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal*» (SAID 2000, 172).

Marguerite Caetani hosted in «Botteghe Oscure» a great number of writers, many of them young and unknown, whose voices entwined creating a

multilingual arabesque; she did not expect nor want them to conform to any precast ideas about style or politics. Her polyphonic editing allowed contributors to preserve their identity and language because it aimed to capture precisely the kind of fractured discourse Char used in his *Feuillets d'Hypnos*. Transposed from the creative to the editorial field, «the gesture of quotation» indicated by Noland as distinctive feature of Char's poetry becomes a gesture of selection in Caetani's editing. If in «Commerce» Marguerite aimed to serve as mediator between a relatively small number of poets – first among all the three official directors of the review, Valéry, Larbaud, and Fargue – and a French-speaking, cultivated audience, with «Botteghe Oscure» she cast a wider net to reflect a mutated historical situation, in which the purpose had become to create a “new tradition” by reaching a global audience in order to avoid any resurgence of nationalism. This apparent oxymoron – “new tradition” – well defines Marguerite's utopia and the ultimate goal of her review-anthology: to offer a generous amount of new works that, for no reason other than their intrinsic “quality,” could represent the parallel evolution of national literatures and lay the ground for a meta-national aesthetic. It is in such a theoretical frame, in such an uncompromised aesthetic ideal, that we find the clearest expression of Marguerite Caetani's editorial philosophy.



Table 1

Char's poetry in «Botteghe Oscure»

ISSUE	YEAR	TITLE	LANGUAGE	PAGE NR.	FIRST IN ITS SECTION ?
III	1949	<i>Poésies</i>	French	387-389	N
V	1950	<i>La lune d'Hypnos</i>	French	203-207	N
VII	1951	<i>La Minutieuse</i>	French	387-388	Y
X	1952	<i>Poems, translated by Denis Devlin and Jackson Mathews</i>	English	128-162	Y
XI	1953	<i>Le Rempart de Brindilles</i>	French	11-12	Y
XIII	1954	<i>Marge d'Hypnos</i>	French	11-13	Y
XIV	1954	<i>Leaves of Hypnos, Lettera amorosa, Feuilletts d'Hypnos, Lettera amorosa</i>	French, English	58-113	Y
XVII	1956	<i>Mon poème est mon voeu</i>	French	11-13	Y
XVII I	1956	<i>Which Rimbaud?</i>	English	85-92	Y
XIX	1957	<i>The Man Who Walked in a Ray of Sunshine</i>	English	62-74	Y
XXII	1958	<i>A une sérénité crispée, To a Tensed Serenity</i>	French, English	74-113	Y
XXV	1960	<i>Prompte</i>	French	11	Y

*Table 2*

A sample of Char's poetry and criticism in the U.S.A. before and after *Hypnos Waking*

René CHAR, <i>Poems</i> , trans. Denis Devlin and Jackson Mathews, Roma, «Botteghe Oscure» X, 1952.
René CHAR, <i>Leaves of Hypnos (extracts) and Lettera Amorosa</i> , trans. Jackson Mathews, Roma, «Botteghe Oscure» XIV, 1954.
René MÉNARD, <i>Interpretative Essay on Two Poems by René Char. To a Tensed Serenity, Lettera Amorosa</i> , trans. Robert Fitzgerald, Roma, «Botteghe Oscure», 1954.
<i>René Char's Poetry: Studies</i> , Roma, «Botteghe Oscure», 1956.
<b>René CHAR, <i>Hypnos Waking</i>, trans. Jackson Mathews, Random House [1956], 1956.</b>
Virginia A. LA CHARITÉ, <i>The Poetics and the Poetry of René Char</i> , Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
René CHAR, <i>Leaves of Hypnos</i> , New York, Grossman, 1973.
René CHAR, <i>Poems of René Char</i> , edited by Mary Ann Caws and Jonathan Griffin, Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1976.
Mary Ann CAWS, <i>The Presence of René Char</i> , Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1976.
Mary Ann CAWS, <i>René Char</i> , Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1977.
James R. LAWLER, <i>René Char: The Myth and the Poem</i> , Princeton, N.J., Princeton UP, 1978.
Nancy Kline PIORE, <i>Lightning: The Poetry of René Char</i> , Boston, Northeastern UP, 1981.
René CHAR, <i>No Siege is Absolute: Versions of René Char</i> , edited by Franz Wright, Providence, R.I., Lost Roads Publishers, 1984.
René CHAR, <i>Furor and Mystery and Other Writings</i> , edited by Sandra Bermann, et al., Boston, MA, Black Widow Press, 2010.
René CHAR, <i>Stone Lyre: Poems of René Char</i> , edited by Nancy Naomi Carlson, North Adams, Mass., Tupelo Press, 2010.
Rosemary LANCASTER, <i>Poetic Illumination: René Char and His Artist Allies</i> ,

Amsterdam, New York, Rodopi, 2010.

*Twentieth-Century French Poetry: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Hugo Azérad and Peter Collier, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge UP, 2010.

Robert BAKER, *In Dark Again in Wonder: the poetry of René Char and George Oppen*, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Char wrote on the first page of *Hypnos Waking*: «I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Librairie Gallimard, original publishers of my works in the French language; and to “Botteghe Oscure”, in which publication some of the translations first appeared».

<sup>2</sup> The expression can be found in a letter Mathews wrote on November 15, 1953, to Ray West, English Professor at Iowa University. West had invited Char to Iowa for a reading; since the poet could not speak English, Mathews stepped in to arrange the details of his visit. West was also founder of «The Western Review» and served as its editor from 1936 to 1959; in the letter Mathews complains about some translations from Char that had appeared on the review without his knowledge: «[...] Snyder and Young [authors of the article] must have known they didn't have Char's approval, since they had corresponded for a long time with Marguerite Caetani who, as you know, is Char's principal sponsor, and who had politely but firmly discouraged their interest in publishing their versions» (15 Nov. 1953).

<sup>3</sup> Many Italian critics, for example, came to see «Botteghe Oscure» as Bassani's creature, a misconception belied by the simple fact that the journal published contributions in as many as five different languages, while Bassani was only responsible for the Italian section. Bassani was savvy in taking advantage of his central role in the making of «Botteghe Oscure» to further his agenda; by his own admission, Bassani's reputation owes much to Caetani's generous support when he was but an aspiring poet who had just moved from Ferrara to Rome. Besides Bassani, other consultants and acting editors of «Botteghe Oscure» included Elena Croce, Ignazio Silone, and Guglielmo Petroni for the Italian literature; Truman Capote, Stanley Moss, Ben Johnson, Archibald MacLeish, and Eugene Walter for the English; René Char for the French; Paul Celan, Ingeborg Bachmann, and Hans Magnus Enzensberger for the German.

<sup>4</sup> Among them was future poet Katherine Garrison Chapin, who would marry Francis Biddle, Attorney General during WWII and primary judge for the US at the Nuremberg Trials; the correspondence with her half-sister is a fundamental source to understand Marguerite's personality.

<sup>5</sup> Jean de Reszke was hailed as the greatest tenor of his generation. His siblings Edouard and Josephine were also professional singers. They often appeared together on stage, the two brothers especially, and their reputation was so widespread that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle put them in his Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*: «[Sherlock Holmes:] “And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for 'Les Huguenots.' Have you heard the de Reszkes? Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini's for a little dinner on the way?”» (DOYLE 1902, 358-359).

<sup>6</sup> According to Iris Origo, a close friend of Marguerite and one of the first to write about her life and work, it was Léger who suggested the title «Commerce», while Valéry would have preferred «Propos», and Larbaud «Échanges». (ORIGO 1965, 82). Léger would have been inspired by a verse he had written, «ce pur commerce de mon âme...» («This pure commerce of my soul...»), which can be found in the first canto of his celebrated poem *Anabase*. Marguerite, however, never endorsed this interpretation. In an unpublished letter sent to poet Theodor Roethke in 1949 she had already given credit to Valéry: «I had a review in Paris [...] called Commerce (Commerce des idées), title chosen by Paul Valéry who was a great friend of mine and one of the directors» (Roethke, 14 Feb. 1949).

<sup>7</sup> From Ungaretti's introduction to *Hommage a «Commerce»*, the volume that accompanied the 1958 exhibit at Palazzo Primoli in Rome.

<sup>8</sup> The use of translation played a pivotal role in carrying out the transnational scope of the review: the 29 numbers of the review hosted translations from fifteen languages including Chinese, Japanese, and other non-European idioms.

<sup>9</sup> Aragon's *Une vague de rêves* appeared in the second number of «Commerce»; Breton published *Introduction au discours sur le peu de Réalité* and the first part of *Nadja* in the third and the thirteenth issues, respectively (Levie 1989, 227).

<sup>10</sup> De Staël's open letter to all intellectuals was translated into Italian by Pietro Giordani and published on the first number of «Biblioteca Italiana». In Italy, it spurred a long and heated debate on the opportunity of opening up to the new cultural trends of the Romantic movement.

<sup>11</sup> Italian translation by Pietro Giordani (1816), quoted from [it.wikisource.org/wiki/Sulla\\_maniera\\_e\\_la\\_utilit%C3%A0\\_delle\\_Traduzioni](http://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Sulla_maniera_e_la_utilit%C3%A0_delle_Traduzioni)

<sup>12</sup> The influence of «Botteghe Oscure» on the diffusion of Italian literature in the U.S.A. has never been quantified, but it should not be overlooked; the review was available at many U.S. campuses, and there is considerable correspondence attesting to its importance for both faculty and students of Italian.

<sup>13</sup> Char and Albert Camus launched the magazine in 1940; its editorial board included Albert Béguine, Guido Meister, and Jean Vagne (CAMUS 2003, 42).

<sup>14</sup> With regard to the third point, one must observe that experimental works did find space in «Botteghe Oscure», notably Dylan Thomas's radio play, *Llareggub*, which would later become *Under Milk Wood*. To remain in the Italian area, the magazine published verses by the future «Officina» group (Volponi, Roversi, Pasolini, Romanò etc.) and, for the prose, two stories by Italo Calvino: *La formica argentina* (No. 10, fall 1952) and *La speculazione edilizia* (No. 20, fall 1957). At least some space was conceded, therefore, to authors whose work was highly innovative and openly defied literary tradition. It appears that, in speaking against «experiments», Bassani was referring to works lacking maturity and structural cohesion. In the last point, the refusal of pre-war models, it is easy to read a reference to hermeticism, which dominated Italian poetry during the fascist period. We do find in «Botteghe Oscure» contributions by authors who belonged to that movement (such as Parronchi, Bigongiari, Sinisgalli, De Libero, Gatto, and Luzi), but they are not stylistically identifiable as hermetic, and in most cases show a return to more traditional narrative modes. This negative attitude toward hermeticism may also explain why Giuseppe Ungaretti, who was Marguerite's consultant for Italian poetry at the times of «Commerce», never published anything in «Botteghe Oscure».

<sup>15</sup> Denis Devlin (Greenock, Scotland 1908 – Dublin 1959) was a modernist poet and translator of poetry, hailed by Samuel Beckett as «without question the most interesting of the youngest generation of Irish poets» (BECKETT 1934, 236). Devlin's career as a diplomat brought him to New York, Washington, and Rome, where he connected with Marguerite Caetani. Devlin befriended many of the poets who were closest to Marguerite, including St. John Perse, Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren. After Devlin's death, Tate and Warren edited a selection of his poems for publication.

<sup>16</sup> American poet Allen Tate may have provided the initial connection between Marguerite and Mathews. In a letter sent to Marguerite in 1952 and currently held at the Caetani archive in Rome he writes: «Jackson is not only a first-rate mind, he is one of the best men in the world, and Marthiel [Mathews's wife] one of the best women. They are, in short, quite wonderful people. I think I have done both you and them a kindness, and it pleases me to reflect that I have» (22 Oct. 1952).

<sup>17</sup> Mathews translated the works of Baudelaire, Gide, Perse, Char, and Yves Bonnefoy. He was general editor of the Bollingen Foundation's fifteen-volume *Complete Works of Paul Valéry*. His own translation of *Monsieur Teste* awarded him the National Book Award in 1974.

<sup>18</sup> *Seuls demeurent* (*Only They Remain*, 1943), is the title of a book of poems by Char.

<sup>19</sup> «Encounter» (1953-1991) was sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an organization covertly funded by CIA with the objective of supporting anti-communist literature. After evidence of such funding emerged in 1967, Spender resigned from his position.

<sup>20</sup> Letter of December 6, 1951, from Marguerite to Jean Paulhan; Marguerite's incensed reply to Paulhan's criticism reveals both her admiration for Char and her knowledge of French poetry: «Cher Jean, / je suis très étonnée et peinée du ton et du contenu de votre dernière lettre. Vous constatez mon admiration pour René Char et vous me donnez raison, ce qui me fait plaisir parce que je le considère le plus grand poète vivant pour dire le moins que je pense. Mais pour ce qui suit nous ne sommes plus d'accord hélas! Quand vous dites que B.O. publie presque exclusivement les disciples de Char: je ne savais pas que vous, Artaud, Ponge, Bataille, Blanchot, Camus, Michaux, Limbour, Dhôtel, Garampon, Thomas, Tardieu, Devaulx, Guilloux etc. vous vous considérez les disciples de Char. Vous dites aussi que les œuvres de ses disciples (les jeunes)

sont trop naïves et monotones. Je ne pense pas que vous avec votre acuité critique pouvez en réalité préférer les œuvres que vous publiez si souvent dans vos “Cahiers” de Lambrichs, Mandiargues, de Solier, Nimier, de Boissonnas, de Renéville» (RISSET, SANTONE, TAMASSIA, and CAETANI 2007, 33). Paulhan contributed to «Botteghe Oscure» on two occasions only, in 1949 and 1951.

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