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Intertextuality, Hermeneutics
and Textual Genetics:
Edmond Jabès'
The Book of Questions

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Abstract¹

Is textual genetics, *i.e.* the analysis of manuscripts and other preliminary materials, relevant to the study of intertextuality? Intertextuality, meant broadly as the communication between one text and another, has been perceived to be essential to Edmond Jabès' *The Book of Questions* and its interpretation since its first publication in the early 1960s. In particular, the links between Jabès' prose and the corpus of Jewish literature have been widely acknowledged and utilized in the attempt to decipher this enigmatic text. However, *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality is a complex and paradoxical one, at once obvious and elusive, anchored in the text and floating around it, located at various textual levels and connecting Jabès' text with a wide range of ever-changing intertexts. This paper attempts to renew the understanding of *The Book of Questions*' complex intertextuality by turning to Jabès' manuscripts and by addressing intertextuality both as a hermeneutics and as a poetic process. Applied to intertextuality, the textual genetics approach allows for a historicized and contextualized view of *The Book of Questions*' communication with other texts. It also reorients the research of the polymorphic field of intertextuality towards the concept of intertextual imagination, a concept accounting for intertextuality as a hermeneutics as well as a poetic process.

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Intertextual paradoxes in <i>The Book of Questions</i>	8
2. Intertextuality and the writing process.....	13
References and citations in the manuscripts: a vacuum?	13
Writing/rewriting: the intertextual turn of the manuscripts.....	17
Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalah: the infinite intertext and intertextual imagination.....	19
3. Beyond textual genetics: Three reflections on <i>The Book of Questions</i> and its intertextuality	27
Conclusion.....	31
Bibliography.....	32

Introduction

Textual genetics is the reading and analysis of manuscripts and any other preliminary or side materials which bear the trace of the genesis of a text. The textual genetics approach brings to light the chronological process of writing and its spatiality, thus displaying previously unknown layers of the finite text. Can the genetic study of a text be relevant to the understanding of its intertextuality? Can the analysis of manuscripts renew the perception of the way in which a text – any text – communicates with other ones? Is this hypothetical contribution bound to endorse an authorial and authoritarian view of intertextuality? These are the questions that this research, based on the genetic analysis of Edmond Jabès' *The Book of Questions*², addresses. It is therefore a two-sided research: one aspect is understanding the specific configuration of intertextuality in a literary text perceived by its readership as a paradigm of an essential and infinite communication with other texts, by bringing to light the unknown dimension of intertextuality as a process (of writing). The other aspect is a broader, more theoretical one. It aims at pointing out the paradoxes revealed by the theorization of intertextuality, often limited to one side of literary communication: the author in traditional literary theory mostly preoccupied with influences, sources and their integration into writing; the text itself in post-Saussurian theory initiated by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes – and the reader in Michael Riffaterre's post-New Criticism model.

Indeed, the term intertextuality was coined in 1966 by Julia Kristeva after Mikhail Bakhtin's "dialogism" to account for any text being in a relationship of absorption, transformation and quotation with other texts. As Kristeva writes in *Semeiotike*:

[L]e mot (texte) est un croisement de mots (de textes) où on lit au moins un autre mot (texte). Tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. À la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'intertextualité, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme double³.

Kristeva's definition of any text as an open mosaic of citations diverged from the traditional conception of literary texts as closed, autonomous entities, and provided the ground for a new

² The present paper relies on the genetic analysis of Edmond Jabès' *The Book of Questions*, *The Book of Yukel* and *The Return to the Book*, which was conducted as part of our doctoral research. The methods, bibliography, detailed observations and conclusions of this analysis are presented in our dissertation, "The Palimpsest and the Canvas: The Manuscripts of Edmond Jabès' *The Book of Questions* and the Genesis of an Enigmatic Text", submitted to the Senate of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in September 2016.

³ Julia Kristeva, « Le mot, le dialogue et le roman », in *Semeiotikè*, pp. 145-146. Regarding the transformation of Bakhtin's original statement by Kristeva, see M. Jesus Martinez Alfaro, "Intertextuality: origins and development of the concept", p. 276: "Though the parentheses imply that Kristeva is only supplying a synonym, or at most, a neutral expansion of Bakhtin's concept, this textualization of Bakhtin changes his ideas, [...] just enough to allow the new concept of intertextuality to emerge."

reading of the relationship between texts, reaching far beyond the usual questions of influences and sources. Expanded by Roland Barthes, intertextuality, the very essence of literature since it is “l’intertextuel dans lequel est pris tout texte”⁴, became almost a “writing degree zero”, insofar as any text is part of a web of *oeuvres* and discourses: “Et c’est bien cela, l’inter-texte : l’impossibilité de vivre hors du texte infini – que ce texte soit Proust, ou le journal quotidien, ou l’écran télévisuel : le livre fait le sens, le sens fait la vie”⁵.

Michael Riffaterre, whose theory was a reaction to New Criticism, views intertextuality not as the essence of texts in Barthes’ fashion but as a reading praxis: « L’intertexte est la perception, par le lecteur, de rapports entre une œuvre et d’autres qui l’ont précédée ou suivie. Ces autres œuvres constituent l’intertexte de la première »⁶. Reading praxis is also crucial to Riffaterre’s definition of “intertextual syllepsis” or connector:

This dual action of the sign is best described as intertextuality: the perception that our reading of a text or textual component (paragraph, sentence, phrase, or word) is complete or satisfactory only if it constrains us to refer to or to cancel out its homologue in the intertext⁷.

In spite of their differences, these three formulations of intertextuality share a common feature: all of them discard the author as principal actor of the literary work, possessor of meanings and responsible for the communication between texts⁸. Textual genetics and the emphasis on the writing process seem therefore irrelevant to the understanding of intertextuality.

However, recent theories of literature, like Nancy Miller’s “arachnology”, advocate the necessity of reintegrating the author, the spider secreting Barthes’ web of texts, into the study of literature. Transposed to the field of intertextuality, such a vision claims that it can only be grasped if its dual aspect – a process of writing and of reading – is accounted for. Textual genetics can then be used to understand the processes through which intertextuality shapes a literary text. The analysis of manuscripts and preliminary materials asks questions ignored by traditional theories of intertextuality, and reaching beyond matters of sources and origins: is intertextuality a constant characteristic of a work in progress? How is the fluctuation of intertextuality articulated to broader genetic processes? What are the resemblances and differences between intertextuality as a process of writing and as a process of reading? The

⁴ Roland Barthes, « De l’œuvre au texte », p. 76.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte*, p. 59.

⁶ Michael Riffaterre, « La trace de l’intertexte », p. 4. See also: “intertextuality, a structured network of text-generated constraints on the reader’s perceptions”, in M. Riffaterre, “Intertextuality vs Hypertextuality”, p. 781.

⁷ Michael Riffaterre, “The Intertextual Unconscious”, p. 374.

⁸ See Julia Kristeva, *Semeiotikè*, p. 156: « L’auteur [...] n’est rien ni personne, mais la possibilité de permutation de S [sujet de la narration] à D [le destinataire] [...]. Il devient un anonymat, une absence, un blanc, pour permettre à la structure d’exister comme telle ».

archeology of intertextuality thus promotes a multidimensional vision of communication between texts. It seeks to recreate the history, processes and steps of the genesis of the text, which is by definition an intertextual genesis, and aims at analyzing the emergence of intertextuality as an integral part of the genetic process.

The Book of Questions, first published in France in 1963 and shortly followed by two sequels, *The Book of Yukel* (*The Book of Questions II*, 1964) and *The Return to the Book* (*The Book of Questions III*, 1965)⁹, received immediate attention and appraisal from major figures of France's literary and cultural scene (Gabriel Bounoure, Maurice Blanchot, later Emmanuel Levinas and Roger Caillois) as well as from the young philosopher Jacques Derrida who dedicated two essays to Jabès' key concepts of "book" and "writing". Derrida's essays¹⁰ were crucial in positioning Jabès' avant-garde hermetic prose, his fragmentary and elliptical novel haunted by abstract characters and cohorts of imaginary rabbis, as the archetype of deconstructed writing, and in outlining the main themes and perspectives through which Jabès' literary puzzle was to be explored: *The Book of Questions* as a postmodern rewriting of Jewish sources such as Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah; and the correlation between Jewishness and writing. Whatever specific expansion Derrida gave to these characteristics of Jabès' *The Book of Questions* and its two immediate sequels, in which he found a literary paradigm of his own philosophy of writing, he was certainly not the only reader to notice the echo of an ancient, long-forgotten poetic vein associated with Jewish sources in *The Book of Questions*. The literary critic Gabriel Bounoure, Jabès' friend and the first reader of the work in progress, pointed out the resonances of "Jewish texts" in *The Book of Questions*, as well as the clear appeal to an intertextual reading on the part of the reader¹¹.

Indeed, although any text, according to Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality, is in a situation of communication with other texts, and although any reading of a text is necessarily intertextual (Barthes and Riffaterre), Jabès seems to put a special emphasis on his writing being a rewriting of previous texts. *The Book of Questions* thus appears to be a paradigm of intertextuality as it is formulated by postmodern theories such as Roland Barthes', who views

⁹ Jabès' *The Book of Questions* features seven volumes, published from 1963 to 1974. Subsequent writings (1974-1991) often echo, cite or rework excerpts from *The Book of Questions*, whether in the titles apparatus (for example *The Book of Resemblances*, *The Book of Dialogue* etc.) or within the writing itself (self-quotations, references to characters, episodes or themes from previous books). The present research focuses on the first three volumes; this methodological decision is motivated by literary features, including intertextual ones, as well as genesis and reception features which point to the first three volumes as a cohesive, homogenous and autonomous unit. Unless otherwise specified, the title *The Book of Questions* refers in this paper to the first three volumes.

¹⁰ « Edmond Jabès et la question du livre » was first published in *Critique*, n° 201, January 1964. It was reprinted together with Derrida's second essay on Jabès' writings, « Ellipse », in *L'écriture et la différence*, 1967.

¹¹ Cf. Gabriel Bounoure, « Edmond Jabès. La demeure et le livre » [1965], pp. 30, 44.

texts as an infinite web of endless connections. First, intertextuality is a theme anchored in Jabès' *The Book of Questions* through indexes such as the reference to historical textual objects ("the Torah", "the heavy scrolls of their divine past"); abstract objects ("The Book", an allusion to Mallarmé's literary utopia); and fictional "intradiegetic" objects (the "Books" or "Diaries of Yukel", Jabès' main character; the excerpts from Yukel and Sarah's notebooks; the citations attributed to the "rabbis-poets" which punctuate the three volumes). Second, the haunting presence of Jabès' speakers and writers, the same rabbis-poets, undoubtedly relates *The Book of Questions* to another literary corpus, an ancient and foreign one: the exegetical and dialogical, even polyphonic, textuality of the Midrashic and Talmudic literatures. One may add the mirroring and quotation effects which connect Jabès' books to one another, from the first sequel to *The Book of Questions* onwards. Intertextuality is thus not only a theme of Jabès' prose but also a characteristic of its textuality. Lastly, intertextuality is a hermeneutical praxis, an interpretive solution which enables readers to understand the textual anomalies of Jabès' text, such as the puzzling generic heterogeneity¹², the fragmentation of the text and the deferral of meaning as "agrammaticalities" which can be explained once one reads them in connection with an intertext in which they are the norm. The intertextual reading of *The Book of Questions* therefore accounts for various aspects, more or less explicit, of Jabès' writing, but it is also a means to solve its enigmas.

It is hence clear that intertextuality is essential to *The Book of Questions*, both as a feature of Jabès' writing and as a hermeneutical strategy. However, perhaps because of its obviousness, the multiplicity of its aspects and the richness of its forms, it seems that the nature and specificity of *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality – the range of texts addressed or alluded to by Jabès' prose, the various modes of its communication with other texts, the different ways in which readers describe or inscribe the relationship between Jabès' *oeuvres* and specific texts or broader corpora, the preference given to certain bodies of literature – yet await a more critical inquiry. By addressing *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality through the prism of textual genetics and the process of its emergence as a poetic feature shaping the whole of Jabès' writing, the present research seeks to investigate this nebulous intertextuality and to understand the processes through which a particular text is read in connection with other texts or literary corpora. The outcome of such a genetic inquiry of intertextuality, therefore, is not a reassessment of Jabès' "real" or "authentic" influences and sources confirmed by the genetic

¹² For an interesting intertextual attempt to outline or solve this heterogeneity, see the part titled « Le mélange (le 'shibbus') des genres » in David Mendelson (ed.), *Jabès. Le Livre lu en Israël*, pp. 41-44. Jabès' genres are compared to traditional genres in Jewish liturgical and rabbinical literature (*iggeret, ahavot, qinnah, baqqashah*).

materials, but rather a fresh look at the ways in which intertextuality emerges, both as a writing praxis and as a reading praxis, from imaginary constructs of literary texts, which are a product of the history and theory of literature.

1. Intertextual paradoxes in *The Book of Questions*

In his commentary on Jabès' *oeuvre* in the light of writings by Gabriel Bounoure, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and echoes of the *Zohar* and Hassidism, José Angel Valente illustrates a type of reading defined as a promenade between very different texts¹³. When addressing *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality, one can broadly identify four intertextual corpora. The first is constituted by texts from French modernism, from Stéphane Mallarmé, René Char, Paul Eluard, Max Jacob and Surrealism to Maurice Blanchot. Immediately accessible to Jabès' French readership, this literary genealogy has been remarked by the first reader of the work in progress, Gabriel Bounoure, who noted regarding the *Book of Questions*' manuscripts that words seem to make love, according to André Breton's famous formulation: « Les mots font l'amour – le livre semble inspiré par cette parole de Breton »¹⁴.

Jabès inherits Mallarmé's particular conception of the place – or rather the disappearance “of the poet who gives the initiative to the words”, and his central concept, that of an “infinite” or “total Book”: Mallarmé's unrealized project explicitly resonates in Jabès' prose from *The Book of Questions* onwards. In later works, Jabès echoes Mallarmé's idea developed in *Les Mots anglais* of a secret and mystic intimacy between languages: the forms of such an intimacy between Hebrew and French in Jabès' *Aely*, *El* and *Le petit livre de la subversion* have been noticed by numerous readers. Jabès also adopts Blanchot's new definition of the literary text in which silence and cautiousness towards language are central. When Jabès refers to his use of the old-fashioned “vocal” to allude to “the voice of silence”, or “the silent speech of the Book”, it is impossible to ignore the echo of Blanchot's words: “Un écrivain est celui qui impose silence à cette parole, et une œuvre littéraire est, pour celui qui sait y pénétrer, un riche séjour de silence, une défense ferme et une haute muraille contre cette immensité parlante qui s'adresse à nous en nous détournant de nous¹⁵”. The influence of Blanchot's *The Book to Come* on the emerging poetics of Jabès' *Book of Questions* – particularly the dissolution of the author into anonymity and the centrality of silence – are essential to the intertextuality of Jabès' *oeuvre*. Confirmed by the personal writings of Jabès and Blanchot, this literary communication has been often observed and dwelt on.

¹³ José Angel Valente, « Edmond Jabès : la mémoire du feu », pp. 157-158.

¹⁴ Ms. Gabriel Bounoure, NAF 28599 (1), 1st folder. See Bounoure, « Edmond Jabès, la demeure et le livre », p. 36.

¹⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *Le Livre à venir*, p. 320. [A writer is one who silences this speech, and a literary work is, for the one who knows how to enter it, a rich space of silence, a firm stronghold and a high wall against the talking immensity which speaks to us and takes us away from ourselves.]

The other intertext of *The Book of Questions* is constituted by the whole corpus of “the texts of the Jewish tradition”, in Stéphane Mosès’ words, meaning the heteroclitite corpus of the Bible, rabbinic literature (Mishna, Talmud, Midrash), and Kabbalah. As Mosès writes:

Que l’ensemble de cette démarche poétique semble renvoyer en permanence à l’expérience du langage telle qu’elle s’est cristallisée, au fil de siècles, dans les textes de la tradition juive et dans la pratique de leur interprétation, avait été souligné par G. Bounoure dès sa préface à *Je bâtis ma demeure*, puis dans son étude sur le *Livre des Questions*¹⁶.

Present at every level of Jabès’ *oeuvre*, the thematic level as well as the stylistic one, this immense and ever-changing intertext is central to *The Book of Questions* and solicits the whole spectrum of literatures which constitute it as a corpus. Indeed, the particular poetics of *The Book of Questions* seems to echo a wide range of characteristics inspired by the corpus of “Jewish literature” or at least perceived as such by Jabès’ readers. For example, Jean-Marie Sauvage addresses Jabès’ “re-appropriation” of Jewishness and of Jewish texts, and cites “non seulement cette confrontation avec le Dieu de la Bible, [...] mais aussi le désert égyptien et la présence de cette foultitude de rabbins¹⁷”. Susan Handelman views the fragmentation and interruption of the Jabesian text as a literary means of reproducing the destruction of Moses’ Tablets¹⁸. More broadly, the perception of a resemblance between the fragmentary textuality of *The Book of Questions* and the Talmud¹⁹, the centrality of commentary as a theme or as a form of discourse (Midrash), the echo of great biblical themes (the desert, the Exodus, the wanderings, God, Jerusalem) and kabbalistic themes (the Book, the universe, language and writing²⁰), invokes a hidden intertext and announces Jabès’ praxis of playing with words and letters in later writings (*El, Le Petit livre de la subversion*)²¹. Lastly, the hermeneutical praxis of “Jewish texts”, which constantly digs into the blanks and polysemy of biblical, Midrashic

¹⁶ Stéphane Mosès, « Edmond Jabès : d’un passage à l’autre », p. 47. [The fact that this poetics as a whole seems to constantly refer to the experience of language as it has crystallized, through the centuries, in the texts of the Jewish tradition and in the praxis of their interpretation, had been underlined by G. Bounoure as early as in his preface to *Je bâtis ma demeure* and later in his essay on *The Book of Questions*.]

¹⁷ Jean-Marie Sauvage, « La ‘judéité’ de Jabès », pp. 470-471. [Not only this confrontation with the God of the Bible, [...] but also the Egyptian desert and that crowd of rabbis.]

¹⁸ Susan Handelman, “Torments of an Ancient World”, p. 66.

¹⁹ Regarding Jabès’ *Book*, the Talmud and the Kabbalah, see Motte, *Questioning Edmond Jabès*, pp. 100-101. See also Ariane Kalfa: « la question, celle qu’il pose par la bouche du sage, est propre à la maïeutique des *textes hébraïques*. [...] Dialogique, la parole jabésienne est semblable à la *parole talmudique* », « Edmond Jabès et la lettre hébraïque », p. 101.

²⁰ Such themes, writes Betty Rojzman in her essay on Edmond Jabès, « font – et fondent – la réflexion contemporaine sur le langage, sont en même temps, [...] des termes-clés sur lesquels la kabbale juive bâtit sa vision du (des) mondes ». « La lutte le point », p. 96.

²¹ For a list of semiotic plays inspired by Kabbalah, see Motte, *Questioning Edmond Jabès*, pp. 42-48 and “Literal Jabès”, p. 292. Mosès identifies in Jabès’ text a quote from *Sefer Yetsira*: « Il a créé son monde par trois livres : le Livre, le livre et le récit ». Mosès, « Edmond Jabès : d’un passage à l’autre », p. 53.

and Talmudic texts, the presence of diverging opinions and polyphony in Talmudic literature, the affirmation of indeterminacy and multiplicity of interpretations of the biblical text: all these are read as the main inspiration for Jabès' hermetic poetics and its reading.

Along with these two corpora, *The Book of Questions* echoes other literatures: the religious poetry of the Quran; mystical and spiritual poetry, for example Hafez's mystical lyricism; the poetic tradition of Haiku, even though Steven Jaron noted that the poet regretted that his poems were compared to haikus, considering that "The hai-ku is but a pretext for employing a pared down style²²". In other words, the third category of intertexts evoked by *The Book of Questions* is a poetic literature coming from far horizons, from the countries of Islam or the Far East.

The last intertextual corpus would be a small number of texts standing at the intersection between various literary traditions: such is the poetic prose of Khalil Gibran, whose fables interspersed with aphorisms and parables, and inspired by Islam, Sufism, Christianity and Judaism resonate in the tales of Yukel (cf. *The Prophet*²³) and in the legend of the mystic madman Nathan Seichell (cf. *The Madman*²⁴); such are, too, the modern mystic fables of Kafka and Borges, sometimes read along with *The Book of Questions*²⁵.

Such a broad and rich intertextual landscape proves that Jabès' *The Book of Questions* is essentially characterized by its intense communication with many other texts. However, it seems that this essential feature of Jabès' text, however much it was exploited by exegetes inspired by the richness of *The Book of Questions*' resonances with biblical language, Talmudic structure, Midrashic discourse, Kabbalistic themes and Jewish hermeneutics, or by its Mallarmean and symbolist influence, has not received systematic analysis. Rather, there is a kaleidoscopic feel to the intertextual readings of Jabès' *The Book of Questions*: readers explore one aspect of Jabesian intertextuality – whether it focuses on a text, a corpus, an intertextual dimension (thematic, structural, hermeneutical) – without formulating the underlying presuppositions and modalities of their own reading and without relating to other texts and aspects of Jabès' text's communication with other texts. This kaleidoscopic or mosaic display

²² Jaron, *The Hazard of Exile*, p. 53.

²³ *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923). *Le prophète*, trad. Camille Aboussouan (Paris : Casterman, 1956). The French translation in particular echoes some of Jabès' character Yukel's poetic features. Cf. inter alia, pp. 12, 13, 52, 82 : « Et d'autres vinrent aussi et l'implorèrent. Mais il ne leur répondit point. [...] Alors Almitra dit : Parlez-nous de l'amour. Et il leva la tête et regarda la peuple, et un silence tomba sur eux. [...] Et une femme parla, disant, Parlez-nous de la Douleur. Et il dit : Par la douleur se brise la coquille qui enveloppe mon entendement. De même que le noyau du fruit doit se rompre pour que son cœur puisse s'offrir au soleil, ainsi vous devez connaître la douleur. [...] Et il répondit, était-ce moi qui parlais ? N'étais-je point aussi un auditeur ? »

²⁴ *The Madman: His Parables and Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1918). The poem "Seven Selves" in particular reminds some of Yukel's dialogues in *The Book of Questions*.

²⁵ For an example of comparing Jabès and Borges, see Rosy Pinhas-Delpuech.

of discrete readings and interpretations is frequent in Jabès' exegesis: it is definitely connected to a particular conception of an "open text" (Umberto Eco's *opera aperta*), as a text to be "performed" by readers, shared by Jabès' readership. It is therefore interesting to point out some of the main features and modalities of intertextual reading of *The Book of Questions*.

1. Jewish texts vs. other corpora

Although my survey of the intertextual landscape of *The Book of Questions* has underlined four major literary ensembles, it seems that some of these corpora remain in the shade of the communication between Jabès' *oeuvre* and the "texts of the Jewish tradition". This paper will not dwell at length on those literatures. However, the conclusions of the present research might suggest an explanation for the phenomenon of minimizing specific intertexts as the promotion of intertextuality as a broader communication between texts.

2. Great corpora vs. specific texts

Some readers choose to refer to specific texts of the Jewish tradition (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Chapters of the Fathers, Song of Songs); some smaller liturgical genres have been compared to Jabès' poetic prose, such as *qinnah* (elegy) and *ahavot* (idyll). However, the intertextual reading of *The Book of Questions* in the light of specific texts or limited genres is secondary to, once again, a broader inscription of intertextuality as the communication between immense, heterogeneous literary ensembles. Rather than the communication between specific, historically, culturally delimited writings, Jabès' *oeuvre* is more often read in the light of a "mega-intertext", however paradoxical the very notion of it might be: Jewish literature.

3. Echoes and resonances vs. localized rewritings

Intertextual exegesis of *The Book of Questions* oscillates between two models of reading: one locates rewritings and translations of biblical or Midrashic utterances; the other emphasizes echoes, resonances, diffuse inspiration. In this second model, intertextuality takes the form of biblical style, Midrashic poetics of commentary, Talmudic dialogism, rather than the form of localized signifieds. Both models are relevant to intertextual praxis; however, they point to different modalities of intertextuality, as writing as well as reading. Therefore, the repartition of these models, the preference of one over the other, might be fruitfully explored.

4. Intertextuality and difference between texts

When intertextuality is regarded as a restricted phenomenon of citation or influence, difference between the texts in communication is evident. In the exegesis of *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality, however, difference between Jabès' text and his intertext often seems understated as irrelevant. The resemblances perceived between Jabès' text/textuality and its Jewish sources or inspirations seem to dissolve difference as inessential to the relationship between one text and the other. Analogical intertextuality (comparison) shifts to metonymical intertextuality (the text becomes *part* of its intertext).

The centrality of this phenomenon in Jabès' intertextual reading has been pointed out in the polemics between Susan Handelman and David Stern in the 1980s. Handelman retraces the path from rabbinical hermeneutics to postmodern textual sensitivity. Addressing Jabès' text, she writes that "for both Jabès and the rabbis, the very ambiguities, gaps, disruptions, uncertainties, and contradictions of scripture are the secret of its power²⁶". As Warren Motte emphasizes,

Susan Handelman has pointed out the similarities of Jabès's technique and that of canonical texts in the Jewish tradition. Jabès's imaginary rabbis engage in much the same activity as the thinkers who contributed to the Mishnah and the Gemara [...] As paradoxical as it may seem, Jabès has appealed, in his search for a different sort of writing [...] to a familiar and highly codified body of work. [...] Both assume the prior existence of the story: 'the story is already known without having to retell it...'²⁷

In his review of Handelman's *The Slayers of Moses*, Stern has vigorously opposed Handelman's rereading of rabbinical hermeneutics as a "newly theologized and dehistoricized concept of textuality²⁸". What is at stake in this polemics is a conception of literature and of the relationship between texts; its contribution to the study of Jabès' particular intertextuality is to point out the existence of various modalities and models of intertextual readings, and the motives behind them.

The reception of *The Book of Questions* has undoubtedly focused on intertextuality as one of its most central, and fascinating, features. However, it seems that there are many ways of defining intertextuality and of inscribing it in one's reading of a text. Can textual genetics be used to sharpen the distinctions between intertextual models? Can it provide material for a fresh reflection on intertextuality as the phenomenon of communication between texts?

²⁶ Handelman, "Torments of an Ancient World", p. 62.

²⁷ Motte, *Questioning Edmond Jabès*, p. 91.

²⁸ David Stern, « Moses-side: Midrash and Contemporary Literary Criticism », p. 203.

2. Intertextuality and the writing process

Turning to the textual genetics of *The Book of Questions* radically changes the perspective on intertextuality. Questions of reading are replaced with questions of writing; the view of Jabès' *oeuvre* as a corpus dissolves into the consideration of specific texts and their "foretexts" (manuscripts and other materials); the finite text is replaced with the work in progress. Thus the reading of intertextuality in the manuscripts first addresses questions such as: what are the modalities of intertextuality in the writing process? How is the relationship between texts formulated in the genetic materials? When, in the genetic process, does intertextuality become central to Jabès' writing? How does it relate to the overall dynamics of the creation of *The Book of Questions*? A second cluster of questions concerns the impact of textual genetics on the understanding of intertextuality: can the reading of manuscripts confirm or change the relationship between Jabès' text and his Midrashic and Talmudic intertexts? Do textual-genetics observations modify the theme of "commentary" evoked in the exegesis of *The Book of Questions*? Last, how does the genetic approach relate to the non-genetic reception and specifically, to the modalities of the intertextual reading of Jabès' *oeuvre*?

REFERENCES AND CITATIONS IN THE MANUSCRIPTS: A VACUUM?

Interestingly, the first observation is an absence. The manuscripts of *The Book of Questions* show very few references to external sources. The first volume of the manuscripts of *The Book of Questions I* contains a few quotes from José Bergamin, as well as reflections on language by Walter Benjamin and Johann Georg Hamann, probably in Pierre Klossowski's translation²⁹. In his study of Jabès' and Bounoure's exchange of letters, Steven Jaron affirms that the quotes from Hamann belong to a relatively late stage of creation. The manuscripts of the second *Book of Questions*, *The Book of Yukel*, contain "Notes about Kabbalah"³⁰. As for the Bible, it is

²⁹ Cf. ms. LQ, I, 151-152: citations of Walter Benjamin and Hamann on language. Non-identified citation on God. Crossed off citation of José Bergamin translated by C. and J. Bergamin, in ms. LQ, I, 142. Jabès cites *Les Méditations bibliques de Hamann*, de Pierre Klossowski (Paris : éditions de Minuit, 1948). Cf. Steven Jaron, *The Hazard of Exile*, p. 10: "while first exploring the possibility of integrating Kabbalistic thought into *Le Livre des Questions*, he drew his inspiration from Pierre Klossowski's translation of selected meditations on the Bible by the Christian mystical philosopher Johann Georg Hamann [...], as his correspondence with Gabriel Bounoure reveals". Then n. 13, p. 14: "Jabès's and Bounoure's exchange of letters on Hamann dates from Aug. 1961". According to my genetic analysis corroborated by external materials, August 1961 is a late date in the genesis of *The Book of Questions I*.

³⁰ Notes sur la « Cabbale », ms. LY, I, 139. My research was not able to identify the source of these notes. In the manuscripts of Jabès' later work, *El*, direct quotations from Kabbalah texts point to a clear turn in the type of intertextuality, from general knowledge or broad reminiscence (in *The Book of Questions I*) to citation (in later works). In the first three volumes of *The Book of Questions*, intertextuality is closer to resonance, which allows for a full play of "intertextual imagination".

explicitly present in the manuscripts only in the form of an erasure and replacement – certainly one of the most interesting moves in Jabès’ writing in progress – the replacement of “Bible” with “Livre” in the first volume of the manuscripts of *The Book of Questions I*³¹. Talmud and Midrash, which are *The Book of Questions*’ main corpora of intertextual reading, are not mentioned in Jabès’ manuscripts.

Except for these rare occurrences, citations, explicit evocation or reference to external sources are absent from the manuscripts. In a writing where citationism is, as Françoise Armengaud puts it, “a style, a genre, a structure, but also a thesis, a principle, an essence³²”, this absence may come as a surprise. The first observation of the archeological reading of intertextuality is therefore that citationism as a poetics of “inspired subjectivity” in Levinas’ words³³, and citation as a praxis of discourse and writing, meaning the insertion of a “foreign” piece of text into another one as part of the genesis of a literary work, do not necessarily coincide.

Moreover, regarding Jabès’ text, a literary work which is constantly read as having been inspired by a corpus of ancient texts – whether the emphasis is put on the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash or the Kabbalah – it is worth pointing out that “inspiration” and “rewriting” do not imply the presence of the source-texts, in any form (citation, reference, allusion) in the preliminary materials. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the perception of a text as being in dialogue with other ones, and its creation as it is represented or conserved in the genetic materials. Even in the sequences which most strongly echo specific intertexts, as for example the dialogue of the two lovers in *The Book of Questions I*, and the poetry of the Song of Songs³⁴, resonance does not take the form of reference or citation in the genetic materials.

This observation about the genesis of *The Book of Questions* is particularly interesting since manuscripts and other genetic materials often bear the trace of the operation by which a text is echoed in the work in progress. That is, an intertextual relationship between two texts is often made explicit in the genetic materials or at least more readable, whether in the form of reading notes, of writing outlines, of citations or even of preliminary versions where the intertextual dynamics of the creation is more apparent. Besides, the analysis of programmatic foretexts on *The Book of Questions I* – particularly a specific sequence written as a preface and later

³¹ Ms. LQ, I, 13.

³² Armengaud, « Devoir citer », p. 23.

³³ « Subjectivité inspirée [...] inspirée au point d’énoncer son dire comme une citation: soit entre guillemets, soit précédé ou interrompu par un ‘il disait’... » Levinas on Jabès in *Noms propres*, p. 94.

³⁴ LQ, 153-154. Regarding the resonance of the Song of Songs in Sarah and Yukel’s dialogue, see Helena Shillony, *Une rhétorique de la subversion*, p. 48, and Georges-Elia Sarfati, « La tension mimésis/judéité dans *Le Livre des Questions* », p. 92.

fragmented and inserted into the body of the Book³⁵ – shows that Jabès’ vague and metaphorical allusion to a corpus of reference, the “Book of Sages”, appears in the chronology of writing only *after* intertextuality has taken its mature form. The formulation by the author of a metaphorical intertextuality therefore bears an element of self-reading, thus making the dichotomy between writer and reader, precisely in the emergence of intertextuality, obsolete.

The absence of a more explicit form of intertextuality in the manuscripts of the first *Book of Questions* is even more remarkable when it is compared to Jabès’ later works, where manuscripts show numerous citations: some of them are integrated into the final text, while others are processed until they dissolve into the fabrics of Jabès’ aphoristic prose. This is in particular the case with the work on citations of Levinas in the manuscripts of *Le petit livre de la subversion*. Interestingly, this observation matches Daniel Lançon’s (see also Bayard and Jaron) remark that Jabès was not well acquainted with Jewish texts prior to writing *The Book of Questions*³⁶, at least the first volume but most probably the first three ones and beyond. Indeed, following Jabès’ own affirmation that he only read the “Jewish texts” after the publication of *Elya (The Book of Questions V)*, Jean-Luc Bayard locates the intertextual turn during the writing of *Aely (The Book of Questions VI)*³⁷ and before the writing of *El, or the Last Book (VII)*, for which genetic materials clearly indicate a different articulation of intertextuality³⁸. In other words, there actually exist, in Jabès’ genetic materials, various modes of dialogue between the work in progress and external texts, and the repartition of these modes parallels and reveals the fluctuation of the deep relationship between writing and intertextuality in Jabès’ creative process.

Back to the manuscripts of *The Book of Questions*: how is the scarcity of the “genetic intertext” to be interpreted? What is its significance or relevance in the understanding of *The Book of Questions*’ relationship with other texts? What are the methodological caveats to keep in mind while trying to grasp that significance? First, “textual genetics” must always be cautious and have its own limits in mind. A first possibility is therefore to suppose that genetics is not relevant in this case: one might suggest that documents have been lost, or that explicit reference or locating of quotations to be integrated into the body of writing has occurred in the

³⁵ This sequence appears in the first volume of the manuscripts of *The Book of Questions I*: ms. LQ, I, 67-71.

³⁶ Daniel Lançon, « Le destin poétique d’Edmond Jabès dans les désécritures de la décennie blanche », p. 47 : « auprès de Madeleine Chapsal [*i.e.* two months after the publication of *The Book of Questions I*], l’auteur se déclare d’emblée peu familiarisé avec la littérature juive traditionnelle ».

³⁷ Jean-Luc Bayard in *Saluer Jabès*, pp. 25-26.

³⁸ Here is an example of a direct citation appearing among others in the manuscripts of *El* : « ‘Lorsque le mystérieux de tous les mystérieux voulut se révéler, il produisit d’abord un point’. Zohar. » Ms. El, 1st folder. Interestingly, some of these citations vary from one genetic version to the other.

margins of the written genesis. However, in the case of Jabès' manuscripts, these hypotheses do not seem valid: first, the genetic materials of *The Book of Questions* are extremely complete and were transmitted by the author himself, so that the eventuality that a whole part of the process might have disappeared is not convincing. Second, the very broad range of phenomena occurring within the process of writing-rewriting which constitute the genetic materials suggests that the hypothesis of a citationism in the margins of writing is, once again, not a valid one.

The most convincing hypothesis is that the dialogue with other texts within the work in progress is the product of diffuse reminiscence rather than of actual citationism. Whether reminiscence as the essence of the genetic intertextuality of *The Book of Questions* is a poetic choice or an unconscious modality of writing, it surely contrasts with the reworking of "real" quotations in later works, pointing to an intertextual turn which might itself be interpreted as the impact of reception back on Jabès' poetic creation.

Moreover, it has two consequences for the genetic analysis of intertextuality and for the attempt to compare intertextuality in the final work and its genesis in the manuscripts. On the one hand, interestingly and paradoxically, the archeology of *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality cannot remain at the level of locating direct sources and acknowledged or confirmed influences. It must work at the level of the echoes and resonances that one text creates with another one without quoting or referring to this text; it must account for the evolution of this echo from its first appearance to its final form. The absence of actual references and citations encourages the genetic study of *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality to explore the biblical, Midrashic or Talmudic inspiration of Jabès' writing as a much broader, more diffuse and richer mechanism of reminiscences which operate in the creation of a text and beyond, in its reception. Such reminiscences might in turn be the same ones identified by *The Book of Questions*' exegetes, who have often read Jabès' prose as a rewriting and at times, a translation of ancient texts. The tendency to identify these rewritings and translations, even though it is not corroborated by the archeology of Jabès' text, does point to the existence of a literary echo, which might be perceived by the writer as well as the reader. In other words, the observation about the scarcity of quotations and references in Jabès' genetic materials suggests interpreting "hyper-intertextual" readings of *The Book of Questions* as intertextual readings sensitive to these echoes and reminiscences.

On the other hand, the previous remark suggests that in order to grasp the relationship between a text and its intertext(s) through the analysis of genetic materials, reference to sources might be irrelevant. In the study of a text so essentially "intertextual" as *The Book of Questions*

is, genetic materials have another purpose, which is to show how initial materials become “intertextual” through rewriting, that is: how intertextuality emerges from the core genetic operations of writing and rewriting, rather than from incidental genetic operations of citing or referring to an external text or corpus. Therefore, the purpose of the analysis of intertextuality in the genetic materials is to show how intertexts emerge into the work in progress, in the space between two rewritings, and what are the connectors and the genetic moves which create the intertextual link. The inscription of intertextuality in the genesis is thus less a matter of citation and incorporation than a matter of textual production and reproduction, reflection and mirroring. The analysis of the *Book*’s dialogue with Talmudic and Midrashic literature will emphasize this claim.

WRITING/REWRITING: THE INTERTEXTUAL TURN OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

Before addressing the emergence of *The Book of Questions*’ communication with Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah as diffuse corpora, a few remarks about the chronology of intertextuality as a becoming (or a rewriting) are necessary. The genetic study of *The Book of Questions* reveals three major stages of intertextuality as part of the process of writing. These three stages are intimately related to the three stages of textual evolution my analysis of Jabès’ manuscripts has unearthed. Here is a brief summary of these observations and analyses. Chronologically, the earlier materials of *The Book of Questions I* are the many versions of a broadly static sequence of stories featuring a character named Jacques, at first very close to the writer, Edmond Jabès, and progressively more remote from him. This sequence is a series of flashbacks interspersed with a traumatic episode – the discovery of anti-Semitic graffiti written on a wall in Paris – often described and referred to as the “matrix of the Book³⁹”.

It is not the concern here to discuss the numerous transformations undergone through many rewritings by this narrative nucleus. My genetic analysis presents in detail the various processes of elimination, narrative condensation, fragmentation and abstraction⁴⁰. What matters from the perspective of intertextuality is that the many versions of this narrative nucleus are not “intertextual”, at least not according to the essential and central meaning intertextuality bears in *The Book of Questions*. Of course, one can argue after Kristeva and Barthes that every text

³⁹ Cf. Steven Jaron, « La ‘matrice cachée’ du *Livre des Questions* », pp. 88-101. Cf. également *Du désert au livre*, pp. 67-68. Jabès évoque dans le *Livre* l’impulsion de cet incident : « Il a suffi de quelques graffiti sur un mur pour que les souvenirs qui sommeillaient dans mes mains s’emparent de ma plume. Et pour que les doigts commandent la vue ». LQ, 30.

⁴⁰ “The Palimpsest and the Canvas”, in particular chaps. 1 and 2.

is an intersection of texts. But in a more narrow and pragmatic view of intertextuality, one which matches the intertextual readings of Jabès' text, the archeology of the primary materials of *The Book of Questions I* shows that none of the intertexts constitutive of *The Book of Questions* in its finite form (mainly the Bible, the Midrash, the Talmud and the Kabbalah, but also the inspiration of Borges or Gibran) nor any other specific text are strongly solicited by the first versions of the original sequence of stories. Similarly, the intertextual connectors and intertextual appeal of *The Book of Questions* listed in the introduction to this paper – references to fictional, historical and metaphorical textual objects; textual forms of citation and commentary (whether fictional or not) etc. – are absent from the primary narrative nucleus. All these connectors and intertextual indexes gradually enter the work in progress: almost all of them, except for the rabbis-poets, appear or start to emerge during the second stage of writing: the “Tales of Yukel” stage.

Indeed, after a long series of similar rewritings, the original narrative sequence undergoes a deep transformation. This structural reworking includes the apparition of a new character, “Yukel Serafi”, a teller, a sage and a witness, who tells his parables to an eager audience. The primary materials are fragmented into Yukel's sayings and tales and his audience's requests. They become fragments of a whole and illustrations of a more abstract vein. At the same stage of writing appear both a reflection on Jewishness (orthopraxis vs. a broader, more abstract definition) and increasingly frequent allusions to other texts (the “heavy scrolls” of the Torah; Yukel's own [fictional] books). Moreover, the structural and indexical intertextuality which emerges in the reworking of the original narrative nucleus into the “Tales of Yukel” is accompanied by clear resonances of other texts – mainly those listed previously in the fourth category: Khalil Gibran's *The Madman* and *The Prophet*, as well as French symbolist Marcel Schwob's *Le Livre de Monelle*⁴¹, whose aphoristic prose, teller-witness/audience structure and title (The Book of...) are strongly echoed in the “Tales of Yukel” rewritings⁴². These intertexts standing at the intersection of many literary traditions and genres are literally pivotal to the intertextuality of Jabès' *The Book of Questions*. The appearance of these undeniable resonances as part of a creative turn in Jabès' work in progress marks a broader transformation, which could be termed the emergence of intertextuality in *The Book of Questions*. In other words, the

⁴¹ Schwob, Marcel, *Le Livre de Monelle*, in *Œuvres complètes de Marcel Schwob*, Pierre Champion et Marguerite Moreno (éds.), Paris : typo. François Bernouard, 1928. 1^{ère} publication, Paris : L. Chailley, 1894.

⁴² Regarding the “Book of” echo, see ms. LQ, I, 23, the title given to the reworking of the previous narratives into the “Tales of Yukel”: “Les livres récits de Yukel Serafi”. In this folio, the word “book” is set aside, but it haunts Yukel's sayings and parables. Schwob's title might be the trigger, before the reference to Mallarmé, for the growing centrality of the “Book” in Jabès' *oeuvre*.

reworking of the original narratives into the “Tales of Yukel” is also the transformation of a foretext in which intertextuality is not a relevant feature into one growingly defined by its infinite and multidimensional communication with entire corpora.

TALMUD, MIDRASH, KABBALAH: THE INFINITE INTERTEXT AND INTERTEXTUAL IMAGINATION

Although the genetic phase of the “Tales of Yukel” is crucial to the emergence of *The Book of Questions*’ communication with other texts, it falls short of accounting both for Jabès’ *oeuvre*-specific communication with Talmudic and Midrashic literatures and in general for the transformation of intertextuality into the essence of this writing wholly defined as being caught in an infinite textual rustle (Barthes’ metaphor). Interestingly, these two features are genetically intertwined, which might point to a deep feature of intertextuality in *The Book of Questions*.

First then, where (=when) in the genetic materials can one perceive the emergence of Talmudic and Midrashic echoes, noticed by every reader of *The Book of Questions*, in Jabès’ work in progress? Which form do these echoes take? What are their textual connectors? This analysis will assess the centrality of the work in progress as a key – and not only chronological – factor in the emergence of intertextuality, and outline the importance of imagination in intertextuality.

For the readers of *The Book of Questions*, the most obvious indexes of an intertextual connection to Talmud and Midrash are the rabbis-poets⁴³ (the “imaginary rabbis”), the recurring formula which introduces their commentaries and aphorisms, “Reb X said”, “Reb Y wrote”, and lastly, the particular Jabesian page featuring wide margins, parentheses, quotations marks and italics. Many viewed it as an echo of the traditional typography of Talmudic prints. Together, these features of Jabès’ text create a polyphonic textuality, in which “commentary”, similar to rabbinical exegesis, is the main mode of discourse. Analyzing the genesis of Jabès’ aphoristic, polyphonic and layered poetics therefore allows a more accurate understanding of the relationship between *The Book of Questions* and its diffuse sources.

⁴³ As Shlomo Elbaz notes, the rabbis-poets who haunt Jabès’ *Book* are « une sorte de signe (faussement) codé plaçant le texte jabésien à l’enseigne du discours talmudique ». « Jabès en question », p. 143.

1. The rabbis-poets in the manuscripts and the intertextual revolution of the Book

The following are the main observations of the genetic study of *The Book of Questions* regarding the appearance of the rabbis-poets and its chronology⁴⁴. First, these characteristic figures of Jabès' prose are absent from the original narrative nucleus, as well as from the dialogical textuality of its reworking into the "Tales of Yukel". Their appearance belongs to a third stage of the work in progress. Second, their emergence is intimately linked to the weakening of the broadly autobiographical dimension of the primary materials. Specifically, the weakening of autobiographical tone and the apparition of the first rabbi are connected in the rewriting of one of *The Book of Questions'* central foretexts, an episode recalling a sandstorm in the Egyptian desert. This autobiographical episode⁴⁵, first written as a first-person narrative, switches to a third-person narrative in a further rewriting: this dactylography bears both the marks of the enunciation switch (first-person occurrences are crossed off and replaced with the third person) and the mark of the appearance of a new instance, "Reb Aaron", whose teaching concludes the dramatic and metaphorical episode. Third, the massive entrance of those speakers and writers into the fabric of the work in progress brings a new repartition of its textual modes: the place of narrative materials shrinks to the benefit of the abstract, aphoristic discourse; continuous textuality is abandoned for a fragmented textuality; linear structure is replaced with tabular page; a particular form of speech, in which attribution and anonymity are inextricable, replaces the former, more conventional instances of speech: the author-narrator and the character-narrator.

Along with the transformation of the work in progress' textuality, the appearance of the rabbis-poets and of their fragmentary speech modifies the modes of reading and interpretation of Jabès' text. Indeed, the invention of these ephemeral instances bearing "barbaric names" (said Gabriel Bounoure, the first reader of the manuscripts), whose only purpose is to enunciate a single, highly poetical, philosophical and meditative utterance, augments the strangeness and the enigma of the text. The fragmentation of the primary materials, the suspension of meaning through the tabular structure of Jabès' page, and the abstract polyphony of the rabbis emphasize not only the intertextual communication with Talmud or Midrash, but also the enigma, the indecidability, the indeterminate mystery to be unraveled by continuous interpretation.

⁴⁴ Full analysis of the appearance of speakers in general and the rabbis-poets in particular in the fabric of the text is presented in the third chapter of my dissertation, "The Palimpsest and the Canvas".

⁴⁵ Regarding the autobiographical dimension, see interviews with Marcel Cohen. See also Steven Jaron in "L'amitié comme éphémères retrouvailles", which displays another version of the real-life episode, written by Jabès' friend and companion of adventure Jean Moscatelli.

However, the irruption of voices, of fragmentary textuality and enigma into the work in progress comes along with keys for interpretation. Jewishness ceases to be a mere underlying theme of Yukel's parables: through the rabbis and their discourse, it becomes the main horizon of meaning of *The Book of Questions* (though it is not an answer to its questions). The foreign substrate, particularly the Hebraic feel of most of the rabbis' names, suggests the presence of a code, a cipher. Lastly, the intertext of rabbinic literature appears as the model for this fragmentary discourse and polyphonic text in which utterances connect in the mode of commentary, explanation and interpretation of a hermetic prose. The implication, then, is to read Jabès' enigma in the light of a literature in which its "anomalies" are the principle and the essence of the text.

The appearance of the rabbis in the work in progress therefore constitutes a textual transformation (layering of texts, turn from narrative to aphoristic, emergence of the commentary textuality); a hermeneutical transformation (modification of the modes of reading and interpreting the text); and an intertextual transformation (modalities of communication of Jabès' text with other ones – specific texts and broader corpora). With the invention of the rabbis, Jabès' text seems shaped by a textual dynamics similar – at least seemingly – to the Talmud's and the Midrash's: fragmentation, polyphony, commentary. Therefore, the intertextual transformation must be understood in its dialogue with the textual one (fragmented text, commentary and exegesis modes) and the hermeneutical one (hermeticism, deferral of meaning).

2. The genesis of the Book and the question of intertext as fiction

Jabès' rabbis are imaginary rabbis and their citations are fictive ones: this has been confirmed by the author himself⁴⁶ and remarked by some of his exegetes, like Françoise Armengaud who speaks of "Edmond Jabès or the great book of fictitious citations"⁴⁷. Textual genetics confirms the fictional character of the rabbis and their interchangeability through multiple genetic phenomena such as phonetic series of names, arbitrary and multiple replacements. However, beyond the invention of fictional citations and their imaginary speakers, the study of *The Book of Questions'* genetic materials also shows that formal dialogism is more a simulacrum of polyphony than a real opening of the text to a plurality of voices.

⁴⁶ Cf. the very beginning of *The Book of Questions*: « aux rabbins-poètes à qui j'ai prêté mes paroles et dont le nom, à travers les siècles, fut le mien » LQ, 11.

⁴⁷ Armengaud, « Devoir citer », p. 22.

Indeed, manuscripts reveal that many “citations” and “sayings” are created by applying the typographical apparatus of dialogue and attributed speech to monological materials, written in one unit, without any dialogical articulation or speech distribution. Even the layering of text and commentary, of attributed voice and orphan speech, host-text and cited text, is a literary artefact, the product of genetic operations of rewriting, replacement and erasure. Moreover, this artefact is not perfectly homogenous: along with the aphoristic speech entering the text at the third stage of writing, genetic analysis of *The Book of Questions* shows that many fragmentary utterances are created by the extraction of sentences from their initial context. Decontextualized and displaced, these fragments turn into some kind of contrapuntal commentary. Jabès’ manuscripts therefore show the emergence of a surface polyphony and a spatial form of commentary, which are not anchored in a textual reality (literary polyphony as the representation of distinct speeches; commentary as a dynamics between a source-text and a peripheral text). If polyphony is one of the main intertextual connectors between *The Book of Questions* and its Talmudic or Midrashic paradigm, genetic analysis shows that it is a literary fiction. Can this mimetic and fictional dimension be ignored in the intertextual reading of Jabès’ text?

Three possibilities exist of reevaluating the relationship between *The Book of Questions* and its Talmudic and Midrashic intertext. One is to conclude that the facticity of Jabès’ polyphony endangers the association with rabbinical literature, arguing that the “real” polyphony and the pragmatic articulation of diverging arguments is essential to the dynamics of the corpus of reference. However, such a conclusion would promote a narrow view of intertextuality, one which does not take into account the powerfulness of echoes, reminiscences and other forms of communication between texts. Another possibility is to suggest that intertextual communication does not rely on the imitation of discourse pragmatics and that the facticity of Jabès’ polyphony does not prevent his text from being read as an echo, a postmodern rewriting of ancient books as they are perceived or dreamed in collective imagination. The image of literary works, particularly of immense and heteroclitic corpora such as the Talmud and the Midrash, becomes then a relevant element in the perception of intertextual communications.

Finally, the third possibility is to suggest that Talmudic and Midrashic polyphony is no less an artefact than Jabès’ and *The Book of Questions*’ undifferentiated, named-but-anonymous rabbis. Such a claim has been made in contemporary studies of Talmud. Facticity and fictionality have also been emphasized by Gershom Scholem regarding the *Zohar*, its imaginary background, its fictional rabbis and its pseudo-epigraphic status. As noted earlier,

Jabès was probably not familiar with the *Zohar* when he wrote *The Book of Questions*, and does not cite it directly until the seventh *Book of Questions* (*El*). He might, however, have been familiar with Scholem's introduction to Jewish mysticism (*Major Trends*), translated into French in 1956. According to this timid hypothesis, not only would fictional polyphony not negate intertextuality, it would even be a key to the communication between Jabès' text and its ancient predecessors. The following section will, however, outline another way of looking at the relationship between *The Book of Questions*, Talmud and Midrash in the light of the genesis of Jabès' text.

3. *Intertext and intratext: the manuscripts as a hermeneutical palimpsest*

The analysis of *The Book of Questions*' genetic materials has shown that intertextuality – the communication of Jabès' text with other texts – is inscribed in the process of rewriting and takes place in the passage from one version to the next, rather than being located at a “pre-writing” or pretext level (such as outlines or programmatic drafts). Moreover, the genetic analysis has demonstrated that intertextuality emerges from the relationship between primary materials and their reworked version: in other words, the textual relationship between one draft and the next, and more broadly between genetic materials and the finite text and even between one *Book* and the next one, is constitutive of the relationship between the text and its intertext. These remarks suggest that genetic *intratextuality*, *i.e.* the circulation of meaning between the textual levels of the work in progress, and the genesis of *intertextuality*, are closely related.

Another remark must be made regarding the parallelism between the genetic process of the appearance of aphoristic discourse in the work in progress (fragmentation of a linear, coherent previous sequence) on the one hand and the poetics of commentary which characterizes the finite text and features at the core of the exegesis of *The Book of Questions* on the other hand. Obviously, if one views Midrash as the paradigm of commentary discourse and textuality, it is clear that the aphoristic discourse of *The Book of Questions* is very different from Midrashic literature. First, Midrashic commentary is a hermeneutics: its purpose is to understand a hermetic text by utilizing all the resources of meaning available to the reader-interpreter. Jabesian commentary does not imitate Midrash's concentric dynamics around a previous text, but features a disarticulated succession in which blank spaces allude to an absent text. If the discourse of Jabès' *Book* resembles commentary, it is therefore less as “exegesis” than as “added (superfluous?) textuality”. In this perspective, it is interesting to read Betty Rojtman's comment on the contemporary rereading of Midrash in the light of modern literary criticism:

For many contemporary critics it is in the very gap between writing and its object, or between writing and its intent, that the plurality of meaning is said to establish itself, whereas in midrash the alignment of some of the same elements that go into this contemporary attitude produces a significantly different perspective⁴⁸.

One can find in Rojtman's words an echo of David Stern's argument against the associative reading promoted by Susan Handelman in *The Slayers of Moses*: the modern reading of an ancient corpus and its hermeneutics is necessarily a rewriting in the light of new aesthetics, theory of literature and meaning. Allan Megill, in his analysis of the literary relationship between Derrida and Jabès, writes similarly:

“Rabbinical” interpretation is the sort practiced by Talmudic scholars, who keep a clear separation between Scripture and Midrash, granting an unequivocal priority to the former and regarding the latter as a secondary working out and expansion of the Sacred Text. “Poetic” interpretation, the sort practiced by Jabès, is a very different enterprise. Here the distinction between “original text” and “exegetical writing” is blurred if not eliminated, with interpretation itself serving as an “original text”⁴⁹.

I will come back to these remarks in my conclusion. However, genetic analysis of *The Book of Questions* has demonstrated that Jabès, through the rewriting of materials, creates a particular modality: “intratextual resonance”. Intratextual resonance happens when sequences echo one another or when a word becomes a leitmotiv. Genetically, the emergence of intratextual resonance happens first through the replacement of certain words (emergence of keywords) and second through the dislocation of the narrative coherence of primary materials to the benefit of isolated sequences and motifs previously disconnected. Furthermore, the general evolution of the work in progress' textuality (from detailed narratives to elliptical fables; from a continuous, linear and monolithic text to a fragmentary, tabular, layered text, etc.) suggests that the dynamics between an almost erased textual nucleus and the fragmentary text imitates the textual dynamics between a hermetic discourse and its exegesis.

Therefore, the genetic processes of *The Book of Questions* invite reevaluation of the “palimpsest textuality” (*i.e.* the relationship between the erased text and the readable text) as essential to the intertextuality of Jabès' text. In other words, the genetic collapse of primary “constructed” materials into a deconstructed text does not only come along with the emergence of intertextual communication with Talmudic or Midrashic literature: rather, this genetic

⁴⁸ Betty Rojtman, “Sacred Language and Open Text”, p. 159.

⁴⁹ Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, p. 320.

textual transformation which generates the layering of the texts, creates *The Book of Questions*' communication with the exegetical literatures and commentary textuality of Midrash and Talmud.

The genesis of *The Book of Questions* is as much the creation of a text (body of writing) as it is the creation of a double textuality where a disappearing, half-buried text and its commentary mingle: it is plausible to affirm that this genetic dynamics makes its imprint on the work in progress and continues to radiate into the finite text. The archeology of Jabès' *Book* therefore suggests that genetic materials are not only the space and the evidence of the intertextual genesis of *The Book of Questions*; rather, their own reorganization, rewriting, reworking, superposition and erasure are an integral part of the creation of this intertextual communication. In other words, rather than analyzing intertextuality "and" or "in" the writing process, the genetic study of *The Book of Questions* has demonstrated that intertextuality *is* the writing process.

4. Diffuse intertextuality: from the genesis to the reception of The Book of Questions

Until now, this study has not questioned the way in which Jabès' text is read in the light of – or inspired by – Midrash, Talmud or even Kabbalah. On the one hand, the communication between *The Book of Questions* and these corpora has been perceived by more and more readers. On the other hand, although direct reference could not be found in the genetic materials of *The Book of Questions* (except for the "Notes on the Kabbalah" in the *Book of Yukel* manuscripts⁵⁰), textual analysis and genetic study agree that there are strong resonances, principally in the attribution of discourse to speakers, even fictive ones; and in the textual and genetic dynamics of hermetic text/commentary. However, this broad, diffuse intertextuality encompassing the communication with very different corpora (Talmud, Midrash and Kabbalah) might be, in the light of genetics observations, a revelator of an essential feature of Jabesian intertextuality.

One of the most interesting materials found in Jabès' manuscripts is a sequence titled "Preface", in which the writer relates his own *oeuvre*, then alluded to as "the novel of Sarah and Yukel", to an ancient "*recueil*", or collection of texts, also called the "book of sages"⁵¹. This reference is capital in the genesis of *The Book of Questions*: it states that, during the

⁵⁰ Midrash is equally absent unless the name of one of Jabès' rabbis, shaped through a long series of permutations from Reb Zikra to Reb Midrasch, is viewed as an allusion to the rabbinical exegetical corpus. Talmud does not appear in the genetic materials of *The Book of Questions*.

⁵¹ Ms. LQ, I, 71.

process of writing, intertextuality has become essential to the poetics of Jabès' text. But it is also important to note that the intertextual essence is voluntarily indeterminate: Jabès' self-acknowledged intertext is an abstract, metaphorical, semi-imaginary corpus. Sensitive to Jabès' appeal to an ancient literary source and motivated by the presence of rabbis in *The Book of Questions*, readership identified this corpus as Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalah or all of them, according to textual features read in their communication with the ancient corpora's similar features ("polyphony", "fragmented text", "commentary"). Therefore, the great mobility of Talmudic and Midrashic intertext in Jabès' exegesis is not surprising. Jabès' readers relate mostly to textual characteristics which remain below or beyond the differences between these corpora. It is not surprising either that *The Book of Questions'* intertextual reading mostly considers a global, diffuse resemblance to be the one Jabès alludes to in his reference to an indeterminate, semi-imaginary intertext. In other words, intertextuality in *The Book of Questions* is firstly a matter of images (the collective, cultural images of a text, a corpus, and their relationship with another text) and imagination.

This intertextual drive might remain a minor phenomenon in the self-conscious, programmatic, referenced intertextuality which characterizes some literary texts – whether considered from the writer's point of view (genetics and poetics) or from the reader's (hermeneutics). However, in the case of Jabès' *The Book of Questions*, intertextual imagination based on echoes, reminiscences and textual images becomes the very essence of the relationship between texts. The idea advanced here is that in *The Book of Questions* and beyond, in all communication between texts, intertextuality relies not only on punctual connectors as Riffaterre maintains but on a broader dimension: the cultural image and imagination of texts.

3. Beyond textual genetics: Three reflections on *The Book of Questions* and its intertextuality

Readers of Jabès' *The Book of Questions* have formulated their own vision of the relationship between the enigmatic text and its intertexts. However, beyond individual differences, the intertextual readings of Jabès' text reveal similar tendencies and sometimes obstacles: the wide range of characteristics of the relationship between texts; the predominance of a diffuse and fluctuating intertextual reading. This study suggests that what is at stake in these conceptions of intertextuality reaches beyond purely theoretical or textual questions and engages a history of texts and of their perception in collective, cultural imagination. In the light of the questions asked at the beginning of this research and the answers brought by genetic analysis, I will conclude with three reflections on the way in which a literary text – *The Book of Questions* – is read together with other texts or corpora: Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalah, symbolist prose etc.

1. Diffuse agrammaticality, intertext, imagination

First, it is important to state that the traditional mechanisms of intertextual communication are transformed by the multiplication and dissemination of agrammaticality through the text. The omnipresence of Jabès' rabbis-poets in *The Book of Questions*; the homogenous dissemination of their aphoristic decontextualized discourse and of a disarticulated text; the poetics of indeterminacy characteristic of Jabès' prose: all these motivate an intertextual reading very different from Riffaterre's model based on localized, punctual connectors. In the genetic perspective, once agrammaticality becomes the principle of Jabès' writing and connectors are disseminated homogeneously through the text, *The Book of Questions*' intertextuality becomes diffuse and appeals to corpora rather than specific texts, to a textual idiom rather than to specific utterances. This characteristic of Jabès' text in the light of its genesis broadly explains the fluctuations in the intertextual reading of *The Book of Questions*, those which are related to the texts and corpora viewed as intertexts, and those which concern the localization and the modality of intertextuality (structural, thematic, stylistic, hermeneutical).

Second, the genetic analysis of *The Book of Questions* – and in particular the study of the emergence of its intertextuality – proves the essential role of reminiscence and imagination in Jabès' intertextual writing. It suggests the existence and importance of a powerful mode of intertextual reading: "intertextual imagination". The centrality of Jewish texts as Jabès' intertexts can be viewed in the light of these observations: intertextual reading appealing to

Jewish texts is efficient in solving the agrammaticalities of Jabès' text; it also promotes a more essential conception of intertextuality, beyond the domain of influences and sources. But most important, the reading of a literary text involves a form of reception and interpretation which is "intertextual imagination". Jabès' communication with Mallarmé and Blanchot, the echo of Khalil Gibran or Marcel Schwob's prose in *The Book of Questions* are undoubtedly crucial to understanding the influences, the origins and sources of Jabès' enigmatic text and the specificity of his poetic work. However, they do not appeal to intertextual imagination. On the contrary, the diffuse, complex, multilayered communication which connects Jabès' text with an ancient, extremely broad and heterogeneous intertext involves the localization of citations and resemblances as well as an imaginative operation.

Acknowledging this dimension – the play of imagination in intertextuality – goes beyond the tracking of influences, translations and rewritings in Jabès' prose. Intertextuality in *The Book of Questions*, genetically based on faint echoes and reminiscences, is about the image (an imaginary one?) of texts in collective imagination.

2. *Intertextual circularity and The Book of Questions*

This remark calls for a reflection on the mechanisms of the "double intertextual reading" of *The Book of Questions* and Jewish texts, not as a metaphor but as a reading praxis which has influenced the contemporary reading and interpretation of ancient texts. There must be no misunderstanding: reciprocity is impossible in intertextuality as writing. Jabès can cite, echo or remind of the Bible; the Bible cannot cite Jabès. The question here is a matter of reading and rereading. What does it mean to read the Bible, the Talmud or the Midrash in the light of Jabès' text? Can the circulation of ancient texts in Jabès' postmodern writing have an impact on the reception and understanding of their characteristics? If Jabès' text is so unanimously read in communication with ancient texts perceived as its inspiration, source and *Urtext*, is it not because these texts are read in the light of a (postmodern) aesthetics, hermeneutics and theory of literature of which Jabès is part?

Intertextual reading of two texts involves to some extent circularity and historicity; it is important to take these into account when dealing with the reading of Jabès' *The Book of Questions* in communication with Jewish texts. Circularity can be found in the influence of Jabès on Marc-Alain Ouaknin, whose essay on the Talmud (*Le livre brûlé; Lire aux éclats*)

bears an explicit tribute to *The Book of Questions*⁵². It is also perceptible in David Banon's *La lecture infinie*⁵³; Banon's essay on reading Midrash explicitly acknowledges the fact that his reading is inspired by modern aesthetics and hermeneutics. Interestingly, when Eric Benoit, one of Jabès' principal exegetes, writes that "Interroger, telle est exemplairement l'activité (infinie) du commentateur, de l'exégète, de l'herméneute, spécifiquement dans le judaïsme⁵⁴", he cites both Ouaknin's and Banon's essays, both of which bear the mark of a certain aesthetic and hermeneutic constellation and the mark of Jabès' influence. There is no doubt that questioning and commenting are indeed characteristics of Talmudic literature; however, their valuation in the contemporary philosophical, theoretical and cultural discourse reveals both a process of rereading and the circularity of this process.

Such phenomena are constant in the history of the reception of literary texts: the perception of certain characteristics as being central, the privilege sometimes given to a metaphorical, anhistorical image of a text, are integral to every process of reception. Reception depends on variable factors, intimately tied to the ways in which literary theory views texts. These in turn are inseparable from historical and cultural constellations. The historicity, circularity and cultural imprint of every process of reading, interpretation and reception only highlight the complexity of the mechanisms involved in intertextual dynamics.

It is interesting to note that intertextual reading of Jabès in the light of Midrash, for example, very has often a specular character: when Moshe Idel reads Jabès as a postmodern incarnation of Midrashic exegesis or Kabbalistic hermeneutics, he always refers to the same text, *The Key*, translated by Rosmarie Waldrop for Hartman and Budick's 1986 volume on *Midrash and Literature*⁵⁵. The insertion of Jabès' excerpt in this volume (a publication rooted in a specific cultural and historical context) might itself be influenced by the polemics between Susan Handelman and David Stern that began with Handelman's publication of *The Slayers of Moses* (1982). In her book, Handelman reads Derrida-Jabès in the light of Midrashic hermeneutics, which anticipates her reading of Jabès as a new Midrash in her 1985 essay "Torments of an Ancient World". Although this specular mechanism is certainly not the cause or origin of *The*

⁵² See Joseph Guglielmi : « L'histoire du livre est celle de son effacement [...] écrit Marc-Alain Ouaknin » ; Guglielmi underlines the « écho de Jabès » perceptible in Ouaknin's words. Joseph Guglielmi, « Journal de lecture d'Edmond Jabès (26 février 1985 – 12 mars 1987) », in particular pp. 98-102: 102.

⁵³ See for example *La lecture infinie*, p. 34 : « C'est pourquoi ce livre est destiné à être lu à voix haute. Plus pour dénouer le silence dans lequel il s'est drapé que pour en saisir le sens. » Resonances of Jabès' reflections on reading, meaning and silence, as well as Jabès' poetic idiom (book, untie, draped...) are obvious in this excerpt.

⁵⁴ Éric Benoit, *De la crise du sens à la quête du sens*, p. 112.

⁵⁵ Cf. Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, pp. 113, 134; *Old Worlds, New Mirrors*, pp. 178-192.

Book of Questions' intertextual reading, it is an important phenomenon which must be acknowledged.

3. *Infinite intertext, anonymous text, Jewish text*

The last remark addresses the parallel emergence in the genetic materials of Jabès' *The Book of Questions* of the paradoxical anonymity of a text spoken by ephemeral and ghost-like figures named with pseudonyms and the blurred instances of the "writer" and the "narrator-witness"; of intertextuality as the essence of the text caught in a rustling web of other texts; and of the Jewish element in Jabès' text. It suggests that a certain vision of texts (anonymity, openness to interpretation) and intertextuality (endless communication) is closely linked to a perception of Jewishness: abstract, symbolical, almost universal. Such a vision of Jewishness was central in France's philosophical and literary spheres from the 1960s to broadly the 1980s. It was promoted by Maurice Blanchot in his communication with Levinas and Jabès, echoed in Jacques Derrida's writings, exploited by the philosophers of the *Tel Quel* and the *Change* groups and by Jean-François Lyotard⁵⁶. Intertextual imagination, textual imagination and cultural imagination are linked in *The Book of Questions*, its genesis, its reception and its impact in a new formulation of Jewishness by and for postmodernism.

⁵⁶ Cf. Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew*.

CONCLUSION

The genetic analysis of intertextuality in Jabès' *The Book of Questions* diverges from traditional conceptions on three grounds. (1) The field of Jabès' exegesis: while adopting a radically different approach from "traditional" Jabesian reception of both intertextuality and *The Book of Questions*, genetic analysis allows for questioning and explaining features of Jabès' text and poetics which are usually taken as conditions of the text and its reception rather than constructs of the text. It enables accurately locating intertextual connectors and intertextual modalities (echoes and resonances) in the process of their emergence without attempting to rule out intertextual readings on the basis of a narrow or authoritarian vision of intertextuality. (2) The field of intertextual theory: the genetic approach to intertextuality falls apart with the Kristeva-Barthes-Riffaterre conception of a totally reader or text-sided phenomenon, without altogether returning to a broadly writer-based communication. Rather, this approach advocates the concept of intertextuality as a necessarily dual phenomenon, a writing process (a poetics) and a reading process (a hermeneutics), and tries to unravel the connection between both aspects of intertextuality, while showing that intertextuality and genesis can be related beyond the traditional questions of influence and sources. (3) The drives of intertextuality: this analysis points to the centrality and essentiality of an understated drive of intertextuality as poetics as well as hermeneutics: intertextual imagination and cultural image of texts. It therefore suggests that instead of viewing *The Book of Questions* as a paradigm of "intertextuality with Jewish texts", it might be considered more fruitfully as a paradigm of intertextual imagination as one of the most essential, although understated, sometimes hidden mechanisms responsible for the communication between one text and another.

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