

world stage with trade in sugar and tobacco, involves bypassing our evolutionary defenses and exploiting our genetic weaknesses. We are the animal who plays tricks on itself. Consumer culture is the trickster spirit incarnate.

McKibben makes a convincing case that we would be wise to favor sustained public debate about germline engineering and to exercise great caution about this immensely powerful and potentially disruptive technology. If, however, our society does go down the path of germline engineering, there is something to be said for having the rich, the well-educated and the self-loathing conduct the first experiments on their own children.

When the poet Edith Sitwell was a child in the 1890s she had a slight curvature of the spine. In her autobiography she tells how her father, Sir George Sitwell, who would tolerate no imperfections in his offspring, had her subjected to the best available medical treatment of the time. "The steel Bastille" was a metal contraption that encased young Edith's body and caused her excruciating pain. Only the rich could afford this particular torture or permit this particular childhood. It is not inconceivable that humanity will learn important lessons from the rich about the consequences of germline engineering, just as earlier generations learned from the cruel and useless medical treatments that premodern doctors inflicted on aristocrats and their children. Today most of what we need to learn is what not to do.

THE EDGE OF SURREALISM: A ROGER CAILLOIS READER

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Roger Caillois holds a distinct place among French intellectuals between the two world wars and after the defeat of Fascism. First seen as a member of the Paris surrealists (1932–1934), he contributed to the then-vital discussion on the origins of myth by balancing his interest in poetry, as a project of being and a means of becoming, with a scientist's rationality through the lens of

biology. His attempt to bridge the distance between the two provided him with a particular view of how acute such a project is, given the values promoted by "poetry" and "biology," the traditions they stem from, and the variable confusions attending "rapprochement." That we are still prey to a general failure here, which Caillois could not extricate himself from, does not in the least diminish the urgent goal of divining the origins of myth, especially now that with technology's ever more attractive simulations the two are merging at last—and that the "absence of myth," a subject that compelled so much comment during Caillois's time, no longer matters.

I do not know what Caillois would have made of all this, save for returning perhaps to his analysis of biology as a basis for myth, eschewing much else as a detour, and his fascination with mimicry in the insect world—the subject of his influential 1937 text, *The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis*—all in the service of an attempt to discern, as he puts it, a "lyrical ideogram" as an objective nexus where poetic thought and lucid reason intersect.

Caillois' combative spirit here also characterizes him, and our current interest in him, at least in terms of the world we know and our need for forceful intellects with wide-ranging passions free from careerism or institutional constraints—a freedom that Caillois advocated more in principle than in fact. But of course it was there, an animating force and a horizon toward which to turn as he did. In this regard, his break with surrealism as being overly "indulgent" on the side of poetry is also born from a desire to recast the movement's focus on myth and myth-making: from its collective origins and orphic cast to its sectarian momentum, social economy and general phenomenology. It is here as well that we can chart his collaboration with George Bataille, his work with Michelle Leiris and Jean Paulhan, his arguments with Levi-Strauss, whether for good or ill, during and after the College of Sociology, which Caillois helped to form and sustain. Among his other accomplishments, I include *Les Lettres française*, which Caillois launched from his interwar exile in Argentina (1941–1947), and the magazine *Sur*, edited by Victoria Ocampo, in which he played a pivotal role, along with the UNESCO-sponsored "transdisciplinary" journal *Diogenes*, which he established as editor in 1952, and, of course, his books.

Thus has Claudine Frank given us a sampling of Caillois's texts in translation, the most complete in English so far, written over four decades, 1934 to 1978, along with informative introductions to each period, at times to each text. Indeed, I am indebted to Frank for the historic frames she provides despite her passing disputes with other commentators, which may be of interest to experts alone, and her sometime opacity.

I have mentioned myth, myth-making and the absence of myth; I do so again. It is the ground Caillois believes to be his own, at least as far as his analyses take him. But as Caillois's thought matures, his sense of the poetic, its orphic heritage, and myth change. He comes to recuperate a type of formalism that reason embraces as an epitome of Western civilization and that Breton, for one, repudiates (see Breton's brilliant response to Caillois's thoughts on poetry in *Ars Poetica*, coauthored with Jean Shuster, which appears in the surrealist review *BIEF/Jonction surrealiste*, No. 7, June 1959).

Nor is this repudiation an abstract or literary affair. It focuses on the heart of a dispute that anthropology finally came to grips with and that Aime Cesaire targeted in his scorching critique of Caillois's defense of Western civilization, and the blind eye he turned to its murderous impulses, a critique I refer readers of Caillois to as a clarifying lens (see Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, first published in 1955 by *Editions Presence Africain*, republished in translation several times thereafter).

Who was Roger Caillois? Certainly, this book will help us draw the character. Will it also act as a mirror to the reader and the intellectual or poetic currents that resonate within him or her? That is another question. It is not a small one.

ELOQUENT IMAGES: WORD AND IMAGE IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA

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There is much to admire in Mary Hocks and Michelle Kendrick's *Eloquent Images: Word and Image in the Age*