

L'Épreuve de la Béance : L'Écriture nomade chez Hédi Bouraoui

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Abderrahman Beggar, a specialist in Mediterranean Studies at Waterloo's Wilfrid Laurier University, has established himself as one of the most authoritative scholars on the tricontinental poet, essayist, novelist and scholar, Hédi Bouraoui. Though a great deal has been written about the Tunisian-born French and Canadian author, the truth remains that most of the contributions on his work are academic articles that remain superficial. Beggar's contribution is all the more distinctive because it is an essay that takes on the herculean task of commenting on and explaining the work of someone like Bouraoui. It does not merely scratch the surface; it rather delves into the meanders and complexities of Bouraouian thought.

L'Épreuve de la béance: l'Écriture nomade chez Bouraoui is an essay written in French that deserves credit for setting up a platform of communication and understanding about Bouraoui. The book deploys Hédi Bouraoui's concept in three articulations. The first part is titled "Béance et l'instinct de mort" (The Wide Open Gap and Death Impulse), the second is "Béance et altérité" (The Wide Open Gap and Alterity) and the last part, "Béance et 'nomaditude,'" (The Wide Open Gap and 'Nomaditude') which puts the concept of béance in articulation with one of Bouraoui's important concepts, "nomaditude."

The key concept in the book's title, "béance," refers to the state of that which is widely and deeply open; it denotes a gaping hole that is synonymous with a void in need of replenishment. In his ground-breaking *Transpoétique: l'éloge du nomadisme*, published with Mémoire d'encrier in 2005, Bouraoui himself defines the concept of "béance." According to Bouraoui, "béance, un état de disponibilité et de dynamisme potentiel qui sollicite une complétude créatrice. Cette béance viscérale ou symbolique produit une énergie créatrice entre deux ou plusieurs présences de graphèmes, de phrases, de voix, de matériaux langagiers, artistiques ou culturels" [the state of availability and potential dynamism begging for creative replenishment. This symbolic or abysmal gaping hole generates a creative energy in the interstice between two or more graphemes, syntaxes, voices, language, artistic or cultural materials] (Bouraoui *Transpoétique*, 30) [my translation]. In other words, "béance" is a hole to be filled up for the purpose of establishing sites of belonging, identity and cultural communication, elements that prove to be central for migrants, itinerants, and "trans-citizens," i.e. citizens of the world.

In Part One of his essay, Beggar uses a series of quotations from Bouraoui's poetry to illuminate the concept of "béance." Admittedly, readers of Bouraoui who are not familiar with Lacanian psychoanalysis might feel lost. That is when Beggar's contribution becomes more than helpful. First, the exercise of decrypting Bouraoui's work, according to Beggar, is the very site of "béance." In Bouraoui's skilful use of the word, like the African wordsmith known as the *griot*, in poems like "*Echosmos*" and "*La Pharaone*," Beggar sees a deployment of "béance" and notes, "[d]ans ce sens, que sont les mots qui composent un poème, sinon des abris de la béance, de la non-existence ? [...] La mort perd son masque culturel pour rejoindre la vérité de sa fonction première organique, qui est celle de décomposer, recycler, engendrer" [In this case, words that make up a poem are nothing but shelters for "béance", non-existence. Death loses its cultural cloak so as to join hands with truth in the latter's original and organic function, which consists in dismembering, recycling and engendering.] (Beggar 16) [my translation].

The concept of *béance* captures all its intended meaning in Beggar's comments in Part Two of his essay. In fact, built on autistic illuminations, the reader of Beggar's essay realizes that Bouraoui operates a choice against habitual binarisms; instead, "Bouraoui choisit l'entre-deux comme lieu de projection de sa pensée. Nous ne sommes pas dans une logique d'opposition, entre une parole saine et une autre 'handicapée'" [Bouraoui opts for the liminal space to express his thoughts. We are not in the face of a logic of opposition between a pure spoken word and one that is vitiated] (Beggar 67 [My translation]). *Béance* is therefore a translation of Bouraoui's political choice pertaining to what it means to be in this global world when one's life is informed by migrancy, as his own life is. His thought reflects his being in the world, not at the mercy of one pole, but in communication with a variety of identities against the backdrop of alterity. In other words, Bouraoui has multiple identities.

In "*Béance et 'nomaditude'*," Beggar leads the reader to encounter Bouraoui in his other and newly minted state, i.e. "*nomaditude*," which is the gist of *Transpoétique*. "Nomadism" is to seize beyond their primal meaning the notions of itinerance and migrancy, which fully characterize Bouraoui's thought. It also reflects Bouraoui's attempt to combine various genres in order to show that he is the master of the word. In *Transpoétique*, Bouraoui notes, "J'ai choisi de vivre dans les mots/ Au coeur d'alphabets inconnus/ Là où les oiseaux chantent/ Leur silence immémorial/ Aux quatre coins des cinq continents" [I chose to live with words/In the middle of unknown alphabets/ Where birds sing/ Their immemorial silence/ In the four corners of the five continents] (Bouraoui *Transpoétique*, 55). In other words, nomadism is about straddling the five continents by mastering the words that relate the latter. In so doing, Bouraoui is recognized for the way he uses the written word instead of who he is, geospatially speaking.

The last section of *L'Épreuve de la béance*, Beggar shows us, is about how Bouraoui, like a prophet with a vision, rebels against the social codification of what is normal, good, acceptable as well as what is

abnormal, bad and unacceptable. In so doing, he illustrates that he is uninterested in distinction, acknowledgement or social status. There is a mission to fulfill; it consists in “libérer l’oeuvre du poids de l’imaginaire collectif, en déconstruisant fictions historiques et préjugés afin d’assurer sa spécificité à l’action créative” [liberating the collective imaginary by deconstructing historical fictions and preconceptions so as to preserve what is specific in creative action] (Beggar 91) [My translation]. This is how Bouraoui becomes a *griot* in a world replete with censorship and inhibitions of all sorts. Beggar further reveals a Bouraoui who is already ubiquitous—he straddles three continents at a time—but also one who imprints his migrant identity on the spoken word—isn’t he a poet, a bard and a *griot*?—in order to turn it into an implement for bridging the gaps and gaping holes that are fictively dug to set nations apart when most of us are campaigning for togetherness.

The essay by Beggar must be read by anyone interested in the discourse of identity, alterity and migrancy, which are the prime definers of Bouraoui. Even though the essay inscribes itself in academic “jargonese” and a psychoanalytical perspective that tend to cordon it off from non-initiates, it is a positive addition to the scholarship on Hédi Bouraoui as much as it is an increment to world literature in French or “la littérature-monde,” which seeks to debunk the Western humanist ideology that is hiding behind attempts to homogenize world cultures under the guise of the global village.

Works Cited

Bouraoui, Hedi. *Transpoétique: Éloge du nomadisme*. Montreal: Mémoire d’Encrier, 2005.