**Japan Through Western Eyes in** *Stupeur et Tremblements* **by Amélie Nothomb: Interpretation Prevailing Over Translation**

**Introduction**

Amélie Nothomb’s 1999 novel *Stupeur et Tremblements [Fear and Trembling]*[[1]](#endnote-3) depicts the misadventures, misunderstandings, and misgivings experienced by a Belgian professional in a large, modern Japanese workplace. This book is most often read as a satirical critique of Japanese society[[2]](#endnote-4) and as representative of a clash of cultures, suggesting the impossibility of cultural exchange.[[3]](#endnote-5) The novel has also been read within a satirical framework as a story of power games and the subversion of power relations,[[4]](#endnote-6) specifically addressing life and identity in Japan’s corporate world.[[5]](#endnote-7)

The novel recounts the story of protagonist-narrator Amélie. After finishing her studies in Europe, she returns to her country of birth, Japan, to work as a translator. Owing to her perfect knowledge of Japanese, acquired before she left the country at the age of five, she is soon hired by the prestigious company Yumimoto on a one-year contract.[[6]](#endnote-8) However, her idealized vision of Japan turns out to be far from reality as she is immediately confronted by the company’s rigid hierarchy. The novel relates the narrator’s downfall from an already lowly position in the organizational hierarchy to one even lower. Sbegins low-ranking skilled professional, ing for the company but,descends toperforming unskilled manual labour “”[]

Read as a satire, the source of criticism lies, as Martine Guyot-Bender observes, in the “disjunction between the nostalgic image of Japan and the less-desirable, buzzing corporate world [which] puts Amélie’s story, before it even begins, within a broad cultural context and foregrounds her failure at (re)integration into a culture she obviously idealizes.”[[7]](#endnote-9) Working in Japan is the narrator’s life-long dream. Having spent the first five years of her life there, her image of Japan is that of an idyllic and pastoral haven. Her perspective of the country is nourished by her happy childhood memories, which foster her dream of returning there as an adult (*SET*, pp. 22, 25–26; *FAT*, pp, 13, 15–16). The Japan she returns to, however, is a modern, industrial commercial society. This contemporary Japanese experience clashes with her two sources of reference; the first being the old, original vision she has of Japan and the other, the West, in the broad sense of the term, as her culture of origin. This paradoxical relationship with Japan is symbolized in the narrator’s feelings towards her superior, Fubuki Mori, which consist of fascination and attraction mixed with rivalry and conflict. Fubuki is the embodiment of hierarchical Japan; however, she is also its victim.[[8]](#endnote-10)

In this article, I demonstrate that *Stupeur et Tremblements* (*SET*) continually draws attention to the author/narrator’s apparently inescapable Westernized outlook on Japanese culture. Her pronounced Western perspective eventually overrides any possibility of her producing an “accurate” depiction of Japan. Indelibly perceived within the boundaries of Western culture,[[9]](#endnote-11) Japan is portrayed in the novel as a stylized construct replete with references to Western concepts. Rather than delivering a representation of the real Japan, the text presents a depiction built on *Western* paradigms of perception and *literary* models of representation.

**Autobiographical Fiction**

From the outset, the narrative presents itself as an autobiography. Any distance between the author, Amélie Nothomb, and the narrator of the same name are markedly small, according to biographical information published about the author,[[10]](#endnote-12) particularly for her first novel published in 1992. In addition, *SET* stresses its authenticity by specifying dates that serve as coordinates of biographical orientation and markers of accuracy and verisimilitude, for example, the specific day Amélie joins Yumimoto and her last day there (January 7, 1991). At one point in the narrative, Amélie Nothomb, as the author, evenaddresses the reader directly to explain her decision to bring certain materials from her real life experience into the novel (*SET* p. 159; *FAT* p. 112).[[11]](#endnote-13) Ultimately, the work proves to be autofiction rather than a full-fledged autobiography. This view is also held by Jaccomard, who noted that “the narrator’s position at once inside and outside the autobiographical pact allows her to remain uncommitted to truth telling.”[[12]](#endnote-14)

The depiction of Japan is not always faithful to realistic representation nor does it strive to maintain plausibility. The occasional break with realism and the fusion of the real with the unreal is recurrent throughout Nothomb’s work, due to her propensity for stylized, excessive, intertextual, and self-reflexive narration. Moreover, the satiric mode, which entails such narrative devices as exaggeration, caricature, irony, and hyperbole, further detracts from the novel’s realism for the sake of amplifying the comic effect.

The first scene in the novel depicts Amélie’s arrival at Yumimoto, where she is forced to wait until her superior, Mister Saito, ends his meeting. To occupy her time, Mister Saito assigns Amélie to compose a letter accepting Mister Johnson’s invitation to play golf. After numerous attempts fail to satisfy Mister Saito, Amélie is forced to admit to herself that she is challenged.

Il y avait à cet exercice un côté : « Belle marquise, vos beaux yeux me font mourir d’amour » qui ne manquait pas de sel. J’explorais des catégories grammaticales en mutation : « Et si Adam Johnson devenait le verbe, dimanche prochain le sujet, jouer au golf le complément et monsieur Saito l’adverbe ? Dimanche prochain accepte avec joie de venir Adamjohnsonner un jouer au golf monsieurSaitoment ». Et pan dans l’oiel D’Aristote! [There was something ‘Fair duchess, I am dying of love for you’ about this whole exercise that demanded a certain amount of creative wit. I explored permutations of grammatical categories. What if ‘Adam Johnson’ were the verb, ‘next Sunday’ the subject, ‘playing golf’ the object, and ‘Mister Saito’ the adverb? ‘Next Sunday accepts with pleasure the invitation to go Adamjohnsoning a playing golf MisterSaitoingly.’ Take that, Aristotle!] (12; Hunter, 4–5)[[13]](#endnote-15)

Her thoughts encapsulate the various directions the novel takes. At an early stage in the narrative, they foreground a reliance on Western paradigms of perception and frames of reference as well as Western literary models for generating the narrative. The paragraph introduces three references to key figures and masterpieces of Western culture: Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, from which she cites; a general allusion to Lewis Carroll’s nonsense poem “Jabberwocky” from *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*; and the final invocation of Aristotle. All three represent the frames of reference through which she grasps Japanese culture. These are preliminary markers and anticipatory clues to a tendency that will amplify to prominence as the narrative progresses.

**Western Perspective**

As a satire, the novel takes on “la raideur nippone” [Japanese stiffness] (13) as the main target of its criticism. The rigid hierarchy is accentuated by superiors’ deliberate acts of humiliation inflicted on inferiors. Superiors merely command their subordinates with no trust in their professionalism. Domination is the organizing principle that governs human relations between bosses and their subordinates, as well as between men and women. Individualism is unwelcome and regarded with suspicion, as are initiative, pragmatism, and practicality. Foreigners are by definition suspect; they are considered untrustworthy both intellectually and professionally. However, the foregrounding of the Western outlook demonstrates that fixed ideas, presuppositions, and suspicion are not exclusively Japanese traits. Borrowing from the paragraph cited above and for the sake of this discussion, I henceforth refer to this Western outlook as “Aristotelian logic,” a term representing Western values and ideas originating in ancient Greece. The narrator constantly looks for Aristotelian logic, specifically individualism and pluralism, where it clearly does not exist. Hence, her eye, enmeshed as it is in Western ideas, distorts any strange phenomenon it encounters by magnifying and ridiculing it.

The term “West” is employed here as a single entity in a clearly generalizing manner since this is the way it is introduced and dealt with in the novel. The narrator constantly shows the Japanese characters making blunt and bewildered comparisons between the “occidental” and “oriental” brain with regards to competence, performance, and behaviour, such as when Mister Omochi roars, “Taisez-vous. Ce pragmatism odieux est digne d’un Occidental” [Be quiet. That disgusting sort of pragmatism is worthy of a Westerner] (48). The Western imagination is foregrounded by several techniques employed throughout the novel.

**A Parallel *Wonderland***

While the novel draws on several literary models of representation, the primary reference is Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s* *Adventures in Wonderland* *and* *Through the Looking Glass*.[[14]](#endnote-16) Rather than presenting the reader with a realistic satire that attempts to depict the true Japan, as much as that is possible, the author provides a literary Japan based on the model of nonsense literature.[[15]](#endnote-17)

Le 8 Janvier 1990, l’ascenseur me cracha au dernier étage de l’immeuble Yumimoto. La fenêtre, au bout du hall, m’aspira comme l’eût fait le hublot brisé d’un avion. Loin, très loin, il y avait la ville – si loin que je doutais d’y avoir jamais mis les pieds. [On the 8th of January in 1990 an elevator spat me out on the top floor of a towering Tokyo office building. An enormous bay window at the far end of the landing sucked me over with the irresistible force of a shattered porthole on an airplane. Far, very far below, I could see the city; it seemed so distant and unreal that suddenly I wasn’t sure I had ever even set foot there.] (7; Hunter, 1)

While Alice falls down the rabbit-hole into a place where everything is strange and unfamiliar, Amélie rides an elevator upwards to experience much the same sensations on the 44th floor of Yumimoto. Japan, or at least the campus of the Yumimoto enterprise, is presented as a microcosm, detached from reality and constituting a lab for examining Japanese mores.

Like Alice, Amélie faces a world whose rules she fails to grasp, despite understanding and speaking the language fluently. And like the *Alice* books, Nothomb’s novel is crammed with logical absurdities that clash with common sense, challenging conventional logic and bordering on total nonsense. In her world, everything is bizarre, nothing is expected. Yumimoto is a business turned upside down: ultimately, Amélie does not do what she was hired to do; she gets paid for doing nothing; she does not get fired; and she does not resign in the face of repeated humiliation.[[16]](#endnote-18)

Similar to *Alice’s Adventures in* *Wonderland*, where fantasy penetrates reality, the characters in *SET* tend toward the outlandish and grotesque. Many of them are qualified by an exaggerated trait, and some even inflate and deflate periodically, according to their position as those who shout or who are shouted at. Fubuki is in one instance “at least five feet ten, a height few Japanese men achieved [..] ravishingly svelte and graceful” (Hunter, 6). However, after being publicly reprimanded, “I saw Fubuki’s body yield. She had always held herself erect, a monument of pride [now] her legs gave out. She slumped into her chair [..] hunched over” (Hunter, 85–86). Throughout the text, characters are continually referred to by their designated qualifiers. Mister Omochi, for example, is referred to as “l’obèse” [the Obese One] and is even compared to an ogre (181).[[17]](#endnote-19) He is also “le Diable” [the Devil] (92), as opposed to Mister Haneda, who is “Dieu” [God] (181).[[18]](#endnote-20) As Jenings remarks, a text with characters that are referred to as an ogre, an angel (Mister Tenshi), and God cannot be deemed realistic by any stretch.[[19]](#endnote-21)

Much like Alice, Amélie’s disposition is one of constant bewilderment. Alice experiences her new surroundings as “a very curious thing” (*Alice*, 104), and Amélie’s wonderland is likewise amazing: “j’entrai dans une dimension autre de l’existence: l’univers de la dérision pure et simple” [That moment that I accepted Fubuki’s assignment, I entered into another dimension – a universe of pure derision] (135). The inhabitants of this strange land are likewise astonished by her. Alice’s strangeness is directly mentioned by the Gryphon, “You *are* a simpleton” (*Alice*, 127) and by the Duchess, “You don’t know much [..] and that’s a fact” (*Alice*, 83). Moreover, Amélie’s Japanese colleagues call her out in similar terms, “Vous-êtes soit une traîtresse, soit une demurée : il n’y a pas de troisième possibilité” [Either you are a traitor or you’re a half-wit. There’s no third option] (68). It is no wonder, however, that Amélie is befuddled, for she is forced to deal with rules that are constantly changing. For instance, after serving tea and conversing with delegates from another company, she is reprimanded for addressing them in Japanese. She is also ordered to forget the language and, since she was hired as a translator in the first place, the overall effect is nothing short of a mad tea-party.

As a representation of modern Japan, Yumimoto is a hierarchical enterprise in which one is constantly at risk of being metaphorically beheaded by one’s superior, an atmosphere reminiscent of the Queen’s domain in *Alice’s Adventures* and her go-to threat, “Off with his head!” It is a place of chaos and frustration where any sense of stability or normality has been tossed out the window. As the narrator concludes,

On ne sait ce qu’est excentrique si l’on n’a pas rencontré un excenrique nippon. J’avais dormi sous les ordures? On en avait vu d’autres. Le Japon est un pays qui sait ce que « craquer » veut dire” [No one knows what ‘eccentric’ means until they’ve met a Japanese eccentric. I slept under the trash in the offices of a major corporation. So what. Japan is a country that knows the meaning of ‘losing it’] (89).

**Western paradigms of perception**

Throughout the text, several devices are employed to foreground the Western frame of reference. The first among these is the *namedropping* of key Western figures and concepts, and hardly a page goes by without a name or a direct citation making an appearance. Such evocations serve the narrator as explanatory tools, concepts through which she gauges things or makes sense of them via comparison, identification, or irony.

Even the title of the novel itself is a direct reference to Nietzsche’s tract, *Fear and Trembling*, and other examples abound.[[20]](#endnote-22) What follows is a narrow selection from among them (the emphases in the following quotations are mine, except where noted otherwise):

1. Le catalogue Import-Export Yumimoto était la version *titanesque* de celui de *Prévert.* [Yumimoto’s import-export catalog was truly titanic.] (15)
2. Elle avait le plus beau nez du monde [..] si *Cléopatre* avait eu ce nez, la géographie de la planète en eût pris un sacré coup. [She (Fubuki) had the most beautiful nose in the world [..] had Cleopatra had this nose, the history and geography of the world would have undergone a major shift.] (14)
3. Il n’y avait pas tant de différence entre le métier de *moine copiste, au Moyen Age*, et le mien [There was very little difference between what I was doing and a monk transcribing illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages] (59)
4. Les chiffres, dont j’avais toujours admiré la beauté *pythagoricienne*, devinrent mes ennemis. [Figures, whose calm Pythagorean beauty I had always admired, became my enemies. (74)

J’ai commençai par regarder chaque nouveau nombre avec autant d’étonnement que *Robinson rencontrant un indigène* de ce territoire unconnu. [I started looking at each new number with as much astonishment as Robison Crusoe spying a footprint in the sand. (74)

1. Mon tonneau des *Danaïdes* ne cessait de se remplir de chiffres que mon cerveau percé laissait fuir. J’étais le *Sisyphe* de la comptabilité. [My Danaide’s jar was constantly filling with figures that my feeble brain managed to empty out again. I was the Sisyphus of accounting] (78)
2. Le lendemain, Fubuki m’accueillit avec, cette fois, un visage d’une sérénité *olympienne*. [The following day Fubuki greeted me with an expression of magisterial serenity.] (128)
3. Il m’attrapa comme *King Kong* s’empare de la blondinette et m’entraîna à l’extérieur. [He grabbed me the way King Kong did Fay Wray and dragged me out into the corridor] (151)
4. Il est typique des êtres qui exercent un métier lamentable de se composer ce que *Nietzsche* appelle un arrière-monde [..] leur *éden* mental est d’autant plus beau que leur tâche est vile. [People with menial jobs conjure up what Nietzsche calls a background world [..] their mental Eden is as seductive as their job is repugnant.] (160)
5. Ce constat me rappela le mot *d’André Maurois*: « ne dites pas trop de mal de vous-même: on vous croirait. » [I remembered a line from André Maurois: ‘don’t speak too ill of yourself. People will believe you.’] (180)
6. Son infarctus paraissait imminent. *J’allai à Canossa*. [His coronary now seemed imminent. So was my arrest.] (178)
7. Quand j’eus dégluti la cause du *casus belli*, j’entamai la suite de mon numéro. [Once I had swallowed the *casus belli*, I started into the next part of my recitation.] (179) (emphasis in the original)
8. L’espace d’un instant, je haïs ma supérieure au point de souhaiter sa mort. Songeant soudain à la coïncidence entre son patronyme et un mot latin qui tombait à pointe, je faillis lui crier : « *Memento Mori!* » [In the mirror I could see her [..] watching me weep. Her eyes were jubilant. Just for a moment, I wished her dead. *Memento Mori.*] (153) (emphasis in the original)
9. Je le regardai comme on regarde le *Messie*. [I gazed at him as one might the Messiah.] (36)
10. Entre vous [Fubuki] et moi [Amélie], il y a la même différence qu’entre*Ryuichi Sakamoto et David Bowie*. [There’s the same difference between you and me as there is between*Ryuichi Sakamoto and David Bowie.*] (156)

These, and the profusion of similar references, attest to the system of thought through which Amélie comprehends her Japanese experience and the paradigms of meaning that serve her as she observes her human environment and attempts to make sense of it. The narrator uses Western names as adjectives, such as in Examples 1 (titanic catalogue); 4 (Pythagorean beauty); and 7 (Olympian serenity). While “titanic” and “Olympian” have become part of standard English, they still retain their origins in Greek mythology. “Pythagorean” as an adjective to describe proportionate beauty is a neologism, but the selection of adjectives is clearly orientated towards Western ideas. Employing Western names as points of reference, Examples 2 (Cleopatra); 6 (Sisyphus); and 14 (Messiah) build on collective knowledge prevalent in the West. Similes are utilized likewise; Examples 5 (Robinson Crusoe); 8 (King Kong); and 15 (David Bowie) inform the reader how to interpret the author’s observations as she invokes cultural emblems from literature and film*.* Expressions also clarify and explicate the points she wants to make. Examples 11 (Road to Canossa); 12 (Casus Beli); and 13 (Memento Mori) are all idiomatic expressions based on Western history and philosophy generally well known to educated people in the West. As a further guide for interpreting her observations, the narrator filters them through notions of philosophy and literature, such as Example 8 (Nietzsche) or 9 (André Morois).

Especially abundant throughout the novel is the semantic field of Christianity. The lexemes appear as comparisons on occasion, as well as reference words and adjectives: Christ, devil, martyr, Eden, the Tower of Babel, Carmelite, Pontius Pilate, Easter, Gehenna, and the sacrificial lamb, among others.

**Stupor as experience**

Another device the narrator uses abundantly throughout the novel to shape the reader’s assessment of scenes and dialogues is the use of qualifiers. These words constantly emphasize how Amélie’s experiences boggle the logic of her Western mind on the one hand and how her conduct makes no sense to her Japanese colleagues on the other. The predominant qualifiers include the word *stupeur* [stupor] with its synonym *stupéfaction* and their semantic counterparts, which recur profusely, both as verbs and as nouns: “ébérluér” [bewilder] (42), “perplexité” [perplexity] (156), “étonner” [astonish] (163, 176), “surprise” [surprise] (175), and “ahurir” [astound] (190). In the English translation we find similar expressions conveying bewilderment, astonishment, and incredulity (the emphases in the following quotations are mine, except where noted otherwise):

1. Ce qui me valait à chaque fois un regard *stupéfait*. [This always earned me a disbelieving eye.] (28)
2. Il me regarda avec *stupéfaction*. [He stared at me with stupefaction.] (49)
3. Les quarante membres du bureau géant le regardèrent avec *stupéfaction*. [The forty members of the office watched him in stupefied silence.] (62)
4. Nous nous regardâmes l’un l’autre avec *stupéfaction*. [We looked at each other in amazement.] (90)
5. J’étais toujours figée de *stupeur* quand me fut apportée la réponse. [I was still frozen in stupor when the answer to my question was delivered on to me.] (91)
6. Elle me regarda avec stupéfaction. [She looked at me in astonishment.] (109)
7. La *stupéfaction* passée, la première chose que je ressenti fut un soulagement étrange. [Once my disbelief had subsided, I felt a strange sense of relief.] (132)
8. Je ne pus m’empêcher de relever la tête pour la regarder avec *stupéfaction*. [This took me by surprise.] (167)

Stupor, then, becomes a leitmotif in the novel, reasserting Amélie’s position as suspicious of Japanese culture from the outset, an outsider observing this strange world where, to her amazement, all laws seem to be inverted. Denoting stupor as bewilderment thus trumps the meaning of the collocation, *Stupeur et Tremblements*, which is the book’s title, presented in the narrative as the required bearing one must adopt when facing the Japanese emperor.[[21]](#endnote-23)

The examples above are all linguistic applications of the specific lexical choice. Examples 1, 2, 3, and 6 are instances of bewilderment on the part of the Japanese cadre, while 5, 7, and 8 show befuddlement on the part of the perplexed translator. In Example 4, the dumbfounded gazes converge; disbelief is on both parts. From either direction, the result is always a visceral reaction outwardly displayed. Mostly associated with a baffled gaze, the trigger is always the conduct of one side, which in turn resists comprehension by the other. Hence, assert as she may her desire to reintegrate with her beloved Japan, these qualifiers serve to maintain a distance between Amélie’s object of observation and herself. Her interlocutors, in turn, are likewise perplexed by her conduct and attitude. There is suspicion on both sides; the Japanese regard her as a stranger, inferior to them, and both parties make a myriad of comparisons between the East and the West, increasing the gulf that divides them.

**Meaning in the eye of the beholder**

The Western vantage point is also foregrounded through the use of the eye as a discourse marker and as a narrative strategy in depicting Japan. Occurring prolifically throughout the text, the eye encompasses several layers of meaning. Some are literal, such as when Amélie lowers her eyes in conversation as a cultural gesture signifying humility and performed in compliance with Japanese customs.[[22]](#endnote-24) Some are figurative or metaphorical, such as in the following examples (the emphases in the following quotations are mine, except where noted otherwise):

1. Et pan dans l’*oeil* D’Aristote! [Take that, Aristotle!] (12)
2. Je le regardai avec des *yeux ronds.* [I was dumbfounded] (20)
3. *aux yeux d’un occidental*, ça n’eût rien eu d’infamant ; *aux yeux d’un Japonais*, c’eût été perdre la face. [To Western eyes, there would have been nothing ignominious in this, to Japanese eyes, it meant losing face.] (22)
4. Ces lieux mythologique me mettait les *larmes aux yeux*. [Invoking these mythological places brought tears to my eyes.] (26)
5. Je *jetai un oeil* sur le contenu de ce que je photocopiais. [I glanced at the contents of what I was copying.] (34)
6. Elle marcha vers moi, avec Hiroshima *dans l’oeil droit* et Nagasaki *dans l’oeil gauche.* [She walked toward me with Hiroshima in her right eye and Nagasaki in her left.] (125)

The recurrent image of the eye in various linguistic contexts reminds us that we are seeing this world through the eye of the beholder. Hence, the eye represents the subjectivity of assigning meaning; the eye is a synecdoche for the idiosyncratic vantage point of the protagonist-narrator.[[23]](#endnote-25) More than merely an organ of vision, the eye represents the faculty of observation and perception; of appreciation and judgment; of perspective and opinion. It emphasizes the protagonist’s constant gaze at Japanese culture through the eyes of a Westerner, a view that leaves her frequently dumbfounded.[[24]](#endnote-26)

A variety of linguistic constructions is employed among these examples referring to the eye. In all of them, the eye of the beholder, or rather the concept of having a specific vantage point from which interpretation is made, is emphasized, whether figuratively (1, 2, 3, 6) or literally (4, 5). The author’s Western gaze in *SET* should not be confused with orientalism, however. If Orientalism is perceived as a meta-system which governs and regulates that which may be imagined about the Orient, this is not the case here. Amélie is not a product of institutionalized and degraded knowledge about Japan, nor does she possess an exalted self-image of her provenance. Therefore, she does not assert the positional superiority of the West over the inferior East. She does, however, express herself through Western discourse, which she cannot escape, to her detriment.

**Paraphrasing and injection of meaning**

Despite the claim to truthfulness, the accuracy of the dialogues related in the text is undermined by an unreliable narrator, who, as we have already seen, is prone to interpretation rather than objectivity. Her artifice is further accentuated by the fact that, even though the majority of the dialogues are spoken by Japanese people, they too correspond to Western paradigms through which Japan is (pre)conceived. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to treat these dialogues as paraphrases and rewordings rather than as veritable quotations or otherwise verbatim transmissions. As Jordan maintains, Nothombian dialogues play a central role in Nothomb’s oeuvre and that they are principally designed to “generate entertaining and intellectually impressive confrontations.”[[25]](#endnote-27) With this aim in mind, Jordan explains, the ‘truth’ of the Nothombian dialogue is often interrupted by borrowings from literary sources or interlocutors who are portrayed as being “larger than life, with fantastic or almost mythical dimensions.”[[26]](#endnote-28)

The dialogues in *SET* therefore constitute a locus for the narrator to inject meaning that manifestly does not originate with the interlocutors. This process is evident in the scene where Fubuki is reproached by her superior, Mister Omochi (22). The narrator provides a foreword to the transmission of the dialogue, “Si J’avais dû être l’interprête simultanée du discours de monsieur Omochi, voici ce que j’aurais traduit” [If I had to be the simultaneous interpreter for Mister Omochi’s speech, this is what I would have translated] (120).[[27]](#endnote-29) What follows is Amélie’s transmission of Mister Omochi telling Fubuki off, not for anything that actually happened, but for what could have happened. The whole scene is related by the narrator as a sexual assault.[[28]](#endnote-30) She specifically employs, in the original French, the form of the *conditionnel passé*, which is putative rather than affirmative. It is markedly an interpretation of the reality of things, one that is clearly based on Western sensibilities. The introductory sentence, as well as the grammatical structure, undermine the accuracy of the dialogue while reinforcing its status as a paraphrase.

**The grave** **crime of individualism and other Western practices**

If we were to narrow down the cause for Amélie’s downfall to its point of origin, it would be her inability to escape her Western mind-set. This idea is epitomized in the dialogue between Amélie and her superior, Miss Fubuki Mori, where Amélie seizes the chance to perform a task given to her by a manager who is not her direct superior. She performs the task superbly, but in order to avoid retribution for the major offense of taking initiative, they both agree to conceal the fact that Amélie is the one who performed the job. Nevertheless, Mister Omochi, a higher-level superior, summons her, tells her off, and warns her never to do such a thing again. Once Amélie finds out that it was Miss Mori who had denounced her, she decides to confront her:

* + - Je commençai d’une voix douce et posée. [I started quietly and soberly.]
    - Je pensais que nous étions amies. Je ne comprends pas. [I thought we were friends. I don’t understand.]
    - Que ne comprenez-vous pas? [What don’t you understand?]
    - Allez-vous nier que vous m’avez dénoncée? [Are you going to deny that you denounced me?]
    - Je n’ai rien à nier. J’ai appliqué le reglement. [I haven’t denied anything. I followed the rules.]
    - Le règlement est-il plus important pour vous que l’amitié? [Are the rules more important to you than friendship?]
    - Amitié est un grand mot. Je dirais plutôt « bonnes relations entre collègues. » [“Friendship” is a strong word. I’d prefer “good relationship between colleagues.”]
    - Elle proférait ces phrases horribles avec une calme ingénue et affable. [She proffered this expression with ingenuous, affable calm.]
    - Je vois. Pensez-vous que nos relations vont continuer à être bonnes, suites à votre attitude? [I see. Do you think our relationship will continue to be good, after what you’ve done?]
    - Si vous vous excusez, je n’aurai pas de rancune. [If you apologize, I won’t bear you a grudge.]
    - Vous ne manquez pas d’humour, Fubuki. [You’ve got a good sense of humour, Fubuki.]
    - C’est extraordinaire. Vous vous conduisez comme si vous étiez l’offensée alors que vous avez commis une faute grave. [You’re behaving as if you’re the injured party, when you’ve actually done something very wrong.] (53–54)

There is no doubt that this is a clear instance of a culture clash wherein incompatible, culturally inculcated values find themselves facing off against each other, but more importantly, it is the infrastructure of Western practices underlying Amélie’s behavior which wreaks havoc in her professional life. In this particular instance – the practice of open conversation and emotional frankness.

Western culture advocates affective discourse, giving priority to interpersonal interactions, encouraging people to voice their feelings and to converse openly and sincerely with the aim of “talking things out.” The West champions the idea that self-knowledge leads to self-improvement. Talking things out and speaking one’s heart are therefore common practices, tools for repairing relationships, clearing the air and avoiding lingering grudges or hard feelings. Sociologist Illouz stresses that,

‘[C]ommunication’ has become an essential part of the ethical substance of men and women inside the corporation [..]. The model of ‘communication’ aims at providing linguistic and emotional techniques to reconcile diverging imperatives: namely to assert and express the self, yet cooperate with others; to understand others’ motives, yet manipulate oneself and others to reach desired goals; and to be self-controlled, yet personable and accessible. Communication is thus an ‘ethical substance’ in which it is impossible to separate self-interest from attention to others, language being essentially the main technique through which the two are to be presumably reconciled.[[29]](#endnote-31)

It is because of this Western mind-set that Amélie feels the urge and urgency to speak with her superior, “Il faut que je parle à Fubuki. Sinon, j’en aurai une rage de dents.” [I must speak to Fubuki. Otherwise I’ll never forgive myself.] (53). And this is not the first time that Amélie summons Fubuki for the very same reason; a similar occurrence happens at the beginning of the novel, “Je vidai mon Coeur.” [I poured my heart out] (24). However, this is definitely not how the Japanese go about things, especially when the summoned person is superior to the summoner – a fact demonstrated in several scenes witnessed by the narrator. For Fubuki and ostensibly for the rest of the Japanese working world, one’s proficiency and competence count less than one’s rank within the organization. Fubuki respects those who openly climb up the clearly established, ladder of hierarchy, whereas Amélie clandestinely tries to sneak in through the back door, thus inverting the proper order. This is unacceptable in terms of the Japanese formula of power relations. While Amélie thinks in terms of efficacy and practicality, Fubuki’s point of view is that she has no right to exploit any back door, as practical and efficient as the result may be.

The Western discourse that Amélie speaks is that of individualism and by that, I mean ideological individualism, in the sense of according superior value to independence, self-reliance, self-fulfilment, and the idea that the individual and her needs will always supercede societal ideals and values.[[30]](#endnote-32) Yuminoto’s Japan, perceived through the narrator’s Western eyes, views individualism pejoratively, either as egotism or as recklessness. At Yumimoto, the individual is of lesser importance; it is the group or the organization that counts above all. As Fubuki puts it ,  “Vous vous conduisez aussi bassement comme les autres Occidentaux: vous placez votre vanité personnelle plus haut que les intérêts de la compagnie.” [Your despicable behavior is typical of Westerners. You put your personal vanity ahead of the interests of the company.] (66-67). Mister Omochi’s rebuke demonstrates this concept perfectly, “Le fond était incroyablement insultant. Mon compagnon d’infortune et moi nous fîmes traiter de tous les noms: nous étions des traîtres, des nullités, des serpents, des fourbes et – sommet de l’injure – des individualistes.” [The content was incredibly insulting. My companion in misfortune and I were called traitors, incompetents, snakes, deceitful, and – the height of injury – individualists.] (44).

It is due to the discourse of individualism that Amélie is relentlessly and irresistibly destructive to the social order at Yumimoto, to the extent that she ends up pushing societal boundaries to absurd extremes and provoking egregious reactions. Because the people around her do not use the same discourse, she never manages to make sense of things, and what she experiences is a continual collapse of meaning.[[31]](#endnote-33)

**Translation vs. interpretation**

The protagonist and narrator of *SET* is a translator. Unable to actually engage in the act of translation, despite being hired by Yumimoto in the capacity of translator, Amélie turns to writing instead. Her stay with Yumimoto ultimately became a formative experience that led to her becoming a writer:

..e[I left the Yumimoto Corporation, never to return again. A few days later, I went back to Europe. On January 14th, 1991, I started writing a novel with the title, *The Assassin’s Hygiene*. [..] in 1992, my first novel was published.]

(186)

This change of function and vocation, from translator to author, brings about the possibility to change the terminology with which Amélie’s comportment can be understood. Amélie actually acts as a *reader* of Japanese culture. She never takes meaning encoded in one symbolic system and transfers it undisturbedly into a different symbolic system, be it lexical or cultural. Not because she cannot easily transfer text from one language to the other but because she assumes from the very start the role of interpreter in the literary sense of the word. To interpret is to construct meaning, specifically in light of individual belief, judgement, or circumstance.[[32]](#endnote-34) Literary interpretation is the act of explaining the significance of something within the presupposed assumptions that govern and shape understanding. Moreover, when it comes to subjectivity, one must always raise the question to which interpretive community the interpreter belongs, since this community sets the interpreter’s initial predilections. For Fish (emphasis added),

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, *these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read* rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.[[33]](#endnote-35)

Interpretive communities consist of readers who have internalized structures of understanding and respond to the texts they read through the lens of these structures. The interpreter’s stance is given prominence and primary importance. Interpretation always involves judgments, expectations, and conclusions on the part of the interpreter. Fish states that reading is not a two stage situation, first grasping things and judging them afterwards. Interpretation always shapes meaning. “The reader’s response is not to meaning, it *is* meaning” (Fish, 3). Indeed, the narrator was never a translator, inside or outside the narrative plot. Within *SET*, and expanding the scope of the term interpretive communities from reading literature to reading cultural texts in general, Amélie is an interpreter of Japan and a member of the specific interpretive community holding preconceived Western frames of mind.

**Conclusion**

On its surface, *SET*’s main narrative satirizes the Japanese suspicion of strangers, while mocking their biased, superficial, and rigid attitude. However, looking deeper, it is the narrator/protagonist’s Western thought habits that cause her to filter all her observations and experiences through a Western prism and to convey them to the reader not as they are but as she interprets them. *SET*’s storytelling is either enmeshed in dogmas of Western discourse or overlaid with imagery reminiscent of the Western masterpiece, Lewis Carrol’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In effect, Amélie’s adventures in Japan are shown as a fragile, ‘limited-liability’ satire at most. Even though the narrator claims to have a profound understanding and appreciation of Japan, is fluent in the language, and aspires to assimilate in its culture,[[34]](#endnote-36) ultimately she preceives Japan as a nonsense world. Due to Amélie’s constant search for Aristotelean logic, as a term representative of Western thought non-existent in the East, she finds absurdities everywhere. Nothomb’s novel demands that we recognize how dependent we are upon our respective cultural discourses for our sense of self and our interpretations of culture and reality.[[35]](#endnote-37)

1. Amélie Nothomb, *Stupeur et Tremblements* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999). Hereafter *SET*. For the English translation, I will be referencing Amélie Nothomb, *Fear and Trembling,* trans. by Adriana Hunter (Faber and Faber, London 2002). Hereafter *FAT*. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
2. Either a satire of Japanese society in general or specifically of the world of Japanese commercial enterprises. In both cases, the novel reads as a satire aimed at exposing the oppressive and misogynist hierarchical system in Japan. See for example, Susan Chira, ‘Lost in Translation,’ *New York Times* (2001), < <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/25/books/lost-in-translation.html>>  [accessed 21October, 2018]; Cécile Narjout, *Etude sur Stupeur et Tremblements* (Paris: Ellipes, 2004) ; Katelyn Sylvester, ‘L’ironie de l’impuissance dans *Stupeur et Tremblements*: une satire de l’entreprise japonaise’, *CLEF* (2016), <artsites.uottawa.ca/luciejoubert/doc/Katelyn-Sylvester.pdf> [accessed 5December, 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
3. See for example: Sarah De Jallad, *Les Interactions Culturelles au Sein de L’Entreprise dans Stupeur et Tremblements d’Amélie Nothomb* (Master’s Thesis, Lunds Universitet, Lund, Sweden (2008)), <<https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/8879129>> [accessed 8December, 2018]; Kyoko Koma, ‘L’univers « Japon » romanesque en tant que scénographie dans *Stupeur et Tremblememts* d’Amélie Nothomb’, *Literatûra* 51:4 (2009), pp. 73–83; Fanny Mahy, ‘L’entre-deux culturel dans *Sweet, Sweet China* de Felicia Mihali et *Stupeur et Tremblements* d’Amélie Nothomb’, *Les Cahiers du Greclef* 1 (May 2010), pp. 19–34. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
4. See Victoria B. Korzeniowska, ‘Bodies, space and meaning in Amélie Nothomb’s *Stupeur et Tremblements*’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 39–49 and Marinella Termite, ‘“Closure” in Amélie Nothomb’s Novels’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 154–166. According to Termite, all of Nothomb’s novels share an attitude of counterculture and sabotage (p. 154). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
5. See Monica Hărşan, ‘Identités en conflit et « culture clash » dans *Stupeur et Tremblements* d’Amélie Nothomb’, *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov* *Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies* 7:2 (2014), pp. 111–116; Corina da Rocha Soares, ‘Dissociation mentale de la realité: *Extension du Domaine de la Lutte* versus *Stupeur et Tremblements*’, *Intercâmbio Revue d’Etudes Françaises* 2:5 (2012), pp. 189–203. Other minor readings are that of Hélène Jaccomard who sees SET as recounting the birth of an author and Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos who views the focal point as being Amélie’s unrequited love for Fubuki. Hélène Jaccomard ‘Self in fabula: Amélie Nothomb’s three autobiographical works’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 11–23; Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, ‘The suspension of suspension: settling for the improbable’, *Law and Literature* 15:3 (2003), pp. 345–370. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
6. The company’s name is a fictional one; its etymological selection is explained by the narrator (*SET* p. 13; *FAT* p. 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
7. Martine Guyot-Bender, ‘Coding Japan: Amélie Nothomb’s and Alain Corneau’s *Stupeur et Tremblements*’, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 9:4 (December 2005), 369–378, (p. 372). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
8. David Ravet, ‘*Stupeur et Tremblements* d’Amélie Nothomb: un voyage infernal dans une entrprise japonaise’, *Astrolabe CRLV* (September 2006), <http://astrolabe.uca.fr/septembre-2006/dossier/stupeur-et-tremblements-d-Amélie-nothomb> [accessed 2 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
9. ~~In the context of this article, the Western gaze in~~ *~~SET~~* ~~is not to be confused with orientalism. If Orientalism is perceived as a meta system which governs and regulates that which may be imagined about the Orient, this is not the case here. Amélie is not a product of institutionalized and degraded knowledge about Japan, she does not possess an exalted self-image of her provenance, therefore, she does not assert the positional superiority of the West over the inferior East. She does, however, express herself through the Western discourse, which she cannot escape, to her detriment. I argue that the narrative devices used in the novel foreground the narrator’s awareness of her inability to escape preconceived frames of mind.~~ The orientalist is unaware of his bias. Contrary to that, Chris Reyns-Chikuma claims that *SET* is an anti-Japanese pamphlet, ‘un texte presque raciste’ [an almost racist text] that begets ‘son idéologie nipponophobe’ [its nipponophobic ideology] by disseminating stereotypes about Japan. He claims, therefore, that the novel should be read as part of the Orientalist tradition, following in the footsteps of such texts as *Tintin in the Congo* (Hergé, 1931). The two allusions he points out within *SET* are to the imperialist, colonial, novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719) and to director Nagisa Oshima's 1983 film *Merry Christmans, Mister Laurence*, with its racist depiction of ‘Japs’. Chris Reyns-Chikuma ‘Néo-Orientalisme? Qui tremble et qui est stupéfié dans *Stupeur et Tremblements* de Amélie Nothomb?’, *Literary Research/Recherche Littéraire* 20:39–40 (2003), pp. 192–210, (p. 193). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
10. On *SET* as an autobiographical text see Henri Delangue, ‘Autobiographie ou autofiction chez Amélie Nothomb?’, *Cédille revista de estudios franceses* 10 (2014), pp. 129–141; and André Leblanc, ‘La réception comparée de *Stupeur et Tremblements* d’Amélie Nothomb’, in *Actes du XVIIIe congrès des romanistes scandinaves*, ed. by Eva Ahlstedt, Ken Benson, Elisabeth Bladh, Ingmar Söhrman and Ulla Åkerström, (University of Gothenburg, 2012), pp. 484–493. Benjamin Hiramatsu Ireland argues, based on extra-literary materials garnered from Belgian archives, that Amélie’s biography as native Japanese is a fabrication, which calls into question the events recounted and renders them misleading: ‘she leads the reader to commiserate with her and her failures by labeling everything “autobiographical”’ (p. 148). Benjamin Hiramatsu Ireland, ‘Amélie Nothomb's Distorted Truths: Birth, Identity, and *Stupeur et Tremblements*’, *New Zealand Journal of French Studies* 33:1 (May 2012), pp. 135–156. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
11. Nothomb’s novel *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam* (2007), titled *Tokyo Fiancé* in the English translation, recounts an alternative narrative of her escapades outside Yumimoto at the same period of time. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
12. Jaccomard, ‘Self as fabula’, p. 20. Much attention has been given to the truth-value of the novel in its depiction of Japan and to the accuracy of the events recounted. Koma concludes that the ‘Japan’ depicted in the novel is inaccurate and incredible, mostly since it reproduces predetermined clichés and stereotypes (‘L’univers “Japon” romanesque’). Leblanc on the other hand, posits that Nothomb’s inclination is toward ‘literary exoticism’ rather than an attempt to produce a ‘scientific ethnographic document’ (‘La réception comparée’, p. 17), asking the question ‘après tout, est-ce si important que tout ce qu’elle raconte soit vrai si le lecteur est captivé?’(ibid, pp. 45–46) [after all, is it that important that all she recounts be true if the reader is captivated?]. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
13. Note that the English translation is not identical to the original. Many of the textual phenomena are either omitted or otherwise ignored and translated differently. The translator, Adriana Hunter, explained her choices as resulting from an editorial request to ‘Americanize’ the text to suit its North American readership as well as unnecessary editing. In her words: ‘One of the frustrations of this particular commission was that my work was quite heavily edited and Americanized and I was offered no power of veto’ (Hunter [insert full bibliographical reference], 2003: 174). Adriana Hunter, ‘Narrative voice in Amélie Nothomb's *Stupeur et Tremblements*: a transalator's impression’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 172–176. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
14. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland/Through the Looking Glass* (Suffolk: Penguin Books (1982)). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
15. For more on the rich intertextual infrastructure of Nothomb’s novels, see Susan Bainbrigge, ‘“Monter l’escalier anachronique”: intertextuality in *Mercure*’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 114–123. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
16. Critics grapple with the question of why Amélie does not resign from Yumimoto. Obviously dissatisfied and undeniably humiliated, she nevertheless continues to hold on to her job. The explanation provided within the narrative is that she does not want to lose face, meaning she does not wish to bring shame on herself for not being able to keep a job. Jennings explains that in that Amélie holds on to her Japanese identity, as this is a perfectly Japanese reasoning. William Jennings, ‘Homecoming and childhood identity in the work of Amélie Nothomb’, *New Zealand Journal of French Studies* 31:2 (November 2010), pp. 29–37 (pp. 31–32). An alternative interpretational hypothesis is that remaining there serves her as an aspiring author. On several occasions Amélie relates her childhood fantasy of becoming God (p. 56). Assuming that ‘God’ can be interpreted as a metaphor for the author, able to generate worlds on paper, then Yumimoto is an arena where she can practice her omnipotence as an author by pushing events *ad absurdum* for the sake of the fiction she is about to compose. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
17. Note that this term does not appear in the English translation. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
18. Their actions also are exaggerated and almost magical. For example, when Mister Omochi grabs Amélie by the hand and drags her into the corridor, she describes feeling ‘like a doll in his hands’ (p. 107) (‘j’étais un jouet entre ses bras’(p. 151)). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
19. Jennings, ‘Homecoming and childhood identity’, p.35. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
20. ~~Especially abundant is the semantic field of Christianity. The lexemes appear not only in the context of Amélie’s childhood wishes to become God but also as comparisons on occasion, as well as reference words and adjectives. The terms include Christ, devil, martyr, Eden, the Tower of Babel, Carmelite, Pontius Pilate, Easter, Gehenna and the sacrificial lamb, among others.~~  [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
21. ‘Stupeur et tremblements’ is a synchronic triple polysemy on top of its explanation in the narrative. First, this conduct is a marker of Japanese culture, and part of the prevalent ethos of hierarchy and authority. Second, the collocation is affiliated with the Western Judeo-Christian as it is mentioned in the Bible (see *Philipians* 2:12), and thirdly, it is also verbatim the title of Nietsche’s tract. These three meanings collide in a perpetual internal conflict in the novel. And, finally, ‘stupeur’ is the narrator’s position toward her overall experience. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
22. For example, ‘j’entrai chez monsieur Omochi […] baissant les yeux et m’inclinant’ (p. 19) (‘I entered Mister Omochi’s office […] lowering my eyes and bowing’ (p. 10)) [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
23. Guyot-Bender (‘Coding Japan’, p. 374) notes that Amélie is never described physically, the only part of her anatomy that the reader is familiar with is her eye. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
24. It is also the eye of a (future) author, able to create a world and control it. This reading gives prominence to the narrative of the protagonist’s initiation as a writer, which coincides with the double ending of the novel. As expounded by Marinella Termite (‘Closure’, p.158), the first ending brings to a close the narrative of Amélie’s Yumimoto trial, while the second one, following immediately thereafter, narrates the publication of her first book. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
25. Shirley Ann Jordan, ‘Amélie Nothomb’s combative dialogues: erudition, wit and weaponry’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 93–104 (p. 95). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
26. Ibid. p.96. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
27. This sentence, along with the entire passage containing it, was omitted from the English translation. It reads (my translation): ‘If I had to be the simultaneous interpreter for Mister Omochi’s speech, this is what I would have translated.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
28. See analysis by Sylvester, ‘L’ironie de l’impuissance’, pp. 10–11, and David Gascoigne, ‘Amélie Nothomb’s poetics of excess’, in *Amélie Nothomb: Authorship, Identity and Narrative Practice*, ed. by Susan Bainbrigge and Jeanette den Toonder (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 127–134. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
29. Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008), p. 89. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
30. See Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
31. Some readings of the novel attribute the provocations in which the narrator-protagonist engages to her unique subversive traits. Claire Nodot claims that Amélie demonstrates incomprehension of borders, both personal and institutional, and that because she refuses to accept the rules she finds herself exiled from the main body of the corporation to its margins. Claire Nodot, ‘La Dame pipi du quarante-quatrième étage: l’exil et la marge dans *Stupeurs et Tremblements* d’Amélie Nothomb’, *Paroles Gelées* 22:1 (2006), pp. 69–82. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2jf516kb> [accessed 9 December 2018]. Martine Guyot-Bender, on the other hand, claims that the same phenomena are due to the narrator’s memory and self-derision. Guyot-Bender, ‘Coding Japan’, p. 374. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
32. Merriam Webster, ‘Interpret’, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interpret>> [accessed 9 December 2018]. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
33. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 171. ~~I have expanded the scope of the term for the purpose of my discussion, extending it form its application to literary interpretation in particular to cultural interpretation in general.~~  [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
34. From the point of view of translation studies, Peter Cowley contends that Amélie the protagonist is incompetent as a translator not because of her language skills but because of her cultural ineptitude. Peter Cowley, ‘Translation and translators in Amélie Nothomb’s autobiographical fiction’, *Australian Journal of French Studies* 48:3 (September 2011), pp. 271–283 (p. 276). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
35. ‘La programmation collective de l’esprit qui distingue les membres d’un groupe ou d’une catégorie de personnes par rapport à une autr*e*’. Greet Hofstede cited in De Jallad, *Les Interactions Culturelles*, p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)