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Demons of Analogy

Likeness and Photography in *Bruges-la-Morte*

Abstract Widely considered the first French-language photo narrative, the use of images in *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) tends to occlude as much as it reveals. Drawing on archives and contemporary debates about the image, this article contends that photography structures the novel on a formal level by reinforcing its poetics of analogy, a project that connects Georges Rodenbach's oeuvre to the larger symbolist movement from Baudelaire to Mallarmé. Rodenbach's novel attempts to invent a tradition of symbolist prose, which provocatively locates a shared likeness in otherwise dissimilar literary and pictorial practices. The aura of Bruges is used to explore the nature and limits of analogy—a term shared by symbolism and photography—leading to a critique of forms of identification that conflate difference with similitude.

Keywords symbolism, analogy, photography, Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte*.

Novels are rarely accused of killing cities. Yet Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) conflated the Flemish town with Hugues Viane, its homicidal protagonist, his dead wife, and his murdered mistress. From the title onward—the name of the city, the feminine article, and its double referent—Rodenbach equates Bruges with a dead woman. Even King Leopold II was moved to accost the writer at the Paris opera, according to a popular anecdote, declaring, “I know that you are the author of a beautiful book, *Bruges-la-Morte*. Well then, rest assured, it shall not remain a dead Bruges for long: we will construct tram lines there and inject new life into it!” (Leen 230). The royal decree to save the town from its literary depiction suggests how powerful the myth of a moribund Bruges had become. Such visceral reactions implicitly recognize the power of the novel's central device, which crosses tropes and figures from symbolist poetics with photographs of the city's vacant squares, canals, and cathedrals. Rather than killing Bruges, Rodenbach's novel attempts to invent a tradition of symbolist prose, which provocatively locates a shared likeness in otherwise

dissimilar literary and pictorial practices. Rodenbach uses the stale aura of Bruges to explore the nature and limits of analogy—a term shared by symbolism and photography—leading to a critique of forms of identification, which conflate difference with similitude.

Serialized in fourteen daily installments in *Le Figaro* in February 1892, his novel was published in volume form the same year, punctuated with thirty-five half-tone reproductions of Bruges taken from Lévy and Neurdein, a Parisian image bank specializing in stock tourist shots.¹ From the very beginning, the narrative seems torn between popular fiction and the art book. Flammarion archives cannot confirm whether it was an editor, a designer, or Rodenbach himself who decided to alter the photographs, retouching and reframing the narratives before they appeared in the book. Although none of the images were intended for the novel, their inclusion effectively makes Rodenbach one of the inventors of the French-language photo narrative, even as his symbolist poetics ought, at first glance, to resist the photographs' realist reference to the external world. The pictures were erased or replaced by illustrations in editions of the novel for nearly a century, ever since the critic Charles Merki condemned them for being banal and anti-idealist in an 1892 review (Edwards, "Photograph" 71). Insofar as Rodenbach stands at the head of an experimental canon of photo literature (from André Breton's *Nadja* and Louis Aragon's *Aurélien* to hybrid works by Suzanne Lilar and W. G. Sebald) his work allows us to reflect on his symbolist contribution to the history of the photo narrative, rightly distinguished from the "roman photos" published in popular magazines (Grojnowski 93). His hybrid text disrupts Bruges's status as a museal city, itself meant to preserve the past glory of Belgium. Instead, Rodenbach's Bruges is full of traces that make it seem at once spectral and murderous, dying and undead.

Despite the centrality of photography to the poetics of *Bruges-la-Morte*, most editions omit these images, while a recent translation replaces them with contemporary ones. As a result, certain critics continue to neglect the photographs, reading the novel as a piece of fin-de-siècle decadence, a provincial romance ending in murder. Alan Hollinghurst, whose own 1994 novel *A Folding Star* is also set in Bruges, writes, "This elaboration of mere atmosphere into a principle of action is certainly the central curiosity of the novel; though it may seem odd that the author should have wanted to supplement his own verbal atmosphere, in all its obscure Symbolist refinement, with the illustrations of a Baedeker" (Hollinghurst 12). Yet, the photographs hardly illustrate the novel, appearing with no evident relation to the events of the narrative. More than a supplementary oddity, we ought instead to understand the work's images as "consubstantial with the novel" as Christian Berg suggests (Berg, "Bruges"). As Paul Edwards has shown, the photographs capture themes present through-

out Rodenbach's oeuvre. More recently, Michael Newman has explored the motif of mirrors and relics in relation to allegory of photography in the novel.

Building on these readings, this essay focuses on the "demon of analogy," a phrase Rodenbach borrows from Stéphane Mallarmé's eponymous prose poem. In his novel, the "demon of analogy" names the central character's drive to intuit likeness, fatally pursued to the point of identity, where none may exist. On a thematic level, Viane's attempts to make his mistress resemble and reincarnate his dead wife—a fantasy that ends in murder—invite readers to reflect on a series of problematic parallels staged in the text: the relation of Bruges to its past, the mimetic rapport of Belgian and French culture, and the ability or failure of images to unveil likeness. Although critics have noted the role of Flemish cultural history, photography, and symbolist poetics in Rodenbach's oeuvre, few, if any, connect these aspects of his work through analogy. An obvious reason for this avoidance is the at times mystical tenor of pronouncements concerning the role of universal analogy from Victor Hugo and Charles Baudelaire onward. Yet, recent contributions to theories of photography, which attempt to go beyond accounts of indexicality by turning to analogy, raise the speculative stakes of making this connection with the symbolist novel.

While the validity and usefulness of periodization remains an open question, *symbolism* is a particularly fraught term whose significance has drifted from "narrow and local use" (as referring to Jean Moréas's 1886 manifesto) to "an extraordinarily broad and comprehensive meaning" (understood as the "metaphoric use of poetic language" as such) (De Man 148). As Paul Verlaine objected, there is no poetry that is not symbolic (cited in De Man 148). Beyond a series of aesthetic breaks—with realism, naturalism, and the Parnassians—René Wellek imagines the term in a set of four concentric circles from the "most narrow" Parisian coterie in the 1880s and 1890s, extending to a wider movement in French poetry from Baudelaire to Valéry, an international literary movement between 1880 and 1920 that includes much of what Anglophone criticism calls modernism, and finally the symbolic use of literary language (28). Belgian symbolism, as Patrick McGuinness has argued more recently, was a double movement "hybrid and francophone in nature," remarkably capable of bridging a series of binary oppositions: the medieval and the *fin de siècle*, the regional and the metropolitan, poetry and prose, the Germanic and the French. Its overall effect, he argues, "was to take Symbolism beyond the specialist area of poetry into the genres which French symbolism coveted but never annexed" (21). Rodenbach's generic range from early poetry, critical essay, and short story to the photo novel confirms as much.

Suspended between Baudelarian concordance and Mallarméan becoming, Rodenbach enacts the "double aspect of symbolism," to borrow Paul de Man's

formula. In referring to symbolism, I am less concerned with a historical poetics than the constellation in which Rodenbach has been placed by critics. As Valéry suggests, symbolism may be little more than such a retrospective projection. Rather than relying on a poetics in which language instantiates the idea, or a theory of the image that merely documents the real, symbolism, like photography in Rodenbach's work, takes a detour through analogy, allowing likeness to be discerned in relation to the apparently dissimilar. Analogies, as I define them here following Rodenbach, are semiconscious relations connecting sensation to thought, often through the use of an image. While critics have explored both Rodenbach's place in symbolism, somewhere between Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and his controversial use of photography, my focus on analogy connects these aspects of the novel together. As Viane seeks an image of unity that he ultimately locates in death, Rodenbach shows how the language of analogy can exacerbate or mediate such a sacrificial desire for identification. In doing so, he formally extends the symbolist experiment to prose narrative and creates a place for a much-derided technique within its pages.

In what follows, I focus on the late nineteenth-century debate on the use of photographs in literary works, and the iconic status of Bruges during the Flemish revival, to then bring this context to bear on an interpretation of likeness and photography in the novel, analyzing how Rodenbach's reliance on analogy configures his novel's vision of psychic and material reality. Analogy exposes the structure and limits of symbolist vision, while moving the ontology of photography beyond subject and object, seer and seen. While these dualities emerge as "nodes in a vast constellation of analogies" (Silverman, *Miracle* 11), they also threaten to engulf and erase the singular subject who falls prey to its demon.

A Supplementary Sense

Theories and practices of photography expose the links of death and mourning to the photograph, not only as a reminder of the dead and the viewer's mortality, "but also owing to the photograph's immanent temporal nature" (Yacavone 162). The photographs of Bruges both demand and resist the claims to likeness enacted in the narrative. Not illustrating the novel's scenes, they seek neither to produce a "reality effect" nor to flesh out details of plot or character. Pierre Piret and Berg underscore the extent to which photography determines Rodenbach's complex style. Both critics rightly warn against limiting the images to an illustrative, referential, hermeneutic, or symbolic function. Rather, as Piret writes, *Bruges-la-Morte* "se singularise ainsi par l'usage à proprement parler symboliste que Rodenbach y fait de la photographie: elle contribue à dédoubler le récit et à conduire le lecteur d'un registre à l'autre: elle vise, autrement dit, à la production d'un symbole, c'est-à-dire, la mise en œuvre d'un mode de signification alterna-

tif" (15). While Piret's reliance on symbol and symbolism as implicit interpretive categories may obscure as much as it clarifies, I take his claim to mean that Rodenbach uses the photographic image to interrupt, mirror, oppose, and complicate the narrative in ways that teach us about his poetics. Rodenbach's "symbolist" use of the photography renders a series of aesthetic oppositions inoperative, notably the opposition between the indexical and the symbolic, as well as the mass-produced image and a rarefied literary style. Analogy binds mourning to the topography of Bruges, lends agency to the city, and relates its key sites and objects (water, stones, mirrors, and carillons) in a dense figural network.

While Viane seeks the unity of the symbol, the novel's nuanced use of photography as analogy explores similarities and differences that he must ignore. Rodenbach's montage relates the city to death and the female body, while asking readers to question the nature of likeness and image itself. The centrality of analogy to any reading of *Bruges-la-Morte* is easily confirmed by Rodenbach's remarks, the existing scholarship, and numerous thematic elements in the plot. Yet, few if any scholars take seriously the extent to which the figure and rhetoric of analogy enable Rodenbach to conjoin the seemingly contradictory practices of photography and symbolist prose in his novel.

The genealogy of analogy is too vast to survey, from its origins in Plato's thinking of (dis)similarity and Aristotle's mathematical model to a host of modern thinkers from Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer to Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, who have explored the uses and abuses of analogy.² Critics attribute the conceptual simplification and enlarged purview of the figure over time—from the ancient analogy of proportion to the analogy of resemblance common in the early modern period—to the erasure of dissemblance internal to proportional comparison: "Quand la part de dissemblance s'efface, alors le démon de l'analogie est lâché" (Michel 17). The demon of analogy thus names a distinctly modern drive to discern likeness without the trace of dissemblance. The genealogical shift from proportion to resemblance is accompanied by an increased attention to a visual component of analogy (otherwise ignored in favor of its inductive or epistemological function) itself aligned by theorists with certain "hermeneutical excesses" (Stafford 19). Barbara Stafford describes analogy as "the vision of ordered relationships articulated as similarity-in-difference" capable of "weaving discordant particulars into a partial concordance" (9). She thus "recuperate[s] analogy . . . as a general theory of artful invention and intermedia communication" (8). For Kaja Silverman, too, analogy enables comparison, unlike unequal "metaphoric" substitution, as the former places terms on an equal ontological and semiotic footing (Silverman, *Flesh* 173).

Much of the recent critical interest in analogy, in other words, relates it to the visual and to photography. Rodenbach's technique finds an echo in Silverman's

recent “analogical” theory of photography, which builds on her earlier writing on Gerhard Richter’s photo-paintings. While “realist” theorists of photography from André Bazin to Barthes reject analogy on grounds that there is insufficient difference between an image and its referent, Richter contends that image and referent only correspond because they are not entirely identical. His photo-paintings explore such minute differences by “creating analogies” (*Flesh* 174). Silverman, too, looks beyond indexicality and artificiality to underscore the “limits of human vision” and argues that “photography’s truth is disclosive rather than evidentiary” (*Miracle* 7). Rather than merely documenting traces of the past qua evidence, photography reveals how the world always exceeds the viewer’s perception of it. Yet, as Rodenbach shows, this is hardly a mutually exclusive capacity. A photograph can show both that its referent has been present, and how this mode of presence belongs to a wider world captured by the lens.

Symbolist analogy often functions through the condensation, idealization, and exceeding of external stimuli (Gross 274). In a study on Rodin, Rodenbach calls analogy the “grande loi de la nature,” declaring that the task of artists and poets is to discern analogies in natural forms and images, and to express them through sculpture and rhythm (*L’Élite* 275). As a “sens de la ressemblance,” analogy is best understood as “un sens supplémentaire, frêle et souffreteux, qui rattachait par mille liens ténus les choses entre elles” (*Bruges-la-Morte* 128–29). The imitative nature of photography enables him to surmount struggles with the materiality of language, which does not immediately afford the same sensuous similarity as the image. Before turning to images, Rodenbach explores the camera obscura in “La vie des chambres,” a series of poems published in *Le Règne du silence* (1891). That the word *photography* is absent from his diction only testifies to its relative novelty and foreignness to the classical poetic register.

Photography captures what the novel’s narrator, following Mallarmé, calls the “démon de l’analogie” when language fails to do so, making it impossible to demote the photographs to a curious aside (102). The phrase alludes to an 1874 prose poem by Mallarmé in which the speaker is struck by a hallucinatory feeling, “la sensation propre d’une aile glissant sur les cordes d’un instrument” only to hear a voice intoning the inexplicable words “La Pénultième est morte.” The absurd, obsessive refrain does not lead the poet to compose a poem. Instead, it phonetically recalls a musical instrument as he stumbles on a set of string instruments in a display window.³ Unable to parse the meaning of the phrase, or escape an analogical series it sets off, linking together figures of crises, the poet is undone by language, as Barbara Johnson suggests, made to bear the “mourning of the inexplicable Penultimate” (205). Likening lexical, semantic, and syllabic elements (especially the sound “*nul*”) to an iconic and metaphoric discovery of death and finitude, the poem shifts analogy from the domain of being to lan-

guage itself (Roger 23). Often considered a crystallization of Mallarmé's poetics, "Le démon de l'analogie" presents what Jean-Michel Rabaté calls "a system of analogies without a referent, deprived of any object other than the universe of poetic correspondences" (8). Mallarmé's "inexplicable" analogies between music and language, sound and sense, death and mourning haunt Rodenbach's novel.

Bruges-la-Morte attends to a neglected synesthetic world, in which "strange analogies" link our thoughts and acts to the senses (Rodenbach, *Rouet* 81). Viane's attempt to conquer mourning leads to a murderous end, a plot whose obsession with death and revivification is shared by a number of works from Poe to Villiers.⁴ Viane is bent on making Jane Scott, an actress, resemble his deceased wife. After a chance encounter, he sees her perform in Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable*, whose demonic leitmotifs echo the fantastic side of the narrative in yet another medium. As Elisabeth Bronfen notes, the novel tells the story of a protagonist losing "a 'first beloved' and refinding her in the body of a second woman whose death ends the plot of mourning and detection," a theme inaugurated by Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and later made famous by Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (Bronfen 326). Mixing conventions from psychological, poetic, fantastic, and meditative tales, the result can only be described as an experiment, crossing the symbolist novel with a variety of popular genres (Betrand and Grojnowski 33).

Viane is overwhelmed by how much Jane sounds like his dead wife. The narrator questions the vocal likeness, implying that Viane may be the plaything of demonic analogy: "La voix de l'autre, toute semblable et réentendue, une voix de la même couleur, une voix orfévrée de même. Le démon de l'Analogie se jouait de lui ! Ou bien y-a-t-il une secrète harmonie dans les visages et faut-il qu'à tels yeux, à telle chevelure corresponde une voix appariée?" (102). While the "demon of analogy" pushes Viane to pursue similarity to the point of identity, the images and tropes of *Bruges-la-Morte* acknowledge the violence of imposing identity on likeness. Here, the novel mirrors the conundrum of Belgium's cultural imitation of (and resistance to) France. At the same time, it invites us to imagine a common connection between persistently different thoughts and things, like a city and a dead woman. Bruges becomes one such ambivalent image. The nostalgia for the past reflected in the still waters of its canals is akin to Viane's cult of mourning, yet the city equally resists his fantasies by referring indexically to a persistent reality.

Against Illustration

Photography unsettles the mimetic and visual conventions of literary form in surprising ways. In the French tradition leading up to symbolism, novelists and poets reacted to a series of persistent clichés about the medium, many of which revived discourses about optical techniques and devices popular in the previous

century. In 1842 Sainte Beuve likened the daguerreotype to the “petit poème en prose” insofar as both seemingly relied on an aesthetics of precision, realism, and the picturesque. The comparison was soon reversed to associate photographs with short prose poems (Compagnon 94–95). Hugo barely wrote about photography, but was active as a photographer between 1852 and 1855, whereas Baudelaire’s “photophobic” experience proved just the opposite (Thélot 5). For Baudelaire, photography encodes a larger technical, commercial, and political crisis of art. The quintessential model of modern sensibility—at once “réaliste, imitatrice, païenne”—he judged it as decadent as universal suffrage and the contemporary broadsheet newspaper (Compagnon 92). In his review of the 1859 Salon, the poet chastises a growing desire for a “reproduction exacte de la nature” that found its messiah in Daguerre. Photography threatened to replace “l’impalpable et l’imaginaire” with an accurate copy whose sole virtue was decidedly scientific rather than artistic. In a 1939 speech marking the centenary of the daguerreotype, Valéry argues, contra Baudelaire, that photography instead gave realist writers a better sense of the limits of language, allowing “pure literature” to forsake description and instead develop discourses that expose “la pensée abstraite” or a free play of “combinaisons et résonances poétiques.”

Between these judgments, *Le Mercure de France* published a survey in 1898, in which the journalist André Ibels asked a selection of writers and editors to share their thoughts on the popular genre of the “récit-photo,” exemplified by Catulle Mendès’s *Gyp*, and sentimental novels by Paul and Victor Marguerite (Thélot 163). The range of responses discussed the merits of etchings and drawings and the use of actors in costume to reenact scenes before the unerring camera-eye. Publishers of photo novels, such as Van Pusch from the Éditions Nilssen, argued for the commercial advantages of photography, as it was cheaper than draftsmanship and allowed both reader and writer to do without laborious passages of description (“Dossier,” *Bruges-la-Morte* 321). Poetics were quickly superseded by economics, as the image outdid the word.

Zola and Mallarmé both responded to Ibels’s survey, and the difference in their response dramatizes a striking split between naturalist and symbolist aesthetics. As a technique of mechanical reproduction, photography would seem to align with realist aesthetics, against the idealism associated with symbolist writers. Yet such a dichotomy does not account for a shared resistance to the insertion of photography in the literary work. Zola dismissed the possibility that any good could come from the increasingly industrialized and inherently sensationalistic technology, which was bound to be used for salacious purposes: “On tombera tout de suite dans le nu” (“Dossier” 334). As Zola lectured and wrote extensively about photography, and was an accomplished amateur photographer himself, his dismissal is best understood as a kind of disavowal, since nat-

uralist novels were often taxed with being sensationalistic. Mallarmé's response suggests a greater openness to the potential of photography as a medium, yet he immediately looks beyond it toward the moving image: "Je suis pour—aucune illustration, tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur ; mais si vous remplacez la photographie, que n'allez-vous droit au cinématographe, dont le déroulement remplacera, images et texte, maint volume, avantageusement" ("Dossier" 338). Mallarmé's premise—that the reader's mind is the only significant apparatus in the phenomenology of reading—leads to the injunction that literary images should remain strictly imaginary. Photography cannot lessen the labor of reading, which includes visualizing what a description evokes. While Zola's and Mallarmé's reasons differ, in effect, they both ban photography from literary space.

In Rodenbach's own response to the survey, he agrees that most literary readers would prefer to use their imagination than have images handed to them. But he also stresses the documentary potential of the photograph and its erotic power: "Pourtant dans les romans de vie moderne, ce sera un élément de réalité, un document de plus: et si le sujet est galant, les illustrations représentatives d'attitudes et de gestes intimes, il y aura une secrète excitation à savoir que tels beaux bras, tel visage voluptueux, telle gorge entrevue existent réellement quelque part. . . . Et, en résumé, tout dépendra des photographies et dépendra des lecteurs" ("Dossier" 331–32). While Zola rescinds and Mallarmé supersedes the terms of Ibels's question about the literary uses of photography, Rodenbach's measured response is more ambiguous. His failure to mention *Bruges-la-Morte* is noteworthy. Although Alphonse Daudet's and Pierre Loti's work had been accompanied by photo types as early as 1885, Rodenbach's novel remained exceptional in two ways: he wrote a preface to integrate the stock images with the narrative and he addressed his work to a readership interested in the experimental possibilities of poetic prose ("Dossier" 320). Rodenbach's response combines Zola's suspicion that photography is inevitably linked to arousal with Mallarmé's concern for the fate of reading. Unlike Mallarmé, he does not place reading exclusively in the mind's eye but insists on the photograph as an "element of reality" in modern novels. And he conjoins the documentary and the imaginary aspect of the photograph by linking eroticism to what Barthes later calls the "émanation du référent"—a picture of a body moves in its power to radiate outward, to touch its viewer's gaze (Barthes, *La Chambre claire* 80). In sum, Rodenbach places the burden on future readers to decide what to do with the images that move them.

When Mallarmé, following the publication of *Bruges-la-Morte*, congratulated Rodenbach for writing one of the only masterpieces of symbolist prose, he

described the novel's unique virtues in terms of the "contemporary effort of reading," with only a veiled allusion to photography:

Votre histoire humaine si savante par instants s'évapore ; et la cité en tant que le fantôme élargi continue, on reprend conscience aux personnages, cela avec une certitude subtile qui instaure un très pur effet. Toute la tentative contemporaine de lecture est de faire aboutir le poème au roman, le roman au poème, mais sans doute qu'on s'embarrasse de trop d'éléments, avec une juxtaposition moins exacte qu'ici: et sans votre magie. (*Amitié*, 66)

Mallarmé's "precise juxtaposition" signals the interplay between text and image in Rodenbach's novel. The moments when "the human story vanishes" may well refer to the pages of the book that are obverse to its photographs: left blank, conceivably out of technical necessity, they create breaks in the narrative. In these gaps, the city indeed expands spectrally, pictured in the images of Bruges on the page opposite. Here, photography becomes another name for Rodenbach's "magic," which fulfills the greater critical attempt to transpose symbolist poetics into prose, while it folds the novel's prose back toward the poem.

Rodenbach borrows interpolation as a principle of construction from Mallarmé's unfinished *Livre*. Not only does he integrate photography into the pages of his own novel, but also allows the medium to pervade his prose, formally and figuratively. Rodenbach's style privileges repetition, rhythm, and assonance, while the novel's narrative voice recalls Baudelaire's prose poems, lending it a certain generic indeterminacy. Berg identifies Rodenbach's narrative technique with the use of free indirect discourse, blank verse, monorhemic syntax, the replacement of active verbs with participles or infinitives, neologisms, allusive language, and vague attribution, creating the overall effect of a series of snapshots in prose. Indeed, Baudelaire's insistence, in an essay on Hugo, that poetic devices only emerge from the "inépuisable fonds de l'analogie universelle" makes him a significant precursor here (*Oeuvres* 2: 133). As Henri Peyre notes, the "poet's intelligence" in this passage "becomes the decipherer of analogies . . . quite different from the drier kind of intelligence, closed to what is mysterious" (26). In a January, 31, 1856, letter to Toussenel, Baudelaire had described both the synesthetic "intelligence" of the poet and imagination as "la plus scientifique des facultés, parce que seule elle comprend l'analogie universelle." Although Baudelaire's imagination did not allow him to place photography at the service of poetic intelligence, Rodenbach attempted to do just that. And in fact, the larger symbolist reticence to thematize photography could well be understood through a remark Rodenbach makes about *Les Fleurs du mal*: "Nulle part il n'est fait une allusion directe au haschisch ou aux visions de l'opium. En cela il faut admirer le goût suprême du poète, uniquement préoccupé de la construction

philosophique de son poème” (*L'Élite* 18–19). Baudelaire instead transposes intoxication into poetic form, making its traces legible in his style. While the realist novel accommodates photography into its representative modes, Rodenbach smuggles photography into French narrative via a detour into the poetics of analogy, which also enables him to liken the medieval aura of Bruges to Viane’s mourning.

Demons of Analogy

Throughout his work, Rodenbach describes a “domaine mystérieux et négligé, limbes de sensations, clair-obscur de la conscience, région équivoque où trem-pent pour ainsi dire les racines de l’être. Il s’y noue des analogies étranges, des rapports volatils qui lient nos pensées et nos actes à telles impressions de la vue, de l’ouïe, de l’odorat” (*Rouet* 81). Although many critics note the importance of analogy for symbolism, for Rodenbach it is far more than a rhetorical structure or a poetic technique. Berg refers to symbolism as an “immense dictionnaire analogique” (Berg, *Bruges* 107), teeming with effects of contiguity and displacement. Yet others select analogy as its central figure insofar as it translates objects or ideas “by means of an appearance that is not its immediate copy, but that serves to evoke the object in an oblique way” (Peyre 6–7). Silverman gives the figure its largest range, defining analogy as the “authorless and untranscendable similarities that structure Being” (Silverman, *Miracle* 11). We are loath to acknowledge these similarities when they “call our autonomy, unity, and primacy into question. Photography is the vehicle through which these profoundly enabling but unwelcome relationships are revealed to us, and through which we learn to think analogically” (11). While Silverman’s claim seems hyperbolic, she likely means less that photography is the *only* means of learning to think analogically—a contention easily falsified by various mathematical and pictorial models available since antiquity—but that it becomes the privileged medium for doing so in modernity. Visual analogies between things, thoughts, and relations become apparent to the camera since nature, to recall Walter Benjamin, speaks differently to the apparatus than the human sensorium. Images reveal the true physiognomy of things, over and above mere cognition, because they set them up in relations of likeness (*Miracle* 142).

Rodenbach also displaces analogy from the linguistic and the sonorous to the visual. As we have seen, the “demon of analogy” moves between these poles. Through an “innate feeling for desirable analogy,” Viane elects Bruges as the corollary to his mourning for its *genius loci*:

Il avait ce qu’on pouvait appeler “le sens de la ressemblance,” un sens supplémentaire, frêle et souffreteux, qui rattachait par mille liens ténus les choses

entre elles, apparentait les arbres par des fils de la Vierge, créait une télégraphie immatérielle entre son âme et les tours inconsolables. C'est pour cela qu'il avait choisi Bruges, Bruges, d'où la mer s'était retirée, comme un grand bonheur aussi. C'avait été déjà un phénomène de ressemblance, et parce que sa pensée serait à l'unisson avec la plus grande des Villes Grises. (128–29)

Viane's "frail and sickly" sense of resemblance—a kind of paranoia creating a thousand tenuous connections—remains fundamentally ambiguous. Rather than mastering it, he is possessed by it. One is hard pressed to decide whether this extra sense is simply too feeble leading Viane to create weak, unmotivated comparisons, or whether it is pathological in its excess. Ordinary resemblance, for Rodenbach, is "la ligne de l'horizon de l'habitude et de la nouveauté" (60). Viane's supplementary sense, instead of reducing desire to this horizon, erects an "immaterial" telegraphic network between his psychic life and the grey city.

Rainer Maria Rilke set a 1906 poem "Quai du Rosaire, Brügge" at Viane's address. Despite the homage, he remarked, Bruges is never identical with the city: "Rodenbach's Bruges has become famous; people forget it was an analogy invented by a poet for his soul, and they get stuck on his word" (1006). While Rilke separates the city from its depiction in the novel, he equally implies that reading *Bruges-la-Morte* requires grasping the logic of analogy (*Gleichnis*) rather than remaining exclusively at the level of the wording (*Wortlaut*). Parsing the relation between Viane, the city, and its images requires reading the bounds of analogy. Here the book links mourning to a place through a series of disparate sensuous objects: water, stone, canals, mirrors, hair, and bells. The likeness between these objects and states of mind configures and discloses ways of meaning that remain hidden otherwise. The significance of analogy inevitably exceeds the narrative frame. As a trope, it "appears in the 'spectral' likeness of the story that reveals it; or rather, it appears in the likeness of an exterior light surrounding the story" (Miller 184). In *Bruges-la-Morte*, this light, which at once illuminates and obscures its workings, is eminently photographic.

From Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics onward, likeness has often been considered definitive of the iconic. At the same time, analogy—understood as the similarity between ostensibly dissimilar things—is hardly a new problem for theories of photography. Debates about the constructed or analogical character of photographs thus confront the premise that images, unlike other signs, record and resemble what they designate. For Silverman, the camera has been considered an "aggressive device: an instrument for shooting, capturing, and representing the world" (Silverman, *Miracle* 1). Most theories of photography either temper this aggressive character by referring to the indexical character of the image, which tends to stress photography's relation to *what has been*, or its

artificiality, which underscores the constructed nature of matter (Barthes, *La Chambre claire* 85). Silverman marginalizes the documentary or the indexical character of the photograph to draw out its analogical character. Yet this aspect of the argument speciously maintains the kind of binarism she wants to avoid. It is not difficult to affirm the various potentials of photography at once. Barthes, although certainly a proponent of indexicality, does so when he writes, “rien ne peut empêcher que la Photographie soit analogique; mais en même temps, le noème de la Photographie n’est nullement dans l’analogie” (Barthes, *La Chambre claire* 88). He declares it futile to argue whether photography is analogical (what he calls an image without a code, ana-logon) or coded (semiotically, historically, and perspectively constructed). Dubbing himself a realist, he considers the importance of photography to be essentially evidentiary, rather than memorial.

Silverman uses aspects of Benjamin’s essays on photography contra Barthes to articulate a theory of the photograph that “attributes it to the world, instead of to technology, treats it as an analogy, instead of an index or a copy, and associates it with development rather than fixity” (Silverman, *Miracle* 7). Photography does not entail “sameness, symbolic equivalence, logical adequation or even a rhetorical relationship” (Silverman, *Miracle* 11). Rather, for Silverman, photography focuses our gaze on the similarities that structure seemingly disparate forms of matter, training us to “think analogically” without reducing difference to identity. While she marshals photographs to think about relationality, Rodenbach uses his novel to narrate the perversity of analogy itself.

The Aura of Bruges

The novel’s first dead subject—Bruges—plays on the city’s aura in the context of the turn-of-the-century revival of Belgian art. Rodenbach hailed from Ghent, and spent much of his brief life in Paris. Bruges, however, was the city of his father, who, according to Maes’s biography, alluded to it whenever possible. Rodenbach later raised this invocation into a principle of exile, paradoxically claiming the French capital as the only fertile soil for Belgian literature—a statement reinforced by the fact that the novel’s snapshots of Bruges were selected from not a Belgian but rather a Parisian image bank, and also by his decision to write in French, largely determined by his social class. Contemporary readers objected that the city did not resemble the images garnered from the novel, a criticism the poet Émile Verhaeren rebutted by remarking that Rodenbach was not compiling tourist guides like Karl Baedeker. Rodenbach’s Bruges differed from the city strategically, for he knew that in a century, no one would worry about the dissimilarity, just as no one asks about the likeness a portrait offers years after its subject has died (“Dossier” 304).

To read the complexity of *Bruges-la-Morte* well it is useful to hold in mind

the series of historical references it encrypts: Bruges, the great medieval city, the deserted port, the home of the Reliquary of the congealed blood of Christ, the site of nostalgic aestheticized nationalism and impending economic upheaval, becomes the ground for Rodenbach's exploration of love, death, and apostasy. Like J. M. W. Turner in Venice, Rodenbach specified his ambition to capture Bruges in the present as well as in its mythic essence (Edwards, "Règne du silence" 38). The comparison to the English Romantic landscape painter suggests how his aesthetics remain caught between epochs and media. The city's incessant bells—a metonymy of time where time is out of joint—are said to sow the air with "poussières de sons, la cendre morte des années." The diachronic nature of Bruges is just one of many spectral qualities associated with it. Often described as a northern version of Venice or a miniature Amsterdam, the city is laced with canals whose still waters reflect its medieval architecture. As Rodenbach writes in an 1888 *Figaro* article, later republished as "Agonies des villes," the prestige and economic importance of Bruges began to decline after the crusades, and in 1475 the Zwin channel began to silt, leading to the eventual closure of the passage to the sea. "Bruges," he laments, "dorénavant éloignée de cette vaste mamelle de la mer qui avait nourri ses enfants, commença à s'anémier, et depuis quatre siècles elle agonise" (307). Overtaken by Antwerp as the most important Belgian port, Bruges was regarded as a relic of itself, a photograph documenting the glory of what had once been. In the nineteenth century, Belgian art movements seeking to express their recent autonomy from centuries of foreign rule seized the city as an emblem of past greatness that had to be preserved and revived. The great Flemish Gothic painters Hans Memling, Jan Van Eyck, and Quentin Metsys were revered anew as symbols of Belgium's age of unsurpassed cultural, economic, and artistic achievement. Among the writers who would pay homage to Bruges as the door to Flemish art were Camille Lemonnier, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Emile Verhaeren, Mallarmé, Stefan Zweig, Joris-Karl Huysmans, and Rilke. Caught between death and revivification, Bruges was ripe for symbolism.

Rodenbach accords an occult power to the city's history and climate, which teeters on the verge of becoming menacingly human itself. In the preface, he alerts the reader to his conception of literary space:

Voilà ce que nous avons souhaité de suggérer: la Ville orientant une action; les paysages urbains, non pas seulement comme des toiles de fond, comme des thèmes descriptifs un peu arbitrairement choisis, mais liés à l'événement même du livre. C'est pourquoi il importe, puisque ces décors de Bruges collaborent aux péripéties, de les reproduire également ici, intercalés entre les pages: quais, rues désertes, vieilles demeures, canaux, béguinage, église,

orfèvrerie du culte, beffroi, afin que ceux qui nous liront subissent aussi la présence et l'influence de la Ville, éprouvent la contagion des eaux voisines, sentent à leur tour l'ombre des hautes tours allongées sur le texte. (*Bruges-la-Morte* 49–51)

Rodenbach does not see the city as the ground of human action, but as a metamorphic space that contaminates those who enter it. Once again, he eschews the word *photography*, opting for the vaguely occult vocabulary of influence instead. Freed from their function as naturalist or realist documentary, the images instead act as “analogues de l'écriture la plus intérieure et psychologique” (Thélot 168). Like Zola, he stresses the power of photography on the senses. Few human figures are visible in these photos; discounting the frontispiece etching by Fernand Khnopff, at no point are the main characters depicted. While many of the stock photos in the catalogue from which the images were drawn show Bruges filled with inhabitants, those included in the novel are devoid of everyday life (Edwards, “Photograph” 73; Grojnowski 108–11). The nearly empty streets, riverbanks, and decaying mansions are not lonely, as Benjamin wrote of Eugène Atget's photographs, but “cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant” (Benjamin, “Little History of Photography” 519), or as crime scenes photographed forensically to “establish evidence” (Benjamin, “Work of Art” 258). The global disappearance of the human figure from photography, in Benjamin's argument, follows the transition from the “cult value” of the image (meant to remember the dead) to its “exhibition value.” We can thus consider the vacant images of Bruges both as an atmospheric influence and an invitation to crime. The city's atmosphere suffuses those who traverse it: “Muettes analogies! Pénétration réciproque de l'âme et des choses! Nous entrons en elles, tandis qu'elle pénètrent en nous” (*Bruges-la-Morte* 192).

Setting his novel in Bruges, a city that risks becoming a snapshot of its past, Rodenbach demands we learn to read its “mute analogies.” Kracauer likens the “imaginative reader intent on studying and deciphering an elusive text” to a photographer. Both depend on a kind of selectivity “closer to empathy than disengaged spontaneity” (26). In this vein, *Bruges-la-Morte* condenses topoi unavoidable for any theory of photography: specters, mirrors, photographs as memento mori, religious relics, mourning and melancholia, resemblance, cognition, recognition, and hallucination.

Into the Dark Room

At first, *Bruges-la-Morte* invites allegorical readings that would transform the text into a reflection on photography. The novel opens with the declining light of day—a Baudelarian trope that Benjamin identifies with “the landscape

as allegory" (*Arcades* 324). At once a hermeneutic mode, a rhetorical figure, and a genre, allegory is akin to analogy insofar as it relates apparently dissimilar phenomena. Allegory can be understood, as Barbara Stafford notes, as a type of "heightened disanalogy" one that focuses on the dissimilar rather than likeness (63). Rodenbach's superimposition of the sacred and the profane, the medieval and the modern, the monumental and the ephemeral certainly lends credence to such a focus, as Viane moves from the stasis of mourning to the "redemptive" movement of the centuries-old procession of the Holy Blood during which he murders Jane. Yet, such allegorical readings risk blurring the specificity of Rodenbach's poetics of analogy.

The dying light of the first sentence, then, ushers the reader into a photographic space: "Le jour déclinait, assombrissant les corridors de la grande demeure silencieuse mettant des écrans de crêpe aux vitres" (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Mort* 51). Just before this description is a gray photograph of a suspended world, showing a bridge, a chimney and a steeple, trees and bank sides, inverted and reflected in the canal waters (fig. 1). The photograph immediately contradicts the description, however, since it is set during what looks to be a spring day, rather than a fall evening. The photographs that follow constitute a series of subtle departures from reality, erasing time, altering perspective to emphasize dark borders and black waters, edging toward fiction rather than documentary (Edwards, *Soleil noir* 42–56). With this initial image, as with all photography according to Barthes, the viewer enters into a space of "mort plate." Photography corresponds to the social intrusion of "une mort asymbolique hors religion, hors rituel, une sorte de plongée brusque dans la Mort littérale" (Barthes, *La Chambre claire* 29). The novel pits Viane's attempts to consecrate death into a symbol against this "asymbolic" quality of photography.

As Viane walks through the city, he seeks analogies for mourning: "Mais il aimait cheminer aux approches du soir et chercher des analogies à son deuil dans de solitaires canaux et d'ecclésiastiques quartiers" (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* 54). The scene of the first photograph seems to be reproduced here, but this time the reader is inclined to appropriate the project and read the face of the city. This second image presents the same bridge from a slightly different angle in a full-page format, creating the "effect of moving forward" (Newman 36). The differences between the two photographs, as James Elkins notes, intensify the atmospheric opening and spur readers to study the quality of light, the depth of the reflections, and the framing of the photographs as they tell the images apart.

Rodenbach projects Viane's psychic life onto a medieval cityscape, contesting Romantic tropes of the poet railing against a decaying metropolis. He instead juxtaposes Flemish architecture with grief, which finds a topographic equal in the silted channel. Colors are likewise muted to a spectral palette of

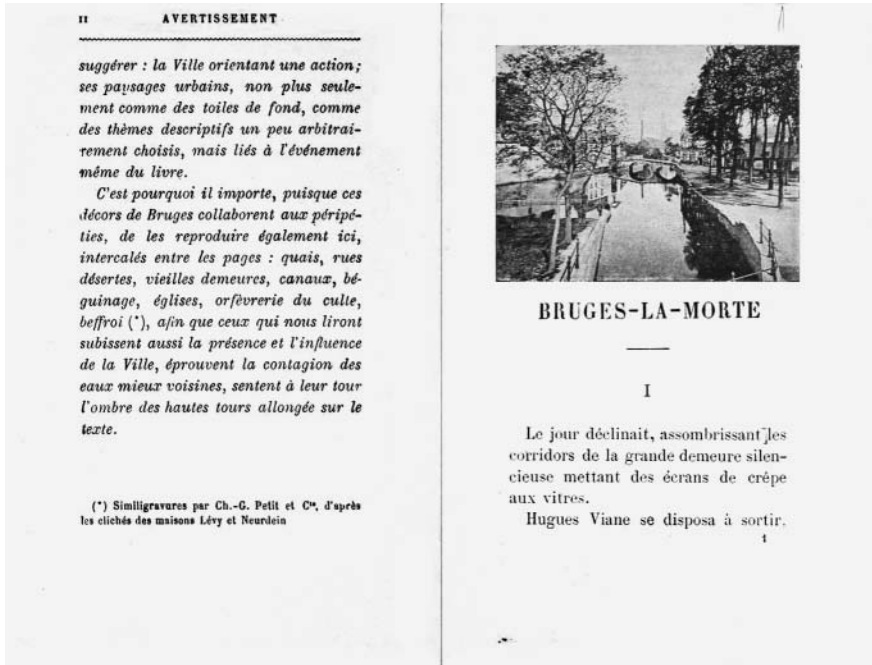


FIGURE 1. *Bruges-la-Morte*, first page of the Flammarion edition (1892).

black, white, and grey. The city's climate dulls vivid shades, as if to preserve a vast pathetic fallacy: "Il y a là, par un miracle du climat, une pénétration réciproque, on ne sait quelle chimie de l'atmosphère qui neutralise les couleurs trop vives, les ramène à une unité de songe, à un amalgame de somnolence plutôt grise" (*Bruges-la-Morte* 130).

This description suggests that the very atmosphere in Bruges is photosensitive. The brooding climate transpires in monochromatic views of the city. Taking Rodenbach's hint from the preface, Edwards argues these photographs are indeed documents, but "of photography itself as an element of modern life," best read as relics and *memento mori* (Edwards, "Photograph" 72). Even so, it bears repeating that the photographs are never merely illustrative or a stable counterpoint for the psychic turmoil of the characters. While the narrative constructs a vast analogy between Bruges's Christian relics and Viane's experience, photographs momentarily arrest its flow.

From the first identification between the widower and the city, the empathetic narrator draws our attention to how Viane sees the city and his past with a photographer's eye. He likens the blissful years of his marriage to the harmony of souls or the mingling reflections from the banks of a canal. The visual metaphor, structured around the city's layout, shows how Viane reconstitutes his psychic world to accord with his surroundings—to such an extent that even past

happiness, experienced elsewhere, is recast in terms of present architecture, which recalls an even more distant medieval past. Once Viane moves to Bruges after the death of his beloved, any possibility of personal redemption whether promised by aesthetic experience or religious faith seems to depend on such transposition.

On a technical level, the photographs distort perception. Edwards describes how the photographic apparatus used constitutes a series of departures from “ocular reality” since most of the architectural shots were taken with a bellows camera, with its lens “shifted upward” to correct the angle. The long exposure times erase any signs of movement on the water adding to the uncanny atmosphere of these images. Lugubrious atmospheric effects—black and white hues, cloudless skies, still waters—depict immobilized time. Taking stock of these details, their composition, their framing, it is impossible to argue in favor of an illustrative function: Bruges becomes a character, even the protagonist of the novel, as Rodenbach suggests. The photographs radicalize Viane’s mourning linking his recollections into a synesthetic restitution of his dead wife’s image.

Rodenbach further imbues the narrative with tropes for photography—from mirrors and specters to water. Although she did not drown, the face of Viane’s dead wife appears in the canals: “Il l’avait mieux revue, mieux entendue; retrouvant au fil des canaux son visage d’Ophélie en allée, écoutant sa voix dans la chanson grêle et lointaine des carillons” (*Bruges-la-Morte* 69). Bachelard described *Bruges-la-Morte* as the “‘Ophelization’ of an entire city,” a process that he analyzes further as the rendering element of death through water’s capacity for total dissolution (121). His remark underscores the fluidity of Viane’s narcissistic identification with Bruges—a city flecked with canals—and his gradual dissolution through this initial gesture (Mosley 36). Not only does water recall mirrors, but, as Bachelard argues, in Rodenbach’s oeuvre mirrors are almost always veiled references to still water (34). Moreover, water constitutes “an archaism in photography” (to borrow a phrase from the contemporary artist Jeff Wall), crucial to “the process, but also excluded, contained, or channeled by its hydraulics” (Wall 110). Wall’s brief essay on his photograph *Milk* opposes “the ‘liquid intelligence’ of nature with the ‘dry’ character of the institution of photography.” (111). As fluids, spirits, and mirrors cohere, photography emerges as a “machine for capturing specters” (Edwards, *Règne* 29). The uncanny tradition of specters from its neo-platonic origins to Swedenborg, Balzac, and Nadar—that Tom Gunning has explored in relation to fin-de-siècle spirit photography—holds sway in Viane’s world. He memorably prohibits his maid from cleaning the furniture and the mirrors in his house for fear the slightest touch would erase traces of his wife’s captive image. Maniacal preservation is one of the many practices used to keep his wife from dying a second death.

In his struggle to stop time, the effectiveness of portrait photography and painting in Viane's altar is finally surpassed by the novel's key object: a lock of his dead wife's blonde hair preserved in a bell jar, like a piece of film in danger of decaying. Fetishized by male writers from Alexander Pope to Guy de Maupassant (and exchanged as mementos during the nineteenth century), the strand of hair exposes the symbolist connivance between death and the "feminine" (Gorceix 42). Reading this scene alongside Maupassant's trichophilic stories, Emily Apter comments, "Hugues's perception of her hair as an 'interrupted' continuity—'une chaîne brisée'—connotes the revulsed or strabismic vision of the Freudian fetishist who, unable to sustain contemplation of the maternal void, 'interrupts' his gaze by refocusing on the nearest contiguous object" (112). Between relic and fetish, adornment and excrement, hair is the medium in which a part survives the death of the whole. In a posthumously published short story, "L'Idéal," an obsessive character equates the unique red hair of a woman he stalks with "originality" itself, both somehow impossible to graft onto the ordinary. In an 1893 article published in *Le journal pour tous*, Rodenbach invokes a "cimetière de cheveux," a strange heirloom containing the locks of his ancestors, including the two sisters he lost in childhood. In a morbid flourish, he declares, "C'est en ses cheveux qu'on se survit. C'est notre portion d'immortalité" (Maes 302). That relic could be read as a family album of sorts suggesting that, in its manipulation of perception and memory, photographic technology precedes itself. Yet, as a material trace of the dead, it elides the image. Viane uses this physical trace as a murder weapon, strangling Jane with the lock of hair. As Newman argues in his psychoanalytically inflected reading, the novel "reveals something of what is at stake in the idea of the relic, including when it is applied as the model of the photograph—not just an indexical trace of the past, but a piece of encrypted, mortifying *jouissance*" (41). At the core of Rodenbach's symbolism, unlike its ethereal Parisian variant, there remains a fatally material reference to reality.

The Fog of Death

For Rodenbach, analogy is bound by death. Rather than remaining faithful to his "code of likeness," Viane "perverts analogy" into a fixed identity when he encounters Jane (Berg, *Bruges* 124). Overwhelmed by the "similarity" of this passerby to his dead wife, he displaces the terms of the analogy. "Quoiqu'il en fût du singulier hasard, Hugues s'abandonna désormais à l'enivrement de cette ressemblance de Jane avec la morte, comme jadis il s'exaltait à la ressemblance de lui-même avec la ville" (*Bruges-la-Morte* 133–34). His sense of resemblance continues to act but in reverse, pushing him to equate the living woman with the dead one, rather than himself with the city. As Edwards suggests, Viane's name echoes *via negativa* and *vanne* (sluice), while Jane Scott, the actress who fatefully

“resembles” his wife, becomes his blind spot, a *scotoma*, in his carefully constructed cult of grief (Edwards, *Règne* 71). Leaving his house of mourning, Viane becomes a “défroqué de la douleur” (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* 193). His betrayal of the life of renunciation constitutes a turning point in the novel. The text becomes highly allusive, incorporating the first sighting of Madame Arnoux in *L'éducation sentimentale*—“ce fut comme une apparition”—as well as Baudelaire’s “À une passante,” with the significant revision that Viane, not the veiled passerby, is in mourning:

À sa vue, il s'arrêta net, comme figé ; la personne, qui venait en sens inverse, avait passé près de lui. Ce fut une secousse, une apparition. Hugues eut l'air de chavirer une minute. Il mit la main à ses yeux comme pour écarter un songe. . . . Est-ce que sa raison périlait ? Ou bien sa rétine, à force de sauver la morte, identifiait les passants avec elle ? . . . Trouble d'une telle apparition ! Miracle presque effrayant d'une ressemblance qui allait jusqu'à l'identité. (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* 74–78)

Rodenbach develops the Baudelarian flash of infatuation into a process of becoming, a gradual unveiling of the face. Blinded by the resemblance, Viane covers his eyes briefly, imitating the movement of a lens shutter. Afraid of losing his mind, he wonders whether he has not simply superimposed the longed-for image onto the passerby; as if the work of mourning had burned his wife's face onto his retina, causing each perception to be a double exposure. He suspends this possibility in favor of a similarity that ends with a morbid identification of the two women. The “almost frightening miracle” of a likeness verging on identity suggests the two threats of analogy: it seductively creates a relationship where one is lacking, even as it threatens to shock Viane out of his senses. As *Le Rouet des brumes*, his posthumous short story collection shows vividly, for Rodenbach an instant of “madness” is the quickest way to realize one's ambitions (*Rouet* 190). Viane, too, enters into a regime of hallucinatory superposition, staging the analogy he has been seeking in vain.

By accepting the identity between Jane and the dead woman, Viane profanes the sacred analogy between his mourning and Bruges. He tries to assuage himself by reinforcing the initial shock of resemblance. Having noted their similar hair, identical in color and texture, he fears Jane may stop coloring hers, thus erasing the artifice. Convinced that a certain physiognomy must dictate a certain voice, he thinks Jane sounds alike as well. Satisfied by the similitude, he does not at first feel he is betraying the memory of his wife, but rather that he is seeing the same woman, and his love has been transposed.

In his desire to totalize the imitation, he makes Jane wear his wife's old dresses, like a costume photographer. This ritual of refashioning recalls the

power of photography to transform the real by making the otherwise unseen detail apparent. The “paroxysme de la ressemblance” he hopes to orchestrate by making Jane animate his wife’s clothes is bound to fail; as the novel insists, gesture interrupts expression rather than completing it. Jane treats the exercise as a farce, finding the dresses unfashionable, like dated details in old photographs. Looking at herself in the mirror, without suspecting the truth, she taunts, “J’ai l’air d’un vieux portrait!” (Rodenbach, *Bruges-la-Morte* 148). Her mockery makes Viane question the “prestige de la conformité physique” between the two women for the first time. As their images grow distant, he realizes his desire to fuse them together has pushed them apart: “Tant qu’elles demeureraient à distance l’une de l’autre, avec le brouillard de la mort entre elles, le leurre était possible. Trop rapprochées, les différences apparaissent. . . . Les ressemblances ne sont jamais que dans les lignes et dans l’ensemble. Si on s’ingénie aux détails, tout diffère” (177–78). The recognition that there is no identity without distance, no resemblance without “the fog of death,” that likeness is a matter of composites rather than details, marks the end of the line for Viane. He realizes he is infatuated with Jane, even without the alibi of physical resemblance. The very demon of analogy that animates photography also exposes the devil in the details.

In retrospect, the significance of symbols becomes over-determined. In his turn to religion, or Catholic dread, Viane studies the city’s tombs and relics, hoping to reinstate an accord with his surroundings. While his scopic desire concentrates on Flemish painting, Jane uses the Holy Blood procession as an excuse to see his house, gauging what she stands to gain if she remains with him. Here a series of analogies emerge between the aesthetic and sacred value of the relic, between commodity and sanctity, and ultimately profane and sacred time, which the denouement collapses together. Juxtaposing the Christian procession said to occur on the “happiest day in Bruges” with Jane’s murder, Rodenbach ironizes art’s failure to create forms of personal redemption while likening it to the collective folly of the religious procession.

Earlier Viane meditates on Memling’s depiction of the sacrifice of eleven thousand virgins on Saint Ursula’s shrine, of which the novel provides a photograph (fig. 2).⁵ Saturated with the imagery of sacrifice and bloodletting, Viane is moved further by the pantomime of the Holy Blood, a historical procession in which descendants of noble families dress in ancestral clothing and jewels: “On aurait dit que s’étaient fait chair et animés par un miracle, les saints; les guerriers, les donateurs des tableaux de Van Eyck et de Memling qui s’éternisent, là-bas, dans les musées” (260). The procession further rewrites the seduction of Emma Bovary in reverse. Instead of Flaubert’s juxtaposition of the speeches at the agricultural fair with Rodolphe’s flirtations, Rodenbach splices the passage of res-

urrected saints with the lover's quarrel. When she stumbles into his chambers of mourning, his "*sanctum sanctorum*," mocking his collection of pictures of "women," she recognizes and yet fails to grasp the significance of the portrait. As she begins to handle the strand of hair, miming her contempt for Viane, she hastens her demise. Although Viane strangles her with the lock of hair, bringing an underlying misogyny in the novel to its apex, elements borrowed from fantastic plots allow one to parse the crime as the revenge of the city or the dead woman through her "chevelure vindicative" (270).

Jane's death does not make difference apparent; rather, as Ginette Michaux shows, it marks the culmination of the narrative's inner logic. Unlike many narratives involving *doppelgängers* where death differentiates, the two women now become photographically identical. "Les deux femmes s'étaient identifiées en une seule. Si ressemblante dans la vie, plus ressemblante dans la mort qui les avait faites de la même paleur, il ne les distingua plus l'une de l'autre—unique visage de son amour" (*Bruges-la-Morte* 270). In life, Viane robs Jane of the capacity to differ, while her death gives her the cadaverous likeness of his beloved.⁶ As Bronfen notes, if Viane "at first uses the special artifice of resemblance to 'triumph over and deride death,' he can be fully satisfied that he possesses death by embracing death as the dead beloved" (338). Yet killing Jane also throws Viane back into time as a medium of radical alterity. The reader leaves him muttering the refrain "*Bruges-la-Morte*," as the bells of Bruges toll. The carillon marking time brings the mind back to its senses through sonorosity. As time is restored to Bruges through crime, a symbolic series that maintained the illusion of atemporality is finally destroyed.

Afterimages

What would it mean to resist the lure of the analogical? In a fragment called "Demon of Analogy," Roland Barthes describes someone to whom analogy would be anathema. The analogical arts ("cinema, photography") and methods ("academic criticism") (Barthes, "Demon" 624) would leave such a person cold. Considering the "curse of analogy"—an unavoidable reference to nature as a source of truth, a drive to discern likeness—Barthes describes failed attempts by writers and artists to flout it through the flat copy or distorted imitation, while its true opposite could only be found in a lost homology, or "simple structural correspondence" (Barthes, "Demon" 624). Only after laying out this semiotic landscape, does Barthes address the possibility of resistance: "Lorsque je résiste à l'analogie, c'est en fait à l'imaginaire que je résiste: à savoir: la coalescence du signe, la similitude du signifiant et du signifié, l'homéomorphisme des images, le Miroir, le leurre captivant" (Barthes, "Demon" 625). My aim has been to show both how photography and prose collude in *Bruges-la-Morte* to trap Viane within

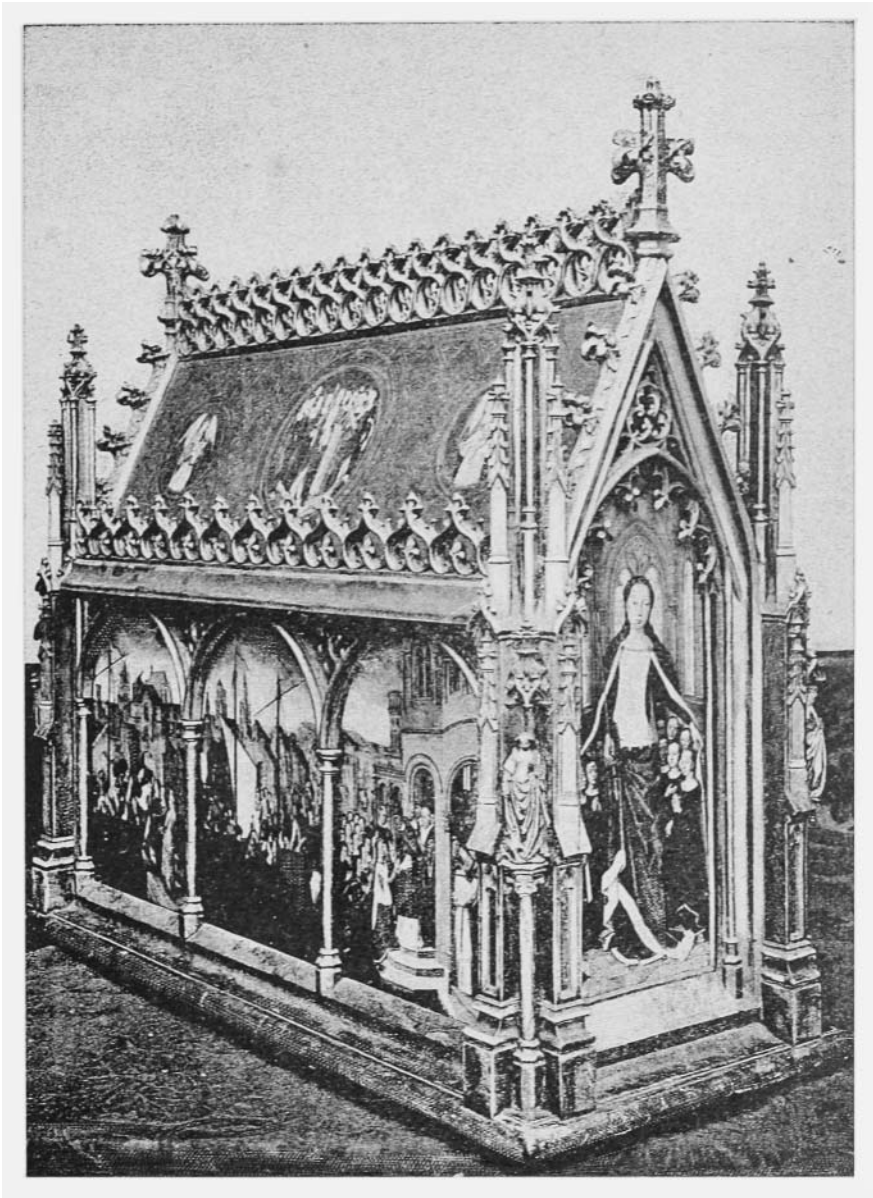


FIGURE 2. *Bruges-la-Morte* (The Shrine of Saint Ursula by Hans Memling).

the “demon of analogy,” while Rodenbach makes the “captivating lure” of such perfect imaginary systems recognizable to his readers.

Viane’s identification of the aura of Bruges with his dead wife attempts to harness the power of analogy. Yet he destroys it by finding a living double in Jane Scott, an error that can only be redressed by her death. The impulse to capture and preserve his wife’s image is undercut by vacant images of the city that suggest other relational modes to his own desire for the past. In this sense, it becomes clear why the novel met with critical resistance. Not only does it muddle the boundaries between popular forms and high art, postcards and prose poetry, in doing so it also undermines the greater logic of Flemish cultural revival. Repetitions of an idealized past in the present that ignore difference follow a murderous pattern. Viane becomes a metonymy for francophone Belgian culture’s more dangerous ventures—using the medieval to redeem the modern, the major to mirror the minor. No surprise, then, that the Flemish writer still lacks a monument in Bruges.⁷

Rodenbach’s death in 1898, a few months after Mallarmé’s, is often used to date the death of symbolism. Such a necrology questions what it means to read *Bruges-la-Morte* as a fragment of a larger aesthetic that went from a “non-national to a multinational movement,” struggling “in its decline between the demon of analogy and capitulation to philosophical discourse” (Balakian 10). Symbolism, as defined by Jean Moréas, was a style hostile to “teaching, declamation, false sensibility, and objective description.” According to the 1885 manifesto written against Verlaine’s “decadent” school, symbolist verse seeks to express the “Idea” through “the sumptuous robes of external analogies,” while the novel remains devoted to narratives of “subjective deformation” which use objectivity as an “extremely succinct point of departure” (2). In the “interregnum” after Hugo’s death, as Benjamin Curtis Williams suggests, critics put forth theories of a messianic poet to come who could ally their shattered insights into a symbolist masterpiece.

Although hardly the masterpiece they expected, *Bruges-la-Morte* is the fruit of a symbolist poetics to the extent that it refuses to transcribe direct perception of reality, opting instead for analogies and images of the outside world made to express interiority. Rodenbach’s short novel enjoyed a considerable afterlife: rewritten as a play by Rodenbach, *Le Mirage*, it influenced the paintings of Khnopff, inspired an opera by Viennese composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and was later adapted into two films. For Mallarmé, Rodenbach’s reader is struck by the author’s remarkable ability to “perceive analogies and discover relations” through sensation (Mallarmé, *Amitié* 119). Yet, Rodenbach also expressed his autonomy in relation to Parisian symbolism, both as a critic who ironized the way the new label ousted the exhausted category of decadence, and as a writer

willing to experiment with his poetics by introducing photography into the text, both as document and analogy. Rodenbach's novel elaborates the failed recognition that identity differs in detail, dramatizing the temptation to locate it in death. By treating photography as an element to further the cult of the dead, rather than reflecting on what it might mean to possess a trace of the past, Viane falls prey to the demon of analogy. Exposing its own poetic construction and elaborating it as the delirium of the inconsolable Viane, the novel urges us to consider the perils of analogical thinking that runs the risk of becoming demonic similarity.

While providing the basis for Rodenbach's montage, the images interrupt the unveiling of the plot urging alternative modes of reading, of which the analogical is paramount. The photographs further suggest how analogy can also arrest the drive to similarity, directing our gaze away from symbols of psychic conflict back toward the world. Without captions, the images appear either briefly before or after a site is mentioned. Inserted after the narrative had been written, they create a space between image and writing. While they depict the architecture of Bruges, they also tear it out of context. The dead city appears paradoxically mortal, its monuments recast as ruins. In doing so, photography acts contrapuntally, interrupting a narrative that attempts to reproduce "a stable image of death" (Bronfen 338). *Bruges-la-Morte* thus stages a unique exit from the impasses of late nineteenth-century polemics between realism and aestheticism through its apposition of photography and symbolism. In this regard, Rodenbach silently prepares the conflation of the aesthetic object and the found document to be practiced by the twentieth-century avant-gardes.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks to Alicia Christoff, Alison James, Alexandra Lukes, and three anonymous readers for their helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

NOTES

1. Rodenbach added two chapters (6 and 10) to the published volume. The images are available at commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Bruges-la-Morte. For further details on sources and editing, see Edwards, *Soleil noir* 42–56.
2. For a helpful overview, see Michel, "Introduction. Petite histoire d'une disgrâce," *Démon de l'analogie* (2016). On resurgence of analogy in the Renaissance, see Foucault 32–59.
3. Rodenbach also plays on this phonic aspect by analyzing "le veuf" and "Bruges-la-Morte" syllabically in the text.
4. It also recalls themes from Charles Perrault's tales (especially "Peau d'âne" and "Barbe bleue"), as well as Maupassant's 1888 novel *Fort comme la mort*, which dwells on doubles, obsession, and fatal resemblance.

5. Joyce O. Lowrie reads the reflection of the virgins on the soldiers' armor as a play on the myth of Perseus and Medusa, just as the novel recalls Narcissus and Echo, Orpheus and Eurydice, Saint John and Salomé, Hamlet and Ophelia.
6. For Blanchot's theory of the literary image in terms of "ressemblance cadavérique," see *L'espace littéraire*, 341–55.
7. There is, however, an 1899 memorial for Rodenbach, designed by George Minne, in his hometown of Ghent.

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