

IRIS

ISSN : 2779-2005

Éditeur : UGA Éditions

39 | 2019

Synesthésies visuelles

Synesthete Spies, Detectives and Outlaws: Unsettling Truths Uncovered Through (an Equally Unsettling) Synesthetic Process

*Espions, détectives et hors-la-loi synesthètes : des vérités troublantes
découvertes à travers un processus synesthésique (tout aussi troublant)*

Patricia Lynne Duffy

 <https://publications-prairial.fr/iris/index.php?id=942>

DOI : 10.35562/iris.942

Référence électronique

Patricia Lynne Duffy, « Synesthete Spies, Detectives and Outlaws: Unsettling Truths Uncovered Through (an Equally Unsettling) Synesthetic Process », *IRIS* [En ligne], 39 | 2019, mis en ligne le 15 décembre 2020, consulté le 16 novembre 2023. URL : <https://publications-prairial.fr/iris/index.php?id=942>

Droits d'auteur

CC BY-SA 4.0

Synesthete Spies, Detectives and Outlaws: Unsettling Truths Uncovered Through (an Equally Unsettling) Synesthetic Process

Espions, détectives et hors-la-loi synesthètes : des vérités troublantes découvertes à travers un processus synesthésique (tout aussi troublant)

Patricia Lynne Duffy

TEXTE

- 1 “I am not an ordinary—I am the one among you who is alive—not only are my eyes different and my hearing and my sense of taste—not only is my sense of smell like a deer’s, my sense of touch like a bat’s—but most important, I have the capacity to conjoin all of this in one point.” (Nabokov, 1989, p. 52) The quote is from the prisoner, Cincinnatus, a fictional synesthete-character, created by 20th century novelist Vladimir Nabokov for his novel, *Invitation to a Beheading*. In the novel, Cincinnatus is jailed for “gnostical turpitude”, a mysterious crime that seems to stem from his apprehending the world in a way that threatens the officially sanctioned norm. Cincinnatus must therefore be isolated, removed from contact with his fellow-citizens, so as not to infect them (the very name, “Cincinnatus”, suggests the double “sinning at us”).
- 2 Cincinnatus is both blessed and cursed in being privy to the double-edged sword of synesthetic perception, presented in the novel as both super-sense (as it allows the world to be experienced more multifariously through the lens of blended sense perceptions) and threat to the status quo, which perceives such blended perceptions as dangerous distortions of accepted notions of what is “real”. The fact that Nabokov, the creator of Cincinnatus, was a real-life synesthete, leads the reader to wonder whether the author himself was expressing feelings about the isolation that his rare form of perception caused him to experience.
- 3 Those who experience the blended perceptions of neurological synesthesia may well have feelings of isolation, for they are viewed at best, as objects of curiosity, and at worst, as objects of suspicion. The

“meaning” of synesthetes’ perceptions has elicited different theories, some exalting or denigrating the condition, as we will see.

- 4 Interestingly, with increased attention to synesthesia studies from the late twentieth into the twenty-first century—also known as the “synesthesia renaissance”¹—a number of fictional works with synesthete characters have appeared, with many being in the crime/detective/spy novel genre. Seeing the possibility of the “power” or even “super-power” of synesthetic perception, authors of this genre have been inspired to assign neurological synesthesia as a trait to main characters who are detectives, spies, or outlaws.
- 5 While the characters in this genre are neurological synesthetes of one kind or another, (either of the “developmental” or “acquired” variety—later in this piece, we will see definitions and examples of each type), synesthetic perception may also be the perfect metaphor for detective’s ability to “synthesize disparate clues” and bits of information to arrive at a coherent solution to a crime; conversely, the outlaw must also use such “synthesizing skills” to succeed in staying one step ahead of the law. Novels in the detective/outlaw/crime genre deal with finding and creating a full picture of the truth of events by putting together the jigsaw puzzle fragments of partial knowledge. There is often a great “Ah-ha!” moment when the full truth, the outcome of an investigation, becomes clear. In the novels discussed here, the characters’ blended sense-perceptions (in the synesthetic form of “colored voices”, “colored auras” or “tasted moods”) carry with them the emotional certainty of “ah-ha!” moments.
- 6 In this detective genre (here with a “synesthetic twist”), the detective’s investigation can also serve as a metaphor for the journey all of us take through life—proceeding, as we generally are, with only partial knowledge of many situations, searching for strategies to widen our understanding as we go along. Just as detectives find disparate clues, which they piece together to form a coherent picture of what happened, so most of us work with “clues” as to what might really be going on in family, work, or other life situations, and the yet deeper truths these situations may suggest. The new literary type of the synesthete- detective or spy, may hint at a hidden human capa-

city, (though rarely accessed) to provide faster, more certain access to the bigger picture.

- 7 In *Invitation to a Beheading*, as in other novels with synesthete-characters, synesthetic perceptions are often linked to the discovery of a larger truth. Interestingly, those who have studied synesthetic perception with a Romantic view (as did circles of poets and artists in nineteenth century Europe) have often linked it to glimpsing at a higher, ultimate truth.
- 8 As historian Kevin Dann writes in his book, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen*, “to many observers, synesthetes [...] have been permitted a view of something that seems to hold more truth than their own non-synesthetic [...] imagery” (p. 15). Examples of this can be seen historically, particularly in late nineteenth century France and Germany where the phenomenon of synesthesia (often referred to as chromesthesia or colored hearing) attracted both artistic and scientific exploration. The nineteenth century Symbolist poets glorified synesthetic perception, while certain scientists and art critics denigrated it. In his *Traité du Verbe*, René Ghil describes “colored hearing”, or sound-color synesthesia, as indicative of a humanity moving towards a higher state of evolution, and he believed that one day this would stimulate a great leap in the development of artistic forms:

Indéniable maintenant, voire de la Science autopsié, peint ses gammes le Fait de l'Audition Colorée, miraculeuse montée vers les heures lointaines qu'avec humilité nous souhaitons, où tous les Arts inconsciemment impies reviendront se perdre en la totale Communion : la Musique épouvantante qui intronise la Divinité seule, Poésie.

À moi, non, de m'enquérir de la cause : une phase, sans doute, d'une évolution progressive de nos sens élevés. (Ghil, p. 25)

- 9 At the same time, we had the quite opposing view of art critic Max Nordau. In his 1895 book, *Degeneration* (originally published in German, 1892 as *Ertartung*), Nordau described the blended perceptions of synesthesia as “a descent from the height of human perfection to the low level of the mollusk” (1895, p. 142).

To raise the combination, transposition, and confusion of the perceptions of sound and sight to the rank of a principle of art, to see futurity in this principle, is to designate as progress the return from the consciousness of man to that of an oyster. (Ibid., p. 33)

- 10 Whether hailed as a higher evolutionary state or denounced as sensory confusion and a diminishment of human consciousness, pundits on both sides seem to have sensed a considerable power in synesthetic perception. It is the potential transformative power of anomalous perception which is potentially dangerous to accepted notions of reality and which requires the prisoner Cincinnatus to be incarcerated, removed from the rest of society.
- 11 Interestingly, another novel with a synesthete-prisoner, published nearly a half century later, picks up rather directly where *Invitation to a Beheading* left off: Brent Kiernan's 2002 novel, *The Synesthete*. Like Nabokov's Cincinnatus, Kiernan's Carly Jackson is a synesthete whose abilities include hearing colors and seeing flavors. As Cincinnatus is accused of the crime of "gnostical turpitude", Carly is accused of the crime of "moral turpitude", also a crime of differing perception stemming from her synesthetic vision of the world. Like Cincinnatus, Carly is society's prisoner. But in this case, Carly is a prisoner of the military, an organization which wants to exploit her synesthetic perception for its own purposes: to create a new computer source code. In Kiernan's novel, society has evolved enough to understand not only the power, but also the possible use of synesthesia—which in this case, the military exploits for its own ends.
- 12 As Kiernan's novel was written almost fifty years later in a more advanced technological age, imaginative possibilities of a character's synesthesia have expanded. In the world in which Carly moves, the military views her synesthetic perception's vast potential to create new cyber forms based on synesthetic principles of perceptual simultaneity). As her former commanding officer says of Carly:

The specialist came to us with a disease of the mind. It's called synaesthesia [...] but it becomes useful because her mind reduces sensory perception down to mathematics, to symbolic representations of what she perceives. I'll give you a simple example. Mathematics and music are integrally related. A pitch can be heard, but it can

also be represented by the rate of vibrations traveling through a medium [...] all mathematical relationships can be reduced to music [...] any computer program can be played on a piano [...] Source code which is written out as language is infinitely inferior to source code that can be expressed or understood through the senses because only then can the true simultaneity of events be expressed. (Kiernan, 2002, pp. 79–80)

- 13 Though at first Carly is coerced into using her synesthetic abilities to serve the military, she later finds a way to use these same abilities to escape from military control. Carly becomes a ‘cyber-outlaw’. However, her synesthetic gifts and the expanded vision they offer her come with a personal price: if not properly channeled, her synesthesia can cause Carly to suffer from overwhelming headaches, and hallucinations that she is unable to distinguish from reality.
- 14 In terms of the five categories of literary depiction as put forth in the chapter, “Synesthesia and Literature” of the *Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia*, the portrayal of Kiernan’s character Carly fits under “Synesthesia as Romantic Pathology”. Her outlaw activities in the Cyber-world give her an almost super-hero status, but the pride in her elevated status is tempered by her vulnerability to sensory confusion and suffering. In contrast, Nabokov’s character Cincinnatus falls under the category of “Synesthesia as Romantic Ideal”. Cincinnatus was born into a society that was not ready for him nor for his more evolved form of perception; unable to understand his perception, his society could only fear it. In Nabokov’s novel, any question of “pathology” is assigned solely to the limited society that has incarcerated him. Hence, Cincinnatus becomes a Romantic hero, preferring incarceration to submission.
- 15 For convenience, the five categories of literary depiction are listed below:
 - **synesthetic experience as romantic ideal**, an expanded vision of reality: in this view, synesthetic perception puts its host in touch with higher realms of reality and mystical states;
 - **synesthetic experience as indicative of pathology**: in this view, the synesthetic experience has no redeeming qualities, it is simply an aberration, a pathology;
 -

synesthetic experience as romantic pathology: in this view, synesthetic perception puts its host in touch with more sublime realms of reality, but the host pays a price with symptoms such as headaches and feelings of being overwhelmed with sensation;

- **synesthetic experience as key to regained balance and resolving of trauma:** in this view, a character's synesthesia is indicative of the individual's health and emotional balance; the character may lose the synesthetic perception due to a traumatic experience, but then regains it once the trauma is resolved;
- **synesthesia as accepted anomaly:** in this view, synesthetic perception is neither glorified nor denigrated, but is portrayed simply as an anomalous trait.

- 16 The synesthete characters in the crime/mystery novels discussed here fall into under "Synesthesia as Romantic Ideal" or "Synesthesia as Romantic Pathology". This view of a "price being paid" for the capacity to tap into more sublime realms hearkens back to nineteenth century Romanticism. An example of such can be seen in poet Arthur Rimbaud's 1871 "Letter to a Seer" (or "Letter to Paul Demeny") in which he speaks of the inevitable suffering that must accompany a poet's perceptual experiments and altered states of consciousness in the pursuit of a higher truth. The result of exploring such visions would lead to a future, universal, poetic language. The characters Cincinnatus and Carly Jackson may be viewed as victims of societal attempts to suppress and control atypical synesthetic perception that can lead to an experience of the mysterious and usher in a new, higher, wider state of consciousness.
- 17 If the characters Cincinnatus and Carly Jackson represent suppressed synesthetic perception, the character Synesthesia Jackson in the novel *Top Ten* evokes unfettered, liberated synesthetic perception. In the *Top Ten* graphic novel series (Book One published in the millennial year 2000), Synaesthesia Jackson is a detective on the 'Top Ten Police Force' in Neopolous, a city populated exclusively by super heroes, each with a different superpower. Detective Synaesthesia Jackson's super-power lies in her multiple forms of synesthesia. Here liberated, the character's synesthetic perception has the power to fuse disparate clues into a single solution to any crime to which she turns her attention. For example, this super hero describes how her "synaesthetic signals" led her to be certain of a suspect's guilt: "It was

her perfume I smelled on Graczik's body, but I translated it into music. She was Graczik's off-world drug customer." (Moore, 2002, no page number)

- 18 Synesthesia Jackson's unusual lens brings her to a "place" where disparate perceptions converge to shed light on a person's guilt or innocence. The depiction of the character's synesthetic perception as superpower has its origins in the romantic notion of synesthesia as heightened perception and a link with a larger truth. While Detective Jackson's language of synesthesia enables her to synthesize information and solve crimes, it also invites the skepticism of the other super heroes on the Top Ten force who are not synesthetes. Her fellow- super heroes wonder if Detective Synaesthesia Jackson's synesthetic visions (which make no sense to them) have really contributed to her solving the crimes. Was it necessary to translate the perfume into music to see it as a valid clue? Was her synesthetic response superfluous? Would just smelling the perfume on the victim's body have been enough? Despite the poking of fun, the Top Ten series nevertheless represents Synaesthesia Jackson's "language of synaesthetic clues" as a superpower (whose only "downside" is the doubt of others), and so, despite traces of modern skepticism, her story fits well into the category of "Synaesthesia as Romantic Ideal".
- 19 The next three novels we will discuss also feature synesthete detectives, and all share the similar trait of seeing the colors of people's words or emotional states. While one of the detective-characters is a natural "constitutional" synesthete, the other two have acquired the perception following a near-death accident and a head injury which have left them with synesthetic perception. The particular form of synesthesia experienced by each character turns out to be very useful in their investigative work: each can tell if a given suspect is lying or telling the truth based on the "colors" of the words they say.
- 20 Before proceeding any further, it may be helpful to clarify two major types of synesthesia, "developmental" (or "constitutional") and "acquired", described below:
 - **developmental synesthesia** (also called "constitutional synesthesia"): this form appears to be congenital, that is, its hosts have experienced it ever since they can remember;

acquired synesthesia: this form appears as a result of a head trauma or related injury and surprises its host with a new synesthetic perception, which s/he must learn to properly channel and control.

- 21 In real life, while some synesthete may be able to distinguish truth-telling from lying through the colors of a person's words, such an ability is undoubtedly rare (if it exists at all). Authors who create synesthete characters often play a "riff" on the usual synesthetic trait of perceiving words as having colors by taking the perception one step further and making it helpful to the character's mission in the novel.
- 22 In T. Jefferson Parker's 2005 novel *The Fallen* (which reached *The New York Times* best-seller list), the synesthetic abilities of the main character, Detective Robbie Brownlaw help him to solve crimes for the city of San Diego. Detective Brownlaw finds himself with "acquired synesthesia" after a fall from a ten-story building causes a neural abnormality. Following his fall and the onset of his new synesthetic perceptions, Detective Brownlaw begins to perceive people's words as colors and shapes emerging from their mouths. These colors and shapes give him information as to the emotional state of the person—and most importantly, whether s/he is telling the truth. The character describes his newly-acquired experience of synesthesia as follows:

My life was ordinary until three years ago when I was thrown out of a downtown hotel window. No one knows it except my wife, but I now have synaesthesia, a neurological condition where your senses get mixed up. Sometimes when people talk to me, I see their voices as colored shapes. It happens when they get emotional [...] [The shapes] linger in mid-air between the speaker and me. (Parker, 2007, p. 5)

- 23 Detective Brownlaw's synesthetic visions help him when he investigates a murder, allowing him to uncover related corruption and a prostitution ring called "Squeaky Cleans":

"You can tell us what you know about Squeaky Cleans", I said.
"Squeaky Cleans?" he asked. "I'm not sure what you mean." The red squares of the lie spilled from his mouth. (Ibid., p. 173)

- 24 Although the Detective's synesthesia offers an advantage for his job, it also creates a problem in his personal life: "The condition is hard for me to talk about, even with [my wife] Gina [...] it annoys her that even her white lies announce themselves to me as bright red squares." (Ibid.) After his marriage breaks up, Brownlaw explores synesthesia research and associations on the web and discovers a department at the University of California at San Diego which is dedicated to the study of synesthesia (an actual fact):

There is an entire department at the University of California, San Diego dedicated to the study of the phenomenon, which leads me to believe that what I have is "real." There is an American Synesthesia Association, a UK Synesthesia Association, as well as an International Synesthesia Association. There are tests to see if you really have it. Several good books and many abstracts have been published on the subject, and many lectures have been given. I know for a fact that synesthetes don't invent what they see, taste and hear. (Ibid., p. 276)

- 25 He then attends a meeting of the San Diego "Synaesthesia Society". The evening's speaker is Darlene Sable, (fictional) author of *Red Sax and Lemon Cymbals*², which provides a description of her growing up synesthetic. After the meeting, some members go out for coffee, and Detective Brownlaw is asked to describe his synesthesia to the group:

"I see blue triangles from a happy speaker. Red squares come from liars. Envy comes out in green trapezoids, so 'green with envy' is literally true for me. Aggression shows up as small black ovals."

"That's not synaesthesia," said Bart. "I've read every word ever written about the subject, and no one has ever established that a speaker's emotions can be visualized [...] What do you see coming from my mouth right now?"

"Little black ovals. Quite a few of them" [answered the detective]. (Ibid., pp. 279–80)

- 26 The above exchange uses satire to depict disputes among synesthetes, which sometimes occur when synesthetes meet. Meanwhile, it illustrates how Detective Brownlaw's synesthesia functions.

- 27 As in *The Fallen*, the next novel we will explore, *Miracle Myx*, also portrays a detective-character who acquires synesthetic perception as a result of a near-fatal accident. The resulting synesthesia is depicted as giving the character an extra-sensory advantage, i.e., an ability to view a normally hidden layer of reality, thus putting this type of portrayal in the category of Synesthesia as Romantic Pathology.
- 28 The character, Myx Ammens, age 14, also has “acquired” synesthesia as a result of two near-death experiences. He is first struck by lightning, later nearly drowns at the hands of a bully. In the aftermath of these traumas, Myx begins to “hear and smell colors” of voices and, especially after the drowning attempt, to “see their flavors”. At first, Myx is confused and overwhelmed by these sensations. Thanks to the help of a psychiatrist, Dr. Zylodic³, Myx learns that his synesthetic perceptions are not merely distracting, but also useful—he learns to use them to assist his town’s police in solving crimes. The colors of people’s voices and words, the smell of their feelings, let him know if they are telling the truth: “His words were green and red, but of a light shade showing me he believed them.” (Diotalevi, 2008, p. 222) Thanks to his newly acquired synesthesia, Myx can tell if someone has “blood on his hands”: “There was another smell, green, sharp and sour: blood. My reaction was fierce, almost mean.” (Ibid., p. 12) As with other synesthete detective characters we have discussed, Myx’s synesthetic signals help him to “synesthesize” disparate clues and come to an “ah-ha!” moment:

The final rays of sunset showed me again which bits here were lacquered in blood. They had never sung to me before because they didn’t fit. But now, when I added the raspberry-tasting pieces from the box, the sun swelled in volume and harmonized. (Ibid., p. 254)

- 29 Similarly, in Nigel McCrery’s novel *Still Waters*, Detective Chief Inspector Mark Lapslie finds his sound-taste synesthesia useful in determining whether others are lying or telling the truth. When Mark is discussing his synesthesia with a doctor: “Strangely,” he said. “I can usually tell when people are lying to me. It’s an unusual taste. Dry and spicy, but not in a curry way. More like nutmeg. It’s helped me investigating crimes before.” (McCrery, 2007, p. 152) Mark continues, “The way I rationalize it,” Lapslie said, “when people lie, there’s a certain

amount of stress in their voice, changing the way it sounds in subtle ways. Somehow, I'm picking up on that stress and tasting it" (ibid.). Unlike Myx Ammens and Robbie Brownlaw, Mark Lapslie is a constitutional synesthete. However, as he advances in age, his sound-flavors become more intense, flooding his mouth with tastes to such a degree that he can no longer tolerate being around noisy activity; he therefore can no longer live with his wife and children in their bustling, noisy household. Mark tries to keep the constant "flooding tastes" brought on by excess sound to a minimum, so he moves alone to a solitary, quiet space and becomes increasingly isolated.

- 30 On the upside, however, his intensifying synesthesia makes him all the more alert to synesthetic signals as clues in the cases he is trying to analyze: "His synesthesia was helping, although he would never admit that in his final dissertation; there were certain key flavours that kept coming up when he heard criminals' voices, like base notes in perfume." (Ibid., p. 259) One of those key flavors is that of lychees, one of the final clues that leads to apprehending a guilty party in the case he is investigating: "Did her voice taste of lychees or was he hoping too hard that it would?" (Ibid., p. 264)
- 31 Finally, turning to the 2013 spy novel *Red Sparrow* by Jason Matthews, we follow the main character, Dominika Egorova, a synesthete who is first a gifted ballet dancer, then a gifted spy. Dominika makes the transition from dancer to spy after jealous fellow-dancers cause an injury rendering her unable to continue dancing professionally. Seeing her new vulnerability, Dominika's shrewd uncle Vanya, himself a spy, recruits Dominika into the world of espionage. Dominika has always been a synesthete, experiencing colors of movements and emotions, perceptions that have aided her in mastering dance as well as in her other endeavors. In her new career, her synesthesia also proves invaluable to her work as a spy. Her synesthetic signals let her know that one of her colleagues is plotting something:

Simyonov seethed the pulsing yellow fog around him paled, then strengthened, then paled again. He was dissembling, planning treachery, she was sure. [...] Dominika looked hard at him, but his aura was faint, a pale green glow around his face and ears. Green, zelenyj, emotional, not what he appears to be, an actor, thought

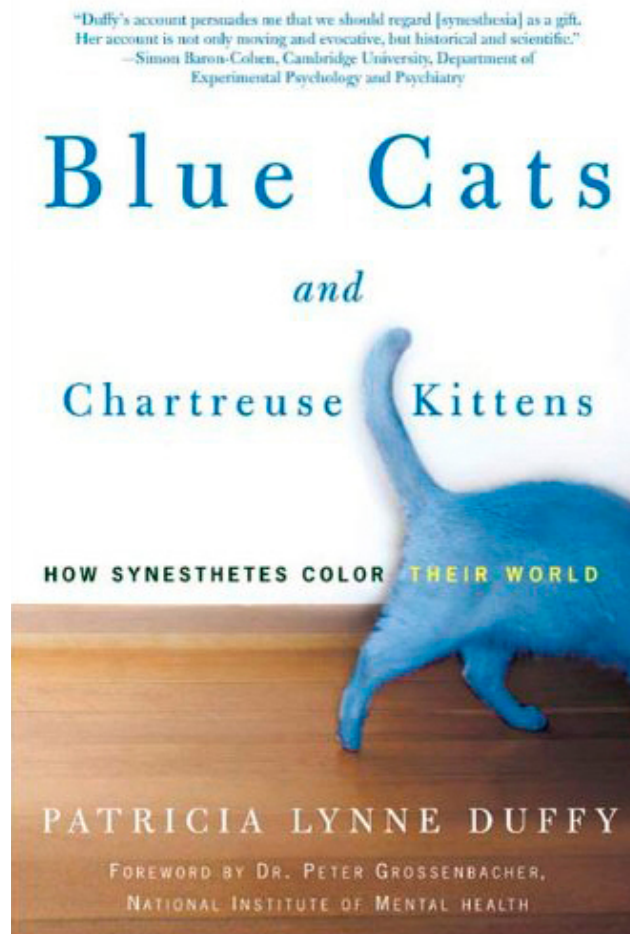
Dominika. So different from Uncle Vanya, but the same, different services, the same lizard. (Matthews, 2013, p. 428)

- 32 Dominika's synesthesia gives her access to hidden knowledge that lets her better assess the motives of key figures around her.
- 33 In terms of the five categories of depiction, the portrayal of Domenika in *Red Sparrow* fits under "Synesthesia as Romantic Ideal" because the character is able to use her synesthesia without being overwhelmed by it. She is always in control, and this trait itself is the key to being the successful spy that she is. In this way, her synesthesia is portrayed as a great advantage, a kind of superpower with no downside.
- 34 This article has focused on "meanings" ascribed to the experience of synesthesia in fictional portrayals of synesthetes. In the fictional crime/detective/spy genre works that we have examined here, characters' experiences of synesthesia help them to better carry out their missions in their respective plotlines. As has been pointed out in the chapter "Synesthesia and Literature", the flurry of resurgence of scientific and artistic research into synesthesia in recent decades has generated mainstream interest in the topic. Information has filtered from the research community into popular media. This interest has led artists, including fiction writers (some synesthetes themselves, some not) to portray synesthetes as characters in their creative works. These fictional portrayals may or may not be 'accurate', only sometimes corresponding to reports of actual "real-life" synesthetes. An author can sometimes see a dramatic or symbolic possibility in attributing the trait of synesthesia to a character. By doing so, the author may be more interested in producing a desired literary effect than in producing a portrayal that remains faithful to scientific data on synesthetes. Nevertheless, the different portrayals tell us something about how the human imagination has approached and tried to understand the phenomenon of synesthetic perception and its hosts. Synesthetic perception also takes on a symbolic meaning, representing a human capacity to transcend familiar perceptual boundaries and a new way to apprehend and interpret.
- 35 In fictional portrayals of synesthetes, which have appeared over the decades, examples of synesthetic perceptions either alerting their

hosts to realms of hidden truths or plunging them into pathological symptoms of sensory overload, such as headaches, seizures, isolation, or madness, can be seen. In some cases, the two are combined: while synesthetic perceptions may at times overwhelm their synesthete hosts with various forms of suffering, they are also a source of vision, allowing them to experience truth on a 'higher' or 'deeper' plane.

- 36 The shocking truths uncovered by synesthete spies and detectives by means of their blended perception can be unsettling, but their synesthesia itself can be just as unsettling for the social norm. The detective/spy genre can be seen as a metaphor for the human journey through life, where we are all working with mostly partial truths, trying to piece them together to form a coherent picture of where we are and where we are going. Synesthetic perception, in these novels, holds the promise of a glimpse at the proverbial "big picture" through a rare human capacity which may lie dormant in us all.

Figure 1. – *Blue Cats*, cover.



BIBLIOGRAPHIE

BARON-COHEN Simon & HARRISON John (eds.), 1997, *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Essays*, Oxford / Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers.

CYTOWIC Richard & EAGLEMAN David, 2009, *Wednesday Is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain on Synesthesia*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

CANNON Zander, HA Gene & MOORE Alan, 2000, *Top Ten*, La Jolla, CA, America's Best Comics.

DANN Kevin T., 1998, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

DIAMOND Stacy, 1996, "Of Wine and Hashish", in *Artificial Paradises*, Translated from the French ["Du Vin et du Haschich" by Charles Baudelaire] by S. Diamond, New York, Citadel Press [Originally published in 1851].

DIOTALEVI Dave, 2008, *Miracle Myx*, Key Largo, USA and Ontario, Canada, Kunati

Inc. Publishers.

DIXON Mike J., SMILEK Daniel, DUFFY Patricia L., ZANNA Mark P. & MERIKLE Philip M., 2006, "The Role of Meaning in Grapheme-Color Synesthesia", *Cortex*, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp. 243–52.

DUFFY Patricia Lynne, 2001, *Blue Cats and Chartreuse Kittens: How Synaesthetes Color Their World*, New York, Times Books, Henry Holt and Company.

DUFFY Patricia Lynne, 2013, "Synesthesia and Literature", Chap. 33, in J. Simner et E. M. Hubbard (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

FLOURNOY Théodore, 1893, *Des phénomènes de synopsie (audition colorée)*, Paris, Alcan.

FOWLIE Wallace (ed.), 1966, "Vowels", in *Rimbaud Complete Works, Selected Letters*, Translated from the French ["Voyelles" by Arthur Rimbaud] by W. Fowlie, Chicago, University of Chicago Press [Originally published in 1883].

GHIL René, 1886, *Traité du Verbe*, Paris, Chez Giraud.

HA Gene & MOORE Alan, 2002, *Top Ten Book Two*, La Jolla, CA, America's Best Comics, LLC.

HARRISON John, 2001, *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

KIERNAN Brent, 2002, *The Synaesthete*, Lincoln, NE, iUniverse.

MATTHEWS Jason, 2013, *Red Sparrow*, London, Simon and Schuster.

MCCRERY Nigel, 2007, *Still Waters*, New York, Pantheon Books.

NABOKOV Vladimir, 1989, *Invitation to a Beheading*, Vintage Books, Random House, [Original printing G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959].

NABOKOV Vladimir, 1989, *Speak Memory*, Vintage Books, Random House [Originally published Harper & Bros., 1951].

NORDAU Max, 1895, *Degeneration*, Translated from the German [Entartung], New York, D. Appleton & Company [Originally published in German, 1892].

MARKS Lawrence E., 1978, *Synaesthesia: The Unity of the Senses*, New York, Academic Press.

PARKER T. Jefferson, 2006, *The Fallen*, New York, HarperCollins.

RAMACHADRAN Vilayanur S. & HUBBARD Edward M., 2001, "Synaesthesia — A Window Into Perception, Thought, and Language", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 12, pp. 3–34.

SCHMIDT Paul, 2000, *Complete Works Arthur Rimbaud*, Translated from the French by Paul Schmidt, New York, HarperPerennial [Originally published works 1854–1891].

NOTES

¹ As cited by H.-P. Lambert, "La Synesthésie : Vues de l'intérieur", *Épistémocritique*, Vol. 8, 2011. Available on <<https://epistemocritique.org/la-synesthesie-vues-de-linterieur/>>.

2 Author T. Jefferson Parker confirms that the book on synesthesia, *Blue Cats and Chartreuse Kittens* (Duffy, 2001), inspired the parody-title *Red Sax and Lemon Cymbals* in his book, *The Fallen*.

3 Author notes the similarity in name of the fictional doctor, Dr. Zylodic, who helps the character Myx control his synesthesia to the real life, Dr. Cytowic, who real-life synesthetes have credited with helping them understand their synesthesia.

RÉSUMÉS

English

This article focuses on portrayals of fictional characters with neurological synesthesia in seven selected 20th and 21st century English-language novels in the detective-spy genre. Characters are discussed in terms of the five categories of literacy depiction of synesthete characters as outlined in the chapter, “Synesthesia and Literature” in the *Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia* (Oxford University Press, 2013). I will suggest that depictions of synesthete characters in the detective genre link synesthetic perceptions with glimpses of ultimate truth, and trace these tendencies back to descriptions of synesthesia in 19th century seminal European works (written during a very fertile period of research into *audition colorée*), including Arthur Rimbaud’s “Letter of a Seer” and Max Nordau’s *Degeneration*.

Novels included in this study: *Invitation to a Beheading* by Vladimir Nabokov, *The Synesthete* by Brent Kiernan, *Top Ten* by Gene Ha and Alan Moore, *The Fallen* by T. Jefferson Parker, *Miracle Myx* by Dave Diotalevi, *Still Waters* by Nigel McCrery, *Red Sparrow* by Jason Matthews.

Français

Cet article se concentre sur les représentations de personnages fictifs ayant une synesthésie neurologique, dans sept romans anglais des xx^e et xxi^e siècles, sélectionnés dans le genre policier-espionnage. Les personnages sont examinés à partir des cinq catégories de représentation littéraire des personnages synesthésiques, exposées dans le chapitre « Synesthesia and Literature » de l’*Oxford Handbook of Synesthesia* (Oxford University Press, 2013). Je suggérerai que les représentations de personnages synesthésiques dans le genre policier relient les perceptions synesthésiques à des intuitions sur une vérité supérieure et rapporte ces tendances aux descriptions de la synesthésie dans les œuvres européennes essentielles du xix^e siècle (écrites pendant une période de recherche très fertile en audition colorée), y compris la « Lettre d’un Voyant » d’Arthur Rimbaud et le *Dégénérescence* de Max Nordau.

Romans inclus dans cette étude : *Invitation to a Beheading* de Vladimir Nabokov, *The Synesthete* de Brent Kiernan, *Top Ten* de Gene Ha et Alan Moore, *The Fallen* de T. Jefferson Parker, *Miracle Myx* de Dave Diotalevi, *Still Waters* de Nigel McCrery, *Red Sparrow* de Jason Matthews.

INDEX

Mots-clés

synesthésie et fiction, détective synesthète, espion synesthète, synesthésie et représentations littéraires, Jason Matthews, Nigel McCrery, Arthur Rimbaud, T. Jefferson Parker, *Miracle Myx*, Nabokov, *Traité du Verbe*

Keywords

synesthesia and fiction, synesthete detective, synesthete spy, synesthesia and literary depictions, Jason Matthews, Nigel McCrery, Arthur Rimbaud, T. Jefferson Parker, *Miracle Myx*, Nabokov, *Traité du Verbe*

AUTEUR

Patricia Lynne Duffy

New York University, co-founder of the American Association of Synesthesia