The plot of *Love Like Hate* is sufficient, and so is its characterization, which includes sharp sketches like that of Sky, an American "gutter punk" teaching English in Vietnam while searching for Buddhism: "He had gone to Vietnam to explore Buddhism, only to discover that there was no Buddhism in Vietnam…. In the Vietnamese universe, Buddhism is merely a thin blanket half hiding an animist demon." The novel's characters are either hopeless onanists beaten into torpor or incompetent opportunists, their futures not at all encouraging, though Kim Lan and her daughter Hoa are survivors. In the daughter's case survival unfortunately likely means a future in upmarket prostitution. But it is commentary that I read Dinh for, not storytelling or characters. I am sometimes bored by his quasi-apocalyptic, Kunstlerian predictions (e. g., "all of humanity is about to reverse gear and roll backward down the oily slope of progress" he writes in the 9/11 chapter of the novel) but I am interested in his remarks about "a parallel between capitalism and Communism" and in his account of the recent history of Vietnam. There is even mockery of the kind one expects in his poems here—for example: "This free verse quatrain…shows that God was very much in tune with the poetics of his time…. When God writes a poem, it appears simultaneously (in his head) in 6,822 languages." My favorite passage is Dinh's description of a mosquito feasting on a "fatty capillary": "the American's blood tasted a bit like vanilla ice cream." Dinh is brilliant at that kind of thing, though this is not a poet's novel. There is story here, and history, and thanks to their presence the novel hits harder than his recent poems.

<div align="right">Keith Tuma</div>

<div align="center">§</div>

Steve Tomasula, Stephen Farrell, Matt Lavoy, and Christian Jara, *TOC*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009. DVD-ROM. $16.95

The aim of Steve Tomasula's most recent narrative experiment, the new media novel *TOC*, seems straightforward: to rework our conventional idea of the novel by use of nonlinear sequencing and participatory choice in the creation of narrative. It has rightly been praised as a magnum opus of software design and creativity, combining text, graphics, and video unpredictably and artfully in an interactive environment. The graphics theme is particularly striking: its affected Victorian aesthetic might be described as "steampunk," with sepia tones and metal clock faces overlaid with fragments of mechanical blueprints, sometimes pulsating with a silent clock tick.

As with most new media, the look and feel of the digital environment prove to be the most innovative aspects of the work. *TOC* relies on seamless transitions between various media, a basic version of what is known

as "transmedia" storytelling. A short video animation introduces a galaxy sparkling in deep space, with a narrator sagely intoning the opening narrative: the invented myth of twins Chronos and Logos (presented as a video), whom the reader will track by a sequence of choices throughout the program. After the opening sequence, the virtual space is not unlike other internet environments; clicking on available options opens new content to read, watch, or listen to. However, a few unique design features dress up the choose-your-own-adventure feel of the program. To start reading, the reader deposits a pebble into a box with the mouse to choose the story of one of the two twins, or "versions" of time. Choosing Chronos begins a 30-minute video; choosing Logos leads the reader to a player piano, which opens short videos, text boxes, or odd statistics by various manipulations of the mouse. The reader can later navigate to an island screen that offers amusing accounts of the bizarre inhabitants, warring tribes that each believe only in one verb tense (future, past, or present). With this list of tasks facing the reader, it is easy to read a running conceptual joke on the Odyssean journey (Tomasula describes the work as a "multimedia epic"): the self-made hero seeks some practical advantage from the various characters he encounters on his homeward quest.

Where *TOC* differs from other new media experiments is in the way its language deflects its digital environment by resorting to ancient rather than futuristic literary traditions and styles: parable, aphorism, philosophical dialogue. Text screens often begin with nameless, ahistorical protagonists pulled from the formulas of children's fairy tales: e.g., "there was once a maiden who lived in dread of the decay of youth"; "there was a woman who claimed she had invented a device that could store time." In one of these parables, a man digs a hole to reach the past, and proceeds to dig so far that depth, in a clever literalization of the Echo myth, creates the necessary distance for a long time to pass. When passersby call down questions, it takes months for the answer to return, and consequently, the immediate responses refer to questions asked months before. This, however, is a revelation for the hearers:

> Sometimes the words offered up by the speaking hole—for this is how people began to think of it—left their hearers satisfied, believing as they did that the incongruity of the answer they received was meant to be understood as a metaphor, or myth, whose true meaning would emerge if they could only puzzle out its contradictions.

This passage pushes heavy-handed dogma (must we really believe in "true meaning" in this world?) to a surprising and pleasing end by portraying the pleasures of obviously fabricated meaning. It depicts in this sense the experience of the chosen narrative of *TOC*, by reflecting how "satisfied" we

feel from puzzling out anachronisms and "incongruity," how pleased we are in thinking that our reading has successfully found meaning in the patterns and repetitions of these tales. The myth is about our eternal attempts (even now) to rationalize the "speaking hole" by hearing meaning in our echoes—a slyly comic version of the Greek oracle or similar figures of authorized, received meaning.

Through these thematic elements, the novel revisits the old idea that our experience of time is constructed by language. Tomasula relies heavily on the declarative statement to define this cosmos: "[time could] regulate all reality, yet could not regulate itself"; "time is a division, experience degraded into symbol and measure"; a pocket watch is a "cosmos in miniature"; "every machine is a time machine." The narration also revels in philosophic conundrum. "How is it possible for a day to start at dawn and also at midnight?" the narrator of the opening animation asks. If Chronos and Logos, two twin brothers and "versions" of time, are born seconds apart, but the second brother is born after crossing a time zone that makes his official birthday a day earlier, who is the eldest? Do we trust our sense of time or of language more? *TOC* aspires to be a novel of ideas, and it's easy to get caught up in (or, on the other hand, be put off by) its intellectualism. Such declaratives and unanswerable questions, we understand, are meant to happily coexist in this digital world. Unlike Mircea Eliade's conception of the "eternal return" in the "sacred time" of myth, the purpose here is not to provide evidence of the stable and singular truths to legitimize human existence. It is meant to embrace paradox as a primary virtue.

TOC's formal achievements are undermined by the relative, qualified tone we resort to when describing new media experiments. On the one hand, it willfully ignores a century of productive novel experiments in world literature. Its attempts to call our attention to the inconsistency between how we speak of time and how time is actually experienced is a conceit harking back to Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu*. Using the idea of narrative choice to disrupt our experience of linear chronology reminds us not only of the earliest hypertext fictions (such as Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* [1995]) but also of the playful design of the postwar Latin American novel, especially Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* (1963). On the other hand, *TOC* can't stand up to the sophistication of even the average computer role-playing game, either in concept or design. A multimedia novel about time might have experimented with more time-bending opportunities such as self-generating texts or 3-D virtual spaces—truly innovative design elements that might have used the complex genre play of the text screens to involve the reader as a creator rather than a passive receiver.

Instead, *TOC* is based on the conventional, linear form of the novel. This encourages the reader to think of its content accordingly. The program

always opens with the story of Chronos and Logos; the reader cannot access the island screen without first entering the screen featuring parables and videos, making the eventual discovery of the island sequences seem like the preordained end of the reading process. Every time a reader accesses a text or video, it appears on the screen in a running list, like a browsing history (unless she chooses to clear the history). There is a strong temptation to read such a list chronologically from left to right or top to bottom—to think of the entire story, despite all the choices involved in moving from one screen to the next, as having a clear beginning, middle, and end. Despite the designer's intention to immerse readers in limitless possibilities, the program, like the folk tale tradition to which it belongs, runs in the repetitive circuits of Fate.

<div align="right">Holly Dupej</div>

<div align="center">§</div>

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, *The Complete Late Poetry of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo*. Translated by Leonard Fox. Lampeter, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010. 440pp. $129.95

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Africa's first Modernist poet, was born in 1901 at the cusp of Madagascar's colonization by France, and ended his own life by cyanide in 1937, a decade before its first heaves into independence. His relationship to the artistic tradition of his colonizers was nonreciprocal, and he remained an unheard interlocutor with the French avant-garde for the first decade of his career. His poetic inspirations were passé—the same year Rabearivelo published his first collection of neo-Romantic verse in French, *La coupe de cendres* (The bowl of ashes, 1924), Andre Breton published the Surrealist Manifesto, and the Paris art world was toasting the poet members of its Cubist circles, Pierre Reverdy and Blaise Cendrars. Rabearivelo's Madagascar-based publisher was French, but didn't have avant-garde sensibilities; its catalogue included titles on guano harvesting and local folk dress. And there was the inevitable issue of cultural difference. When Rabearivelo broke free of his Romantic influences with the important essay "Quelques poètes, enfants d'Orphée," Henri Michaux was visiting India and Southeast Asia and writing about his experiences as "a barbarian in Asia." The exchange with global French culture was at cross currents.

Rabearivelo's early reputation was never in doubt in his own country, however. As the editor of Malagasy poetry anthologies and renowned local literary journals *18 Latitude Sud* and *Capricorne*, Rabearivelo was the de facto Madagascar laureate. He was an advocate as well as a poet: he spoke for himself and on behalf of an entire Malagasay tradition to his French counterparts. He translated his own writing in Malagasay and that of others into